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THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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# THE TWO SWORDS

By

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The seventh in a series of seventeen addresses on PEACE, delivered in the Catholic Hour on February 1, 1942, by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen of the Catholic University of America. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

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**National Council of Catholic Men  
Washington, D. C.**

Deadline

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Voltaire, the scoffer, once wrote that "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him." He meant that neither man nor the universe is self-explanatory, and that every human creature is incurably religious. Catacombs, persecutions, tyrannies, and concentration camps alike are powerless to crush the heavenward aspirations of the soul. The human heart, like an exiled king, yearns for the happiness of a kingdom where once it walked in a garden with God.

In this age we could paraphrase Voltaire, and say that if man had no cross it would be necessary to make one; for life without sacrifice is impossible. As Francis Thompson put it: "Nothing begins and nothing ends that is not paid with moan, for we are born in other's pain and perish in our own." This war-era might be accurately described as one in which the whole world is re-discovering a cross—either the true one or the false. For a century or more the whole world tried to live without the Cross of Christ. It abandoned self-discipline for what it called self-expression, but which really was only self-destruction; it ridiculed the idea of penance and reparation, for why should man atone for sin when there is no sin; it defined freedom as absence of all restraints, responsibilities, and law, or as "the right to do whatever you please"; it concentrated on rights but never on duties, on liberties but never on commandments. So general was this repugnance to Christianity with a Cross that it is safe to say that among those who passed through our secular colleges and universities from 1918 to 1939, a re-

spect for religious institutions, marriage, and the moral law, was regarded as a mark of mental inferiority.

The net result was that the cross of sacrifice was literally up-rooted from the world as the world itself became a criss-cross of conflicting egotisms, inspired by an aggressiveness in which each sought to get the maximum of pleasure out of life with the minimum of responsibility.

Then came the inescapable verdict of history: If men lose a true cross, they will make a false one, for the human heart knows that survival, either personal or national, is impossible without effort and pain.

One part of the world then began to make a false cross. We can almost date the beginning of its construction as the 11th of December in the year 1880 when General von Moltke wrote a letter to General von Bluntschli which was an extravagant plea for war and militarism, but for the most curious of all reasons—the need of reviving sacrifice: “In war, man’s noblest virtues come into play: courage and renunciation, fidelity to duty, and a readiness for sacrifice that does not stop short of offering up life itself. Without war the world would become swamped in materialism.”

It was like arguing that sickness and disease must sweep the earth, otherwise medical theory will be swamped in ignorance. But the idea of militarism continued to win adherents under the guise of restoring sacrifice, as, for example, when Mussolini in a speech on August 24, 1934 said: “We are becoming a militaristic nation . . . a war-like nation; that is to say one endowed to a higher degree with the virtues of obedience and sacrifice.”

As we pointed out last week, the world that lost the enthusiasm of religion replaced it with a fanaticism for dictatorship; so, also, the same world that lost the sacrifice inspired by true religion, now replaces it with the false religion of militarism. The dictatorships were right in saying that they could. But the dictatorships were wrong in making the sword the symbol of sacrifice rather than the cross. The young men of these dictatorial nations, whose forefathers were nurtured on the Christian virtues, were sick of a phantom culture based on selfishness and parading under the name of freedom; they wanted the hardy wine of sacrifice. But since there was no one to dip to them the chalice of Christ, or because they refused to drink its refreshing draughts, they intoxicated themselves with the poisoned drink of militarism.

This new religion swept through Europe, and within nine years after von Moltke professed to cure materialism with the sword, there was born to a government worker of Austria one who, with other totalitarian dictators of Europe, would raise militarism to new heights of glory. So determined was he to fill the vacuum created by the world's abandonment of a crucified Savior, that he chose as the symbol of his new cult the swastika: The cross annulling a Cross; the false cross of militarism contradicting the true Cross of Christianity; the cross of hate double-crossing the Cross of love—a realization for the 20th century of the prophecy of Simeon to the Virgin Mary as he looked upon the infant in her arms and called him "a sign that shall be contradicted" (*Luke* 2:35). We in our day see that contradiction in its new form—the cross across a Cross.

The new religion was a proclamation that if

men had lost the power to practice the virtues of Gethsemane, then certainly it would be better to practice those of Sparta than none at all. If nations would no longer seek inspiration in Calvary, then let them seek it in Valhalla! The ideal of the militarists—the need of a cross—was right; their solution—the anti-Christ—was diabolically wrong. The parable of the prodigal son was fulfilled again: Those who leave the Father's house must eat, and if they have not the Bread of the Father's House, they will fill their bellies with the husks of swine.

Totalitarianism could never have swept Europe if it did not at least promise some solution of the problems of life; if the citizens of those countries thought it was as wrong as a diet of sulphuric acid they never could have accepted it. It was something which Liberalism failed to give—it was a quest for meaning, a search for an absolute. The error consisted in grounding that absolute in man rather than God, and in giving politics a theological overtone by pledging loyalties to primitive realities which could not bear the weight of absolute significance. The whole world, suffering the terrible effects of having apostatized from Christianity, began a search for a new Calvary. Machiavelli reading his Livy, Rousseau dreaming over his Plutarch, Hitler thumbing his Wagner, Lenin digging into his Marx, Mussolini copying his Sorel, the Japs studying their James, were all led by the same abomination of desolation to a false god, a false altar, and the utter chaos. Nations as well as persons "get religion" some time in life, and if they refuse to accept the burdens of Christianity they will turn to the resuscitated ghosts of Wotan or Caesar, or to the cadaver of Lenin.

The choice then confronting the modern world

is not whether men will believe in a cross: It is, which one will they embrace?

We in America no longer have the choice of living with or without sacrifice! Pearl Harbor and the barbarism of militarist nations has roused us from our undogmatic slumbers. We were not even considering a national regeneration through sacrifice; our ears were still attuned to false prophets talking progress and license. Then suddenly bombs began to fall on our possessions, and as they fell they seemed to whistle: "America, take up your cross!"

Overnight we saw that it was impossible to conquer those nations which were willing to die for a false absolute with our false relativity which, denying the distinction between good and evil, left a man with nothing to die for. Like a man aroused from deep sleep, we realized that the fanaticism which their false cross inspired could not be overcome by our own indifference and neutrality to the true Cross, and that if we were ever to defeat those who made politics into a pseudo-religion we could do it only by living a true religion unto the re-making of politics.

As a nation we were like Simon the Cyrenean who stood by the wayside as an indifferent spectator to the Christ climbing His Golgotha for the Redemption of the world. But as Simon was aroused from his lethargy by the cruel soldiers of a dictatorship, who forced him to take up the cross behind the Savior, so too we, who were apathetic to sacrifice, were constrained by the violence of modern dictatorships to lay the Cross of Christ on our own shoulders and follow Him to the Hill of the Skull. And just as Simon quickly changed from an unwilling slave of the Lord's Cross to an enthusiastic

cooperator, so too we as a nation of other Cyreneans are beginning to see how light is a cross when we can carry it in the footsteps of the Lord of the Universe. America has made its choice: We are marching under the banners of the true Cross against the double-cross.

It would have been so much easier for us to have fallen down before false gods as they did, for the false gods never begin by demanding man himself, but only a part of him; that is, what he can give to the nation, the race, or the class. They end however by destroying man completely. The true God on the contrary begins by asking for the whole man—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength, and with thy whole mind" (*Luke* 10:27)—but ends by liberating man completely. The false cross bends without ever setting a man free; the true cross frees without bending. No one else in the world ever could point to a cross and say: "Come to me . . . and you will find rest for your souls" (*Matt.* 11:28, 29).

We said in the beginning, the world is no longer free to live with or without a cross; it is only free to decide which one it will embrace. In like manner, we are no longer free to live with or without violence. We are only free to choose between two kinds of violence: Shall it be the violence of the false cross born of hatred, vengeance, and irreligion, or shall it be of the violence of the true Cross born of charity and love? Shall it be a violence against neighbor, or a violence against self? For violence there must be even for the just: "But from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and



the violent have been seizing it by force" (*Matt.* 11:12). If we can get enough Jews, Protestants, and Catholics in the United States to spend a Holy Hour a day in meditation and prayer, we shall be a nation of the true violence, for only by the penitential uprooting of all that is base in us shall we be made worthy to defend a Justice descending from the Father, witnessed by the Son, and diffused by the Holy Spirit.

Neither are we free to choose to live with or without a sword; we are free only to choose one of two kinds: The sword like Peter's which thrusts outwards to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, or the sword like the Savior's which thrusts inwards to cut out our own baseness, selfishness, and egotism. "I have come to bring a sword, not peace" (*Matt.* 10:35). If thirty million Americans would take up the sword of the Holy Hour in their hands, every day while America is at war, we would win not just a victory, as we did in 1918, but a peace with justice wherein even the vanquished would love us. Twenty-two million Catholics there are in the United States. To them particularly I appeal, to unsheathe the sword of God's justice, to take it by the hilt with them tomorrow morning to Holy Mass and Communion, and like the knights of old lay it on the altar, that it may be consecrated to that justice and charity which alone can remake a world. To Peter who drew the outward sword in the Garden, the Savior had but one question: "Couldst thou not watch one hour?" (*Mark* 14:37). Why do we all respond when new swords of violence are directed against Him? If you heard His voice in the Garden would you say No! Will you say it now as He cries out to us from the Garden of the world's agonies? If you or any Jew or Protestant

would like a book of suggestions for the Holy Hour we will gladly send it to you.

Neither are we free to choose whether or not we shall be armed. We are free only to choose whether we shall have only one kind of armament or two. It is our contention that no nation can be saved in this crisis unless there is an armament not only for our bodies, but also for our souls. One source of raw material for this spiritual armament is to be found in the secret mines of the daily Holy Hour. Harken then to St. Paul: "Therefore take up the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of justice, and having your feet shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace, in all things taking up the shield of faith, with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God" (*Ephesians* 6:13-17).

No man, no nation, today can live without a cross! Sacrifice is inescapable. And there are only two crosses from which we may choose: The cross of brutal force militarism and the cross of Christ, the cross which claims God is as Caesar, and the cross which "renders, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (*Matt.* 22:21).

There are only two ideas left in the world: Totalitarianism and Christianity. Totalitarianism has an idea: The crucifixion of neighbor for love of self. Christianity has an idea: The crucifixion of self for love of neighbor. In between these two there are no ideas, and hence no choice. Perhaps

then we ought to thank God that our nation, which at one time felt it could live without a cross, now recognizes that, without it, it is like a shorn Samson—clipped of the secret strength of an ultimate conviction. But with it, it is strong in Him Who first saved the world not by detachment from sacrifice, but by acceptance of a Cross.

And now thanks to a rebirth of sacrifice let it be one that has the tang of repentance about it; one wherein we accuse not life but ourselves, and blame world troubles not on systems but on our sins. By this kind of self-accusation we will begin to see ourselves as our brother's keepers and as people on whom God has laid the heavy charge of being the disciples of His Freedom: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (*Matt. 16:24*).

There is a price tag on every soul in the world; there is a value on every nation and every people. But they can be bought not by gold and silver, but only by our trials, our sacrifices, and our prayers. Would you, a Jew, if you knew that your daily Holy Hour of meditation could save a soul in a German concentration camp, not make that sacrifice as your brother's keeper? Would you, a Protestant, if you know that your unbroken daily Holy Hour would co-redeem, with Christ, a soul ensnared in an enemy country, refuse to watch that Hour? Would you, a Catholic, if you knew that daily Holy Hour including daily Mass and Communion would restore to the sacraments of Jesus Christ a soul who had lost his faith, refuse to lift your heart with the host and chalice of the Savior?

But this is the only way souls are saved. It is the only way devils are driven out; for the kind that possesses the modern world "can only be cast out by

prayer and fasting" (*Matt.* 17:20). We help ourselves more by praying and suffering for others than we do by praying for ourselves. That is why we recommend the Holy Hour, which looks not to our petitions, but to the world's needs and the glory of God and the praise of His Divine Son.

We are now a nation on a cross! Beneath it, as once before in history, there come the scoffers of religion, the undisciplined and selfish who sneer at sacrifice. Out of their mouths as from craters of blasphemy, there comes the echo of the words first heard beneath the Cross of Calvary, "If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him" (*Matt.* 27:42). Come down from your Cross of sacrifice; come down from Hands hurt in the service of others, from Feet pierced with brotherly love, from Lips burnt with the fires of charity. Come down and we will believe.

But Our Savior refused, until the work of redemption was completed and with the strong voice of triumph He could say: "It is consummated!" (*John* 19:30).

Neither must we respond to that false challenge of the enemies of the Cross! It is human to come down! It is divine to hang there until the last lost sheep is brought back into the fold. America, take up the cross of the Holy Hour. Continue it every day while America is at war. And let this be our inspiration: God came down from the heavens, but He did not come down from the Cross!

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who in Thy Mercy hearest the prayers of sinners, pour forth, we beseech Thee, all grace and blessing upon our country and its citizens. We pray in particular for the President—for our Congress—for all our soldiers—for

all who defend us in ships, whether on the seas or in the skies, for all who are suffering the hardships of war. We pray for all who are in peril or in danger. Bring us all after the troubles of this life into the haven of peace, and reunite us all together forever, O dear Lord, in Thy glorious heavenly kingdom.





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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Twelfth Year—1942

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii, including one short-wave station broadcasting to the entire western world. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 18,700 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

Our Sunday Visitor Press  
Huntington, Indiana

