

III

THE CHALLENGE TO SPIRITUALITY

THE most revered image ever fashioned by human hands represents a living man, a village carpenter, spiked to a cross of wood. After two thousand years that living man, a village carpenter, spiked to a cross of wood, still lives and holds the adoration of innumerable multitudes. Twenty centuries ago He walked this earth, slept under the stars that still shine tonight, gloried in sunsets that make us wonder too, walked among the lilies of the field that still bloom; yet the simple, artless story of His birth, life, and Resurrection has been translated into seven hundred and eighty languages and dialects. Sixty generations ago He lived alone among men and women as we are. But today one-third of the population of the modern world names His Name. As well untwist moonbeams that fall with a yellow glow on the all-glorious gardens and countryside about your city as to suppose you can untwist the name and memory of the Son of Man from the hope and heart of the world. Browning was right:

That face far from vanishes, grows
And decomposes only to recompose.

He stands the erect among the fallen, the strong among the weak, the pure among the unclean, the believing among the cynical, while those whose lives have been made over by His presence sing with Bernard of Clairvaux:

The Answer to Chaos

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, thou light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

His words are still the solvent for every problem, every heartache, every disillusionment, socially, economically, politically, personally. The world is not done with Him, but the world is done without Him. Our wistful world in the hour of its bewilderment turns its face to Galilee, saying with Chesterton:

To an open house in the evening,
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden,
And a taller town than Rome,
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless,
And all men are at home.

Like bells of hope, clear, resonant, harmonious, that ever-new old story rings over land and sea. It is a story of which childhood never grows weary and for which old age never loses its affection. It is the place where life finds a new compelling, where hope sees a new star, where faith finds a new example, and love hears the rustling of the leaves. It is the place where all wandering ends.

Democracy has been good to His followers and to all who bear His name. Indeed, Christianity finds in democracy its finest and most complete political expression. Now in its day of trial and peril democracy turns to Christianity, asking what it can do for her. In such a moment Christianity is not silent, for in times of crises, when the resources of men shrivel, the resources of God always unfold. Christianity answers the call of democracy by saying: First, hold fast to your conviction in the dignity of man and the worth of personality. Do not let it down. This we proclaim too. You

The Challenge to Spirituality 113

may look within and say, "I am a child of God." Second, hold fast to your faith in the community. Life is not only a matter of personal initiative, but social responsibility. We, too, proclaim it. Look out upon humanity and say, "We are brothers." Third, hold fast to your belief that spirituality stands in the center of the universe. We proclaim it, too. We are not alone. Eternal purpose and eternal love stand in the heart of the world. You may look up to God and say, "Father." I have in two previous lectures emphasized the first and second. Tonight will you let me think with you of the third?

The fundamental problem of our time is how to recover the sense of purpose. When the world is tumbling apart into broken and brittle bits and the lights are going out on all the shores of all the seas, man must find again the aims and objectives of life, and, having found them, must give himself to them with intelligent abandon. That is the paramount duty of this hour.

I have already referred to people for whom everything has grown futile. They have made themselves believe that they are of no consequence and are quite convinced that their lives do not count. They seem to think that there is no place for them in the universe. They arise in the morning with a feeling of frustration and go to bed at night assured that they have accomplished nothing. For them, the universe is a dead-end street. Life has slipped through their fingers as water filters through the finger tips of a statue in a garden fountain.

There must be an explanation for this abnormal attitude, since most people live normally with a more adventurous joy. There have been two schools of thought to explain this sense of frustration. There are those who maintain that the consciousness of futility is born from forces which man cannot

control. He has been victimized by his environment. Tensions have come which are not of his making; circumstances for which he is not responsible have brought on these conflicts. He cannot help himself. Elements which he cannot control have created inhibitions, repressions, suppressions, and depressions. Man is simply the victim of an untoward setting.

But there is another school of thought to which the Christian religion belongs which maintains that the sense of futility which crowds so many lives is in reality born from aimless living. We have had too much random living. We have refused to commit ourselves to something beyond ourselves. Frustrations, inner strain, and wishful thinking have been caused by purposeless living. John Ruskin once said that there are three great questions which confront every human life. They are: Where am I from? Whither am I going? And what must I do on the way? A refusal to answer these three questions robs life of its heroic adventure and of its peace. It is because we have refused to answer definitely these three perplexing questions that life has become frustrated. That is where life breaks down today. It is living with no purpose which is so grievous a blunder. We refuse to commit ourselves to something beyond self; we simply will not live dedicated lives.

Now that is exactly what totalitarianism has done, and that is exactly why it is gripping so many people in our generation. Those who are familiar with Europe by travel or by reading know what appalling disillusionment hung over continental life in the post-war period. Especially in Central Europe one often heard that life had no meaning, man had no worth, and that personality counted for nothing. A dreadful feeling of frustration haunted men's lives. There was little happiness, and the burning presentiment that life had

The Challenge to Spirituality 115

neither value nor importance kept people close to the edge of despair.

Then something strange happened. Totalitarianism was born with its new ideology. They found something to worship. Almost overnight self-pity passed out and a new hope took possession of people. They no longer felt sorry for themselves. Life was no longer an empty thing. They talked about it and read about it and sang about it. They became aware of a new destiny. They dedicated themselves to it. They did not mind the long marches it involved, nor the longer meetings which they were forced to attend, nor the tedious monotony of the severe discipline. As they marched along they sang. I have often heard them sing upon the road as they tramped from village to village. Their watch cry was, "Strength through joy." They were proud, held their heads high, and were glad to live. They had found something to which they could give their lives with a reckless abandon. They were not afraid to struggle and suffer. Gladly they lived for this purpose and just as gladly would they die for it. That is the amazing transformation which has taken place in totalitarian countries.

You may not like the cause to which they have given themselves. You may shout all manner of ugly things against this ideological skulduggery. You may say anything about it you like, and, if it is necessary, I can toss in a few adjectives of my own! But the fact stands that it gave life meaning and purpose. It led to a dedicated citizenry. It lifted before them high hopes and placed upon them gigantic demands. At last they had found something to which they could commit life.

Now it is this committal of life to something outside of itself which must take possession of us today. We shall never know joy, peace, or strength until we have done so.

The way of life in which we are supposed to believe will never survive until there comes to us again this sense of dedication.

But the question inevitably arises, to whom shall we dedicate life, or to what? The sense of worship is one of the central facts of human experience, but what we worship is even more significant. In this lecture I propose to discuss with you what totalitarianism worships, then I shall try to point out what is the function of religion in democracy, and after that, how Christianity vindicates democracy in this approach.

When you discuss the onslaught of totalitarianism on democracy from the point of view of religion you face in many respects its most devastating tragedy. Spiritual values are swept aside. The relationship of man with God is entirely rejected and abrogated. Under that philosophy man builds his golden altar to the state, worships it with the ancient cry, "These be thy gods which shall lead thee out of bondage." It knows no other God and it recognizes no other Omnipotence. *Mein Kampf* affirms, "No Jewish God will save the democracies. There is a stern time coming. I shall see to that." Religion as we know it will be entirely outlawed. Naziism has written a new commandment, "Thou shall have no other gods before me, except Hitler." In the new order which totalitarianism proposes, religion as we know it will be as dead as freedom. The state becomes the only recognized object of worship. It supersedes conscience, morality, and conduct. It is an emotional revivalism which takes on a religious form. To millions of Germans it is self-evident that Hitler is a divine figure, and he has encouraged this faith by every possible known technique of the Minister of Propaganda. Ralph B. Perry has written, "It is a government standing outside the creed, and regarding it as

a technique by which to mobilize a power having no end beyond its own perpetuation and aggrandizement—a fighting faith, in which the faith is for the fighting, and not the fighting for the faith.” It invests itself with the aura of religion. The leader is the Messiah; his words are the true faith, and the state is the highest and holiest good. Even fascism, the most superficial and glib of the new doctrines, declares itself, through the mouth of Mussolini, to be a “religious conception.” Soviet Russia dethrones other religions, sets up the shrine of Lenin, and makes his iron disciple the new anointed one. Nazi Germany humiliates all other faiths and seeks to replace them by its own dogma of the mystical organism of the nation. It, too, has its saints and its martyrs; its hymns and its altars. All these dictatorships promise man an abiding place for his distracted, crisis-torn spirit, a refuge from his sense of detachment, a spiritual home in which to rest from his vain yearnings and his endless quest. Unless we recognize this aspect of dictatorship we will fail to understand its hold on the mass of its devotees. Robert M. MacIver in *Leviathan and the People* says: “The state is the whole, the absolute, the crowning fulfillment of mankind, the march of God on earth, the limit of all morality, all duty, all brotherhood. There is nothing beyond.” This is the goal to which the nations are led like sheep to the slaughter, while the exalted leaders preach to the hosts beneath them the empty and the fatal worship of the state; “so darkness cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.”

The conceptions good and evil are replaced by the categories advantageous and injurious for the party and the state. The end justifies the means. Justice is replaced by discipline, freedom by authority, and conscience by obedience. Every man must obey those above him and give orders to those below him. Opposition is mutiny, criticism is

treachery. The man who places his honor above the interest of the state and his conscience above the party is a criminal—the most detestable deed which is performed for its sake is transfigured and beautiful. All duties of the individual to God, to his neighbor, and to his own soul, pale into insignificance before his duty to the deified state. You have Hitler saying to Rauschning: “The religions are all alike, no matter what they call themselves. They have no future—certainly none for the Germans. Fascism if it likes may come to terms with the Church. So shall I. Why not? That will not prevent me from tearing up Christianity root and branch and annihilating it in Germany.” “A German Church, a German Christianity, is distortion. One is either a German or a Christian. You cannot be both.” “We don’t want people who keep one eye on the life in the hereafter. We need free men who feel and know that God is in themselves.” “Providence has ordained that I should be the greatest liberator of humanity. I am freeing men from the restraints of an intelligence that has taken charge from the dirty and degrading self-mortifications of a chimera called conscience and morality.”

It is only natural that Nazi doctrine—in such violent contrast with Christian teaching—should distort and even deny the existence of Christ Himself. For instance, a Gauleiter in the Saar is quoted in a Nazi paper as proclaiming that “Hitler is a new, a greater, a more powerful Jesus Christ. Our God, our Pope, is Adolf Hitler.”

Propaganda Minister Goebbels similarly places Hitler upon a divine pedestal. Speaking in Berlin on “Hitler’s Mission,” Dr. Goebbels stated: “Our Leader becomes the intermediary between his people and the throne of God . . . Everything which our Leader utters is religion in the highest sense, in its deepest and most hidden meaning.”

The Challenge to Spirituality 119

An important regional paper, *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, goes even further. "Our body, our spirit, our possessions, our souls belong to Der Fuehrer. He has come out of us. He is the sum of our power and meaning and we live through him as God."

Alfred Rosenberg, the "official" Nazi philosopher, puts his stamp of approval on these ideas in the following words: "When a National Socialist dons his brown shirt he ceases to be a Catholic or a Protestant and becomes a soldier of Hitler whose religion is his Faith in the Leader."

Over against that intolerable and insane ideology one finds that in democracy religion and freedom are inseparable. An awareness of and an obedience to God has always been considered paramount to good citizenship. It is true, we boast quite correctly of freedom of religion. But freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion. We proclaim quite truly the liberty of conscience, and we will ride our horses up to their bridles in blood before we surrender this heritage. But liberty of conscience does not mean liberty from conscience. Democracy is a form of government so high and so exalted that it requires a high level of intelligence to appreciate and a high standard of character to maintain. When democracy loses its spiritual basis it degenerates into bureaucracy, and liberty passes into license. It is not a mere chance or accident that from the very beginning we have stamped on our coins, "In God We Trust." It is a significant fact that the charter of each of the original thirteen colonies begins with a recognition of God. Only Virginia was an exception, and after thirteen years that state revised its charter to include this ascription to God. Men have always affirmed that you can no more maintain democracy without spiritual forces than a watch can run with a broken mainspring. In the day of the Pilgrim and Puritan, when

our way of life was established on New England's broken coast, the full right of citizenship involved membership in the Church and attendance upon the acts of worship. If a citizen did not attend Church worship on Sunday he was put in prison. (We do not do that today perhaps because we haven't enough jails!) Bigotry, you say. Perhaps! But what they wanted to make clear was that citizenship without godliness was not safe. Without that faith an enlightened civilization cannot possibly endure. It is this which we must reaffirm and recover.

It is not knowledge which we need. We are clever enough; indeed, we are too clever for our own good. It is not power we need, for we have in our keeping inexhaustible resources. It is faith which we need. We can never hope to build the holy city by outwitting spiritual forces. A generation which seeks to rebuild national life without reverence and spirituality has put mortar between its stones which driving rains and early frosts will crack and crumble. The moment a nation ceases to rest heavily upon God it turns the hands of the clock back to savagery. There have been times in the recent past when it was thought smart to challenge man's faith in invisible forces. There were those who thought it was a sign of intellectual acumen to rub out the marks of reverence. We know now, however, that it is not an earmark of brilliance. It only requires a pair of scissors and an ink pot of vitriol. People are great, not in proportion to their cleverness, but in proportion to their humility. The steady-sense of God's presence is the only lasting bulwark of freedom. When democracy becomes certain of that, its chords which are broken will vibrate once more.

Now it is this fundamental conviction which Jesus gave to man. The conviction that a God of love stands at the center of the universe has come through the Christian reli-

The Challenge to Spirituality 121

gion. In the Magna Charta of the Christian religion commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, it was knowing God and seeing God and being like God which constituted the burden of Christ's message. He bore witness to that in His own life. Not all men are agreed upon the full meaning and mission of the life of the Carpenter of Nazareth, but all men everywhere are agreed that He lived a God-centered life and so proposed to build a new order. He made clear that when a man trusts God he can be trusted with his fellow men and when a man loves God he will love his fellow men. That is equally true of nations. The conviction that eternal law and eternal purpose and eternal love stand in the center of the universe is one of the most steady and enriching convictions of mankind. It is fundamental to all progress. Chesterton, the inimitable past master of paradox, once wrote, "When I go to engage lodgings I do not inquire of the landlady, 'Where is the room located, how many windows has it or what will be the charge?' But rather I say, 'Madam, what is your view of the universe?'" Then he adds naively, "If she is right there, she will be right in everything, and if she is wrong there, it does not matter what she says about other things." That is not only the most fundamental concept that can come to life, but also the most revolutionary. The man who believes that a God of love stands in the center of the universe is going to care what happens to God's world. He who lives with a consciousness that we are children of God is going to be concerned about what happens to his fellow men.

It is this conviction which must be recaptured if history is to have meaning and if our faith in democracy is to stand. It is because we have forgotten this simple, but profound truth that we are so confused and so on edge today. If we could be certain once again that history is not a muddy

stream of unrelated and disconnected events, that the universe is not a mad jumble of stars and planets, that life is not a tangled mass of shreds and twisted threads which can never be untwisted to a divine design, that the universe is not a dead-end street, then we would live with a finer serenity and a greater faith in democracy. For when I say God, I mean I live in one kind of a world; and when I say no God, I mean I live in another kind of a world. When I say God I mean I live in a world which is the Father's house and in which I am greeted as a welcome child; but when I say no God, I mean I live in a world in which I am greeted with a blank stare. When I say God, I mean I live in a world in which faith, freedom, and good will are the master forces; but when I say no God I mean I live in a world in which faith, justice, and freedom do not count. Now if I could not believe that spirituality stands at the center of the universe, then I would agree with Bertrand Russell that man is only a sick fly, clinging dizzily to the revolving wheels of a dynamo. Then, too, I would bow hope out of this earth. But I, for one, would rather put my civilization in the keeping of those humble pilgrims of the past who in dawn and dusk, in autumn and spring, in winter and summer, met life bravely and buoyantly because their daily litany was, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," than to put my civilization in the keeping of these papier-mâché, quasi-intellectual, fly-by-night theorists whose only contribution to civilization has been to smear religion and to stagger the mind of this generation with the brilliancy of their negations. It is a rather suggestive and sobering fact that the people and leaders who have lost faith in God have also immediately lost faith in man and in humanity.

Often in these latter days I have been thinking about a home in New England which is sheltering for the duration

The Challenge to Spirituality 123

of the war three evacuated British children. One night not long ago the father of the family had put these children to bed and listened to them recite their evening prayers. The boy of nine had just finished the prayers which his mother had taught him in their home in England. When he had recited these three formal prayers of the Anglican Church he closed his eyes again and said, "And now, dear God, please take care of yourself because if you don't, we are all sunk." That evacuated child of a war-ravaged country had found something which we must rediscover, that as long as a God of love stands at the center of the universe we need not despair. We need desperately a resurgence of unfaltering faith in an unfailing God. Without religion the foundations of democracy will crumble and sag, no matter who is President, what the Congress may do or what may be our Constitution, if any.

Studdert Kennedy, familiarly known as Woodbine Willie, has it:

We must go back again, we must, we must,
Our rainy faces pelted in the dust,
Creep back from the vain quest through endless strife
To find not anywhere in all of life
A happier happiness than blest us then,
We must go home, we must go home again.

I began my first lecture with a portrayal of the lengthening shadows which are falling across the earth today. One often hears it said that mankind is entering the night. All our dreams end in darkness. But religion has no such hopeless conception of the universe. I have been reading the Bible lately to find what religion had to say about night. I made the discovery that nowhere in the Bible does night speak the last word. There is no finality about darkness. In the very beginning of the Book you read, "It was evening and morning, the first day," and so on through all the days

of creation. If man had written it he would have reversed the order and recorded, "It was morning and evening, the first day." But not so religion. It always writes, "It is evening and morning," because God's day always ends in dawn. The ancient prophets lifted before men the vision, "At eventide there shall be light." Standing on the rim of the world the voice said, "What of the night? Will it soon pass?" And the watchman cried, "Awake Thou that sleepest, the night is departed, the day is approaching, gird on the armor of light." The most entrancing figure of speech used about the coming of the Lord was that "the dayspring from on high shall visit us." The Christian era always ushers in a dawn. Among the last sentences in the New Testament is the promise, "And there shall be no night."

Let democracy be assured again of the incontestable truth that night never speaks the last word. The fingers on the dial of God never move backward. In this dismal day of cynicism and fear it is time that democracy recovers the assurance of religion. When once a truth has been born, nothing can ultimately defeat it. It is so easy to make mockery of dreams and ideals. There is too often the melancholy mood which says, "We may as well give up at the beginning for darkness will only defeat us in the end." Disease will always haunt; hunger will always gnaw; pain will always stalk; wars will always darken and ruthlessness will always have a toe-hold on our dreams. When the great Solon lost his only son a friend came to him, saying, "Why do you weep if weeping avails nothing?" Solon replied, "Precisely for that reason; it does not avail." So this melancholy mood has taken possession of men today, saying in the words of Marcus Aurelius, "And this, too, shall pass away." It is high time we recover the assurance of religion that night never speaks the last word and that dawn is irresisti-

ble. In the economy of God nothing is ever settled until it is settled right. The golden rivers of truth, freedom, and justice will yet make their way to the sea. Issues in which God has a stake can never be ultimately defeated. The mole-eyed cynic may see only shadows in the tomorrows of the world, but he who believes may walk with his head bloody, but unbowed. If the whole world resorted to dictatorship, that would be no proof of the permanence of the system. Man may take refuge from storms in dark caves, but it does not follow that they will continue to live in them.

A book is more than pulp; a painting is more than canvas; a house is more than timbers; a symphony is more than bars and measures; and history is more than Hitler. The world of tomorrow is in the hands of men who keep faith in God. The steadying sense of God's presence is the supreme need of democracy today. Haunted by disappointment, torn by anxiety, burdened with misgivings, yet keeping step with God's eternal purpose, so will democracy march to its predestined end. We are not alone. The God of the fifth sparrow is still at work in the world. Modern dictators with their ruthless philosophy and still more ruthless methods can never ultimately prevail. In the long run of history they have no tomorrow. Power always faces the sunset. That is why it must fight a blitzkrieg. It is now or never; if it is not now it can be never. God's purposes alone face the sunrise. Not Corsica, but Galilee speaks the last word. "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Bearing witness to the worth of personality, living with a consciousness of community, holding a vibrant faith, democracy can stand before this generation unashamed and unafraid. And a government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth. In that conviction Christianity undergirds it.

I would like to quote again the lines, "I said to a man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown,' and he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way.'"

And when the last day is ended, and the nights are through,
When the sun lies buried in a field of blue,
When the stars have lost their luster,
And the seas no longer fret,
When the winds have lost their cunning, and the storms forget,
When the last lip is palsied, and the last long prayer is said,
God will reign immortal, though the earth lies dead.

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