

### O TEMPORA! O MORES!

Hubert O'Hanley, '42.

At the present time the nations of the world are engaged in the most titanic struggle the world has ever witnessed. On four continents and four oceans the powers of the world are waging total war. Already great damage has been done, and death and destruction are widespread. Our own country, with its shoulder to the wheel in an all-out drive for victory, is already experiencing the sufferings of a belligerent nation. Many of our young men have offered their services to Canada as fighting men; and already not a few have sacrificed their lives in the struggle. Those of us who remain in Canada feel the burden of heavier taxation and the loss of many of the luxuries we once enjoyed. The whole country, under the influence of war, is in a state of stress.

It is in times of social stress such as these that most men begin to think. During the balmy days of peace when we had everything we desired, more gas, sugar and rubber than we needed, we led carefree lives, blissfully ignorant of the conditions in which we were living, and by which we were being victimized. But in time of war we are shocked into realization of the fact that war is not the only evil that exists in modern society. We are living in an age of crime. On every side we find results of moral depravity among our people. The results of economic injustice are widespread. The state of total war in which we live is the immediate result of unjust international relations and policies.

### GOD FORGOTTEN

Modern evils, like all other effects, must have a cause; and we do not have to be great philosophers to realize this fact, or to convince ourselves of what the cause is. We find that the world in which we live is, in general, a world of "the forgotten God". Individuals commit the most heinous crimes in direct disobedience of His Will; social life seems to have as a principle of its being the absence of God from all its departments; international relations have become so patently Godless that the mention of God at international conference tables has become a rare anachronism.



Yet God is the sole and infallible source of all true rules of individual, civic, and international conduct: He is the one and only author of a true norm of morality. Moreover, the total disregard by individuals and nations of a true norm of morality has been the radical cause of World War II, the most violent social cataclysm in the world's history. The God of Calvary and His Ten Commandments have been relegated to the little world of the faithful few; and, by the vast majority of men, first place has been given to Mars and his code of war. The Altar of the Cross has been deserted, and upon the altar of the God of War the lives of many of our noblest brothers are being sacrificed daily. All this is the inevitable result of the lack, or rather the disregard, of a true and universal norm of morality.

#### RULE OF MORALITY

Morality, that quality of human act by which it is said to be morally good or morally bad, must have a true norm. There must be some determined and fixed measure to which a human act must conform, as to its exemplar cause, in order that it be morally good. If it fails to measure up to this standard or exemplar of moral rectitude, it is morally bad.

The rule of morality has been made different things by different men. Some would have man's individual utility as the true norm. The defenders of this theory belong to the Utilitarian school, and hold that an act is morally good in so far as it is useful and attains the end desired by the agent. Such a doctrine seems to constitute a first principle of Nazism. The Hedonistic school makes the morality of an act depend upon the pleasure it brings the agent. Perhaps this was the rule of morality of too many of the unfortunate people of vanquished Singapore. These doctrines are both unbecoming to civilized men and ethically untenable. Either teaching leads to the error that an act may be morally good at one time, and morally bad at another. The norm is neither stable nor universal, but varies with particular circumstances; and as such it must be rejected as false.

#### REMOTE AND PROXIMATE RULE

The world did not come into existence by chance, but was fashioned in accordance with a plan that existed in the



mind of God from all eternity. By this plan too all things are directed to their own proper ends and to the end of the universe. The execution of this providential plan is called divine governance, and is, as it were, an extension of divine wisdom operating in every order, the order of this world and of Heaven as well. But this plan of divine Providence, directing all things to their proper end and to the end of the universe, presupposes some law, an ordination of divine reason according to which all creatures should act (whether naturally or freely). Thus Divine Wisdom has the character of a plan; it has also the character of a law so far as it moves all things to their due end: "*ratio divinae sapientiae secundum quod est directiva omnium actuum et motionum*", the Eternal Law. All things, therefore, are directed to their proper ends by the Eternal Law of God; and upon their conformity or non-conformity to that law ultimately depends their morality. In other words, the ultimate or remote norm of morality is the Eternal Law.

Since a law is a measure and rule of action, it must have, so to speak, a dual existence: existence in that which rules, and existence in that which is ruled. The supreme rule of the actions of all creatures, as it exists in God, the Supreme Ruler, is the Eternal Law; this same law, as it exists in creatures, is called the Natural Law. This participation of the Eternal Law by creatures, being a reflection of Divine Wisdom in creatures, must guide all creatures in accordance with, not in violation of, their natures. Thus, all creatures belonging to an order of nature inferior to rational nature are guided by the natural law from physical necessity; and this law is commonly called physical law. Rational creatures, in virtue of their endowment of the human intellect, know this law that is impressed in their nature; and, in virtue of their endowment of free will, are guided by it from moral, not physical, necessity; and, in this case, the law is known properly as Natural Law.

Man, being a free agent, is guided to the attainment of his due perfection, not from physical necessity as in the case of plants and brutes, but in so far as he freely complies with the precepts of the Natural Law. The first precept of the Natural Law, and that to which all others may be reduced, is this: do good and avoid evil.

This general norm of moral rectitude is known to all men endowed with the use of reason. From this fundamental command of the Natural Law immediately



follow, by way of conclusion, secondary precepts, that is, particular applications of the first and fundamental precept of moral rectitude. Concrete expression of these latter was given to us by God in the Ten Commandments. They are known by the vast majority of men, for the simple reason that the vast majority of men can derive them as immediate conclusions from the first precept. There are other less obvious conclusions, called remote conclusions of the Natural Law; and of these ignorance is possible and, in many cases, even excusable.

It is evident, then, that that by which man's properly rational acts are regulated, their proximate rule of morality, is that God-given power in man by which he judges rightly regarding the proper end of his human acts and knows whether or not they are in conformity with the precepts of the Natural Law. Right reason, therefore, is man's proximate rule of morality. "To measure up to the rule of morality which is human reason", writes Rev. Walter Farrell, O. P., "means to measure up to that supreme rule of morality—divine reason—which is mirrored in our created reason" (*A Compendium to the Summa*, p. 68).

God is the basis of all morality. Without Him there could be no true norm by which the objective morality of human actions could be judged. In the first place, if there were no God, man would have no ultimate end to which his actions ought to be directed. It would be futile for man to strive to be good, if he were not destined for a higher and a more perfect life. In the second place, there could be no safe rule to guide man's actions without a supreme and infallible legislator. There cannot be a house without a carpenter to build it. Neither can there be a law without a legislator. God, who is Supreme Wisdom, is, therefore, the basis of all morality; and the denial of His existence leads to moral anarchy. Just as God is one and God is Truth unchangeable, so too is divine wisdom true and unchangeable. A true and universal norm of morality, which is a manifestation of divine wisdom in the governance of creatures, must, therefore, be one and unchangeable for all men.

### MODERN GODLESSNESS

The lack of a universal norm of morality is very evident in modern life. Many individuals are professed atheists; many others reject any thought of God's existence



because they think they shall have a happier life on earth without Him. Whatever the case, they try to make themselves believe that there is no God, and quite logically conclude that there is no moral law. "God does not exist; Therefore, why should I practice prudence, justice, temperance or fortitude? Why shouldn't I 'eat, drink, and be merry'?" The result is irreligion among the masses, who scoff at the idea of religious services and are amused at the thought of praying. They seek to enjoy the pleasure of sense to the fullest, and sink to the lowest state of moral degradation. They drain the cup of iniquity to the very dregs, and lapse into a coma of moral "D. T's". Such seekers of ease, luxury, and self-indulgence regard the time-honored laws of morality as old fashioned and outmoded, and preach a moral code that is new and godless for a world that is, modern and materialistic.

#### IN PRIVATE LIFE

To-day men do not regard the marriage bond as sacred and of divine institution, and brand its indissolubility as a human superstition that is both outmoded and silly. Despite Christ's specific injunction, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," one out of every five marriages in the U. S. A. ends in a divorce suit; and in the majority of cases a civil divorce is granted. Thus is the way paved for "legalized" adultery, despite the lessons of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, birth control has come to be regarded not only as convenient but as ethical and fashionable. This complete disregard of a true rule of morality in the sacred domain of matrimony has resulted in the corruption of private life, is fast depopulating the world, and is undermining the very foundations of society.

#### IN SOCIAL LIFE

The modern world would be depressing enough if these abuses were present only in the lives of individuals. But the philosophies by which the masters of the world regulate their private lives soon become the moral code of human society. These teachings, knowingly or otherwise, have become the philosophies of men in their dealings with fellow-beings. The capitalists, eager to add to their already excessive fortunes, so transact business that they make



exorbitant profits to the detriment of the labouring class. The great evil here is the payment of an insufficient wage. Such actions have already been the occasion of the writing of two great encyclicals in which such business relations have been exposed and condemned as contrary to the moral order. Both *Rerum Novarum* and *XL Anno* propose the "living wage" for the labourer which, they declare, the employer is bound in conscience to pay from part of his profit. But men, as a result of their belief in individual economic utility, have still seen fit to deny labourers the rights that are theirs as men. They do not believe in the existence of a moral order, and think that they may rob their fellowmen with impunity.

But the struggle between labourer and capitalist is not the only abuse in social life resulting from the rejection of a universal norm of morality. It is indeed far from the only one. So many false ideologies have sprung up in the social order that this has been truly called an age of "isms." In Russia arose Communism which, among other things, denies the existence of God. Nazism sprang up in Germany, and it too rejects belief in the Supreme Being. Both of these are sworn foes of Christianity, and strive to banish God from the hearts and minds of men. In His place they would deify the State and give it supreme control over man, body and soul. Therefore, they would abolish the Eternal Law and make civil law the rule of human conduct. Man is deprived of his God-given liberty, and, under penalty of imprisonment or death, is forced to do only what the civil authority commands or permits. Such are the normal results of Statism and its rule of morality, or rather, of immorality. The rejection of God's law has led to the lamentable conditions of present-day social life. Repercussions in the political relations among nations have become inevitable, for it is indeed true that international affairs are subjected to the same pernicious influences as are individual and social relations.

### IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

International affairs have been in a sorry condition since the beginning of the century; twice they have culminated in disastrous wars which have brought great destruction of life and property to all the nations involved. The flower of the youth of two generations has been slaughtered in bloody battles. The World War I was followed by



social and political upheavals and the great economic depression. War, in itself and in its consequences, has all the marks of the greatest evil with which the world could be plagued. But like all the other evils which must be deplored in modern society, it has as its radical cause the lack of a universal norm of morality. This fact is evident from a careful survey of the conditions immediately preceding the conflict.

Various causes for the war are placed before the people by the nations' propaganda machines. Some of these have some foundation in fact; but the tendency to blame the opposing forces may obscure the true order. On one nation may be placed the immediate responsibility for war, in so far as it commenced hostilities. But oppression by other nations may have forced it to declare war. The real cause was the failure to be guided by a true norm of justice and charity.

#### BROKEN TREATIES

In times of peace the cause of wars are born. The leaders of governments, with national interest as their principal aim, direct their nation's efforts to become one of the greater powers. In striving after economic security, the rights of lesser states are trampled into the dust. More powerful nations are dealt with more subtly, but their rights are disregarded. Any country which stands in the way of the nations' attaining their goals is swept aside. To obtain security and more power, so that their acts may be sanctioned by other peoples, national leaders draw up and sign treaties. But these treaties are made only to be broken, especially if the rights of lesser nations are involved. The diplomatic struggle to keep the world at peace is based on hypocrisy and simulation. Japan's two-faced policy has become the classic example. While its ambassadors appeared to be making an earnest effort to preserve peace in the Pacific, its armed forces were preparing to strike Pearl Harbour. Such procedure is typical of international affairs in this age. Leaders of totalitarian states, with only national power as a goal and with no idea of moral obligation, will permit no lesser power, treaty, or national rights to stand in the way of the attainment of their object.

#### AFTERMATH

The norm of morality in international policies is not right reason as dependent on the eternal law, but national



interest as interpreted by the nations concerned. War and its concomitant and consequent evils may be traced back to nationalism and broken treaties.

Nations plunge themselves into war to attain their object, even if its attainment will result in a disregarding of the rights of others, or even of the duties of the nation to itself. States which are controlled by atheistic factions cannot possibly enter into a treaty that entails moral obligation for them, and feel perfectly justified in breaking promises as soon as they are made, if they deem it profitable to them. The same is true, though perhaps to a lesser degree, of almost all other nations. In their peace conferences God has had no place, and the stage has been set for future wars. If God has no place at the conference table when the terms of the peace treaty concluding the present war are signed, we cannot hope for a lasting peace.

The world is living in almost complete oblivion of God. Totally ignoring His moral law, it is steadily plunging deeper and deeper into moral chaos. Individuals reject the moral law, and know in their hearts a bitter hatred for God. Others choose to deny His existence. Moral depravity is the result in either case. In social life God has no place. It is the *sanctum sanctissimorum* where God has no right to be. The international order has its basis, not in the observance of rights, but in the principle, "Might is Right." By hatred of God and the consequent disregard of the divinely established moral order, the whole world has become so filled with evils and abuses that one wonders why God does not destroy it, as He did in the days of Noe.

### A WARNING

France has gone the "way of all flesh." Germany will follow in due time. Our turn will come too, unless we give God His rightful place, unless we respect and obey the Decalogue, unless we live lives that are Christian and according to the spirit of the Gospel. Therefore, if we would escape disaster, we must hearken to the words of warning of Pope Pius XII: "The radical cause of the evils which we deplore in modern society is the denial and rejection of the universal norm of morality, as well for individual and social life as for international relations . . . When God is hated, every basis of morality is undermined"

(Summi Pontificatus).



The restoration of peace and contentment to our war-torn and unhappy world can come and will come only when men will be guided by the true universal norm of morality. Justice and charity, peace and happiness among all men, will exist only when all men learn to "render to God the things that are God's", and to "love their neighbor as themselves for the love of God".



Redeem the misspent time that's past  
And live this day as 'twere the last.

—Ken

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Of all the causes that conspire to lead  
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,  
What the weak head with strongest bias rules  
Is pride, the never failing vice of fools.

—Pope

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Pleasure admitted in undue degree  
Enslaves the mind nor leaves the judgment free.

—Cowper