

It may sound to you this morning as though I have become a crepe hanger. I am going to talk about how long we may have to live. For several months now I have been hearing a good many exceedingly wise and well informed people declare emphatically that our civilization is in mortal peril. Alexander de Seversky, one of our leading military aircraft experts, stated earnestly on a recent TV program that if the United States did not change its military and economic policies at once ~~that~~ within three years three out of the four people watching him on television at that moment would be dead.

In November (18) there appeared an article in Life Magazine entitled "Arguing the Case for Being Panicky" in which the author, Dr. George R. Price, a scientist, asserted that the American people are utterly unaware of the disaster which faces them and that they ought to become panicky about the situation if they are to save themselves. He asserted that our national leaders are misleading us by beguiling assurances concerning our scientific and moral superiority. "We have seen about us a multitude of signs pointing directly toward our defeat by Russia," he wrote. "Yet we have pretended that these did not exist and have turned to one another to praise our country's power and its glorious future." (p.125) An impressive group of other eminent and intelligent people have warned us that our civilization has come to the very edge of doom.

Now let me ask every member of this congregation: do you believe this is true? Are these people feeding us scare stories? Are these shades of the prophecies of doom of the Bible which we have long since regarded as being discredited? The Bible is full of predictions of doom, yet up until the present time it appears that the world, while suffering grievous losses and disasters, has never been completely destroyed. Do you think that there is a difference in these current threats of disaster?

I have asked you what you think; now I will tell you plainly what I think. I think we are at the very edge of doom. If this frightens you I am sorry. There are times when fright cannot be avoided. If someone were to burst into this room and shout that the church was on fire I am sure that we would all be frightened. But ~~would we~~ would we scold the bearer of such news for spreading ~~such~~ scare stories? Some scare stories are true! It is absolute folly to disregard the warnings. You may have come here this morning seeking peace of mind and comfort. I am sorry if I shall trouble you. But I am deeply troubled, and how can I

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cry "peace, peace!" when there is no peace.

Let me remind you where I think we are: we are at the very ~~mit~~ edge of doom. I did not say that we are doomed. I think it is not too late, but as Norman Cousins has said, "It is not too ~~late~~ late; but it has never been later." The purpose of coming to church is to discover, by the light of God, where we are and, by his grace, lay hold of the ~~place~~ ^{means} whereby ^{can} we move to where we ought to be. We ought not to be at the edge of doom. Therefore let us inquire how we may move away from the abyss. I ~~would~~ suggest that these things are urgently and absolutely required.

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First we have got to know the facts and face them. We shall never know what we can do to be saved until we know the facts about our present condition.

The facts about our present situation are very hard and frightening. We might as well recognize that we are in extreme peril. Perhaps we are like the sleep-walker whom we had in my college fraternity. We had to tie a rope around his leg and fasten it to the bed to keep him from harming himself at night. He would get up and crawl out on the roof. He could walk on the very edge of the roof without knowing the danger he was in. We too are walking in the sleep of our complacency and the comfort of our illusions. We do not know the facts which speak of our nearness to total disaster. Someone has said that "Facts which are not frankly faced have a habit of stabbing us in the back." (Sir Harold Bowden in MSM Bulleton, Sept. '57, p.6)

Someone else recently cited for me a cartoon that brought two events together last fall. A woman is shown reading the newspaper to her husband. She comments to him: "'They' and 'we' both progressed last week - they had the Intercontinental Ballistics Missile and we had the Edsel." (Martin Marty in O.C. Jan. 22, 1958, p.95) These ~~are~~ facts which all of us know. But our peril is that we do not face their implications.

A good many wise men are telling all who will listen now that we are becoming a morally and spiritually exhausted people. They are saying that our prosperity is killing us. We had better listen if these be facts. I believe they are. Claude M. Fuess has recently written an article (SAT.REV., Feb. 1, 1958, p.12, "Money is Not Enough.") pointing out that "With prosperity play and pleasure seem more attractive than hard work, and a drop in morale is inevitable. Then is precisely the moment when a fresh people, barbarian perhaps but willing to endure hardships and make sacrifices, has so often risen and overthrown the enervated and

demoralized older society." Then he quotes the famous observation of Voltaire: "History is only the pattern of silken slippers descending the stairs to the thunder of hobnailed boots climbing upward from below." It is very dangerous for an over-fed and fattened champion to enter the ring with a crude but hungry fighter.

During World War II an American cruiser got engaged one night against Japanese warships. As the action began the Captain of the American cruiser expressed his contempt for radar which he considered a new fangled-gadget. Impatient with the use of radar as a device for locating the enemy, he ordered his crew to ignore it and turn on the searchlights. The result was that in short order 105 men on his cruiser were put to death. His stupid assumption of strength spelled disaster. He didn't face the facts. (Norman Cousins in ed. in SAT.REV., Sept. 4, 1954, p. 40)

The other night I heard Dr. Arthur Flemming of Ohio Wesleyan University address a distinguished gathering in Columbus. Dr. Flemming is a very sober and exceedingly well informed man. He does not peddle "peace of mind" as though it could be acquired by the swallowing of pills. He gave this group some very hard facts to swallow about our present situation. The thing that chills your blood about hearing Dr. Fleming speak is the realization that he is one of the best informed men in America, having just come from a very responsible position on President Eisenhower's cabinet. He said to this group: "I don't think we can go on under this constant threat of atomic annihilation without a total war. We need a spiritual breakthrough. We have got to make sacrifices." (Torch Club, Feb. 6, 1958) If it is a fact that we are going to have to make sacrifices then we had better face ~~them~~ ^{it} now.

The fact is, I believe, that we can now be destroyed. This was not true ten or twenty or a hundred years ago. Mankind did not possess twenty years ago the means for causing total disaster to this earth. Now he has it and we had better recognize it as a fact of our world. Once we have faced this fact we can decide upon our strategy.

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The second thing we must grasp is really the first fact. And that fact is that the time is short. It is as though it were five minutes until midnight. We do not have all of the time in the world. Time is not of the essence.

We had better heed the admonition of Marcus Anrelius: "Do not act as if you had one thousand years to live." (quoted by Edgar Dale in NEWS LETTER, Jan. '58,) Our trouble

is that we have been assuming that we have a thousand years to set things in order. We don't.

I think I see a parable of our situation every time I go to St. John's Arena for a basketball game. The scoreboards, as you know, always show the flashing away of the seconds, the total number of minutes and seconds remaining clearly seen on the board. Before every game there is a patriotic ceremony in which all of the lights of the arena are darkened and the crowd stands to sing the national anthem as a spotlight is thrown on the American flag high overhead. This ceremony is started as the clock on the scoreboard shows about three minutes to go before game time. And as the throng sings lustily I notice that the minutes and the seconds continue to flash away the time, in a steady and incessant approach to zero. In a like manner the minutes are ticking away for our life and safety as we continue to observe the customs of our national life. Every time we sing our national anthem could be the last.

The ~~great~~ great Scottish preacher, George MacLeod, one time told about a Chinese general ~~xxx~~ who had recently invaded Tibet. The general had been brought up in a Christian school. Later a missionary asked him why he had become a communist. "Christianity is good," he replied, "but it is too slow." (C.C. DEC.29, '54, p.1578) Now our Christian faith doesn't have much time. It has got to work - and work effectively - quickly.

It is said that George Whitfield, the great co-preacher of John Wesley whose eloquence helped fire the power of the Methodist revival in England, always spoke "as one preaching for the last time. In a little while, it might be too late." (C.E. Vulliamy in John Wesley, p. 113) I tell you that there are times when I feel like that ~~as well~~. I feel like that now. I think we have got to pay instant ~~xxx~~ heed to this gospel about which we have been so fumbling and halting.

I think we ought to ~~seek~~ the importance of our church and its worship in the terms of a cartoon which shows a driver approaching the entrance to a highspeed thruway. Just before the turn onto the highway is a church. Outside of the church is a sign announcing in Gothic lettering: "Last Chance to Pray." (from "Humor vs. Taboo" in SAT.REV. Nov. 2, 1957, p.12, by Jerome Beatty, Jr.) The early Christians lived and made their witness under an extreme sense of urgency. They believed that the world was coming to an end. This they believed for different reasons from what we have. They prayed and witnessed as though every day were their last. What have we got to lose from praying as though this day were our last? Perhaps in our extremity of need God can find the opportunity he has been waiting for to get through to our hearts.

~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ In the light of the fact, then, I think the third thing we have got to do is to change our lives in a hurry. We haven't got time to bemuse ourselves with such arguments that "you can't legislate morals," and "it takes time to grow up" and people don't become good overnight." We have got to learn how to live as Christians immediately!

Once a frog was imprisoned in a deep rut in the road. A number of friends tried to help him out without success. Finally they left him there in despair. The next day ~~that~~ one of his friends saw ^{him} chipper as you please, and no longer in the rut. "What are you doing here?" ~~the friend~~ the friend asked. "I thought you could not get out of the rut." "I couldn't," the frog replied, "but a truck came along and I had to." (from Ladies Home Journal) On our own merits we too are stuck. Yet we have got to find the spiritual grace to move as quickly as that.

George R. Price, the scientist who made out a case for being panicky, declared in his article: "In ^{the} short, unless we depart utterly from our present behaviour, it is reasonable to expect that by no later than 1975 the United States will be a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. . . What, then, should we do? Just this: we should each decide what we really want ~~most~~ in the world. For that is what we will be likely to get. What do we want most? A Cadillac? A color television set? Lower income taxes? - Or to live in freedom. . . We will have to learn to be more concerned about giving our children a good education than about keeping our property taxes low, more concerned about who wins the Nobel prize in physics than about who wins the World Series, more concerned about whether we will live in freedom than about whether we can afford a new car next year." (p. 126-128) Here a scientist is adjuring us to change our materialistic and scientific behaviour, and all of this is essential. Yet I, as a preacher, am declaring that we are under the absolute necessity of changing our moral and spiritual behaviour as well.

The ~~xxx~~ apocalyptic prophets of the Bible spoke of a coming doom and so do I, but there is quite a different emphasis. They called upon their people to make ready their own personal salvation. I am saying that our salvation depends upon our ethical behaviour. Dr. Arthur Flannery said the other night that "We do not have enough ~~xxx~~ people in the United States who really believe in spending billions of dollars ~~xxx~~ to help the other peoples of the world in their basic needs. We ought not to help them just to fight communism but because

we have the resources and ought to help them." We are going to have to develop a greater concern for the plight of the world's undernourished and under-developed peoples if we are going to survive. And we should be reminded of what T. S. Eliot has written, that "The greatest ~~xxxx~~ treason is to do the right things for the wrong reasons." ("Murder in the Cathedral") We should do this primarily because it is God's will, known through Christ, that we should bear one another's burdens.

Indeed it is suicide for us to indulge our traditional attitudes of ill will toward other people - now. Dr. William ~~M~~ C. Manninger, general secretary of the Manninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, has pointed out that mankind's greatest job is to learn to control "the hate which is instinctive in us all." He also said that "hate is the causative factor of most of the world's problems, whether in the family, the community or international relations." (Quoted by Edgar Dale in NEWS LETTER, Jan. '58) Quickly all of us have got to work at changing the petty little hates, the massive hates with which we have been poisoning our souls. Either we learn to replace hate with love and understanding or we will be incinerated in our own hate..

I wonder if this generation of college students is going to be able to change quickly enough to assure their survival. According to a study made by Professor Philip E. Jacob of the University of Pennsylvania the prospects are disquieting. He reports: "It appears that our colleges are turning out a generation of students generally cast in the same mold. Far from wanting to change things, they are only too eager to slip comfortably into our society as it is. The great majority of them are self-centered and materialistic." (from ANTIOCH NOTES, Vol. 34, May 1957, No. 8) According to all of the predictions, if this is a true picture of the current generation of college students, and if they cannot and will not change their ways immediately, we are doomed. Are there any students here who would be willing to give their lives in Christian service, disavowing lives of comfort and material success, to save the world? Possibly if there are not a good many such students there won't be a world in which to find any ease at all.

Make no mistake about it: we are going to have to leap out of the grooves of our complacent behaviour if we are going to avoid mass graves. If you are prejudiced against other people because of their race, color or nationality, you had better change quickly. There isn't time to think it over. If you cheat in school or in business you had better stop at once and begin to be honest. If you are so adulterous that you cannot be faithful to a life mate

you had better mend your ways and. If you are a church member and give ~~xxx~~ stingily to the causes of Christ and his kingdom you had better start giving generously and sacrificially, for the selfishness you share with others is what is killing the world. It is going to cost you a great deal to help save this world and move it off of the edge of doom.

Above all, if you have thought so highly of yourself that you have not bothered to worship God in his almighty presence then you had better seek to live truly in the fear of God. The only thing you really need to fear~~x~~ is that you will not have God's grace to live in these tumultuous and trying days. Indeed the only way you can change your life and make the necessary adjustments to love, justice and truth is by his grace. And the prayer that all of us had better pray is that of the Psalmist whose words have been read this morning:

Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail;

let the nations be judged before thee!

Put them in fear, O Lord!

Let the nations know that they are but men!

Last summer when I was in New York City I had the thrill of ~~attending~~ worshipping in one of the greatest churches in America - Riverside Church on Morningside Heights. After the service I tarried so that I could observe this magnificent sanctuary more closely. It was an exciting moment to me to stand in the ~~xxxx~~ pulpit which, because of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick ministry there for over twenty years, is regarded as the greatest in America. Fastened onto the pulpit was a notice which compelled my attention. It read: "In the event of an air-raid warning, please close the activity going on in this room and send everyone to one of the approved shelters in the building." - Civil Defense Committee. Ever since I have thought to myself that in the event of an atomic attack it would be too late for the church to do its work. We had better be doing it now - earnestly, prayerfully, sacrificially. At the moment we are at the edge of doom. But it is not too late. I would send you away from here this moment - into the highways and the byways - proclaiming with your lives that you are new creatures in Jesus Christ. "Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail!" ~~xxxx~~ "Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways."