

FULTON SHEEN'S

WARTIME
PRAYER BOOK



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

Fulton Sheen

composed this prayer book
in 1943, during a time of great
danger and suffering for the
United States and the world.

Our world has fallen again
into the shadow of war,
and terror stalks souls
in many lands.

May these prayers that
brought holiness and comfort
to an earlier wartime generation
bring goodness and consolation
to ours.

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TO MARY,

Mother Immaculate, gracious protectress of the United States, in humble petition that thy land, which was violated on the eve of thy great feast, may be victorious and inviolate again on that same feast day, when the false god of a rising sun sets, and the double cross untwists itself, and we, who fought to make others free, are ourselves made free with the glorious liberty of the children of God.



INTRODUCTION

This prayer book is for soldiers, sailors, marines, coast guard, for all fighting forces at home and abroad — on land, on the sea, and in the air — and for civilians at home: for all who live in a world at war, that through our prayerful lives God may grant us victory and give to the world His peace and justice.

This book is not made up exclusively of prayers, because prayer consists not in the saying of words but in the lifting of our heart and mind to God.

Our divine Lord Himself warned us: “In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matt. 6:7). In the same spirit, St. Augustine said: “We may pray most when we say least, and we may pray least when we say most.”

When love of God reaches a peak, it almost becomes too deep for words. For that reason this prayer book is made up of reflections which it is hoped will provoke us into meditation and communion with God, so that we will not only speak to Him, but also listen to Him when He speaks to us. So these reflections are not only to be read, but are to be thought about. Each thought should serve for a considerable period of time.

Prayer is a dialogue, not a monologue. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

The joy of a Christian comes not from intermittent devotions and vocal prayers, but by living the Christ life intimately and to

such an extent that even in our failings and weakness we may still betray our familiarity with Christ, as did Peter in the moment of his weakness: “You also were with Jesus the Galilean. . . . Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you” (Matt. 26:69, 73).

†

CLEARING AWAY THE DEBRIS

(Reasons to believe in God)

*“There is no God;
the world is only a machine.”*

Did you ever know a machine
without a designer?

Did you ever know a designer
without intelligence?

Did you ever see a shadow
that was not caused by light?

Have you ever read
a book that was not first
in the mind of the author?

Then you have seen a world without God!
Remember the wise words of the soldier at
Bataan: "There are no atheists in foxholes."



*"I am an atheist:
I do not believe in God."*

Would there ever be prohibition unless there was something to prohibit? Would there ever be anti-cigarette laws unless there were cigarettes? How could there be atheists unless there was something to atheate?

Atheism is not a doctrine; it is a cry of wrath. "By night an atheist half-believes there is a God."

Before you deny God, ask yourself why you deny Him. Is it because of the way you live? A poem of Arthur Hugh Clough satirized those who wish there were no God because He interferes with their dishonesty, their lawlessness, or their license:

There is no God, the wicked saith,
And truly it's a blessing,

For what He might have done with us
It's better only guessing.
There is no God, or if there is,
The tradesman thinks, 't were funny
That He should take it ill in me
To make a little money.
There is no God, a youngster thinks,
Or really, if there may be,
He surely didn't mean a man
Always to be a baby.
Some others, also, to themselves,
Who scarce so much as doubt it,
Think there is none, when they are well,
And do not think about it.



*“Christ is a good man:
a great humanitarian.”*

If Christ is not all He claimed to be, the Son of the living God, then He was not a good man! A good man never lies; but He lied if He was not God, for He said He was God.

A good man never leads others into false belief. But He asked that men die for belief in

His divinity, which they are doing even in this day.

If Christ was not God, then He not only was not a good man, He was the most villainous impostor and scoundrel the world has ever seen.

If Christ is not God, He is the antichrist.



*“I have no need
of religion.”*

No man has need of religion who is self-righteous, who is all he wants to be and all he ought to be.

Anarchists have no need of law: they are a law unto themselves.

Hitler had no need of God: in his own conceit, he was a god.

The man who never made a mistake has no need of an eraser; just so, the man who has never done anything wrong has no need of a Redeemer.

Our Lord Himself has said: “Those who are well have no need of a physician.”



*“We have no freedom;
our wills
are determined.”*

Then why do we say “Thanks” for a favor?



*“There is no right or wrong:
it all depends upon your point of view.”*

If there is no difference between right and wrong, how can Hitler be wrong and how can we be right? Why are we at war, if it is not because right is more precious than life?



*“It makes no difference what you believe;
it’s how you act.”*

It makes no difference whether you have any rules in football; it depends upon how you play. It makes no difference whether you believe triangles have three sides; it depends on how you draw. Can we not see that if we believe wrongly, we will act wrongly?

The trouble with Hitler and other tyrants is that they practice what they preach. Because

their doctrines are wrong, their deeds are wrong. Because Nazism as a creed is wrong, its workings are wicked.



*“Christianity has been
tried and found wanting.”*

Certainly, but did you ever know a Catholic who not only knew that he did wrong, but also wished that he had not? A Catholic who does wrong still believes his Faith is true.

There is always hope for the man who knows that he is doing wrong; but there is no hope for the man who in doing wrong calls the wrong right.

The Catholic gets off the road like anyone else, but he never throws away the map.

*“Christianity has been
found hard and not tried.”*
G. K. Chesterton

†

THOUGHTS IN WARTIME

“Why does God not stop this war?” God could stop this war, but the cost of doing so would be the destruction of human freedom. Are we not fighting to defeat dictators? Then why do we ask that God become a dictator?

God will not destroy our freedom because He will not be a dictator. And that is why God will not stop this war.

‡

This war is really only an episode in the working out of a Truth; it is not the great

Truth that is an episode in the war. War is a sign that men are against God and therefore against one another.



“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ” (II Thess. 3:5). If you go to a mystery play, do you walk out in the first act when the hero is killed? If you give the dramatist credit for a plot, give God credit for a plot. Hard as this war is, it is happening for the best.



“My soul, sit then a patient looker-on.
Judge not the play before the play is done.
The plot hath many changes.
Every day speaks a new scene;
The last act crowns the play.”

Francis Quarles



To love one's country is not necessarily to love God, but to love God is necessarily to love one's country. Caesar is under God, but God is not under Caesar.



In wartime we must worry less whether God is on our side and worry more about whether we are on God's side.



The great assurance of victory is our correspondence with the Divine Will: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Can our enemies' zeal for the cause of anti-God be overcome by our indifference to God?



We know what we hate in this war. Do we know what we love?



Those who think that in time of peace it is God's business to ensure prosperity are the very ones who in time of war think it is God's business to keep them from harm.

If this life were all and if we had no soul, then God would do these things. God will not save our skin, but He will do everything to save our soul.



Death is not the greatest disaster in the world; sin is.

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who can destroy both the soul and body in Hell” (Matt. 10:28).



The evil in the world must not make me doubt the existence of God. There could be no evil if there were no God.

Before there can be a hole in a uniform, there must be the uniform; before there is death, there must be life; before there is error, there must be truth; before there is a crime, there must be liberty and law; before there is a war, there must be peace; before there is a Devil, there must be a God, rebellion against whom made the Devil.



We should not call God “good” because He does our will, nor should we call him “evil” because He does not.



Because there is a God, this war is not Hell. God permits it to happen only for a greater good presently unseen.

The war is more like Purgatory than Hell, for through its refining flames we were meant to have the dross of our materialism burned away.



It is not easy to explain why God permits evil; but it is impossible for an atheist to explain the existence of goodness.

How could a spiritless, soul-less, cross-less, Godless universe become the center of faith, purity, sacrifice, and martyrdom?

How can decency be the decent thing, if there is no God?

Since God is love, why should we be surprised that want of it should end in pain, hate, broken hearts, and war?



There are only two philosophies of life: the Christian, which says: first the fast, then

the feast; and the pagan, which says: first the feast, then the headache.

In either case, there is pain. The Christian never ends with it, even if he waits until the end of time.



There is a greater tragedy than death: the victory of evil.



We think sometimes that all God does is to see the evil we do! Do not be so discouraged. He sees every good act, every charity to our neighbor, every suppressed evil word, every drink of water given in His name.



God is not a tribal God; He is not the God of any one nation or people, but the God and Father of all, who made men of one blood to dwell upon the earth.



“But if we all pray to God — the Germans, the Japanese, the English, the Americans, etc. — on whose side is God?”

God's side is determined not by geography, but by those who do His will. If Germans, English, Japanese, and Americans prayed right, they would all be praying for the same intention: "Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

And what is that Will? The reign of Justice and Charity in the hearts of men.



Through a prayerful contemplation of this war we will see not soldiers of different nations in combat, but one great family, quarreling, fighting, wounding, and all in need of the peace and charity of Christ which we hope to obtain by our supplications.

