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The masque of Purim, 1954.

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THE MASQUE OF PURIM

March 21, 1954

...Purim is a most joyous day, which has been celebrated for hundreds and hundreds of years among our people. It is a day when people relaxed a bit the restraints of every-day life and indulged in conviviality, fun. And yet there is a dark undertone in this festival of Purim, an undertone of danger and of tragedy. The laughter of this holiday is heard against the background of a vast human slaughter which was in the making, which was about to be carried out. Purim means that the lot had been cast to destroy the Jews of the empire of Persia. The date had been set by lot. The orders had been issued. Fortunately, the orders were cancelled at the last moment.

I don't know how many Jews lived in the empire of Persia in the 127 provinces which included also Palestine in the 5th century when Ahasuerus reigned and when this story took place. Possibly millions of lives were involved, and fortunately these millions of lives were spared at the last moment because Haman could not carry out his plot. But there were times in Jewish history when the Hamans did carry out their plot, and one of them was in our own lifetime, when Hitler did destroy six million Jews. And this event did not take place in dim, distant legendary years of the past. It took place just about ten, twelve years ago, in our own lifetime.

The Purim story is therefore not a mere carnival fantasy. It is a very stark and sober actual and recurrent phenomenon of Jewish experience.

Of course Haman was not the first nor the last of the enemies of Jews. According to tradition, he was a direct descendent of Amalek, the enemy who sought to destroy the Jewish people centuries before Haman's day, at the time when the Jews left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. And a special Sabbath has been designated in the Jewish calendar called the (Hebrew) "Sabbath of Remembrance" - remember what Amalek did unto you when you left Egypt.

No, he wasn't the first Haman or the last of the enemies of our people, but in his story, in the story of Purim recorded in the Book of Esther there is reflected many of the experiences which have been fairly constant in the long history of our people. And therefore when we read the Megillah, we should be alerted to our own days, to the world in which we find ourselves.

Why was a decree issued by the king (Hebrew) to destroy and to annihilate the Jews of Persia, Jews who had lived there in that vast empire, the largest empire of antiquity, larger by far than the Greek empire came to be or the Roman empire later on, where the Jews had lived in peace and in quiet for many generations. Why was this sudden decree issued to destroy them? Were they wicked? Had they become suddenly wicked, evil people? Did they disobey the king? Did they rebel against Ahasuerus? Not at all. There is no trace of it, no record of any such sudden rebellion on the part of the Jews of Persia. Why then the sudden dread decision? Well, an ambitious man, one man, Haman by name, had come upon the scene, power hungry, who, in the pursuit of his ambitions, set out to consolidate and coordinate all the groups and all the peoples about him, set about to eliminate all opposition, set about to crush all minorities in order to establish himself as the unchallenged head, next to the king himself, with an eye undoubtedly, ultimately, to throne himself. And the king, a foolish king, sunk in carousing and debauchery - the story of Esther begins, you may recall, with 180 days banquet which the king gave to his princes and his nobles and his governors and his army chieftains in the capitol of Susa, where according to the Megillah, drinks were served in golden goblets and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king; six months of drinking. This king was easily beguiled by this cunning and scheming vizier, whose eye undoubtedly was on the throne.

Now there chanced to live in the capitol, in Susa, a Jew by the name of Mordecai, whose niece, Esther, had been chosen queen to replace Queen Vashti, who had been deposed, and this Mordecai, according to the Megillah, would not bow down to Haman or do obeisance to him. He refused to be coordinated. Now the reason is not given in

the Book of Esther why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, and the Rabbi set about to explain it. Clearly, they said, there must have been on the apparel, on the raiment of Haman, symbols of idolatry, and kneeling to such symbols worn by man or not worn by man was tantamount to apostasy. The Jews had refused to bow down to idols or the symbol of idols. They refused to permit the images even of the emperors to be placed in their synagogues or in their temples. One of the writers commented on this fact, and said, "All that was required for Jews and all peoples for conformity to the state religion was to scatter a few grains of incense upon an altar. That's all. To refuse so simple an act of fellowship with society, one might almost say of common courtesy to one's neighbors, seemed to show a strangely malignant character. One was not asked to believe anything. One was asked to conform to a political convention. And the Jews were the only people who refused to conform."

The Pagan writers, the writers of antiquity, failed to understand this act on the part of Jews. They attributed it to the cussedness of this people. They charged them with being misanthropes, "who regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies" to quote a Pagan writer. They charged them even with being atheists and cannibals. Pliny the elder called them "a race famous for its insults to the Gods." They couldn't understand this attitude on the part of the Jews to go through this routine, this convention which meant so little. To the Jews it meant everything. It meant doing violence to the one great dogma of their faith. Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image nor any manner of likeness in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them or worship them.

Whatever the reason, Mordecai felt it grave enough not to do obeisance to Haman. It must have been grave enough because Mordecai would have not disobeyed the King's command. Now Haman sensed danger in this act of defiance of Mordecai. If Mordecai will not bow down to him, perhaps others will follow suit. What happens then to his totalitarian control of the empire? And so the book says he was "filled with fury"

against Mordecai. But - and here is the key - to a recurrent cycle of Jewish experience - "But," says the Book of Esther, "Haman disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; so as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout all the empire of King Ahasuerus."

There you have it. The anti-semite is not content to vent his anger upon one Jew who may have crossed him, but upon all the Jews. In the eyes of bigots and fanatics, the misdeeds of one or a few members of a minority group must be visited on the entire group. And then in order to rationalize their vicious purposes and give them a semblance of justification, these fanatics and bigots, conspirators, proceed to resort to manufacture, theories, philosophies of race and religion to arouse the fears amongst people of imminent danger, and by frenzied propaganda they create a mood of panic among the people or in the heart of the ruler and so achieve their purpose.

So in the third chapter of the Book of Esther we read, "Haman said to the King, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the King's laws - so that it is not for the King's profit to tolerate them. If it please the King, let it be decreed that they be destroyed." In that one sentence you have the whole technique of anti-semitic propaganda. The entire technique. It is all there.

First, charge these people as being a scattered people, a dispersed people. Point to the fact that their involuntary homelessness and dispersion is proof of their unworthiness. And then call attention to the fact that they are different, and it's dangerous for the state to have people who differ on the points of view, from the customs of the majority. It is a crime to be different. And from there there is only one step - from this being different - to the charge that they are hostile to the state, that they do not keep the king's laws; they are unpatriotic. No specifications are given, no details of the indictment - that's not necessary. Sufficient is a smear. A general statement of difference and hostility, and then finally comes the

suggestion that the King should not tolerate them, that they are a danger to the state. And therefore the King should issue orders to destroy them. This is the technique, you may recall, which Hitler used, with the German people. He succeeded. And this, my good friends, is the technique which every demagogue uses, invariably. And demagogues do not begin their careers always as anti-semites, but they nearly always end up as such, and that's the thing to bear in mind - a very important thing to bear in mind.

Sometimes even Jews are taken in by such demagogues who seize upon a popular slogan or some popular idea and proceed to exploit it for personal aggrandizement as a means of gaining political power, and they employ all ruthless means - lies and deceptions and half-truths and character assassinations to achieve their aim, and many people, including Jews, are inclined to overlook these means which are employed because they are so engrossed in the end which this demagogue avows. And when they wake up, it is sometimes too late. Then the idol which they have worshipped is proved to have not only clay feet but also iron teeth which devour and break in pieces.

A disappointed and a disgruntled demagogue nearly always turns anti-semitic - if for no other reason than the fact that the unstable and neurotic elements with which he surrounds himself and which flock to him in his ascendant years are the ones which remain with him in his political decline and then force him to champion their views if he intends to hold them for another type of power. And the views of these fanatics and neurotics and reactionary elements are always tinged with Jew-hatred and anti-semitism.

Think back for a moment to Father Coughlin, and you will understand exactly what I am talking about.

Do not for a moment imagine that it is only the Jewish minority in history which was singled out for misrepresentation and indictment and fearful persecution. It is not so at all. It is the fate almost of all minorities. There are always people on hand, demagogues, who will exploit the hatred of the majority for a certain minority in order to capitalize upon it for their own self-aggrandizement and power, or, to

turn the minds of the people away from their unhappiness, their poverty, their misery for which these rulers or demagogues made themselves be responsible. The eminent Roman historian Tacitus, in writing about Emperor Nero and the burning of the city of Rome, the efforts which Nero made, who was responsible for the burning of the city, to shift the responsibility to others because the act clearly was not popular with the Roman people. Tacitus writes in his annals, and I read: "All human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the Emperor, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate; (notice whom Tacitus blames for the crucifixion of Jesus - not the Jews). Now this Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of Pontius Pilate, and the most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment, Christianity, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world, find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty. Then upon their information, usually extracted by torture, an immense multitude was convicted. Not so much of the crime of firing the city as of hatred against mankind... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths - the deaths of these Christians. Covered by the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired."

Now this festival of Purim, dear friends, has therefore this message of alertness, charging us to be wary of demagogues and their conspiracies, not to be taken in, not to be beguiled. The festival of Purim is a joyous festival because it teaches us that evil is finally defeated. That things are ultimately turned (Hebrew) from sorrow to joy and from mourning unto a holiday. Minorities should not be discouraged. Time

and again they have saved the world. If those who belong to a minority group remain loyal to their faith and to their vision, they will win through ultimately. We read in the Bible "when you go out to battle against your enemies and you see horses and chariots and people more than you, be not afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you - fear not!"

That isn't all that the Purim tells us. To have confidence in the ultimate triumph of the truth even though it is proclaimed by a few; it tells us that the ultimate triumph and the ultimate salvation does not come automatically; it has to be courageous leadership and tremendous loyalty, the kind represented by Mordecai and Esther, by human beings, by people who are alert and who are determined to resist the evil. And whenever a great cause was won for mankind and a great triumph recorded, it was the result of the work of men and women who had the steadfastness, the resoluteness, the fearlessness even at the point of endangering their own lives as Esther did when she went before the king as a result of the labors and the sacrifices of such people. The triumphs of freedom and democracy and of all human values do not come about automatically.

And therefore, for us, Americans, and for all men, there is this lesson in Purim - that those who wish to preserve their freedom from demagogues and from Hamans of all kinds, of all denominations, should not rest easy in the thought that it can't happen here. It has happened almost everywhere on the face of the globe. But in loyalty to their great traditions, they should rally round courageous leaders and fight these dark, conspiratorial forces, who masquerade as patriots and defenders of American freedom. That's the masque of Purim, good Friends. These are the truths behind the masque.

1) Carnival Dark under tone of Danger and Tragedy - Laughter as background of a vast human slaughter which was ^{in the way} to be carried out - (20/2) - Lot had been cast - Date set - order issued - Fortunately it ~~was not~~ ^{was cancelled} - However at last moment - I don't know how many Jews - (127 prisoners) - 50 - } which Pol. was a part - brutality, threats But Hitler did carry out his plot - worst - (6 M) - not in dire, distant ^{byondary} ~~place~~ but just 10 yrs. ago! - Prussian story: not the for a carnival fantasy in J. but start going really but a fantasy & recurrent phenomena -

2) Pastor Haman, at first was last enemy of Jews - a descendant of plow - who sought to destroy Jews - curious help - Egypt - to go - But in the story of Prussian - Other - one reflected many of the experiences which have been fairly constant - in our history. And \therefore we may be alerted to our own days - when we read the Bible.

3) Why was the decree issued to kill all 3000 - in Prussia - when they had lived in peace for many years? Were they wicked? Evil? Disloyal to the King? Rebels? Why us at all? Why then the sudden dread decision? An ambitious man Haman, had come upon the scene - power-hungry - who, in the process, his ambitions set out to corrupt every thing about him - to eliminate phenomena - to crush all minorities - to establish himself as the unhindered head - with the King - and the

King, Ishtar, ~~and easily beguiled~~, sunk in carousing and debauchery - the DRICK begins with 150 day banquet with the King gave for his prizes, notes, precious and many chaps in the capital of Susa - ~~was easily beguiled by this scheme~~ where drinks were served in golden goblets and the royal wine was lavished according to the hounty of the King - was easily beguiled by this scheme, Uzige - where eye, undoubtedly was on the Throne!

4) This changed to him in Susa - a Jew Wordeai - when Wise ^{other} had been chosen Queen to replace Vashti, deposed - and he would not "bow down to Haman or do obedience" - He could not be condemned - Haman not given Labbs - Symbols of idolatry -

apostasy - refused to allow image / Emperors - "All that was required for conformity to the state religion was to scatter a few grains of incense upon an altar... To refuse so simple an act of fellowship with society, one might almost say of common courtesy to one's king, seemed to show a strangely malignant character. One was not asked to believe anything. One was asked to conform to a political convention. And the Jews were the only people who refused!" -

Pagan Writers - charged Jews with being unsanctified - "who repaid the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies (Tartars) - cannibals, atheists -

Phony the elder - "a race famous for its insults to the Gods"

3/ Whatever the reason - Grave - not dropped their command:

Haman sees danger in the act of defiance -

"We were filled with fury"

But - and here is a key to a renewal cycle of experience -

"Haman disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone"

"So, as they had made known to him the people, Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people, Mordecai, throughout all the empire, wherever"

The Anti-semitic would vent his anger ^{not} against one Jew,

upon all the Jews -

In the eyes, the bigots, the fanatics, the mis-deeds of an

7 or 8 members of a minority group ^{would} be to be excused

in the entire group -

To rationalize their vicious purposes - and so they resort to the same -

methods / justification they found to excuse

and philosophies - to raise and redress -

pleas of imminent danger and conspiracy, and by fringed

prejudices create a mind of panic among a people, and in the

heart, the rule - and so achieve their purpose -

Haman: (Chap. 3) said to K. Ahas. "There is a certain people

scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples as all the

princes of your kingdom; their laws are different from those

of every other people - and they do not keep the king's laws -

so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. If it

please the King, let it be decreed that they be destroyed"

① whether the charge - their involuntary heredity advanced as a

justification for them, their unworthiness (2) Different - on one

and from then it is only a step to (3) They do not keep the things
laws - unpublished - no specifications - no details when
is apparently asked for by the thing - It is enough to

swear a people - whose ways, or ideas, are in some way -
different and then, of course (4) the thing should not tolerate
them - danger! (5) Decided that they should be destroyed

5. This is the technique which Hitler used with the Jewish
people. - All demagogues!

And demagogues do not begin their careers, always, as
anti-semites but they mean always, and all that
way.

Sometimes even Jews are taken in by such demagogues
who see, often a popular slogan, or idea, and
proud to exploit it for personal aggrandizement,
as a means of gaining political power. Employing
all ruthless ~~and~~ means, lies, deceptions, half-truths,
weak character defamation and manipulation to
achieve their end -

Many people, including Jews, are inclined to overlook the
means employed, so impressed as they are in the end
approved by the demagogue -

And when they wake up - it is sometimes too late!
Their ideal has not only clay feet - but a great
iron teeth which demolish and break in pieces -

A disappointed and disappointed ~~being~~ ^{eyes of the} almost always, (5)
turned into serenity. - ~~the~~ If for no other reason than the
fact that the vast, ~~and~~ ^{significant} neurotic elements with which
he surrounds himself, and which flock to him, finally is
his excellent career, are the ones which remain with
him in his dislike and free him to champion their views,
if he intends to hold them ^{for another day or two} and these views are always
the views of big ideas and formations - of few haters -

6/ Think back to Father ^{Coughlin} Coughlin - and I will know what
I mean -

7/ Do not for a moment imagine that it was only the Jewish
minority in history which was singled out for unrepre-
sented, indifferent and peaceful persecution -
When Christians were in a minority - (Tacitus).

8/ The joyous message is that - Evil is finally defeated - and
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A minority should not be discouraged - If it remains loyal
to its faith & its vision - that comes - it will win through.

"When you go out to battle against all enemies - and you
see horses, and chariots and people more than you - be not
afraid of them - for the Lord - you God is with you - you will not lose."

Minorities have time and again saved the world!

The salvation minorities, however, is not automatic.

> 20% - 23% - Leadership! Loyalty!

Americans who wish to preserve their freedom from Hawaii 16
and immigrants — should not rest easy as the that — that it
taut happen here! — But, in loyalty to their great leaders
they should rally round congressional leaders — and
fight the dark faces who corrupt al faces — who
are misquoting as patriots and defenders, American
freedom .

