

**SERMON BY BISHOP CLEMENT AUGUST, COUNT VON GALEN
PREACHED ON JULY 13, 1941
IN ST. LAMBERT'S CHURCH, MÜNSTER, WESTPHALIA**

My beloved Catholics of St. Lambert's! After the events of the last week, I felt a need to deliver in person from the pulpit of the City and Market Church my Episcopal and Pastoral Message, and especially to voice my inward sympathy with the flock of my former Parish. It is in certain districts of the Parish of St. Lambert's, as well, indeed, as in other parts of the city, that devastations and casualties have been especially great. I hope that by the action of the City and State authorities, and especially also by your brotherly love and the results of today's collections for the relief work of the Charity Association and the Parish Charity, a part of the suffering will be overcome.

I had intended to add a few words on the meaning of these visitations, how God is thereby seeking to bring us home to him. God wishes to bring Münster home to him! How much at home did our forefathers feel with God, in God's Holy Church! How entirely were their lives borne up by belief in God, and led by the holy fear of God and by the love of God; alike their public lives, family lives and social lives. Has it still been so in our time? God wishes to bring Münster home to Him!

I intended to express to you today some more thought about this. But today I must abandon this intention; for I see myself compelled here and today publicly to give utterance on another matter: a terrible happening that befell us yesterday, at the end of this week of horror.

All Münster still bears the stamp of the frightful devastations that the outer enemy and wartime opponent has visited upon us this week. Yet yesterday, on July 12th 1941, at the end of this very week, the Secret State Police sequestered two Houses of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit Order in our City: The Sentmaring House in Wesel Street, and the House of St Ignatius in King Street; it has expelled the inmates from their property and compelled the Fathers and Brothers immediately, on that same yesterday, to leave not only their Houses, not only our city, but the provinces of Westphalia and the Rhine.

And the same hard lot was yesterday also meted out to the Sisters of Steinfurter Street. Their House, too, was sequestered, the Sisters have been expelled from Westphalia and must leave Münster by 6 o'clock this evening. The houses and properties of the orders, together with their contents, were appropriated for the benefit of the Gauleitung of Northern Westphalia.

Thus the attack upon the monasteries and convents, which has long been raging in the Ostmark, in Southern Germany, in the lately acquired territories, in the Warthegau, Luxemburg, Lorraine and other parts of the Reich, has also broken out here in Westphalia.

We must make ourselves ready to hear further such dreadful news in the next few days; that here, too, one monastery and convent after another has been sequestered by the Gestapo, and its inmates, our Brothers and Sisters, children of our families, true German comrades, have been thrown upon the streets like abject helots, hunted out of the country like criminals: and this at a moment when everything trembles and quakes at new night raids, which can kill us all or make any one of us a homeless refugee. At such a time innocent – indeed most highly deserving and widely esteemed – men and women are hunted from their modest properties, and German comrades, our fellow-citizens of Münster are made homeless refugees.

Why? I am told: for reasons of State policy! No other reason is offered. No inmate of these monasteries or of this convent was held guilty of a misdemeanour or a crime. None was accused before a court, much less condemned! And if one were guilty, let him be set before a court! Is it permissible that the innocent be also punished?

Dear people of my Diocese, because of the grave visitation that has come upon us by enemy attacks, I would have wished for the time being to keep silent in public about other recent measures of the Gestapo, which positively challenge me to public protest.

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But if the Gestapo gives no thought to those events that have made hundreds of our fellow-citizens roofless; if at this very moment it continues to throw innocent fellow-citizens into the street and to banish them from the country; then I can no longer hesitate publicly to express my just protest and earnest warning.

Already often and recently we have seen how the Gestapo, without legal verdict or defence, has imprisoned innocent and irreproachable citizens, robbed them of their liberty, banished them from their homes and interned them – who knows where? In fact, during recent weeks two members of my closest council of advisers, the Chapter of our Cathedral, were suddenly fetched by the Gestapo from their dwelling, transported away from Münster and exiled to distant places, which were assigned to them for permanent residence.

My protests to the Reich Minister have, during the past weeks, received no answer. But from enquiry made by telephone of the Gestapo, this much could be ascertained: against neither of these canons lies any charge or suspicion of any punishable dealings. Completely without fault of their own, without charge made against them, without chance of defence, they have been punished with exile.

Christians of my diocese, pay close attention! We have received official assurance that Canons Vorwerk and Echelmeyer are under no reproach or punishable dealings. They have done nothing to deserve punishment! Yet they are punished with exile!

And why? Because *I* did something displeasing to the government of the Reich. Out of four appointments to Canonries made during the last two years, the government has on three occasions informed me that the nominations were not to its liking. Nevertheless because, in accordance with the terms of the Prussian Concordat of 1929, the government is explicitly denied any right of intervention, in two of the four cases I proceeded with my nomination. Let *me* be set before a court, if anyone thinks I have acted against the law.

I am sure that no independent German court will be able to condemn me for any proceedings in the appointment of Canons.

Is this the reason why recourse has been had, not to a court, but to the Gestapo, whose actions in the German Reich are, alas, subject to no legal scrutiny?

Against the physical force of the Gestapo every German citizen is completely without protection or defence – completely without defence or protection. Many German comrades have learnt this by experience in the course of the last year; amongst them our beloved religious instructor Friedrichs, who was kept in prison without legal trial or verdict; also the two canons who are now in exile; also the people of our Order, who yesterday and today have been suddenly thrust forth from their property, city and country.

Not one of us is sure – though he may be confident that he is the most loyal and conscientious of citizens, though he may be confident of his complete innocence – that he may not one day be fetched from his dwelling, robbed of his liberty and confined in the dungeons and concentration camps of the Gestapo.

I know very well that today or some day that can also happen to me. Because I shall then no longer be able to speak publicly, therefore, I wish to speak publicly today; I wish to give public warning against further progress along this road, which, I am surely convinced, calls down God's punishment upon men and must lead to misery and ruin for our people and Fatherland.

In protesting against these actions and punishments carried out by the Gestapo, in publicly demanding the abolition of the present state of affairs and the legal scrutiny or annulment of all these actions of the Gestapo, I am doing exactly what Governor-General and Reich Minister Dr Frank did, when, in February of this year, he wrote in the Journal of the German Legal Academy:

“We seek such a firm balance of inward State order as will not tip over into absolute authority for the State Prosecutor, exerted against persons condemned in advance and robbed of any means of defence. The law must offer the individual the legal possibility of defence, of throwing light upon the situation and thus

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having a safeguard against wilfulness and injustice... Otherwise we should rather speak, not of a penal code, but of a penal force. It is impossible to combine the edifice of justice with a condemnation made without hearing of the defence... Just as it is the task of others to represent authority in every form, so it is our task to express, equally and emphatically, our duty courageously to defend the authority of the law as an essential element of a permanent power.” Thus wrote Reich Minister Dr Hans Frank.

I realise that I, as Bishop, as proclaimer and defender of God’s law and the law of morality, which assure to every individual original rights and liberties before which, by God’s will, all human demands must give way; I am called, like Minister Frank, courageously to represent the authority of the law and to condemn the condemnation of innocent people as a wrong that shrieks to heaven.

Christians of my diocese! The imprisonment of many irreproachable people, without chance of defence or verdict, the deprivation of liberty of the two Canons, the closure of the monasteries and convent, the expulsion of innocent people of the Order, our Brothers and Sisters, compel me to make reminder of the old, unshatterable truth: *“Justitia est fundamentum regnorum”* – justice is the only sure foundation of all State entities.

The right to life, to personal immunity, to freedom, is an indispensable part of every moral order of Society. It is convenient for the State to impose, as a punishment, limitations on this right for certain of its citizens; but the State has this dispensation only over breakers of the law, whose guilt can be proved by impartial trial.

The State that transgresses this limit willed by God, and permits or provokes the punishment of the innocent, is undermining its own authority and the respect for its rule in the consciences of its citizens.

We have, alas, repeatedly in recent years had to observe that more or less severe punishments, for the most part consisting in imprisonment, have been decreed and carried out without the condemned being convicted before a regular court or being given the opportunity of defending their rights or proving their innocence.

How many Germans are suffering shamefully under police arrest or in concentration camps, people who have been expelled from their homes and have never been condemned before a public court, or who, after having been acquitted by a court or having paid the penalty imposed by a court, have once again been arrested and detained by the Gestapo! How many have been expelled from their homes and their places of work! I make reminder again of the venerable Bishop of Rottenburg, Johannes Baptista Sproll, an old man of 70 years, who recently had to celebrate his Silver Jubilee as a Bishop far from his diocese, because the Gestapo three years ago expelled him from his bishopric. I mention once again our two canons, the venerable Vorwerk and Echelmeyer. I think of our venerable religious instructor Friedrichs who is suffering shame in a concentration camp. I will refrain today from mentioning other names.

The name of a Protestant man, who in the world war risked his life for Germany as a German officer and U-boat Commander, and who for years now has been robbed of liberty, is known to all of you, and we have the greatest respect for the courage and resolute devotion of this noble German.

From these examples you can see, Christian people, that it is not only a matter affecting the Catholic Church of which I speak publicly to you today, but of a matter of Christian, indeed of universal human and national and religious import.

Justice is the foundation of States! We lament and regard with the deepest anxiety the fact that we see how this foundation is today shattered, how justice, that natural and Christian virtue, indispensable for the ordered preservation of every human society, is not unequivocally maintained and prized for everybody.

Not only in defence of the rights of the Church, not only in defence of the rights of the human personality, but also out of love for our people and the deepest anxiety for our Fatherland, we request, we require, we demand: “Justice!” Who must not fear for the existence of a house, if he sees that the foundations are undermined?

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Justice is the foundation of States! The State authority can oppose honourably and with hope of lasting success the illegal use of force by whoever happens to be stronger, the oppression of the weak and their degradation to unworthy slave labour, only if those who hold the State's means of power bow down in awe before the royal majesty of justice and use of word of punishment only in the service of justice.

That authority will be able to count on the honourable service of honourable men, whose actions and impositions of penalties can be proved by impartial scrutiny to be free from all wilfulness and to be weighed in the unbiased scales of justice. For this reason the practice of condemnation and punishment without possibility of defence or verdict, "the condemnation without defence of persons condemned in advance", as Reich Minister Frank put it, arouses a feeling of lawlessness and a sense of anxious fearfulness and slavish cowardice, which must in the end spoil the character of a nation and ruin its national community.

Christian people! The reproach will perhaps be brought against me that by this open speaking I am weakening in wartime the inner front of the German people.

Against this I assert: it is not *I* who am the cause of any weakening of the inner front, but those who without regard for this time of war, without regard for the emergency from without, indeed here in Münster at this very time, at the end of a week of terror from dreadful enemy attacks, impose harsh punishments, without verdict or possibility of defence upon innocent national comrades, our countrymen, our Brothers and Sisters, who deprive them of their property, cast them upon the streets, hunt them out of the country!

They are destroying the safety of the Reich, *they* are undermining the sense of justice, *they* are destroying trust in our State leadership!

And therefore I raise my voice in the name of the right-thinking German people, in the name of the majesty of justice, in the interests of peace and the firmness of the inner front, therefore I call aloud as a German, as an honourable citizen, as representative of the Christian religion and as a Catholic Bishop: we demand justice! If this call remains unheard and unheeded, if the dominion of Queen Justice is not restored, then our German people and Fatherland, despite the heroism of our soldiers and their glorious victories, will collapse from inner decay and rottenness!

Let us pray for all who are in distress, especially for the exiled people of our Order, for our city of Münster, that God may keep us from further trials, for our German people and Fatherland and its Führer: in the Name of the Father.