

Pamphlet #4

**Pontius Pilate Spares Jesus
The Impeachment of Adlai Stevenson**



CARLOS M. N. EIRE

PONTIUS PILATE SPARES JESUS

Christianity without the Crucifixion

Take away the crucifixion and you have erased the central moment of the Christian religion. Is it blasphemous to wonder what would have happened if Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Jerusalem, had not ordered Jesus of Nazareth to be nailed to a cross but had spared him? What sort of life might Jesus have led? And, more important, how might the faith that he founded have developed and what sort of influence might it have had? How might the Romans have turned it to their advantage?

That new religion, speculates Carlos M. N. Eire, the chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University, would have been monotheistic but hardly Christianity as we know it. In essence, it would have been a form of Judaism, but a form that persecuted those who disagreed with its interpretation of Jesus: those who refused to accept him as a prophet or, conversely, those who believed him to be the Messiah—in other words, the people we now know as Jews and Christians. For Rome, a crucifixionless Christianity might have been a blessing, as Eire explains, because such an official state religion could have helped the empire survive into our own time. Still, what would our world be like without an Easter or a Christmas?

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THE PRISONER STOOD before the procurator, bruised and bleeding, his hands bound, and his head ringed with thorns. A crude crown, made by Roman soldiers.

A zero, ringed with thorns, on the head of this rabbi.

The crowd kept calling for crucifixion, but the procurator hesitated and stalled. He couldn't pass sentence. Not that sentence. Not yet. Maybe there was some other way to save this prisoner from death. He had already pronounced him innocent, and so had Herod, the local "puppet" king who ruled over Galilee, the prisoner's homeland.

He kept thinking about that message his wife had sent him, urgently, by means of a servant. Like many Romans, the procurator placed a lot of faith in dreams, especially those that spoke directly to present affairs. Dreams were messages from the gods. And here, in godless Judaea, where they worshiped only one measly deity who was very touchy, and overly jealous, the gods had spoken to his wife.

He couldn't get the message out of his mind, not just because it was troubling, but also because his wife was such a good conduit for messages from the gods. She didn't garble the messages, or get them wrong. She was good at it. Better than most.

"Have nothing to do with that righteous man," the message read, "for today I have suffered much over him in a dream."

He had already tried to free this prisoner by offering the crowd a choice between him and the notorious rebel Barabbas. Much to his chagrin, the crowd had chosen freedom for the accused murderer instead of the rabbi.

And the crowd called for the rabbi to be crucified, again and again.

Accursed place, this Palestine, to which he had been sent. How he longed for those balmy summer evenings in his native Tarraco, in Iberia, on

the shores of Mare Nostrum—Our Sea, the Mediterranean. No better place on earth.

He had already ordered a severe scourging for the prisoner, thinking this would satisfy the crowd's thirst for punishment. Then he ordered that the rabbi be paraded before the crowd, arrayed in a gorgeous purple cloak—an ironic joke from Herod—with that stupid crown on his head. Maybe these morons would get the joke and leave the poor man be.

Pilate yelled to the crowd, "Behold your king!"

But the crowd still called for crucifixion. Morons, all of them.

His own judgment and conscience weighed in heavily against giving in to the crowd. And then there was message about the dream. He couldn't dismiss that so easily. No. Not at all.

Pilate spoke: "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I didn't find this man guilty of any of your charges against him."

The crowd yelled more loudly: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate pronounced him innocent again. And the crowd grew increasingly hostile. "Crucify, crucify him!" Pilate spoke a third time: "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him."

The crowd yelled all the louder. The noise unnerved Pilate, but his conscience unnerved him even more. If he were to release this man, would he have a riot on his hands? What would be the best thing to do here? Spare the life of an innocent man, who posed no threat to the empire, or sacrifice that life for the sake of peace in Jerusalem?

He hated riots. All that property damage. All those corpses, and all those casualties. He hated to lose any of his soldiers, especially.

He hated the thought of having to face his wife too and of having to tell her that he had disregarded her dream. He heard her voice in his own head, speaking clearly and very loudly from the future, any time some misfortune should befall them: "See! See! It's all your fault: I told you not to crucify that man in Jerusalem!" That was it. Yes. That clinched it.

Over the roar of the crowd, Pilate shouted at the soldiers as loudly as he

could: "Release the prisoner. Release him now! Forget any additional punishment. He's suffered enough. Release him and escort him back to Galilee. Now!"

He placed his hand on the rabbi's shoulder as he walked by, and neither man said a word. Jesus looked Pilate straight in the eye with a look of total bewilderment. Pilate looked away and stared at his hand—the one with which he had touched Jesus. He stared at it for a minute or so, and at the blood on it. He called for water. "I need to wash my hands," he said to one of the guards.

The crowd went wild, but nothing much happened. A few tried to start a riot, but the soldiers took care of that quickly. Roman soldiers knew how to handle such situations. This was an easy crowd to control, compared to others they'd seen. A few cracked skulls, some broken bones, a few puncture wounds. A little bit of blood. That's all. The crowd dispersed within an hour.

Pilate went home early and told his wife about the hard day he'd had and how much he'd appreciated that message she sent him.

It turned out to be a beautiful, sunny spring afternoon. Pilate and his wife drank three jars of wine that evening. Wine from Italy they'd been saving for a special occasion. They toasted the glowing sunset in that godless land, thanked the gods for their messages, fell asleep early on their dining couches, and snored so loudly that the slaves began to laugh and woke them up.

And Jesus of Nazareth returned to Galilee, under escort. There, out in the hinterland, he continued to teach and preach, and to cure the sick, and astound the crowds that flocked to him like sheep. Every now and then he showed up in Jerusalem, especially at Passover—that is, until that rebellion against Rome when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. After that, he stopped coming to Jerusalem.

Many around him thought Jesus was the Messiah, the savior promised by God to the Jewish people, and he did his best to keep them guessing. Some proclaimed this message, up until the day he died, crucified by his own aging body and its 1,001 infirmities.

And after his death? What?



THE DECISION THAT MADE A RELIGION

Pontius Pilate (second from left) discusses the fate of Jesus, in a fourteenth-century fresco by Giotto. Pilate would elect to crucify the troublesome religious leader, thereby presenting the Christian religion with its central unifying moment.

(Giotto di Bondone, 1266–1336, detail from *The Mocking of Christ*, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

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What if Jesus hadn't been nailed to a cross at Pilate's orders? What if he had lived a long, long life? Or even just ten more years? Or one? What if his person and message had been interpreted differently, as they surely would have been?

These are impertinent questions for a believing Christian—questions only an impious dog would dare ask, as John Calvin might have said in the

sixteenth century. Believing that the world was saved through the crucifixion of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. For any believing Christian this counterfactual exercise is the ultimate blasphemy. The answer any traditional Christian theologian would have to give to our "what if?" question is quite simple: If Jesus hadn't been crucified, there would have been no redemption from sin and death, and the entire human race would be headed straight for hell.

Rewriting history with a different Jesus is a daunting enterprise. If you alter the central figure of the Christian religion, what might you end up with?

Religion is such an unpredictable factor in history, perhaps one of the most unpredictable. It is not entirely rational. Its very nature is to seek transcendence, and the coincidence of opposites. Paradox is always key. Sometimes, especially in the case of the Christian religion, the deepest and largest claims of truth are those that are most radically paradoxical.

This means that if you deal with the wild card of religion in any historical narrative and try to rewrite history, you are balancing on a high tightrope, and often without a net. Finding "facts" to tweak in religious history is not easy. Even single events, which could be considered pivotal facts, such as the crucifixion of Jesus, do not lend themselves readily to a counterfactual approach. This is because religion necessarily involves beliefs, and beliefs are among the fuzziest of "facts."

Even the "minimal rewrite," that is, the changing of one small, highly plausible fact, is hard to carry off with confidence in religious history. One of the most common, and most plausible minimal rewrites in counterfactual history is that which kills off the protagonist earlier than he or she died in real history. The proposition may seem simple enough—but not when it comes to religion. Consider this: The minimal rewrite that kills off Jesus is impossible, since it is the fact that he was killed prematurely that started the Christian religion and remains the basis of an entire structure of belief, the cornerstone of thousands of institutions.

Any fact related to Jesus, then, is embedded in a thick bundle of paradoxes. Facts are inverted, folded into counterfactuals, into beliefs. The prime "facts" the historian has to work with in the story of Jesus and the religion he founded are not bare historical facts, but beliefs. And here is the rub: Be-

liefs leave you with no clearly defined line between the objective and subjective.

Religion is all about interpretation.

And a figure such as Jesus of Nazareth is like a lightning rod that attracts interpretations. To speculate on what might have happened if anything at all had been different in the story of Jesus and his followers is to sail in an infinite ocean of possibilities.

So, what if Jesus had lived to a ripe old age? Or even just one year longer?

It could have happened, easily enough. Pontius Pilate did not have to condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion. This is what all the gospel accounts tell us. And the prime reason might have well been a procurator's desire to heed the warning given to him by his wife, for a complex set of reasons—or perhaps for a reason as simple and mundane as a husband not wanting to give his wife yet another chance to nag him for the rest of his life.

So, what might have happened if Pilate had listened to his wife?

Flash forward one year.

Jesus is still attracting huge crowds wherever he goes. It's not just what he says, but what he does that draws people to him. Especially the healing. When word comes that Jesus is near, the afflicted as well as the healthy flock to him. He moves from town to town, as always, never staying in any one place too long. Many of his relatives still think he is insane, but have given up on rescuing him from his delusions. Mary, his mother, remains at his side much of the time, and still supports and encourages him.

He still depends on twelve disciples to help him with his mission. Judas has been replaced by another man, handpicked by Jesus. As always, all twelve of them are confused and perplexed. What is Jesus trying to do? What is going on?

Jesus himself has a very clear sense of who he is and what he needs to do, but awaits the direction of the Father he always mentions. The Father doesn't always reveal His intentions, so Jesus goes from town to town healing the sick, preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God, expelling demons from those who are possessed by them, and, occasionally, it is rumored, raising people from the dead.

Jesus asks himself: "What happened last year?" He thought then that going to Jerusalem at Passover would have been the turning point, the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. He was ready to suffer and die. He didn't like the idea, but he was ready. He had even told his disciples he would be killed. Maybe the Father had heeded one of his prayers on the night he was arrested? "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours be done."

The Father always acted in mysterious ways. When and how would his Kingdom come? He kept telling the disciples that even he, Jesus, didn't know. Only the Father knew.

But he knew he had to go to Jerusalem again at Passover. He had to. Maybe this time he'd be killed. He didn't know what would happen, but he had to go where the Father led him.

It was so different now. There was much less talk about the Messiah among his followers. Last year's arrest had shaken them up. They had all fled. Even Peter, their leader, had turned tail and denied him, as Jesus knew he would. The arrest, and the torture, and the trial had made many redefine their Messianic hopes, and their view of Jesus. Could the genuine Messiah allow himself to be handled so roughly, and come so close to death? Many were now saying that Jesus was merely a great prophet: another Elijah, another John the Baptist.

Jesus listened to what people said. He always did. And many believed he could read their minds.

So he went to Jerusalem again, not knowing exactly what would happen and yet knowing, in that peculiar way of his. This time, thanks to Pilate, no harm came to him. He preached the Kingdom, expelled demons, and healed the sick. And all of the religious elites who despised him could do nothing but wring their hands.

Those Roman soldiers were such good guards. Some were the very same men who had scourged him and beaten him up, but he had forgiven them, and they now had a very special affection for him.

He knew he had to descend into every hell, every single hell, and offer himself up in the place of every human bound by sin. But when would this

happen? Not this year, it seems, he thought as he made his way back to Galilee with his disciples.

This scenario repeated itself many times over. Year after year he preached the Kingdom, celebrated Passover in Jerusalem, and waited for the Kingdom to come. He sacrificed his life, hour by hour, day by day, ministering to his people, tirelessly, waiting for the sacrifice to be offered, for his blood to be spilled. Year after year, he received protection from the Roman authorities. They liked what he had to say, despite all his talk about a Kingdom to come. The Romans knew that all of this Kingdom talk is like that of followers of Mithras, or Zoroaster, or even the Egyptian mother-goddess Isis. Spiritual talk, that's all. He taught people to turn the other cheek and forgive their enemies. What a wonderful message to preach to a subject people! Anyone who preached docile submission must be protected, especially if he also encouraged people to pay their taxes.

"Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. . . ."

Emperors Tiberius, Claudius, Caligula, and Nero will hear of this Jesus and heartily approve of having him protected and so will their immediate successors. If only other subject nations could have such a prophet and teacher! So what if Jesus and his followers refuse to worship the gods of the empire? There's plenty of room for that Jewish God in the pantheon of all divinities. No one in their right mind would think that the Jewish God could totally displace all the other gods that exist and are worshiped. So what if this sect balks at worshiping the emperor? Better to allow these people to teach and practice submission than to insist on worship of the emperor. Only that crazy Caligula really believed he was a god, anyway. The others knew better. Any wise Roman knows that Jesus is a gift from the gods—a strange one, since he denies their existence, but a gift all the same. The gods have a strange sense of humor.

By the time he is sixty years old, Jesus has many more followers than he can handle or control. There are so many different ways in which his message and work are being interpreted. So many ways to interpret what Jesus has said and done. So many ways to interpret that change he made in the

Passover dinner ritual, in which he distributed matzoh and wine and said, "Take this and eat; this is my body. Take this and drink; this is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me." So many ways to interpret the Kingdom, too, and the New Covenant.

He can manage his disciples, for the most part, and they, in turn, those who are under their care. But the chain of command, though clear enough, stretches too far. And there is plenty of fraying and breaking away beyond that tight, narrow chain. Too much.

At one end he has those who still proclaim him to be the Messiah. Among these there is a whole spectrum of beliefs. Some see him as a spiritual savior; some have no clue as to what he can accomplish, but worship and revere him; some see him as a king in the making—a king who will establish a new order on earth. At the other end, he has followers who hate Rome with a passion and are waiting for him to lead a revolt. To these followers, he is a political leader.

In between these two ends, there are almost as many interpretations of who he is as there are people who follow him. Some believe he is a messenger from the spiritual realm who has come to reveal secret knowledge about the structure of the universe, and to expose and defeat the evil that resides in matter. Some of the intellectuals approach him as a sage and the founder of a new philosophical school. Some believe that he is a great prophet who has come to extend membership in the Chosen People to gentiles. Some constantly change their minds as to what he is, or what he is going to do. All they care about is the healing he imparts to bodies, souls, and minds, or the power he has over demons.

The world is so full of demons. They are everywhere, desperately trying to turn earth into hell. And Jesus has power over them. The demons fear him, and obey him. They leap out of the bodies of the possessed screaming and writhing and foaming at the mouth, and cursing Jesus and his Father. The important thing is that Jesus makes the demons tremble, and obey, and desist.

The most amazing thing of all: Simply invoking the name of Jesus makes the demons flee. You don't have to be Jesus, or even one of his handpicked disciples. You don't have to be touched by him or be appointed to this task.

You don't have to know everything he's said, or to understand it, or even agree with it entirely. All you have to do is have faith in him, invoke his name, and those stinking, accursed fiends bolt back to the nether regions from whence they came.

So many followers, so many views. So hard to control all these people and what they think and say. So impossible.

And then there are those disciples who have fanned out to all corners of the earth. Disciples traversing the entire Roman Empire, even as far away as Iberia and Britain. Disciples beyond the boundaries of the empire. Disciples in Ethiopia. Disciples in Armenia. Disciples in Persia. Disciples as far away as Scythia, Colchis, and the Indus River Valley. Rumors of disciples having made it all the way to the Middle Kingdom of China. And all those disciples in Rome, the seat of power.

These disciples have made tremendous inroads among the Jews who are scattered all over the world: the Jews of the Diaspora. There are so many opinions, and so many teachers, but also so many new disciples. Day by day their number grows throughout the world, and not just among his own people.

By now, also, a very large number of his followers are not Jewish by birth. There are many gentiles who believe that they can be counted among the Chosen People if they worship Yahweh, the True God of Israel, without observing all of the ritual and dietary laws required in the covenant with Moses. Jesus, they believe, has come to announce a new covenant—one that makes all nations children of Abraham. These beliefs were already in place before Jesus came along with his so-called new covenant. Jews had been carrying out missionary activity of this sort before, but now, with the presence of Jesus, and the wisdom he imparts, and the Kingdom he promises, and the cures and exorcisms effected in his name, the missionary activity has a keener sense of purpose. And Saul of Tarsus: what a dynamo, what a wonderful apostle to the gentiles!

Jesus loves to read Saul's letters. The man is truly inspired. By the time Jesus is sixty-six or so, all hell has broken loose on his corner of the earth. The Zealots in Palestine have openly rebelled against the Roman powers. A terrible war has swept over the land. In the end, the Jewish uprising is

crushed. Jerusalem is besieged and captured by the Roman forces. The temple is destroyed, reduced to mere rubble. That gorgeous temple, gone, just as he had foreseen so many years ago. The very seat of God's presence on earth demolished. No more place to offer sacrifices to Yahweh, as required by His Law. So many Jews killed. Jerusalem, it is rumored, is awash with the blood of the slain. He knew it would happen, but that doesn't make the news any easier to bear.

Jesus is spared by the Romans. They know they can count on him to keep teaching submission and nonviolence.

Jesus weeps and sobs uncontrollably by the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He has managed to find a lonely spot where he can be by himself. Well, almost by himself. He always keeps some of his favorite disciples near him. That John, especially; he is the sweetest of them all, and the best friend anyone could ever hope to have. John is nearby, and Jesus can hear him weeping too. And those women. None of them are there now, but how could he live without them? They make life bearable when it is at its most unbearable, and they help to make him wiser. They are so far ahead of the men, and the men are too slow to realize it. They fill his life. He loves them so. No women at this spot, this time, though. Better not to let the women know you are crying uncontrollably. A few tears are fine: they can witness that, and have witnessed it hundreds of times, but unrestrained sobbing is another thing. No, that would reveal far too much and would cause more misunderstandings. Every tear is already counted and interpreted in so many ways. What would happen if the women saw this torrent, this infinite sea of tears that merges with all the water in the world, turning each and every drop into a grain of salt.

What if that one woman he loves more than all the others—the one who has so filled his soul for all these years—were to see him crying like this? No. She shouldn't see it. She might not be able to bear it. But John will understand. He always does.

There are really so few people he can trust and rely on. As they all fled once, so could they all flee again. All but John, and the women. Sometimes an awful thought crosses his mind too. Can he trust the Father? Can he rely on Him? Can he, really?

Abhorrent thoughts cross his mind all the time. He is tempted, sorely tempted, as are all human beings. Such an intolerable burden at times, the mind and the body. Wanting this, shunning that. So many appetites. So much that is forbidden, with good reason. So much that is unknown. So much that has to be taken on faith. So much mystery in history.

Such a disaster, such a holocaust. Was this the ultimate sacrifice that would usher in the Kingdom? The temple destroyed one more time, one final time? The end to animal sacrifices, forever? The Ark of the Covenant nowhere to be found? The Jewish people slaughtered yet another time, dispersed to the four winds?

Jesus cries out, as he has taught everyone to do: "Father, dear Father, our Father, who art in heaven, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

What will his many, many followers say and do now? What shall he do now?

Fast forward, another thirty years or so.

Jesus is ninety-seven years old, and very frail. He can barely see now: he who once healed the blind. Cataracts. He can barely walk: he who once made the lame dance. His hearing is still fine, though. The Word incarnate, as John calls him, can hear just fine. He suffers from arthritis, and his mind is somewhere else most of the time. On some days he doesn't even recognize his favorite disciple, John, who is nearly as old as he is, but still attends to his needs. Jesus' disciples think that his mind is in heaven most of the day and night. He suffers terribly from a hernia that can't be repaired, and from constant indigestion, and a bladder he can no longer control. His hands and feet are so numb sometimes that he can't feel them at all. He looks as old as he feels too: thin, white hair, wrinkled, nearly transparent skin, spots all over his body, blue veins snaking all over too. No teeth left with which to chew.

He who healed so many has chosen not to heal himself, it is rumored.

Jesus wakes up to good news on the last day of his life on earth. He receives word that a woman he healed as a little girl more than sixty-five years ago has come to visit him with some of her great-grandchildren. Many still

believe he didn't simply heal her, but actually brought her back from the dead. He loves her visits, and the thought of seeing her again makes him rise from bed eagerly, for a change.

He thinks about the numbers that his disciples toss at him all the time: so many disciples here, so many there. He has followers all over the world, most of whom consider themselves members of the Chosen People. His followers don't all agree. As a matter of fact, more often than not the various sects are at each others throats. Jesus thinks of what might happen once he dies.

He knows what will happen. He's been praying for it not to happen since that awful Passover night, when he begged the Father not to take his life, the night before he was tried and tortured by Pontius Pilate.

"Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

He has been praying for it not to happen for over sixty years. He knows that all the divisions that exist already will only grow worse once he's gone. But he doesn't stop praying for it not to happen.

The Father works in mysterious ways.

So many people are now worshiping the one true God and following the spirit of Law of Moses rather than its letter. So many gentiles turned into Chosen Ones, spiritual children of Abraham. So many of them, in so many different places. In Rome alone, the numbers are amazing. In Alexandria, that most learned of cities, there are so many intelligent followers trying to make sense of his message according to the structures of thought invented by Greek philosophers. So many bright scholars trying to fuse Moses, Jesus, Plato, and Aristotle.

The future looks dim and promising at the same time. He is convinced that his physical death is not the end at all, but only the beginning. He thinks back on all his years on earth, ponders his long, long life, and all the pain and joy.

He has spent so much time these last few years reliving his childhood in Nazareth. Does he really talk about the carpentry shop that often? John, ever so thoughtful, has taken to bringing him baskets full of sweet-smelling sawdust. "Nothing like sawdust," says Jesus.

Jesus sleeps with the sawdust next to his head.

This is not what he expected. Not at all. He knew he'd have to empty himself, spend himself totally. But, this? Betrayed by Judas once upon a time. Yes, that was awful, but easier to comprehend. Betrayed by his own body now, and by the Father, maybe. That is not so easy to understand.

So much accomplished. So little accomplished.

He thinks of his visitor that morning. He can't wait to see that little girl, now a great-grandmother, and, as ever, he is eager to embrace the children.

It is then that he suffers a massive stroke, alone in his room, alone with the Father, and the Spirit he is always talking about too, the Spirit he so desperately wants to see take over the world.

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus dies within two minutes, his blood spilled, finally, inside his own head. No one is there to see him die, or hold his hand. It is John and the little girl turned great-grandmother who find the corpse. "Oh, look, he's asleep," says the old woman.

Jesus receives a humble, discreet burial, as he had requested many times.

No one, however, will be able to find his body after it is buried. It vanishes from the grave, mysteriously. John and his disciples are accused of stealing and hiding the body, but they claim they buried it properly. Those who witnessed the burial will speak up in their defense.

Three days later, though, some will claim to have seen him alive. The rumors will spread like wildfire. Most who claim to have seen him are in Palestine, but reports will later surface all over the known world. In Rome itself; in Colonia Agrippina, on the Rhine River; in Toletum, in Iberia; in Athens; in Carthage; in Edessa; in Seleucia, near ancient Babylon; in Nubia; far, far away in Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganges River; and even farther away, walking on the Wan-Li Cha'ng-Ch'eng, the so-called Great Wall of the Middle Kingdom. All of the reported sightings say that the resurrected Jesus looks as if he's thirty-three years old again.

And, oddest thing of all, no one dares to claim that they have a relic taken from his body.

Flash forward, about 230 years. The Emperor Constantine is seated on his imperial throne, taking part in the dedication of a new synagogue and

shrine to the Apostle John, whose body has been brought to Rome. Constantine is about to make his conversion official. He is almost ready to undergo baptism, the rite of initiation into the New Covenant. He is about to become one of the Chosen Ones, as soon as Passover rolls around, in a couple of months.

This is a remarkable synagogue that Constantine has built, the grandest building in all of Rome. Imagine, having the body of the Apostle John, right here in Rome. Imagine all the pilgrims that will flock to this shrine, and all the miracles that will take place there. Imagine all the honor that will spill over to the emperor who built the shrine, brought the body to Rome, and was there at its consecration.

Constantine congratulates himself for having decided not to build that new capital city out east, on the site of that fishing village, Byzantium. What a dumb idea that was, in the first place. Good thing he didn't listen to those Greek advisers.

Constantine has put imperial muscle to work in unifying all of the followers of Jesus. All of those wrangling sects. Too many of them. Too untidy for the religion of the state. Unseemly for the Chosen People to disagree so much. Calling all of the chief rabbis together at Milan was one of the best ideas he ever had all on his own. They came up with a list of beliefs and defined the Truth for all time. Jesus has been proclaimed a prophet. The greatest prophet of all time. His New Covenant promises to make anyone who is baptized one of the Chosen People. The Messiah is yet to come, at some point in the future. Jesus has helped pave the way for him who will redeem and transform the earth for good. These New Covenanters think of themselves as God's Chosen Ones, since they worship Yahweh, but they despise those Jews who don't accept the teachings of Jesus and still follow the Law of Moses. They also despise those followers of Jesus who proclaim him to be the Messiah, and believe him to have been resurrected. The central rituals of the Chosen Ones are baptism, and the celebration of the New Passover meal, which is celebrated weekly, on the Sabbath. The council has also approved the veneration of the relics of Jesus and those of anyone who has led a holy life. Every synagogue is to have at least one relic enshrined under the pulpit from which the Scriptures are read.

Now that all of this has been defined, Constantine's troops can get busy closing down the synagogues of all those who don't believe the Truth as defined at Milan. Now all of his subjects will share the same faith, and be as one, just like the Prophet and Teacher Jesus, and the Father. Now his troops can descend upon those few misguided souls who still believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he rose from the dead. Deluded fools, turning Jesus into the Son of God. Now his troops can also go after those Jews who refuse to pay any attention at all to Jesus. Retrogrades, ignoring Jesus and following Moses instead. Now all those who believe falsely can be wiped off the face of the earth, for the glory of God and the well-being of the Chosen People and their empire.

A little persecution should take care of all those who believe what is wrong.

With the emperors residing at Rome, the western half of the empire remains strong and vibrant in every way, and the Roman cities of Western Europe grow and flourish undiminished by attacks from Germanic tribes. The German barbarians are held back east of the Rhine and north of the Danube and are gradually civilized by the missionaries that the Roman emperors send across the border. The same happens with the Scots and Picts, and the Celts of Ireland. The eastern half of the empire remains as strong as ever too, so the empire remains intact for a few more centuries, until the armies of the prophet Mohammed wrestle away much of the Near East and all of North Africa.

Centuries after Constantine, Roman civilization dominates all of the European continent, including those client states of the former barbarians that were outside the Constantinian borders of the empire, as far north as the Urals. All of these people profess belief in the One God of the ancient Jews. Anyone who doesn't agree with the orthodox religion defined by the rabbis, and approved by the Roman state, is persecuted, even in the client states of northern and eastern Europe. The evolution of the Roman Empire into a loose federation of nation states takes centuries, but is more or less complete by the year 1700 after the birth of Jesus. An evolved form of Latin remains the lingua franca of the entire continent, thanks to its use in all the rituals of the state religion. As to those lands discovered across the Atlantic

Ocean by the client state of the Norsemen in the ninth century, they will be Roman too. Conquered bit by bit, those two continents will be converted to the Roman religion, all the way down to Tierra del Fuego, by the year 1400. Missionaries make their way to Asia too, and contact with the East becomes ever stronger. Around 1250, Australia and New Zealand are discovered and colonized by the Chinese, who have learned a few lessons from the discoveries of the Norsemen.

But all that is in the distant future. Meanwhile the whole world has woken up and found itself Chosen, or so it seems. Chosen Ones, members of the New Covenant revealed to Jesus by God, according to the Council of Milan. Even those barbarian tribes north of the empire's borders are beginning to accept the new religion from Palestine and Rome, and they are becoming ever more civilized and docile. The old gods are dying fast. The old elite families of Rome continue to cling to the old religion, and the simple people mix the old with the new, but there is no denying the fact that the world has been transformed.

The temples to the old gods are vanishing quickly. Many have been turned over to the worship of the One Jewish God, Yahweh. The sayings of Jesus, and the narratives that tell of his life, are now being given the same attention by learned men as the writings of the greatest philosophers. Men and women are flocking to the desert to live lives of prayer and self-denial, just like the Essenes of old, the Jewish sect that had spawned John the Baptist, and influenced Jesus himself. Gladiators are a thing of the past, as are most of the old, cruel games of the arena. Crucifixions? Forget it. They've gone the way of wild orgies.

Some are very, very unhappy about the sexual ethics of this new religion. Will anyone ever be able to have any fun again?

As Constantine watches the long, intricate consecration ritual, he ponders the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Should he do it soon? Should he do it at all? This new Synagogue of John the Apostle in Rome is so nice, and it has cost so much to build. Isn't this enough for now? Isn't it enough that he has also brought to Rome the bed in which Jesus died, and the clothes he was wearing that final morning, along with all of his meager surviving wardrobe, and those coffered full of his hair and nail clippings?

And what about that most precious relic of all, the golden flask containing all the tears that Jesus ever shed, so lovingly collected by the women who followed him around all the time? Isn't all of this enough for now? Should he give in to the nearly endless requests he receives from all around the known world and rebuild the temple?

Constantine imagines what honor would devolve upon him if he were to rebuild the temple. He could go down in history as another Solomon, or maybe surpass him in fame.

The Temple of Constantine? It sounds so good. Maybe he should also move the capital of the empire from Rome to Jerusalem? Or, better yet, why shouldn't the temple be rebuilt at Rome instead of Jerusalem? Rome: the New Jerusalem? He should ask his advisers. He should ask the chief rabbis too. And he should check with his wife, first. Maybe she's had a dream?

Pontius Pilate Spares Jesus

- 1. Why does Pontius Pilate in the essay spare Jesus?**
- 2. How plausible were the events that followed these actions or inactions?**
- 3. Which seem the most likely? And which the least likely?**
- 4. What kind of statement does the essay make about the Western Christian view of God's plan?**
- 5. Which outcome would you have preferred and why?**

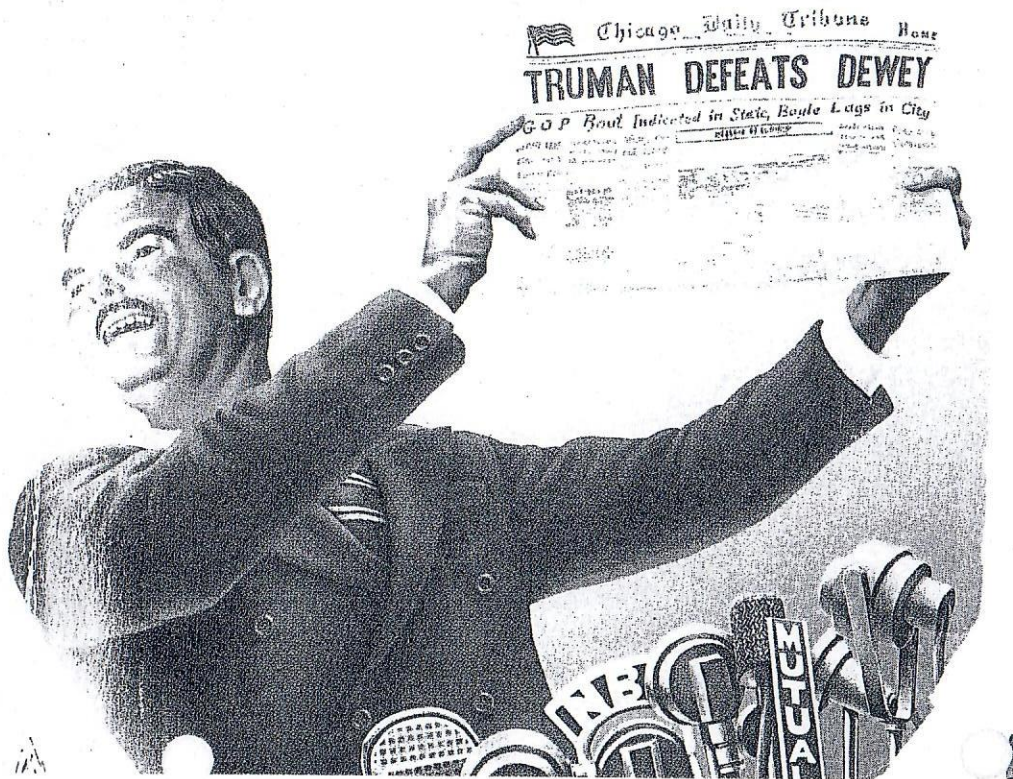
From Benjamin Franklin to
Michael Dukakis — 200 years of

ALTERNATE

PRESENTS

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Alexis Gilliland • Susan Schwartz • Jody Lynn Nye
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The Impeachment of Adlai Stevenson by David Gerrold

Washington, D.C., in August smells bad even when Congress isn't in session. The days are humid, the nights are just oppressive; the whole city swelters under a soggy blanket of dead air. When Congress is in session, it's even worse. Then the air is filled with lies and whispers. I wished I could line the whole pack of them up against a wall—

The Philco in my office was tuned to CBS. That nasty little creep, Walter Cronkite, was going to host a news special on "The Unraveling Presidency." I didn't want to watch it. I'd had my fill of bad news this summer, but I didn't have the courage to turn it off either. I felt like a relative of the guest of honor at a hanging.

As if things weren't bad enough, the air-conditioning still wasn't working. Even this late in the evening, it was so muggy in my office that finally, in desperation, I had shrugged out of my jacket and tie, and rolled up my shirt-sleeves. I was staring at the umpteenth draft of the speech, and I hated it. This was not a speech I wanted to write, and I was having a tough time of it. The President wanted to see a final draft by midnight. I didn't think I was going to make it; but a White House press conference had been called for ten o'clock tomorrow morning, so I'd be here until the speech was finished.

Some of the others on the White House staff hoped that Cronkite's broadcast would be a call for sanity—that maybe when the American people truly confronted the enormity of the moment, they would back away for a second thought. My own feeling was a lot less optimistic. I always assumed the worst.

Television had abruptly become our nemesis. It was an unleashed monster, even more powerful as an enemy than as a friend. Ed Murrow, for instance—there was a case; all he did was sit in his goddamned chair smoking his goddamned cigarettes, and talk to people. Yet, somehow, he still came across like God sitting in judgment on everything that passed before him. More than once this month, I'd prayed that he'd choke to death on one of those goddamned smokes. Over on NBC, those cretins Huntley and Brinkley weren't much better, dispassionately reading through the news as if the country weren't being hurt by the torrent of words. They were like a hundred thousand tiny knives, each one taking another slash at the authority of the President.

There was blood in the water and the sharks were gathering. *Hm*. Blood in the water? I wondered if I could use that image in the speech. I started to write it down on my notepad, then abruptly crossed it out. No, I wanted to avoid calling attention to the President's injuries. I didn't want to do anything that acknowledged his weakness. But how could you write a resignation speech without acknowledging why?

I felt frustrated.

This should have been one of the high points in my career—speech writer for the President of the United States. Instead, I was one of the last rats left on a sinking ship. The half-empty bottle of Coke on my desk was warm and flat. I pushed the cap back on the bottle and dropped it into the wastebasket by the side of my desk, where it resounded with a loud metal clunk. Those little green fluted bottles were probably the only thing in this world that would never change. I thought about going down the hall for another one, but I didn't even have the energy for that. The wet August night had drained it out of me. Besides, the broadcast was starting. I leaned back in my chair and watched; it creaked alarmingly, but it held.

Cronkite began with the 1952 election campaign. That had been a good time. The Republicans had marched out of the convention hall happily singing, "I like Ike," and Harry Truman had promptly remarked, "I like Mickey Mouse, but I ain't going to vote for *him* either." Two days later, Herblock published that famous political cartoon in the Post, showing Eisenhower with a pair of big black Mickey Mouse ears framing that sappy smile of his and suddenly the campaign had a theme. Was there anybody home behind that vacuous grin? That, plus the insinuation that Walt Disney had personally put a lot of money into the Republican campaign was the first crack in the Republican armor.

Nevertheless, according to Cronkite, Eisenhower could have won the election. After all, it had been twenty years since there had been a Republican in the White House; many felt that the country was overdue for a change; and he was popular and well known. Unfortunately, he chose the wrong man for the office of vice president—that's what doomed the ticket.

John Nance Garner was right. The vice presidency wasn't worth a bucket of warm spit. The evidence of past elections suggested that even if the American voters had their doubts about the fellow on the bottom half of the ticket, that wouldn't stop them from voting for the guy on the top half, if he was their first choice. But in this case, Eisenhower's vice presidential nominee clearly cost the Republicans the election.

First, there was that business about Korea. Cronkite had most of it right. When Ike said, "I will go to Korea," he took a three-point jump in the polls. The American public automatically assumed that the general who had won World War II would bring a quick end to the growing mess in Asia. I remembered the agonized meetings we'd had about an appropriate response. It was obvious to us that candidate Stevenson could not say the same thing without inspiring laughter. What could an egghead do? But then, before we'd even had a chance to react, Ike's vice presidential candidate had added, "And if we have to use the atomic bomb and vaporize a few cities to

bring those little yellow monkeys to their senses, then that's exactly what we'll do." That had been the first appalling mistake—and we had capitalized on it immediately. From that moment on, we treated the Republican vice presidential candidate's outrageous remarks as if they represented Eisenhower's opinions too, the party platform, and the political ideology of every Republican from William Howard Taft to Harold Stassen. We hoped enough people would be terrified by the specter of a war with Red China that they would be scared into voting Democratic. "The Republicans want to send your son overseas again!" That was my line. We talked about their greed and their desire to return to a wartime economy; but we knew who would really foot the bill. Wasn't inflation bad enough already? Gasoline was nearly a dime a gallon!

We hit him pretty hard on that issue; we milked it for nearly a month; but Ike was enormously popular and he was a good campaigner. Our best hope was for the vice presidential candidate to put his other foot in his mouth—and then shoot himself in it. We crossed our fingers and waited.

And sure enough, in the last week of September, the idiot was filmed at a private fund-raiser, waving around a sheaf of papers and claiming that the State Department was full of Communists, homosexuals, and Jews. He had the list right there in his hand, and what was the Democratically controlled government doing about it? Nothing. Somebody slipped Ed Murrow a copy of the film and the firestorm that followed was wonderful to watch. We didn't have to say a word. And in fact, we didn't. The Grand Old Party did our work for us.

Half the Republican Party was appalled and the other half kept trying to defend the candidate by explaining what he had really meant. It took Eisenhower over a week to disavow his vice presidential candidate's remarks, but that only made it worse. The VP candidate promptly snapped back that the country didn't need "another lace-pantied imitation Democrat, but a red-blooded Republi-

can who isn't afraid to call a spade a spade." would have been hysterical if it hadn't been so tragic; the Republican ticket was tearing itself in half. The vice presidential candidate was acting like he was the voice of the ticket. Eventually, they managed to muzzle him, but everybody knew he was muzzled, and the press was playing a great game with "Tail-Gunner Joe," trying to bait him into saying something else he shouldn't.

Before October was half over, Ike's well-orchestrated campaign had become a discordant cacophony. We weren't just running against Mickey Mouse. We were running against Mickey Mouse and Goofy. If ever there were a loose cannon in American politics, the Senator from Wisconsin was certainly it. Why Eisenhower ever chose Joe McCarthy for his vice president was a mystery that none of us on this side of the aisle were ever likely to understand.

Cronkite's broadcast was focusing almost completely on Eisenhower's campaign, and abruptly, I realized what he was doing. He was showing us that Stevenson hadn't won the election as much as Eisenhower had lost it. By implication, Stevenson shouldn't have been elected. Eisenhower should be president now, and, also by implication, he would have been a much better one. He barely even mentioned our October offensive. I had written what many people felt was the single best speech of the entire campaign:

"They've been calling me 'the egghead.' They've been saying that I'm too intelligent to be president. Can you imagine that? Too intelligent? Well, if stupidity is the qualifier, then by that standard Eisenhower's vice presidential nominee is the most qualified man for the office! And Eisenhower is the second most qualified man, because he chose him! What the Republicans are offering you is a witch-hunt at home and a land war in Asia. And frankly, I don't think it takes too much intelligence to recognize that either of those options would be a big mistake for the United States of America.

"But enough of the jokes. The Republicans have given us the best jokes of the campaign, and I'm not going to try to top them. I'm going to talk seriously about the future this

country. An election isn't a popularity contest. It isn't about who you like the most. What's at stake is too important to be decided so casually. An election has to be about two things: first, who's most qualified to run the country? And second, where is he going to take America?

"Let me tell you what the Fifties are going to be about if a Democrat is elected president: they're going to be about peace and prosperity. We're going to create jobs, we're going to build houses, we're going to build shiny new cars and great interstate highways to drive them on. We're going to build radios and television sets so that Americans can be informed and entertained. We're going to build hospitals to take care of our sick and schools to educate our children. And most of all, we're going to build a strong economy, an economy based on freedom and prosperity for all. We're going to demonstrate to the entire world how democracy really works.

"This is a nation of courageous men and women who have demonstrated over and over again that Americans are not afraid of hard work. We have worked our way out of a terrible depression, we have fought and won the most terrible war in the nation's history, and we stand second to no one in our commitment to the rebuilding of war-torn Europe and Asia. Our children are going to know a world of shining cities, a world that is clean and safe and bright. Our children are going to know a world that is free from war and sickness and hunger. Our children—"

It was the "Our Children" speech, and that became the theme of the campaign for the last three weeks. It crystallized the entire election, and Eisenhower slid disastrously in the polls. We put up posters with pictures of Joe McCarthy, and the caption read, "What is this man going to do to your children?" With Eisenhower, we were a little more respectful. We went back to the earlier theme, "General Eisenhower wants to send your children to Korea." It was enough.

We had dictated the theme of the campaign. We had defined the choices. The Republican campaign never found itself and by the time the first Tuesday of November rolled around, fifty-three percent of the American people voted for the Democratic candidate, forty-five percent voted for the Republican. Not a landslide, but not an embarrassment either. The people chose fairly.

During the commercial I went to pee. I passed one of the Negro custodians in the hall; he nodded to me sadly. "You watchin' the broadcast? Mr. Cronkite sure ain't being nice to the boss."

I shook my head. "I don't trust Walter Cronkite. I wouldn't buy a used car from him."

"Wouldn't buy a used car from him!" The old Negro cackled at the joke. "Hee hee hee. That's a good one, all right."

I continued on down the hall; with a little luck, by morning that remark would be all over Washington, D.C. It wouldn't help the boss any, but it sure would make me feel better.

When I got back to my office, there was a note on my desk. *The President would like to see you after the broadcast.* I crumpled it up and tossed it into the wastebasket after the Coke. He was going to ask me how the speech was going. And I was going to have to tell him that I couldn't write it. "Sir, you're a statesman," I wanted to say. "A statesman doesn't make speeches like this."

But I knew what he'd reply. "No, I'm not a statesman. I won't be a statesman until I leave office. Until then, I'm the man who has to make difficult decisions."

"But not this one, sir!"

"Yes, even this one."

We'd had the argument a dozen times. And each time, there were a few less voices saying that the President should resist the cries for his resignation.

Cronkite came back on the air then. Now, he began chronicling the unraveling presidency of Adlai Stevenson. He worked his way steadily through all six years of it. The endorsement of Oppenheimer, even though J. Edgar Hoover said he was a known Communist. The commutation of the death sentence of convicted atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The President's public opposition to the hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The Berlin Wall embarrassment. The Soviets' growing atomic stockpile. The continuing failures of the Vanguard missile system. The Northrop vs. Symington Flying Wing scandal. The attempt on Khrushchev's life at Disneyland. The Soviet demonstration of a 100-megaton nuclear weapon. The breakdown of relations with France because of the President's refusal to back them in Indochina. The public break with J. Edgar Hoover, resulting in the firing of the Director of the FBI—and didn't *that* one set off the howls from the right. Simultaneous inflation *and* recession. The civil war in Cuba—and the *very* unpopular decision to send in troops to support the Batista government. And then—goddammit—*Sputnik*, the Russian satellite. It seemed that nothing that Adlai Stevenson did was the *right* thing to do.

The founder of the John Birch Society insisted publicly that the President was a Communist agent; that was the only logical explanation for the floundering of America—Stevenson was trying to bring the country to its knees so that the Soviets could triumph without firing a shot. "Khrushchev says that he will bury us—and Adlai Stevenson wants to give him the shovel." Stevenson's response: "No, I'm a capitalist. I'll sell him the shovel." But the joke fell flat. It's a bad sign when even the press corps doesn't laugh at the President's jokes. Even worse, the late-night TV talk-show hosts, Steve Allen and Jack Paar, were starting to make jokes that were hostile to the President. Those jokes would be repeated in a hundred thousand stores and offices the next day and the day after that.

And then, that grandstanding little son of a b——the congressman from Van Nuys—stood up in the House of Representatives and introduced a Bill of Impeachment. He charged the President with "non-feasance in office," whatever that was. Maybe he'd meant it as a joke to call attention to the rampant hostility on the Hill, or maybe he'd intended it as a way to get himself a little public attention, or maybe he'd meant it only as a political stunt, deliberately designed to embarrass the President—or maybe he just meant it.

Whatever the case, the press took it seriously. And because the press took it seriously, so did the American public. And within two weeks, a House Committee was drawing up Articles of Impeachment and holding hearings. The House Republicans were still angry about the slapping down they'd gotten over the Committee on Un-American Activities, so they were only too happy to go after the egghead—"You can't make an omelet without breaking eggheads."

But there was no support on the left side of the aisle either. The Democratic Party's unity was fractured so badly, there was talk it might break apart into two new parties. The South wanted out because Hubert Humphrey, that babbling little Porky Pig senator from Minnesota, had been trying to introduce a civil rights plank into the party platform every year since 1948. The closing of unnecessary military bases all over the country had further undermined the President's support in every town that had lost jobs as a result. The shutting down of all those unnecessary air-defense and missile-building projects hurt Southern California the worst. And Detroit was claiming that the administration's rigid insistence on auto-safety standards and smaller cars and gasoline efficiency had shut down half the assembly lines in America; so he couldn't depend on much support from Labor.

But an impeachment—at least that was something that Americans could agree on. Adlai Stevenson's campaign pledge had abruptly come home to haunt him: "We're going to demonstrate to the entire world how democracy really works."

The broadcast concluded with a recap of last Friday's uproar in the House of Representatives and the mean-spirited vote to impeach. The Senate was already organizing for the trial. From where I sat, they looked like a bunch of kangaroos laying railroad tracks to oblivion.

Cronkite hadn't told it all; he'd missed all the backstage squabbling and infighting, but he'd replayed most of the worst news—and in retrospect, the cumulative weight of it was crushing. Even I found myself thinking, "Maybe the President is right." Maybe it's impossible to continue under these conditions, and unfair to the American people to try.

Abruptly, I knew what I wanted to write. I rolled a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter and quickly tapped out: "*The problems of America and of the Free World demand the full attention of our elected leaders. This country needs a full-time executive. It is unfair to the nation and to the office of the presidency to continue trying to operate in the current atmosphere of public dissatisfaction and distrust. Accordingly, this Friday, at twelve o'clock noon, I shall resign the office of the presidency.*"

I wondered how long Vice President Kennedy would last in front of the jackals. Already he was a laughing-stock for marrying that silly blonde actress from Hollywood. (The new Monroe Doctrine: "Ooh, ooh, aaaahhhh.")

Never mind that. I rolled another sheet of paper into the typewriter. "*The presidency of the United States is not a popularity contest. It is not a prize or a reward. It is not a laurel wreath to be given or taken away by the winds of hysteria. The presidency is only a job—sometimes it is a great responsibility, sometimes it is a terrible and crushing burden—but once the ceremony and ritual have been stripped*

away from the presidency, what is left is the responsibility for making difficult decisions, decisions that need to be made to protect the interests of America and the Free World. Sometimes those decisions are bitter medicine—but like bitter medicine, we take those steps because in the longer term, we know that we shall be healthier for it.

"I have had to make many of those difficult decisions. They were the best decisions that I and my advisors could make at the time; they were based on the very best information that we could get. It is my firm conviction that most of those decisions were the correct ones, and I believe that history will vindicate those choices.

"When I was elected in 1952, and reelected again in 1956, I did not promise a pot of gold. The rewards I promised were those that would only come from hard work. Today, we are stuck in the middle of that course—and we are having a crisis of confidence. If we succumb to this crisis and abandon our larger goals, we will not simply be quitting a difficult task in favor of momentary comfort; we will be abandoning our leadership of the Free World.

"When I accepted this responsibility, I accepted the difficult as well as the great. I refuse to abandon the goals of America. I refuse to quit the job. I refuse to give up, halfway across the rushing river.

"If I do not resist this shameful course of action to the fullest of my ability, then I will be damaging the integrity and authority of this office for all of those who succeed me. My love of this nation and my responsibility to this office demand that I protect the constitutional balance of power.

"Accordingly, I am calling a special session of the Congress of the United States. I will present myself to a joint session to answer any and all charges that they wish to raise against this Administration. When all of the facts are spoken, it will be demonstrated that I am guilty of nothing more than being unpopular. Being unpopular isn't exactly an honor, but it is certainly not a crime—and it is definitely no cause for impeachment. More important, if the people of this nation allow themselves to be stampeded into turning their backs on the twin responsibilities of hard work and difficult decisions, the shame will not be mine, but America's.

"I remain confident in the wisdom and good faith of the American people, that this will not happen.

"Thank you. Good night."

I looked at the two speeches, side by side. Not quite my best—I would have preferred a few more jokes; but neither of these speeches lent themselves to the famous Stevenson wit. I put each one into a folder and headed up the hall to the Oval Office.

His secretary looked red-eyed, as if she had been crying, but she just nodded at me without actually meeting my eyes. The door was standing half-open. "Go on in," she said.

I knocked on the door and pushed in. "Mr. President?"

He was sitting at his desk, reading through a stack of leather-bound briefing books. He held up a finger, a familiar "wait-a-minute" gesture, while he finished reading. He nodded, initialed the book, scribbled something on it, closed it, and put it in the out basket. He looked old,

much older than his years—and tired too. But that was given; nothing aged a man like the presidency. Almost automatically, President Stevenson reached for the next one, opened it, checked out the summary page, then closed it again and put it aside on his desk. At last, he looked up at me. "The work piles up. Even on the eve of impeachment." He sighed. "What have you got for me?"

I passed across the two folders.

"Two drafts?"

"Two different speeches, sir."

"I see." He massaged his nose between his thumb and forefinger, then readjusted his glasses and opened the first folder. He read it quickly. "Well, that's short and to the point."

"I don't think anything more than that needs to be said."

"You're probably right. Your judgment in these areas has always been on the mark. What's the other speech?"

"Read it."

He opened the second folder. I watched his features intently, looking for a clue to his reaction. He frowned, and at one point he shook his head, but I'd seen him do that even with speeches he approved of. At last, he finished, and closed the folder. He laid it on top of the first one. "A good speech, Drew," he said.

"But?"

"But nothing."

I sat down in the chair opposite him. "Mr. President—don't resign. It'll look like weakness."

"For what it's worth, Vice President Kennedy agrees with you. He's only forty-one, you know. I think he's a little afraid of the responsibility. But he'll handle it, I'm sure."

"There's nothing I can say, is there?"

"You said it all in the speech."

"You don't agree, do you?"

He shook his head.

"In one respect, you're absolutely right. If I resign, it will weaken the office of the presidency for all who come after me. It will set a precedent."

"And you don't see that as a reason to fight?"

"No. If anything, it's a better reason to resign. The office of the presidency has become much too powerful. Roosevelt was the most powerful president the country has ever had. Think of what he could have become if he had been motivated like Hitler. Maybe it's time to rein in the presidency and make the office more responsible to the voice of the people. Maybe I can leave this country with a presidency that's less *dangerous*."

"You want to trust Congress with the future of the country?"

"The last I heard, that's how democracy is supposed to work. We trust our elected officials."

"Mr. President, resigning will destroy trust in the Democratic Party. You know what that will do to the election process—it'll give the Republicans a stampede."

"The Democratic Party is not America. And they'll recover. They always do. Maybe after they've lost a few presidential contests they'll lose some of their arrogance and rediscover some of their purpose. I hope so." He took off his glasses and rubbed his nose again. "I'm tired. I'm beaten and I want to go home. I did my best. I'm not ashamed of that. But I know when it's time to quit. It's time." He reached across the big desk to shake my hand. "Thank you. You've done good work for me. I've always appreciated your loyalty and your advice."

"Yes, sir." It was a dismissal. I accepted his thanks perfunctorily and headed for the door. I suppose I should have thanked him for the chance to work for him, but I was hurting too badly. I could see why so many people hated him. Maybe the Republicans had been right all along; Adlai Stevenson was too smart to be president. . . .

I headed down the hall, back to my office, and finally began doing what I should have done weeks ago. I started cleaning out my desk.

Adlai Stevenson had too much compassion and too

much integrity and he respected the so-called wisdom of the American people far too much to do any real good as president.

Okay, Mr. Stevenson. Go ahead. Resign. Forget the dream. Forget the promises. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the firestorm. Quitters are failures. A dumber man would have kept on fighting, until he outlasted his enemies.

I slammed the last empty desk drawer in angry disgust. "Next time, I'm going to work for a man who's too stupid to know when he's beaten!"

Hmm.

The senator from California hadn't declared yet, but he was certainly the front-runner for 1960, and many people were already looking to him to restore the nation's pride and confidence in itself. They said he had the kind of stern statesmanlike quality the country needed right now. I didn't particularly like the man, but he was a great poker player. He'd probably be one hell of a president. Best of all, he'd once remarked to me at a White House reception that he wished he had a speech writer who could write an "Our Children" speech. At the time, I hadn't given the comment any thought, but it was clearly a hint.

Okay, I wasn't exactly thrilled about working for a Republican, but what the hell? I could learn. And Richard Nixon was exactly what this country needed and deserved.

The Impeachment of Adlai Stevenson

1. How did the Democratic campaign against Eisenhower succeed? What were the two attacks with respect to Korea and his VP candidate
2. Who was Adlai Stevenson's VP?
3. How was Adlai Stevenson characterized?
4. Whom did the narrator i.e. speech writer for Stevenson favor next for President and how was his choice filled with irony?