

THE POWER OF TEN
"And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake"
Genesis 18:32

"For ten righteous, God always saves Sodom." It was that sentence of seven words written by Dr. Ferre that made me think of the power of ten. Today we think it terms of thousands and millions. The advertisements in our magazines tell us of the power of the masses of people. Our newspapers count their circulation in hundreds of thousands. Colleges turn out their graduates, not by the score, but by hundreds and thousands. We are reminded on every hand of the power of the many. Yet there was a time when ten people could have saved a city.

The story is found in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Genesis. It pictures Abraham entertaining the Lord in his tent. He had laid before the Lord and his two companions the best he had, not because he recognized his visitors ~~but~~ because of the law of hospitality. When the men were about to leave they looked in the direction of the city of Sodom and the other cities of the plain. It was then that the Lord told Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness. The account says, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"

This states an eternal principle. Disasters of a social nature do not come "out of the blue." There are always men like Abraham, prophets, sensitive souls, who can predict such disaster. God never hides from such people the thing which he does.

Abraham's reaction to the announcement tells us much about him. We could almost expect him to grin with glee. Here was the justification for all he believed. Here was the vindication for all of the things he had said. These people were getting what they deserved. I knew a man once who had a disagreement with another man. He finally said, "If you go on opposing me God will do something terrible to you." Only a few days later the man to whom this was said was kicked in the face by a horse. The first man visited him in the hospital, and the first words he spoke when he went in the room were, "See, I told you so!" Abraham certainly had more justification than that. We could really understand if he had excused himself and rushed back

to his wife Sarah with the good news, "Sarah, they are going to get it now!"

Instead, Abraham is pictured as arguing with the Lord in an attempt to save the city. I do not know what your idea of prayer is but here in this story we have a notion of prayer that is creative and quite startling to those whose prayers are perfunctory. A belief is expressed here that it is perfectly in order for the devout to express their doubts about the Divine judgment. Abraham starts out by expressing his amazement that the Lord will destroy the righteousness with the wicked. Now this is nothing new because in the earlier story of the flood you remember that the righteous were saved. What is new about this is that Abraham expects that God will save the whole city if there are any righteous there. So he poses a question. Suppose, he says, that when you visit the city you find fifty righteous there will you still destroy it? And the Lord replies that he will not destroy Sodom if he can find fifty who are righteous. Then Abraham gets rather cute—and he says, suppose you lack just five of the fifty? And the Lord gravely says that, of course, he would not destroy the city for the lack of five. But Abraham persists. He always is respectful and even humble, stating his own unworthiness in posing the question but relentlessly he reduces the saving number to forty, and thirty, and twenty until the Lord finally says: "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." Before we talk about this power of ^{man} then, and just for the sake of the record, we had better state that God did not find ten righteous people in Sodom and that the city was destroyed. I hope that you will get the point of this great story and not miss it because you take it too literally. Here centuries ago a great religious genius with divine inspiration was saying that civilizations are saved by creative minorities.

Jesus thought of his disciples as just such a creative minority. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." As a matter of fact it is always the few who determine the course of affairs. A few determined people have greater power than the majority and can control the majority, sometimes against its will.