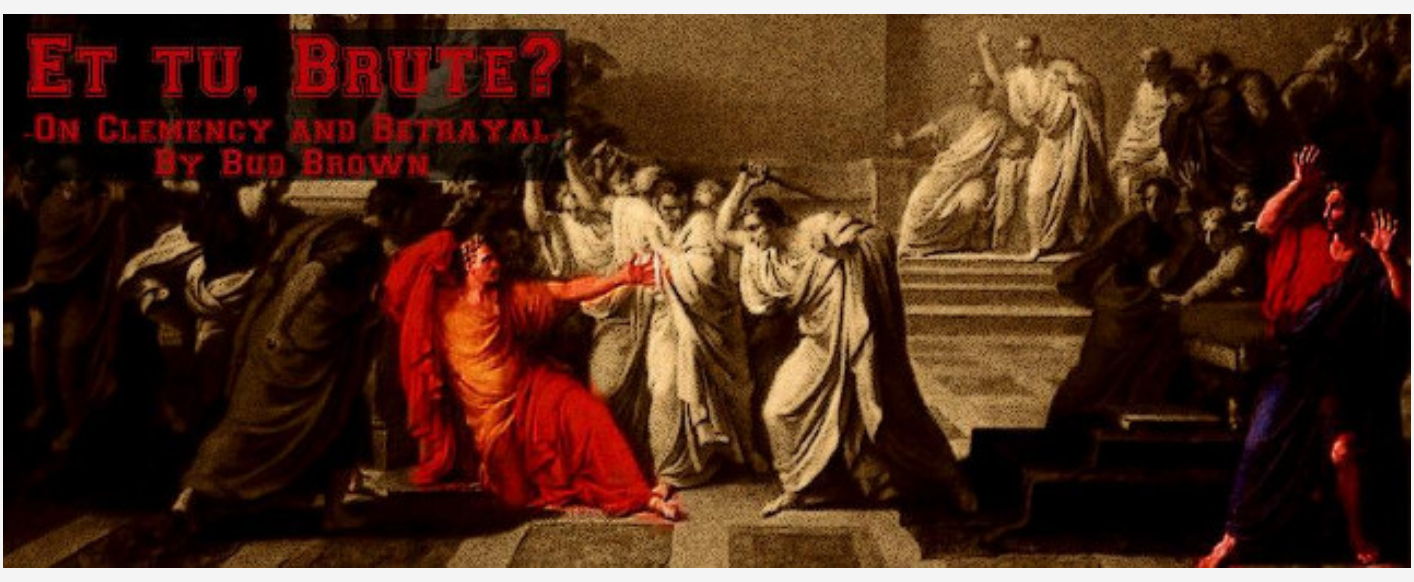
ET TU BRUTE?



By Bud Brown[1]

ON CLEMENCY AND BETRAYAL

2057 years ago this past March one of the most influential figures in human history was murdered.

You may have encountered his name when reading one of William Shakespeare's plays in a high school or college literature class. But precious few people realize just how profoundly his life still affects us today.

The Roman Empire was the greatest ancient power in world history, a fact that is commemorated on the pages of our Bibles. Julius Caesar was Rome's most brilliant military genius, politician, author and inventor. His books on military strategy entitled "Military Commentaries" are widely studied to this day. His military and technological innovations paved the way for an empire that civilized Britain, France, Germany and the Baltic States.

It was Julius Caesar who created the foundation on which modern Europe was built.

A little known fact about him concerns the way he treated kings whose territories he conquered, enemies he defeated in the field of battle, and soldiers who deserted.

He was the first of the ancient conquerors to extend mercy and clemency. Rather than slaughtering captive troops and stacking their corpses to rot in the sun, he allowed them to join his forces or go home in peace. Kings who met him on the field of battle became clients; they swore loyalty to Caesar and return to their capitals. When the Civil Wars that racked Rome for years were finally suppressed he forgave the Senators, politicians and soldiers he conquered in the course of pacifying the insurrection.

Caesar was hailed as a merciful conqueror. A temple was built in honor of his clemency; Mark Antony its first priest.

On the morning of March 15, 44BC he was assassinated in the Roman Senate. A group of Senators who were jealous of Caesar's growing power conspired together and in a moment they set upon him with knives. Among them were a young man whose name is forever memorialized in that famous Shakespeare line, "Et tu, Brute?"

Quintus Servilius Caepio Brutus was the son of a famous Roman noblewoman named Servillia. She and Caesar had conducted a long, torrid love affair in their younger days, and it was believed by many that Brutus was borne of that liaison. The ancient historians never give a definitive answer to that question but the official records of this era show that Caesar treated Brutus will special consideration.

Brutus, and many of the Senators who conspired for Caesar's death, had been granted clemency for their roles in the Roman Civil Wars. They had deserved death but received mercy.

Picture this, if you will. There sets Julius Caesar on a gilded throne in the Senate chamber. A vicious pack sets upon him with knives, hacking away at his flesh, spilling his blood. To a man they had received Caesar's forgiveness.

But it wasn't until Caesar saw Brutus, his special object of affection among them, that he resolved to die. In Shakespeare's words Caesar looked on the one he loved and said, "You, too, my son?" At that point Caesar pulled his robe up over his face and submitted himself to the fatal blow.

When Jesus Christ was being scourged prior to crucifixion, we were the ones who swung the cruel whips on his back. When his arms and legs were held in place atop the cross, the hammer and nails were in our hands.

And when the deed was finished he hung suspended between heaven and earth. He looked down upon us and then turned his gaze to heaven and petitioned, "Father, forgive them." Jesus died to extend clemency to rebels, mercy to sinners and grace to all.

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