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THE CITY OF MAN



NCE again, in spite of the Scriptural admonition that "unless the Lord build the house, in vain do they labor who build one,"¹ man is trying to usurp the rights of God. No ordinary house is the one contemplated by the new builders; they propose to America and to the world a "New God." In this latest conception of God, the last vestiges of the supernatural are cast aside. The heritage of Western culture is cut off from its anchorage to true Christianity and to Western culture is offered not the *City of God* which so long sustained it but the *City of Man*.

The publisher's blurb presents quite a different aspect: "The signers of this Declaration (*The City of Man*) call upon everyone within the hearing of their voices to throw aside the destruction and disillusion that the events of our day have introduced, and to accept the desperate crisis itself as a vantage point from which the wrongs of the past can be effectively challenged by a living program for democracy in the future. The men and women whose deepest convictions are expressed in this joint manifesto are spokesmen of many cultures and pursuits. They have gravitated together because they know that for the moment the tasks upon which they are individually engaged must give way, and that they must contribute the weapons they possess to the common cause of mankind. Those weapons are formidable, for the authors of *The City of Man* are representative of the highest attainments of the modern mind. . . . Our thinkers are with us in the critical hour. This book is their sword."²

The claim that the signers of this manifesto represent the highest achievements of the modern mind need not be taken too seriously unless the modern mind be the undisciplined faculty of modern phi-

¹ Ps. CXXVI, 1.

² *The City of Man*, Viking Press, N. Y., 1941.

losophy. The most representative scholars of the modern world are the members of the Pontifical Academy of Science. Nevertheless, the signers do represent, by American standards at least, some of the most influential and active writers now enjoying public approval. Herbert Agar is a former Pulitzer Prize winner who has a wide following as a pundit and lecturer. Frank Aydelotte, a former Rhodes scholar, is President of Swarthmore College. Guiseppo Antonio Borgeese is professor of Italian Literature at the University of Chicago. Ada Louise Comstock is President of Radcliffe College. Christian Gauss is dean at Princeton University. Van Wyck Brooks is a famous literary critic. William Allan Neilson, former President of Smith College, is a Shakespearian scholar of the first rank; Thomas Mann and Lewis Mumford are standard names in the field of the successful novel.

The publisher's notice states the possibility that "their Declaration, which thrusts to the roots of the world's sickness and proposes a cure based upon universal verities rather than on debatable specific strategies, will be as epoch-making a statement for a new democratic era as other great Declarations have been in their times."³ This slender volume is now in its fourth edition and plans are now ready to circulate it on an unprecedented scale. It seems strange that this book has not been more generally recognized as one of the most pernicious and destructive manifestos against Christianity since the days when an angry friar posted his theses on the church-door in Wittenburg. Indeed there is hardly an historical precedent by which this new creed could be paralleled, so complete is its break with the Christian past of Divine revelation. The paganism of this creed would leave Christianity a heap of ruins. The religious apathy of the American people may well act as a check to this new movement but whatever the effect, the signers of this Declaration have hitched religion in all its forms to the star of democracy. This new creed would send forth the Spirit and renew the face of the earth, not by the divinely instituted means left us by Jesus Christ, but by, through, and for man alone. *The City of Man* seeks to answer the oft-proposed question—Will Men be like Gods?—in a new way; it replies with a resounding affirmative—one so strong that it drowns out God's answer as contained in the lights of reason and faith. This new city will truly be the city of man but in it there will be no place for Christ, His Sacraments or His Church.

The general tone of the manifesto is ostensibly Christian but the

³ *ibid loc. cit.*

mask of pretense is thrown off in many places. The demand for "love of the brethren" and "service in brotherhood" are Christian realities which these signers cleverly pervert to their own purposes. The two following excerpts prove conclusively the anti-religious and anti-Christian motif of the Declaration: "The legacies of Greece and Palestine contribute almost equally to this creed. Passages from Plato foreshadow it. Tenets from the Lord's Prayer still sound and will ever sound adequate to it: 'Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' . . . Therefore sophisticated sham and frivolous irony must vanish as we dare pronounce again the prayer—and now the battlecry—'Thy kingdom come.' For any religion or doctrine cloaking injustice and misery on earth under the promise of some transcendent bliss to come, deserves the scorn of Marx, who called them 'the opium of the people.' (italics inserted)⁴ The rôle of existing churches is thus described: "Old cults, developed and crystallized over the centuries, will have the honorable protection of democracy. But no Church, however powerful or far-spreading, can be officially acknowledged as a religion of the State and no church can be granted primacy or privileges above the other churches. Indeed, the desire for such a place of privilege or pre-eminence on the part of any Church would be a measure of its inadequacy to the fundamental principle of democracy. The separation of Church and State is and remains the base from which arises the supremacy of world-humanism and world-democracy—the catholicity of the common creed, which embraces and interprets every lesser faith." (italics inserted)⁵

The Declaration is the first of three sections in the book; following it are a series of "proposals"; a "note" explains the origins of both the manifesto itself and the four "proposals" that follow it. For the sake of clarity, it seems better to consider first the history of the Declaration before analyzing its contents.

Two years of preliminary work preceded the major document. An exchange of ideas by a small group of friends in the autumn of 1938 soon after what they are pleased to term "the surrender" in Munich and the "dismemberment" of Czechoslovakia. These conferences were extended throughout that winter and the early spring of the following year. In May 1939, three months prior to the outbreak of the second World War, a *First Memorandum*, summarizing the motives and intentions of this first group, was drawn up. In it, the dismal state of the Old World is pointed out, together with the

⁴ *City of Man*, Viking Press, N. Y., 1941. P. 49.

⁵ *op. cit.* p. 46.

apparent hopelessness of victory either by "appeasement" or by force of arms. The signers would have us believe that America's "destiny" cannot consist in the gratifying delusion of aloofness: "It is common knowledge at last that we live on the same planet under the same constellation of destiny and that no ocean is now broad and silent enough to keep us away from unwanted entanglements and undesired contagions."⁶ They point out the causes of the world-crisis thus: "Much of what has happened in the past twenty years is due to the action of a misled intelligentsia. It is the intellectual more than any other class that has done and undone things in Russia as in Italy and Germany. The assumption does not seem unwarranted that a well-directed intelligentsia could make up in the future for the misdeeds of the past. It becomes imperative at any rate to offer to the intellectual elite an opportunity to give evidence of its ability to mix in the affairs of the world, to be considered as one among the elements of leadership."⁷

A "Committee on Europe," composed of a small number of the "most prominent intellectual and political exiles from Europe and a majority of American thinkers and scientists," was instituted "to be free of any allegiance except to truth and of any obedience except to the laws of this country."

The aims of this committee were further clarified in a *Letter of Invitation*, dated March 28, 1940, whose views did not differ substantially from the hopes and fears expressed in the memorandum. This letter of invitation bore the signatures of G. A. Borgese, Robert M. Hutchins, Thomas Mann, Lewis Mumford, William A. Neilson and Reinhold Niebuhr. Thirteen persons attended the first meeting which took place at Atlantic City and extended from May 24th to 26th, 1940. Five other conferences followed, in which such topics as war and peace, the redefinition of democracy, education, religion and economic reform were discussed. William A. Neilson was elected Chairman, to be assisted by an executive board composed of Herbert Agar, W. Y. Elliott, Lewis Mumford and G. A. Borgese as Secretary. The Declaration was at last approved by the group and was endorsed by the seventeen signers whose names appear on page 73, (from which the name of President Hutchins is absent, although he had participated in the preliminary activities of the Committee).

The Declaration as finally drawn presents a vivid and penetrating analysis of what the signers call "the death-agony" of the Old World, which is promised "a peace more terrible than the war it now

⁶ *op. cit.* p. 99.

⁷ *op. cit.* p. 102.

endures." "England, where modern man first rose to his dignity," (so the signers proclaim) "still holds out in tragic valor—a bastion in flames. But not even her survival in heroic self-defense would be adequate, without outside help, to the task of reshaping a world, and the alternative of defeat has been ominously intimated by her Premier himself (Mr. Churchill) 'until,' he said, 'in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, sets forth to the liberation and rescue of the Old.'" ⁸ The signers assure us that the Nazi victory is not explicable in terms of mere technological superiority—it is more the result of burning faith and conviction. The Declaration contrasts "the compactness of their (Nazi) religion of darkness" with "the dim Hamlet-like glow which the rulers of France and England offered." "The blindness of their (France and England) diplomacy and the helplessness of their strategy were the external symptoms of a decay of the soul . . . Military defeat was the outcome of moral abdication." ⁹

Leaving the European scene, the signers discover that the same virus has entered the American blood-stream and continues to poison its very life. Our American Democracy, they would have us believe, has given us only millions of gadgets that have made "life and liberty comfortable." They admit that American education has been hopelessly adrift in a relativism that doubted all values; American scientists have degraded science into a formula whose mechanism shirked all spiritual issues. To these signers, "The doom of the Old World will be our own doom unless we take a last stand. There is only one defense. Unless our world is to die, 'self-slain on its own strange altar,' we must renew the faith and hope that once made us strong."¹⁰

There is no doubt in the minds of the signers as to the responsibility for this state of affairs; it rests chiefly upon the "intellectuals." "None of us, or of our contemporaries," they admit, "can escape some share of the blame, for we all have to some extent accepted this culture and immersed ourselves in it. This recognition of guilt must pave the way, not to maudlin regrets, but to immediate atonement."¹¹ They accept this present peril as an "'ordeal by tyranny'" . . . To this expiation by tyranny . . . we oppose the ancient dream of man, which we deem imperishable. In an era of Apocalypse, we call for a Millenium."¹²

⁸ *op. cit.* p. 13.

⁹ *op. cit.* p. 16.

¹⁰ *op. cit.* p. 18.

¹¹ *op. cit.* p. 19.

¹² *op. cit.* pp. 19-20.

They are convinced that universal peace must be a pre-requisite to this so-called Millenium. The alleged "inevitability of slaughter and arson" need not be identified with the necessity for change and conflict. In their opinion, "Far from being the most shining light of life as proclaimed by the totalitarian voices of destruction, war is chaos and horror."¹³ The first step, they are certain, must be the outlawry of war through a universal peace which must not be confused with a "parasitic pacifism that even now shelters Trojan horses and parachute columns." Added to this is the signers' conviction that this universal peace cannot be the outcome of subtle bargaining in the clearing houses of secret diplomacy backed by standing armies—nor can it be achieved by half-hearted ententes nor by structures like the League of Nations. They offer the solution of universal peace through one law and one government. Such answers as a federated Europe are dismissed a "deceptive scheme" for they are convinced that "Europe without Britain is no Europe. It is Germany with fringes; and Europe with Britain and the nations of the British Commonwealth is already the world."¹⁴

Thus runs the first part of the Declaration which should give some inkling as to the insidious type of rhetorician with whom we are dealing. Other critics have pointed out the many evils of American culture, the necessity for reform and the responsibilities of government to promote and conserve peace. Catholic doctrine has always offered us the remedy of Christ's peace which will lead us to the City of God, if only we "taste and see how sweet is the Lord."¹⁵ Under the seductive guise of virtuous aspirations towards justice and love, natural to man even apart from his elevation to the supernatural order of grace, these signers propose for our worship a totally different end—one to be attained in this world, through "service in brotherhood."

The second section of this manifesto pleads for a new definition of democracy. It asks that this oft-abused term take on a new significance—one that is divorced from *laissez-faire* liberalism and private objectives—one that will be completely integrated in a "purposeful organism." Henceforth, the signers declare, Democracy must be conceived of as "*nothing more or less than humanism in theocracy and rational theocracy in universal humanism; it (Democracy) is the plenitude of heart-service to a highest religion embodying the essence*

¹³ *op. cit.* p. 21.

¹⁴ *op. cit.* pp. 23-24.

¹⁵ Ps. XXXIII, 8.

of all higher religions."¹⁶ (italics inserted) These signers adapt the totalitarian formula "everything within the state, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State" to the uses of Democracy and humanity by the formula, "Democracy teaches that everything must be within humanity, nothing against humanity, nothing outside humanity. The dictatorship of humanity, on the basis of a law for the protection of human dignity, is the only rule from which we may hope for life for ourselves and resurrection for the nations that have fallen."¹⁷

This new Democracy and its concept of liberty, they maintain, can never include within itself the power to destroy itself. Liberty is not given to the murderer and the arsonist and from this analogy they conclude that no liberty can be granted to whosoever and whatsoever threaten the "divine spirit" in man and above man. Modern tempters can cite Sacred Scripture with the same facility as of old: "This is . . . the spirit which Christ called the Holy Ghost. In its ultimate sacredness, He set a limit to all tolerance and charity 'Wherefore I say to you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.'"¹⁸ They then affirm that "the spirit of the New Testament" in which most of us believe (President Roosevelt's words cited on page 35), is identical with this new religion of the Holy Ghost.

"This universal religion, harbored in the best minds of our age," they aver, "must be the hymn of democracy militant and triumphant." Its substance has ripened out of whatever rose highest in man's speculations and hopes. To it the saints and sages of all ages have contributed. To it Israel, Greece, classical Rome, the Catholic Church, the Renaissance and our own American Revolution have offered their part. "*In each and all of these particular systems there are humanity and redemption. Each and all of them are comprehended under the all-embracing religion of the Spirit.*"¹⁹ (italics inserted) They then hasten to add that all of these creeds were only partial affirmations—none of them reached the true universality of the religion of the Spirit. They reject Judaism as a failure because in their eyes Israel "was overcome by the sterility of its unshakable conservatism and by the racial stubbornness which severed the orthodox

¹⁶ *The City of Man*, p. 33.

¹⁷ *op. cit.* p. 34.

¹⁸ *op. cit.* p. 35.

¹⁹ *op. cit.* pp. 37-38.

Jew from *Jesus the highest of the Jewish prophets.*"²⁰ (italics inserted) Nor does the Roman Church fare any better in their opinion, although they do admit its rôle in piloting man through the Dark Ages but, they hasten to add, "its catholicity was severely curtailed by its constant temptation to commit the basic error of identifying the Church as a temporal kingdom with the Kingdom of God of Christian and prophetic expectation." This "error" invests what they term the sociologically relative architecture of the Church with an "unwarranted" aura of holiness.²¹ Then follows the cloven-hooved play on prejudice: "Freedom-loving, justice-loving Catholics, here as well as in Latin-American republics and wherever else they can awaken to the examples bequeathed to them by braver ages, will see to it some day that humility in faith will no longer be the lure to servility in politics and that allegiance to the City of God be disentangled from bondage to Vatican City as a foreign potentate in feud or trade with other potentates."²²

Other creeds are equally condemned by the signers for their "sectarianism and theological trivalities." This is their interpretation of the rôle played by Lutheranism in Germany: "When the hour of reckoning came and the orthodox Lutherans in Germany hastened to grovel before Hitler, the liberal Protestant Churches in the democratic world either shrank in solitary protests unheeded by the estranged masses or supported a doctrinaire pacifism willing to accept slavery and call it peace, and watered Christian charity, which is a fighting one, down to the Quaker's entreaty to extend 'love even to Hitler'—Christ's life to the Antichrist."²³

The manifesto then summarizes: "Democracy, in the catholicity of its language, interprets and justifies the separate creeds as its own vernaculars. *It follows then, that none of these vernaculars, however venerable and lovable, and whatever their right to citizenship, can take the place of the universal language that expresses the common belief of man. The latter explains and annexes all dogmas as symbols; the churches, in the fetters of literalism, anathematize as heresy and error the symbolical meaning that is dogma's inmost truth.*"²⁴ (italics inserted)

The foregoing, is, in substance, the new creed which "our leading writers and best minds" would offer us as a panacea for world-ills. In it the stern discipline of sacrifice, service in the brotherhood of

²⁰ *op. cit.* p. 40.

²¹ *op. cit.* pp. 40-41.

²² *op. cit.* p. 43.

²³ *op. cit.* p. 44.

²⁴ *op. cit.* p. 45.

man, ambiguous references to Christian concepts and ideals are so cleverly interwoven with pure naturalism that the unsuspecting reader might be tempted to give his approval without serious analysis of the principles involved and the conclusions that necessarily flow from them.

Any document so lacking in practicality that it demands that all individual aims be subjected to the court of the all-embracing Demos is sheer nonsense. Yet the very tone of purported idealism that runs through the Declaration may mislead the unwary whose dissatisfaction with the present state of the world inclines them to snatch at any straw. From a pragmatic point-of-view, only a wistful thinker would stake his all on the certainty of an Axis defeat; present events would seem to indicate at least the possibility of the reverse. Even assuming that the hope of British victory is well-founded, a peace like that of Versailles would, within another generation, see the old struggle renewed. As for "universal and total democracy" being the new leaven of a completely altruistic society, that is more fanciful than real. If Great Britain be a democracy, if the Balkans be democracies as well as China and Russia, then indeed, Democracy stands in need of redefinition.

It is really pitiful to witness the spectacle of our so-called "best minds" wandering so helplessly in the fog of error. The full harvest of American education is now being reaped in a bumper-crop of absurdities. The signers of the manifesto humbly strike their breasts and acknowledge the errors of the relativistic education which they now seek to propagate; they lament the degradation of science into a mechanistic shibboleth of gadgets that has shirked all spiritual issues. Yet the supreme spiritual issue in their minds is humanity and not the God that reason demonstrates and supernatural faith lovingly obeys. Their supposedly-abandoned relativity rises to proclaim that all religions, pagan and otherwise, are equally good as long as they are content to remain symbols of the new humanity. They set but two restrictions to their endeavors to solve world problems: allegiance to truth and obedience to the sovereignty of the United States of America. On both scores they have deceived themselves. How can American political freedom be conserved in a super-State such as the one advocated in this manifesto? The signers clearly affirm that "Europe with Britain is already the world."²⁵ They are quick to decry the League of Nations as an impractical dream of Woodrow Wilson whom they term "the last prophet of the Old Testa-

²⁵ cf. note 14.

ment era of American Democracy." Yet in its place they propose a "Nation of Man embodied in a Universal State, the State of States." There will also be a President of Mankind, presiding over a Universal Parliament, a practical gesture if there ever was one. This is almost as naive as the utter disregard for the historical hatreds that have burned in Europe since history began.

Yet by far more important than the evident impracticality of these proposals by our "leaders" is the explicit revolt against reason and revelation that is contained in this otherwise dreamy document. All serious-minded persons realize the gravity of the present situation and the tremendous issues involved and most of us are grateful for the many liberties which our way of life *guarantees*. This word guarantee is most important. The rights to life, to the fullness of the earth and to worship God according to right reason and faith, do not have their source in civil government, democratic or otherwise. That form of government is good, better or best in the measure that it fosters and protects these God-given rights and duties. These are objective principles flowing from the natural law and do not in any way depend for their validity upon the success or failure of mercantile England's attempt to cope with modern Blitz technique. Reason revolts against the dictum that man's soul is not destined to live forever. Any philosophy of life that does not offer man the hope of and the means of attaining some transcendent bliss to come denies not only its name but its reality. Rational humanism in the best sense of these abused terms has always bound man to the unfailing source of his being and has always implied some relation of service to Him. "Universal and total" democracy as propounded by these signers offers man a serfdom not far removed from the totalitarianism it so bitterly decries.

Christians will reject the substitution of man for the God-man. This dismissal of Christ's Divinity, His Church and His Sacraments, together with the blasphemous identification of the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity with the cult of humanity strike at the very bases of true freedom and the Christian life. These signers would take from our lives the joys of Christmas and Easter and in their place give us the President of Mankind's birthday. The City of Man is indeed a weak edifice, built with hands—an infinite distance removed from the true City of God of Christian aspirations which is "the new Jerusalem, prepared like a bride for her husband."²⁶

²⁶ *Apoc. St. John. XXI 2.*