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- Dave Owens

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It was during a critical moment when the fortunes of the American Revolution were at their lowest ebb, that Tom Paine wrote the famous words, "These are times that try mens' souls." Compared to the epochal transformation of the world which our generation is now experiencing, the American Revolution -- until then the most significant event in modern history -- was a very parochial affair. In the last fifty years the conditions of human existence have changed more radically than they have in the previous fifty thousand years. These changes -- in their speed, in their radical character, and in their universal and planetary scope -- are unprecedented, and have no analogies whatsoever in past history.

Our contemporary world-revolution is primarily a consequence of technology and man's scientific conquest of physical nature. Bacon's aphorism "Knowledge is power" has been amazingly vindicated. Indeed, the progress of material civilization may well be traced by means of the successive forms of physical power that man has learned to harness to his purpose. First came the power of unassisted human muscle. Then the domestication of beasts of burden made available the power of animal muscle. The development of physical science led to four successive epochs of physical power, of which the first was the mechanical age, in which men learned to use wind-power and water-power. Next came the chemical age, in which man utilized the molecular energy of combustion, characterized by the use of steam and internal combustion fuels. The electrical age followed, which exploited the outer electron shells of the atom to produce electricity. Finally came the present atomic age, in which man has learned, through nuclear fission and the dissolution of matter itself into energy, to release the stupendous power locked up in the atomic nucleus.

Following each of these successive epochs in the availability of more and cheaper power have come two profound effects on the social history of man. Each in turn produced a technological revolution which furnished man with more efficient tools of production, enabling him -- or, at first, only some privileged class -- to rise above the rude struggle for the bare means of subsistence and to become the founder of civilizations in which the arts began to flourish, new values were discovered and creatively expressed, and, above all, new learning was pursued and preserved for posterity.

This latter indicates the second revolutionary effect that Technological advance has had on human society. Be devising new and more efficient means of communication, technology makes possible the more rapid accumulation, preservation and dissemination of information. The effect of this improvement in the art of communication and preservation of knowledge is to speed up the rate of social change in geometrical ratio. Today with the arrival of the electronic computer we can accumulate, locate and process astronomical amounts of information such as Bacon in his wildest dreams could not have conceived.

The effect of all this is now becoming apparent to us of this passing generation, but the full impact thereof will be felt mostly by our children and grandchildren. We are perforce moving into a planetary world order in which we shall eventually have to make effective some type of world government. Simultaneously accompanying this inevitable result will be the evolution of a single world culture, whose connective tissue will necessarily be a great many universals, the most obvious of which will be a universal language of communication, universal science and technology, a universal and integrated economic order to provide the means for peaceful production and exchange of goods, a universal system of transportation and communication. To this list I must add one fundamental and indispensable ingredient of a genuine world culture -- that is a unifying religion that can provide man with a philosophy of life and a philosophy of history which relates men not merely horizontally in this secular sphere, but must relate men also vertically to that supreme source and ground of all life and all existence itself -- that is to the supreme Being, God. Creative living is possible only if men believe that life has a genuine and final meaning and purpose. Only God, only a Being of supreme wisdom and sovereign power can provide a real unshakable basis for giving to this amazing drama of cosmic and terrestrial life any final meaning and purpose.

With our present development of nuclear technology we may be said to have arrived at the time which begins to exhibit the nemesis of power -- more accurately, the self-defeat of naked physical power. We have released from the Aladdin's lamp of the atom an awful genie called atomic energy. This mighty genie is entirely obedient to its master, the human will. Depending therefore entirely on the character of this will -- whether it be good or bad, benevolent or malicious, moved by love and generosity, or by hatred and animosity -- the genie of atomic power will work mightily for either human weal or human woe. Which it shall be now depends however no longer on any further increase in scientific knowledge, but on the development of firm and aggressive moral and spiritual convictions and on a radical reorientation of man's ego-centric will, his inordinate self-conceit, and overweening self-concern.

Physical science has led man to realize the ultimate self-destructiveness of the pursuit of physical power and purely factual information alone. Physical power unrelated to spiritual power is a Frankenstein monster that threatens to destroy man and all his works.

Today the number of "cultured despisers of religion" -- as Schleiermacher called them -- is very great. Many intellectuals profess to see no reasonable grounds of religious profession, either in personal religious experience nor in the general facts of nature and of religious history. They have decided to get along without God.

Nevertheless, despite the current sceptical fashion of thought, at the existential limit of life at which mankind has now arrived it turns out that God has become man's most desperate necessity. The brutal events of two world-wars have taught us that the civilization of the natural man is, for the most part, a rather shallow veneer of social habit. Scratch deeply and you will expose the lurking beast of prey, who seems well disposed only so long as his selfish interests and predatory impulses are not aroused. When aroused, as events of the recent past have amply shown, man still acts with demonic ferocity. In these events man's pitiful lack of spiritual self-control stands revealed. Man, said a famous biologist, is the only animal on earth that ferociously murders his own species. It is precisely now that the paradox that man has learned to control everything but himself has become apparent. It appears that man as H.G. Wells confessed at the end of his life has reached the end of his tether, unless he finds a firm objective foundation for belief in a meaningful universe, and new inspiration for human decency, for social and economic justice, -- in short for God and spiritual values. Our generation is rapidly approaching this climactic period. Man can live confronting even an enigmatic God; he cannot live confronting a vacuum.

Today millions of people have lost all sense of any rational meaning or purpose in human life. Men feel themselves the victims of the blind interplay of the unconscious and meaningless forces of nature.

Nothing can dissipate this current mood of cynicism and despair, nor the prevalent urge to compensate by indulgence either in reckless hedonism or in a futile shaking of one's fist at a mindless universe but a tenable faith in the meaning and purpose of life. What is needed, in short, is a philosophy of life and a philosophy of history. But such a philosophy which sees rational purpose at work in terrestrial affairs and in human existence, implies that the forces of both physical and human nature are expressions of rational meaning and subject to the guidance of an intelligent cosmic purpose. And this implies the validity of religious faith, for, to repeat, nature can have no rational purpose unless it is the creative expression of a cosmic will and a cosmic intelligence, that is to say, of God.

What now -- let us ask ourselves -- are the current trends of contemporary history? Can we detect a plot in history unfolding itself toward intelligible goals? Or, in religious language, can we see evidence of divine purpose at work? To answer such questions we must assume the role of the prophet and become interpreters of the signs of the times. When, on one occasion, certain sceptics asked Jesus for a sign, he replied, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be

stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening'. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." (Matt. 16:2-3). Let this exhortation, then, be our warrant for assuming the hazardous role of interpreting the signs of the times.

Now from the point of view of religious faith, history can be no chapter of accidents, no aimless meandering of events resulting from the random collisions of human caprice and blind circumstance. Human freedom and arbitrariness are, indeed, real. But their decisions are subject to the supervening ordinances of Divine providence. As St. Paul said to the Athenians, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth . . . made every nation on the face of the earth, having determined their allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation." God, therefore, is God of universal history and not merely of Biblical history alone. If so, the revolutionary events of our day, what we are prone to call the events of the secular world, are in reality also portents of divine purpose, challenging us to new tasks and enterprises which are as Matthew Arnold expressed it, "the will of God for us today." What historic trends, then, are discernable which constitute such "signs of the times"?

Let me mention at least five such significant movements of contemporary history and then briefly attempt to assess their significance. There is first that portentous and world-wide phenomenon that De Gasset has called "the revolt of the masses". Secondly, we see the coming world-wide dominance of scientific technology. Thirdly, there is the progressive secularization of modern culture. Fourthly, there is the problem of population control. Fifthly, we observe the emergence of a planetary community based on the reciprocal diffusion and synthesis of all national cultures.

1. Let us consider, first, the revolt of the masses, one of the cardinal phenomena of modern history. This revolt is manifest in two inter-related aspects. It is anti-exploitive and it is anti-elitist. Its anti-exploitive aspect is simply the demand on the part of the toiling masses of mankind for economic and social justice. Almost since the dawn of history the masses of men have labored for the benefit of a wealthy leisure class and have been subject to the rule of an economic autocracy. The common people toiled but enjoyed only a pittance of the usufruct of their own labor -- barely enough to maintain a subsistence standard of living. Perhaps this can be condoned in an economy of scarcity, dependent, as it was in times past, on the low productivity of manual labor and of more primitive technology. Universal poverty for the masses was the price that had to be paid in the past to maintain a creative leisure class which could begin to lay the foundations of culture and civilization. But the industrial revolution and the rise of scientific technology has, in our day, radically altered the former state of affairs. Power machinery and automation have now made possible an economy of sufficiency, if not of abundance. This news has permeated the minds of the masses. All over the world they are rising in revolt against economic exploitation. They demand their equitable share in the usufruct of their own labor. They refuse to do their work and let others monopolize the product. The disinherited are claiming their right to share in the inheritance.

It is because Communism has formally championed this cause of the disinherited, denounced economic exploitation of the masses, and espoused the ideal of distributive justice, that it makes its appeal to the poverty stricken and economically depressed people everywhere. That this is a valid moral ideal, and that this hope is a just aspiration of the depressed classes none of us can deny. In inveighing against the deceptive claims of the Communist panacea, we on our part dare not reject the moral legitimacy of this ideal of distributive justice. Our private free enterprise economies stand condemned by the Communist rebuke unless we can show convincingly to the exploited masses of mankind that what Communism glibly promises, free-enterprise can do better. And to demonstrate this fact in actual practice is the only way we can win the ideological war with Communism.

We are obliged to say, as those who accept the teachings of the Biblical prophets regarding economic justice and the injunction that man is, indeed, -- whether he likes it or not -- his brother's keeper, that an exclusive mercenary interpretation of the profit motive, that merely encourages financial and material acquisitiveness, that makes money making the standard of success, and that is not subordinated to humane goals of good-will, social altruism, neighborly service and social welfare is -- we are bound to say -- morally unjustifiable. We must frankly renounce this our western obsession about the supreme importance of making money. No just economy can be built on the theory that the end of life is to make money, that financial self-interest must be the main spring of business enterprise. Business exists for the welfare of man, for the general welfare, not man for the benefit of business per se.

A second phase of the revolt of the masses is its anti-elitist attitude epitomized today in the racial struggle. Here again we have more than an assertion of group pride. The so-called "rising tide of color" predicted two decades ago by Lothrop Stoddard is an ethical, not biological phenomenon. It is a rejection of the hypocrisy of white-supremacy and its imputation of inferiority to other races. It rejects as morally and scientifically untenable the theory of elitism, which would divide mankind into master and slave races, into human and subhuman races, and thus would rationalize the denial of rights and of equality of status and human dignity to large portions of the human race.

In both of these phases of the revolt of the masses I see an ethical ideal at work; namely, the valid aspiration of men everywhere to realize a just and humane social order in which the needs, rights, and dignity of every man is respected. This is a trend, therefore, that is bound to triumph in the end and bound to sweep aside all those who seek to oppose it.

2. The second cardinal trend of modern history is the eventual diffusion of scientific technology throughout the world. This will be necessary if the demand for distributive justice and for rising standards of living for the masses of mankind are to be satisfied. Only machine industry can supply the enormous consumer demands being generated by the revolt of the masses. And, for the first time in world history, such universal industrialization is possible. The availability and easy transportability of atomic fuel will free all people from dependence on local natural resources for power development. In any event, the earth's supply of fossil fuels is being rapidly depleted, so that in the not too distant future it will be more economical to utilize atomic fuel. Atomic power plants can be constructed anywhere to furnish the electric power so necessary for industrial production and domestic convenience.

But this diffusion of scientific technology is, by no means, an undisguised boon to mankind. We must bear in mind that every increase in the power and efficiency of human tools implements man's evil propensities as well as his residual good-will. Hence we can take little comfort in the thought that men today are morally no worse than they have always been. Multiply the power of human tools by one thousand, then the same degree of hatred, greed, or pride, thus implemented, becomes a thousand times more destructive than in the past. We are probably less war-like today than our fore-fathers were, but our wars are ten thousand times more disastrous, cruel and destructive than those of the past because of our terrible weapons of mass destruction. The moral and religious effects of technological culture must therefore be kept in mind. Technology multiplies cheap pleasures and panders to our fleshy lusts and appetites, and thus invites man to walk the primrose path of self-indulgence, debauchery, and moral decay. Human gadgetry seems also to obscure God, and to inflate human price, thus creating the illusion that we men are masters of our fate in a man-made world. Technology alone cannot produce the good life for man. There is real danger, also, that the newer industrialized nations will have learned nothing from the past mistakes of the West and might perpetrate again in the rising new nations of the earth the horrors of the early industrial revolution. None the less, for better or for worse, the universal triumph of scientific technology is certain, and will present the future with new assets and many ominous liabilities. Perhaps

a primary problem will be how to preserve humane values and the dignity of life in a world of mechanization and cybernetic automation. Will we all become mechanical robots, mere adjuncts to machines, the robots of Huxley's "Brave New World?" Or can we find a way to make machinery man's servant and the instrument of his good will and his creative imagination? To paraphrase a famous saying, "Machines were made for man, not man for machines." As more and more machinery takes over the burdens of routine human labor, the future will have to discover how to employ man's need to work in more humane, creative and significant ways -- ways that can utilize the higher capacities of man rather than the mechanical habits required to feed a mass assembly line.

3. A third trend of our times that social historians have noticed is the progressive secularization of modern culture. In the West this has been going on since the Renaissance, but it is now becoming a world-wide phenomenon. Secularism as a way of life is an attitude that takes account only of the natural order of things and does not find God or a realm of spiritual values necessary for life and thought. Such a point of view I hold to be shallow and opposed to the truth of the Universe, and therefore one in which human nature will not permanently rest. Paradoxically enough, as a transitional phase of human culture, this secularist trend might ultimately contribute to strengthening religious belief rather than undermining it. Secularization tends to oppose an untenable dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. From the standpoint of theism the natural is merely that aspect of the supernatural that happens every day and hence no longer incites our surprise or wonder. Thus the current secularist trend could well pave the way for the "sacralization" of the secular rather than the secularization of the sacred. This would obviously be a step toward what Bonhoeffer calls "religious maturity", in which God ceases to be a God of the stop-gaps, given only to occasional miraculous interventions -- a God reduced to the status of a Sunday supplement. Instead he is the God whose creative activity is universally recognized in all aspects of the universe, including thus his general as well as his special revelatory activity. Thus God is understood to be relevant to the concerns of every day life. He is the God at work not only in nature and in redemptive history, he is at work also in the creative activities of man, and therefore also in the office, the factory, and the scientific laboratory. Thus God and religion do not oppose the true values of man's natural life, his historical existence, or his creative culture. God is involved in all of these and when man enters the world he does not leave God behind. Rather man should find Him everywhere Present and active. We see, therefore, that the contemporary trend towards a secular society need not terminate in an atheistic secularism. Even where it seems to have done so, as in countries ruled by Marxist dictators, such atheism may be more fundamentally a protest against an obsolete or obstructive religion, than a died-in-the-wool negation of God. I personally have faith that even in communist countries the obligation to respect truth -- which is taken for granted as basic in scientific method -- is an ideal which must ultimately also allow men's mind and consciences the freedom to espouse whatever metaphysical and religious convictions the facts of human experience seem to warrant. When that time comes, religion will assuredly revive, since its roots are to be found imbedded in the very constitution of human nature.

4. The fourth significant sign of the times I see in world history is the population explosion. There was a time when we could argue that our increase in the efficiency of agricultural production could indefinitely postpone the dire predictions of Malthus that, in accordance with his so-called Malthusian law, the rate of human reproduction must always result in too many mouths to feed, that the increase in food production must always fall behind fertility rate, resulting in periodic famines, malnutrition, death and a hundred other social evils these bring in their train. Today we must say that unless man can voluntarily control the human birth rate, Malthus' predictions will continue to be fulfilled on a dreadful scale. It has been estimated that at the present average growth rate of 2% per annum in 600 years there will be in theory one square yard of earth for every man, woman and child on earth, not to mention any standing room left for all the animals -- the dogs, the horses, the elephants and the like. Of all the problems I have mentioned, this one, I believe, is most likely to be solved by the universal adoption of birth-control. Significant advances have already been made in countries like Scandinavia and Japan to show what can be accomplished with the cooperation of a responsible government. Don Weaver has discussed this issue with us in a paper he read some years ago, so I shall pass on to some remaining prognostications I feel impelled to make.

5. The fifth significant trend I see in contemporary events is the steady evolution of a planetary human community. We move relentlessly toward the realization of one world and its necessary correlative: world government. This trend is a secondary consequence of modern science and invention. Increasingly rapid transportation and virtually instantaneous world-wide communication, both verbal and visual, has so accelerated the mobility, the mutual knowledge and co-mingling of peoples, has so drastically reduced the former barriers of space and time, that the world must, in the not too distant future, become a single planetary neighborhood. Isolationism, bellicose nationalism, and world-wars are today the relics of past barbarism. The unity of the human race, the brotherhood of man, and the equal dignity of all peoples -- these are by no means utopian phantasies. They are coldblooded, scientific and moral truths, and inevitably the march of events must begin to express these truths more effectively in an emerging world community. Such a community will transcend our present exclusive nationalisms. It will supersede the present division of the world into Communist and non-Communist blocs. Everything human is subject to change, and neither Communism nor so-called Americanism are exempt from this law. Whatever there is, therefore, in present socialist or in present free-enterprise systems that is inconsistent with the coming world community will inevitably be modified and transformed by the pressure of truth and moral conviction that is always silently at work in this irresistible trend of history toward world unity.

I have not argued that the universal planetary culture to which history is irretrievably committed must necessarily issue in a world-wide, monolithic, omnicompetant state. There are many possible intermediates between such a totalitarian monster and planetary chaos. Some variety amidst the unity must surely be devised to achieve a humane balance between freedom and order. It is clear to me, however, that no coherent world order can be achieved by relying solely on the resources of the political state. Its functions are legal, regulative, coercive, external, heteronomous. It cannot by its political machinery develop the soul of a man, nor the soul of a nation. Consider broadly what it makes to make a civilization -- basically not skyscrapers, jet planes, or thermonuclear power-plants. As Prof. Hocking has expressed it, "The essence of civilization is a sense of honor, a reverence and a respect for all manner of undefinable and unprotectable obligations." The state by itself, then, cannot civilize; it takes a pervasive and passionately held religious spirit to do that. Take justice, the very hallmark of the state's concern. It is a paradox that goes back to Plato that "only a good man can be punished. Others can only be hurt." Can the state produce this good man? Or take education. I have had almost 50 years experience with the educational process. The state and the university registrar can certify that the teacher has a certain fund of information. But they cannot certify that the teacher has a soul -- and it is the soul of the teacher that educates. Souls can be inspired only by inspired souls, and to inspire the soul is the function of the agencies of the Spirit -- those that foster love, fidelity, and human sympathy. Again it is a commonplace to say that no social order is better than the quality of its family life. The family is the nursery of creative and sacrificial love, qualities which alone can point reason to its proper ends. Can the state legislate these conditions of family life? Finally there is that great area which the Marxists imagine is the very specialty of the totalitarian state -- economics. Now, many of the conditions of economic justice can be legally provided. Still, by and large, any viable economy depends on being able to count on the presence of certain moral virtues, which are the basis of all credit and all confidence in economic exchange. They are such virtues as honesty, truthfulness, good-will, and fidelity to one's agreements. Can the political state firmly implant these virtues among men? No doubt a thoroughly rationalized economy could surfeit everyone on earth with a super-abundance of goods and gadgets. We know many people today who have everything. Yet are they happy and contented? By no means. All too often they are cynical, bored, hysterical protestors, seeking diversion in speed, intrigue, cocktails and debauchery. Why should the richest nation on earth also have the highest suicide rate? The answer was long ago given by wise men of old: "man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." If man's work is to be a man's joy it must be the expression of a valid meaning, that can give significance to his existence, to his vocation, to his world. Can the state give such a meaning to life? I submit, not. That is the function of religion, and that is why I say

there can be no hope for man's life in the future unless he attains a new and convincing vision of God.

In each of these historical trends we see an important moral and spiritual idea at work. These various world movements are applications of those principles of social justice which the prophets of Israel long ago proclaimed as the will of the Lord. Hence we are bound to believe that their objectives reveal, in part, the meaning of history and the purpose of God at work in the world. These events presage the time when our present divisive denominationalism will be overcome and the unity of Christendom will be achieved. This new unity will, however, not take the form of a monolithic church committed to a cast-iron system of dogma. Rather it will exhibit a variety within the unity, leaving room for that freedom of thought which the diversity of human nature and environmental circumstances makes inevitable.

But here another fundamental fact must be noted. The execution of God's will on earth is entrusted to human hands. And this creates a problem. What man manipulates, he also corrupts -- not excepting every good thing and every divine thing. Hence all these trends I have mentioned manifest a moral ambivalence. They are productive of both good and evil. Valid as are the goals involved, such historic movements are often perverted into implements of human pride, hatred, greed and lust. Even the church itself, so far as it is a human organization, has in past history been, all -- too -- often, the bulwark of social injustice, intellectual obscurantism, cruelty, and bigotry. Again and again the Spirit of God has had to renovate what man corrupts, and it will not be otherwise with the contemporary trends I have mentioned.

I do not wish to leave the impression in what I have said about current trends in history that what the Bible calls the Kingdom of God is an order realizable as a terrestrial utopia. I have no prophetic indications that extends beyond this earth, or beyond the next few decades of human history, if indeed the world survives until that time. It is apparent, however, that any earthly Utopia would be inhabited only by the last few survivors, thus disinheriting the bulk of the human race, those who have toiled, sacrificed and hoped for the Kingdom in all past ages. This selfish exclusiveness at once disqualifies any earthly Utopia from being the Kingdom of God -- that is the final realization of the purpose of human history. The Kingdom obviously, then, cannot be a terrestrial order an earthly Utopia. Never-the-less, historic life has an organic relationship to this Kingdom. We are bidden to pray that "God's Kingdom come and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The historic movements I have mentioned I believe to be signs of God's purpose in history. So long as we accept <sup>it</sup> as our duty to do the will of God, we have the duty to align ourselves with these great causes, though their ultimate outcome be hidden from our eyes. The cosmic process has been going on for millions of years; we are only its most recent entrants. Personally I do not believe that the stupendous evolutionary panorama which science has opened to our gaze has exhausted the energies of the Creator. New Aeons and dimensions of being are yet to be revealed. But our task today is not to beguile ourselves with visions. Our task is rather to be aware of these great contemporary issues, to assume our full share of responsibility in the world's concerns, and in this way to promote both the welfare of man and the glory of God.

At no time in history has the dire necessity for more effective moral discipline and human good-will been more apparent than it is today. The need of the hour is an unprecedented degree of the love of righteousness and the love of man, an ardent and overwhelming passion for goodness for beauty and for honesty. It is my firm conviction that no materialistic or naturalistic creed can possibly inspire such an exalted and ardent love of moral ideals as our times require. In a materialist world there is just nothing to love, nothing to adore with absolute and unreserved devotion. In the materialist's world ultimate being is only dead matter, unconscious force, purposeless energy. Out of the blind and accidental mixture of such unconscious atoms man is supposed by certain philosophers to have emerged.

From a materialistic point of view, man is but a frail bio-chemical accident, vitiated by destructive passions and a pitiful conceit foisted upon him by the biochemistry of his brain cells. Man, so conceived, cannot be an object of supreme devotion. He can only be an idol with clay feet -- a religious fraud. It is questionable whether even the current, abstract and somewhat tepid humanism that parades as the ersatz-religion of naturalism is actually a product of materialist metaphysics. This popular humanism is only the lingering aroma of an expiring religious faith. Scientific naturalism, then, is simply incapable of inspiring the degree of human good-will that our modern predicament so urgently demands. It is my belief that only religious faith can satisfy this need and fill our contemporary spiritual vacuum. And this is why the church and other agencies of the Spirit must rise to their responsibilities in the emerging world order. We may be only "a voice crying in the wilderness." But we have the promise of God that the voice will be heard. Long ago the prophet Isaiah declared, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Is. 40:3-5).