



## The City of God

### Cultural Conflict in a World of Contradiction

An oxymoron is a seeming contradiction. Examples include *Ajumbo shrimp*, *civil war*, *honest graft*, and a *definite maybe*. The 2004 movie, *The City of God*, directed by Fernando Meirelles, is illustrative of a cultural oxymoron. *City* refers to the streets of Rio de Janeiro's notorious slum, a smoldering cauldron of filth, crime, early death, and human misery.

#### SIGNS OF CONTRADICTION

*Culture war* is also a contradiction, which has permeated the very root and fiber of American society. One might ask how can art, language, education, or the theater be at war. They have no armies, tanks, air force or marines. The culture war is one of subtlety, fought daily in newspapers, movie theaters, classrooms and on television. Though there are no bloody battlefields, it does have its *fatal consequences*. While there are no sieges of cities, there are millions of abortions. While there are no artillery or aerial bombardments, there are assisted suicides and in the case of Florida victim, Terri Schiavo, *judicial execution*. The deadly fumes from its battlefields have polluted the cultural air with what Pope Paul VI called the *Smoke of Satan*. Like an ontological version of the Peloponnesian Wars, (431-404 BC) the *City of God* and the *City of Man* continue to battle it out in an eternal struggle for the souls of men.

#### SMOKE DETECTORS

There is no lost irony on the fact that a trio of Popes warned of this *clash of civilizations* long ago. Many of their Encyclicals presaged the dangers of modernism, freemasonry, secularism, and liberalism. They were papal *smoke detectors* that alerted the world to the dangers of replacing the *Lord of History* with a religion of humanity.

In 1864 Pope Pius IX (1846-78) condemned sixteen propositions that had infected western society in *Quanta Cura* (*Condemning Current Errors*). To this he appended his famed *Syllabus Errorum* (*Syllabus of Errors*) a table of 80 of the *principal errors of our day*. Historian Christopher Dawson

said that Pius IX's *Syllabus* was an *antidote to the modern secular liberalism, which denied the subordination of human society to divine law*. The last error persists today: the Roman Pontiff should *reconcile himself to liberalism, progress, and modern civilization*. This same refrain echoed throughout the chambers of the mainstream media after the election of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Pius X (1903-1914) wanted to *restore all things in Christ*. Written in 1907, his *Pascendi Dominici* (*On the Doctrine of the Modernist*) condemned *modernism, as the synthesis of all heresies*. The Pope warned that a society that denied the permanence of truth undermined the foundations of a moral society.

In his *Divini Redemptoris* (*Atheistic Communism*), written in 1937, Pius XI (1922-39) reiterated the Church's long opposition to Communism, progressivism and liberalism. In 48-pages the Pope succinctly outlined the seduction of intelligent people to a philosophy so evil that it resulted in the death of millions of people. Like modernism, Communism *claims to inaugurate a new era and a new civilization, which is the result of blind evolutionary theories culminating in humanity without God*. Pius XI blamed a *conspiracy of silence in the non-Catholic press* in the world for its unfettered advance. He believed the law of nature could not be flouted with impunity. No one can exist in a completely materialistic philosophy. The Pope realized that the Communists' dream of a Soviet earthly paradise was in direct contradiction to the Church's belief in life after death. This was of little consequence to secular-minded literati, who ridiculed papal teachings that attacked modernism and its heirs as silly, archaic, and meaningless.

#### THE CHIEF ARSONIST

Where there is smoke there is fire. James Billington, the former director of the Smithsonian Institute, captured the revolutionary spirit perfectly in his 1980 book, *The Fire in the Minds of Men*. The book focused on the revolutionary thinking of such radicals as Babeuf, Saint-Simon, and Marx. Their ideas

laid the godless foundation for the secular ideas at war with the Catholic Church today. Their heretical ideas of modernism, progressivism, and Communism attacked the pillars of Catholic dogma and tradition with a subtle ferocity that lay beneath their seductive charms.

None of these ideas would have had any lasting appeal had it not been for the *new science* of Charles Darwin. He stands out as the chief arsonist for the modern view of mankind. He threw the gasoline on the *fire in men's minds* that has ignited Western Civilization in a suicidal act of self-immolation.

While his *The Origin of Species* (1859) did not openly assault religious belief, Darwin's *Descent of Man*, (1871) clearly explained that mankind shared a large kinship with lower animals. This idea cannonaded a broadside of scientific fire off the bow of religious orthodoxy. It struck a blow, *at the religious view of man as a special creation of God*. One scientist relished the fact that Darwin *made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist*. Darwin's thinking unequivocally lurks beneath the surface of abortion, euthanasia, cloning, and embryonic stem cell research.

Darwin had severed the one link in the chain of existence the French radicals of 1789 could not break. His theories effectively abolished the moral and historical necessity for a Divine Creator. According to Catholic professor Thomas E. Woods, Darwinism put *in place of Christianity's teleological understanding of an orderly universe created by a benevolent God*, a scientific creed that pointed to *a cosmos born of chaos and chance*.

### A GODLESS ANSWER

Darwin had another profound social affect. According to author Richard Weikart's book, Europeans believed before Darwin in the sanctity of life with regard to the life questions of abortion, euthanasia, infanticide and suicide. After Darwin, suffering and death became an engine of evolutionary progress. His teachings provided a godless answer to the question of evil and death. They justified evil and death based on the good that came from the struggle. Darwin believed that it was *from the war of nature...and death...that we are capable...of the production of the higher animals...* German scientists constantly assailed Christianity for insisting on an elevated status for humans. Darwin had snatched good and evil from the theologians and given it to the scientists. The next logical step in his *progressive thought* was the gas chambers.

### THE EVOLUTION OF CHOICE

Movies sometimes have a social application that may not be readily apparent. Meryl Streep played a Catholic mother caught in the horror of the Nazi death camps in the 1980 adaptation of William Styron's 1976 novel, *Sophie's Choice*. Upon disembarking with her two small children from a train that was fitter for animals than people, a wicked Nazi officer

presented her with the ultimate *choice*. She could keep one of her children. The other would go to *the showers*. If she refused, they would both die.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the term *choice* conjures horrid visions of abortion clinics and millions of butchered unborn children. The unvarnished truth is that almost all women are as conflicted as Streep. It was Darwin in a Nazi uniform that forced Sophie to choose between her children and against her maternal nature.

*Choice* also raises the question of *how could people become so cruel?* For generations Westerners have quickly dismissed Hitler and the Nazis as *evil or crazy nuts!* A 2004 German film, *Downfall* provides a more plausible answer. The film paints an atypical portrait of Hitler. While not ignoring his demonic and murderous rages, it depicts Hitler as a flesh and blood human being with touches of kindness and human concern for those who served him. Based on the eyewitness account of Hitler's young secretary Trudi Junge, *Downfall* goes against the conventional wisdom by suggesting that possible evil resides, not just in the Nazi heart, but in many human hearts. The Germans followed Hitler, not because he was a raving lunatic, but because he displayed great human appeal, coated with an intensity that made people proud to be Germans again.

### PAPAL NIGHTMARE

Hitler was not Darwin's only kindred spirit in building a secular edifice. One of his most successful disciples was educational pioneer John Dewey (1859-1952), who presented the Popes' worst nightmare. Dewey believed there was no room for religion in secular society, especially in the public schools. His philosophy of Progressive Education attacked the heart of dogma with such a high tolerance of error, that *mistake* as a category vanished. Historian Robert Crunden has opined that the public school had replaced the church *as the key institution in the saving of souls for democracy*. Dewey believed *the child is for democracy*. For the Church, *the child is for God*.

Dewey encouraged moral relativism, which reduced morality to personal preference. Modernism combined all the varied aspects of philosophy that denied God and His creation. Its sex education programs, with their lack of moral judgments, have successfully undermined traditional sexual morality for generations.

Darwin and Dewey have been augmented by groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and their defiant vanguard of troops waving the disingenuous banner of *separation of church and state*. Founded by radical Roger Baldwin in January of 1920, a few months after his release from prison, the ACLU has as its main focus the removal of God from the public square. It stresses a philosophy of emancipation of the self from any form of religious, ecclesiastical or moral restriction.

Wearing the American flag and democratic rhetoric as protective armor, the ACLU has created an evolutionary flow that plans to sweep away any public thought of religious permanence or transcendence.

### A NAMELESS RELIGION

Democracy has not only chased God from Dewey's public classroom, it has invaded the churches with a religious orthodoxy of its own. Planned Parenthood matriarch, Margaret Sanger first recognized it as the *religion without name*. This new religion of secular humanism threatened to obliterate all thoughts and feelings of transcendence, permanence, and an afterlife.

This no-name religion was first conceived by 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) when he wrote *everything over and above a good life which a man thinks he can do, in order to please God, is mere superstition and idolatry*. Kant believed that God's existence could not be rationally demonstrated and that morality could be grounded on something other than theology. It could be an ethic that was fully autonomous. His thinking echoes in virtually every culture decision that has emanated from a supremacist judiciary in the last half century. According to Kant, the new focus of religion had turned to the service of man from the service of God, an early version of a *habitat for humanity*.

Near the end of his life in 1857, French philosopher Auguste Comte devised his own *religion of humanity*, which was a secular approach to his fellow man but ignored their immortal souls. Darwinism gave form to this new religion. Harvard President Charles Eliot jumped aboard when he wrote that all Americans should *abandon such outmoded mythologies as the Fall, the Redemption, a heavenly paradise, and the divinity of Christ*. The personal God of Christianity should be replaced by a *sleepless, active energy and will*, that is recognized *chiefly in the wonderful energies of sound, light, and electricity*.

### SOCIAL GOSPEL

The Catholic Church had long warned that a conscious move toward individual spirituality would make the Church seem irrelevant. Self-centered spirituality movements, many focusing on eastern religions, now abound in the religious marketplace. Modernism has fostered a non-sectarian religion that has eroded the discriminatory qualities of the traditional Catholic faith, replacing it with a view of God that emphasizes inner feelings, good works and compassion for the poor. It has virtually eliminated the need for prayer, the sacraments, and penance. With a greater focus on material needs, true individual spiritual growth has taken a back pew. It is a continuation of 19<sup>th</sup> century reformer Walter Rauschenbush's initiation of the Social Gospel that sheds Christian dogma in

favor of a warm contradictory religion more attractive to modern society.

These pernicious ideas have even invaded Sunday Mass. One of the most powerful admonitions in the Bible is Matthew (16:26), which offers Jesus' stern warning: *What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his immortal soul?* St. Ignatius Loyola converted St. Francis Xavier with these powerful words. As the Gospel for the fourth Sunday in August 2005, it now reads...*and forfeit his life?* Its spiritual caution has disappeared into a maze of secular ambiguity that has immanitized the eschatology of the human soul.

Unfortunately, many Catholic leaders and scholars do not recognize that there is a serious canker infecting the Church. It was a palpable irony that during Vatican II a number of Catholics theologians ridiculed the pre-Vatican II thinking of the anti-modern Popes as archaic and out of touch. It is just the opposite! They have conveniently ignored that the urban conflict between the Cities of God and Man is the eschatological theme of the New Testament, which constantly exhorts Christians to *die to the world* and ward off the temptation to reject or ignore the Christian promise. The challenge of every Catholic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is how to keep the Faith while living in a culture dominated by moral contradictions. The situation underscores how prescience the Popes have been. Their encyclicals have a universality that is relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The satanic fumes are very much within the Church. Like the *10 Virgins*, (Matthew 25:1-13) Catholics must be ever vigilant. It is important for every one to accept the cross of Christ, the true *sign of contradiction*.

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**PSALM 53:6, 8**

*"God himself is my help. The Lord upholds my life. I will offer you a willing sacrifice; I will praise your name, O Lord, for its goodness."*

## News and Notes

### Pray the Rosary Daily

Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, *"The rosary is the book of the blind, where souls see and there enact the greatest drama of love the world has ever known; it is the book of the simple, which initiates them into mysteries and knowledge more satisfying than the education of other men; it is the book of the aged, whose eyes close upon the shadow of this world, and open on the substance of the next. The power of the rosary is beyond description."*

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