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THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

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Change is the central characteristic of our times. More knowledge has been discovered in the last fifty years than man has accumulated in all previous history. In many areas this knowledge has been doubling every ten to fifteen years. It is a bit shocking for most of us to realize that 90 percent of all of the scientists who have ever lived are alive today. We are experiencing one of the great innovative periods of history. Like the fourth century which witnessed the triumph of Christianity and the seventeenth century which marks the dawn of modern science, we are entering a new epoch of human existence. In magnitude of change the only era which compares with it is the transition from the paleolithic pre-civilized society to the civilization of villages and cities in which the roving hunter through the invention of agriculture, the domestication of animals, and the development of better tools was able to settle down in permanent communities and make the growth of civilization possible.

The tough-stones of the Modern Age which extended from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century were science and reason. During the early part of the twentieth century our confidence in the infallibility of science and reason was shaken. World War I, the rise of the dictators, and the large scale appearance of irrational behavior convinced most thinkers that the old frames of reference were no longer adequate. While the old philosophical-cultural patterns were thus being undermined, the foundations of a revolutionary science and technology were being laid. This revolution is now entering its mature phase. Newtonian physics has culminated in nuclear and relativity physics. Our understanding of matter has penetrated succeeding levels in the microcosmos and we are now in search of elusive particles which we hope will discover the basic dynamics of matter. As a result of this research we are on the threshold of revolutionary applications of atomic power in our society.

During the last fifty years our astronomical view of the universe has literally exploded. We now visualize a universe so vast it staggers human imagination. The discovery of quasars has permitted us to look back nine billion light-years in our stellar history. The scientific assumption that there are millions of inhabited planets has been so widely published that it doesn't even shock the religious fundamentalist today.

We are now in the process of making the transition from human memory and control systems to computerized and automated systems. This new technology will transform our planet from a general state of material need to a general condition of material abundance. While doing this it will also free man from a great deal of work and give him a considerable amount of leisure time which he must learn to use constructively in such activities as education, research, creative development, and service. These activities will be greatly facilitated by significant advances in communication and transportation. Very soon we will have world-wide television via satellite transmission and not long after this we will have documentary programs which the entire world will watch. Computerized libraries will enable high school and college students to do research of the quality now done on the graduate level.

Building on the foundations and using the tools of the physical sciences, the biological sciences and medicine are also experiencing break-through developments. Not only are basic problems in the control and cure of disease and degeneracy being solved by so-called miracle drugs and advanced surgical techniques but molecular biology is discovering the basic bio-chemical structure of life in the DNA and RNA nucleic acids. The biological sciences are now giving us the knowledge for the quantitative control of world population and laying foundations for its qualitative control. Geneticist Theodosius Dabzhansky observes that man now has the knowledge to control his own evolution and suggests that he will use this

2. knowledge in the actualization of purposes which he sees are good or believes to be with will of the Creator.

Although more immature than the physical sciences, the social sciences are developing at an amazing rate and are on the threshold of major applications in our society. Increasingly education is being recognized as the foundation responsibility of our society. Educational goals, standards, and procedures are undergoing radical examination and ambitious plans are being formulated which will profoundly alter our society. A genuinely humanistic psychology and sociology have evolved which are making value statements which only the church dared to make in the past. The social sciences are now beginning to face our pressing human problems of peace and violence, ghettos and poverty, race and human understanding, alienation and brotherhood. The advent of enlightened social engineering is waiting in the wings of history to make its entrance and transform our chaotic social milieu into a symphony of evolutionary progress.

ae? Our whole civilization is in a ferment and is groping toward a new philosophical awakening. It is generally recognized by contemporary philosophers that we have come to the end of a philosophic age. Numerous obituaries have been written for the death of philosophy as well as for the death of God. At professional meetings philosophers spend much time telling each other that nothing significant is being said. Not having anything dynamic to present, they spend endless time telling what they are going to discuss and then bore their colleagues with elaborate minutia. At one time philosophers like Socrates and Giordano Bruno were put to death because their ideas were so vital and disturbing people were afraid they would turn the world up side down. Philosophers are again beginning to sense that only when they abandon their citadel of epistemological escapism and venture boldly into real life to face the new problems of living and the enlarged

problems of the ultimates in human existence will they have something to say. It is comforting to realize that, historically, the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk. The shadows are now deep and the time of awakening is at hand.

This awakening, however, will not advance from its initial stirring and stretching until mankind is stimulated and challenged by the perception of enhanced realities which once again have the potential of turning the world up side down. This is essentially the result of an enlarged spiritual awakening, the burden of the prophet, the mission of a relevant religion.

The decade of the 1960's has been marked by revolutionary changes in religion. Historians of the future will probably mark this decade as the beginning of a new spiritual era. Perceptive minds have labeled our times variously as the post Christian, post-Puritan, post-modern, and post-industrial age. These expressions of profound dissatisfaction with traditional modes of religious expression are rooted in a world wide cultural revolution which is forcing contemporary man to search for new and more adequate spiritual foundations.

The appearance of radical theology marks the bankruptcy of a decadent theological-religious tradition. Radical theology is the logical conclusion to modern man's attempt to understand religious convictions and behavior from an empirical point of view. Social anthropology traced cultural and religious forms to biological needs, social-economic problems, and historical events. In this manner much of traditional Christianity was reduced to folkways and myths.

Modern textual criticism applied the methods of archaeology, anthropology, and historical analysis to the Bible. The social, economic, political, and religious biases of biblical material were demonstrated. Additions, deletions, and editing of biblical material became obvious. This process of "demythologizing"

scripture culminated in the work of Rudolf Bultmann. The end result of decades of empirical study of the Bible is summarized in the cryptic statement: "Even though scripture may not be revelatory in the sense of God speaking in some miraculous way and although the scriptures are lacking in historical validity - they, nonetheless, contain myths which do speak some of the finest wisdom of man." Unchallengeable authoritarian revelation was discredited. For the educated man biblical authoritarianism has become an untenable position. The death of authoritarianism and "magic" in religion has left many with a spiritual void or at best only a humanistic ideology.

Paul Tillich carried this negation of face-value symbolism one step farther in asserting that biblical and religious symbols are illusions unless we get to the philosophical-religious meaning behind these symbols. God, for instance, must be understood not as an old man with a beard or some vague spiritual entity but as "the ground of being." While Tillich rendered a significant service to the intellectual community by infusing relevant meaning into threadbare religious symbols, theology was becoming so esoteric many fundamentalists regarded Tillich as a disguised atheist. Just as Bultmann and Tillich pronounced the death of literal, authoritarian revelation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared the world has now "come of age" and announced the death of the church and Christianity as "separate" institutions of significance.

There was only one more logical step in this progression: the announcement of the death of God. Among contemporary theologians, this was accomplished first by Gabriel Vahanian, in 1961, with his book The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era. The "death of God" theologians brought some basic spiritual insights into sharp focus:

1. We have come to the end of a philosophic-religious era.

2. The primitive idea of God as an "old man with a beard," the "deus ex machina," is dead.
3. The empirical method alone cannot find God - indeed leads to the conclusion that God is an illusion of the mind of man.
4. The old religious orthodoxies of Western civilization have been shorn of most of their relevance and power.
5. There is a sense of frustration, alienation, and despair along with, here and there, a new humanistic optimism about philosophy and religion.
6. The human personality and religion of Jesus has taken on new status.
7. There is a growing spiritual hunger for knowledge of Reality (God).
As the spiritual vacuum in Western civilization increases, forms of religious extremism and the occult will flourish among common people similar to the extremism of the mystery religions of the Greek and Roman world which attempted to fill the spiritual void just before the advent of Christianity.

Prophetic attempts to reconstruct and revitalize Christianity are numerous and significant. Peter Berger's The Noise of Solemn Assemblies (1961) challenges morphological fundamentalism. John A. T. Robinson's Honest to God (1963) and Harvey Cox's The Secular City (1965) are stirring popular attempts to rethink and vitalize religion. Recognizing the decadent state of the old religious institutions and traditions, Martin Marty wrote The Second Chance for American Protestants (1963) and E. E. Y. Hales speaks of the drastic Roman Catholic theological and institutional reformation in Pope John and His Revolution (1966).

In spite of these heroic attempts to bring spiritual relevance and power to traditional religious institutions, there is a sense of futility in the life of the church. There is a general recognition among thoughtful people that the

time-honored structures of Christianity are irrelevant to the actual conditions and needs of the world. Youth has lost faith in the old religious institutions but search earnestly for spiritual reality. The urge toward nihilism is powerful; and the tendency to irrational thought and action or social isolationism is very strong.

In this spiritual wasteland we are already witnessing an occult explosion. As people experience alienation from themselves, their fellowman, and Reality they grasp for straws of hope. Occult book sales have doubled in the last three years. Nearly seventy percent of our daily newspapers carry columns on astrology. Over two million ouija boards were sold last year. There are 10,000 professional astrologers and 400 witch covens practicing in America. We have become a land in which palmists, phrenologists, numerologists, tarot card readers, satanists, and alchemists exist in large enough numbers to form associations and hold meetings. Gurus and mystics are fashionable and experimentation with mind-altering hallucinogens has become epidemic.

The shadows of the downfall of Western civilization threaten us. Philosophers of history such as Arnold J. Toynbee and P. A. Sorokin have pointed out that only a new spiritual dynamism can redeem our crumbling culture. Both historical analysis and prophetic insight suggest they are correct. Is there such a spiritual rejuvenation gestating in the womb of history? A realistic prognosis of the spiritual condition of our society does give some ground for hope. During the 1960's there has been a radical and irreversable constructive change in American religion. In addition to the prophetic voices mentioned earlier, there are many constructive movements at work. Informally we see activities such as "the underground church" and there are various formal organizations like World Perspectives which are making great contributions toward a transformation of values in our society. These references give only a glimpse of the enormous spiritual ministry which is preparing us for the advent of a new philosophical-religious age.

Mr. Ian H. Wilson in an address given at the First General Assembly of the World Future Society says, "We find ourselves today at the opening of a New Reformation - a major re-formation or re-ordering of our public and private value systems. Powered by the forces of affluence, education, and technology, and forged in the crucible of our tense and changing times, this values reformation - perhaps more than any economic or technical change - is becoming perhaps the most distinctive, certainly the most pervasive, feature of the newly emerging 'post-industrial society.'"¹

French philosopher Jean-Francois Revel in his provocative book, Without Marx or Jesus: The New American Revolution Has Begun,² says the definitive revolution of the twentieth century can only take place in the United States and it has already begun. He also recognizes the basic moral-religious character of this transformation and believes this American revolution is the key to a new world and the only possible escape from disaster for mankind.

We are only in the initial stages of one of the greatest advances in social and religious development our planet has ever experienced. The process of change is now centered in what Abraham Maslow called the growing tip of humanity - the one percent of the population who are the innovators and the pioneers. This is where the action is - our world is quivering on the edge of one of its most amazing epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment. There is a great need for our culture to be inspired by an enlightening and ennobling spiritual vision which will energize the minds and hearts of men where it will incubate and spring forth in creative activity which will enable us:

To build more inclusive concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness which will bind together naturalism and idealism, the humanities and technology, science and religion.

To develop a new concept of man enabling him to appreciate his potentials

and encouraging him to participate in his own creative evolution inspired

¹The Futurist, June, 1971, p. 105

²Doubleday & Company, 1971

by a vision of his great destiny.

To develop a mature view of the goals of social evolution and stimulate us to initiate wise programs of social engineering.

To present an enlarged concept of the gospel of love and thereby teach man the baseness of violence and war and inspire him to develop personal, governmental, and universe potentials of love and brotherhood.

To construct a comprehensive view of our planetary evolutionary destiny which in turn will unify culture, governments, and religion.

To enlarge and enhance man's conception and understanding of his eternal destiny and thereby fill his life with vital meaning and dynamic purpose.

This momentous task will require extra-ordinary spiritual resources and leadership.

The only prophetic vision which appears to have the spiritual depth and breadth to bring about these transformations and furnish the spiritual foundations for planetary development in the centuries ahead is a challenging and awe-inspiring book published in 1955, The Urantia Book¹. Although it claims to be the fifth epochal revelation to this planet, it makes no authoritarian demands of acceptance. Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophical coherence, and reality-centeredness it is far superior to any book or world-view with which I am acquainted. Its profound understanding of man's origin, history, and destiny has the potential of developing a new man and a new humanity. The Urantia Book, in all probability, is destined to become the spiritual corner-stone of the new age into which we are moving. If you are interested in a comprehensive and progressive view of the universe which has a solid appreciation of the great value achievements of the past and yet has the potential¹ of enhancing these values and shaping our planetary destiny, The Urantia Book is a creative resource which you cannot afford to miss.

¹The Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60614