Paul Johnson in New Zealand

Paul Johnson

New Zealand Business Roundtable

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About the Author

Paul Johnson was born in November 1928 in Manchester, England, and grew up in a family of five children. His father was the headmaster of an art school and was also a painter. Married to Marigold Johnson, who is a public affairs administrator, Paul Johnson lives in London and Somerset and has four adult children and five grandchildren.

Education

Stonyhurst and Magdalen College, Oxford. Army service, with rank of captain (1950–52).

Current positions

Feature writer and columnist for the London *Daily Mail* and the London *Spectator.*

Previous Positions

- Assistant editor of the magazine *Réalités*, Paris (1952–55).
- Editorial staff and editor of the *New Statesman*, London (1955–1970).
- Freelance contributor to the London and New York *Times*, *Le Monde*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Sunday Times*, *Time*, *L'Express*, *Mainichi Shimbun* (Tokyo) and *Il Giornale* (Milan).
- Former member of the Royal Commission on the Press and the British Cable Television Authority. Has made over 40 television documentaries and frequently lectures to business, political and academic audiences all over the world.

Publications

Author of 30 books including *Modern Times: The World from the 1920s to the 1990s* which has been translated into 18 languages and has sold over one million copies, *A History of the Jews*, and *The Offshore Islanders: A History of the English People*. His latest book *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage* will be published in New York and London in the spring.

Hobbies

His hobby is painting and he has had a recent exhibition of his works in London under the title of 'The Sketches of a Global Journalist: Watercolours from Five Continents'.

Preface

These addresses were delivered in response to an invitation by the New Zealand Business Roundtable to pay a visit to New Zealand in November 1995 and talk to a variety of audiences—business, academic, political, media and religious. They were prepared quite separately but, in conjunction, they cover most of the great questions which perplex us in these last years before the turn of the century and the coming of the new millenium. These include the future of politics, and not least the future of the old Left/Right party system; the future of individual economies and of international trade; the future of education and especially of the universities; the future of the media; and the future of religion. They have, moreover, a unifying theme: the need to approach these great questions, and indeed all the problems which face the turn-of-the-century world, in a spirit of moderation and reason, shorn of the ideology and extremism which has devastated much of the 20th century, but, at the same time, within a firm moral framework based upon absolute standards of right and wrong, and guided by the great Judaeo-Christian system of ethics.

I present these addresses in the spirit in which they were delivered: as a personal interpretation of the contemporary world, aimed not to lay down the law but to stimulate and to contribute to debate.

Paul Johnson
Auckland
November 1995

The Geographical Outlook for Business: Fortress Europe and the Threat to New Zealand

Presented to the Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce, Christchurch, 13 November 1995

There are many aspects of the global picture I might cover with you today. But I would prefer to deal with one particular aspect at length so I propose to talk mainly about why the concept of a United Europe has become a threat to New Zealand, and what we can do about it.

When the notion of a United Europe was first mooted by Jean Monnet in the late 1940s, nearly everyone of good will welcomed the idea. The prospect of Europeans merging together in a common economic and political purpose, turning their backs on war and closing ranks about what they had in common—the heritage of Greece and Rome, the Judaeo-Christian ethic, the culture of the Renaissance and the spirit of scientific enterprise—was attractive, and especially so was the coming together of those old enemies France and Germany. Monnet's idea had a further dimension: an immense free trade area in which enlightened capitalism would dissolve ancient frontiers in bringing European consumers the widest possible choice at the lowest cost. That was a noble vision and even Britain, which felt it could not belong because of its close ties with Commonwealth countries like New Zealand and Australia, wished the prospect well.

But a great deal has changed in the last half-century, not all for the better. A Europe of sorts has come into being, and what Monnet dreamed of has materialised after a fashion. We now have the European Union (EU), with a very visible and bureaucratic headquarters in Brussels. Moreover, Britain has joined it, and its economic ties with the Commonwealth have been largely dissolved. But Britain joined with reluctance, and each step towards closer union has been a struggle against

its national and international instincts. This is partly because the EU has acquired characteristics Monnet himself would have deplored: a spirit of interventionism, almost of socialism; a huge bureaucracy, with its attendant evil, an immense volume of regulation; and an inward-looking approach to trade, verging on protectionism. In some respects the emergent Europe is closer to the centrally-directed entity which in turn Louis XIV, Napoleon, Bismarck and Hitler sought to create, and against which Britain fought—as it is fighting this one.

Meanwhile, over the past half-century, a quite different organisation has sought, with considerable success, to achieve some of Monnet's aims, but on a global scale. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) is a little-reported organisation which radiates dullness but in its own way it has achieved remarkable things. Over the years its members have succeeded, slowly but surely, in lowering barriers to trade throughout the advanced world and beyond, by mutual consent and to the mutual benefit of all. It has been the principal diplomatic agent in doubling, trebling and quadrupling world trade, and so adding hundreds of billions of dollars to the Gross Global Product. It is an engine of world affluence and there is no downside to its results.

The misfortune, which threatens to turn into tragedy, is that these two well-meaning ideas, the EU and GATT, the attempt to unite Europe and the attempt to liberalise world trade, have come into increasing conflict. This became gradually apparent during the 1980s and it threatens to sour all our relationships in future. At a time when the end of the Cold War is freeing us to push the world forward in union to unprecedented prosperity, the conflict between the EU and GATT, and notably between the Europeans on the one hand, and the great English-speaking countries of North America, Australia and New Zealand on the other, is a monstrous self-inflicted wound we cannot allow to deepen and fester.

Britain is in the middle of this incipient conflict, as it is in the middle of so many things. Despite our relative decline in physical power, we do contrive to be the fulcrum or epicentre of so much of importance that happens in the world. We are committed to Europe by geography and by growing trade ties—60 per cent of our exports now go there. But we are

committed to the English-speaking world by cultural, historical and emotional ties which are just as strong. Our special relationship with the United States is a persistent reality which successive American presidents, when they take office, begin by pooh-poohing and live to value. I go there four or five times a year and, to me, it is not a foreign country in any real sense of the term. It is part of 'home'. Still more so, when I come to New Zealand or Australia I feel I am on a family visit. I know that some people in the antipodes—Mr Keating ofAustralia for instance—are anxious to treat me and my kind as very distant relations indeed. But he is wrong about that, as he is wrong about many other things, and he is going to find that these ties of blood and heritage and, more important still, the bonds of mutual interest which still hold us close, are not so easily severed by a mere politician.

It is because of these links, and because of the permanent international interests which have governed British policy for hundreds of years, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, that we are so uneasy about the direction the EU has taken over the past decade. Europe, as at present constituted, is run by a Franco-German axis, in conjunction with its satellite adherents in the Netherlands and Belgium, and, in general, the Mediterranean powers—Spain, Italy, Greece—tend to tag along. In this set-up Britain appears the odd man out, and is frequently in a small minority, or even a minority of one, when decisions are taken. But this isolation is more formal than real. For, in resisting a dogmatic European federalism, especially an inward-looking one, the polls and other evidence show that Britain enjoys a good deal of silent support on the Continent, not indeed from the political elites, which are overwhelmingly federalist, but from ordinary people. Just as in the wars against Napoleon and Hitler Britain evoked a response from invisible underground armies within a subjugated Continent, so today it can, if it chooses, raise the spirit of resistance among the European peoples against the *diktat* of those who claim to speak for them in Brussels.

That being so, let us look more closely at the path the European elite wishes to take, and the alternative Britain proposes. These two paths do not necessarily lead in completely opposite directions, and this is a point

to bear in mind, but they certainly diverge at the moment and the long-term risks this bifurcation poses are alarming. France is the original architect of Europe, and French ideas, reflecting French interests, continue to be the main driving force. The French are a logical and schematic people and they tend to think in terms of great concepts which create intellectual excitement but which often ignore practical considerations and the real needs of ordinary people. To put it briefly, their elite wants a European superstate, and wants it now. Behind this aim is fear of Germany: not just the aggressive Germany of Hitler and the past, but the present Germany of 80 million well-organised and efficient producers, able to dominate Europe industrially and financially as they once sought to do militarily. Back in the 1950s, the French felt they could contain Germany only by merging with it, and the seal on this bargain was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Under this, German industry gained access to French markets on condition its profits subsidised the agonising process whereby France persuaded its peasantry, until recently half the nation, to leave the land and to become part of an affluent industrial workforce. That process is now well past the half-way mark but is still continuing and explains why France is so obstinately attached to the main outlines of the CAP. But in the meantime the reunification of Germany has restated the original German problem, in French eyes, in an even more acute form. That in turn has led the French elite to wish to accelerate the movement towards federal unity and, in particular, to leap forward towards a common currency, via the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the Maastricht Treaty. That was the master-plan of Jacques Delors, the French-born socialist politician who ran the Brussels bureaucracy until recently.

But if fear of Germany, and the consequent anxiety to exorcise it by union, constitute the original compulsion pushing the French along this path, there are other factors which make the scheme more complex and dangerous. First, the French elite have always preferred a 'little' Europe to a 'big' Europe. It is true that de Gaulle, echoing the wider dreams of Napoleon, spoke of a 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals'. But the federalist politicians of Paris have always felt more at ease with what has been termed a Carolingian Europe, whose axis was the Rhine, and which

essentially embraced Franco-Germany plus Benelux, with an Italian offshoot —the original 8th century empire of Charlemagne in fact. Initially at least, France was not too keen on admitting Greece and the Iberian countries, though it has since worked hard to reduce them to satellite status, and it has always felt most uneasy about a British presence, which it feels is incompatible with its whole idea of Europe.

If France hesitated at expanding the original six, it is opposed, *a fortiori*, to enlarging Europe to take in former Communist states like Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia and Croatia—though it has in the end agreed to take in the western-style economies of Sweden, Austria and Finland. First, the French felt all such additions would dilute French influence. Secondly, a Europe extended geographically and horizontally would be less easy to transform, and deepen vertically, by plunging quickly into federal institutions. Thirdly, the French worried that if the central and eastern European states were quickly admitted, Germany would feel the old 'pull to the east', the *drang nach osten*, which would draw it away from the Franco-German axis and the French concept of a Europe dominated from the Rhine area, and, worse still, would allow Germany to create an autonomous economic empire in the east, controlled from Berlin and Frankfurt, which would be wholly beyond French influence.

For all these reasons France strongly preferred vertical consolidation to horizontal expansion. But there were and are two further factors. First, though the original concept of Europe was a capitalist one, based on free enterprise, the market and free trade, the EU as it has emerged is the world of socialist and Christian Democrat politicians who have in common many collectivist, not to say corporatist, notions. The political culture of Brussels is thus strongly interventionist, and from it pour forth countless directives concerning the rights of labour, the needs of the environment and the absolute necessity to curb the excesses of capitalism. European industry thus already has to carry heavy and expensive burdens of compliance. But, in addition, the Maastricht Treaty itself appended what is termed the Social Chapter, a list of requirements which is again socialist-corporatist in inspiration, ranging from shorter working hours and better work conditions to labour participation on the boards of all large companies.

The further financial burden this imposes on industry is formidable, and this is why the British Conservative Government has refused to adopt it, but the other governments have done so and it is now being applied. The net result of all these burdens is to weaken the capacity of European industry to compete in world markets, especially with Japan and other Far Eastern states, but also with the United States. This lack of competitive edge is being felt increasingly, as the cost of compliance reduces European industrial profit margins.

Secondly, France is by history and instinct a protectionist country. It has always had high external tariffs, and though some sectors of French industry have recently become competitive, at least within Europe, French industrialists and unions have never felt comfortable with free trade. In this respect French industry makes common cause with its agricultural sector, which tends to be inefficient and high-cost and which bitterly resents competitive imports, particularly of livestock products. Time and again French farmers have taken to the streets and fields to resist competition by physical force, and this kind of action has always filled French governments with fear. France has never been a parliamentary democracy. It is a bureaucratic autocracy tempered by revolution, and all French governments tremble when any powerful interest resorts to direct action.

This then is the background to the current French scheme for Europe —a federal entity entrenched behind high external tariffs: in short, Fortress Europe. That, they would argue, is how the United States, the first federal state, came into existence and became a great economic power, and to some extent it is true. But the United States, by immigration and by territorial expansion, was always an 'open' country, never in any sense a fortress. Besides, the external conditions today are radically different. Fortress Europe goes totally against the grain of the world which has emerged in the late 20th century. It is a cooperative, mutually dependent, free-trading world, where barriers are slowly coming down everywhere, and where continental and regional differences no longer have much meaning. The world is becoming an open society, and to try to erect a closed Europe in its midst goes against every promising trend and tendency, and indeed against elementary common sense.

Moreover, Fortress Europe poses grave dangers to itself and the world. It is a concept which runs directly contrary to GATT and, sooner or later, one or the other must crumble. If GATT disintegrates, or even if it is merely put on hold, the consequences will be serious for all. The United States will not be prepared to live with a Europe it will see, particularly in agricultural products, as protectionist. It will react strongly, even aggressively. Like France, the United States is by tradition a protectionist country, and only slowly and painfully, thanks to GATT, has it been weaned from its old habits in the last 50 years. In many ways it is a stricken industrial giant which has suffered with growing indignation the huge inroads foreign imports have made into its home markets. That indignation could boil over and the US political system is designed to give powerful vent to it.

It is not merely a question of the United States going protectionist again. It is, rather, a risk that North America will react to Fortress Europe by erecting a fortress of its own in the western hemisphere. The United States has already signed a treaty with Canada which amounts to an embryonic trading union. More recently it has come to an agreement with Mexico which adumbrates a similar arrangement. There is already in existence a North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), which is the hemispheric equivalent to the EU. That can be, and in the worst eventuality will be, turned into Fortress North America, with internal free trade and high external tariffs of its own.

Now if two trading fortresses come into existence in the world, it is inevitable that a third, and possibly more, will follow. For Fortress North America will not merely keep out or penalise European goods; it will also be aimed at protecting US industry from Japan. Indeed, to many US domestic lobbies, Japan is the main enemy. They have argued for years that high tariffs, quotas or outright embargoes are the only way to keep huge sectors of the US industrial economy in existence. Once North America begins to build its hemispheric fortress, all these interests will leap into the debate and add their own portion of protectionist dogma. Until recent decades the United States was largely a self-contained economy, whose external trade was marginal in relation to its enormous domestic market. It is now

an immense consumer of foreign manufactures, and its taste for imports is one reason why world trade has expanded so fast. If the United States—and still more, if NAFTA as a whole—turns protectionist, the entire world will feel the pinch.

East Asia, not just Japan but Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand, and other countries, will be particularly affected by this transformation of the United States from an open to a high-tariff country. China too will be hit. The dismay will be universal in East Asia, will be deep and bitter, and will have ominous political consequences as well as economic ones. Japan certainly does not forget that US protectionism in the 1930s was one factor which led to its own fatal attempt to create an East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere—and we can be equally sure that China, which suffered so much from it, does not forget either. Inevitably, then, Japan, indeed the whole of East Asia, will react to a high-tariff NAFTA, a Fortress NAFTA, just as NAFTA reacts to a Fortress Europe.

It is impossible to say exactly what form this reaction will take. Because of Japan's past political and economical imperialism, there are good reasons why other East Asian powers will be most reluctant to join with her in creating a Fortress Asia. But in a world dividing into competing and antagonistic trading blocks, they will not have much choice. They will have to protect their interests by mutual tariff arrangements, if only to use them as bargaining counters. And once tariff walls go up, and local industries enjoy their shelter, it is hard to pull them down again.

Equally, it is hard to say what course New Zealand and Australia will pursue if these things happen. Plainly, your dilemma will be acute and painful. Many of your interests are now geared to Asia and will argue that the country has no alternative but to follow the logic of present patterns of trade into a deeper union. But it is one thing to belong to a trading block; quite another to commit yourself to a block with a high external tariff; and still more serious to merge yourself into the kind of quasi-political entity to which high-tariff blocks tend to lead. Let me remind you of a very basic fact. In geopolitical terms, Australasia is a very desirable property. It is rich in raw materials, its ratio of population to land surface is one of

the lowest in the world, and it exists at the extremity of a huge land mass where the ratio is among the highest in the world. At the same time, it is incapable of defending itself without powerful allies—it cannot even control most of its own air-space without assistance. In view of all this, New Zealand and Australia, I imagine, will be most reluctant to sacrifice any part of their sovereignty to a vast entity dominated by Japan, or China, or possibly both in uneasy tandem. Yet if you do not sign up with East Asia, where do you go, and how do you survive?

The consequences of such a line-up for the world as a whole are also formidable. It is worth recalling that in George Orwell's nightmare vision of the future, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, the planet was divided into three vast and antagonistic geographical blocks, in a state of perpetual warfare with each other. A world in which the progress achieved by GATT was reversed, and three huge trading groups emerged, facing each other from behind high tariff walls, and competing fiercely for the markets which remained outside, would be a highly unstable entity. Trade wars are bitter things, hard to contain within their original bounds. History teaches that they tend to degenerate into fighting wars. Are we really prepared to accept the prospect of a 21st century in which the risk of global conflict between Europe, North America and Asia—conflict, let me remind you, in which Australasia would inevitably be caught up—is always there?

No: of course we are not. Such a prospect is totally unacceptable. But we must ensure we do not drift that way by acting sensibly now. That is why Britain, within Europe, has indicated a path which diverges sharply from the French one towards Fortress Europe. In my opinion, the British government, currently weak and indecisive, has not outlined the British path as clearly and confidently as it should.

We lack a Margaret Thatcher to trumpet forth our plan, more's the pity. But the British alternative is there, all the same. It is this. The EU should decelerate its march towards federal union, and scrap its present target of monetary union before the end of the century. It is far too ambitious anyway. Instead, it should give other aims priority. The first should be horizontal expansion to take in the de-collectivised economies of east-central Europe, which, by all historical and cultural standards, belong in

any European condominium—Poland, Hungary, Bohemia and Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia. Priority must be given to enable all these economies, some of which are very weak and undercapitalised, to move towards the EU and to secure favoured access to our markets. That is the simplest, cheapest and surest way to de-communise eastern Europe, and at the same time to spread western prosperity to Europe as a whole, to the mutual benefit of us all.

It goes without saying that such geographical expansion is incompatible with the high-tariff Fortress Europe. It implies, indeed, an open Europe, open not merely to eastern Europe, including Russia and its former dependencies, but to the world. With Europe geared to horizontal expansion, rather than vertical integration, I do not think there would be any danger of a Fortress North America, still less of a Fortress Asia, arising. Quite the contrary: the fruitful work of GATT in lowering barriers throughout the world could then be resumed, with renewed vigour, and we could look forward to a free-trade world, if not in our lifetimes, at least in those of our immediate progeny.

I suspect we could look forward to rather more. For a Europe which follows the British path will not simply be a free-trading zone, useful though that will be. It will have many common institutions and purposes and it will explore, with pragmatism and common sense, and at a speed all members will find comfortable, ways of merging sovereignty to mutual advantage. The European vision will not be abandoned—far from it. It will, rather, be refashioned to conform more closely to practical realities. In particular, it will seek to harmonise EU ideas with the natural and desirable wish of ordinary people to retain their national ways of doing things. Such a Europe can be created with a far greater degree of democratic consent, and with a much smaller element of bureaucratic direction and compulsion, than the French vision of Fortress Europe. And because it will be a democratic Europe, it will be a much stronger entity, capable of natural, organic growth.

Until recently, we in Britain anticipated a long and bitter struggle between these rival views of Europe, with a fearful risk of global trade wars of the kind I have suggested, if the French vision triumphed. I always thought

Europe would follow the British path, or something like it, in the end, if only because it makes more sense, not least to ordinary people. But I was worried. Now I am much more confident that the pragmatists, as opposed to the dogmatists, will win. I am indeed happy to say to a New Zealand audience: I bring you good news.

The reason is this. The French fast track to a federal Europe, and a Europe likely to turn out to be a Fortress Europe, was essentially dependent on the rapid creation of a common currency. Under the French timetable this would be accomplished long before the turn of the century. We would have a Eurocoinage, Euronotes and a European Central Bank. All this is provided for in the Maastricht Treaty, itself the prolegomenon to a final treaty of federal union to be signed before the end of the century.

But all this, of course, was a castle in the sky. The reality was that, in order to move smoothly and rapidly towards a common currency, the EU states had first to achieve alignment of their existing ones. The instrument to bring this about was the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), a kind of currency grid, in which all the national moneys took up agreed stations, as a half-way house to union. The stations were within both narrow and wider bands, according to national choice. Those keenest on union took up narrow bands, and indeed the ERM as a whole was based upon a quasi-fixed relationship between the Deutschmark and the franc. Those less keen, such as Britain, occupied wider bands.

The ERM, like all exchange-rate systems fixed by politicians as opposed to the markets, was open to the objection that the markets might not like it, and would seek to overthrow it. The history of the last half-century has shown that no fixed currency on earth, even the dollar, can retain an artificially contrived parity if the markets think it is overvalued. Those who created the ERM were, however, convinced that with the reserves of a dozen central banks behind them, the parities the politicians laid down could withstand any conceivable speculative assault.

This assumption was based on two fallacies. First, the arithmetic showed that, in present and foreseeable conditions, the combined reserves of the central banks were outclassed by the immense sums available not indeed to speculators as such but to businesses throughout the world who, for

their own legitimate reasons, need to possess large quantities of foreign currency and buy them at the lowest possible cost. Such companies are forced to speculate when fixed exchange rates provide the currency markets with a challenge. So the arithmetic, given certain circumstances, is always against the central banks. The second assumption was that the central banks would always act together. But central banks inevitably reflect national interests, rather than those of the ERM parities; indeed most of them are constitutionally obliged to do so. In a crisis, these national interests always come to the fore.

In the particular case of the German Bundesbank, a quasi-independent institution specifically created to be in a position to defy political pressure if needs be, there was an additional incentive not to back the ERM. Those in charge of the Bundesbank did not believe it would work, and were anxious to prove their point. The major recession which began to hit Europe at the end of the 1980s, and in some ways continues today, gave them the opportunity, and the excuse. The process of absorbing East Germany, which began in 1990, imposed huge strains on the West German economy, and threatened a fierce outbreak of inflation as state and private borrowings increased. So the Bundesbank was determined to hold interest rates as high as necessary to keep inflationary pressures under control. At the same time, other European economies, led by Britain but including in turn Italy, Spain and France—to name just the major powers—hit by the worst recession since the war, required rates to be as low as possible. There was here an irreconcilable conflict.

The first big test of the ERM came when speculators, followed by a mass of non-speculative traders, made a determined assault on the banding of certain currencies, notably the pound sterling and the Italian lira, which they believed to be overvalued. In theory, all the central banks should have backed these currencies when they reached the floor of their bands with all their resources. But the Bundesbank shared the speculators' view that the pound and lira were overvalued. It merely went through the motions of support, and it flatly declined to cut its own interest rates, which would have reduced the incentive to buy Deutschmarks. So, when crisis struck, sterling, followed by the lira, left the ERM. The departure was

said to be temporary, but in practice it looks final, certainly as the ERM is at present constituted.

The French viewed this ominous event with misguided complacency and did everything in their power to hurry on the EU towards the monetary union of which a working ERM was an indispensable forerunner. In the meantime, Britain's retirement from the ERM, and the return to a floating currency finding its own market level, permitted it to reduce interest rates steadily, and this set in motion the process of climbing out of recession, which is now plainly under way. At the same time, the recession in Continental Europe continued, putting political pressure on the French and Spanish governments to reduce interest rates. That in turn incited speculators to attack the franc and the peseta unless the Bundesbank reduced its rates accordingly. This the Bundesbank refused to do, and no amount of pressure from the German government succeeded in changing its independent mind. It followed German national interests, which were and are to give the battle against inflation priority over any European federal chimera, and its own private beliefs, which are that the ERM, and with it currency union, are now dead for the foreseeable future.

The second crisis came when speculative pressure forced the ERM to change its rules, so that most currencies now float within huge bands of 15 per cent plus or minus. That makes nonsense of the whole system, and puts a common currency on hold for the indefinite future. It has been a humiliation for the French and, equally important, a fearful blow to the Franco-German axis, which lies at the heart of a fast-track federal Europe. The French government feels that the Germans, when it came to the crunch, betrayed them, and that they cannot be relied on to put European before German interests. The Germans shrug their shoulders and carry on doing what they think is best for their country.

This may not be the end of the federal European dream. But it certainly makes nonsense of the Maastricht Treaty, which has now turned from a pretentious bit of paper into something resembling the bull of a dead pope. With the wind thus taken out of their European federal sails, the French are far less likely to be in a position to steer the EU vessel into a frontal battle with the GATT powers, especially since Britain has been encouraged to throw its weight behind the anti-protectionist forces. Indeed,

the British now hope to wean France away from its German alliance into a posture closer to Britain's, and this is one reason why John Major has been so adamant in refusing to condemn French nuclear tests in the Pacific. The virtual collapse of the ERM and the consequent postponement, perhaps for years, perhaps for ever, of a common European currency, mean that it is now highly unlikely that Fortress Europe will ever be constructed. The result will be, I trust, a stand-down on all sides, as nations relax and the practical forces working in favour of a free-trading world resume their sway.

The prospects, then, not least for New Zealand and Australia, are a good deal rosier than they were in the early 1990s. It is my view that, with a bit of good fortune, and a lot of patience, we will eventually get rid of the Common Agricultural Policy altogether. Freed of this albatross, there is no reason why the EU should not resolve its differences with the other GATT powers and all move together towards a free-trading world. You in New Zealand have everything to fear from a Fortress Europe and its consequences. But you have nothing to fear, and much to gain, from a strong, free-trading Europe moving towards closer policies among its component nations, determined by rational not dogmatic factors and pushed along at a sensible pace. That is the Europe Britain wants and New Zealand should want too—a Europe in which Britain can play a full and fruitful part, while still maintaining with New Zealand, and other English-speaking nations, the close ties created by common ways of looking at things and hundreds of years of history. I hope, and believe, that such a European Britain will always be the best and closest of friends with the New Zealand we know and love.

What are Universities For?

Presented at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 13 November 1995

This is an important question, and it is hardly ever asked. Why not? Up to the late 1940s, the number of university students throughout the world could be counted in hundreds of thousands. Now they number tens of millions; soon they will be scores of millions, and by the mid-21st century hundreds of millions. It is hard to calculate the amount of money spent on universities throughout the world today, but it cannot be less than US$100 billion annually. We are devoting a great and growing proportion of our total resources to this institution. We are taking a growing number of our young men and women, from the ages of 18 or so to 21—at the very peak of their physical and intellectual energy—and placing them in universities where, far from contributing to the wealth-creating process, they actually consume a huge proportion of the Gross National Product. Does this make sense? The object, it is said, is to educate them to the point where their eventual contribution to society, even in material terms, will be very much greater than if they had not received tertiary education. But this argument is vitiated by an unresolved debate, among those who run universities, about whether their purpose is to instruct those who attend them in practical, wealth-creating skills, or in something quite different.

Universities, as we know them, have their origins in the early Middle Ages. Essentially they go back to the 12th century, and the ancient University of Paris is the prototype, closely followed by other models such as Padua in Italy, Salamanca in Spain, and Oxford and Cambridge in England. Universities in the New World, Africa, Asia and Australasia were essentially derived from their European forebears, thus the Universities of Santiago and Buenos Aires still bear the unmistakable imprint of their Spanish models, just as Yale and Harvard derive from Oxford and Cambridge. Yet the ancient universities of medieval Europe were not

designed to raise the Gross National Product or perform any other secular purposes. That question did not arise. They were designed essentially to train clergy—priests, secular canons, monks, friars—and their most important instruction was in what was then called 'the Queen of Sciences', theology. Their debates, factions, rows, sometimes bloody struggles, all centred around God-related issues. They had nothing to do with materialism as such; everything to do with spirituality, with the philosophical knowledge of the deity and his intentions for mankind. And however much the modern campus has changed and secularised itself, it still bears unmistakable traces of its origins. It tends to follow the old ecclesiastical calendar of the year; it often has collegiate structures; it draws ancient distinctions between undergraduates, graduates and post-graduates; and its curricula often faintly display, like a palimpsest, the faded images of medieval schemes of study.

Not surprisingly, an institution like the university, so old, so difficult to change, has always attracted fierce criticism, especially from men of outstanding intellects. The famous Paris University College of Mont Aigu—which trained among others Jean Calvin and Ignatius Loyola, two giants of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and was rudely known as 'the cleft between the buttocks of "Mother Church"—' was furiously criticised by two of its most distinguished alumni, Rabelais and Erasmus. In his *Discours de la Méthode* (1637), Descartes launched a savage attack on his education at one of the best schools in Europe, and Edward Gibbon, the great historian of ancient Rome, dismissed his Oxford college—which happens to be mine, too—as absolutely useless. Darwin too claimed that his education, properly speaking, took place only after he left university. It is a striking fact that the Industrial Revolution, which introduced the modern world and began in England in the last three decades of the 18th century, occurred with virtually no contribution at all from its two principal seats of learning, Oxford and Cambridge. (This is not true, I should add, of Scottish universities, since Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* is the first serious treatment of capitalism and the market, and one of the most influential books ever published, actually held a professorship at Glasgow University.) It is generally correct that great events in cultural

and economic history have usually taken place despite, not because of, the existence of universities.

This proposition is by no means untrue even today. I well remember in the 1960s, when universities were expanding fast, we were told that one of the new universities was sited so that it would serve as a forcing-house for the West Midlands car industry. What in fact it did was to become heavily politicised—of course to the Left—producing a new breed of graduates who went into the industry not as managers but as union officials, to cause trouble, and soon inflicted incalculable damage on an industry already in decline, which is now in consequence virtually non-existent.

Hence in general universities have never had much to do with wealth-creation. What they do tend to exhibit is changing intellectual fashion. Just as in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance they reflected rival theological trends, so in our own century they have been theatres in which the successive dramas of our Youth Culture have been enacted. I think this point is worth examining in a little detail before we move on to the question of what universities should aim to provide, because it illustrates what actually happens there, as opposed to what is meant to happen. In our century, we have seen five complete phases in Youth Culture, and are now at the beginning of a sixth.

The first phase was the decade before the First World War, which was perhaps the golden age of youthful idealism. For the first time, youth movements became a European, indeed a world phenomenon. They were especially strong in Germany, where members of the *Wandervögel* clubs hiked, strummed guitars, protested about pollution and the growth of cities, and denounced the old. As professor Robert Wohl points out in his arresting book, *The Generation of 1914* (1979), sociologists everywhere were studying youth, to find out what it thought. To opinion-formers like Max Weber, youth was all-important—they looked to the youthful passion of students to save the world from the dry cynicism of their elders. The German historian Moeller van den Bruck wrote: 'What is needed is an insurrection of the sons against the fathers, a substitution of the old by the young'. The new writers, just out of university or even still students—Ernst Junger, Rupert Brooke, Henri de Montherlant, Charles Péguy,

Filippo Marinetto—seemed to have the world at their feet. In short, for their radical elders, the new university generation was expected to lead society. Well, so they did, in a sense: they were by far the most enthusiastic element in favour of the First World War. In 1914 it was not cynical old men like Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in Germany, or Prime Minister Herbert Asquith in England, who wanted war—quite the contrary. It was Youth. Idealistic young writers like Junger, Péguy and Brooke went to war in a spirit of total emotional commitment. All this of course vanished in the carnage. By the time it was over, Junger, for instance, had been wounded 14 times and the two others were dead. Those that survived became embittered war-poets and novelists. But no one can deny educated youth willed the war; it is all on the record.

Hence the new youth generation who climbed over the corpses and emerged in the 1920s was anti-idealistic. They were hedonists. They wanted a good time. Scott Fitzgerald, who spoke for them, summed them up in a famous sentence in *The Crack-up* (1945):

> The new generation had matured, to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in many shaken: all they knew was that America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history.

What Edmund Wilson, one of that generation, called 'the drunken fiesta' of the 1920s was not confined to the United States. British novelists like Aldous Huxley in *Antic Hay* (1923) and Evelyn Waugh in *Vile Bodies* (1930) recorded youth's restless quest for pleasure, and the leading cultural symbol of Europe was the Berlin night club.

The Great Depression and the totalitarian horrors it threw up or reinforced introduced a third phase, a return to the pre-1914 idealism but in a much more sombre mood. It was marked by a sense of impending doom relieved only by the new cult of the proletariat and the belief in the socialist paradise on earth. For a time it was fashionable for young graduate poets like Auden or Lorca or Louis Aragon to sing about Communism. The youth-symbols of the period were the writers-and-artists' 'workshops', the International Brigade, the Kibbutz. The university was the essential background to this activity. This third phase persisted throughout the

Second World War and beyond, gradually petering out as Stalin's monstrous crimes became known and the long post-war boom resurrected the capitalist promise of the 1920s. It was writers like George Orwell in Britain and Albert Camus in France who led youth away from the pit of idealistic absolutism and into a more questing empiricism. By 1956, Jimmy Porter, who is the key youth character in John Osborne's epoch-making play, *Look Back in Anger*, was complaining 'there aren't any good causes left', thus echoing Scott Fitzgerald.

Even while Osborne wrote, however, a fourth phase was preparing itself. 'Angry young men', as they were called—the post-war university generation—were already helping to point the way back to idealism and passion. In the United States, youth was bored with the years of Eisenhower prosperity and, as they saw it, philistinism. In 1958 they read eagerly J K Galbraith's foolish but powerful book, *The Affluent Society*, which condemned the notion of 'private affluence' achieved at the expense of 'public squalor'. The election of John F Kennedy introduced an entirely new phase of idealistic youth culture, enormously magnified by the vast programme of university expansion, planned in the 1950s, which became a reality in the 1960s and early 1970s. This worldwide phenomenon, one of the most important events of the 20th century, not only rapidly expanded but radicalised the campus everywhere, as a completely new breed of teacher invaded it, and the student intake reached much further down the social scale than before. It was the sheer size of the campus expansion, the quantitative factor, which prolonged 1960s idealism well into the 1970s, almost to the end of the decade.

But a reaction was bound to come, and history suggests that the longer such reactions are delayed, the more severe they are likely to be. Young people, whether children or adolescents, tend to reject the conventional wisdom of their instructors when they perceive it to constitute a monolithic orthodoxy. This applies whether such wisdom is radical or conservative, idealist or materialist. The generation of politically active, mainly Left-wing, idealistically motivated university lecturers, recruited during the 1960s expansion and still dominant on the campus in the 1980s, constituted one of the chief reasons why students turned, during the last decade, to

self-advancement and political indifference. Students who, in the 1960s, had created charities like Oxfam or wished to work in Amnesty International and Voluntary Service Overseas, and similar altruistic bodies, now turned to the financial sector, advertising and business generally, or professions like the law, where advancement might be rapid and pay-scales high. At the end of 1983 I carried out a survey for the *New York Times Magazine* and found this trend to be almost universal among university students in advanced societies in the West. It both reflected and epitomised more general trends in society. In my book *Modern Times* I characterised the 1960s as the 'decade of illusion'—a spectacularly foolish 10 years—and the 1970s as the 'decade of disillusion', when the mistakes of its predecessor produced devastating consequences. The 1980s I called a decade of returning realism. During the 1980s, the essentially constructive merits of the free-enterprise, capitalist or market system—call it what you will—were universally recognised, and Communism as an economic ideology collapsed. The new materialism of students was a harbinger of this process, and part of it. It involved a recognition that there are no short cuts to Utopia—that Utopia, indeed, does not exist—and that the world is hard and difficult, as it always has been, and always will be.

Now there is a new mood on the campus again. We are entering a sixth phase. I find it difficult, at this early stage, to distinguish its characteristics, but it would be surprising, if the 20th century is any guide, if it did not contain a more marked element of idealism than its predecessor. There were many, especially among the 1960s vintage academics, who denounced the university student materialism of the 1980s; they coined such terms as the 'Me Generation', and 'I-Want-It-Now-Youth'. But I recall the wise words of Dr Samuel Johnson who pointed out that amassing wealth, while not morally meritorious in itself as a rule, often diverts people from much more reprehensible activities: 'Sir', he said, 'a man is seldom so innocently employed as when he is getting [ie making] money.' A similar point was made by the great economist John Maynard Keynes, who noted that the quest for wealth often directed the darker forces in able and ambitious men into comparatively harmless channels. The lust for money poses fewer dangers to society than the lust for power: 'It is far better', wrote

Keynes, 'that a man should tyrannise over his bank account than seek to tyrannise over other people'.

We must bear these points in mind if, as I believe, the universities are once more moving in an idealistic direction. For we have to consider: which is the greater peril to ordinary men and women—an intellectual generation dominated by materialism or one driven by idealism? I suspect the latter. For let us be frank about what universities are. Until recently, they were places where large numbers of young people, overwhelmingly male, were concentrated; indeed they are still male-dominated. The usual way in which young men are gathered in close proximity is in armies. Universities are not so very different. Man is an ancient species and there are deep biological urges towards hunting and war-making—the display and use of violence—to be found among young men, especially when they are herded together. The fact that university students are highly educated intellectuals as a rule, and exposed to ideas and ideals, does not make them potentially less dangerous, but more so. We see on TV students struggling to overthrow totalitarian regimes in Peking, Prague and elsewhere. History shows, alas, that students are just as likely to sustain totalitarian regimes, or help to set them up in the first place. The record of this century shows, time and again, that the youthful altruism of the educated is one of the most powerful weapons in the entire armoury of totalitarian despotism and oppression. Students were among those who put Lenin in power, and they led the march of Mussolini's fascists to Rome to the strains of their hymn, *Giovanezza, Giovanezza!*—Youth, Youth! In his ascent to power, Hitler consistently scored higher ratings among students than among any other sector of the population. It is a melancholy fact that the rise of German militarism proceeded, over 200 years, *pari passu*, with the spread of literacy and higher education. The nation which put Hitler in power was in many respects the best educated in the world and possessed the finest universities, as it had done since the late 18th century.

Much of the present violence in Central America has its origins on the campus, not least Havana University. It was there that Fidel Castro as a student activist—he called himself an idealist no doubt—learned first to carry a revolver, then a sub-machine gun. While still a 'student idealist' he

was involved in appalling violence, in Bogota and the Dominican Republic as well as Cuba where he was accused of murdering the Minister of Sport. Students have played all kinds of roles in recent years in Third World countries, as well as in eastern Europe. Some we might approve of, most we certainly would not. Students in the Arab world, for instance, tend increasingly to back fundamentalist and intransigent positions, especially against the West and above all against Israel. They tend to be extremist rather than moderate on both religious and political issues and to back nationalism—and racism—in its most virulent form. They adopt, in short, all the attitudes which the history of the 20th century shows lead to instability and war. This is bad enough in itself; what is worse is the apparent unanimity with which such student bodies—or mobs—think and act. There is none of the discussion, debate and division which we would expect in an educated community: merely a sloganising consensus obtained, as a rule, by terror. I will not easily forget a conversation I had with a South African black student who told me he had been obliged to back a boycott of university classes organised by the African National Congress on pain of being 'necklaced', and his parents' house in Soweto fire-bombed.

In advanced western countries such methods are not used to secure homogeneity of opinion on the campus but there are many unpleasant pressures nonetheless from student activists, who do not find it hard to capture student union organisations and the funds they possess—often supplied by taxpayers—and thus to organise political campaigns for any object they choose. Nor do they hesitate to deny freedom of speech to their political opponents while vociferously demanding it for themselves. There have been a series of incidents in British universities in recent years in which student mobs, often organised by the student union itself, have forced the abandonment of meetings at which public figures on a 'hit list' compiled by the union have been due to speak. Similar incidents have occurred at universities in the United States, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and no doubt elsewhere. In every case that I know of, the denial of free speech has been enforced by the Left, by methods similar to those employed by German students in the 1930s to shut the mouths of Jewish professors.

All these considerations lead me to my first conclusion. Whatever universities are *for,* what they are *not* for is to be used as a political arena, because the result is invariably, if in different degrees, intolerance and violence. University authorities, particularly in liberal, democratic western countries, are reluctant to use their authority to stop students doing things, especially discussing politics. There is a long tradition of political debate at such universities as Oxford, where the Union Debating Society goes back to the early 19th century and has produced a dozen or more prime ministers and scores of cabinet ministers. But this society has always operated under the most stringent rules of procedure, rather like the House of Commons itself, on which it is modelled. It seems to me that if politics is to have a place on the campus, such stringent rules, to avoid one-sidedness, to preserve freedom of speech, and above all to avoid the fatal cult of violence, must not only be laid down but strictly enforced by the authorities. One chief cause of the politicisation of universities, with all its baneful consequences, has been the cowardice of university heads and dons—this applies virtually all over the world—in the face of student activism. I believe that there is no place on a campus for a student who is there primarily to pursue politics, and those who show such ambitions should be instantly expelled. Equally there is no place for student unions based on trade union models. They should not be permitted, still less should they be subsidised by the state through compulsory deductions from student grants. A particularly undesirable practice is to allow 'student leaders' an extra year, free from study, to act as full-time union organisers, as happens at many universities today. I cannot think of any sort of person whose presence in a university is less desirable. Such people do not merely acquire authority, often by dubious means, but they exert it ruthlessly, imposing their opinions on others. And, to quote Dr Johnson again, 'Sir, a university is a place where students come to learn, not to teach'.

The intolerance and denial of free speech we find on so many campuses has been made possible by the connivance or even active cooperation of radical dons, most of them recruited during the disastrous 1960s rapid expansion, and some of whom now hold senior positions. Such figures are not merely happy to see radical dominance of student opinion but wish to ensure it by a process of social engineering. Social engineering—

the attempt to change or Utopianise society by shovelling people around as though they were gravel or concrete—is reprehensible in any form. But it is particularly objectionable when used in the educational system, especially higher education, where the most rigorous standards of objectivity and truth-seeking should be upheld. Yet it is now being applied in a variety of ways, often by senior figures who ought to know better—indeed, who *do* know better, but have not the courage to stand out against such practices.

Let me give just two examples. At Oxford University, and to a lesser extent at Cambridge, Left-wing or 'progressive' dons have forced through a policy whereby what can only be called 'positive discrimination' is applied in favour of admitting entrants from state schools, or opposed to those from the private sector. A great deal of obfuscation, not to say downright lying, surrounds this policy, but there is no doubt that it is being applied, especially at Oxford, on an increasing scale. What it amounts to is this: candidates from private schools, who have scored high marks both in their general examinations and in their entrance papers to particular colleges, are denied admission simply because it is assumed that their parents' income is above an 'acceptable' level. This is a false assumption in many cases, since some parents choose to devote a greater part of their income to educating their children than others, and it is precisely such children who are likely to benefit most from university. However, these high performers are rejected in favour of lower performers from state schools. The object is to secure 'a more equitable social balance' in places like Oxford. It would be hard to think of a policy more intrinsically unjust, more calculated to damage the university's reputation or more contrary to the whole spirit of higher education, which is the pursuit of excellence. Some of the best schools in Britain no longer even bother to send their star pupils to apply to certain Oxford colleges, where the Left is most firmly entrenched and social engineering of this kind is most ruthlessly practised—they know it will be pointless. Such colleges, needless to say, are already falling in public esteem in consequence. Indeed the reputation of the entire university is suffering.

In the United States, and not least at universities of similar eminence, such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford, social engineering operates in a variety

of ways. It is now very difficult indeed to expel a student for organising or practising violence on behalf of causes approved by the liberal Left, or indeed for doing no academic work at all. But students can and are expelled summarily for offending the growing code of liberal censorship by using words disapproved of by organised pressure-groups—women, blacks and homosexuals, for example. At Smith College, once one of the best women's colleges in the world, forbidden activities include racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and what is termed 'lookism', which is said to 'oppress' ugly people by supposing 'a standard for beauty or attractiveness'. 'Sexism' is a particularly easy crime to commit. Not long ago, a visiting professor at Harvard Law School, once the best law school in the world, committed it simply by quoting Byron's famous line, 'And whispering I will ne'er consent—consented', judged to be offensive to women. Stanford is working on a speech code in which such words as 'girls' and 'ladies' are banned—instead of 'girls', the term 'pre-women' will have to be used. Indeed, some women's pressure groups now insist that even the term 'women' must be spelt 'womyn'.

The idea is the same as that at Oxford, a general levelling down. At the University of Connecticut students who offend against what is universally termed 'Political Correctness' or PC, can be expelled for 'derogatory names, inappropriately directed laughter, inconsiderate jokes and conspicuous exclusion of others from conversation'. One girl, or rather one pre-woman, was expelled for a joking remark that 'preppies, bimbos, men without chest hair and homos' should be 'shot on sight'. Some students now talk in whispers, rather like people in Ceaucescu's Rumania or Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Even the word 'individual' is banned in some places, as implying that some people are more gifted then others. The levelling-down process applies to works of art and literature as well as people. Yale University has been invaded and to a great extent taken over by 'deconstructionists', whose aim is to destroy comparative standards in achievement and systematically to discredit great literature or indeed meaningful literature of any kind—their slogan is 'meaning is fascist'. It recently turned down a $20 million endowment for a course in Western Civilisation, termed 'elitist'. A leading deconstructionist, Professor Houston Baker of the University of Pennsylvania, elected by his pressure group to the influential position of

President of the Modern Language Association of America, is notorious for saying that discriminating between writers like Pearl Buck and Virginia Woolf is 'no different from choosing between a hoagy and pizza', explaining 'I am one whose career is dedicated to the day when we have a disappearance of those standards'. Thus social engineering marches on.

But if universities should be de-politicised, or rather turned into apolitical institutions where discussion, rather than 'commitment', is usual, and if they should cease to be instruments of social engineering, what should be their purpose? I am going to put their aims in what you may consider rather simple and unsophisticated terms, and they are three-fold. They must teach the cleverest of our young people wisdom; they must teach them how to recognise and pursue true knowledge; and they must teach them goodness—in short, philosophy, science and ethics.

On the first point, we must once more align the teaching of philosophy with the acquisition of wisdom. At the moment, and for three generations past, philosophy has been little more than an academic parlour-game, fascinating to its initiates, useless to the educated elites and to society as a whole. If any one group has failed us in the 20th century, and so contributed to its miseries, it is the philosophers. The logical positivists, for instance, laid down that any proposition which could not be verified empirically meant nothing or was tautology. Most statements in entire areas of traditional philosophy—morals, religion, politics, social theory, aesthetics—were thus exposed as meaningless, and as a result large numbers of philosophers were reluctant to say anything. Linguistic analysts argued that philosophical problems were just messes we blundered into by misusing language. None of this was of the slightest use to ordinary people. The professional philosophers did not care. Bertrand Russell laid down that common sense was the metaphysics of savages (well, he would, wouldn't he?—possessing so little of it himself). The line was put out that the academic philosopher, with his trained, specialised methods of reasoning, can find out the truth about reality, whereas ordinary men dealt only with appearances. The philosophers thus laid claim to a modern form of gnosticism and separated themselves, as sacerdotal dictators, from the rest of mankind. The most typical and most revered of them, Ludwig

Wittgenstein, reminds one of a high priest from ancient Egypt dealing in hieroglyphics, which the secular population could not understand and, equally important, *were not meant to understand*. How different from Emmanual Kant, who wanted to help the world improve itself, who knew he wrote obscurely, and who desperately hoped others would come along to explain his thought-processes in ways ordinary people could grasp!

Thus philosophy in our time has become negative and destructive. A J Ayer almost boasted: 'philosophy . . . tends to show that we can't really know lots of things that we think we know'. In earlier times philosophers addressed the big issues. The Fall of Rome produced St Augustine's *The City of God*, a huge and brilliant work of philosophical reflection which provided a coherent answer to the questions educated people were asking. It was the most widely read work of the whole Middle Ages, to judge by the number of copies which have survived. What have the academic philosophers told us about our terrible century, almost as destructive as the 5th century? Almost nothing. It is significant that Karl Popper, one of the few philosophers who consistently dealt with the great issues of our time—especially totalitarianism and the use and misuse of science—despised academic philosophy, and regarded most of it as completely useless. 'I cannot say', he wrote, 'that I am proud of being called a philosopher'. To men like him—and there are not enough of them in the universities—the Wittgensteins were no better than the old schoolmen, arguing about how many angels could sit on the head of a needle.

A university, then, should teach the young how to seek wisdom, and how to discuss and debate, in an atmosphere of reason and forbearance, not only great contemporary issues but eternal verities too. Why are we here? Where are we going? What should we do with our lives? It should also develop in the young the critical faculties, so that they can sort the dross from the gold, and detach the great nonsense-mongers of our time—Teilhard de Chardin, for instance, his neologisms so reminiscent of Comte, Marshall McLuhan, Herbert Marcuse, Michel Foucault and so many others. It should likewise teach them how to approach thinkers who have something useful to say—I am thinking of men like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Noam Chomsky—but who tend to surround it with much pretentious

rubbish. A judicious habit of criticism, a willingness to delight in new ideas, combined with a sharp eye for the fraudulent, is one of the most valuable things the young can learn at university.

The second chief purpose of a university is how to recognise and pursue true knowledge. This means tackling the huge problem of how to comprehend science. Science grows ever more important in our lives. It is advancing at a prodigious rate—there are perhaps now 100,000 specialist scientific journals in the world publishing about 20,000 technical articles a week. But as it grows more important, so it is less and less understood by most of us. And so we speak of two cultures. But there are not, there cannot be, two cultures: there is only one. The walls of the Altamira Caves show artistic observation, and imagination, of a high order, but they were part of the current technology where primitive man learned to survive by hunting skilfully. The notion that 'science' is somehow separate from the rest of knowledge dates only from 1840, when Dr William Whewell, the Great Nomenclator, first used it in this specialist sense. The difficulty is that science, and scientists, are widely misunderstood, often as the result of non-scientists reading foolish novels. Thus there was the bishop who, in the late 1940s, pleaded with scientists to 'destroy the formula of the atomic bomb', as though it were a secret on a bit of paper which, once lost, might never be found again. Fiction has led many to suppose scientists belong to a special Gothic type, half-genius, half-mad—such as Baron Frankenstein, Doctor Moreau, Professor Moriarty, Doctor Strangelove. Even highly intelligent people often believe there is a special 'scientific type', somehow different from the rest of us. In fact, James D Watson's book, *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of DNA* (1968), perhaps the first full analysis of how a major scientific discovery came to be made, surely shows that scientists are exactly like other people: they come in all types.

Of course there are differences between, say, poetry and physics—thank God for that! The point was never made better than by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry* (1595) when he wrote:

> the poet yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image whereof the philosopher [ie the scientist] bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce nor possess the sight of the soul.

Exactly, and that is why we value poets so highly. But poet and scientist alike are both pursuing truth in their different ways, and making it available to mankind. No one has written more sensibly of science than that scientific statesman Sir Peter Medawar, who rightly rejects the humanist distinction between the scientist as a dealer in facts and the humanist scholar as a dealer in ideas. As Einstein once said, scientific discovery begins with an act of imagination—the scientist tells himself a story, and then examines the data to see if there is any truth in it. That is how Einstein developed first the Special, then the General, Theory of Relativity. The mark of a true scientist, of course, is that he looks just as carefully for data which disprove his story as for data which confirm it. That, as Karl Popper has pointed out, is the scholarly heroism—and it is a form of heroism—which distinguishes a true scientist like Einstein from a pseudo-scientist like Freud.

Medawar also attacks the myth that there is an essential difference between 'pure' and 'applied' science. There is no such thing: a true creative scientist is always thinking in terms of how his work can be used to benefit mankind. As Medawar says, this false distinction was made by non-scientific academics. So-called pure research, he points out, is no better, morally or in any other way, than applied research: it is undertaken because there is no more direct way of obtaining the desired end. He writes:

> It is our humanist brethren who have taught us to believe that, while pure science is a genteel and even creditable activity for scientists in universities, applied science, with all its horrid connotations of trade, has no place on the campus.

As Medawar says, it is all dangerous nonsense.

A true understanding of science is one thing the young should acquire at university. They should be taught to see science not as a remote, incomprehensible and threatening monster but as a necessary and natural part of life. And, just as they should learn to distinguish between the true scientist and the pseudo-scientist, so they must learn to approach with caution the pseudo-sciences, and the so-called 'social sciences' in particular. Weak, immature and partly-fraudulent sciences have flourished during the great university expansion, and have undoubtedly done much harm. Sociology is the most characteristic of them, and much is to be learned

from its rise and fall, and the disastrous manner in which it has been used—and, alas, is still being used—to plan and justify misguided efforts in social engineering. Just as a university must teach the young what knowledge can do, so it must caution them against what it cannot do. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre wisely pointed out that in the 1960s and 1970s many clever young people studied sociology hoping to find a view of the world which would reinforce their moral convictions and the hopes of producing a reformed society. These were the same kind of people who once put their hopes in theology. But the object of science is not to legitimise theories of social change. What we have to accept, MacIntyre added, is that the social sciences as they now exist can give us little more comprehension than the everyday understanding of social life which we possess anyway.

At the same time, the university should always stress the conviction that mankind can, and with wisdom will, progress. There are no short cuts—as the Marxists supposed—but no insuperable obstacles either. A degree of scepticism is a necessary ingredient to a university. But cynicism and nihilism have no place there. To quote Medawar again: 'To deride the hope of progress is the ultimate fatuity, the last word of poverty of spirit and meanness of mind'. The point had been made in a different way by Sir Francis Bacon, the first great writer on empirical science. In his *New Instrument* (1620) he writes that the greatest obstacle to human understanding is that men 'despair and think things impossible'. The 'human understanding', he adds,' is unquiet, it cannot stop or rest and still presses onwards but in vain'. Our spirits are obsessed by 'the obscurity of nature, the shortness of life, the deceitfulness of the senses, the infirmity of judgment, the difficulty of experiment, and the like'. But we must learn to face these difficulties and overcome them: 'I am now to speak', he continues, 'of hope'. And to hope (and believe) in progress is a natural emotion in *homo sapiens*, who derives perhaps his most noble satisfaction from the knowledge that he can do difficult things, once thought impossible. The great political philosopher Thomas Hobbes has this definition: 'Joy, arising from imagination of a man's power and ability, is that exultation of mind called glorying'. It is natural for man, he writes, to exhibit 'a

perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge'. Life, he adds, is a race. Felicity is the state of mind of those in front of it. The race has no finishing post—the point is to be in it:

> There is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind while we live here, because life itself is but motion and can never be without desire, or without fear, any more than without sense . . . there can be no contentment but in proceeding.

That, indeed, should be the spirit of a university: life as a race, life as endeavour to perform our best. That is one reason why all true universities are necessarily elitist and why social engineering to produce a levelling uniformity is so disastrously out of place in them.

However, in the relentless pursuit of knowledge, the universities cannot and must not leave out the moral dimension. Here we move into an area of great difficulty but it would be cowardly of me to evade it, even at the risk of forfeiting the sympathy of many of you. Popular suspicion of scientists, mainly as a result of two high-technology world wars and the development of nuclear weapons, is a comparatively new phenomenon. Scientists have traditionally been regarded by the public as great benefactors. But some scientists themselves have long been uneasy about the use made of their work. Some—not all. Galileo, for instance, by no means the altruistic hero he is sometimes portrayed to be, took a chilling view of scientific inquiry as an almost autonomous process which had nothing to do with human judgment or morals. 'The conclusions of natural science', he wrote, 'are true and necessary, and the will [*abitrio*] of man has nothing to do with them'. This, on the one hand, led him to risk offending the church in his cosmology; on the other, during the Thirty Years War, he was prepared to offer his services both to Spain and its enemy the Netherlands in trying to find a method of exact longitude-determination, for centuries the most eagerly sought naval secret. He was not interested in the morality of the conflict. I am not sure that Leonardo da Vinci's scientific morals were much higher, since he appears to have been willing to offer his services as a military engineer to the highest bidder, irrespective of the unrighteousness. On the other hand Francis Bacon, in his

New Atlantis (1626), assumed it was the duty of scientists to keep some secrets from the state, on moral grounds. Descartes, in his *Discours de la Méthode*, actually drew up an oath, on the analogy of the Hippocratic oath, which went: 'I will not engage on projects useful to some only by being harmful to others'. This is a very restrictive oath indeed: if sworn and followed, the whole of modern military technology would have been impossible.

The problem is difficult for the scientist, especially if he feels his nation is engaged in a just war. But such problems are precisely the kind that university students should be taught and encouraged to consider. A student may not leave the university with the answer. But he or she should leave it knowing how to examine and weigh the arguments on both, or all, sides, systematically, dispassionately and rationally. And the use and misuse of science constitutes only one of the many great issues which universities should train students to tackle. When I say universities must teach their students goodness, I mean precisely that. Knowledge cannot be divorced from ethics. Universities must operate within an ethical framework. My own strong belief is that the framework must spring from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the only system of human behaviour ever devised by man which makes consistent sense, which successfully promotes justice over the whole range of human endeavour, and which is capable of continuous improvement. If a secular system is devised, it is likely, if righteous, to vary only in detail from the Judaeo-Christian one. Of one thing I am absolutely certain, and I wish to stress it with all the emphasis at my command: the last thing a university should teach is moral relativism. To stress the relativity of ethical systems—to insist that any is valid in its particular place and time and circumstances—is to abandon ethics altogether. It makes it possible to justify apartheid or Pol Pot, Communism or Nazism, Ceaucescu or Saddam Hussein. Society as a whole has not only a right but a duty to propagate the ideal ethical system, the one which is mostly likely to produce a free, orderly, creative and fair society, the one which comes closest to reconciling the aspirations and imaginative longings of the individual with the welfare of the community. With the aim defined, there can be no doubt that the Judaeo-Christian system points

in the right direction and, as I say, any acceptable system of ethics is likely to be based on it. If a university student is thus schooled in ethics, he or she may not emerge a good man or a good woman. But they will know what goodness is, how to define it, and how to search for it.

There, then, is the answer to the question set in this talk: what are universities for? They are to teach wisdom, promote knowledge and define goodness. Of course they will give detailed training over the entire range of subjects. But they are not about changing society or overthrowing governments or establishing Utopia on earth. They are about producing individuals who benefit from this triple object. They may approach it in countless different ways but wisdom, knowledge and goodness must be the three goals on which they set their sights. Man is an imperfect creature; universities are imperfect institutions. Will the ideal university I have defined ever come into actual existence? Perhaps not, but we can strive for it. As Bacon says, we must 'speak of hope'. Mankind has had a disastrous 20th century, and the university has done little to alleviate its catastrophes—in some ways it has promoted them. Higher education is a sombre area, in a sombre age. But I hope, before I die, to see the university move at any rate some small distance in the direction which I have indicated. I have hope, and I will be content with modest progress. Let me end with these apposite words from John Henry, Cardinal Newman, recently beatified by the Pope:

> Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
> Lead thou me on;
> The night is dark, and I am far from home,
> Lead thou me on.
> Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
> The distant scene; one step enough for me.

And for universities to take the first, decisive step along this way would be, indeed, a small but useful victory for civilisation.

How the Media can Make the 21st Century Principled, Civilised and Safe

Presented at a New Zealand Business Roundtable/Parkroyal Hotel lunch, Wellington, 14 November 1995

Hundreds of years hence, historians will look at the 20th century and say: 'They wasted it'. After the unprecedented progress in making the world more civilised in the 19th century, the 20th century was an almost unqualified disaster. From 1914 to the end of the 1980s, the world was either at war, or in uneasy peace, or living under the shadow of immense totalitarian dictatorships. Material progress was rapid; moral progress was non-existent or, rather, in many ways we went backwards into the horrors of the distant past. Indeed, we created new horrors never before contemplated by man. Auschwitz, the Gulag, the Great Famine and the Great Purge, the Cultural Revolution, Hiroshima, the plague of AIDS, electronic pornography, 100 million abortions—these unprecedented scourges were inventions of 20th century man.

However, the worst seems to be over. The century is ending, not exactly in peace—far from it—but with the curse of Communism, after 75 years of human and material destruction, largely exorcised, and with a return to Judaeo-Christian values. In most of the world we have freed ourselves from the totalitarian past, learned some of the lessons, and are now anxious to pursue political and economic freedom in peace. We are determined to do everything in our power to make the 21st century a return to the progressive standards of the 19th—and in particular to pursue three overriding aims. First, to spread the practice of democracy and, even more important, the rule of law, to every corner of the globe. Secondly, to devise means, while steadily increasing the wealth of the advanced part of the world, to spread this prosperity everywhere and encourage all the peoples to join the lighted circle of affluence. Thirdly, to set about creating international institutions and practices which will bind the world together

peacefully, eliminate all barriers to trade, and reduce the risks not just of general war but of regional and internal conflicts.

These are important and difficult goals and we are going to have to call upon all the influential sources and institutions in the world to play their part in achieving them. And first and foremost we must ask the media to commit themselves to these goals. Well, that is the easy bit. Of course the media will say they will help. They are always against sin. They are approximately in favour of progress. I have never yet met a newspaper editor or a TV tycoon who had a word to say in favour of evil. They are against it. But it is one thing to pledge yourself to promote the good things in life: quite another to make a positive contribution to their attainment, in a sinful world dominated by intense commercial competition, circulation battles and ratings wars, where the law of survival usually takes precedence over the law of God and even of man.

So let us not talk about vague promises, which may be empty, but about specific and practical pledges, to be taken and adhered to, by all those who work in the media. And before I come to particular pledges to be taken by different categories of media people, let me outline a more general undertaking, which all should feel it their duty to make. And the pledge is this:

> Working in the media involves grave responsibilities and privileges. It sometimes gives us direct power to help shape or even determine events. It always gives us influence over the minds and tastes of countless men and women, adolescents and even children. We undertake to use this power, and direct this influence, in a dutiful and conscientious manner, to promote the comfort, safety, prosperity and happiness of our fellow human beings, to deter and frustrate evil-doers of all kinds, to bring to light injustices and remove them, to establish harmony among all races, classes and peoples, and to help the nations and those who compose them to live in harmony with each other.

Now in addition to this general pledge, which all should take, I want to outline what we have a right to expect from particular categories of media workers. The first comprises proprietors and management, those in overall

charge and who take the commercial decisions. Media tycoons are often held up to hatred and contempt by not always well-informed or objective critics. I have known many, from different countries, ranging from famous Canadian media bosses, like Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Thomson and Conrad Black, to important US owners, like Mrs Kay Graham and Cy Newhouse, to Australians like Rupert Murdoch and British press barons like Lord Hartwell and Lord Rothermere. And I must say I have yet to meet a real rascal among them. Most of them intended, or intend, to do the right thing, to uphold virtue and put down vice, and to work for objects that the vast majority of us agree with. But they all had or have faults of excessive ambition or over-anxiety to please shareholders, or insufficient understanding of moral issues at stake, or sometimes of negligence. They mean well, as a rule, indeed almost always; but they do not always do well, and sometimes misdemeanours or even crimes are committed in their names. More often, splendid opportunities to promote the welfare and moral improvement of their fellow men and women are missed.

It is in the light of this experience that I set down this undertaking for media owners, major shareholders, chairmen and senior managers:

> I recognise that my position gives me special responsibilities for the conduct of the newspapers, magazines, broadcasting outlets and other businesses with access to the public which are under my direction or control. I undertake to do three things in particular. One, to ensure that all those men and women I appoint to senior posts in my organisation, whether as editors, producers or executives, are persons with an adequate moral upbringing, who have a keen sense of right and wrong, and an ardent desire to do justice. I will not tolerate, in my organisation, any senior officeholder whom I discover to be morally defective.
>
> Secondly, while endeavouring to the best of my ability to promote the commercial fortunes of my organisation, so that the quality of the products may be maintained and improved, shareholders adequately rewarded and decent wages paid to employees, I pledge myself also not

to publish or broadcast material which I know to be morally subversive or an insult to human dignity or calculated to promote crime and vice.

Thirdly [and this is an important undertaking often neglected even when others are honoured] I pledge myself so to supervise and control my organisation, however big it may be, that breaches of this second undertaking do not occur or, if they do, are soon detected. I will exercise oversight and vigilance in all things, and those who edit my newspapers and direct my programmes will be under strict orders to carry out my pledges.

Next, let us turn to those senior employees—the editors and their deputies, the programme controllers and the like, who are directly in charge of what the public reads, hears and sees. These always are, and must be, the key people. Without their endorsement and active support—indeed without their enthusiasm—no moral programme for the media is likely to succeed. There are four specific pledges I would like editors and TV and radio producers (and the like) to make:

First, I will make truthfulness the guiding principle and the context of everything I cause to be published, in print or on the airwaves. Truth will come before professional or commercial advantage, before party or ideological preference, and before personal friendship or alliance. It does not have to be the whole truth, for I must always respect the legitimate privacy of individuals. But it must be *nothing but the truth.*

Secondly, while being objective as to the facts, and allowing them to speak for themselves, I must have a strong commitment to justice, and a justice which is above nation or party, creed or class, special interest or personal preference.

Thirdly, I will in general ensure that what I publish and broadcast has a tendency to promote moral principles, encourage lawful and responsible behaviour, and to discourage wrong-doing and corruption. I will not permit material to be disseminated which I believe will deprave, especially the young and innocent, and I will have a particular care for those with tender and susceptible minds.

> Fourthly, the reporters, writers, broadcasters and specialists I appoint will be men and women who make clear distinctions between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil, and who have a reliable commitment to accuracy, justice and right conduct.

Then we come to the journalists and broadcasters themselves. I would like to see all of them subscribe to, and consider themselves bound by, codes of behaviour which are not only negative—that is, listing practices which must be avoided—but positive, that is, enjoining virtues. It is a fact, and to my mind a distressing fact, that many young men and women today come to journalism, as they come to other professions and trades, with virtually no moral training at all. They know in effect nothing of religion or ethics and cannot even list the Ten Commandments. Where the family and the churches and the schools have failed, newspapers and broadcasting networks must endeavour to meet the deficiency. Some newspapers and magazines already possess statements of values and codes of ethics which journalists employed by them are expected to abide by. These cover such subjects as declarations of assets and ownership and trading in securities; entertaining by firms and PR people and acceptances of gifts; junkets and freebies; relationships with sources; protection of trade secrets and proprietary information; surreptitious entry and impersonation; payments to sources and purchasing of information; and a list of do's and don'ts governing the journalist's obligation to his or her newspaper and the newspaper's to him or her.

These mainly negative codes of ethics are now common. But they are by no means universal. Even in the United States, where ethical codes have been fashionable in the media for many years, important newspapers and magazines still go without them, and they are by no means general in TV and radio. Moreover, many of these codes are vague or feeble or out-of-date. I would like to see a first-class and up-to-date standard code of ethics drawn up by professional organisations, circulated and generally adopted, with each paper or network adding clauses to suit its special requirements. And I would like to see these codes spread worldwide. Outside the United States they are the exception rather than the rule.

Those that do exist, in Europe and Asia for instance, are rarely stringent enough. Let us take financial journalism, where codes need to be particularly strict. I have before me an excellent 'Statement of Values and Code of Ethics' drawn up by the US magazine *Business Week*. Yet in countries such as Britain, the practices observed by business sections of newspapers, or by specialist business publications—whether they have formal ethics codes or not—fall well below what is demanded by this *Business Week* code. I am not saying British publications are more corrupt than their US counterparts. I merely observe that the formal precautions taken against corruption are less demanding. My impression is that ethics codes, even where they are set down in print, could be strengthened all over the world.

That, moreover, covers only the negative side—what journalists must avoid. But there is a positive side, too, and in many ways it is by far the more important, especially if the media are to make a contribution to ensuring that the 21st century is principled. I would like to see journalists enjoined to recognise in principle, and take note of in practice, the fact that the media have moral functions. They are not simply a system for gathering news and information and disseminating it. They must do that, of course, and they must do it up to the highest professional standards—and every single journalist has positive duties in this regard. But they must do much more. They have a duty to use their power and influence and their opportunities to improve the world as they find it: to pursue justice, to fight oppression and wrong-doing, to help those in distress and need, and not least to educate—especially in ways which save lives and protect the innocent and ignorant. A good journalist should always be on the lookout to use his or her professional skills to improve the human condition, not only in his or her own country but everywhere. People often smile at Tom Paine's remarks in *The Rights of Man* (1791,1792), 'My country is the world, and my religion is to do good'. And certainly I prefer journalists to be good, honest, old-fashioned patriots, and to have more specific religions than mere internationalism. But for a journalist, Tom Paine's is not a bad adage all the same. A journalist should have a global outlook, should see the interests of our planet as a whole, and he or she ought to be a do-gooder, that is, one committed to make the most of chances to help,

uplift, inspire, improve, encourage, praise and fortify those striving to make our world better. In all decent journalists, those who regard their work as more than a trade, as a calling, there ought to be an element of the boy scout or the girl guide, or, if you like, the visionary, the evangelist and the apostle. And some of these yearnings can be set down in positive codes of conduct and ethical aspiration. That is something ultimately the journalists can only do for themselves—but proprietors and especially editors can help in a variety of ways. The aim should be to make the journalist—who after all may dispose of great power—like the politician, to become a moral human being beyond the call of strict professional duty. That is a high aim but it is one that is surely attainable.

I have spoken so far of ways in which the media can become more principled, and so help the world of the 21st century to become more principled too. What exactly do I mean by saying help the world to become more principled? What I mean is this. All the nations of the world, and the world as an international entity—insofar as such a thing can exist—ought to subscribe to and practise agreed principles of public utility. All nations should be republics in the strict sense, that is, states pursuing the *res publica*, the public interest—the wellbeing of the citizens as a whole. That means, in the first instance, that every nation should be a society under the rule of law—where the law is clearly set out, generally agreed and periodically reformed and updated, where all citizens have reasonable access to it, where all are equal before it, and where it is fairly and impartially and equally dispensed. And such societies should be democratic—that is, with power constitutionally invested in adult citizens so that they can periodically choose their governments and remove them. Societies based on principle can be many other things in addition, of course, but these are the two most important, the fundamental things without which all other merits are nugatory. The virtues of such principled societies, moreover, can clearly be extended internationally. It is possible to produce, abide by, and, in the case of transgressions, enforce codes of international law. Some aspects of these international codes have been made to work, some have not yet worked, but in theory at least it is possible to place the entire world under the rule of law—and that is an

object we must work towards. Again, if the law is to be effectively enforced, it must be backed by consent, and this means that international institutions and law enforcement agencies must be answerable to bodies which in one way or another represent the global will—are world-democratic. We are not there yet, by a long chalk, but perhaps we are on our way—we certainly ought to be on our way—and the 21st century ought to witness striking progress in that direction.

In all these matters—in the installation of the rule of law and working democracy in all the world's separate nations, and in the development of international codes which have general, democratic backing and control on a world scale—the media can and ought to play a central part: informing, encouraging, applauding, criticising, identifying particular hurdles to be overcome or weaknesses to be eliminated. All have a part to play in this effort: proprietors and chief executives and chairmen, editors and producers particularly, and journalists of all conditions. Those who work in the media should accept, as a general principle, the notion of *improvement* and say to themselves: 'Yes, it is our function to record and inform the world, but it is also our duty to seek to improve it'. There we have the first guidelines.

Now let us turn to the next topic—the task of the media to try to make the world more civilised. Journalists should always work towards the good society. Now, it takes all kinds of things to create a good society. The rule of law and a working democracy are the fundamentals to establish—they are, as it were, the bread-and-butter of a good society. With them alone a good society can live. But for it to blossom, to flourish, to become creative and rich, it requires much more. It needs a feast of civilised things. The media cannot of themselves supply these things. What they can do, however, is to hope to create the structures, the environment, the atmosphere in which people, individually and collectively, can supply these things themselves. They can do so in three specific ways.

First, the media are educative. In some ways, in the speed and thoroughness with which they can disseminate knowledge to reach the largest number of people, they are the most effective educative instrument of all. Proprietors and educators must be particularly mindful of this

function. A newspaper is a school of knowledge, employing people who educate themselves all the time and seek to pass on that education to readers. Radio and TV broadcasting is a still more comprehensive educational instrument because it can reach the illiterate too. The media inform and entertain and, in doing so responsibly, they educate. In every issue of every paper there ought to be, quite consciously and clearly, an educational element. An editor should be able to point to his or her newspaper and say: '*There*, *there* and *there* are items and articles and visual aids which will help my readers to become more enlightened and better informed—and better and more useful persons in consequence'. A programme controller should be able to look at a single day's output and say: '*There*, *there* and *there* we have been able to supply something which the viewers did not learn at school, we have given them something new, and worthwhile, and interesting, and informative, enlarged their minds and raised their sensibilities'. Those who conduct a TV network, for instance, in considering and finalising the programmes for a season, ought to ask themselves: are there sufficient elements in this to enable us to say honestly that watching a reasonable selection of our programmes will make viewers more civilised? Equally, an editor, discussing the paper's policies and performance with his staff, ought to ask: 'What are we doing, regularly and systematically, to raise our readers' cultural sights, to satisfy existing cultural appetites and arouse new ones?'

Now it goes without saying that the media do not in practice work like this. The war for ratings and readings will not allow it—or so it is said. H L Mencken spoke for many journalists, that is, critics, when he declared: 'No newspaper ever did itself harm by underestimating the intelligence of its readers'. Most newspapers and virtually all TV networks accept the lowest common denominator as their benchmark and seldom aspire above it. There is a general feeling in the western world that educational standards have fallen in the past half-century, and that standards observed by the media have fallen accordingly. Many so-called quality newspapers are not much better today then the populars and tabloids of a generation ago, and many tabloids themselves have become systematic purveyors of rubbish. Sex and violence are the staple of the media everywhere. The same

declension has not yet overtaken the booming societies of East Asia and the Pacific, but there are hints of it even there. There seems to be a Gresham's Law operating in the media—fierce competition means that bad programmes drive out the good, sensational and irresponsible newspapers pinch the circulations of those who try for higher standards. Proprietors and editors alike shrug their shoulders and say that such a declension is inevitable. They blame the educators and the politicians for turning out such semi-literate adults from the state systems.

I answer that such an attitude is defeatism and abdication. It is not true that viewers and readers want sex, crime and violence as their staples. Surveys made all over the world indicate, rather, that the public share the view of the critics—there is too much sex and violence on TV and in newspapers. The fact that the public continue to buy newspapers which supply these things, and watch programmes and stick to networks where sex and violence are prominent, is neither here nor there. The public expect to be led. They are waiting for a lead. The popular instinct is to yearn for the fleshpots. But it will always follow a determined Moses to the Promised Land. For an editor or a programme controller to submit to lowest-common-denominator indicators is a surrender, a cop-out, a wilful dereliction of duty. It is weak and contemptible. An editor should have a cultural mission. He or she ought to regard it as part of the job to leave the readers better educated and more civilised than he or she found them, to appeal to their best instincts—which undoubtedly exist—to their yearning to improve themselves, to learn and to absorb and to appreciate. The editor should be an evangelist of civilisation. Equally, newspaper proprietors and those who control broadcasting networks should take steps to ensure that editors and programme makers can and do accept this mission. They should facilitate the transformation of their outlets from mere sources of news and entertainment into positive educational and cultural instruments. That is not hot air. It is not an impossible ideal. Despite the failings of our educational systems, perhaps because of them, there is a general desire among the public to better themselves, to improve their cultural knowledge and aspirations, to raise their sights, both for themselves and for their children. Proprietors and editors and programme makers

should take advantage of it. For the media to assist in making the 21st century a more civilised place is not only morally sound, it is commercially sound too.

Now let me turn to my last main point—how can the media help the world of the 21st century to become a safer place too? Now this is a broader question than might at first appear. Safety covers a multitude of risks and threats. There is safety at home and in the streets and in the workplace—safety from crime, accident, disease. The western media, in my opinion, do not play a prominent enough role in the prevention and detection of crime, especially violent crime. They are less vigilant than they were in the 19th century to ensure that peaceful citizens can walk the streets at night and can be secure in their homes. Burglary and mugging have increased enormously in the past half-century, especially in big cities all over the world. These are crimes which spread fear among every element in the population and therefore ought to be of particular interest to the media, who claim to speak to and represent all. How often, I wonder, do editors and proprietors and those who control and direct TV networks sit down together and say: 'What positive steps can we take to make our city or country freer from serious and violent crime? What *have* we done about it—what *should* we be doing about it?' This is precisely the kind of moral and practical public service the media can render, and rarely do.

Then again, the media have in the past concerned themselves with safety. In the 19th century in both New York and London, for instance, the media were in the vanguard of those forces which brought about better water supplies, better drainage and fire services, purer milk supplies and more wholesome bread. The modern media often disdain such mundane roles, or rather leave it to local newspapers and radio and TV stations. The powerful national voices are not uplifted to ensure that ordinary citizens are better provided for with the necessities of life. Instead, the media often lend themselves to the well-orchestrated clamour of professional pressure groups and lobbies like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and the Club of Rome—groups which are permeated by dogmatic ideologies and are none too scrupulous in their use of statistics. There is a distinction between a safe world and a risk-free world—the

latter being a dangerously Utopian concept, involving massive quantities of legislation and regulation, the beneficiaries of which, in the end, are merely the lawyers. We have to live in a world of risk in order to live in a better world later, and the media must be constantly aware of the need to keep the world free for risk-taking, daring and enterprise. At the same time, we can make the world safer, slowly but surely, by practising the ancient skills of inquisitive and campaigning journalism, demanding that states and municipalities be more efficient, individual businesses more careful and responsible, and that all institutions do their duty. This is another case of routine, bread-and-butter journalism that we see too little of nowadays—let us have more of it, to get the 21st century off to a safer start.

But there are also the wider, geopolitical aspects of safety. What I think the events of our own time, especially the story of the Cold War and its triumphant ending, have shown, is that collective security pays. We did not have it in the early years of the century, and the dreadful catastrophe of the First World War was the outcome. We failed to establish it through the League of Nations, and the Second World War inevitably followed. Then we did learn the lesson—we built NATO, we created and stuck to an efficient collective security system for the West, and as a result the Soviet empire eventually disintegrated and the Cold War was won.

There are many global messages which enlightened media should preach—the value and necessity of world free trade, for instance—but none is more important than collective security. It is something which proprietors and media chairmen must always have in the forefront of their minds when they set the global parameters for their newspapers, magazines or networks. It is something which editors and producers have to watch perpetually as they cover the news and shape their comments on it. It is something which journalists, however humble, should know about and think about. The world of weapons technology expands all the time. The power to destroy continues to increase. More and more nations can reach beyond their frontiers with weapons of terror. We must strive, as I have already shown, to make the world more subject to the rule of law, and more democratic. Thus we may eventually eliminate the kind of evil absolutists whom we have seen in our own dreadful century. But there are

still many such men around, and more to come, and they are likely to exercise power well into the 21st century. So to make that century a safer time, the principles of collective security must be upheld, and the media must hammer them home, week after week, and year after year. The price of global safety is eternal vigilance and the media are our prime invigilators, sleepless and hawkeyed.

So here are some of the ways in which I believe the media can safeguard and embellish the 21st century. I have been preaching, you will say, the doctrines of perfectionism, and most of my precepts will go completely unheeded. Maybe so. A preacher must aim high and not expect his congregation to follow him in all things. But if only one or two of the points I have made today are taken up, if only one or two of the thoughts I have put to you percolate through to a wider audience and cause those who hold power in the media to ponder their responsibilities, then I am content. I do not believe in Utopias. I do not believe in revolutions. I put my trust in the old Victorian doctrine of *improvement*, of small but steady changes for the better which, over a period of time, bring immense and welcome transformation. So let us set about getting the media to make our world more principled, civilised and safe, by gradually raising our standards and notching up our sights. Then at least we will have done our duty and can look the coming century squarely in the face. There are fine times ahead, I am sure, but we in the media can make them better.

Left and Right in Politics Today

Presented at a New Zealand Business Roundtable/Sheraton Hotel lunch, Auckland, 15 November 1995

We are entering a period of political confusion in which the old signposts and nomenclature of political categories are misleading. Perhaps we should try to draw up a new taxonomy of politics. What is a Communist these days? For that matter, what is a socialist? Why do some call themselves democratic socialists and others social democrats—and why is the difference so important? What is a liberal now? And why do some conservatives, Thatcherites for example, call themselves radicals, and some socialists, Britain's Tony Blair for instance, call themselves radicals also? Lacking the restraints of a Trade Description Act, politicians lurk behind or invent labels which they think will attract them votes rather than describe their real views, which in any case may be vague or non-existent. I am reminded of Lord Randolph Churchill, Winston's father, and founder of Tory Democracy. Asked what Tory Democracy stood for, he replied, in a moment of frankness: 'Oh—opportunism, mostly'.

I think what matters most in politics is not so much specific political opinions as attitudes, states of mind. There is, on the one hand, the resentment of power and ordained authority—often by people who dispose of quite a lot of power of their own. Such rebels are known in the French tradition as *frondeurs*, from the group of irresponsible aristocrats who tried to seize power during the minority of Louis XIV. In the English tradition, where they have a somewhat more responsible reputation, they were called Whigs, for reasons so obscure and involved, requiring a discursion into the history of the west of Ireland, that we won't go into them. Dr Johnson, who hated Whigs—he was a church-and-king Tory—gave it as his opinion that: 'The first Whig was the Devil, Sir'. I see what he meant. Satan led a rebellion of powerful angels against God's supreme authority, which they wished to share, rather as, in 1688, the heads of the Russells, the Cavendishes and other powerful and grand families led the revolt against

James II. Their gamble came off, and they replaced James with a parliamentary monarchy, first William of Orange and then in due course George I of Hanover, and so inaugurated a long period of Whig supremacy, during which England became a constitutional monarchy. The Devil, on the other hand, lost his rebellion—and Johnson's argument was that, having been ousted from Heaven, he tried his hand again on earth by corrupting those powerful families and founding the Whig tradition. Personally, I nominate John of Gaunt as the first Whig, using the power and riches of the Duchy of Lancashire to try to mitigate the attempts of Richard II to create an absolute monarchy. His great speech on England in Shakespeare's play *Richard II* might be seen as a declaration of Whig reformist principles against the usurpations of centralised power and bureaucracy.

There is, then, the Whiggish resentment of supreme, divine-right authority and its tendency to align itself with popular resentments of a more earthly nature, in order to obtain power. In due course Whiggism begat liberalism—I am talking about the English or British tradition of course—and in due course again liberalism begat the Labour Party and British forms of socialism. What all these movements had in common was an optimistic attitude, a belief that society could be changed for the better, that human nature could be improved and that serious, systematic and bold reforms would make the country a happier place.

Against this there is the pessimistic attitude, which is at the root of most forms of conservatism. A conservative, or pessimist, distrusts human nature, believes it to be sinful—believes in the notion of Original Sin, in fact, which leaves man a fundamentally flawed creature—and therefore doubts that it can be radically improved in this world. Hence all systematic schemes of human improvement or betterment are impractical and may be dangerous and lead to the ruin of a state and great personal unhappiness among its inhabitants. What is required, rather, is a strong central authority, which curbs the unruly passions of sinful men and women, and, far from engaging in Utopian schemes of betterment, simply contents itself with ensuring the security of their lives and property. This pessimistic or Tory attitude is displayed, with simplicity and severity, in Thomas Hobbes' great political tract, *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes was a premature child, born in the year of

the Armada, 1588, his mother being so scared by rumours of the Spaniards coming that she was delivered of him after only six months in the womb. He grew up nervous and apprehensive, and during the 1640s saw his worst fears confirmed when a weak central power began by appeasing the radicals and Utopians and in due course found itself engaged in a civil war, which it lost. Hobbes' great book was an attempt to learn and teach the lessons of the disastrous and avoidable English Civil War by arguing the case for authority.

This powerful conservative theme was taken up in due course by Edmund Burke, who argued that an attachment to the existing order, as opposed to Utopian innovation, recognised the collective wisdom of past generations, and he presented the body politic, or the constitution, as the work of the historical process, which had an organic growth of its own. To overthrow this metaphysical creation, which had a peculiar magic only time could convey, was to invite disaster. And of course disaster arrived in the shape of the French Revolutionary Terror, from which emerged the Bonapartist military dictatorship. The United States, by contrast, largely escaped the ravages of the Napoleonic Wars, and benefited accordingly, becoming for the first time during this period a major commercial power.

We come now to a point of great importance, which I think is insufficiently appreciated even now. The American Revolution of the 1770s, leading to the creation of the first constitutional republic, the United States, in the 1780s, is often conflated with the French Revolution of 1789 as being part of the same process, and as similar events. A few years ago, the French celebrated the 200th anniversary of their revolution, just as the Americans had in the 1970s celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, as marking the beginning of enlightened, progressive modernity, something to be welcomed, admired and imitated. In fact these two revolutions were very different things, and their consequences were very different. It is important to keep them separate. One of the few modern statesmen to perceive this was Margaret Thatcher who, invited to Paris in 1989—along with countless other world leaders—to rejoice in the 200th anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille, had the temerity to say to her host, President Mitterand:

> I don't know what we are supposed to be celebrating. Revolutions are usually dreadful things, which kill countless innocent people, and are usually quite unnecessary, and the French Revolution was one of the worst.

Well said—though no one took much notice at the time. And it was left to the great Irish historian, Conor Cruise O'Brien, to make the point rather more weightily in his fine book on Edmund Burke, *The Great Melody* (1992). Taking up Burke's theme, O'Brien argues that the French Revolution was, at it were, the beginning of modern evil, the exemplar and precursor of the totalitarian dictatorships which devastated the world in the 20th century, and which turned it from an age of hope into an age of despair.

I believe Burke and O'Brien were right and that, from 1789 onwards, the modern world was hijacked by the Utopians of the Left and that it is only now, at the end of the disastrous 20th century, that we have become fully cognisant of the dangers of the Utopian view of life and the disasters which it inevitably brings in its train. I now see the history of the last two centuries as follows. It was towards the end of the 18th century—coinciding with the beginning of the demographic revolution in the West, when populations in Europe and North America began to increase with dramatic speed—that the people first made their decisive appearance on the stage of government. Until then, societies all over the world had always been governed by narrow elites of one kind or another. Now, for the first time, the growth in living standards and the spread of literacy made other forms of government possible. But the world took two different routes. In the 1770s in America, the Founding Fathers, Washington, Jefferson, Madison and company, thanks in part to their own political genius, and in part to the good sense of those they represented, set up a new form of republican government, and endowed it with a constitution which has lasted more than two centuries. They did not reject idealism—on the contrary, they embodied a great deal of it in their constitution, which was fundamentally democratic. But they did not reject the past either, including in their form of government and legislature all that they believed was best from the old, unwritten English constitution. They kept the English Common

Law and statutory law and many other aspects of English public life. The new nation was, and is, far from perfect, but it was consciously a judicious blend of past and future, and thus capable of gradual, organic, self-correction and self-renewal. It succeeded because it put the good before the best, a reasonable, working republic before Utopia—and it thus brought into being the richest, most powerful and most democratic society the world has ever seen.

By contrast, the French Revolutionaries made a complete break with the past and tried to build an ideal state, peopled by what Rousseau had called the New Man. It was based on the assumption that human nature was not just reformable but perfectible. Instead of following the example of the United States, and building upon the political and economic reforms which were already taking place in various European countries, including France itself, the revolutionaries in Paris chose to demolish the existing royalist state completely. They chose extremism, and the inevitable consequence was intolerance and terror. And from terror sprang absolutism, with all its appendages, secret police, massed political prisoners, fierce censorship, propaganda and brain-washing and, above all, state violence. A rudimentary form of modern totalitarianism was born, and there are very few of the totalitarian evils of the 20th century which did not have their distant precursors in revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

Worse still: the full magnitude of the evil which the French Revolution brought into the world was not generally recognised by contemporary progressives. Burke, of course, understood it well, raising his voice in warning about the future. But other great spirits, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in the United States, and Charles James Fox in England, went some way to bless and so sanctify it. In due course, successive generations of political radicals and ideologues sang its praises, and some of them, such as Marx and Lenin, argued that the French Revolution was history's prime example on which mankind should build to create the ideal future for itself.

Moreover, the absolutist French Republic which emerged from the Terror also embodied a new spirit of aggressive nationalism. Behind a mask of egalitarian missionary zeal, it unleashed on Europe 20 years of conquest, which killed millions, involved the looting of the Continent's

art treasures and destroyed ancient societies and institutions, some of great value. And Bonaparte's wars themselves provoked violent nationalist reactions among the nations he sought to subdue. The reaction was strongest in Germany, Russia and Spain, whence it spread to Latin America, but it fostered everywhere a dangerous new spirit of irredentism and self-determination, based on a combination of race, language, ethnicity, religion and culture. In time the smaller peoples, especially the components of the Austrian, Russian and Turkish empires, were imbued with this inflammatory spirit, and it was precisely the nationalist determination to acquire self-expression, whatever the cost, which detonated the First World War, the chief engine of catastrophe in the modern age.

From this dreadful conflict two monstrous evils emerged. The first was the elimination of all political arrangements, such as the old-style dynastic empires, that were *not* based on assertive nationalism, thus beginning the long process which dismantled imperial systems everywhere—including the liberal and progressive British and French empires—and put in their place the tragic collection of inchoate nation-societies which we have come to call the Third World. The second was the creation of the first totalitarian terror-state, in Russia, followed soon by imitators and rivals in Italy, Japan, Germany and, eventually, China. Hence the despairing record of the 20th century: four years of the First World War, 1914–1918; two decades of instability and violence, 1918–1939; six years of the Second World War, 1939–1945; and then nearly half a century of Cold War, 1945–1990. The peoples of the world were the victims of this tragedy rather than its authors. Whether they lived in constitutional democracies, which functioned after a fashion, or fascist corporate states, or national-socialist republics, or Soviet or People's Republics, they bore nominal responsibility only; in fact the decisions were taken by narrow elites, and ideologues and *exaltés* and autocrats, just as in the age of Revolutionary France.

We now have to reconstruct the world on safer, more sensible and, above all, more democratic lines. The new millenium must be a truly democratic one, the first in human history, and we must use its coming as an opportunity to clear our minds, sharpen our wits and strengthen our determination to get things right for the next thousand years. One thing

I hope will happen, just as a preliminary, is the disuse or even disappearance of the terms 'Left' and 'Right' in politics. Looking back on their history, I think they have done little but mischief. Both have become magnets of weird and destructive loyalties, especially the term 'Left'. Both have also become terms of bitter abuse, labels to be pinned on people whose views we deplore. Both words, as also ones like 'liberal' and 'progressive', have been subject to continual osmosis, so that their real meaning is impossible to pin down.

It is said that the terms 'Left' and 'Right' originate in France. When the Estates General assembled in 1789, the nobility, the First Estate, sat on the right of the King's chair, and the commons, or Third Estate, sat on his left. When special buildings were created for legislatures, the pattern tended to be repeated, with the more radical elements sitting on the left of the president or speaker's chair. It is argued that Left-Right positioning tends to be encouraged by the creation of parliamentary buildings in hemicycle shape, as is usual though not universal in Europe and the Americas. This may be so. In England, where parliament originally met in St Stephen's Chapel at Westminster, and continued to do so until it was burned down in the 1830s, the shape was rectangular, and MPs sat on either side of the Speaker's chair in the collegiate benches. There was an early tendency for spokesmen for the crown to sit on the front bench immediately on the Speaker's right, and this was well established by the 16th century. The bench gradually became known as the Treasury Bench after the Treasury was placed in commission in 1714 and one of the Lords of the Treasury, or commissioners, always sat there—eventually of course it was the place of the first Lord of the Treasury, which is the official name of the Prime Minister (or was until recently). Consequently, the most persistent opposition members tended to sit on the opposite side. But when, towards the end of the 18th century, a government went out of office and its opponents replaced it, they and their followers simply changed places, moving to the other side of the House, so 'Left' and 'Right', meaning radical and conservative, certainly did not spring in England from the physical properties of the Commons chamber, and indeed were hardly used at all before the first Labour MPs came into the Commons in 1906.

They were a Continental import, particularly from use among the Continental Social Democrats.

Conversely, it is strange that the United States, which does have hemicircular chambers, has never used Left-Right terms in politics, at any rate until quite recently. The history of political parties in the United States is very peculiar and does not easily admit of Left-Right categories. There was a time indeed when the terms 'Democrat' and 'Republican' were interchangeable and one group was called the Democratic-Republican Party. If we take the year 1860, the beginning of the American Civil War, as the key year in the evolution of the modern US political system, it would be hard to categorise the Democrats as on the Left, since they embodied the traditional and slave-owning society of the South, whereas the northern Republicans were backed by virtually all of what we would now call 'progressive' elements. By the turn of the 20th century, however, the Republicans had begun to be identified with business, and even Big Business, and the polarisation was underlined by the great Democratic reforming administrations of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Even so, the fact that the Solid South continued, though ultra-conservative, to vote Democrat, impeded any Left-Right division in United States politics until the 1980s and it is only since the Solid South has dissolved, and now tends to vote predominantly Republican, that it has been possible to equate Republicans with the Right and Democrats with the Left, in Continental fashion.

Even so, the distinction is not clear and absolute. Newt Gingrich, who as a Republican has led a revolution in Congress, and captured control of it from the Democrats, strikes me as a radical, a populist and a reformer rather than a Right-winger. He is certainly not a conservative in any sense, except perhaps in the cultural sense. The little book he has published is a tabulated programme of radical change. Again, the fact that the Republicans were in all probability going to adopt Colin Powell as their candidate for President next year until his wife, terrified by the Rabin assassination, persuaded him not to run, will suggest to many that present-day Republicans belong more clearly to the democratic, egalitarian and libertarian Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln, than the Republican Party of Big Business.

There are similar shifts and confusions everywhere in the world today. In eastern Europe, former Communists are often re-emerging as exponents of conservatism and upholders of the status quo. Those who want to bring back the *ancien régime* as it existed before Communism are treated as dangerous radicals. In China, the controlling Communist Party, while embracing capitalism in various forms, is also highly conservative in other respects. In most of Europe and further afield, socialist parties have formally renounced old-style socialism in the form of nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. This repudiation has been particularly marked in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and it is proceeding apace in Britain, where the Labour leader, Tony Blair, is in the process of expunging any vestige of state socialism from his party's programme. Indeed, to many people he now appears more conservative than the vacillating and rubbery John Major, the official leader of the Tories. So there is another Left-Right dichotomy which has broken down.

Personally, I still prefer to identify people as belonging to the Left or Right not so much by particular policies they advocate as by their general approach to life and politics. If someone believes that human nature is fundamentally reformable, and that in consequence the quality of life on earth can be totally transformed, then this belief is so vital that putting it into practice through political change is the most important thing we can do and must take precedence over any other venture in life. If, on the other hand, he or she believes that human nature will carry on much the same whatever we do, and that trying to bring about fundamental changes is foolish and even dangerous, then politics are not the be-all and end-all in life, and must take their place with many other human activities.

That, to me, is the real distinction in politics, between people who think politics are all-important and those who believe them to be only fairly important. The first group tend to make politics a full-time occupation and verge into fanaticism. This tendency first became apparent in the England of the 1620s and 1630s, when the Puritan radicals sitting in the House of Commons formed the first group of what might be called professional politicians. Originally the Commons had met at dawn and dispersed at dusk. The Puritan group insisted that candles be brought and the House continue sitting long after dark. According to John Selden,

this group were mainly men in their middle years, between 30 and 50. By keeping the Commons sitting, they tended to get their way because the young men left to engage in the dissipations of the town, and the older men went off to supper and bed. If the Commons had had fixed sitting times ending at dusk it is highly improbable the English Civil War would ever have occurred. Similar tactics, to keep meetings going until the less fanatical elements leave in boredom and disgust, have since been employed by the Left in many forms, notably at trade union branch meetings.

You may say: but fanaticism and the totalitarian impulse to make politics the be-all and end-all of life are to be found at both ends of the political spectrum, Left and Right. I deny this. In my view, the so-called Fascist parties, or Nazis, or whatever you like to call them, belong with the Communists at the Left end of the political spectrum. Fascism and Nazism have much more in common with Marxism-Leninism and Communism than they have points of difference. Mussolini, founder of Italian Fascism, the prototype of all Fascist parties, was by origin a fanatical Marxist, and as such praised by Lenin as an example to all; his Fascist Party was essentially a Marxist heresy, replacing internationalism with nationalism, rather than a polar opposite. Equally, German Nazism or National Socialism grew out of a racial group known as the German Workers Party, and remained to the end radical and revolutionary. The Communist authorities in Russia, and the international bureau of Communist Parties they controlled, were unwilling to recognise Fascism as a heresy, springing from the same root as themselves. Instead they tried to brand it as a vicious flare-up of the dying bourgeois era. Hence after much thought an official Soviet definition of Fascism was formulated in 1933, which called it 'the unsealed terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialist elements of finance capital'. This manifest nonsense was adopted as the official Communist line everywhere, and it was gradually adopted in academic circles in the West and thus passed into general use. But it is still nonsense, which reverses the truth and confuses us all. Small groups of extremists who are termed 'Fascist', whatever their actual name may be, and branded also 'extreme-Right wing', are often almost interchangeable with Left-wing factions—indeed, their followers sometimes move from one group

to the other—and ought to be similarly classified with the radical Left. What matters, and what ought to distinguish the Left as opposed to the Right, is the degree of intensity with which politics is regarded.

Now since the overwhelming majority of people do not take a fanatical view of politics, do not think politics can solve all our ills, or that they are the most important thing in existence, you may think it strange that the Left has done so well in the present century, and that Left-wing governments have been elected, often repeatedly, all over the world. I suspect this is due in great part to the emergence of the professional politician. In early assemblies, such as the House of Commons, members tended to reflect the common view that, in normal times, politics were just one of many activities of life. That was true of their own lives—they were country gentlemen or prominent citizens who ran farms, estates and commercial businesses, and who got on with their humdrum life and came to Westminster only on occasion to raise revenue and do the King's business, and then went back home and resumed real life. But as government got more complicated, and bigger, MPs spent more time in the capital, and when suffrage spread and it began to be possible to elect men of all categories of life, the demand grew for them to be paid. This demand originally came exclusively from the Left, and it fitted in well with the Left's general philosophy that politics were so important that they must cease to be a part-time and become a full-time, indeed professional, occupation. So the demand was conceded, politicians were paid and the notion of the professional, full-time politician spread from the Left and eventually to all parties. So now most parliaments and assemblies and congresses throughout the world are mainly, usually overwhelmingly, composed of full-time politicians and increasingly of people who have always been full-time politicians. For them, politics is their career, from youth to retirement.

Such professionals are less likely to share the attitudes of ordinary people than the old part-timers. They have few interests outside politics—there are in fact determined moves in many countries to control the outside interests of elected representatives and, in effect, to eliminate them. Politics occupy all their energies. They now employ numbers of staff and research assistants who help to make them even more expert and remote from

ordinary folk. They spend their lives with fellow professionals and with the equally expert members of the various lobbies which now work on parliaments and increasingly determine the shape of legislation passed. Professional politicians, backed by professional machinery, are, almost by definition, activist politicians, whether their labels indicate they are theoretically of the Right or Left. And activism means more legislation and more government. The rise of the professional politicians has coincided with a prodigious growth in the amount of legislation produced, with the size and expense of governments, and with the number of bureaucrats they employ.

All these things are interconnected and they constitute forces which are almost impervious to reform. It is a horrible fact that Margaret Thatcher, one of the strongest-willed politicians who has ever lived, came to power in 1979 pledged to reduce government in our lives—in that sense she was and is very much a politician of the Right—and that at the end of eleven years in power, followed by five years of her chosen successor John Major, government in Britain now costs more than ever before and in many ways interferes more in our lives. Under Mrs Thatcher and since, some of the most obnoxious, detailed statutes ever tabled have been passed into law and are now being enforced with relentless ferocity by bureaucrats. And that is so because the machinery of professional politics, which essentially means the machinery of fanatical interference in private lives, is in place and active. In this sense the stronger the personality at the head of the government, the more likely it is that government will grow and interfere more.

Not that I am opposed to strong leadership. Quite the contrary. Indeed, I propose to end with the assertion that, in my opinion, leadership is more important than party and that the essence of democratic choice is not so much party allegiance as spotting the right leader. Despite my remarks about what happened in Britain under Mrs Thatcher, I still believe that her period in office was one of recovery and improvement in Britain. I do not regret having been one of her staunchest supporters. There is no substitute for leadership which is strong and wise. This has been proved again and again in history, and not least in our own times. Consider, for

instance, what the leadership of Konrad Adenauer did for post-war Germany, or how Alcide de Gasperi led Italy to recovery from its wartime low, or how General de Gaulle transformed the prospects of France in the 1960s. And think what the leadership of Ronald Reagan did to enable Americans to recover their self-confidence and belief in themselves and their country.

The reason why there is no substitute for leadership is really quite simple. Parties may exist and be strong, and they may have detailed programmes for which people cast their votes. But what happens when a government is in office often bears little relation to the philosophical standpoint of the party or the ideology of its programme. The world is moving on all the time, driven by forces often beyond any government's control, and governments therefore have to move with them or react to them. Most major situations to which governments have to respond are unforeseen, indeed unforeseeable. I often remember Harold Macmillan's reply—some would say cynical reply—when a colleague of mine asked him what was the determining factor in a government's success or failure. He answered: 'Events, dear boy, events'. The more I study governments in action, both in history and in my own times, the more I have come to believe in the essential truth of that reply.

Hence the vital importance of leadership, because leadership is about character. And it depends on the character of a man or woman how he or she will react to events, and master or contain or exploit them. In British politics today, I prefer Tony Blair to John Major not because I prefer Labour to the Conservatives but because I think Blair is a man of strong moral character and good general principles, with a clear sense of what is right in public life and what is wrong, and a fierce determination to do the right. I have a good deal of confidence that, as Prime Minister, he will know how to respond to events, whether they be good or evil. I have no such confidence in John Major, having seen him in action for nearly five years.

So there we have it. We have lived through a century of ideology, but it is now in rapid decline. We have lived through a century of parties, but they too are now becoming confused and subject to rapid change, and I

suspect that the era of the party is passing. But the world will always require leadership, and leadership is a function of moral character.

So as we approach the millenium, I am inclined more and more to look to leadership rather than party or ideology in judging how to vote or whom to applaud. It is not the Left and Right which matter—these are increasingly rather meaningless terms—but the man or the woman. In judging such men and women it is important to look at how they came to lead their party and how they run it, rather than what it is supposed to stand for. And I also want to look at how those men and women view the whole business of politics. If they take the view that politics can transform the nation or the world or our lives, I will be far less inclined to vote for them than if they take the view that politics can bring about a few carefully considered and sensibly administered changes, which will marginally improve some points of our existence. I also want to know which of them are more likely to act swiftly, responsibly and sagely if the roof suddenly falls in.

My final point follows from all this. The best way to ensure that we get the politics we want and need is to make certain that politics as such impinge only on a limited part of our lives. For public policy to be right, we must work to preserve the strength, integrity and extent of the private sphere. Whoever is in office, Left, Right or Centre, we must make sure the individual citizen remains in power over his or her life, and that the great majority of the key decisions which affect it are taken according to his or her own interests and conscience. If this puts one at the Right end of the spectrum, well and good. It certainly puts one at the democratic end of the spectrum. For what the great majority of people want today, and have probably always wanted, is for politics to be kept in their place, and government to be efficient, honest, practical—and tame.

Religion in the Post-socialist Era: the failure of God to die

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It is a striking fact that, at the end of the 20th century, the majority of people in the world still believe in a god, and this is true even of those who live in the 'enlightened' West. But it cannot be denied, also, that the Promethean spirit, the spirit of those who believe they can do without God—or that they can find substitutes for God—is also strong today, perhaps stronger than ever before. The Promethean spirit, proud of man's progress and seemingly limitless potential, unwilling to submit to the subordination which the notion of God demands, driving itself first to resistance, then to denial that God exists at all, has been growing with dramatic speed over the past 250 years. It is presented as a voice of modernity, the creed of rationalism, the march of progress. It preaches the absurdity of belief in God, the fatuity of religious doctrine, and the positive evil of much of the teachings and practices of the organised faiths. In the western world today, it is possible that a majority of the people who consider themselves well educated—that is, who have attended university, read books regularly and regard themselves as people who think seriously about the public issues of the day, and the nature of life—would range themselves in the Promethean camp, with varying degrees of consciousness and enthusiasm. Scepticism towards or denial of the existence of God is the hallmark of modern *homo sapiens*—Thinking Man.

One characteristic of the Prometheans has always been, and is still today, to mock at the beliefs of religious people, especially Christians. Voltaire began the practice. It is still common today, notably in the polemics of Professor Richard Dawkins of New College, Oxford, a biologist, author of *The Selfish Gene* (1976), who has put himself at the head of the Prometheans in Britain and is probably today the world's best-known atheist evangelist. To such people, Christianity is an absurdity, not just because it

is an anti-social force in the world—for instance, by opposing artificial birth control—but also and above all because it teaches a whole series of ridiculous doctrines. These range from the resurrection of the dead to transubstantiation (consubstantiation is scarcely more credible), from belief in miracles to Papal Infallibility. To the Prometheans, religion would be a joke, were it not so serious, and destructive. And, certainly, if you look back at some of the things which religious men have taught and believed over the long centuries of Christianity, it is hard not to smile.

However, it is a moot point whether to preach and believe in the manifestly incredible is a characteristic of Christians or of *homo sapiens* as a whole. For what is most remarkable about the Promethean movement is not its castigation of Christianity but the absurdity of its own alternative explanations of life. I find that one of the many advantages of being a historian is that you are constantly obliged to refer to the exact data, to what precisely happened at any one time, and what people actually said then. The record of the Prometheans, to judge by their utterances, is no more impressive than that of the benighted and obscurantist Christian clergy they denounced.

Here, taken almost at random, are some of them. For instance in 1764, by which time the Prometheans were already powerful in educated society, their leader, Voltaire, wrote: 'Theological religion is the enemy of mankind'. Note: not *an* enemy, but *the* enemy. There are many enemies of mankind today, many more than in Voltaire's time, I fear, but no one in his or her senses would put 'theological religion' high on the list. Or again, here is Winwood Reade, whose powerful tract *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872) was a bible of many atheists in the late 19th century: 'The destitution of Christianity is *essential* to the interests of civilisation'. Note again the tone of extremism: not 'desirable' but 'essential'. Today, our civilisation, or what is left of it, seems far more fragile than in Reade's fortunate lifetime, and were he to return to earth today I do not believe he would find a solitary soul, agnostic, atheist or anything else, who would agree that the destruction of Christianity is essential to keep civilisation going. Quite the reverse. The vast majority see it as a prop, however feeble.

Other central propositions of the Promethean faction, or who at the end of the 19th century became known as the humanists, seem equally

ridiculous with the passage of time. Ernest Renan, the French popular historian and seer, was foolish enough to write: 'History proves beyond possibility of contradiction that Christianity is not a supernatural fact'. Poor Renan! So plausible and sure of himself in his day, when his agnostic *Vie de Jésus* (1869)was one of the top best-sellers of the entire 19th century, and now no more convincing than Bishop Ussher, who worked out from the Old Testament the exact day and year the world began. Both now raise only smiles of compassion.

Actually, by the standards of most 19th century anti-religious intellectuals, Renan survives comparatively well. The ones who appear most absurd are precisely those who tried to apply the principles of contemporary science—the frontiers of knowledge—to explain the world in non-religious terms. The French biologist Littré defined 'soul' as anatomically the sum of the functions of the neck and spinal column, physiologically the sum of the functions of power and perception in the brain. Not exactly helpful, is it? The German, Haeckel, by contrast, wrote: 'We now know that . . . the soul [is] a sum of plasma-movements in the ganglion cells'. In England, Professor Tyndall thought 'all life' was 'once latent in a fiery cloud'. In France, Taine stated: 'Man is a spiritual automaton . . . vice and virtue are products like sugar and vitroil'. Late 19th century atheists were particularly positive, though contradictory, on the process of thought. Karl Vogt laid down: 'Thoughts come out of the brain as gall from the liver or urine from the kidneys'. Jacob Moleshott was even more certain: 'No thought [can emerge] without phosphorus'.

The 20th-century Prometheans do not survive with much more credit and their *obiter dicta* are already acquiring the same fusty whiff of absurdity. H G Wells, world famous in his day, not least in the United States, was a marvellous writer of science fiction but it is now almost impossible to point to a single pronouncement of his on society in his own day which carried the ring of truth or even mere plausibility. He ended his life (in 1945) in despair, having painted a strange mural on the walls of his London house, of horned devils and an image of man, accompanied by the slogan 'Time to Go'. Bertrand Russell, whom I knew—he figures prominently in my book *Intellectuals* (1988)—was perhaps the leading evangelist of anti-God rationalism of the century. But it is hard to find a subject—and

he wrote on most subjects, including those of the highest importance—on which he did not change his mind fundamentally, often more than once, and usually without explanation or apology; indeed his rule was to deny that any change of position had taken place. His immense output, supposedly offering an alternative philosophy of life and morality to one based on belief in God, thus leaves the reader who struggles through it—and there cannot be many these days—with an impression of total confusion. The truth is, Russell could not devise a Promethean alternative to God which convinced even himself for more than a few years; his secular faith was in a state of constant osmosis, like that of Auguste Comte, who occupied the same position of intellectual eminence in the mid-19th century as Russell did in the 20th, and is now simply a joke, if a pathetic one.

Russell's most passionate disciple was the late Sir Alfred Ayer (A J Ayer), an engaging man, like Russell a tremendous egoist and an unconsciously comic figure, in whose company I delighted. We used to meet at the Beefsteak Club, where I enjoyed teasing him: 'Freddie, I suppose it would be a correct statement to say you are the most intelligent man in Britain'. 'Oh no, no, no, my dear fellow', he would begin modestly, 'don't be so absurd'. Then, intellectual rigour and his love of truth would assert themselves. 'Well, if one looks at the statement seriously—if one considers—if, in short, one wishes to be strictly honest, I suppose—indeed I *must*—conclude you are right, you are, in fact, *absolutely right*!' My other tease was to threaten to visit him on his death-bed, accompanied by a Jesuit of powerful intellect, who would convert him to Roman Catholicism at the eleventh hour. I soon realised this genuinely frightened him, so I dropped it. In fact, Ayer's end was a little mysterious, because he had a physical experience which convinced him he had died and come to life again, and his final writings on the subject are so unclear to me that I am not sure whether he met his God in a state of disbelief, belief or genuine doubt. At all events, as with Russell himself, there was evidence of instability and confusion in Ayer's thought.

A third leading Promethean I knew, Jean-Paul Sartre, died I think in a state of disbelief but his life and writings are no better an advertisement for

the secular, humanistic alternative to religious faith than Russell's. Sartre was not a bad fellow in some ways. He was, for instance, one of the very few progressive intellectuals I have ever met who was really generous about money. But the heroic secular morality he preached, derived largely from Heidegger and christened existentialism by the media, was belied by the extraordinary squalor, selfishness, confusion, cruelty and, not least, cowardice of his own life. His final years, in fact, were squalid, bordering on the horrific. Moreover, there was in his writings—his output, like Russell's, was enormous—a degree not so much of inconsistency, though there was certainly that too, as of incoherence, so that in the end one was not clear what, if anything, he did believe, and what, if anything, he advised humanity to do. Sartre, I feel, bewildered even his intellectual followers, who were once numerous. What then had he, classified in his heyday in the late 1940s as the world's leading philosopher, to offer to the great mass of ordinary people? Hard to say. Yet if there is to be a truly secular, humanist alternative to God, it must speak clearly to the masses, as Christianity has always done.

Humanism, in our time, has been a dismaying failure, and my impression is that, at any rate as a substantial body of thought, it is in decline. It is interesting to note that, in Europe, membership of organised atheist and humanist societies, as a proportion of the population, reached its peak in the 1880s, at roughly the same time as the maximum percentage of those regularly attending church. But while Christianity has survived, and in many places flourishes and renews itself, no one could now conceivably believe that humanism—any more than socialism—is the spiritual force of the future, or indeed anything at all except a faint impress in the minds of a small minority. A more interesting and difficult question is the degree of harm it has done, particularly in our century. I believe that the political teachings of Sartre, for instance, were immensely pernicious among the French-educated leaders of Third World countries in Southeast Asia and North Africa. The genocidal leaders of the Pol Pot regime, for instance, were in a sense Sartre's children. In general, however, the humanist impact was ephemeral and in many respects superficial. Millions read Wells and saw the plays of George Bernard Shaw, found them clever,

were impressed for a time, then laughed, as the absurdities and misjudgments—and essential frivolity—of both became manifest, and went their ordinary, humble ways as before. Russell, like Sartre, retained a small, fanatical following to the end; but had neither man existed, such grotesque disciples would have found equally irrational and eccentric masters to serve.

Far more dangerous than the humanist impact have been the 20th century attempts to find substitutes for God—attempts both conscious and unconscious—which appeal not so much to intellectual pretensions but to much deeper, darker and stronger instincts in mankind. The detonator of the modern tragedy of mankind was the First World War, which began in Europe in 1914 and which the United States joined three years later. Its destructive impact on established and improving notions of human behaviour and international morality was immeasurable, and we are still suffering from its consequences. This war was not merely without reason, it was plainly avoidable. What caused it? I suggest it was, above all, the worship of money and still more power which already, by 1914, was becoming for many people a substitute for the worship of God. We have already noted that in Europe the population percentage attending church regularly began to decline, for the first time, from the end of the 1880s. Now church attendance is not a key, certainly not *the* key, to social and individual morality. But history suggests that the regular practice of a structured religion does impose restraints on human appetites, both individual and collective, which are difficult to achieve by any other means.

In the United States, church attendance continued to rise until the end of the 1950s but in Europe its fall around the beginning of the 20th century was accompanied by a marked and progressive increase in materialism, at all levels of society. What is materialism? It is the belief that the object of life is to satisfy instinctual human desires to possess, use, consume and control. At all levels of society, the growth of materialism leads to forms of moral squalor which make the heart sick and destroy decency and happiness. At the highest levels it leads to war, and to war on a scale and of a savagery hitherto inconceivable. The growth of Gross National Products in the years 1890–1914, especially in the United States, Russia, Germany and

Japan, was truly prodigious. This led to greedy competition and, no less significant, fear. One primary cause of the First World War was terror among Germany's rulers that Russian industrial growth was now so rapid, and must inevitably be reflected in such growing military power, that Germany, with her weaker ally Austria, had a duty to provoke the Russian bear into conflict while they were still strong enough to overwhelm it. The courts of central and eastern Europe were still nominally Christian but riddled with superstition and Erastianism. Russian Orthodoxy was a state church of the most craven kind. Prussian Lutheranism was an enthusiastic bedfellow of a largely militarised society. Austrian Catholicism was a formal palace creed which had long since cut itself off from spiritual roots of any kind. In France, the militant secularists won an overwhelming political victory in the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair and had systematically tried to purge the state, the schools and the armed forces of Christian influences. In all four states, the spiritual vacuum thus created was increasingly filled by adoration of power, above all military power. Guns replaced altars, and barracks churches. Thus the stage for catastrophe was set.

The war was fought with a degree of unscrupulousness and an array of high technology—and thus violence—never before experienced in world history. It reversed the increasing civility of the 19th century and introduced an era of extremism in thought and action which itself bred systematic attempts to create totalitarian alternatives to religion. These produced formulae for horrors yet unimagined by man. The first, the Soviet Communism imposed on Russia in 1917, specifically denied the existence of God, whom its ideological mentor, Karl Marx, described as an imaginative superstructure on the capitalist system of production. Change the system, and the notion of religion itself would gradually fade from men's minds. The system was certainly changed, but it was nonetheless found necessary to close down by force thousands of churches, synagogues and mosques, add compulsory atheism to the school curriculum, and slaughter thousands of practising Christians, Jews and Moslems, policies which continued unremittingly until the late 1980s. Grotesque secular alternatives to traditional Christian practices were devised. Baptism and

confirmation were replaced by induction into the *komsomol* youth movement. Elaborate but lifeless secular marriage services were conducted in Moscow's Hall of Weddings. The founder Lenin, when he died, was installed in a patriarchal tomb and worshipped. His successor Stalin was adored while yet alive and, like the savage gods of Aztec Mexico, demanded and received worship by hecatombs of sacrificial victims.

Other living gods sprang up from the diseased bowels of this alternative religion: petty but nonetheless bloodthirsty deities like Hoxha of Albania and Ceaucescu of Rumania, and self-proclaimed supergods like China's Mao, who wrote and forced his entire nation to learn by heart his catechism or Little Red Book, and who performed 'miracles', such as swimming 20 miles in the Yangtse at the age of 75. When the entire worldwide system of murder, mendacity and fraud began to collapse at the end of the 1980s, evidence of every form of corruption known to man began to emerge from this system based on 'reason' and 'idealism'—rather as, when the triumphant Christians first took over pagan Alexandria, they discovered that wooden idols which miraculously spoke oracles had hidden recesses in which the devil-priests had concealed themselves.

This first totalitarian alternative to God, founded in 1917, bred others. Mussolini, himself originally an orthodox Marxist, praised by Lenin, then branded a heretic, founded a new political church. He adopted the symbols of ancient, pagan Rome, but his Fascist movement was never quite sure whether to deny the existence of God or subvert and utilise it, whether to persecute the church or exploit it. Mussolini himself oscillated between atheist braggadoccio and the craven superstition typical of the most primitive forms of Italian Catholicism, but it was still unclear whether he was a Christian when in 1945, summarily executed, he was hung, naked and upside down, alongside his mistress on the shores of Lake Como. Hitler's Nazism, based on both the Soviet and Italian models, but with many characteristics drawn from south Germany and Austria, was more deliberately and consciously an attack on Christianity, and an alternative to it. It preached various forms of purity, including race purity. Hitler spoke of 'the higher morality of the Party' to justify mass murder, just as Lenin used the excuse of what he called 'the Revolutionary Conscience'.

The Nazis devised elaborate quasi-religious services ranging from mass parades with sacred torches to private wedding ceremonies between party members who had to prove their Aryan ancestry. Both involved ancient pagan practices, such as sacrificial fires, sprinkling of salt, incense and other substances, the swearing of vows and blood-pledges, and millenarian hymns. The striking characteristic of Hitler's alternative to God is that while in theory appealing to the highest human ideals, it exploited in practice the basest human instincts—cruelty, greed, corruption and the desire to tyrannise over the weak. It also combined a yearning for a primitive past, the pagan forest culture of the *niebelungenlied*, with the rapid acquisition and use of the most modern methods of warfare, torture and mass slaughter. Hilter's own end illustrated this sinister paradox, he being immolated on a pagan funeral pyre inflamed by ersatz gasoline.

Such totalitarian substitutes for religion spread rapidly in the 1960s, following the withdrawal of the colonial powers, to Africa and parts of Asia. Voltaire's dictum that religion was the enemy of mankind rang particularly hollow in Southeast Asia (as well as China), where the missionary Catholicism of the French was replaced by the totalitarian poverty and militarism of Ho Chi Minh, who soon had the largest armed forces, in relation to population, in the world, and by the genocide of Pol Pot. Missionaries had been accused of many 'crimes' in Africa and the East—of trying to stamp out human sacrifice, polygamy and cannibalism, for instance, or forcing local women to cover their nakedness, and their husbands to make love to them in the orthodox 'missionary position'. What a golden age it now seems, when subsequently large parts of Africa embraced the Communist alternative to God, and so plunged themselves into civil and internecine wars, perpetrated man-made famines, as had Stalin in Russia, and acquired huge armies and modern weapons at the cost of everything else. The martyrdom of Ethiopia—a Christian state, if an elementary and rough-hewn one, since the 4th century—has been of particular poignancy, as its noble-looking and God-fearing people were decimated by endless civil war, famine and disease. And, in many parts of black Africa, where missionaries had tried to introduce western standards of moral behaviour along with their altars, self-made chieftains, now calling

themselves generals and presidents, reverted to mass slaughter on a colossal scale and in some cases to cannibalism also. The witch doctor and the commissar walked hand in hand to assist in this continental tragedy.

In the minds of almost all intelligent people in the West, these totalitarian alternatives to God, whether sophisticated or primitive, have now been demonstrated to be incorrigibly destructive and evil. Belief in them lingers on only in that home of lost causes—though even there fitfully now—the university campus. There are still Maxist dons, just as, if Hitler had won the war, there would still be Nazi dons. But the intellectual consensus has now belatedly joined the common-sense consensus, that totalitarianism is the negation of morality. However, that does not mean that the search for godless solutions has been abandoned. Quite the contrary. Even Marxism itself, though conclusively and repeatedly demonstrated to be a system of thought without the smallest merit, created by an intellectual crook who constantly invented and manipulated his so-called 'scientific evidence', has reappeared in a quasi-religious form in the teachings known as liberation theology. This is plainly and simply an anti-Christian heresy, without any moral basis, and indeed, as experience in Latin America has shown, a source of violence and great moral evil.

Even more worrying are the non-Marxist alternatives to God now being canvassed, because at least some of them contain elements of rationality and even of justice, and therefore exercise a genuine appeal. An acquaintance of mine, whom I think I should now term a former Marxist, not so long ago expressed himself undaunted by the intellectual collapse of Communism as a system for promoting prosperity combined with equality. Marxist economic theory, he argued, and its stress on the industrial aspects of materialism, had always been a handicap. 'What we can now turn to', he said, 'are far more attractive and exciting forms of action—race politics, sexual politics, environmental politics, health politics. There are other forms of action which will emerge in due course whereby we will transform and overthrow existing society.'

We are not here concerned with the overthrow or defence of existing society but with the alternatives to God that men have proposed in our times. But to some extent the two topics are the same. The radical agenda

my acquaintance listed does, as it were—with its strong appeal to the idealistic, as well as the materialistic, instincts of mankind, especially among young people—constitute an alternative religion. Like any other form of humanism, it replaces God by man, and establishes the welfare—or supposed welfare—of man, rather than the worship of God and obedience to his commandments, as the object of human existence and the purpose of society. That of course is its radical defect. The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner once argued that it is the consciousness of God, the acceptance that there is a power outside and above ourselves, to whom we owe allegiance and whose guidance we must follow, which essentially distinguishes mankind from other creatures. If belief in God were ever to fade completely from the human mind, we would not, Promethean-like, become masters of our fate; on the contrary, we would descend to the status of very clever animals, and our ultimate destiny would be too horrible to contemplate.

I believe this argument to be profoundly true, and corroborated by history, and what worries me about the new radical agenda is the danger that it will de-humanise man just as the totalitarian alternatives did, though no doubt in rather different ways. But there are further, related objections. All the items on the agenda lend themselves to extremism. Take, for instance, the issue of homosexuality, an important part of the sexual politics item. There were many of us, in the 1960s, who felt that there were grave practical and moral objections to the criminalisation of homosexuality, and who therefore supported, as happened in most western countries, changes in the law which meant that certain forms of homosexual behaviour ceased to be unlawful. Homosexuality itself was still to be publicly regarded by society, let alone by the churches, as a great moral evil, but men who engaged in it, within strictly defined limits, would no longer be sent to prison. We believed this change to be the maximum homosexuals deserved or could reasonably expect. We were proved totally mistaken. De-criminalisation made it possible for homosexuals to organise openly into a powerful lobby, and it thus became a mere platform from which further demands were launched. Next followed demands for equality, in which homosexuality was officially placed on the same moral level as standard

forms of sexuality, and dismissal of identified homosexuals from sensitive positions, for instance in schools, children's homes and the like, became progressively more difficult. This was followed in turn by lobbyists' demands not merely for equality but privilege: the appointment, for instance, of homosexual quotas in local government, the excision from school textbooks and curricula, and university courses, of passages or books or authors they found objectionable, special rights to proselytise, and, not least, the privilege of special programmes to put forward their views—including the elimination of the remaining legal restraints—on radio and TV. Thus we began by attempting to right what was felt an ancient injustice and we ended with a monster in our midst, powerful and clamouring, flexing its muscles, threatening, vengeful and vindictive towards anyone who challenges its outrageous claims, and bent on making fundamental—and to most of us horrifying—changes to civilised patterns of sexual behaviour.

Here indeed we have sexual politics in action. And, as with other alternatives to God, the result is not human happiness, but human misery. The homosexual community, as they now styled themselves, by their reckless promiscuity during the 1970s and 1980s helped to spread among their members the fearful scourge of AIDS, a killer disease of a peculiarly horrible nature, for which there is no cure, and no immediate likelihood of a cure. Nor are homosexuals the only ones to suffer from sexual politics. Venereal diseases of all kinds, some unresponsive to even the latest antibiotics, are spreading rapidly. So is divorce. The percentage of one-parent families, with all the misery that entails, rises remorselessly. The number of illegitimate births, another prime source of human unhappiness, is now over 50 per cent in some great cities; in parts of Washington, the capital of the western world, it is now as high as 90 per cent.

The object of sexual politics is supposedly hedonistic. What a bitter irony is there! I often think of my old friend and college contemporary Ken Tynan, another figure I describe in *Intellectuals*. Marvellously gifted, world famous early in life, he became a leading evangelist of sexual liberation. It was his religion, and sex was his god. He distinguished himself, if that is the word, by being the first person to use a four-letter word on British TV, and later by devising the first pornographic stage-

show, *Oh Calcutta!* But the god he worshipped proved false and vengeful: his career, his private life, his health, all collapsed, and his end, at a tragically early age, was sad, lonely and hopeless.

Race politics, like sexual politics, constitute an alternative religion for some, and in many ways are open to the same objections. They begin with a legitimate demand, and then proceed rapidly to request, indeed insist on, unwarranted privilege. Affirmative action or positive discrimination is a moral evil, almost as great as its negative form, for by giving one man more than justice it must, by definition, give another less. Nor does it work, nor is it ever likely to achieve its objects, but, instead, like all forms of extremism, arouses hatred and disgust, and countervailing forces. What is essentially wrong with race politics is that they are fuelled not by love and reason, but by fury and bitterness. How much more valid, and helpful, and likely in the long run to raise the condition of hitherto underprivileged races, is the Christian teaching that all men and women are equal in the sight of God? It is the true multiracialism, just as it is the true sexuality, and—dare I say it?—the true socialism.

It is possible to detect the same incipient signs of extremism in other items on the new radical agenda. Environmentalism, for instance, starts from the sound premise that the earth is our heritage and our responsibility, and that we must conserve it for our progeny. That, indeed, has always been orthodox Christian doctrine, which teaches that man has no absolute right of possession and that all is on leasehold from his maker. But environmental politics can degenerate into a new form of pantheism, indeed of paganism, in which notions like Mother Earth assume spiritual and mystic significance, and we are in danger—rather like the Nazis, themselves notable Greens in their origins—of reverting to primitive patterns and, like our distant ancestors, worshipping woods and rocks and rivers and animals.

I see somewhat similar dangers in the developing movement of health politics, a new name for what used to be called eugenics, a favourite science of dictators in the interwar period and particularly in totalitarian societies. Stalin treated his opponents as insane, and locked them up in psychiatric hospitals. Hitler murdered the insane, to improve the stock of

his race, and when this practice was abandoned in response to Christian pressure—the only success the churches ever had in deflecting him from a policy—he used the death laboratories thus prepared as a pilot project for the 'final solution' of the 'Jewish problem'. We do not yet murder the insane, perhaps we never will, but we slaughter unborn babies throughout the world literally in their millions. There are already countries, the Netherlands for example, where euthanasia is on the verge of legality and is indeed already widely practised. In some ways health politics is already the most threatening item of all on this secular agenda which constitutes the contemporary alternative to God.

But the practice of abortion and euthanasia reminds us of one important point. It lies at the very heart of man's failure to find the alternative spiritual comfort and moral leadership which only belief in God can provide. These alternative secular systems can kill. They can do that only too easily: whether the six million Jews slaughtered by Hitler, or the 20 million Russians done to death by Stalin, or Pol Pot's massacre of a third of the population of Kampuchea, or Mao's prodigious mass slaughters on a scale we do not yet exactly know—or the millions of infants we do not permit to be born at all, let alone live. All these systems can end life, but they cannot prolong it. The greatest of all human problems, the problem of death, they cannot solve. The secular mighty of the world—the tyrants, the kings, the arrogant intellectuals, and gifted men and women who think they know all the answers, the clever dons, the brilliant writers—all alike are sentenced to death from the moment of their birth, and, sooner or later, that sentence is carried out.

The point was made with sombre brilliance by that great adventurer and writer Sir Walter Raleigh, on the last page of his *History of the World* (1614). It was written in the Tower of London, while under sentence of death from his implacable enemy, King James I. The passage is plainly directed at this conceited king, once called 'the wisest fool in Christendom', but it applies to all who set themselves above law and morality:

> O eloquent, just and mightie Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded. What none hath dared, thou hast done. And whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hath cast out of the world and

> despised. Thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words—*hic jacet*—here lies.

It is because sensible men the world over, at all times, have recognised and accepted the inevitability of mighty death, that they have turned to God to explain its significance. Without God, death is horrific. With God, death is still fearsome, but it can be seen to have a meaning and purpose and a hope. The great strength of Christianity has always been that it brings men and women to terms with death in a way which offers them comfort and an explanation. Of course, the explanation is not complete. How could it be? As St Paul writes, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face'. God cannot be replaced, because only belief in him offers a 'then'. There is a famous passage in the first volume of history, and it is a great one, written by a member of the English-speaking race, St Bede, after whom I am proud to be named. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, he tells the story of how Paulinus first preached the new doctrine of Christianity at the pagan court of King Edwin of Northumbria, and in particular of how he gave the Christian explanation of death and what followed it. This explanation has always been clear and unequivocal; it was then, as it is now. And so it struck these simple pagans. There was a moment of silence, and then a wise old Earl spoke. Life, he said, was short. It was like a sparrow, in winter, flying through the king's hall:

> It goes from darkness into the light, then into the darkness again—that is life . . . This life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, and what is to follow, we know nothing. If, then, this new teaching gives us certitudes, we should follow it.

There is no substitute for God: this our own dreadful century has abundantly proven. But I do not myself think that belief in God can be demonstrated like some mathematical theorem. It cannot be proved, in the sense we humans understand the word. It is something we intuit, and accept, and something too we reach, or reinforce, by prayer. Those who try to find substitutes for God not only fail, and often bring down misery

on themselves, they throw away something marvellous. Some lines from the Catholic poet Francis Thompson make the point with enviable eloquence. Thompson was an unfortunate man, whose own life became and remained a mess; but on the central issue of the purpose of life he was strong and sure. We do not, he wrote, need to look for an explanation of our existence in the distant universe. Our quest for an alternative is wholly unnecessary, for the real thing is before our eyes, if only we will open them:

> Not where the wheeling systems darken,
> And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
> The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
> Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.
>
> The Angels keep their ancient places; —
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
> 'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
> That miss the many-splendoured thing.

There is, then, no alternative to God, so far as I can see—so far as our 20th century experience teaches us. But that is only the first step on our quest. If our need for God is such that no alternative which human ingenuity can devise will satisfy us, what is the nature of this enormously important and essential being? Can we in fact know God, describe him, define him? Perhaps we cannot, ladies and gentlemen. But we can pray to him. And he, in his infinite wisdom, will enlighten and comfort us.