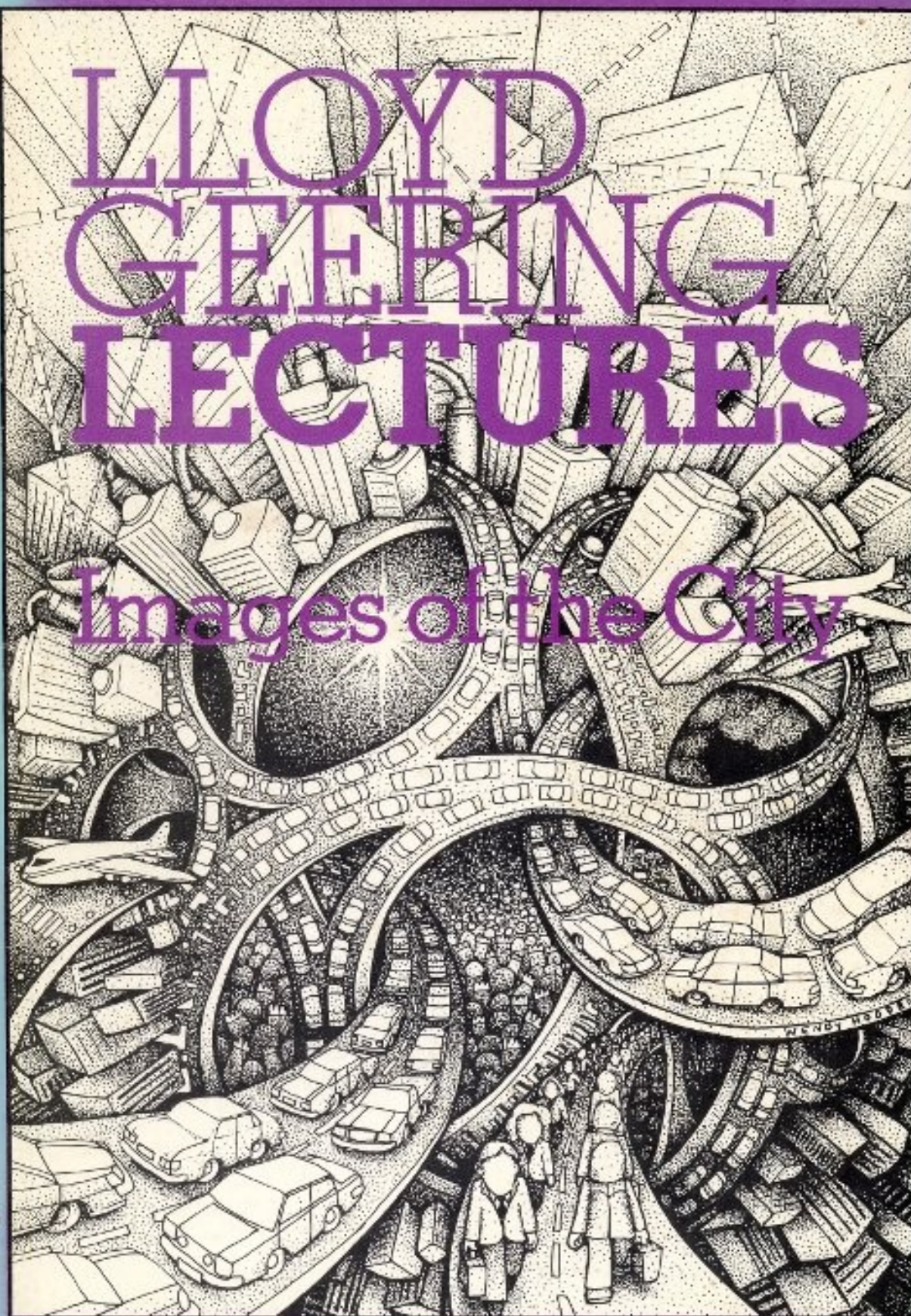


# LLOYD GERRING LECTURES

Images of the City





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## CHAPTER ONE



# THE WICKED CITY

As each year goes by, more and more of all mankind live in cities and find themselves more or less cut off from surroundings in which the forces of nature predominate. Nearly two-thirds of all Australians live in only five cities, leaving a vast continent largely uninhabited. Even in New Zealand there are rural areas which are less populated today than at the beginning of this century. (1900)

If this trend continues worldwide, the time may come when all human beings will be city dwellers. If so, our descendants will dwell not just in one of many cities but in one vast global city. So we need to ask ourselves — where are we really heading with rapid urban growth? Is city-dwelling so wonderful that we can have no doubts about this trend?

For a generation or so — but for not much longer than that — various professional people, such as town planners, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and even theologians, have been turning their attention to the rapid expansion of city-dwelling, as some of the titles of their books make clear — *Cities in Transition*, *The New World of Urban Man*, *The Secular City*. They have been looking critically at this modern process of urbanization and asking some fundamental questions. In this short series of studies on the city, I intend to focus attention on several mental images which are frequently associated with the city. In particular I shall be showing how some of these images have been shaped by the influence of the Bible. This in itself should not surprise us, for this ancient collection of writings has been dominant in our cultural tradition for so long that it has supplied us with nearly all of our goals and value systems.

The scientific study of the city is a modern phenomenon. But long before this the Bible has been helping to shape the way we think about the city. Quite unconsciously, no doubt, and for better or for worse, we have inherited various images of the city.

The Bible speaks very frequently about the city. Even more interesting is the fact that the Bible is ambivalent. It provides quite contrasting images. The reason for all of this is that the Bible was being written within the long period in which the process of urbanization has been taking place.

The oldest part of the Bible is between three to four thousand years of age. But the first cities began to appear five to six thousand years ago — in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley. Cities had been in existence for some 2000 years before the Judaeo-Christian path of faith began and, in part, as I shall show, this faith originated as a kind of response to the evolution of the city.

We should note in passing that though five to six thousand years seems a very long time, it is relatively short compared with the length of time our human ancestors have been on this planet, which is at least 100,000 years and probably more. The advent of the city, then, has been relatively recent. It had the effect of introducing a new dimension to human existence. To understand this we must ask what it is which constitutes the essence of a city.

In part, of course, it is numbers. Yet the first cities were quite small in population compared with some of our great metropolitan centres today. The first cities in ancient Sumeria had a population of between seven and twenty thousand. But the city is not just a matter of numbers. We have to ask what factors occurred which allowed such numbers of people to live together in close proximity. Then we must ask — What resulted from this concentration of humanity? How could it give a new dimension to existence?

The simple answer to the first question is that the fertile river valleys of the Tigris, the Nile and the Indus yielded food in such abundance, through agriculture and stock-breeding, that no longer was it necessary for all persons to spend most of their available time in gathering sufficient food to keep themselves alive. The growing food supply freed a section of the population for other pursuits. While the majority remained food producers, forming a kind of peasant class, there developed, in addition, an aristocratic ruling class and a professional class of craftsmen.

Of course there had been some form of art and craft in the pre-urban era but these had to be pursued on what we would today call a voluntary or part-time basis. Because they could now be developed as full-time professions, the skill of the craftsmen also increased at a much more rapid rate. Another important factor in this was that the city enabled a community of craftsmen to work together and to learn from each other's improvements. The solitary craftsman was replaced by the community craftsmen. Indeed, one of the chief reasons why urban life was bringing a new dimension to human existence was this — the greatly increased opportunities for personal contact, dialogue and stimulation brought a new heightened awareness and sophistication.

There was now provided, at least for a few, both the freedom, and stimulation to think, which were necessary for the first attempts to philosophize. This in turn led to the invention of writing. Writing provided a new means of communication. In oral speech one communicates only with those who are within hearing distance, and, even then, there is no permanent record of what has been said. By means of writing one can communicate with people much further away both in space and in time.

Here was a new way in which cultural traditions could be inherited from the past and handed down for the future. It gave rise to the phenomenon of Holy Scripture. All these things make up what we call culture. The seeds of culture had long been there in pre-urban mankind. It was the advent of the city which nurtured those seeds to mature growth and flowering. What we call civilization is the direct product of the advent of the city as the very word "civilization" reminds us, being derived from the Latin word for "citizen", a city-dweller.

But the advent of the city led quite naturally to a sharp division being made between city-dwellers and country dwellers. The city-dwellers saw themselves as the sophisticated people, the civilized? The rude simple folk of the hills and mountains were the barbarians, the uncivilized. When Christianity spread through Europe it was the country dwellers who were last to be influenced by it: that is why they were called "heathen", i.e. people of the heath. As late as the early part of this century (1900) people of tribal cultures were still being referred to as savages.

Moreover, even in countries of western culture like New Zealand the division of people into urban and rural classes still lingers on. Country folk are sometimes referred to by their sophisticated city cousins as hayseeds and country bumpkins. We find the differences caricatured in comic sketches like those of the "Two Ronnies". Dressed in the smocks of country peasants they make us laugh with their childish simplicity and lack of logic.

It is quite true that from the very first city until now, urban life has led to a particular kind of sophistication, by the variety of personal contacts it makes possible, by the mental stimulation it provides, by the variety of professional pursuits it offers, by the cultural and entertainment opportunities it makes available. Only in the cities are to be found the libraries, the theatres, the opera houses, the art galleries, the universities and other places of higher learning. There is a great deal which we owe to the emergence of urban life.

But there is another side to the city, a side which the country dweller is often more acutely aware of than the city dweller. First, there is noise and cramped living conditions. There is the complexity of traffic. How many country people say they would not dream of driving their car in the city? The city can be very impersonal in comparison with the country. It is full of strangers. One can become very lonely.

The loneliest place in the world, it is sometimes said, is in the middle of a large city where one knows not a soul. Shopkeepers often appear to want your money rather than your custom, for they may never see you again.

Cities quickly become drab and dirty. Some areas deteriorate into slums. What is more, the city becomes the place in which the anti-social tendencies, always present in the human heart, begin to breed and multiply in the same way as that in which diseases strike our plants under hot-house conditions. The city becomes the place for the spread of burglary, drug trafficking, gang warfare. The city produces a criminal underground.

For all these reasons, country people often feel thankful they are not city-dwellers but belong to the country. There they enjoy the freshness of nature — clear air, clean water, quietness, honest toil, mutual trust and a network of sincere personal relationships. To the rural mind the image of the city which is often uppermost is that it is a breeding ground of wickedness.

The wicked city is the very first image of the city which occurs in the Bible. The reason is simple. When the city had been in existence for two to three thousand years, it was already beginning to manifest some of its worst by-products. The semi-nomadic wanderers who lived no settled existence visited

the cities for trading purposes but were often not at all impressed by what they saw. It was to such pastoral nomads that the ancient Israelites belonged. Indeed, the very word Hebrew is said to be not an ethnic term but one which simply describes a migratory class of peoples. Their modern survival is to be found in the Bedouin, who still value their freedom above all else, and who contemplate with horror the sedentary, tightly packed life of the city. They and their ancient counterparts saw the city as a wicked place.

It is this image of the city which is reflected in that very quaint but fascinating myth which the Israelites told about the Origin of mankind. Our mythical parents, Adam and Eve, had two sons whom they called Cain and Abel. Cain became a tiller of the ground, an agriculturist. For this purpose he had to settle in one place. Abel became a keeper of sheep, a pastoralist. He was free to move with his flocks and herds. The ancient Israelite mind saw human beings divided from the beginning into these two types, the permanently settled and the free. Curiously enough something of that class distinction between the pastoralist and agriculturist occurs even to this day. I know parts of New Zealand where the high-country run holder treats the agriculturist (whom he calls the dirt-farmer) with a slightly superior air. It is reflected in the well known musical, Oklahoma, in the song which urges the cowman and the farmer to be friends.

Animosity between the two is evidently very old indeed. In the biblical myth Cain killed Abel, At this point in the story we are told that Cain went off with his wife into exile. Many people get side-tracked here and say, "Hang on. If Adam and Eve and their surviving son Cain were the only human beings on earth, where did he get his wife from?" That is the kind of problem which would only occur to the prosaic logical mind of the sophisticated city-dweller. The ancient poetic mind of the pastoral story-teller was just not interested in that kind of logic. What we should take notice of is not what he omitted to explain but what he did say. "Cain went off with his wife, fathered a son and built a city".

Here there are three quite fascinating insights into the nature of the city. First, the ancient nomad saw the settled life of the agriculturist as the transition from the pure and free life of the nomad to the beginning of city life. Secondly, he saw the city as something man-made unlike the natural world. Thirdly, the founder of the very first city was Cain the murderer. That being the case, could one expect the city to be anything else but a cesspool of iniquity?

The image of the wicked city is further reflected in the myth of the Tower of Babel, where the very building of a city, with its accompanying tower, was seen by the nomad as a human monstrosity which reflected the wicked pride in the human heart and which was an affront to God, who made the earth in its natural state. In similar vein, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah became so wicked that according to ancient folk-lore God destroyed them by raining down fire and brimstone from heaven.

In later Israelite tradition it was the Assyrian city of Nineveh which became the symbolic embodiment of all the evil a really great city was thought to

engender. When it fell, the prophet Nahum cried out victoriously;  
Woe to the bloody city  
all full of lies and plunder.

In those days the great powerful empires were often known by the name of the city which was the seat of the Emperor. Assyria, ruled from Asshur, was succeeded by the Empire ruled from Babylon. From that time onwards Babylon became the chief symbol for the wicked city, partly because Jewish exiles were held in captivity there. These symbolic associations long survived the destruction of the city itself and were later used by both Jew and Christian whenever they wished to refer to the wickedness they both deplored and feared in the later city of Rome. It is really Rome which is being referred to in the New Testament Apocalypse where the writer in the following words looks expectantly for its imminent destruction;

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great  
It has become a dwelling-place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit. . .  
for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion,  
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her.  
She shall be burned with fire.

The writer of the Apocalypse hears the voice of God calling:  
Come out of her, oh my people,  
lest you take part in her sins,  
lest you share in her plagues.

In view of the frequency of the image of the wicked city in the biblical tradition, it is not surprising to find it accompanied by a divine call to move out of the city, to start somewhere else a new, purer, freer life. Because the city was associated with wickedness, immorality, filth, murder, crime, sexual aberrations, slavery, it was beyond redemption. The city had to be destroyed. The only hope for mankind was to make a clean break with urban existence.

Something of that is embryonically there in the opening of the saga about Abraham, "Go away from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you". And later tradition did embroider this story of Abraham by saying that he was called to abandon the ancient city of Ur because of its idolatry and other forms of wickedness.

The story of Abraham has come down to us almost wholly in legend. But there is another and more important biblical tradition which is much more firmly based on historical events. It is the Exodus from Egypt of a group of Hebrew slaves under the leadership of Moses. The city of Pharaoh had become for

them a prison, where they had lost all freedom, and where they lived as forced labour under a foreign ruler. Moses came with the promise of a new land of freedom even though it meant years in which they suffered the rigours and hunger of an unwelcoming wilderness.

The rejection of the city for one reason or another and the return to the simplicity of rural and even desert environment has been no isolated occurrence in past human experience in general and in religious traditions in particular. Several of the great religious traditions originated in just such a move. As the Judaeo-Christian tradition is founded on the Mosaic Exodus from the city of Pharaoh, so Buddhism is founded on the experience of Gautama, who abandoned the princely comforts in which he was born to take up the life of a wandering mendicant, seeking the answers to the questions of life. Finally he found them, as he thought, not sitting at the feet of the wise men of the city, but sitting in solitude under a bo-tree.

Jesus of Nazareth, so the Gospels tell us, really began his ministry to mankind by going out into the loneliness of the Jordanian desert for a long period. There, like the John who baptised him, he lived on locusts and wild honey. Muhammad, unlike Jesus, was actually born in the city — the rich, commercial centre of Mecca. But it was only after he had made a practice of frequently retiring in solitude to a cave on Mt Hira, that he received the divine revelations which became the heart and soul of the Islamic faith.

The flight from the busy, frustrating and wicked city has continued from time to time. It led the Christian St. Antony in the third century to leave completely the wickedness of Egyptian city life and retire in solitude to the desert. His move became the beginning of the monastic orders which became such a feature of mediaeval Christendom. Behind monastery walls monks and nuns found a haven of peace.

Most of us can identify with this rejection of the city even though with us it takes a different form. It is city people, not country people, who complain of the pressures and stress of modern life and who want to get out of the 'rat race'. It prompts people, if they possibly can, to acquire a bach, a weekend cottage, where by the seaside, the lake, the countryside, they can catch their breath, regain their equilibrium, amid the quietness of natural surroundings.

For most, it is but a temporary respite, but a few go further. They turn their back permanently on the city, sell their homes and find a quiet uninhabited spot, where on their own, or as members of a small commune, they live a simple existence close to the soil and the forces of nature. Some would say they are going back to God.

Others would say they are going back to nature. They are certainly turning their backs on the man-made city.

But for most people that is not possible and never will be. The human species is becoming more and more urbanized whether we like it or not. Even the decreasing minority who still live in rural areas are becoming more and more dependent on what goes on in the city. In some respects we can say that just as city dwellers receive their bread from the country, so the cultural fruits of



the city are being increasingly distributed in the country. This interdependence between city and country began from the very origins of city life.

However frustrating, uninviting and wicked we may come to view it, wholesale abandonment of the city is not a practical solution. What, then, can be done? Are we humans doomed to become imprisoned within the urban social structures which we have built? What kind of positive hope is there for us city-dwellers? Is the future to be all downhill? There are certainly some who think so. Go to Hong Kong, New York, Philadelphia and Sydney, to name but a few, and you will find much evidence to-support such a gloomy picture.

But there are other images of the city beside that of the wicked city. To these we shall be turning in the next three chapters. In the course of them we shall see that a strange and unexpected thing happened in the biblical tradition itself. Certainly the very first image of the city it presented is that of the wicked city. Even in the last book of the Bible this image is found. But other images began to occur. These eventually became more dominant. The biblical tradition in the course of time gave rise to the conviction that wickedness is not the last word on the character of the city. Instead of becoming an ever more virulent breeding-ground of evil, violence and inhumanity, the city can be redeemed, eventually to provide the highest form of human existence.

## CHAPTER TWO



# THE SECULAR CITY

In 1965 a Baptist theologian in the United States called Harvey Cox wrote a book which was intended for a fairly confined audience. It was to provide the basis for discussion in a series of conferences organized by the National Student Christian Federation. He called it *The Secular City*. To his great surprise it suddenly took off. It began to be read by many people for whom it was not specifically intended.

Both American and foreign theologians began arguing about it. Sociologists and city planners began discussing it. It reached an unexpectedly large Roman Catholic audience. Within a short time it had sold half a million copies in America alone — and had been translated into seven other languages. By the following year a book appeared called *The Secular City Debate*.

It presented a sample of the wide diversity of responses which Cox's book had brought forth — some of them appreciative, some of them harshly critical.

Why was the book so widely read? And why did people come to such different opinions about it? Cox had put his finger on an issue which, though sensitive, pinpointed the most dominant trends in today's city. The issue is two-fold: *The spread of urbanization* and with it, *the process of secularization*.

Cox defined this process as one in which people turn their gaze away from a supposed other-world and fasten their attention on this world and this time. For *saeculum* is the Latin word which means 'this present age'.

These two dominant processes he put together in the term *The Secular City*, with the implication that this is the dominant image of the city which operates today. Many refuse to acknowledge that there is any good in this secular city. They see it as an enlarged and grotesque form of the wicked city. This is particularly so with many church people who, though they live in the secular city, keep contrasting it with their ideal city, which they call the holy city. Cox set out to allay what fears Christians may have about the increasing manifestation of the secular city. He tried to show it is not the wicked city many take it to be, and that there are many advantages it has given to us for reaching more fruitful levels of human existence. Instead of being seen as an enemy to be fought and held in check, it should be seen as the logical development of certain trends deeply embedded in the Judaeo-Christian tradition itself.

Cox's book is a little dated now and should certainly not go unchallenged. But it raises issues which are still with us.

What is the character of the modern secular city? There are three we may

usefully observe. The first we may call *mobility*. Cox notes that there are two visual images which we frequently associate with the city; the switchboard and the cloverleaf. Since his book it has become necessary to add the computer. The telephone switchboard means that in spite of the very large population of the city, we have the opportunity for instant communication with the person of our choice. And the arrival of STD (Subscriber Telephone Dialling) in most cities of the western world illustrates better than anything how fast the globe is becoming one city.

Our best example in Wellington of the clover-leaf is that at the new Ngauranga intersection of two motorways. In the big European and American cities, these clover#leaf intersections are much more complex. They manifest the variety of directions in which people choose to travel. Not only are there many geographical directions, but these in turn symbolize the variety of career directions one can take and the variety of opportunities for life fulfilment.

Compare the city with the village. There was one main street — the High Street. It led in and it led out. And life in the village was often just as confined. One tended simply to follow in one's father's trade, if a man, or become a housewife and mother, if a woman. The clover-leaf of city life keeps presenting us with choice after choice.

Further, the clover-leaf symbolizes the fact that, as a result of increased choices, we are people more frequently on the move. City people less commonly put down their roots for long periods, but move from suburb to suburb, from city to city.

In the age of the village, life was sedentary. One spent one's whole life very often within an area perhaps only fifteen kilometres in diameter. So it was in the first cities. But in the modern secular city there is great mobility. Instant communication, constant change and instant information. First it was access to knowledge stored in libraries. Now it is the computer. Knowledge which once took a lifetime to amass is now instantly available. Soon, at the touch of a button, we shall be able to call it up on our television screens.

From mobility we turn secondly to anonymity as a characteristic of the secular city. This aspect of city life is what often first strikes a person from a rural area, where everybody knows everybody. By contrast, in the city it first appears that nobody really knows anybody. Other people become nameless faces we pass in streets, sit with in a bus or theatre. In our contacts we do not speak of people by name but by the role in which we meet them — the "person on duty", the "girl at the counter", the "rubbish man", the "paper boy", "the milkman". . . Even at work it can be the case we do not even know by name people working close to us, let alone have any kind of personal relationship with them.

Of course in one sense the great numbers of people in a city make this essential. A city mayor who set out to know all the citizens on a personal basis would never get anything else done. Nor is this phenomenon completely without its advantages. Because it is not possible to know all our contacts personally, it frees us to be highly selective in those whose friendship we do

want to cultivate. Although the city can be the loneliest place in the world, its anonymity means also that there we have greater opportunities for living our private lives than we have in the country. There your presence cannot fail to be noted and you are talked about, whether you like it or not.

Let us now turn from the mode of life in the modern city to its secular character I have so far defined secular as 'this worldly' in orientation, compared with the alternative of being 'other worldly'. Another term we could use as the polar opposite of the secular city is to speak of the holy city.

There are three cities which in the course of history have come to be regarded as the chief claimants of this title. First, there is Benares in North East India, on the River Ganges, the holy city of Hinduism. Secondly, there is Mecca, the holy Muslim city towards which every faithful Muslim turns several times a day in order to say his prayers. Thirdly, there is the city of Jerusalem, revered as holy by all three faiths of Middle Eastern origin, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Any religious tradition which acknowledges one city to be a holy city keeps focussing attention on that city — going there if it is at all possible on holy pilgrimage. That city provides for the devotee a centre to his world. This is very clear in Islam where every mosque has its Kibla, or apse, which marks the direction of Mecca. The central point provided by the holy city symbolizes the fact that the religious faith stemming from that city gives direction and meaning to life.

One of the reasons why Jews built synagogues, Christians built churches and Muslims built mosques is that the further one lives from the holy city the more difficult it is to go there. So the church, synagogue or mosque becomes a holy place which serves as a centre for the village, town or city where one lives. As Christianity spread through Europe and Western Asia, the church became the village centre and the cathedral the city centre. The market square, where business and trade were carried on, where celebrations occurred, was very often directly in front of the church or cathedral.

This meant that every pre-modern city of the Christian West had a holy centre. Such was the magnificence of the buildings of the European cathedrals during the High Middle Ages that one was left in no doubt as to where the centre of the city was. The one city of New Zealand where this state of affairs is still clearly visible is Christchurch, where the Cathedral still dominates the city, remains the centre-point of the city and is faced by a large open square, now a pedestrian precinct.

But in most cities today it is very different! Even in London the great dome of St. Paul's which long was visible from almost everywhere in London, has now become hidden among large blocks of post-war commercial buildings. The secular city, unlike earlier cities of Christendom, has no holy centre. Indeed it tends to have no real centre at all. When the modern city first began to emerge the city hall tended to become the centre. In the late 19th century it was the railway station. Each city may develop its own idea of a centre. In Dunedin, for a long time, in spite of the presence of First Church with its

imposing Gothic spire, it was actually the Stock Exchange which was the centre. By and large the modern secular city has no centre — certainly no permanent and universally acknowledged centre. Each person sees and finds their own centre — depending upon interests. That means that the city no longer supplies us with a kind of architectural model of our world, of an ordered cosmos, which conveys to us a strong sense of direction and purpose. The city of Christendom once used to do that. The spire to be seen from everywhere, was a constant reminder that eyes should be continually turned to God above. The bells which were rung from the church or cathedral were a call to prayer. Indeed the tinkling of bells still heard at the Roman Catholic Mass is only the relic of the practice of ringing the great bells so that all within hearing distance would know the moment in which that miracle had taken place once again by which the bread and wine had become the body and blood of Jesus.

Many Christians look back nostalgically to cities of European Christendom with their holy centres; for these give, both visually and in sound, a clear sense of direction and order to life. Such people deplore the fact that those characteristics have been choked to death by the rise of the secular city.

But there is another side to it. The homogeneity and uniformity of life in a city with a holy centre was fine for all those who whole-heartedly embraced the Christian faith. But what of others, the Jews for example? They could not be citizens of that city. They could be allowed no part of that city. They had to be herded into a ghetto and sealed off, as it were, from the Christian community.

What also of those solitary individuals, who from time to time, followed their own independent thoughts, exerted their individuality and questioned one aspect or another of the foundations of the Christian city? They too could not be tolerated. Stern measures were often taken to ensure that all conformed. That is the other side of the Christian city of the Middle Ages. It was selective, not wholly human. It limited personal freedom. It curbed initiative. At times it even imprisoned the human spirit. Since the Renaissance and Reformation, which mark the first clear beginnings of the modern world, personal freedom has been growing in successive stages, resulting in increasing diversity of thought and conviction.

As the modern world emerged it became necessary to break out of the boundaries and rigid forms into which the Christian tradition had become fixed. While on the one hand these had given security, on the other hand, they were becoming a prison. This is why in the late nineteenth century the prophetic insight of Nietzsche charged Christianity with teaching a slave morality.

The result of this outburst of human freedom and of the emancipation of western society from ecclesiastical control necessarily meant that the modern city had to become secular. There could no longer be a holy centre. To allow freedom for the individual, the institution both of city and of the nation, had to become religiously neutral. The only kind of a human society consistent with the freedom of the individual human spirit is one of religious pluralism.

This brings us to a new and important meaning of the word secular. It should not be equated with 'non-religious' far less with 'anti-religious' but with



'religiously neutral'. The modern secular city, like the modern secular state, must be religiously neutral in order that its citizens may be religiously free. Good examples of the modern secular state are India, United States and New Zealand. England and Sweden are secular in practice, but, in theory, they are still religious states. Russia, in theory, is a secular state but, because of its official commitment to an anti-religious ideology, it is actually a 'religious' state of a negative kind.

The secular city, like the secular state, has therefore become religiously necessary in the modern world. Many traditional Christians find that hard to accept and feel great nostalgia for the former holy city or the city with a holy centre.

One of the reasons Cox wrote his book was to expound two main theses. The first is that the modern secular world was a product of Western Europe. The second is that the secular world, far from being an enemy of the religious tradition out of which it has emerged, is in fact the logical development of certain trends which have been present in the Judaeo-Christian stream from the beginning. There is no time here to discuss his arguments at length. They may be briefly described as follows.

First, Cox contended, the Hebrew teaching about creation had the effect of separating God from the forces of nature. Whereas primal man treated the very forces of nature themselves as sacred, the Hebrews saw them as having no ultimate power over mankind. Rather, mankind was given legitimate control over them. The forces of nature were effectively desacralized.

Secondly, the Exodus from Egypt under Moses was a dramatic rejection of the conviction that hitherto had been unquestioned, namely that royal houses and aristocratic classes rule by divine right. Moses led the first of what was destined to be a long series of social revolutions before this truth was to be universally recognized. The Exodus was the first step, said Cox, in the process of taking the 'sacred' out of politics, that is of desacralizing the institutions of social power and government.

Thirdly, the ancient covenant at Mt. Sinai between the Israelites and their God, Cox saw as the relativizing of all absolutes. This is expressed particularly in the first two commandments which call for the iconoclastic destruction of anything from this world which begins to assume the absoluteness, the holiness, the finality, which belong to God alone. Cox called this the deconsecration of values. He meant that all our value systems are relative to a time and place. They are open to criticism. They must not be treated as eternal and unchangeable.

In short, it was Cox's contention that the process of secularization which is the dominant trend in modernity really found its origin in the very foundations of the Judaeo-Christian faith because of the way it desacralized various aspects of life in the world — and that is why the modern world emerged out of the Christian West and from nowhere else. This means that though the term 'secular city' cannot be termed an image of the city which is explicit in the Bible, it is nevertheless one which is implicit in the Bible.

There is one strange confirmation of this in the Bible. It is in the Book of Revelation, that last book of the New Testament which has both puzzled and yet fascinated Christians ever since it was written. Right at the end of the book (and consequently of the Christian Bible itself), the writer describes a vision he saw of a new kind of world which was to replace the present world. He described it as a holy city, a new Jerusalem. One of the features of this city was that there would be no temple in it — there was to be no holy centre!

Why was this to be the case? He explained! It was because the only temple would be the Lord God Almighty. But where was this God to be found, if not in a temple or church? He would be found among his people. He would be found among and in human beings. The very same Greek language is used here as we find in the prologue to St. John's Gospel in the passage that gave rise to the term 'incarnation'.

There it says that the logos or word of God became enfleshed in Jesus. But here it says that in this city of the future, God will cease to be the transcendent divine ruler in heaven above and will be in and among, not just one particular person, but in all people.

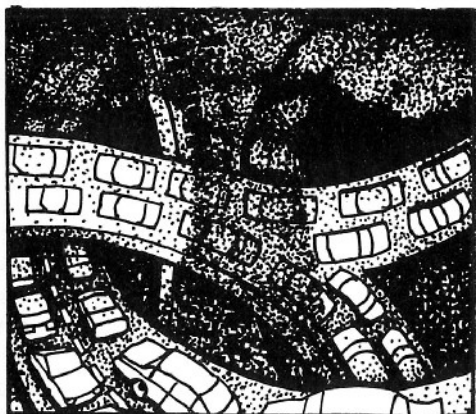
All this is expressed in ancient mythical language. Yet it is in many ways the most daring thought in the whole Bible. The implication is that in the city of the future the dichotomy between holy and secular will have disappeared. There will be no difference between the secular city and the holy city. There will be no difference between God and the human community.

It is abundantly clear that we are still a long way from the realization of that ancient vision. Yet it may help us to see that although the modern secular city must not be regarded as any final product, it may well be an important stage on the way towards a yet more satisfying and fruitful form of human existence. Already in the modern secular city there is increased freedom and choice of opportunity. But at the same time we must assume increased responsibility for our human future. We participate more and more in the prerogatives which formerly were attributed to God.

We now have to determine the direction we should take where formerly the direction was laid down for us already. Life in the secular city may be freer but not easier.

Because our future is coming increasingly into our own human hands it is all the less certain.

## CHAPTER THREE



# THE DOOMED CITY

A few years ago two Italian students of archaeology and I hired a taxi from Baghdad and travelled south about 100 kilometres until we reached the Euphrates River. The countryside was only sparsely populated. What I had gone to see was quite uninhabited. It was the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon. First I climbed and walked over a shapeless mound of dry earth. Although only about 20 metres above the completely flat landscape, one could nevertheless see quite a distance, including the palm—trees growing on the bank of the Euphrates. This mound is all that is left of what legend calls the Tower of Babel.

Archaeologists call it a ziggurat. Several were built in ancient Mesopotamia and some remain in much more of their original shape than this one, for after this one was destroyed for the

last time it served as a quarry of sun-dried brick for builders for centuries to come. This ziggurat once stood about 90 metres — a most imposing structure. It started as an ancient Sumerian village some 5000 years ago.

Then the invading Semitic Akkadians built a tower-like ziggurat as a temple to their goddess Ishtar and they gave it the name Bab—el, which means Gateway of God. The name of the city which grew up round about took its name from that tower and became Babylon. The story of Babylon is the story of construction and destruction — more than once. The earliest destruction of the tower gave rise to the biblical legend of the Tower of Babel.

There were two great periods of Babylonian prosperity. The first was about 1800 years before Christ when it became the religious and administrative capital of an empire ruled by Hammurabi. His law-code carved in rock can be seen in the British museum to this day. But that city of Babylon was destroyed and rebuilt by successive waves of foreigners. More than 1000 years after Hammurabi came the second great flowering. We may call it the New Babylon. It was the capital of the greatest empire the world had then seen. This Babylon was the city of Nebuchadrezzar who, in his victorious marches, captured, among many other cities, the holy city of Jerusalem. It was to this Babylon that he took into exile as captives the Jewish priests and aristocracy. It is probably in this Babylon that the first five books of the Bible were compiled into their present form.

I thought of all these things as I walked through the ruins of what was in its day the greatest city mankind had ever built. The hanging gardens of Babylon were long regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world. All that I could see were toppled, broken-down walls of sun-dried brick. It needed the expertise of an archaeologist even to discern what was left of temples, palaces,

theatres in this heap of rubble. It was not hard to conclude that in the course of time all the greatest and noblest of human constructions ultimately end like this. The words of the Bible came to mind;

Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images  
of her gods the Lord has already shattered  
to the ground.

The Jews, because of their close association with this city of Babylon seized upon it as an image of the wicked city. The early Christians inherited this image. But Babylon also became the chief example of the doomed city. Babylon thereafter became a symbol of every city doomed for destruction.

More than 400 years after the time of Nebuchadrezzar, when the enemies of the Jews were no longer the Babylonians but the Hellenistic kings of Syria, an anonymous Jew tried to encourage his persecuted fellow-Jews by writing of the fate of Babylon. He portrayed Nebuchadrezzar strutting proudly over the rooftop of his royal palace saying, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my own mighty power for the glory of my own majesty?" While the words were still in his mouth a voice from heaven called to him, "Your kingdom has departed from you — you will be driven out from humankind and forced to live like an animal."

But though Babylon became the chief symbol of the city doomed for destruction, it was not, of course, the first to suffer that fate. Rather it was the largest in a long line of cities which, in Jewish memory and experience, had been reduced to ruins. The pages of the Old Testament are full of stories of doomed cities from Sodom and Gomorrah onwards. The most persistent message in the renowned prophets of Israel is one of impending doom for one city after another. One can open the books of the prophets almost at random and come across such words as:

Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city,  
and will become a heap of ruins.

Moreover, this gloomy message of destruction to come was not confined to foreign cities, the strongholds of one's enemies. Finally the prophets told of the coming destruction of their own cities — including the holy city of Jerusalem. This was particularly the case with the prophet Jeremiah who declared "a destroyer of nations" was already on the way:

to make your land a waste; your cities  
will be ruins without any inhabitants,

For this subversive talk he was reviled, imprisoned and tortured. He was regarded as a traitor and was almost put to death, yet he lived to see his words come true.

In 586 B.C. the Babylonians destroyed, sacked and burnt both the city and temple of Jerusalem.

A whole book of the Bible is devoted to Jewish lamentation over this ultimate disaster;

How lonely sits the city  
that was once full of people. . .  
Women are ravished in Zion  
virgins in the towns of Judah.  
Princes are hung up by their hands  
no respect is shown to the elders.  
The joy of our hearts has ceased  
for Mount Zion lies desolate;  
and jackals prowl over it.

Now we must ask the question — why has this image of the doomed city been such a persistent one? It is found not only in the biblical heritage, but in human experience everywhere. So many of the cities of the ancient world like Asshur and Babylon, like Byblos and Ugarit, like Memphis and Palmyra exist today only in ruins.

Why is this so?

The answer given by the Bible is simple. They long associated the image of the doomed city with that of the wicked city. They firmly believed that human history moves onward according to moral laws because it is ultimately controlled, not by men but by a righteous and all-powerful deity. Therefore all cities, being wicked, must ultimately end in destruction. In the long run this answer has turned out to be over-simplistic and even false.

All of us would hesitate to apply that superficial answer today. Did major earthquakes devastate Lisbon, San Francisco, Tokyo and Napier because these cities were especially wicked? Of course we dare not say so. We need to enquire further to find satisfactory reasons for the phenomenon of the doomed city.

Actually the first reason why the frequency of city destruction led to the prevalent image of the doomed city is very simple. A city brings a lot of people into close and interdependent relationship. Any natural calamity will as a consequence, appear much worse and often be much worse than it would have been in sparsely settled countryside. Life in the city multiplies the degree of vulnerability already present in human existence.

In the earliest cities fire was the chief cause of destruction. It took a long time to realise that cooking methods which were relatively safe in the country became highly dangerous in the city. As recently as the great fire of London, started in a baker's oven, the lesson had not been learnt. Not only was fire one of the simplest weapons for the ancients to use to destroy the cities of their enemies but some ancient cities such as Persepolis were destroyed by accidental fire (or so it is thought).

Then lack of adequate city planning contributed to urban disaster. The early cities grew up like Topsy as the result of unrelated factors working blindly together. People needed a water supply. So they built beside rivers. This left them unprepared for the "one in a century" flood which swept the city away. Indeed one of the reasons why the early inhabitants of Mesopotamia built their large artificial towers or ziggurats was to provide a refuge. The surrounding



land was so flat that when the Euphrates flooded, as it sometimes did without any warning, cities found themselves in the midst of a shallow sea.

Then thirdly there is the phenomenon of disease and plague. Contagious diseases spread very quickly in the city, not only because people are in closer contact, but because cities which are unplanned and uncared for create the conditions conducive of diseases — such as bad drainage, impure water, and no sewerage. More recently it has been air pollution and the hazards of traffic congestion. For all these reasons "it is little wonder" as one sociologist has said "all of the early cities were eventually abandoned or overrun by enemies".

Not just wickedness but ignorance lies behind city destruction. The less planned a city, the more likely it will end in ruin. City planning is a relatively new art, only really in its infancy. Already it has done much to improve the prognosis of the modern city. But this in itself is not sufficient to overcome the challenge of the doomed city.

We must never forget that the city is a human construction. It is artificial. City buildings are themselves lifeless and static and like all human products are finite. They have a limited time span, having a beginning and an end. This is something we could hardly help noticing as we have been walking through the streets of Wellington in the last twelve years, as we have observed one building after another being demolished. The chief features of the countryside result from the living forces of nature. Whereas a deserted city only falls more and more into ruin, a deserted countryside has the natural capacity to re-establish itself. This contrast is strikingly illustrated by the unexpected discovery of Angkor Wat. What had been an impressive structure of Buddhist civilization, once deserted, became hidden and swallowed up in the encroaching jungle.

This contrast between the natural countryside and the artificially made city leads us to distinguish between two aspects of the city — the buildings and the people. We often refer to each as the city, but in fact a city consists of both. Empty buildings constitute only a dead city. Buildings plus people constitute a living city. A living city, like the natural forces in the countryside, does have the power to grow, to change, to transcend earlier mistakes and disasters, to rise again out of the ruins and partial loss of population, and destruction of buildings. We have seen this happening all over Europe since World War II.

Doom need not be the ultimate end of every city. Because cities are man-made they can not only be rebuilt; they can be remodelled. They can grow into something different. The awareness of the vulnerability of the city and its possible doom can so spur the creative human imagination that the city may grow to be something different from what it has been. It is for this reason that even the Bible itself, in its evolving thought, completely changed its stance on how it saw the city. Its very first image, as we have seen, was that of the wicked city, from which we can expect no good at all. But its very last image was that of the eternal city as we shall later see. The middle step in this metamorphosis of images was the image of the doomed city.

For a long time in history one of the chief ways men attempted to overcome

the vulnerability of city life was simply to strengthen its defences by building walls. Cities came to be built in places which were more easily defended from enemies.

This process gave rise to a new image of the city as a fortress. Indeed, in the Teutonic languages, the word for fortress, 'burgh', became the commonly used synonym for city. The relics of this remain to this day in such place names as Edinburgh — and in our own use of the 'borough' for small towns. Both in the ancient world, and in the European world, until two or three hundred years ago, a city always implied a walled city. The gates were closed at nightfall. The walls were manned by night-watchers. People felt much safer in cities than in the countryside. They believed the early vulnerability of cities had been overcome. Cities had become invulnerable. They had become places of safety, fortresses, sanctuaries of peace.

Today cities no longer have walls. They have ceased to be places of safety. The simple reason is that the ingenuity of man can work both ways. The ability to build walls which are impregnable can be matched by the ability to build weapons and machines of war which make walls useless. In the modern world the vulnerability of the city has re-emerged in a starker form than ever before. This was clearly illustrated by the bombing raids in World War II. The city, long thought to be a refuge and place of safety, had become a hot spot of danger. Britain encouraged as many non-combatant and non-essential personnel as possible to leave London for the countryside. Children in particular were sent out of what had become the danger zone.

One of the memories I have of World War II is of the day news reached us of Pearl Harbour. I happened to be living in Wellington then. What I remember was this. At every petrol-bowser there was a queue a mile long, with people anxious to fill their cars with petrol so that they could leave the city at a moment's notice. The city had ceased to be a sanctuary and had once again become vulnerable as a place doomed for destruction by enemy action.

This vulnerability of the city has not decreased since World War II but, because of missiles with nuclear warheads, has actually increased many times over. Practically all such missiles if ever used, will be targeted on cities, for their aim is to do the greatest possible damage in the shortest possible time. And that is only part of the story.

The age of nuclear war began, of course, with the dropping of the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That news sent a spine-chilling wave around the world. I know to many it brought a sense of victorious relief in that it would hopefully bring a speedy end of hostilities with Japan — which in fact it did. But that is not how everybody saw it even then. I was living in a small country town of North Otago at the time. The day the news came through I went in to the village store. To my surprise I found the storekeeper almost beside himself with rage and indignation, that the human race could sink so low as to use such a monstrous weapon on relatively innocent citizens. When I think back to that initial reaction of a relatively simple New Zealander whom I would have thought of as possessing only average ability and moral sensitivity,

I am amazed how dulled has become the moral sensitivity of the western world today. We seem to have become quite blasé about nuclear war, as if it is something we have become adjusted to, and have learned to take in our stride. Moral aspects of it are rarely discussed any more.

To the extent that this is so I believe we are today living in a fool's paradise. It is true that for a decade after Hiroshima there was a widespread fear of nuclear war. Then in the period of *détente*, that fear became less acute. Unfortunately, during that lull, the perfection of much more powerful nuclear warheads went on apace until the arms race once again accelerated. Today the threat of nuclear war hangs over us like the sword of Damocles. The image of the doomed city has never been such a threatening reality in all human history as it is today. This time it is not a few selected cities only which are threatened. It is all cities. It is in fact the emerging global city which lives under the shadow of the doomed city.

The reason is that nuclear war, if it breaks out, will escalate so fast that all the fatal decisions may have been made in the first half-hour. From what the experts tell us there seems to be no way of limiting a nuclear war. The only alternatives are; either an all-out nuclear war or no nuclear war at all. An all-out nuclear war would not only produce destruction and death on an unbelievable scale — but its aftermath is likely to spell the end of all higher forms of planetary life. A nuclear war would bring the ultimate end of the city for all time.

Even many of those who support the possession of nuclear arms as a necessary deterrent agree with this Either—Or. They say we must have nuclear arms equal to those of our potential enemies in order to prevent the ultimate disaster of a nuclear war. I respect the sincerity of those who produce this argument but I find the logic puzzling and unconvincing. It is like saying — "We are living dangerously — we are sitting on a gigantic powder keg which may explode at any moment. Our only hope of survival is to add more explosive so that no-one will dare light the fuse!"

Without realising it, our potential enemies are no longer what they once seemed to be. It is no longer the yellow peril, the Russians, the Communists which constitute the real enemy. Our real enemy today is this gigantic Frankenstein which, because of our mutual distrust and hostility, our own minds and skill have created. It is not our human enemies, but this potentially dangerous and unstable state of affairs which, if not defused, will destroy both us and our so—called human enemies. The global city of the world stands under threat of ultimate doom.

And the cause? It is not the wrath of a righteous God. It is not the wicked designs of our enemies. It is the fact that human ingenuity has outreached both the moral and rational capacity to control what we have created. The famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, in his last public interview for the B.B.C., was asked about the human future, and whether there would be a Third World War. He made a significant reply.

"Man himself is the origin of all coming evil." This means that if the ultimate

doom falls it will be because the human race through blind ignorance, wilful short-sightedness and narrow-minded self-centred has brought about its own destruction.

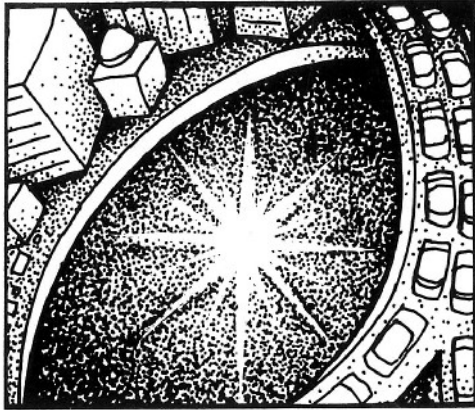
We witness today a growing tide of concern around the world as the image of the doomed city shows up more clearly on our horizon. Yet those who point to what they see are often reviled, sneered at, and dismissed as prophets of doom. Such is frequently the treatment meted out by people in high places. Prophets of doom have never been popular, even in the ancient world. Although the ancient prophets were seen as traitors in their own day their words came to be collected and placed in the Bible because they came true.

It won't be like that this time. If the words of today's prophets of doom come true, because they are not heeded, there will be no one left to ponder and record their words. The global city will lie in ruins, uninhabited, for the last time in the history of this planet.

This is the season of Lent. It is a time of reflection and stock-taking, a most suitable time of the year for trying honestly to meditate on our present human predicament without trying to score points off those who see it differently. An incident relating to the Jesus whose death is remembered in the Lenten and Good Friday season is very relevant. If you visit Jerusalem you will find halfway up the hill, called the Mount of Olives, a tiny church. There is a window over the altar. Through that window one has a breath-taking panoramic view of the old city of Jerusalem. The church is called Dominus Fleuit. (The Lord Wept). It marks the approximate point in which, according to Gospel tradition, Jesus paused as he approached Jerusalem with his disciples and he wept as he thought of the destruction which was shortly to befall that city. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not. Behold your house is to become forsaken and desolate." Jesus too was a prophet of the doomed city!

No prophet of the doomed city, either from the ancient world or the modern world, takes pleasure in what they foresee. They weep! Nor are they fatalistic. They know the dangers are real but they see a glimmer of hope. It is that hope which is expressed in the final image of the city which we shall turn to next.

## CHAPTER FOUR



# THE ETERNAL CITY

In the modern world the image of the doomed city has recently assumed colossal proportions because of the advent of nuclear war. The prospect of the complete destruction of the global city has become frighteningly near. Yet the doom which hangs over us, as I tried to show in the last chapter, owes more to human ignorance, short-sightedness and narrowness of vision than it does to wilful wickedness. Doom is to be related to the dark side of the secular city rather than to the wicked city.

The secular city has much to be said for it. It has brought to the individual person greatly increased freedom and opportunity for fulfilment. But every increase in freedom carries with it an equal measure of responsibility. The secular city appears to have laid on our shoulders a degree of responsibility for which we are not yet ready. Our cleverness,

our technological ingenuity, has outstripped our wisdom. One reason for this is in the rapid expansion of science and technology which has characterized the emergence of the secular city.

We have lost our vision. The secular city, as currently experienced, is often flat, uninspiring, cold and inhuman. The secular city lacks vision — that which has the power to stir the human imagination, motivate the human will, and inspire with hope. That is why we must turn now to the image of the eternal city.

There is actually one city in the world which has long regarded itself as the *eternal* city. It is the city of Rome. Why is this so? Most of us think of Rome, either as the capital of modern Italy, or as the even greater capital of the ancient Roman Empire. Why eternal city? Admittedly it is a very old city. It is much older than New York, London and Paris, and even older than Alexandria and Athens. It proudly traces its foundation to the legendary Romulus in 753 B.C. Old and magnificent — yes! But why eternal? After all, it too has known destruction. The reason for this epithet is chiefly to be found in what happened after it ceased to be the capital of a great empire and before it became the capital of Italy.

For a period of about 1000 years, it was the centre of an empire very different from the kingdoms of this world. After the fall of Rome some of the structures of the empire were inherited by the church and the mantle of the emperor was assumed by the Bishop of Rome. He even took to himself the title once proudly claimed by emperors, Pontifex Maximus, used by the Pope to this day in the form Chief Pontiff.

We may take Christmas Day 800 A.D. as a convenient starting point for the long period in which Rome was to be viewed as no ordinary city but as the



eternal city. On that day the Pope crowned Charlemagne as Emperor of a new and Holy Empire. During the next 1000 years the Pope claimed a higher authority than that of all kings and princes of Christendom. From Rome he exercised power both temporal and spiritual. That period came to an end in 1870 when the Italian army entered Rome. The temporal power of the Pope was considerably reduced and is today confined to a few acres known as the Vatican City.

The fact that Rome was the eternal city for 1000 years is due in no small measure to the thoughts of one man — Augustine. When Rome fell to the Goths in 410 A.D. only a century after Constantine had elevated Christianity to be the state religion, many citizens of the old school blamed the decline of Roman power on the spread of the new faith.

Augustine, living in North Africa and the most influential Christian thinker of his day, set out to answer these charges. It resulted in a famous book, written and published in instalments over a period of 13 years. It became one of the great Christian classics and is known as *The City of God*. These circumstances of its appearance illustrate something mentioned in the last chapter. The doomed city may serve as the middle term between the wicked city and the eternal city. It was the experience of destruction on a grand scale which gave birth to the image of the eternal city. This book was destined to have wide influence on later thought in the West, both political and religious.

Augustine lived at one of the extremely critical periods in the history of the West. He saw the last days of Rome. And he himself was a product of the best which Roman culture had to offer. In some respects he was the last of the great Romans. Yet bleak as the future appeared to many of his fellows, he looked into it with great hope. That hope was expressed symbolically as the City of God — or the heavenly city. His simplest definition of it runs: "The heavenly city has truth for its King, love for its law and eternity for its measure".

To appreciate what Augustine was doing we must remember that he was living at a time when people of the ancient world thought in terms of the *Civitas Romana* — the Roman body-politic. That 'city', as it were, was for them the one and only possible society. To this end they had deified the emperor as its living incarnation. They had given a religious sanction to all its claims. As its framework was at that moment cracking into pieces, Augustine said in effect, "This is not the whole story! There is another and greater society — towards which the whole of creation is moving". He elaborated a gripping philosophy of human history which inspired new hope! He did this by drawing a sharp contrast between what he called the heavenly city (the city of God), and the earthly city (the terrestrial city).

The city of God was pervaded by relations of righteousness joining together all the righteous on earth, wherever they are, with God and his angels in heaven. This city was universal in extent, but it excluded the fallen angels and the unrighteous. This city was not visible to the naked eye. As he saw it, it did contain most church members but not all. The earthly city was also invisible to

the naked eye. It contained the unrighteous — and that included some church members.

These two cities were chiefly characterized by two different kinds of love. In the earthly city was found love of self and contempt of God. Thus wherever people exert power for their own advantage, imperial, civic or economic power, we have the presence of the earthly city. In the heavenly city we have by contrast, the love of God and contempt of self. Wherever people are ready to sacrifice their own personal advantage in the interests of the common good (which is none other than for God himself) there we have the presence of the heavenly city.

It is a mistake to identify the earthly city with, say, the declining Roman Empire (or the civil state) and the heavenly city with the Church. Augustine specifically stated that "these two cities, based as they are on these two kinds of love, shall live side by side and even intermixed until the final separation shall take place at the end of time at the Last Judgement!"

This aspect of Augustine's teaching is remarkably parallel to Jesus' parable of the need to let the weeds grow up with the good grain until the harvest. However, Augustine's teaching came to be misunderstood. As time went on the church did come to be equated with the City of God and all that was not in the church belonged to the terrestrial city. Later Christians looked expectantly to the ultimate dissolution of the earthly city, already symbolized in the historic fall of Ancient Rome. And they looked to the ultimate victory of the church as the one and only final society. This is how the new Christian Rome, arising out of the ashes of the old Rome, came to be seen as the manifestation of the eternal city.

Yet this was not all. What of those faithful who died before the consummation? The opening words of Augustine's classic seemed to put it clearly:

That most glorious society and heavenly city of God's faithful is partly to be found living a pilgrim life amidst the declining times of this wicked world. And it is partly to be found in that solid state of eternity — which the first part patiently awaits.

Thus Augustine divided the City of God into the Church Militant on earth and the Church Triumphant in heaven.

In this way Augustine's vision of hope for the city gave rise to that dualistic view of reality — which dominated the mediaeval mind and which has survived for some Christians right up to the present. In this view final human destiny was transferred from this world to 'another world'. This world was to remain the doomed city and the only hope for mankind was to look for another non-physical world for the realisation of the eternal city.

Although this view of human destiny is less widely held today than formerly, its residue, where it is to be found, could well have disastrous consequences. This view is frequently found among fundamentalists of the 'born again' variety and among those who form the American Moral Majority. It leads them to say quite openly that they have no fear of a nuclear holocaust. If it comes, they have

every confidence that they will be transported to the eternal city of God and only the wicked, who in their view includes all Communists, will be annihilated. Such people have little interest in the future of this planet for they, like the mediaevalists, have come to equate it with what must ultimately pass away. Thus should the decision to use nuclear warheads ever be in the hands of such people (and we are uncomfortably close to it in the American political scene) we would do well to tremble.

This dualistic view of reality has been rapidly declining in the last 100 years and for very good reasons. Although Augustine can be indirectly blamed for it in part, it is a gross distortion of what he thought. Augustine was a very complex person. Besides the Christian commitment in his life there were two other great influences in his thought. First he was a Platonist in philosophy. Like Plato he believed the eternal realities were not physical things but ideas. The heavenly city and the earthly city were for him essentially ideas — powerful ideas, controlling ideals. That is why they could both be present at the same time in the everyday world.

Now along with Platonic philosophy there remained in Augustine a considerable deposit from his pre-Christian days when he was a Manichaeist. The religion of Manichaeism stretched right back to the ancient Persian religion of Zoroaster. These two influences, put very simplistically, are the ultimate source of the dualism we find in Augustine. Zoroaster taught that in human existence we are caught up in a cosmic war between the forces of God and the forces of evil. Translated into Augustinian and mediaeval terms that is the conflict between God and his angels on the one side and Satan with his fallen angels on the other. If people become dominated by Satan then they belong to the earthly city. If they respond in obedience to God, then they belong to the heavenly city.

The elements in Augustine's vision of the eternal city which led to the dualistic world view of the Middle Ages owe much more to Platonism and Zoroastrianism than they do to the Biblical tradition. This was also, of course, an influence in Augustine. To this we now turn.

It is in the Bible that the term City of God first appears. Of course it appears as a term for Jerusalem, also known as the stronghold of Zion. The Psalmists celebrate the greatness of that city;

On the holy Mount stands the city founded by God  
the Lord loves the gates of Zion  
more than any other of the dwelling-places of Jacob.  
Glorious things are spoken of you  
O city of God.

It was largely because of all the holy associations which Jerusalem came to have for the Jew (from the time David captured that city about 5000 years ago), that the Israelite image of the city underwent a transformation. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the earliest image of the city in the Bible is that of the wicked city. Those early traditions look at the city through the eyes of the nomad. But the city came to be accepted into Israelite tradition. The point was

reached where they could speak of the city of Jerusalem in particular as the city of God, the holy dwelling-place of the most High.

Now it is true that Jerusalem is a very old city, perhaps 1000 years older than Rome, and it has remained in religious imagination a holy city — first for the Jew, then for the Christian, and finally for the Muslim also. But this does not mean that Jerusalem has by any means remained through history an impregnable fortress of peace and righteousness, impervious to the evil designs of men. In fact, Jerusalem has known destruction many times. It has been fought over by all the great Empires of the ancient world, by Muslim and Christian in the Crusades, by Muslim and Jew in this century.

Jerusalem can, no more than Rome, be identified in any final way with the eternal city. Both, in their respective ways, have been only signposts of a hope yet to be realised. And nowhere is this better expressed than in some words we find in the New Testament. They refer to Abraham. To appreciate them fully we must recall that the very earliest tradition about Abraham reflected the nomadic distrust of cities. It depicted Abraham turning his back on the ancient city or Ur and venturing out to a land as yet wholly unknown. In between that tradition and the New Testament reference lies the long history of how Abraham's descendants dwelt in Israel, made Jerusalem their holy city, saw it destroyed and later returned to rebuild it. Once again it was destroyed, this time by the Romans. Some time after that, an unknown Christian wrote the book we call Hebrews. In recalling the ancient men of faith he singled out Abraham for special attention. He was a model of what it means to have faith for he obeyed when he was called. He went out "not knowing where he was to go". But "he looked for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

What is meant by that city? That city cannot be identified with Rome or with Jerusalem, or with Mecca, or with London, or with any city in God's own country! But neither does it refer to some actual but unseen city in another world. That city exists only as a symbol of hope. The 'eternal city' is an image, a product of human hope and faith, created by the human imagination. We should not think any the less of it for that. The same applies to all the images we have been looking at.

How those images relate to reality depends upon us. The images of the wicked city and of the secular city refer more particularly to ways of seeing and understanding the present.

The doomed city and the eternal city refer more to how we see future possibilities. Each of these may possibly be realised. The image of the doomed city may well motivate us towards the eternal city — as it did for Abraham — as it did for Augustine. If we wish the eternal city to become the reality we must journey towards it in faith and hope. Even as we journey we can sense the reality of that city. The signs of its coming shine through from time to time, even with our experience of the secular global city. They are to be found wherever people act, not out of self-interest but out of concern for others — not just within their own family, not just within their own nation, but out of

concern for all their fellow humans of whatever colour, class, creed or political persuasion. In the eternal city there are no such divisions.

Nationalism belongs to the earthly city. The eternal city knows no national boundaries. Let me take a simple example. If loyalty and concern for others can be fostered in our young people by the regular saluting of a flag (and about this I have real doubt), then it is not the national flag of New Zealand, but the United Nations flag to which we should be encouraging loyal devotion. The coming city of God is present in our cities only to the degree to which we citizens look beyond our own city limits, beyond our national limits, to the global city of mankind.

Some, of course, would like the eternal city to be much more substantial than an image, a symbol of what is yet to be realized. They would either like to be able to point to it in this world or else have it proved to them in Holy Writ that it already exists in another world. There are no such guarantees. The eternal city remains in the class of future possibilities. Whether we realise it or not it has become a matter of human responsibility. We humans tread a razor edge, between the doomed city and the eternal city. It can be seen only by faith. It can be reached only as we shoulder our human responsibilities and move steadily towards it in obedience and hope. We can visualize it with the eye of faith. We can sense its presence. But it remains intangible — a hope for the future.

It was this city of which Samuel Johnson wrote. He was not the Dr. Johnson of London fame, but an American of the same name from the last century (1800s). He was a man of quite radical theology for his day, a modest and deeply spiritual man but an active social reformer and vigorous anti-slavery protester. He was deeply learned in the religions of the East. He wrote a book on the oriental religions and how they too relate to the universal religion.

One should see all of that in his famous hymn:

City of God, how broad and far,  
Outspread thy walls sublime,  
The true thy chartered freemen are  
Of every age and clime.  
In vain the surge's angry shock,  
In vain the drifting sands,  
Unharm'd upon the eternal Rock,  
The eternal city stands.

With him and countless others who have joined the company of Abraham, we too are called to look ahead and move forward to the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God. That is the city of which Augustine said, "It has truth for its King, love for its law and eternity for its measure".