

## THE SUICIDE OF MAN

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I will talk to you today about the death wish of mankind. To put it in another way, I think the world is in the process of committing suicide. I realize there are some people who are totally optimistic and others who are totally pessimistic. I must say that if you look at the world from one perspective you have reason to be optimistic. God is at work and great things are happening. Many people are being saved. But if you look at the world from the other perspective, the perspective of the world itself, you will quickly discover that the world is in the process of committing suicide.

You and I know that the world did commit suicide once before. It happened in the days of Noah. God judged the civilization of that day and all people on the earth died apart from eight souls who were rescued in the Ark. Civilization came to an end; mankind committed suicide.

I have here an excerpt from the *Saturday Review of Literature*, a well known American magazine. The editor, Norman Cousins, wrote about the Nigerian-Biafra war. He said: "No problem need any longer be considered insoluble. No one is going to believe any longer that we can sustain life on the moon but are unable to do it on earth." Henry Pitney Van Dusen, former president of Union Seminary in New York, a theological liberal of the optimistic variety, wrote a letter to the editor in response to Norman Cousins' observations. He said: "I know no one who faces the facts and has taken accurate measure of the manifold symptoms of profound, perhaps mortal, sickness in American society that still clings to such illusions. Denial of or blindness to the harsh reality merely aggravates the illness." Here is a former optimistic liberal who has become a pessimist. He no longer is optimistic. He no longer expects Utopia. Rather, he asks: Do we not have a mortal illness that will bring culture or civilization to an end?

Bertrand Russell, the atheist, said in his book *A Free Man's Worship*: "All the labor of the ages....all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins."

Listen to Ruben Alves from Latin America. For two years he was an associate professor at Union Seminary in New York. In the Spring 1974 *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* he wrote: "What is given, in our historical situation, does not make room for any sort of optimism. But I know, also, that without hope, man cannot survive...So I am stretched between the anthropological need for hope and the historical impossibility of hope...One thing I know for sure. In the business of living, one must not live by certainties..." So speaks a man who once was a Fundamentalist; who once believed in absolutes and entertained hope; who still yearns for love and justice but who says he does "not see grounds for justice and

love to triumph in the world." This is his thinly-veiled invitation to universal despair and racial suicide.

I remind you that man can commit suicide in one of two ways. One way is to be in revolt against the creation itself. God the Creator is a moral being who has ordained that civilizations shall move according to the principles or laws which come to us from natural revelation. You can trace the rise of empires through history whether it be that of Egypt or Rome or some other nation. These cultures or civilizations flowered because they more or less obediently followed the revelation of God given in nature. But the time came when these cultures stubbornly revolted against the laws of God in natural revelation, and these cultures disappeared.

There is a second way man can commit suicide. He can cut himself off not simply from God's creation, but from God the Creator. It is my opinion that the unregenerate people of the world who are far more numerous than the saints of God, and the nations of the world, are committing suicide both ways. They are cutting themselves off from God's creation as it relates to his natural law. They are cutting themselves off from God the Creator as revealed in Jesus Christ his Son. You may well ask the question: "Why do you think the world is committing suicide?" Let me suggest some of the forms which this suicide or death wish of civilization takes.

First, man is committing ecological suicide. Every great city of the world has had its atmosphere contaminated. Tokyo, London, New York, and Moscow do not have pure air for their people to breathe. The overpopulating of the planet by human beings will soon leave us with standing room only. The effects of radiation through atomic explosions have been serious. The balance of nature has been destroyed, sometimes without intention, by the use of pesticides and other pollutants. Scientists have discovered that the South Pole has been contaminated from gasoline fumes in California and the use of DDT on American farms. Rachel Carson wrote a book called *The Silent Spring*. In it she forecast many of the unfortunate consequences of ecological imbalance which we are now seeing before our own eyes. The lakes of Switzerland, the rivers of India, even the oceans of all the world, have been raped and exploited. Death and decimation have come to marine life. The whale life in the oceans will shortly become extinct. Bird and animal life in many places around the globe faces devastation and eradication. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, all attest man's unceasing quest for ecological suicide.

We are also committing scientific suicide. In the last thirty-five years we have more than doubled the knowledge that the world possessed in all of the preceding generations of man's history. At the rate we're going we will more than double or triple the knowledge of mankind by the end of this century. Learning and advancement, however, have not brought peace and security but peril and fear. The net effect of scientific advance has produced overkill. The nations of the world have a potential destructive capacity in nuclear energy so terrifying that if these weapons were to be delivered by intercontinental ballistic missiles or by air power, virtually all life on this planet would be destroyed. Indeed, we have chemicals, liquid and gaseous, some so nox-

ious that a single drop on any part of a human body is fatal. Only a few years ago in the western part of the United States hundreds of sheep died accidentally when shifting winds spread gases that decimated all the sheep of the area. Many nations have a vast array of chemical and biological agents called germs. If the great powers ever decided to release this kind of destructive potential in warfare, the world as we know it could indeed come to an end. We're also unraveling the genetic code. Scientists tell us that the possibility exists for the creation, perhaps through cloning, of the true superman, a scientific monster with great brain power, with physical strength and powers, with great physical beauty, but with the moral stature of an idiot.

In the field of medicine, what the physicians have done almost defies description. Some of this knowledge has been very beneficial. We have reached the place where we have pain pills, sleeping pills, birth control pills, energy pills, pills to stunt growth, pills to produce growth, hormones for sexual potency as well as pills to control conduct. Ours is a world of pill therapy. We are in the age of curative medicine with heart transplants, kidney transplants, and the use of artificial organs. We have powerful drugs that knock out and cure pneumonia, stop syphilis, and get rid of gonorrhea. We have hallucinogenic drugs that are supposed to give meaning to life. We have pep pills and marijuana and acid so that we can take trips into outer mental space. We've extended life in a medical sense but we've offered nothing worth living for.

Sweden is regarded as the showcase for the welfare state, a paradise in which all men's earthly needs are cared for and guaranteed by the state. Instead of a paradise they have an alarming increase in juvenile crime, wide-spread alcoholism, increased drug addiction, a high suicide rate, and sexual aberrations, all at a time when church attendance flags and God has become less real. The welfare state neither there nor anywhere else has brought in the Kingdom.

See what science has done for war. Remember that the latest conflict between Arabs and Israelis provided an opportunity for the great powers of the world to test the efficiency of their most modern military hardware. The world is preparing, if you please, whether it knows it or not, for Armageddon. In Vietnam there is a very temporary truce. They are gathering their forces again to engage in another round of that conflict.

War between North and South Korea is likely to erupt in the not-too-distant future. On the borders that separate China from the Soviet Union great hosts of armed forces are balanced one against the other. In Latin America dictatorship after dictatorship has arisen, whether it be in Bolivia or in Chile, whether it be a dictatorship to the left or to the right. In South Africa black and white are poised one against the other. In the United Kingdom the Catholics and the Protestants in Ulster are at each other's throats.

Yes indeed, the nations are loading their guns, their knives are being sharpened, the planes are gathering on the runways, the bombs are poised waiting to be released. Make no mistake about it. All we need is one match to start the conflagration. All we need is one mistake of human judgment and a great military catastrophe will overtake the world.

Man is committing moral suicide. Within two-and-a-half blocks of my office in Washington there are more pornographic outlets than you

are likely to find in any other major city around the world. Yes indeed we have pornography. We have sexual freedom. We have fornication, adultery, homosexuality, wife-swapping, rape, sodomy, incest, pandering, prostitution, voyeurism. You name it. We've got it. The movies and legitimate theater are sex-oriented. They concentrate on the abnormal and the illegitimate under the guise of freedom of expression. A new morality that is immorality under an undefined and contentless concept of love abounds around the world. Every man, every woman, is doing what is right in his own eyes.

We are also committing sociological suicide. In the United States one marriage in four will break up, or twenty-five percent of all marriages end in divorce. It used to be that the Roman Catholic Church was way behind the statistical averages because they have consistently taught that there is no divorce for any reason including adultery. But the turn of the tide, the trend of the times, is catching up with the Roman Catholic Church and even among this part of our population they have almost reached the national rate of one out of four divorces. In Italy divorce is now possible. Yes indeed, there has been a breakdown of the home. Young people no longer respect their parents. Our colleges and universities have been hotbeds of revolution. Whether it be Japan, Thailand, Brazil, Germany, Ireland, or Portugal, youth is on the march, flaunting their disrespect, disobedient to parents, denying the values that have traditionally undergirded family, community, and national life. Respect for law and peace is being destroyed; morality has been abandoned; crime has increased; drug addiction and alcoholism abound everywhere; the major cities around the world are in a state of decay; the rich nations are getting richer and the poor nations poorer. Society is becoming unglued.

The world is committing intellectual suicide. In our day the dialectic has overtaken Aristotelian logic. Aristotelian logic is based upon the law of antithesis. Francis Schaeffer has done a good piece of work at this point. He tells us that if A and B are opposites they are irreconcilable; they cannot be brought together. But the dialectic, as put forth by Hegel, picked up by Marx, and used in current society, argues that you can have a thesis and then you have an antithesis or the opposite of it. When the two opposites come together a new synthesis emerges. And this is logically irrational. It is biblically untrue.

We are committing intellectual suicide by creating nonpropositional versions of truth. At a time when science has stressed reason, religion and philosophy have abandoned it. All over the world men are saying that life itself is really meaningless. It is irrational. It doesn't make sense. Read the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre or Camus. Hear them say over and over and over again that there is no God and reason is folly. Thus atheistic existentialism does whatever it pleases because it doesn't make any difference. For them life is meaningless. One young college student speaking to this issue said: "When you are on the Titanic you might just as well go first class. The ship's going to sink anyway."

Men everywhere are committing theistic suicide too. Not many years ago the death of God theology swept through American universities and theological seminaries. For many, God is dead or irrelevant. God is denigrated by a homocentrism which places man at the center of life. Life for so many has become humanistic, and religion including Christianity

has been relativized. Some say all men are religious by nature and all we need to do is synthesize the good elements in each religion to form a new and universal faith. This view undercuts the notion, traditional in Christianity, of special revelation. Many people have not accepted the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, which teaches that God has sovereignly saved some people and passed by others. But today there are those who believe that all men will be saved and thus they embrace a far more rigid dogma of predestination since even those who don't want to be saved will be saved. Thus a noted theologian and philosopher in the liberal tradition, Paul Tillich, could make this statement. He said: "Even those who deny God are by that fact affirming God and are justified."

At the heart of theistic suicide lies the autonomy of man, man who thinks he is subject to no power outside of himself; who thinks he is a law unto himself; man who is the creator of his own absolutes, the judge and the jury of his own life.

Men and nations are committing suicide. This is a dark picture that I have painted.

In the midst of man's race with death, the tool he now uses is revolution. In one place it may be economic revolution; in another it may be social revolution; in another it may be political revolution; in another it may be religious revolution. Men by revolution think they will shatter the bonds that bind them. They hope for a better life with freedom and dignity. But they miss the true message that is to be found in revolution. The struggle is not a struggle between man and man or nation and nation. The real revolution is the warfare between God and Satan. It is the revolt of darkness against light. It is a warfare that is being fought in the whole cosmos, even in the unseen world far out beyond the sight of men or the hearing of their ears. The fallen angels of Satan are engaged in a titanic struggle against God and his holy angels.

The Word of God assures us of the doom of this present world and of sin and Satan. In II Peter, chapter 3, it says: "The heavens *shall* pass away. The elements *shall* melt with fervent heat. The earth *shall* be burned up." Yes, the seal of death is upon this earth. Nothing can save it. It must die before it can live again. The judgment has already been pronounced.

Thank God that the new is even to be found within the old. God's Kingdom is emerging in the midst of man's quest toward suicide. God has a people, and he is calling out this people for his name from among all the nations of the earth. His body the Church is being completed. The final holocaust is delayed until his purpose is fulfilled, his Gospel preached, and all nations reached with the Good News.

The door of the Ark still remains open. The hour is late but it is not too late. The restraining power of the Holy Spirit is being lifted and men when left to themselves become what men when left to themselves always become. It is only the Holy Spirit in common grace who holds things together. When his restraining power is lifted then all things will fall apart. In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 12, the Scripture says: "Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.' But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God... See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we

reject him who warns us from heaven. His voice then shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken, as what has been made in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be thankful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken."

In the midst of a world that is committing suicide and of God's Kingdom that cannot be shaken, the Apostle Paul describes the characteristics of unregenerate men who move irresistibly toward suicide. He says that "in the last days there shall come times of stress, for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than the love of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. They will listen to anybody and can never arrive at the knowledge of the truth. These men oppose the truth, men of corrupt minds and counterfeit faith" (from II Timothy, chapter 3).

In the book of the Revelation there is the description of the Laodicean church which is an apostate church. As John writes of it he says, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing." But the tragedy of this church was that it thought it was what it was not, and it is what it doesn't think it is. John concludes by saying: "You do not know that you are wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked."

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus tells us that when unregenerate men come toward the end of their great desire to commit suicide, in that hour when multiplied wickedness has overtaken the earth, then the love of many believers shall wax cold. You cannot become cold unless first you have been hot. You cannot lose a love that you never had. Here then is the description of people who had love and heat, yet Jesus says that because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.

God still has a message for his people in the midst of this world that is proceeding apace toward suicide. You and I who love him are to occupy till he comes. We are his army and his disciples. We are expendable, for the world is on fire and we ourselves may be consumed in the burning. The night is coming when all of us who know Christ can work no more.

There is the sound of music in the air and two bands are playing. One is the music of death unto death and the other the music of life unto life. And the great cosmic question is, "To which music do you march? Which piper do you follow?" You know, I can hear the sound of music. I hear the marching feet. I see the glory light. I see a Cross on which is lifted up the Son of man. I hear a multitude singing from every tribe and nation and kindred and people and tongue. And they sing, oh how they sing; and this is the song that they sing: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so Amen." They sing, yea, they sing. How

great is the music of their song as they sing. They say, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on. He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat. He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat. O, be swift my soul to answer him be jubilant my feet. Our God is marching on." We march with him in the hope of victory. We march with him for the salvation of men. We march with him because he calls to service. We march with him so long as one man still needs to hear the Gospel. We march because men must be saved from their suicide.