

## Introduction

### Clouds over a Mountain Stream

There I was, in the Adirondack Mountains, sitting on a rock in the middle of Johns Brook trying to digest C. S. Lewis' The Abolition of Man. The mountains were supposed to be my escape, a short time away from my job, a short time away from my ministry. But now I had let myself become unsettled, not by the realities that Lewis had observed over 60 years ago, but how his prophetic message was clearly being lived out today.

This short book is only 109 pages long, three chapters and an appendix; just the right size, and weight, for a five-day backpacking adventure. It is small, but it is filled with incredible and timeless observations. The first chapter, *Men without Chests*, deals with society's denial of objective values; a desire to build up rational thought at the expense of emotions. Lewis expresses outrage at those that consider themselves to be intellectuals. He writes: "It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so."

The second chapter, *The Way*, addresses the existence of a universal set of moral values that provides a guide for all societies and civilizations; that there are certain things that we *ought* to do and others that we *ought* not do. Lewis refers to this set of values as the *Tao*, and is concerned about its denial by the forces of relativism. Lewis argues: "When all that says 'it is good' is debunked, what says 'I want' remains."

The final, and title, chapter, *The Abolition of Man*, presents the logical conclusion of a society where emotions and values are discredited; where intellect and wants reign supreme. And this conclusion is not only the end of a civilization, but the end of humanity. Lewis looks with concern to the past and observes: "I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and

attained power, has used that power benevolently." He looks to the future, talks about man's attempt to conquer nature, and concludes: "Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man."

### The Clouds Darken

I left the mountains and returned home considering how the numerous intellectuals of our time are attacking the moral fabric of our society. I questioned whether our society was becoming more civilized, or less. My personal observations of current realities, viewed now in the light of Lewis' arguments, haunted me as I returned to my routine. Are we approaching the abolition of mankind? Are we maybe on an inevitable path in that direction?

Back from the mountains, I returned to my job as an engineer in the automotive industry; an occupation that I no longer found satisfying. It was a good job; I was well compensated, I worked with, and for, wonderful people, and I was recognized for my accomplishments and contributions. At a time when people were losing their jobs and struggling to survive in the automotive industry, I felt guilty for not being satisfied with a position that many others would envy. But at age 54, I had changed much emotionally and spiritually since those days in engineering school. The industry had changed as well. And the result was that I no longer had any passion for the type of work I was charged with performing. My only source of passion was generated by helping my coworkers, especially the younger ones, to accomplish their project goals and move along, or survive, in their careers.

In an effort to find direction for the next stage of my life, I stumbled upon another book that had a dramatic impact on my life, one that was much more contemporary. And that book was The Rhythm of Life: Living Every Day with Passion & Purpose, by Matthew Kelly. Matthew's book gave me great insights into changes I needed to make to be better equipped to face the challenges of life; as he calls it: to be "the-best-version-of-

myself". Basically, I was called to restore discipline in my life. As I reflected on my life, I realized it was the discipline that had been present during the most productive periods of my school, work, and spiritual activity. I went charging through the book with an upbeat and positive attitude, filled with the hope that maybe I was on the right track to regaining my balance. But suddenly I came to a halt as I read one of the final chapters of the book entitled: *Leaders, Critics, Dreamers, and the Future*. Here is the excerpt from that chapter that caught my attention:

*"There are five signs of a declining civilization: a dramatic increase in sexual promiscuity; the political undermining and disintegration of family values; the cultural destruction of the family unit; the killing of the innocent; and a radical increase in non warfare violence. These signs have played a major role in the decline and collapse of every civilization in recorded history. So much so that once these signs have emerged to some level of general occurrence and acceptance, no civilization has been able to prolong its existence for longer than one hundred years.*

*"In our own culture, these signs gained initial prominence during and after World War I. They were compounded and spread even more widely by the effects and consequences of World war II, and by the end of the 1960s, they were rampant. At the turn of the millennium, they have all but been generally accepted as valid views and forms of behavior. Therefore, using a date even as late as the 1960s as the landmark for the general emergence of these signs, our civilization is left with only sixty years. This is not a prediction, it is not a prophecy, it is a reality set in the past. It is a lesson we have continually failed to learn from history. And sixty years is a short time for one person, never mind a civilization."*

Now I have not researched Kelly's claims regarding the five

signs that have heralded the collapse of all previous civilizations. It is clear that all five signs were evident during the fall of the Roman Empire, although the 100 year timeline for its collapse is arguable. We can see the five signs not necessarily as causes of the collapse, but as symptoms that the collapse was occurring. Without dwelling on whether these signs have taken place in every declining civilization, or whether we have 60 years or 160 years left in our civilization, I think we can agree that all five signs currently exist in our society.

And while we may be concerned about the future of our civilization, we must realize that saving our civilization cannot be our goal. As C.S. Lewis puts it in Mere Christianity: "[W]e shall never save civilisation as long as civilisation is our main object. We must learn to want something else even more." We must learn to want to do the right things; the things we ought to do and not just the things we want to do. Civilization will take care of itself.

### **Correcting our Path**

Is the end of our civilization inevitable? Is it as close as the signs seem to indicate? What can we do now to delay it? What should we be doing now to prevent it? But, most importantly, if our civilization does come to an end, how can we be prepared for what happens next?

These are the questions I pondered. It was my reflections on these questions that lead me to attempt to write this book. My high level conclusion is that our society, our civilization, must once again find its way; it must return to the straight path. It was for this reason that my originally-intended title for this book was "Orthodoxy". Orthodox means, literally, correct belief. Orthodoxy implies traveling a journey along the path that leads in the right direction, and I fear our society is not moving in the right direction. As I searched the word *orthodoxy* on the internet, however, I found that there was already a book written with this title. I found that the great G. K. Chesterton had written that book back in 1908, and it was a wonderful find. Like Lewis' The

Abolition of Man, Chesterton's Orthodoxy was a tightly written masterpiece of insights. Every time I read it I find new meaning, and I highlight more sections. I thought at one time of abandoning my own book and directing my efforts to a paraphrased rewrite of this wonderful work; updating it to make its message more accessible to readers of today. I ultimately decided not to do that; yet. That may come later.

### **Submarines**

Chesterton presents an autobiographical explanation of how he came to know and believe his faith; for him it was Christianity. He takes a much more optimistic view of the state of the world and the ability of civilizations to survive. He did not see that civilization died with the fall of the Roman Empire. For him, it was the existence of faith that provided the light to guide mankind through the darkness so that the civilization could reemerge. This is how he puts it in Orthodoxy:

*“And in history I found that Christianity, so far from belonging to the Dark Ages, was the one path across the Dark Ages that was not dark. It was the shining bridge connecting two shining civilizations. If anyone says that the faith arose in ignorance and slavery the answer is simple: it didn't. It arose in the Mediterranean civilization in the full summer of the Roman Empire. The world was swarming with skeptics, and pantheism was as plain as the sun, when Constantine nailed the cross to the mast. It is perfectly true that afterwards the ship sank; but it is far more extraordinary that the ship came up again: repainted and glittering, with the cross still at the top. This is the amazing thing the religion did: it turned a sunken ship into a submarine.”*

Who will be our submarine captains if, or when, our civilization submerges again? Are you ready to do your part to keep humanity on track until it re-surfaces?

### **Orthoscopy**

Since the use of *orthodoxy* as a title had already been done, I needed to look more closely at the objective of my book and try to discover a new title for my own use. I realized that my objective was not so much to determine or describe the straight path, as it was to look at the obstacles that we all face in finding that path for ourselves and as a society. The real question is: how can we see better? *Orthoscopic* is an adjective meaning *free from visual distortion*. (Not to be confused with the more commonly used word *arthroscopic* which relates to the inspection of joints.) *Orthoscopy*, therefore, is my noun form of this word, and the title I have chosen for this book. I hope to share some reflections that will enable you to have a clearer vision of what you, and society, ought to do.

### **Limitations and Qualifications of this Book**

This book is not intended to change your views, or necessarily to try to convince you of the appropriateness of any particular perspective on the issues of our times. At the same time, however, I will make no attempts to hide my own personal views and moral beliefs. To do so would be dishonest, and not very workable. I tend to be very transparent and never do a very good job at portraying myself to be something that I am not.

By way of disclosure, I need to share some information about myself and about my faith. I am ordained as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. The teachings of the Catholic Church are, for me, my first and foremost guide to finding the correct and straight way through life. This approach is grounded in faith, but balanced by the belief that my faith must be reasonable. It is an approach that follows St Anselm's definition of theology: “faith seeking understanding”. This book is intended for people of all faiths. My hope is that those who do not share my Catholic faith tradition will still be able to benefit from the observations that I share.

This is not a book about religion or about arguing for or against the tenets of any one established religion or denomination. I will use personal examples from my own Catholic faith as illustrations, but not with the intention of proselytizing. This is not a book about religion, but it is a book that presupposes a basic belief in the existence of God. If you truly do not believe in God, then much of this book will be meaningless, and you might want to put it down now and walk away.

In this book I will often use the issue of abortion as an example to express and clarify some of the points I will try to present. It is clearly one of the most divisive issues of our times and makes a good example for examining different ways of approaching an issue. It should already be clear, by what you have already read, what my position is on the issue of abortion. My intention here is not to change your position if it is different than mine, although I admit that this is clearly something I would like to do at another time. No matter what your position is on the abortion issue, I hope you will choose to continue reading this book.

### **Scope**

There are three reasons why an individual or society does not travel along the path that is straight. First, there can be a refusal to recognize that a path exists. This subsequently results in a failure to look for it and find it. Second, there can be an inability to see clearly enough to find the path. It becomes lost in the fog and dark. And third, there can be the conscious choice to abandon the path that is clearly identified.

I will touch on the first and last reasons briefly, but the focus of the book is the second reason. This book is addressed to people who want to find the straight path and also want to follow it; people who want to know what they and society ought to do.