

VIII. - The great cities of the world.

Woe, woe, the great city! REV. 18:16.

UNDER three different points of view the contrast between the earlier and the present mankind appeared before us. Formerly powerless against the forces of nature, now dominating them. Formerly locked up in a small, silent world; now participating in the life of the whole world in a never-ending movement. And likewise, formerly limited in knowledge; now loaded with knowledge. Applied now to the life of religion, it made that powerlessness dependent; made that peace of life retreat into itself; and made the smallness of acquired knowledge eagerly grasp for the knowledge that was revealed. And conversely, the awareness of one's own power has now weakened the feeling of dependence on the Almighty; the restlessness of outward action leaves no time for life in the inner chamber of one's own heart, and the predominance of finite knowledge pushes back nostalgia for the knowledge of the Infinite. As will appear later, this should not be so, and our being created in God's image should rather have led to an opposite result. But the guilt of the past, and the sin of the present generation, will not allow it otherwise. Our power in all areas, our being at home everywhere, and our having knowledge of everything, has put our own self in the glory and made it almost inaccessible to the glory of God and His Christ. Where rebirth intervened, this spell was naturally broken, but the general instinct for faith in the unseen, which had previously been the most powerful lever for our human life, lost its power, and as a result religious life everywhere declined in importance and strength. The religious instinct has therefore not gone. The spark is still there. But the layer of ash that presses the spark prevents the glow from shining.

When the former concentration of life and consciousness in one common worship was lost, the desire and need to find the concentration of life in something else had to arise out of it. However much our lives may have been broken up by excessive individualism, the urge for unity and solidarity cannot be ignored. This urge for unity arises from our own being. However different and sometimes contradictory the inclinations and abilities of our souls may be expressed, in everything our one, own being is expressed. And even if nowadays one prefers not to speak of the soul, the more one gets used to speaking of his I, and again of his I, and that I is and remains the unity in our own existence.

But our human race cannot rest in that unity of the personal I. The ego of one person as opposed to the ego of another has a disconnecting and dissolving effect,

and hence the constant search for an imposing power that unites us in all our differences and all our divergent expressions of life. That power used to be Religion. Not first among Christians, but already very strong in ancient Israel, and even in the world of the pagans. Local idols combined local and national life, but among the Greeks, for instance, the high idea of Jupiter hovered over and above the local idols, giving a certain unity to the whole body of the gods. But this unity reached a higher level when the worship of the one true God entered the world. That worship was brought together in the veneration of Christ, and then a time came when all human life was actually concentrated in the worship of Christ. Not only personal life and the life of family and relatives, but also the life of the schools of science, the guilds of our craftsmen, city life, the life of art and skill, everything was religiously sanctified and found its meeting point in the Christ. Thus, there was unity, thus there was concord, thus there was concentration, and it was this that gave human life its higher harmony, as through a holy glow that radiated from the unseen world to this world of visible things.

Now, on the other hand, that conception has been broken, that unity is gone, that concentration has been lost, that holy harmony has faded. There is too much turbulence in the waters, which pushes up the sludge from below, and therefore there is no longer any reflection in those waters of what shines in the firmament. The clarity was lost. What we see around us has already become murky. It is already one stormy sea, which feels its waves being stirred up by the wind of the day, and cannot come to rest.

And yet, in the midst of this disintegration and fragmentation, the never-dying need for unity and synthesis is once again making itself felt, but it is now working in an entirely different way. Whereas in the past it was a striving for spiritual unity, today that unity must have a visible, a material character. In the past it came to us from the unseen world, now it is fixed in the world before our eyes and seeks its concentration not in the Jerusalem that is above, but in the mighty World City, which encompasses all human life. This striving has also been known in antiquity, on the one hand in Jerusalem and Athens, and on the other hand in Babylon and Rome. But even though there is equality, it was different then than it is now. Jerusalem and Athens were world cities, not because of their huge size, nor because they contained all human life, but because of their spiritual excellence. As cities they were relatively small. But Jerusalem shone through the monotheism on Zion, Athens through its artistic genius. And although Babylon and Rome were already powerful cities, and to a certain extent, prototypes of the world city, yet in

a completely different sense than we see today. The temple, albeit of the idol, always remained the centerpiece. There was power, there was ingrained decay, there was bulging of wealth, there was sinking into sensuality, but, for all the doubt and skepticism, there still remained something sacred that held together. But even in that subdued state the prophet saw the danger that schools such powerful cities. Babylon even remained, in his application to Rome, the evil name of the city that drank the peoples from its poisonous cup; and the contrast between Babylon as the world city and the Jerusalem that is above, inspired the visionary on Pathmos.

Yet antiquity has never known the metropolis as we know it, as the aggregate of all human life and even under the renunciation of all high and holy semblance. In our world cities, the metropolis has automatically become, without anything higher or more ideal, the center, the governing power of human life. There is no question of the smaller cities, as we also know them at home. Urban self-indulgence may also refer to Amsterdam as a world city, but every connoisseur knows that the world cities are Paris, London and Berlin for Europe, and New York for the American world. Concentrations of millions of inhabitants, who draw the action from all over the country, and regard all the rest of the country with its towns and villages as a dependent area over which they hold sway. Yes, even more so, cities that do not respect national borders and try, each in its own field, to subjugate the life of all countries to itself. Paris as the metropolis of wealth, London as the metropolis of trade and commerce, Berlin as the metropolis of human knowledge, and New York as the metropolis of money. People flock to these metropolises from all sides. It is a pilgrimage from all over the world to first feel fully human in those cities. They draw everything to themselves with magnetic force. From them emanates the watchword that must resound throughout the world, and set the tone for life to the most distant regions. Whoever did not make the pilgrimage to those cities does not count as a full human being. There, in those cities, one lives one's own life; everything that flourishes outside merely imitates the life of those cities. They are the mistresses, the rulers in every area of human existence. Wine is poured in those cities, and according to the word of the Seer, they have watered all peoples with their wine. Those who set the tone there are "clad in fine robes of purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls." Still according to the old type, portrayed in such powerful language by the prophets and by the Seer at Pathmos.

Thus, the ancient concentration of human life under the shield of Christ was lost; the concentration that the city of the world gave us in its place could only be an

unholy one. Already the prophet gave the type of such a city the impression that it could not be anything other than a "gathering place of unholy spirits," a "repository of what is unclean and hateful. This could not be more different. The seed of sin is present in the heart of every human being. The more people you bring together in one place, the more you heap up the unholy fuel for the fire of sin into an unholy mountain. The idea that this is only the case in Paris is as inhuman as it is contrary to the facts. In England's capital evil accumulates just as powerfully. Berlin has not been left behind in any respect. And in New York sin, in its shameful forms, celebrates satanic orgies. In each of these cities there is a pool of iniquity in all moral and material areas. Not as if all these cities were like that. In all these cities there is a civilized, very tasteful facade, but behind it evil brews and ferments without bounds and bandits, and the poisonous gases evaporate everywhere in wild rising clouds.

This comes from the hiddenness of impudence. In the countryside and in small towns you are known by reputation and by your name. Self-esteem therefore compels self-restraint. Holy shame is a guardian angel there, keeping wild passion in check. But in those metropolises with their millions and millions, the individual loses himself completely. Nobody knows him. He is left to himself and therefore loses sight of the guardian angel of shame. He sees how others do not bother about anything anymore, and in their bacchanalia he rejoices. Night is turned into day, day is turned into night. One ceases to be a human being with one's own name and esteem, and is absorbed in the bread-drunk crowd. Thus, sin among men and women takes on ever more shocking forms. From whom should one spare oneself? From whom should one hide? It becomes one evil sport in sensual self-degradation, in which one tries to outdo the other. And so, one drinks, one plays, and makes oneself miserable, until all the higher nobility has been trampled upon. Nothing to which one recoils any more. Nothing that wakes up the voice of conscience. One knows about the other and feels safe in one's own guilt because of the other. None of the unholy "brothers" will consider you less. The children know it from their father and mother. The younger brothers and sisters from the older. It is one irresistible train of pleasure and wealth, which lures and pulls everything along. And this in turn has the natural consequence that from all over the country, and even from distant countries, the most wicked and criminal elements crawl and creep towards these world cities. There they find a world to their liking, and, once there, they give vent to their evil passions.

And in those inwardly depraved world cities all the glory of human life is drawn together. All art opens its temple there and gives honor and gold to its priests and priestesses. Artistic entertainment celebrates its highest triumphs there. Singers and singers with the most sonorous voices, players of all musical instruments and of the utmost skill, theatrical performances with the most splendid decor and the most accomplished action delight the listeners and spectators. What is the life of an artist in a provincial town compared to his triumphal march in one of our world cities! In architecture, sculpture and painting, these metropolises surpass everything else in the country with their monumental palaces and richly furnished museums. The forms of life are raised to the highest refinement. The banquets sparkle through the choice of dishes and the finesse of the table settings. In garments and robes a color of cut and harmony of colors and richness of decoration is achieved, as you fruitlessly seek elsewhere. And not only this, but also science flourishes there. Every metropolis smells of its university and displays a series of the best-equipped schools in every field of human activity. There are societies, associations and clubs for all areas of human knowledge. Meetings, lectures and conferences on every area of human science gather a wide range of people in its premises every evening. The government unfolds its power there. An army of police and soldiers guarantees peace and order. The government illuminates canals and streets until deep into the night. For speed of communication she offers you tracks under the ground, streetcars along all lines, carriages under her control. It provides you with drinking water that rivals the water of the mountain stream in purity, and it guards against the consequences of disease, with which filth or poisonous microbes could threaten you. And even without government interference, you are at home in every part of such a metropolis. Taproom on taproom awaits you, to accommodate you. Everything has been taken into account. All of life's necessities are provided for.

The summary of life in such a metropolis therefore far exceeds the concentration of life in your villages and small towns. In those metropolises there is not only a concentration of the life of the whole country and of the whole world, but also a concentration within itself. In the countryside and in our small towns one lives one's own life in one's own home, and in that quiet domestic life a sense of family, devotion and mutual attachment develops. But in such a metropolis, the home is an afterthought. All too many people leave it in the morning and only return to it after midnight. The house is a place to stay if you want to go to bed or if you are ill. But one does not live in the house, but in the city. One has lunch in one's office, one has lunch in one's restaurant, and in the evening one finds one's husband and wife

and their children in the theater, at the concert or in the dining room, and one returns home only to go to sleep. In this way life becomes more and more externalized, transferred to the public domain, and on this public domain the person loses his or her identity, the family spirit loses itself, the family ties are loosened more and more, and ... religion no longer finds a place for the hole of its foot. How, then, could there be any question of a unification of life under Christ as the Head of all of us in all areas of life? Art excludes Him. Science degrades Him to a rabbi of antiquity. And the always evil society in its endless agitation creates for itself a moral standard, which no longer cares about the soul and dares to deny the body anything.

The strong concentration of life in such a metropolis, always going completely beyond the unity in Christ, yes, increasingly deliberately going against the unity of life in Christ, therefore seeks its unity in its own spirit. Not in a spirit of its own, one that comes from on high, nor even in a spirit embodied in a powerful personality, but in a spirit without a name, in a spirit that you cannot portray, yet a spirit whose dominating and compelling power you feel in every sphere of life. No one can resist the power of this spirit. And everyone who wants to participate in it transforms himself according to it. Not only in the large things, but also in the small things, in the fashion of the garment, in the way one presents oneself, in the language one speaks and in the tone in which one expresses oneself. One is addicted to this spirit. No one dares to resist. Like a flock of lambs, one follows the other. Also, in the changes in which that spirit is constantly vermeiling itself. Because what was fashionable ten years ago is now long outdated. Practically every five years or so that same, all-controlling spirit changes into new forms, into forms of how one dresses, what one eats, which room one visits, where one goes in the evening. And so, the form is not changed again until thousands and tens of thousands willingly follow and go along, and no one thinks of continuing to follow what was the rule for ten years. That spirit is different in Paris than in London, different in Berlin than in New York, and whoever comes to Paris from Berlin hastens to abandon his Berlin ways and slavishly blends into the Paris spirit. Who sets this tone can still be said of fashion. It is the man or woman who prescribes the cut and color of your garment every spring and autumn. But for the rest, the trendsetters are unknown persons. No one can tell you for certain why now and in precisely that way our habits and way of life have changed again. But the result remains the same. The spirit haunts and rules, and everyone submits to that spirit, and everyone who lives along follows suit.

And beneath it all, a unity of spirituality swirls and works. All these forms and habits and customs, however diverse and changing they may be, are nevertheless the expression of one and the same intention, one and the same will, one and the same direction, which is unconsciously steered. Nothing stands alone. There is a connection between everything. There is not only external and formal concentration, but also a concentration in unity of mind in everything that steers, directs and leads. This is how philosophers arose who believed they could express this unity of the governing spirit in their system, and these deep thinkers undoubtedly had an influence, but they were nevertheless mistaken when they believed that their thinking created this spirit. Rather, in their system they merely gave expression to what had been awakened in the minds of the people and had gradually become clearer in the minds of a metropolis. Whoever now peeks behind the curtain knows how, in all this, on the one hand the power invested in our human being by God is at work, and on the other all kinds of satanic influences. These two wrestle with one another, and it is from this wrestling that the leading spirit for each new age arises. In the century that now lies behind us this spirit has increasingly deviated from the holy path, and it is more and more clearly engaged in organizing a spiritual human existence that forsakes God in every respect and turns its back on His holy will. We do not know whether this ungodly development will once again be halted, curtailed, defused and subjected to a higher spirit. We may be on the way to the revelation of "the man of sin". It may also be that what is ruling now will be set aside again temporarily. But, whatever the future may bring, one thing is certain: our entire human development is at present marked by the metropolis, and the spirit that emanates from these great metropolises as a guiding and governing force is increasingly leaving its mark on our entire human existence. It is that spirit of the metropolis which, propagated to cities and villages, is increasingly coming to dominate the entire life of our gender. It is that spirit, which imposes its unity, conception and concentration on the sympathetic part of our human race, and seeks to propagate itself in all parts of the world. He, who was once its King, has dethroned Christian Europe, and the metropolis has become its Queen, under whose scepter people willingly bow. What reigns supreme is no longer the spirit from on high that lifts us up with *a sursum corda*, arms us against sin, and unlocks for us the gates of eternity. That spirit of above still rules in the small circle among those who have remained faithful to their King. But the spirit that rules over the masses is a spirit from the world, which, within the confines of this world, shuts off life and, even among the sufferers, takes possession of the human heart more and more. It is of this "spirit of the world" that the "world city"

is the shining temple. And out of that temple of the spirit of the world, one does not even fight against the Kingship of Christ anymore. That would have been the very thing that would have awakened the zealots of Christ's Kingship. No, it would have been better to spiritualize the Kingship of Christ, to leave it undiscussed, and finally to let it be forgotten. Thus, the terrain was cleared. Europe forgot that it had once possessed its harmonious unity for all the expression of life in the Christ, and thus the door of the heart opened to the majesty of the new Queen, to the Babylon which would give us its unity of mind and in its glory the modern summary of our human life.