

**The “Manhattan Declaration”  
Selling out the Reformation?  
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The New York Times Magazine, Dec. 20, 2009 carried an article by David Kirkpatrick on his old mentor and friend Dr. Robert P. George, a Roman Catholic “natural law theorist” who teaches at Princeton University.

During the interview, Dr. George is quite candid about the theological and philosophical basis of the “Manhattan Declaration,” a document that recently surfaced in New York City and has made headlines in the secular media. Dr. George is the hand behind the Declaration from beginning to end.

What makes the “Manhattan Declaration” significant is laid out in three points in the interview:

1. The Manhattan Declaration “disavows dependence on divine revelation or biblical authority” (p. 27). Luther’s teaching that “reason is so corrupted that faith in the divine was humanity’s only hope” (p. 29) was specially denounced by George. He noted that the Protestant doctrine of original sin poses a serious threat to the basis of the Declaration. George comments, “This is a serious issue and, if I am wrong, this is where I am wrong” (p. 29).

The Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura, if true, would mean that George “puts too much faith in the power of reason, overlooking what Christians describe as original sin.” (p. 29) Thus the basis of the Declaration is that the Protestant doctrines of original sin and Sola Scriptura are erroneous. God and His Word are not the ultimate authority of what to believe or how to live. Dr. George acknowledged as the case.

2. Once Sola Scriptura is rejected, what or who is the ultimate authority on what to believe and how to live? George stated that “human reason,” apart from and independent of revelation is the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. Man’s reason is the measure of all things.

Kirkpatrick summarized George’s position:

George is the leading voice for a group of Catholic scholars known as the new natural lawyers. He disavows dependence on divine revelation or biblical Scripture...Instead, George rest his ethics on a foundation of “practical reason”; “invoking no authority beyond the authority of reason itself.” (p. 27)

George argues that sodomy and same sex marriages can be condemned as immoral and illegal on the sole grounds of “reason” and “logic” alone. (pgs 26f) Kirkpatrick comments, “George argues that reason alone show that heterosexual sodomy and homosexual sex are morally wrong.” (p. 29)

“Heterosexual sodomy” refers to oral sex between a man and a woman, including between a husband and wife. “Reason,” according to George, would make oral sex between a husband and wife immoral and a matter of criminal law!

3. George expressed his amazement that so many “evangelicals” signed the Manhattan Declaration, which is clearly based on Roman Catholic Natural Law and Natural Theology. He noted that evangelicals historically denied Catholic Natural Law and Theology and instead upheld the Bible as the ultimate authority over faith and practice (Sola Scriptura).

**Our Analysis**

That Catholic bishops, theologians, and philosophers signed the Declaration is understandable. The New Catholic Catechism and recent popes have upheld Aquinas’ Natural Law and Theology. We can understand the Protestant apostates who renounced the evangelical gospel and converted to

popery signing the Declaration as well. The plain truth is that the “Manhattan Declaration” is the “Catholic Declaration.”

How then did George get so many Protestants to sign a “Catholic” Declaration when by signing it they rejected the very basis of the Reformation? George stated, “I sold my view about reason!” (p.29) By this statement “the cat is out of the bag.” George exalted man’s reason as the Origin and Measure of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. Thus the “Manhattan Declaration” is also a “Humanist Declaration.”

In the judgment of charity, most of the “evangelicals” who signed the Manhattan Declaration did not realize that they were in principle rejecting the Reformation and, in particular, the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. They did not understand that when they lifted up human reason as the ultimate authority on what is right and wrong, biblical authority was denied.

Some of the neo-evangelicals who signed the Declaration knew exactly what they signing. They have openly rejected original sin, the radical nature of the Fall, the inerrancy of Scripture, eternal conscious punishment in hell, the lost condition of the heathen, biblical authority, etc. in the name of “reason.” They are on the “highway to hell” and do not know it!

The ignorance and arrogance of the signers of the “Manhattan Declaration” underscores the importance of my new book, *The Bible, Natural Law and Natural Theology: Conflict or Compromise?* My book could not come out at a better time. The book is at the printers and will be ready to fight the heresies of natural religion, natural law, natural theology, and natural apologetics. It focuses on the real issues:

Is God or man the origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty?

Is the Bible or corrupt human reason the final authority on what to believe and how to live?

Is God or man the measure of all things?

#### **Who Signed?**

Numerous Catholic Bishops, priests, theologians, and philosophers.

Heads (20) and faculty members (19) of "evangelical" Seminaries, Colleges and Universities: e.g. Albert Mohler, David Dockery, Robert Sloan, Duane Litfin, J. I. Packer, Tom Oden, Cornelius Plantinga, etc.

46 Leaders of various “evangelical” ministries, associations, policy institutes and think tanks: e.g. Prison Fellowship Ministries, National Association of Evangelicals, Family Research Council, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, Alliance Defense Fund, e.g. Charles Colson, Rav Zacharias, Maggie Gallagher, Ron Sider.

22 "evangelical" Pastors, e.g. Tim Keller

10 "evangelical" Publishers (Christianity Today, First Things, Kairos Journal, Touchstone, and World Magazine)

The above signers were for the most part ignorant of what they signed and will be horrified when they realize they were duped. Some will withdraw their signature but most will be too proud to admit they were deceived. Pray that they will see the error of their ways and reaffirm Sola Scriptura instead of sola ratione.

#### **Conclusion**

The Bible alone is the final authority on what to believe and how to live. Those who build their theology on the shifting sands of human reason, experience, feelings, and faith are doomed to failure. The Rock of Scripture is the only solid ground on which we can stand.