

1-1-2011

The Grand Manifesto of Alexander I

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Recommended Citation

Daniels, Kelcie; Michael-Schwartz, Hannah; and Spring, Nick. (2011) The Grand Manifesto of Alexander I.
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/napoleon/11>

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SpCN944.05A374g1816

The Grand Manifesto of Alexander I: Translators' Introduction

Written following Napoleon's final exile on the Island of St. Helena, *The Grand Manifesto of Alexander I* was simultaneously a work of royalist and national propaganda and of personal passion. From the French Revolution through Napoleon's rule, in period of no more than thirty years, both the ideology of the sovereign monarch and the autonomous sovereignty of the European nations were profoundly threatened. In his manifesto, Alexander I protects his own throne both with both carrot and the stick of Christianity: he paints Napoleon as a dangerous monster and refers to his defeat as evidence that the Russians are God's chosen people. But, he also warns that the Napoleonic wars were God's punishment for their sins and that the Russian people must remain obedient subjects lest they provoke His anger again. At the end, he clearly states that the people are reliant on their rightful sovereign—God's representative on Earth—for their entry to heaven: "But as from our Royal Majesty, inspired and elated by our great people; nothing is left but to constantly implore in our prayers for God's benevolence for our people" (11).

Alexander's manifesto also directly warns the leaders of the other European powers to respect his autonomy. As with his people, he refers to Christianity as both a positive and negative motivator. He praises the steadfast unity of the European Alliance by comparing it to God's "sun of peace and tranquility" (10). But he also stresses the might of the Russian military and the holy power behind it, noting that Russia defeated Napoleon at his height while no other country could stop him even when he had lesser power. In the end he emphatically states: "It will be honorable and glorious for us to show the world that though we desire to make no man tremble, no longer do we fear any man" (11). Ultimately, as sincere as Alexander the First's piety was (and indeed it was intensely sincere), in this manifesto Christianity is a calculated weapon against both his people and his counterparts to protect his rule from the very real threats that shook the European aristocracy at the end of the eighteenth and the turn of the twentieth century.

In addition to the question of religion, in order to deter any nostalgia that could undermine his authority, Alexander plays on the very raw and painful memory of the Napoleonic conquests. With highly dramatized prose, he illustrates the antithetical relationship in which he is the hero and Napoleon the villain. He is pious, brave, preoccupied with the welfare of his people: *a rightfully born Emperor* while Napoleon is an ungodly, cowardly destroyer of his people: *a usurper*. Each and every step of the story highlights that any attempt to disable the sovereign throne, to usurp, is the embodiment sin and sordidness. To honor and obey the throne is the embodiment of virtue and heroism.

Although Alexander's story is very consciously purposed it also profoundly emotional. He and Napoleon had a very personal antagonism and the wounds it left were a driving force behind the manifesto. Alexander took the throne only three years before Napoleon was crowned

Emperor. In 1801 at the age of 24, Napoleon was eight years older than him and already legendary both as a villain for his role in the French Revolution and as a hero for his military and political prowess. Alexander carried this dual sentiment for Napoleon throughout their concurrent reigns. At the beginning of his career he actually reversed his father's policies and openly admired France. With the murder of a familial connection to the Bourbon Dynasty (the Duc d'Eghien), his self-appointment to Consul for life, followed by his coronation as Emperor, Alexander pitted himself against Napoleon by forming the European Alliance of Russia, Austria and Prussia.

After the European Alliance suffered heavy losses at Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau and Freidland, Napoleon lured the young Emperor into a Franco-Russian alliance by promising to divide the rule of all Europe with him. This alliance, solidified by the Treaty of Tilsit in 1808, Napoleon was obligated to cede his eastern-most territories (most importantly the Duchy of Warsaw) and restore their autonomy, but by 1810 Alexander saw that his only intention was to continue his own expansion. In addition Napoleon repeatedly toyed with Alexander, in one case demanding the hand of marriage of his younger sister. When this was refused Napoleon refused to ratify his and Alexander's convention and formed an alliance with Austria by marrying Princess Marie-Louise. Their relationship dissolved, and Alexander, having been deceived at least twice, was doubly embittered.

When the harsh winters destroyed Napoleon's army in his 1812 invasion of Russia and after second return to power in 1815 he was again defeated, Alexander felt more than the relief of defeating a long term threat. He felt the elation of defeating an intensely personal enemy—an enemy that had been an object of admiration and friendship. In this manifesto, when Alexander speaks of Napoleon's duplicitous ways in treaties it is more than just propaganda, it is personal experience. The cinematic description is more than effect, it is emotion. The scarred relationship between the most might leaders of Europe speaks loud and clear.

In reading through this document we see both an astute politician preempting any antagonistic action by his European counterparts as well rallying his people in the face of a very real threat: the loss of both national and personal sovereignty. We also see the deeply angry and prideful young Emperor of Russia reacting to the final overthrow of Napoleon, a worthy opponent who was alternately an idol and an enemy.

*-Kelcie Daniels, Hannah Michael-Schwartz and Nicolas Spring,
DePaul University November 21, 2011*

SpCN944.05A374g1816
THE GRAND MANIFESTO
OF ALEXANDER I
EMPEROR AND AUTOCRAT
OF
ALL THE RUSSIANS

*Given in Saint-Petersburg, the first of January,
the year of grace 1816,
and published in Paris, the fifth of March that same year.*

Translated by Kelcie Daniels, Hannah Michael-Schwartz and Nick Spring

Paris,
TIGER, Printer-Book Seller, rue de Petit-Pont, n. 10.
AU PILIER LITTÉRAIRE



ALEXANDER I
EMPEROR OF ALL THE RUSSIANS

Born the 23rd of December 1777

Thoughtful politician and generous prince,
The welfare of Europe occupies his thought;
And Religion, too long neglected,
Breathes in his writings making his people happy.

THE GREAT MANIFESTO
OF ALEXANDER I
EMPEROR AND AUTOCRAT OF ALL THE RUSSIANS,
TO HIS PEOPLE
A PORTRAIT THAT HE HAS MADE OF THE USURPER
BUONAPARTE.

This Manifesto was read solemnly in all the churches of Russia. The reader, therefore, will not reject reading it in its entirety. From the periodicals, for the most part, have published but fragments or extracts. Therefore it would be impossible to have a just idea of a work so useful and so influential on public opinion.

We Alexander I, by the grace of God, Emperor and autocrat of the Russians, etc.

The events that have occurred within so few years of this century are so remarkable and of such high importance that history will perpetuate them into ineffaceable memory. It is as necessary as it is useful that these events be conserved in the memory of the current and future generations. It is the hand of God that has regulated and linked together these events, that has directed them down this path known to Him alone, but which is not entirely invisible to mortal eyes. Hence He may put an end to the upheaval to which humanity has fallen prey, appease the restless hearts and souls, and revive calm and order within the breast of these wars and confusion. The All Mighty has overturned pride, his wisdom has dissipated the darkness and by the mercy and grace of which He is the source, He has prevented men from losing themselves entirely to their blindness and their passions. We will briefly recount the path of these events; we will inform our people, not out of vain glory, but for the sake of their instruction and salvation. May the people read that which the hand of God has orchestrated, may they see the effect of his judgments, that they may be inflamed with love for Him and that they may cry out from the depths of their hearts, with their Emperor: *It is not to us, Lord, it is not to us, but to Your name alone, that glory must be rendered!* May the memory of all that has passed thus be conserved for perpetuity from generation to generation!

This dreadful, bloody war that has devastated everything and that only the goodness of Providence has brought to a fortunate end cannot be compared to any in history. Perhaps this is due to its origin, the immense number of troops that it employed, or the unique circumstances that have often accompanied it.

It is an event altogether extraordinary, the like of which had never passed upon this earth. A scourge, as it were, brewed in the abyss of Hell in order to rattle and destroy the world; an evil carried to the height of violence to which the world was subjected according to the decrees of the All Mighty. There is something incredibly shocking and incomprehensible in the beginning and

the cause of the war. Its fire, continually fueled, erupted from time to time and was nearly extinguished, only to burst into flames again and with renewed furor. It was suddenly stifled in the midst of its greatest violence only to then be rekindled; it was completely smothered only after many similar efforts. From its first origin this war, akin to a cloud charged with pestilent flaming vapors, was not born of a chance disagreement between two States. It began, not so as to end in length or in haste, but to stifle the ingenious virtues that God's hand placed in the heart of man and then to nourish itself upon the innumerable evils that followed. It could not be extinguished but in the blood of the many men who fought. It is this monster in the moral order, engendered by vice, rooted in the hearts of infidels, nourished by error, and hidden in the darkness of mystery and fraud, that circulated a long time from country to country under the mask of enlightenment. His lips, with sweet deception, in naïve hearts sowed discord and death. Full of malice and guile from the first moments of his existence, then impotent and cruel in his advanced age, this monster laid his first venom in the den where he was born. The people who cradled him in their breast, so to speak, were infected by his poisonous breath. Trampling religion, humanity, the throne, the law, these people fell prey to discord, license and barbarity. They robbed, tormented and tore themselves part, they amassed crimes and infamies, defiling themselves with the murder of their King and all the honest, distinguished men of the nation. Finally they chose as their leader, and then as their emperor, a foreigner of the most base extraction.

This foreigner, elevated to the throne by those in the midst of violent storms excited by the passion of a people who had abandoned their God, played first the role of the hypocrite. He presented himself as the restorer of religion and justice, as the destroyer of this monster birthed by vice and untruth, who had threatened to shred the entire world with the same claws with which he had shredded the bosom of France, his own mother. But suddenly he appeared, not as the destroyer of this monster, but as his principal champion and his foremost support. Reunited with this monster through similar intents and sentiments, the two entrust themselves entirely to the rapidly progressing depravity that Napoleon had already spread afar and that ultimately was to clear the path for earthly grandeur, self-love and cold scorn for all humanity. Empowered by the immense number of his subjects, defying the liberty of his people and manipulating their blindness, he assembled a vast army and threw himself with fury upon the neighbor and distant states annihilating them all in the same manner.

Fortune followed his steps; the mighty successively bowed before him and rivers of blood cemented his domination. He overthrew from their thrones the legitimate sovereigns, divided their States and formed new ones. At the head, under the name of King, he placed vassals, taken from his own family. He made war not only to ruin towns and states through the pillage of properties, conscription levies, occupation of official posts and fortresses, and excessive taxes, but also to remain absolute master even after the concluding peace. He made treaties and alliances only to violate them with impudence, to exhaust the allies with boundless exclusions, to paralyze their forces and then to subjugate them to the most humiliating dependence with a new war. Moreover, something unheard-of, in waging war against a State, he took the subjects on state to make them fight against another, he even forced them to carry arms against their motherland and charged them with treason if they remained loyal to their country. And to equally perfidious strategies, to equally hideous means, he joined the most terrible threats, the prodigal dissipation of property, the fraudulent and untruthful language and the tone of pride and despotism. His force of arms succeeded in being no less than formidable because of

his unbridled audacity and cruelty. His insolent pride grew more and more with each success obtained through blood or guile and menace.

Ultimately he even tried to overtake that right belonging only to Divinity, absolute world domination; an insane enterprise bordering madness but one no less frightening for its disastrous and bloody effects. The cult of the divine and the faith were abandoned. Princes who had been granted their rights by God alone were obliged to renounce the governance of their subjects. Peoples were condemned to no longer have a homeland, laws, a language of their own; to renounce their liberty, their property, their commerce, their mores, their customs, their virtue. Enlightenment, sciences, arts, industries, all the results of man's most arduous work were destroyed in order to plunge them back into the darkness and the barbarity where they had languished for so many centuries. Universal slavery necessarily brings distress and general upheaval. With this impious and perverse project, lavish in blood, recognizing no legitimate power and trampling the rights of man, he thought to establish his glory on the misfortune of all humanity and like a malevolent divinity to place his throne on the tomb of the universe.

It was from this height that he, dazzled by wild hope and deceitful enthusiasm, set his eager sights on Russia. Inflated by many victories and the servitude of many countries he did not see Russia as invincible; their might and power though insufficient to foil his bleak plan of world subjugation, could at least to oppose it with courage. Consequently, in order to destroy this final boulevard of liberty he gathered and mobilized his forces. He obliged all his already subjected or dependent peoples to join him and with this formidable army composed of troops from twenty different states he advanced. Full of lies and guile, reiterating his desire to conserve peace as he prepared for incessant combat, he approached the frontiers of the Russian Empire and swiftly descended upon the provinces without a single declaration of war.

Like a torrent pouring down from a mountain, this conqueror, whose violence and cruelty know no bounds, penetrated directly into the heart of the Empire. Through his march all his steps are bought with blood; he pillaged and destroyed the villages, set fire to the towns, brought Smolensk to a pile of ruins and arrived before Moscow rendering it to pillage and flames. He triumphed; he accumulated cruelties and horrors, defied humanity and insulted all that is most sacred on earth.

What hope for salvation was left us if all Europe had been unable to resist his perversity even before he had attained such a degree of might? How could one expect that the isolated Russian Empire, which had already suffered so much, could, like an unassailable rampart, put a stop to this villain at the height of his power with all the forces of Europe at his disposal? But what came to pass? Oh celestial Providence! The iron, the cold, and the hunger came together to destroy most terribly this enemy who had penetrated amongst us with furor, this enemy who then fled with terror from Moscow. Nothing could spare him, not the number of his troops, his resistance, nor his flight. Divine vengeance struck him. It was in vain that he abandoned his artillery, his chariots loaded with powder and spoils; his horses fell below their riders. If the number of his troops was immense upon entering Russia, the number of their cadavers was equally so upon their retreat. Nature trembled at their annihilation. The cadavers torn apart by ravens still wore upon their frozen faces the imprint of hideous desperation. The hand of death was unable to erase their final agony from their traits, the convulsions of remorse for the profanation of temples and the other crimes with which these unfortunates were sullied. Such was their tragic end.

Their leader alone escaped from his loss and captivity by prompt flight and reached his country with some of his generals. The Russian warriors after having saved their land hastened the march to deliver Europe as well. The peoples who had been forced to arm themselves against their brethren rose up full of courage when they saw the Russians approach with amicable intentions. They joined the Russians and broke the chains of their enslavement joyfully turning their arms against their sole true enemy.

This enemy, like a storm divided by the winds which nevertheless cloaks lightening within its black and menacing clouds, gathered up his strength and reentered the fortified wall. Rivers of blood flowed once again and not even all the misery could pacify his barbarous heart; his prideful pretention to world subjection and his raging destruction never abandoned him. Once beaten in several bloody affairs he was then repelled everywhere, everywhere overturned and forced to find refuge in his capital without defense. There he again forged armaments, assembled again an army and rejected once more the peace that had been offered. He depleted himself entirely as well as his people through new efforts and combats; and from the height of his usurper's throne, he fell into his former nothingness.

So it unfolded, in the interval of a year, without the ability to rise again the colossal power lay defeated. Primed for a century, emboldened by seventeen years of success and victory, and at last elevated on a pile of human bones, on the debris of devastated empires, and on the ashes of cities, this colossus had threatened to swallow the entire world. The Russian warriors broken-hearted and guided by the eye of Providence, whose symbol they wore upon their chest, flew with the speed of an eagle from the walls of Moscow to those before the impious capital of France. This prideful city, the den of revolt, discord, and corruption, finally humiliated by fear, opened their doors and received them as liberators with enthusiasm and open arms. The name of the brigand foreigner was obliterated, the monuments elevated in his honor were overturned. The legitimate King of the ancient Bourbon dynasty, Louis XVIII, was reinstated, according to the will of the people, on the throne of his ancestors as a token of peace and universal tranquility.

It is in Paris, how prodigious! And in the very place where the villain, vomited from Hell, insulted and crushed under his feet religion, the authority of the prince, the clergy, virtue, and humanity; where he raised an altar and offered incense to crime, where the unfortunate Louis XVI perished, victim to the furors of anarchy, where the blood of the innocent flowed everywhere to frighten virtue and embolden license. It is in this very same place that troops from many a different mighty land maintained the strictest order, and there, in the midst of this immense theatre of people, the Russian priests addressed a solemn canticle to God giving thanks in our language according to the rites of our holy religion. Those very men who had renounced God knelt before Him along with the pious children of the Church in testimony that He had confounded their designs and overturned their power. And so it was that peace descended upon earth and rivers of blood ceased to flow; the hostile dispositions of an entire kingdom changed to sentiments of love and gratitude, meanness was disarmed by generosity and the fire of Moscow was extinguished below the walls of Paris.

What man or what men could have executed such an enterprise, one so above and beyond human strength? Do you not see the evident finger of God? It is to Him, to Him alone, that the glory of this change belongs. The neglect of God, the decadence of Religion produced this war; this furious monster gorged on the blood of victims whom he immolated without pause. His deadly wings were allowed to grow and engulf the world leaving a torrent of evil and calamity in

their wake. Eternal Wisdom allowed him to grow so that mankind would be punished for its crimes with suffering, and learn, by this terrible example that only the fear of God can maintain the well-being and security of men. But the judgments of his just wrath being executed, our Sovereign Judge, who does not forever remain enraged, seeing the monster ready to breach all the bounds of audacious recklessness, stopped him suddenly with the gaze of all his might. That very instant his power vanished, his force was annihilated, and everywhere he was pursued and shredded. He perished utterly in that same place where he was born and where he rose up with such audacity, his mind fertile in horrors.

Thus ended the long and terrible war of mankind. The canon ceased to fire, the blood to flow and the burning of cities and States came to an end. The sun of peace and tranquility rose and illuminated the universe with its benevolent rays. Napoleon Buonaparte, the leader of this appalling war, renounced the throne that he had usurped and surrendered himself to his adversaries' hands. Human justice cannot pronounce a just sentence against one so culpable. May he, on that final judgment day, come forth covered in the blood of the world, come forth before the throne of the Eternal, where each is judged according to his deeds, without having been punished by mortal hand! According to these sentiments, the mighty Allies offered a friendly hand to the French Nation with no trace of vengeance. The allies permanently exiled Napoleon Bonaparte to the island of Elba, they worked to consolidate the peace on a solid foundation and bring order to Europe's affairs that much violence and many wars had thrown into utter disarray.

But while one side worked with the best intentions to reestablish universal tranquility, the perfidious, on their side, put forth every effort to foil the salutary plans. The proud and perverse spirit knows no repentance; it never abandons its fateful plans. Destitute of power, it hides in the corrupted hearts. Disarmed, it seeks its new weapons within artifice. Struck down, it violently attempts to rise. Forgiveness inspires new malice and vengeful desires. Bonaparte having schemed and established secret intelligence with his accomplices, escaped from the island of Elba and with his small entourage moored the coasts of France. At each step he found new followers. The royal troops sent against him, long accustomed to war and brigandage, were convinced by corrupt leaders to betray their legitimate King and cross to the side of this usurping thief. The nation, still partially audacious and insubordinate, partially dominated by fear and force, again received the dethroned foreigner. He who had forever renounced the sovereignty of France was again proclaimed the Emperor. The King withdrew and the capital opened its doors to the fugitive from the island of Elba. With such audacity the villain reappeared and once again a menacing storm of destruction took shape. And the torch of war, extinguished with so much blood and calamity, was lit with a new fervor. But again God showed us His miraculous goodness; the perfidious malice tried to reestablish his former power and grandeur on the division of the allies only to find them against his scheme in perfect union. Immediately the allies employed all their forces to quell this unexpected fire raging across the earth. The vagabond's newly reassembled army, under his command, was defeated in a final bloody battle.

In this way the spirit of discord and pride was vanquished and silenced for a second time, its final embers faded, the movement of the people calmed and King Louis XVIII returned to Paris. Napoleon Bonaparte was taken prisoner to Saint Helena surrounded on all sides by the immense ocean. And peace, universal peace, extended its blessed scepter over the land and sea for the joy of all nations.

What are we to say---we now---Russians, our loyal and dear subjects? With what sentiments should our hearts be filled after such marvelous events? Let us prostrate ourselves before the All Mighty! Let us lay our hearts, actions and thoughts at the foot of his throne! We have received grave wounds; our cities and our towns have suffered like those of other countries but God has chosen us to accomplish a great task. He has converted just rage against us into ineffable mercy. We have saved the motherland, delivered Europe, struck down the monster and choked its venom. We have reestablished peace and tranquility on earth, reseated the legitimate King upon the throne from which he had been torn, and returned the physical and moral world to its former existence and well-being. However we have seen from the very grandeur of these effects that it is not we, who have produced them; God, in order to accomplish them through our hands has lent his strength to our weakness, his wisdom to our simplicity and his all-seeing eye to our blindness. What choice have we between pride and humility? Our pride would be unjust and criminal before He who has plied us with goodness; this pride would render us like those who we have overturned. But our humility will purify our ways and acquit us of our debt to God. It will be honorable and glorious to show the world that though we desire to make no man tremble, no longer do we fear any man.

Oh Russian people and their army devoted to Christ, Divine Mercy has shown how deeply the fear of God and the love and fidelity for religion has penetrated you. After a short punishment for our sins the just and sovereign Judge of Hearts has graced us and spread an eternal blaze of glory over our people. At the same time His benevolence gives us a salutary lesson. May the punishment we have undergone, as well as that of our enemies, live forever in our memory and unceasingly be held before our eyes. May such a sight make us tremble with fear! It cries out to us louder than the celestial trumpet: "THERE LIE THE FRUITS OF CRIME AND INCREDULITY!" May this terrible thought penetrate the depths of our souls, but then remind us that we are awash in God's benevolence. He crowns our heads with glory, so that His light, more brilliant than the sun, penetrates our purified hearts enflaming them with gratitude towards God and love for virtue!

In casting our gaze over our many loyal and submissive peoples, we are unable after such grand events and actions to prove our gratitude. We have seen their confidence in faith, their fidelity to the throne, their love for the motherland, their constancy tried at every fatiguing ordeal, their patience in the face of misfortune and their courage in battle. Thus we see God fill them with his graces. We see His grace and the universe sees it with us. Who other than God? What prince on earth could repay him and what recompense could any prince offer? His great actions, which heaven and earth have witnessed, shall be His recompense. But as for us, our Royal Majesty, inspired and elated by our great people, nothing is left but to constantly implore in our prayers God's benevolence for our people. May the Russian people under his mighty protection prosper gloriously and live happily from generation to generation!

Given in St. Petersburg, the first of January, the year of grace 1816, during our fifteenth reign.

Alexander.

The original signed by the hand of His Royal Majesty.

End.

