

To Jean Ullmo

THE CONSECRATION OF HISTORY:
AN ESSAY ON THE GENEALOGY OF
THE HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

How did it become possible to *philosophize* about history? Man has generally sought to locate himself in natural space rather than in historical time. The various oriental philosophies give no place to history. "Humanistic" Greece herself, in other respects so eager to explore human conduct in all its characteristic dimensions and in all its aspects, prudently recoiled from anything which might give value to time or cause history to appear as the specifically human mode of existence. No other culture, perhaps, carried so far the concern for harmonizing human relationships, and yet the idea of progress was completely lacking in it.¹ The organization of the terrestrial city always remained the central point of the reflection of Greek poets and philosophers, who

Translated by Wells F. Chamberlin.

1. Cf. Kostas Papaioannou, "Nature and History in the Greek Conception of the Cosmos," *Diogenes*, No. 25 (Spring, 1959), pp. 1-27

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were almost all teachers and law-givers—but they never thought to situate the true destiny of man in the historical world, much less to grant man a place in the universe which would make him forget the precariousness of his condition and his subordination to that which surpasses him. And, if we listen to Aristotle: “The life of moral virtue,” he says, “is happy only in a secondary degree. For the moral activities are purely human, *ανθρωπικαι*.”² Naturally, “it is true that, being a man and living in the society of others, he chooses to engage in virtuous action, and so will need external goods to carry on his life as a human being, *προς το ανθρωπενεσθαι*.”³ But we must take care not to assert “that man is superior to the other animals . . . since there are other things far more divine in their nature than man, for instance, to mention the most visible (*φανερωτατα*), the things of which the things of which the celestial system is composed.”⁴ Aristotle was referring to the stars—and, indeed, it was in the circular motions of the luminaries, much more than in the human domain, that the classic Greeks saw that which is manifested in being with the greatest splendor. If we limit ourselves to the specifically human—as do those whom Plotinus designates under the frankly disdainful term *οι ανθρωπικωτεροι*⁵—we risk losing contact with the Good that revolves in the cosmos and is our sole guaranty against the senseless non-being which threatens us from every side. Under these conditions the question of knowing whether or not history has meaning, and whether or not it is provided with an appropriate logic which expresses the profound structure of our being, appears meaningless.

Resistance to history grows as we leave Greece. But, whether, as in Chinese cosmology, the world “repeats itself” in concentric zones fitted into each other, from the human body to the ends of the earth, or whether, as for the Greeks, it is the “model” to which human relationships must conform, it is always conceived as a totality with a unity which nothing can and certainly nothing will break. Whatever the

2. *Nicomachean Ethics* x. 8. 1. 1178a.9–10. (Trans. Harris Rackham [“Loeb Classical Library” (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926)], p. 619).

3. *Ibid.* x. 8. 6. 1178b.5–7.

4. *Ibid.* v. 7. 4. 1141a.33–62.

5. *Second Ennead* i. 9: “the too human,” or “the common earthly men” (*Plotinus Complete Works*, trans. Kenneth S. Guthrie [London: Bell, 1918], II, 616).

differences which, in other respects, may separate the cosmological doctrines of pre-Christian Antiquity, these doctrines all agree on the essential idea that the microcosm corresponds exactly to the macrocosm and that it *is* or *must be* the same thing. Religious veneration of the cosmos, the will to participate in the inviolability and the perenniality which are proper to Nature, and also the desire to guarantee one's self against the intrusion of the historical arbitrary and its risks through the "naturalistic" (cyclical) concept of time—such impulses made the thought of a break between the two realms inconceivable or, rather, intolerable. If we contrast the vegetative impulse, which has no self-awareness and is at the lower end of our scale, with the pure and equitable norm which comes down from above, or if we contrast the calm cosmos of Justice with the titanic forces which operate in the sublunar world—even then, the two orders do not cease to be intimately joined, and there is value in their connection.

Nowhere else does this bond appear with such force as in the central notion of the "mandate from heaven" which, through the sovereigns who are its depositaries, civilizes the terrestrial world. Just as "August Heaven" orders time and establishes the rhythm of the seasons, so does the principal function of a prince consist in assuring agreement between this celestial order of the seasons and the order of human work. It is knowledge of the laws of heaven which confers this mandate and which entails the submission of everything belonging to the earth. Such is the origin of Confucianism's "cosmic" citizenship and of the importance given to the observation of rites which constitute more or less a collaboration of man with the laws of Nature. In the Ming-t'ang, a kind of "House of the Calendar," the sovereign had to stay successively during the year in rooms corresponding to the four seasons of the year, adapting colors, foods, etc., to the requirements of the cosmic correspondences. While this institution was perhaps merely an intellectuals' exaggeration, it illustrates nevertheless the obsession with an ordered and single world, the need felt by ancient cosmological thought to integrate human relationships to the cosmos from which they cannot and must not be severed.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition alone seeks to understand the past and the future as the regulating perspectives of existence and to show in history the revelation and the realization of an order of ends which are transcendent to those of Nature and the cosmos. Indeed, historical

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consciousness appears for the first time in Jewish prophecy and in Jewish spirituality, which see in Jehovah the God of the history he has lived and is living with his people. Unlike the Aristotelian god, this God is not the *contemplator* of an eternal cosmos existing independently of him. He is a *creator* God who has drawn the world out of non-being and who maintains it in being by an act of *will*. On the other hand, this God manifests himself essentially through the eminently historical act of the Covenant that links him with the chosen people, all history itself being the history of the relationships between God and his people and of the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of Israel.

NATURE AS A CREATURE

The Judaeo-Christian conception of a God who transcends the world has devaluated the cosmos and transformed it into an object of creation, into a creature. The idea of creation places God as Will above the world. God's thoughts are essentially acts of will, or *deeds*, and the world is his work—a creature which subsists only by virtue of the will which created it and which is present only to bear witness to the glory of God as well as to the substantial nullity of all that is. In itself, every creature is so made that it can be brought back to non-being, since of itself it possesses no possibility of persisting in being. "The heavens are telling the glory of God."⁶ but, "When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust."⁷ It is understandable that the notion of *physis* was never developed by the Jews as an intelligible structure or as an ethical model. According to Leo Strauss," the Hebrew term for 'nature' is unknown to the Hebrew Bible."⁸

The Greeks sought "salvation" in the knowledge and contemplation of a cosmos which is completely a harmony and of which God is himself a part. In the Judeo-Christian idea, all is based in God, and God alone is important: "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved."⁹ The enigma created

6. Ps. 19:1.

7. Ps. 104:29

8. *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 81.

9. Ps. 93:1, 96:10.

by the course of the world is resolved in the certainty of the permanence of God:

Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They will perish, but thou dost endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away;
but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.¹⁰

Far from guaranteeing the possibility of salvation by its eternal presence, Nature is deeply tainted by the sin and the imperfection of man. For the Greeks the nature of this sin is shown in the *hubris* which violates the order established by Justice, which is immanent in the cosmos, and it is precisely this Justice, comparable to the “geometrical equality” which Plato says is “mighty, both among gods and men,”¹¹ which saves being and maintains the world. But here culpability emanates from nowhere. It does not result from any transgression of the objective order. It belongs to the very essence of man. Established in the very depths of the human being, sin places him solely and exclusively before God and his impenetrable will:

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done that which is evil in thy sight . . .
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.¹²

It is no longer a question of salvation through knowledge, but of salvation through the fact that God, who can abandon man without appeal, can also retrieve him. God’s *mercy* is also his essence. His presence manifests itself not only in the act by which he firms the unsteady world but also and particularly in his relationship with man. It is not a question of making one’s self similar to God by “imitating” his essential activity, but of bending without reservation under the domination of his power. Man is consequently required to serve God, to be the “servant of God” and the “son of his handmaid.”¹³ The absolute power of the creator implies the absolute obedience of the creature.

10. Ps. 102:25–27.

11. *Gorgias* 508a (*Dialogues*, trans. Benjamin Jowett [New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1927], p. 200).

12. Ps. 51:4–5.

13. Ps. 116:16.

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This God who is entirely will does not manifest himself only in the mercy which relates him directly to the human individual—as originator of the Covenant, he affirms his power over the whole of history.

COVENANT AND ELECTION

Since God wills all that concerns man, human history, ceasing to be an avenue without deep meaning, becomes impregnated with divine substance. Very early, the agrarian festivals which were based on the eternal periodicity of the natural existence were transformed in Israel into celebrations of the historic acts of God, into historical *commemorations*. And so, in the spring, for the traditional lunar festival there was substituted the celebration of the salvational act of God causing the Israelites to come out of Egypt. Here the circular motion of Nature assumes a radically new sense and is subordinated to historical time which manifests the divine will of salvation. For Yahweh is the terrible “man of war,” the God-king who goes “before them”¹⁴ and who by turns leads his people and abandons them in anger. Absolute master of the universe, he has chosen, by an act in which no ethical judgment is involved,¹⁵ an elect people to whom he has promulgated his law and whose history he conducts, punishing his people’s infidelity and rewarding their fidelity. Consequently, we find references to a covenant with Noah, to another with Abraham in which Yahweh announces the great future of the people of Israel, and finally to the one concluded by Yahweh with the whole collective body and its mediator, Moses:

and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God . . . if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.¹⁶

This “faithful God,”¹⁷ who keeps covenant and is merciful “to a thousand generations” with those who love him and keep his commandments, promises Israel to force all its enemies into submission and to set it “high above all nations that he has made.”¹⁸ “And when the

14. Cf. Exod. 13:21 and 15:3; Num. 14:14, etc.

15. The Bible insists upon the character of the election as being beyond good and evil: Deut. 9:4–5.

16. 6:7, 19:5–6.

17. Deut. 7:9.

18. Deut. 26:19.

Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.”¹⁹

It was after this Covenant, this election, this superhuman promise which was made them, that the people of Israel located themselves in a universal historical perspective and sought to reveal, in the centuries of terror they had to endure, the sign of God’s providential plan. With their prophets there appeared for the first time that particular species of men for whom the reading of the news is truly, as Hegel put it, a “realistic morning prayer.” And never perhaps was history so absurd as at the time men first wanted to find a meaning in it! Isaiah (10:32) describes for us the anguish of the people of Jerusalem watching from their walls for the arrival of the Assyrian army and thinking they see in the distance Sennacherib “shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion.” For more than two centuries the Near East had lain broken beneath the chariots of the conqueror “who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert.”²⁰ History had been for centuries the history of unspeakable catastrophes. Indescribable cruelties fell upon this little world, which saw its kings beheaded, flayed, impaled, or buried alive, chained by the jaws like dogs; and which saw its soldiers slaughtered en masse, its population deported to distant provinces, its cities reduced to heaps of ruins. In the face of such calamities it was impossible to dilute anguish by coloring it with reason. This anguish had to be oriented, organized, given form and consistency, and driven deep into the collective memory. Consciences had to be made sensitive to the history which encircled them. For all this the prophets were able to find a language. In them, event became Word, and through this Word flaming cities and desolate countryside appeared as if illuminated by God’s lightning. One had to live through history as through a sinister theophany—it was the Eternal of the armies who was venting his anger on these lands of abomination in order to punish his people for having served other gods and ignored the Law.

Then I said, “How long, O Lord?”

And he said:

“Until cities lie waste

19. Deut. 7:2.

20. Isa. 14:16–17.

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without inhabitant,
and houses without men,
and the land is utterly desolate,
and the Lord removes men far away,
and the forsaken places are many
in the midst of the land."²¹

But after a total expiation, including the destruction of the temple, devastation, and exile, the Law shall be re-established, and Israel shall flower again.

As Judaism became more profound, it became clear that the salvation willed by God was no longer the victory of a particular people over the others but the salvation of all nations. As soon the disturbing figure of the "servant of Yahweh" appears in the second cycle of Isaiah's prophecies, Israel's historical privilege takes on a purely spiritual meaning and is subordinated to the spiritual mission: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."²² However, this universalism profoundly disturbed the Judaocentric conception of history. Any nation or empire which collaborates even fortuitously in the work of Israel's salvation finds itself a partner in the action of God as an instrument of divine providence. Thus, in Isaiah we see Cyrus himself feted as the Messiah. He is God's "anointed" (45:1), charged by him with the freeing of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple (44:28). This history, which began with the fall of Adam and which was renewed by the Covenant, is the history of the long preparation of the Messianic kingdom, destined to create a universal religious society and at the same time to make Jerusalem the capital of the universal order: "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste" (60:12).

This temporal dream, formulated at the very moment when the political existence of Israel was reduced to nothing, was linked with apocalyptic and eschatological prophecy which expects, from the "completing of time," the total transfiguration of men and of things.

SUBORDINATION OF THE WORLD TO ESCHATOLOGICAL HISTORY

The natural God does not manifest himself only in the act of covenant

21. Isa. 6:11-12.

22. Isa. 49:6.

or of mercy. When the psalmists speak of divine mercy, the *anger of God* is always mentioned—or rather, they conceive of God's mercy as the cessation of his anger. Yahweh is "merciful and gracious," that is, "he will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger for ever."²³ And so, in the prophetic proclamation of the "Day of the Lord," Yahweh, the God who, in the original conception, triumphs over darkness at the beginning of each year, becomes the lord of apocalyptic history who will obtain victory *in the end*. Thus conceived, eschatology immediately appears to be "counterphysical," since the future "Day of the Lord" is announced as a threat of total destruction of the natural universe. Thus, the final salvation will be found in the possibility of annihilation, which lies perpetually at the side of existence, and in the eschatological imminence of nonbeing which will annihilate all the certainties of reason and will tear man definitively away from the natural determinants of his being. This is how Amos (5:19) describes a man surprised by the Day of the Lord: "as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him"!

Prophetic rapture is nothing, more than an ecstatic cry for the liberating end of all things. Here what the Greeks considered as the sole eternal reality is only an object shorn of all its power and which can be unexpectedly dissolved by the will of the supernatural God. With this God are associated the new visions of the Man-God, of Satan, of the struggle between light and darkness, and of the announcement of the apocalyptic destruction which will precede "new heavens and a new earth."²⁴ And, thus, as physical reality was drained of its substance, the view became historical and bound the history of the universe and the history of mankind into a single history of salvation. Henceforth, man will see history as a great cosmic drama unfolding between creation and destruction, having a determined direction between a beginning and an end which are strictly defined and having as its apogee a single, unrepeatable event—the appearance of the Savior. "Let thy kingdom come and the world crumble away"—this prayer of the early Christians brought the Persian and Jewish apocalyptic visions which preceded Christianity to an extreme of tragic violence, since it assumed that the

23. Ps. 103:8–9.

24. Isa. 65:17, 66:22.

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time of waiting which was going to transform completely the horizon of the world had already been fulfilled.

Christianity inherited from the Old Testament the notion of a single God, creator of the universe, and the formula of creation *ex nihilo*, itself of Biblical origin,²⁵ became the technical term used by all Christian writers to designate the ultimate founding of the universe. And what has begun must also end when the drama has been played out. Jesus, as did all his era, awaited the end of the existing age (*αἰῶν*). Then “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”²⁶ The world becomes merely an episode in a *history* which does not emanate from it but which surpasses it in all directions, since before the world there was the solitude of God and after it there will be a kingdom which will not be of this world. And, in the gospel of John, Jesus himself does not appear as the enunciator of the last and total revelation. Another will come,²⁷ and, if Christ does not leave, the Paraclet, the Spirit of Truth, cannot come, but between the two lies the last Aion of the world’s history, the empire of the Antichrist. Everything had its time—the catastrophic end as well as the ultimate transfiguration, but the world as such was expressly denied by both, to the extent that the expression *ὁ κόσμος οὗτος*, “this world,” finally became synonymous with *ὁ αἰὼν οὗτός* and meant a certain *historical epoch*, an Aion opposed or even hostile to the future Aion which will cause the “new heavens and a new earth” to appear.²⁸

In correlation with this eschatological depreciation of the world, another conception comes to light and places the soul above the cosmos, conferring upon it a privileged status in reference to the whole of created things.

SUBORDINATION OF THE WORLD TO THE DEIFIED SOUL

The mind and the world, which up to that time were on an equal footing, are separated. The individual is distinguished from the world,

25. II Macc. 7:28.

26. Mark 13:24–25.

27. John 15:26 and 16:7, 13.

28. II Pet. 3:13. Cf. Clement of Alexandria *Ad. Cor.* vi: “The present Aion and the future Aion are two enemies.”

and in it he no longer sees a *being*, but merely a fugitive *state*, a “form.” “The form of this world is passing away.”²⁹ What Plato considered as a “perfect living being,” what he venerated as a “blessed god,” here becomes a contingency, a dream from which one must awaken, a fugitive spectacle which exists only in so far as man turns away from God and is abandoned to himself. “And the world passes away, and the lust of it.”³⁰ Its only essence is desire, which imprisons the soul in the here-below and turns it from its center. The world is an appearance which assumes body and consistency only through the state of servitude which characterizes “psychic” man reduced to the life of desires. The term “cosmos” now takes on a purely anthropological sense and means a certain affirmative attitude toward the world, a certain positive evaluation of the goods of this world which turns the soul away from divine life, light, and freedom. *Amare mundum* will come to mean *non cognoscere deum*.

We have reached the diametric opposite of the ancient veneration of the cosmos. On the day when Paul contrasted liberation by Jesus with the old slavery under the *στοιχεῖα*, “the elemental spirits of the universe” (Gal. 4:3), the formula for the reversing of all the ancient values had at last been found. These “elements” which Hellenism, from the Ionians to Plotinus (II. i. 4), held as incorruptible and as guarantors of the world’s eternity, are now put down as evil-doing powers which subjugate man and make him a stranger in his own land. Halfway between the light of the extracosmic God and the world were placed the *στοιχεῖα*, forming a dome of magic opacity, a hermetically sealed cover completely separating the high and the low, the spiritual breath from the unbreathable air of a suffocating existence, the life-giving light from the gaping cavern of horror which envelops the world. For the Gnostic, the *στοιχεῖα* which surrounds him conceals the utmost in conceivable terror. Paul also knew their *δυνάμεις* and *ἀρχαί*, their “powers” and their “dominations.” He also thinks that the “elements” are the archons, the “rulers of this age” (I Cor. 2:6), even “the god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), the one who crucified the “Lord of Glory” and blinded the unbelievers that they might not see the light of Christ shining. The man who is ensnared in matter, who knows only the “psychic” life, lives un-

29. I Cor. 7:31.

30. I John 2:17.

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der the tyranny of the elements, but he who has received the Pneuma and the Gnosis (Christian or other), overcomes “the weak and beggarly elemental spirits,”³¹ since he has rediscovered the innocence of the state anterior to creation or the freedom of the “new creation” inaugurated by Christ. And so, after having been for the Greeks the foundations of the perfect and eternal world, the “elements” are transformed into the evil-doing tyrants of a shadowy world, and finally they will see their power expire on the threshold of the emancipating light.³²

Thus the world was stripped of what is sacred, and man convinced himself that his soul alone is divine and spiritual. And it is precisely this gnostic-Christian anthropocentrism which separated, in the most decisive way, the last representatives of Hellenism from the new thinking. “The Gnostics,” said Plotinus in his great treatise against them, “do not hesitate to call the most abandoned men their ‘brothers,’ but refuse this name to the sun, and the other deities of heaven, and to the very Soul of the world, fools that they are!” (ii. 9. 18.) They consider “the souls of both themselves and of the vilest men immortal and divine, while refusing immortality to the entire heaven, to all the stars it contains, though they be composed of elements more beautiful and purer than we” (ii. 9. 5). Plotinus contrasts forcefully the old Hellenic modesty with this exaltation of man: “If even man holds a great superiority over animals, there must be a far greater superiority in those stars which exist as ornaments to the universe, and to establish order therein, and not to exert thereover a tyrannical influence.”³³ Man’s true greatness consists in “turning toward the whole” (ii. 9. 9) and not in reducing the whole to himself.

In the same way, the Judaeo-Christian claims seemed to Celsus to be

31. Gal. 4:9.

32. Byzantium will complete this semantic revolution. In the *στοιχεῖα* people will no longer see anything but the magic spirits which imprison the vital force of beings and cast lands under their spell. (Modern Greeks still have this conception when they talk of the *στοιχεῖα* and bewitched places: *στοιχειωμένοι τόποι*.) Similarly, Emperor Romanus I had the top cut off a pillar which was supposed to be the *στοιχείου* of his enemy, Czar Simeon of Bulgaria. And, if we think of the *στοιχεῖα* of Euclid, we can measure the magnitude of this dislocation of the perspectives.

33. For Plotinus, the stars are divinities, “in view of their regular motion, and their carrying out a magnificent revolution around the world” (*Ennead* ii. 9. 9; *Complete Works*, trans. Guthrie, II, 615). For the Gnostic, they are “tyrants” who misuse their power over the world, and the planets are the wicked archons who, in seven-fold ranks, close against us the way to the peace of the eighth heaven.

the height of absurdity. Latter-day Judaism had already established man at the center of the universe—apparently the world had been made for man, and not man for the world. The apocalypticians of Celsus' time had carried this anthropocentrism to its utmost consequences, and it was against this reduction of God to his unique relationship with man that Celsus reacted:

After this he [Celsus] continues as usual by laughing at “the race of Jews and Christians,” comparing them “all” to “a cluster of bats or, ants coming out of a nest, or frogs holding council round a marsh, or worms assembling in some filthy corner, disagreeing with one another about which of them are the worse sinners. They say: “God shows and proclaims everything to us beforehand, and He has even deserted the whole world and the motion of the heavens, and disregarded the vast earth to give attention to us alone; and He sends messengers to us alone and never stops sending them and seeking that we may be with Him for ever.” In the words which he [Celsus] invents he asserts that we are “like worms who say: “There is God first, and we are next after Him in rank since He has made us entirely like God, and all things have been put under us, earth, water, air, and stars; and all things exist for our benefit, and have been appointed to serve us.’”³⁴

It seemed that the Greek universe had suddenly crumbled. It is true that the Greek Fathers, fed on platonism, saw in the splendor of the creation a theophany, a partial and limited expression of the divine perfection, but it is no longer a question of a philosophy or a science which might bring the Logos out of the cosmos. And so for Saint Augustine, the problems of the cosmos have become utterly insignificant. In his eyes, all philosophy reduces to two themes—knowledge of God and knowledge of one's self (*noverim te, noverim me*). And, in its monologue to the soul, reason asks

Now what do you want to know?
I desire to know God and the soul.
Nothing more?
Absolutely nothing.³⁵

On the one hand, the exterior world becomes a pure phenomenon of the mind—it is out of itself that the soul draws the sensations and the

34. As quoted by Origen in his *Contra Celsum* iv. 23. (trans. Henry Chadwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], pp. 199–200).

35. *Soliloquia* I. i. 7 (*The Soliloquies of Saint Augustine*, trans. Thomas and Gilligan, [New York: Cosmopolitan, 1943], p. 17).

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images which make up the material world, and, in order to form it, the soul gives up something of its substance. And, insofar as it turns toward the exterior world, the soul becomes exhausted through this loss of substance. It turns away from the one thing necessary to it and falls into a state of decay from which Grace alone can uplift it. On the other hand, the enjoyment of God (*fruitio Deo*) is the supreme goal toward which every human effort must be directed, and, whatever may be its splendors, the material world does not deserve to hold our attention except to the extent that it is related to the life of the soul, itself conceived as a restless impulse which drives man to come out of himself, to transcend himself and abandon himself wholly to the adoration of God.

Now it is clear that the conception of a Nature with a structure in itself and an intelligibility for itself could reappear only by virtue of the rediscovery of Aristotelian physics in the thirteenth century. But what Nature lost in autonomy, history gained in depth. The idea of the unity of universal history, the periodization of history from the beginning to the end of time, the conception of the progressive advance of the human race, raising itself by successive "ages" from ignorance to truth, from time to eternity—all these directing ideas of the modern historical consciousness were made possible and can become comprehensible only by virtue of the Judaeo-Christian image of history.

GOD AS PROVIDENCE

First of all, the notion of a single God, both creator and providence, imposed a radical revision of the old conception of history. Indeed, it was impossible to believe, as Saint Augustine said, that this all-powerful God "from whom all nature, mean and excellent . . . derive and have being . . . would leave the kingdoms of men and their bondages and freedoms loose and uncompromised in the laws of His eternal providence."³⁶ This essentially mystic idea that the unity of history and the succession of empires both originate and end in the providential plan of God is not found in Bossuet alone.³⁷ Hegel uses exactly the same arguments when he sets out to explain his unconditional faith in the rationality of events.³⁸

36. *De civitate Dei* v. 11. *The City of God*, trans. John Healey (London: J. Dent, 1945), I, 156.

37. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, Part III, chap. i.

38. *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Meiner, pp. 29–30 (Cf. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* by G. W. F. Hegel, trans J. Sibree (London: Bell, 1890), pp. 13–14.

Saint Augustine recoiled from admitting that this infinitely good God, who created not only heaven and earth but also “the most base and contemptible creature . . . the bird’s feather . . . the herb’s flower . . . the tree’s leaf” could have left universal history outside his providence. In the same way, Hegel refused to believe that God can “hover above history as above the waters.”³⁹ Furthermore, when he proposes to explain the basis of his philosophy of history which is at the same time theogony, theognosy, and theodicy, he falls back upon the arguments of the Bishop of Hippo:

It was for a while the fashion to profess admiration for the wisdom of God, as displayed in animals, plants, and isolated occurrences. But, if it be allowed that Providence manifests itself in such objects and forms of existence, why not also in Universal History? This is deemed too great a matter to be thus regarded. But Divine Wisdom, i.e. Reason, is one and the same in the great as in the little; and we must not imagine God to be too weak to exercise his wisdom on the grand scale.⁴⁰

Nothing could better illustrate the *hubris* of modern historicism. Five thousand years of history represented for Hegel a matter “greater” than the entire universe, and it would be considering the creator God as “too weak” if we disputed the cosmic interest which the human adventure may offer. In any case, although Hegel did go much further than did Bossuet, who was satisfied with juxtaposing divine providence and human motivations as well as he could, what Hegel really did was to “logicize” the old theology of history rather than to “secularize” it. Moreover, Hegel was not afraid to speak of history as a “divine process,”⁴¹ and Marx with his visions, which are astounding in more than one way on the “humanism of Nature,” could wax ironic at will upon this Hegelian notion in which history was disguised as a “divine process of man.”⁴² Marx saw an insurmountable contradiction here. In fact, by accepting the conclusions of this theology of progress while seeking to escape from its premises, Marx succeeded only in making his intention more enigmatic. He wanted to isolate from what he called

39. *System der Philosophie* (Jubilee ed.; Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1958), III, 432, par. 549.

40. *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, p. 42 (*Lectures . . .*, trans. Sibree, p. 16).

41. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

42. Marx, *National Ökonomie und Philosophie* (Kiepenheuer, 1951), p. 259.

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“the natural history of man”⁴³ an intelligible process, tending, moreover, to produce the final “leap” into the realm of freedom. And this shows how impossible it is to assign to history as such the aim of bringing about human reconciliation and the “resurrection of Nature,” without presupposing as the subject of the evolution a providential and demiurgical consciousness, and without accepting the theological basis of the concepts of “progress” and “development.”

THE NEW CONCEPTION OF TIME

We owe to Christianity the introduction into philosophy of the idea of progress and the idea of the historicity of man as a basic characteristic of his structure. At the same time that the idea of the cosmos was giving way, the cyclical conception of time, which is, moreover, derived from the idea of the cosmos, also collapsed. The image of the circle, which represented for the ancients the outstanding symbol of perfection and eternity, now indicates the major sin of a world that has lived without hope. Aristotle saw no difficulty in comparing human life to a vicious circle.⁴⁴ And already the psalmist sees in the circle the symbol of the damnation of the impious.⁴⁵ In Dante’s hell, the just who did not know the true faith, the patriarchs and great men who lived “before Christianity” are “for such defects, and for no other fault . . . lost; and only in so far afflicted, that without hope we live in desire.”⁴⁶ The Christian’s existence is entirely nourished by hope, entirely turned toward the future. We understand how unbearable, as Saint Augustine said,⁴⁷ the conception of the eternal cyclical return must have been for him. Indeed, such an idea of time came into violent contradiction with all the themes controlled by the idea of the historical incarnation of the Savior and the eschatological hope which was associated with it. In this respect the Augustinian refutation of the eternal cyclical return is highly significant:

As Plato the Athenian philosopher taught in the academy that in a certain unbounded space, yet definite, Plato himself, his scholars, the city and school,

43. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

44. *Problems* xvii. 3.

45. Ps. 12:8:

46. *Inferno*, IV, 40–42 (trans. J. A. Carlyle in *The Divine Comedy* [New York: Modern Library, 1932]).

47. *De civitate Dei* xii. 20 (trans. Healey, I, 363).

should after infinite ages meet all in that place again and be as they were when he taught this. God forbid I say that we should believe this. "For Christ once died for our sins, and rising again, dies no more, nor hath death any future dominion over Him."⁴⁸

Here we see the appearance of the possibility of a time structured by substantially new events. And it is remarkable that this refutation of the eternal cycle, without which there would be no modern concept of history, is based solely upon the supernatural argument of the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ. Indeed, the Christian sees in this a single event which recapitulates all anterior history and inaugurates all posterior history. Then there is introduced the notion of a time oriented in a progressive direction, a before and an after, a past running from the creation to the fall and from the fall to the redemption, a future running from the redemption to the end of time. Profane history is itself sustained by sacred history, which gives it life and a privileged meaning in relationship to the "vain repetitions" of the natural life.

THE HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, the religion of an erudite and syncretistic age, was obliged to locate itself in reference to Judaism and to Hellenism, of which it felt it was more or less the heir. It could do this only by locating itself historically, by becoming aware of its time (*καίρως*) as a historical moment. Furthermore, the very objections of its opponents incited Christianity to assume a self-consciousness which was clearly historical. Why, asked Marcellinus of Saint Augustine, why was it necessary that the Law given by God to Moses had to be improved?⁴⁹ A revelation which needs perfecting indicates an imperfect revelation and the possibility of its remaining so always. Why, asked Celsus⁵⁰ and Porphyry,⁵¹ did God allow so long a period of time to pass before willing the redemption of mankind? Such questions were all the more disturbing because the deep conviction of the Christians that they were the "new Israel," the "new people," or, more generally, that each was "the new man," placed them forthwith in a historical perspective in the eminent sense of the term,

48. *Ibid.* xii. 13 (trans. Healey, I, 356).

49. *Corresp.* Letter 136.

50. In Origen *Contra Celsum* iv. 8 (trans. Chadwick, p. 189).

51. Cf. St. Augustine *Epistle* 102. qu. 2: *De tempore christianae religionis*.

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since it implied the idea that the radical renewing of the world brought by Christianity was at the same time the end result of all the efforts of the past.

This is a renewing which does not imply an absolute break in historical continuity: We have here the germ of an interpretation of the becoming of truth and of the world to which philosophy, from Bossuet to Marx, would give legal authority, whereas it was only the expression of a conception of history which was purely and simply autocentric. In more precise terms, it gave birth to three ideas which direct the modern historical consciousness: the idea of history as the "*education of the human race*," the idea of an *evolution of humanity* comparable to the various ages of life, and, finally, the idea of the "*co-called universal history*," which found in Marx both its first critic and its last faithful follower.

HISTORY AS THE EDUCATION OF THE HUMAN RACE

When it reflected upon its own antecedents, the Christian mind indeed had the vision of a progress being accomplished through the efforts which God makes to educate humanity. Men are sinners lost in darkness, but, as Clement of Alexandria said, the Logos assumed the functions of a teacher in order to guide the world toward the Christian light. Thus Tertullian and Augustine thought of the human race as a single individual who, in the different ages of his life, lets himself be educated by God, progressing in knowledge through "degrees of perfection" as he goes through the stages of his own development.

Beginning with this conception of the pedagogical work accomplished by God in history, we shall see developing in modern times all the philosophies of the history of the human mind, in which each historical epoch appears as a moment in the revelation of the Spirit. From Lessing (*Education of the Human Race*) to Hegel, history will be conceived as a progressive revelation in which the result is set forth as the prime mover, as the first veritable beginning. And that was the explicit postulate of the theology of progress. By causing to appear, for the first time in history, an internal progress in the evolution of religious beliefs, Christian thought assumed the immanence of final and total truth in the partial institutions which are the reference marks of history and which give it meaning.

A step forward was taken by Clement of Alexandria when he pro-

posed the integration of philosophy. There are two Old Testaments, the Jewish Law and Greek philosophy, as avenues of access to the New Testament. Before the advent of Christ there was the Law, and no one doubts that it was willed by God in order to prepare the advent of faith. And this continuity in revelation must also include in some way the philosophy which “educated the Greeks and directed them toward Christ in the same way as the Law of the Jews.”⁵²

Hegel will not forget the lesson. Christian religion will appear in his system as the still inadequate expression of the final Truth, a moment in the pedagogical progression toward philosophy, a stage of which the historical significance will be only that of having prepared minds to receive absolute knowledge *in the time* of philosophy and the absolute knowledge *belonging* to philosophy. As we shall see, the philosophical overtaking of the Christian religion announced by Hegel—and in the same way, the “practical” overtaking of philosophy in and by the total transfiguration of the material world preached by Marxism—presupposes the notion of “the accomplishment of time” which had been used originally by the theological mind to reconcile the intense historical consciousness which the new religion had of itself with its still deeper certainty of possessing an absolute and therefore non-temporal truth.

This completely new experience of the historicity of existence prompted the seizure upon time as a process of pedagogical maturing, in which the intellectual experiences of the past appeared as uncompleted forms, without maturity, subordinated to a future destiny which surpasses them. It then became possible to answer the questions of Celsus and Porphyry and to show, for example, that the Incarnation was delayed only because mankind had to have a long and multiple experience in order to reach the point of feeling the need of the Redeemer and of assuming his message. Man had to serve in time the apprenticeship in divinity which alone would make him capable one day of receiving it.

Augustine will answer Marcellinus in the same way—that revealed religion is no ready-made truth, given for all eternity, but that it assumes that there is a history, a series of gradations in which each stage constitutes the requisite condition for the next. The modifications which revealed religion has undergone from the Law of Moses to the Incarnation are also explained by the very evolution of humanity, an evolution

52. Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* i. c. 5:

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which can be compared to the various ages of life and which makes man become increasingly capable of receiving the truth:

Quoties nostrae variantur aetates! adolescentiae pueritia non reditura cedit; juventus adolescentiae non mansura succedit; finiens juventutem senectus morte finitur. Haec omnia mutantur ne mutatur divinae providentiae ratio, qua fit ut ista mutantur. . . . Aliud magiser adolescenti quam puero solebat, imposuit.⁵³

This was a decisive formula, one which will be found again, in stronger or in weaker form, in all the later philosophico-historical meditations from Florus, who divided Roman history into four periods corresponding to childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age,⁵⁴ to Herder, to Hegel, who considered the modern period as the “senile age of the mind,” and to Marx, who spoke confusedly of a “social childhood of mankind” and who quite seriously distinguished the Greeks as “normal children” from the abnormal and precocious children represented by the other peoples of Antiquity.⁵⁵

Saint Augustine will take the decisive step by bringing the Roman Empire into the horizon of this metaphysics of history. Prudentius already thought that the Roman domination had been willed providentially by God so that peoples would first unite under a single law, then under a single faith: “For the time of Christ’s coming, be assured, was the way prepared which the general good will of peace among us had just built under the rule of Rome.”⁵⁶ The deep significance of “the great successes and triumphs of the Roman power” had to be discovered in the fact that Rome prepared the peoples it pacified to receive Christ:

53. St. Augustine *Corresp.* Letter 138. Cf. *Writings of Saint Augustine, Letters*, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons, S.N.D. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), III, 37: “Childhood, never to return, gives place to youth; vigorous manhood, doomed not to last, succeeds to youth; old age, putting an end to vigorous manhood, is itself ended by death. All these are changes, yet the method of Divine Providence by which they are made to change does not change. . . . The master gives a different task to the youth from the one assigned to the boy.”

54. Florus, *Epitome, ad init.* (cited in J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* [London: Macmillan & Co., 1928], p. 23, n. 1.).

55. *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Dietz, 1935), pp. 269–70 (trans. N. I. Stone [Chicago: Charles Kerr, Inc., 1913], p. 312).

56. Prudentius *Contra Symmachum* ii. 578–636 (in *Prudentius*, trans. H. J. Thomson [“Loeb Classical Library” (Harvard University Press, 1953)], II, 57).

“En ads, Omnipotens, concordibus influe terris! jam mundus te, Christe, capit, quem congrege nexu Pax te Roma tenant.”

Augustine, who had witnessed the crumbling of the Roman peace, was able to cast a freer glance over the mass of events. In his thought, extended entirely toward God, events lost their consistency and became a repertory of detailed arguments which could be used arbitrarily to prove theses which in themselves were external to historical becoming. And, consequently, the Romans received world empire from God because they subordinated the purely earthly passions to the noble desire of glory “whereby they desired to survive after death in the memories and mouths of such as commended them.”⁵⁷ By the immense prosperity and by the greatness of Rome, God showed the power of the civic virtues, even without true religion, in order to make it understood that, when the true religion is added to such virtues, men become citizens of another city—the city of God, transcending history but alone capable of fecundating the earthly city.

Without this God, terrestrial governments are great thefts, *magna latrocinia*.⁵⁸ The earthly city, left to itself, is the city of sin and the devil, *civitas diaboli*.⁵⁹ Human history, however, has not been surrendered to chance and to death: by means of the ephemeral works of mankind, the divine architect builds this city of God “of which the king is Truth, the law Charity and the measure Eternity”: “Architectus aedificat per machinas transituras domum manentem.”⁶⁰

A whole image of universal history could come out of this theohistorical parallelism. The river of time no longer meant oblivion and dissolution. For Clement of Alexandria, all the history of human knowledge resembled the course of two rivers, Jewish Law and Greek philosophy, and at their confluence Christianity had gushed forth, as a new direction, carrying with it in its course all the contributions of the past. Formerly, a man was proud to be descended from Nestor, and he gloried in being counted among the *Trojogenae*. Now, men wanted to ennoble the past by making of it a series of echelons resulting in the

57. *De civitate Dei* v. 12 ff. (trans. Healey, I, 163 [v. 14]).

58. *Ibid.*, iv. 4 (trans. Healey, I, 115: “Set justice aside then, and what are kingdoms but fair thievish purchases?”)

59. *Ibid.* iv. 1.

60. *Sermon* 362. 7.

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present development, to save the past by giving it an appearance of preparation—*Preparatio Evangelica*, according to Eusebius of Caesarea. He will strive to show how Jewish religion, Greek philosophy, and Roman law were combined to make the world capable of receiving the Christian revelation.⁶¹

History had really ceased being an object of true knowledge. Men cared little about human things—and, in any case, their concern for them did not assume the form of a true recital of events or a coherent analysis of real relationships. Yet they were eager to see proofs of the divinity which is immanent in history, and, above all else, they had the absolute certainty of forming the center of a historical system which included all mankind. Universal chronology, invented by Isidore of Seville in the seventh century, in which everything was dated as before or after the birth of Christ, shows what the center of perspective was from which emanated the light which conferred meaning on all events.

Fabulous notions were substituted for the still meager knowledge of worlds outside Europe, such as India and China, but the idea of the mystical unity of humanity in Jesus Christ made possible for the first time the conception of history as embracing the whole of humanity—a universalist conception of history which was given concrete form by the adoption of a single chronological framework for all events. Centuries disappeared in visions and dreams, but, at the same time that the idea of the unity of the human race was imposed, there was also imposed the idea of the division of universal history into a well-defined number of periods—six periods corresponding to the six days of the Biblical creation, or four periods corresponding to the four empires mentioned in the Book of Daniel.

The result of a mystic glance into the mysteries of the providential order of God and belonging in its original formulation to a vast apocalyptic literature which was handed down to Christianity, this schema of the four epochs was destined paradoxically to exercise a sovereign power over modern philosophic thought. Theoretically, it should have lost all meaning as soon as a rational conception was formed of it, but the contrary occurred. Hegel sacrificed his dialectic to it when, contrary to the ternary schematism we find everywhere else in his work and which he constantly abuses, he presented an image of

61. Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 51.

“universal” history divided into “four empires” and ending in a true epiphany of God in the “spiritual light of the present.”

At the dawn of modern times Jean Bodin denounced the quaternary division of history as an illegitimate relic of the visions of the prophet Daniel.⁶² And Voltaire made fun of Bossuet for omitting the history of China from his schema of providential history. The secularized theology of progress has had only the effect of accentuating this exclusivism and of shrinking even more the image of history. One would think Marx adequately forewarned against the optical illusion which is at the base of “the so-called historical evolution.” According to him, “the so-called historical development amounts in the last analysis to this, that the last form considers its predecessors as stages leading up to itself.”⁶³ One could not state it better. But why should his own conception have been removed from this mirage effect? For it certainly was not “putting dialectic back on its feet” to substitute for the Hegelian idea of the “four historical empires” an image in which “the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois methods of production” appeared “as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society.”⁶⁴

For all its having substituted the “economic formation of society” for the “progressive attainment of liberty,” this vision was no more “scientific” or “materialistic” than the dissertations of Paulus Orosius: “de regnorum mutatione Dei providentia facta,” in which we see how God arranged in a sovereign manner the succession of the great empires—Babylonian, Macedonian, African, and Roman—which have followed each other since the beginning of time.

Having said this, it is important not to press too much the sense of the Christian propositions concerning time and history. In the believer’s view, what we call history has meaning only insofar as it obtains life from the transcendency which goes beyond it.

62. *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566), Cap. vii: *Confutatio eorum qui quatuor monarchias . . . statuunt*; see *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* by John Bodin, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), “Refutation of Those Who Postulate Four Monarchies and the Golden Age,” pp. 291 ff. (cf. Bury, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38, and Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 57).

63. *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, p. 263 (trans. Stone, p. 301).

64. *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, p. 13 (trans. Stone, p. 13).

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SUBORDINATION OF THE HISTORIC TO THE SACRED

Thucydides did not know a *sense of history*, but that did not prevent him from creating, in his *Peloponnesian War*, both a historical work ἐς αἰῶν⁶⁵ and the last tragedy in which we still sense that Aeschylus' feeling of destiny is alive. With the coming of Christianity, history had accepted a providential goal, and this did not stimulate Christians at all to grant to real history, both that of the present and that of the past, the interest which they were reluctant to see in the political or economic life. In making all the faithful members of a single mystic Corpus, the new religion tore them loose from the political gangue from which the citizen of Antiquity had never been able to free himself. The ancient *politeia* vanished before the Christian "*politeuma*" which "is in heaven."⁶⁶ As this radical experience of inner freedom became more and more clear to itself, the more were political and social reality drained of every essential significance. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Perhaps no other words uttered by Christ were of greater significance for this world. They have lent themselves to varying interpretation, from that of Tertullian, who stated with superb tranquility, "nobis nulla magis res aliena est quam publica,"⁶⁷ to that of the unknown author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* in which the kingdom of heaven appears for the first time as giving life from within to terrestrial cities, to that of Dante, who first explicitly recognized a value proper to the State. God and Caesar—this new polarity was capable of expressing the non-temporality of the early Christians, for whom Mammon meant all of reality, as well as the ideal of theocratic politics from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas. The idea of complete submission to established authorities (even pagan ones!) and the theory of regicide developed *in parte guelfa* could both appeal to this expression, which was enigmatic in its implications, yet perfectly clear in its liberating intent. To proclaim the absolute independence, because it is based in God, of an existence fecundated by faith, hope, and charity in the face of the world of facts (his-

65. Thucydides (i. 22) says he has left a lasting monument to posterity, a "possession forever." He wanted to serve "as many as shall wish to see the truth of what both *has* happened, and *will* hereafter happen again, according to human nature—the same or pretty nearly so" (trans. Henry Dale [New York: Harper & Bros., 1861], p. 14).

66. Phil. 3:20.

67. *Apologeticum* par. 38.

torical, political, and others): to show that this world, whether absolutely evil or relatively good, will always be inadequate for the profound essence of the soul—this was a completely new freedom, in which it has been possible to base the most diverse historical interpretations without altering its substance. Indeed, one might consider the State to be the beast of the Apocalypse (as Saint Augustine did), or make it a part of the Dionysian illuminations (as did Thomas Aquinas and Bartholomew of Lucca), or proclaim with Boniface VIII, “ego sum Caesar, ego imperator”—and yet historical, social, and political reality did not cease to stand for the soul’s mere outer aspect.

It was not until the time of Marsilius of Padua, or even that of Machiavelli, that Napoleon’s saying, “politics is destiny,” began to be true. Dante went further than any other mediaeval thinker in his attempt to establish the autonomy of the political *felicitas*. The terrestrial city, far from representing the *civitas diaboli*, caused the very possibility of grace to appear: *praeambula gratiae*. Human work belonged henceforth to the same theophanic universe which the cathedrals celebrated. And so Dante could speak of the happiness of this life as something entirely distinct from the felicity of the eternal life.⁶⁸ Happiness here below not only can be attained through natural reason, which appears fully in the work of the philosophers (*quaeper philosophos tota nobis apparuit*), but also constitutes the ultimate end assigned to man as a perishable being. It is perfectly clear that by the active life in the city, enlightened and guided by reason, and contemplative beatitude, which is the final end of man as an immortal, Dante did not at all intend to make the work of history an end in itself or the encompassing reality of all the possibilities human nature contains.

We must still not forget that for Christianity the last epoch of universal history is the one which will see the reign of the Antichrist and which will end with the Day of Wrath of the Last Judgment. If it is true that the modern philosophies of progress are merely secularizations of the former theology of history, they are such particularly insofar as they eliminate this image of the catastrophic end of history and transform the “City of God,” which is outside time, into a social state which is attainable inside time by means of scientific, political, economic, or other kinds of progress.

68. *De monarchia* I, chap. i ff.

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The reign of the Antichrist and the end of the world were fixed constellations hanging over the Christian horizon. It was evident truth for the early Christians, who lived in expectation of the event—and also for Roger Bacon, in whom we thought we saw the first indications of the modern idea of progress.⁶⁹ Roger Bacon, who had reflected upon the steam engine, the steamboat, and the airplane, was deeply convinced of the imminent coming of the Antichrist.⁷⁰ In his “experimental science” he exalted the sovereign force which would give power to those possessing it—therefore, the Church had to favor the idea of experimental science “in its fight against the infidels, and particularly in view of the perils which will threaten us in the time of the Antichrist!”⁷¹

We have come a long way from the initial apocalypse. Perhaps nothing more clearly demonstrates the breadth of the transformation of Christian feeling about the cosmos than the active, aggressive attitude which comes to light in this conception of Bacon. From here it took only a step to assert the eternity of the world and the existence of a matter independent of God. It is true that such theses were never orthodox, but for the new thought they were a kind of permanent temptation against which the doctrinal authorities never ceased to struggle. Up to that time, man wanted to free himself from Nature, in the name of the invisible God and the spiritual soul, in order to direct all his energies toward an acosmic love for Jesus Christ and toward the imitation of his divine life. In the future, Nature is to recover her rights, and she will owe this to the rediscovery of Aristotelian physics.

Indeed, the medieval universe was still the Greek cosmos, except that it was created by an omnipotent God, that it will disappear as such at the end of time, and that it is interpreted in an anthropocentric manner completely foreign to the ancient feeling for the cosmos.

MAN'S PLACE IN THE COSMIC HIERARCHY

The cosmos of Heraclitus is an order which “is the same for all,” imposing itself in a single and identical way upon all the beings who collaborate in the beauty and perfection of the universe. Reality is now conceived as a hierarchy in which each being is defined by the place it occupies therein and by the function it performs. All creatures are ar-

69. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

71. Ét. Gilson, *La Philosophie au moyen âge* (Paris: Payot, 1944), p. 482.

ranged according to a hierarchical order of perfection, from the most perfect, which are angels, to the least perfect, which are bodies. The rank of creatures is their very being itself.

Created in the image of God, king of Nature through the order of creation, participating in the nature of Christ, who is both eternal God and eternal man (Adam), man occupies a central place in this hierarchical universe. He is the goal and the end of creation: all Nature was created for him. We have seen how scandalized Celsus was by this anthropocentric conception of the early Christians. Gregory of Nyssa will see in it the highest point of creation, the intermediary by which the visible world is spiritualized and is joined to God. For Nemesius, one of the first to write a work of "anthropology," man is a universe in reduced form, a "microcosm"; his dual membership in the world of bodies and in that of spirits makes him the crux and middle of all natures. And, since it was through the defection of man that all of Nature was exiled from its principle, the return of man to God, according to Maximus the Confessor, will involve the return of the whole world.

In the whole of the theophanies which constitute the universe, man is the part of creation which is capable of willing and thereby of freeing himself from the sin which results from his union with Nature. He will make himself like God or he will degrade himself, as he turns toward spiritual goods or toward those of the body. This is the source of the eminently historical character of his being. Other natural beings have no history; that is, they can be only what they are and as they are. To the contrary, man has a history because of his freedom, which makes him capable of determining to a certain extent the place he will occupy in the hierarchy of beings. He is capable, through the decision of his own free will, of growing or of shrinking insofar as his participation in the divine is concerned. And it is precisely this new experience of freedom and of its relationships with divine providence and divine grace which gives human society primacy over Nature. Just as the degree represented by man marks the limits and a kind of horizon line between the pure angelic intelligences and the universe of natures, so does human society represent a higher form of the natural order.

Thus it was that the social world could appear and place itself above the natural world, without, however, opposing it. The appearance of the modern opposition between Nature and history presupposes the complete destruction of the medieval world.