

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY

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THE problem of the relations of Christianity to History has been very much complicated and, I think, obscured by the influence of nineteenth-century philosophy. Almost all the great idealist philosophers of that century, like Fichte and Schelling and Hegel, constructed elaborate philosophies of history which had a very considerable influence on the historians, especially in Germany, and on the theologians also. All these systems were inspired or coloured by Christian ideas and they were consequently eagerly accepted by Christian theologians for apologetic purposes. And thus there arose an alliance between idealist philosophy and German theology which became characteristic of the Liberal Protestant movement and dominated religious thought both on the continent and in this country during the later nineteenth century.

Today the situation is entirely changed. Both philosophic idealism and liberal Protestantism have been widely discredited and have been replaced by logical positivism and by the dialectic theology of the Barthians. The result is that the idea of a Christian philosophy of history has also suffered from the reaction against philosophic idealism. It is difficult to distinguish the authentic and original element in the Christian view of history from the philosophic accretions and interpretations of the last century and a half, so that you will find modern representatives of orthodox Christianity like Mr C. S. Lewis questioning the possibility of a Christian interpretation of history, and declaring that the supposed connection between Christianity and Historicism is largely an illusion.¹

If we approach the subject from a purely philosophical point of view there is a good deal to justify Mr Lewis's scepticism. For the classical tradition of Christian philosophy as represented by Thomism has devoted comparatively little attention to the problem of history, while the philosophers who set the highest value on history and insist most strongly on the close relation between Christianity and history, such as Collingwood and Croce and

1 In his article on 'Historicism' in *The Month*, October, 1950.

Hegel, are not themselves Christian and may perhaps have tended to interpret Christianity in terms of their own philosophy.

Let us therefore postpone any philosophical discussion and consider the matter on the basis of the original theological data of historic Christianity without any attempt to justify or criticise them on philosophical grounds. There is no great difficulty in doing this, since the classical tradition of Christian philosophy as represented by Thomism has never devoted much attention to the problem of history. Its tradition has been Hellenic and Aristotelian, whereas the Christian interpretation of history is derived from a different source. It is Jewish rather than Greek, and finds its fullest expression in the primary documents of the Christian faith—the writings of the Hebrew prophets and in the New Testament itself.

Thus the Christian view of history is not a secondary element derived by philosophical reflection from the study of history. It lies at the very heart of Christianity and forms an integral part of the Christian faith. Hence there is no Christian 'philosophy of history' in the strict sense of the word. There is, instead, a Christian history and a Christian theology of history, and it is not too much to say that without them there would be no such thing as Christianity. For Christianity, together with the religion of Israel out of which it was born, are historical religions in a sense to which none of the other world religions can lay claim—not even Islam, though this comes nearest to them in this respect.

Hence it is very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to explain the Christian view of history to a non-Christian, since it is necessary to accept the Christian faith in order to understand the Christian view of history, and those who reject the idea of a divine revelation are necessarily obliged to reject the Christian view of history as well. And even those who are prepared to accept in theory the principle of divine revelation—of the manifestation of a religious truth which surpasses human reason—may still find it hard to face the enormous paradoxes of Christianity.

That God should have chosen an obscure Palestinian tribe—not a particularly civilised or attractive tribe either—to be the vehicle of his universal purpose for humanity, is difficult to believe. But that this purpose should have been finally realised in the person of a Galilean peasant executed under Tiberius, and that this event was the turning point in the life of mankind and the key to the

meaning of history—all this is so hard for the human mind to accept that even the Jews themselves were scandalised, while to the Greek philosophers and the secular historians it seemed sheer folly.

Nevertheless, these are the foundations of the Christian view of history, and if we cannot accept them it is useless to elaborate idealistic theories and call them a Christian philosophy of history, as has often been done in the past.

For the Christian view of history is not merely a belief in the direction of history by divine providence, it is a belief in the intervention by God in the life of mankind by direct action at certain definite points in time and place. The doctrine of the Incarnation which is the central doctrine of the Christian faith is also the centre of history, and thus it is natural and appropriate that our traditional Christian history is framed in a chronological system which takes the year of the Incarnation as its point of reference and reckons its annals backwards and forwards from this fixed centre.

No doubt it may be said that the idea of divine incarnation is not peculiar to Christianity. But if we look at the typical examples of these non-Christian theories of divine incarnation, such as the orthodox Hindu expression of it in the Bhagavad-gita, we shall see that it has no such significance for history, as the Christian doctrine possesses. It is not only that the divine figure of Khrishna is mythical and unhistorical, it is that no divine incarnation is regarded as unique but as an example of a recurrent process which repeats itself again and again *ad infinitum* in the eternal recurrence of the cosmic cycle.

It was against such ideas as represented by the Gnostic theosophy that St Irenaeus asserted the uniqueness of the Christian revelation and the necessary relation between the divine unity and the unity of history—‘that there is one Father the creator of Man and one Son who fulfils the Father’s will and one human race in which the mysteries of God are worked out so that the creature conformed and incorporated with his son is brought to perfection’.

For the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is not simply a theophany—a revelation of God to Man; it is a new creation—the introduction of a new spiritual principle which gradually leavens and transforms human nature into something new. The history of the human race hinges on this unique divine event

which gives spiritual unity to the whole historic process. First there is the history of the Old Dispensation which is the story of the providential preparation of mankind for the Incarnation when 'the fulness of time', to use St Paul's expression, had come. Secondly there is the New Dispensation which is the working out of the Incarnation in the life of the Christian Church. And finally there is the realisation of the divine purpose in the future: in the final establishment of the Kingdom of God when the harvest of this world is reaped. Thus the Christian conception of history is essentially unitary. It has a beginning, a centre, and an end. This beginning, this centre, and this end transcend history; they are not historical events in the ordinary sense of the word, but acts of divine creation to which the whole process of history is subordinate. For the Christian view of history is a vision of history *sub specie aeternitatis*, an interpretation of time in terms of eternity and of human events in the light of divine revelation. And thus Christian history is inevitably apocalyptic, and the apocalypse is the Christian substitute for the secular philosophies of history.

But this involves a revolutionary reversal and transposition of historical values and judgments. For the real meaning of history is not the apparent meaning that historians have studied and philosophers have attempted to explain. The world-transforming events which changed the whole course of human history have occurred as it were under the surface of history unnoticed by the historians and the philosophers. This is the great paradox of the gospel, as St Paul asserts with such tremendous force. The great mystery of the divine purpose which has been hidden throughout the ages has now been manifested in the sight of heaven and earth by the apostolic ministry. Yet the world has not been able to accept it, because it has been announced by unknown insignificant men in a form which was unacceptable and incomprehensible to the higher culture of the age, alike Jewish and Hellenistic. The Greeks demand philosophical theories, the Jews demand historical proof. But the answer of Christianity is Christ crucified—*verbum crucis*—the story of the Cross: a scandal to the Jews and an absurdity to the Greeks. It is only when this tremendous paradox with its reversal of all hitherto accepted standards of judgment has been accepted that the meaning of human life and human history can be understood. For St Paul does not of course mean to deny the value of understanding or to affirm that history is without

a meaning. What he asserts is the mysterious and transcendent character of the true knowledge—‘the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory which none of the rulers of this world know’.² And in the same way he fully accepted the Jewish doctrine of a sacred history which would justify the ways of God to man. What he denied was an external justification by the manifest triumph of the Jewish national hope. The ways of God were deeper and more mysterious than that, so that the fulfilment of prophecy towards which the whole history of Israel had tended had been concealed from Israel by the scandal of the Cross. Nevertheless the Christian interpretation of history as we see it in the New Testament and the writings of the Fathers follows the pattern which had already been laid down in the Old Testament and in Jewish tradition.

There is, in the first place, a sacred history in the strict sense, that is to say, the story of God’s dealings with his people and the fulfilment of his eternal purpose in and through them. And, in the second place, there is the interpretation of external history in the light of this central purpose. This took the form of a theory of successive world ages and successive world empires, each of which had a part to play in the divine drama. The theory of the world ages, which became incorporated in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and was ultimately taken over by Christian apocalyptic, was not however Jewish in origin. It was widely diffused throughout the ancient world in Hellenistic times and probably goes back in origin to the tradition of Babylonian cosmology and astral theology. The theory of the world empires, on the other hand, is distinctively biblical in spirit and belongs to the central message of Hebrew prophecy. For the Divine Judgment which it was the mission of the prophets to declare was not confined to the chosen people. The rulers of the Gentiles were also the instruments of divine judgment, even though they did not understand the purposes that they served. Each of the world empires in turn had its divinely appointed task to perform, and when the task was finished their power came to an end and they gave place to their successors.

Thus the meaning of history was not to be found in the history of the world empires themselves. They were not ends but means, and the inner significance of history was to be found in the

² *Col.* ii., cf. *Eph.* iii.

apparently insignificant development of the people of God. Now this prophetic view of history was taken over by the Christian Church and applied on a wider and universal scale. The divine event which had changed the course of history had also broken down the barrier between Jews and the Gentiles, and the two separated parts of humanity had been made one in Christ, the corner-stone of the new world edifice. The Christian attitude to secular history was indeed the same as that of the prophets; and the Roman Empire was regarded as the successor of the old world empires, like Babylon and Persia. But now it was seen that the Gentile world as well as the chosen people were being providentially guided towards a common spiritual end. And this end was no longer conceived as the restoration of Israel and the gathering of all the exiles from among the Gentiles. It was the gathering together of all the spiritually living elements throughout mankind into a new spiritual society. The Roman prophet Hermas in the second century describes the process in the vision of the white tower that was being built among the waters, by tens of thousands of men who were bringing stones dragged from the deep sea or collected from the twelve mountains which symbolise the different nations of the world. Some of these stones were rejected and some were chosen to be used for the building. And when he asks 'concerning the times and whether the end is yet', he is answered: 'Do you not see that the tower is still in process of building? When the building has been finished, the end comes.'

This vision shows how Christianity transfers the meaning of history from the outer world of historic events to the inner world of spiritual change, and how the latter was conceived as the dynamic element in history and as a real world-transforming power. But it also shows how the primitive Christian sense of an imminent end led to a foreshortening of the time scale and distracted men's attention from the problem of the future destinies of human civilisation. It was not until the time of the conversion of the Empire and the peace of the Church that Christians were able to make a distinction between the end of the age and the end of the world, and to envisage the prospect of a Christian age and civilisation which was no millennial kingdom but a field of continual effort and conflict.

This view of history found its classical expression in St Augus-

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tine's work on *The City of God* which interprets the course of universal history as an unceasing conflict between two dynamic principles embodied in two societies and social orders—the City of Man and the City of God, Babylon and Jerusalem, which run their course side by side, intermingling with one another and sharing the same temporal goods and the same temporal evils, but separated from one another by an infinite spiritual gulf. Thus St Augustine sees history as the meeting point of time and eternity. History is a unity because the same divine power which shows itself in the order of nature from the stars down to the feathers of the bird and the leaves of the tree also governs the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires. But this divine order is continually being deflected by the downward gravitation of human nature to its own selfish ends—a force which attempts to build its own world in those political structures that are the organised expression of human ambition and lust for power. This does not, however, mean that St Augustine identifies the state as such with the *civitas terrena* and condemns it as essentially evil. On the contrary, he shows that its true end—the maintaining of temporal peace—is a good which is in agreement with the higher good of the City of God, so that the state in its true nature is not so much the expression of self-will and the lust for power as a necessary barrier which defends human society from being destroyed by these forces of destruction. It is only when war and not peace is made the end of the state that it becomes identified with the *civitas terrena* in the bad sense of the word. But we see only too well that the predatory state that lives by war and conquest is an historical reality, and St Augustine's judgment on secular history is a predominantly pessimistic one which sees the kingdoms of this world as founded in injustice and extending themselves by war and oppression. The ideal of temporal peace which is inherent in the idea of the state is never strong enough to overcome the dynamic force of human self-will, and therefore the whole course of history *apart from divine grace* is the record of successive attempts to build towers of Babel which are frustrated by the inherent selfishness and greed of human nature.

The exception, however, is all-important. For the blind forces of instinct and human passion are not the only powers that rule the world. God has not abandoned his creation. He communicates to man by the grace of Christ and the action of the Spirit the

spiritual power of divine love which alone is capable of transforming human nature. As the natural force of self-love draws down the world to multiplicity and disorder and death, the supernatural power of the love of God draws it back to unity and order and life. And it is here that the true unity and significance of history is to be found. For love, in St Augustine's theory, is the principle of society, and as the centrifugal and destructive power of self-love creates the divided society of the *civitas terrena*, so the unitive and creative power of divine love creates the City of God, the society that unites all men of good will in an eternal fellowship which is progressively realised in the course of the ages.

Thus St Augustine, more perhaps than any other Christian thinker, emphasises the social character of the Christian doctrine of salvation. For 'whence', he writes, 'should the City of God originally begin or progressively develop or ultimately attain its end unless the life of the saints were a social one?'³ But at the same time he makes the individual soul and not the state or the civilisation the real centre of the historic process. Wherever the power of divine love moves the human will there the City of God is being built. Even the Church which is the visible sacramental organ of the City of God is not identical with it, since, as he writes, in God's foreknowledge there are many who seem to be outside who are within and many who seem to be within who are outside.⁴ So there are those outside the communion of the Church 'whom the Father, who sees in secret, crowns in secret'.⁵ For the two Cities interpenetrate one another in such a way and to such a degree that 'the earthly kingdom exacts service from the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven exacts service from the earthly city'.⁶

It is impossible to exaggerate the influence of St Augustine's thought on the development of the Christian view of history and on the whole tradition of Western historiography, which follows quite a different course from that of Eastern and Byzantine historiography. It is true that the modern reader who expects to find in St Augustine a philosophy of history in the modern sense, and who naturally turns to the historical portions of his great

3 *De Civ. Dei.* xix. V.

4 *De bapt.*, V. 38.

5 *De Vera Religione*, vi, 11.

6 *In Psalmos*, li, 4.

work, especially Books XV to XVIII, is apt to be grievously disappointed, like the late Professor Hearnshaw who wrote that the *De Civitate Dei* contains neither philosophy nor history but merely theology and fiction. But though St Augustine was never a Christian historian such as Eusebius, his work had a far more revolutionary effect on Western thought. In the first place, he impressed upon Christian historians his conception of history as a dynamic process in which the divine purpose is realised. Secondly, he made men realise the way in which the individual personality is the source and centre of this dynamic process. And finally, he made the Western Church conscious of its historical mission and its social and political responsibilities so that it became during the following centuries the active principle of Western culture.

The results of St Augustine's work find full expression three centuries later in the Anglo-Saxon Church. Unlike St Augustine, St Bede was a true historian, but his history is built on the foundations that St Augustine had laid, and thus we get the first history of a Christian people in the full sense of the word—a history which is not primarily concerned with the rise and fall of kingdoms—though these are not omitted; but with the rise of Christ's kingdom in England, the *gesta Dei per Anglos*. Of course Bede's great work can hardly be regarded as typical of medieval historiography. It was an exceptional, almost a unique, achievement. But at any rate his historical approach is typical, and, together with his other chronographical works, it provided the pattern which was followed by the later historians of the Christian middle ages. It consists in the first place of a world chronicle of the Eusebian type which provided the chronological background on which the historian worked. Secondly there were the histories of particular peoples and Churches of which St Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is the classical example, and which is represented in later times by works like Adam of Bremen's *History of the Church of Hamburg* or Ordericus Vitalis's *Ecclesiastical History*. And thirdly there are the biographies of saints and bishops and abbots, like Bede's life of St Cuthbert and the lives of the abbots of Wearmouth.

In this way the recording of contemporary events in the typical medieval chronicle is linked up on the one hand with the tradition of world history and on the other with the lives of the great men who were the leaders and heroes of Christian society.

But the saint is not merely an historical figure; he has become a citizen of the eternal city, a celestial patron and protector of man's earthly life. So that in the lives of the saints we see history transcending itself and becoming part of the eternal world of faith.

Thus in medieval thought, time and eternity are far more closely bound up with one another than they were in classical antiquity or to the modern mind. The world of history was only a fraction of the real world and it was surrounded on every side by the eternal world like an island in the ocean. This medieval vision of a hierarchical universe in which the world of man occupies a small but central place finds classical expression in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. For this shows better than any purely historical or theological work how the world of history was conceived as passing into eternity and bearing eternal fruit.

And if on the one hand this seems to reduce the importance of history and of the present life, on the other hand it enhances their value by giving them an eternal significance. In fact there are few great poets who have been more concerned with history and even with politics than Dante was. What is happening in Florence and in Italy is a matter of profound concern, not only to the souls in Purgatory, but even to the damned in Hell and to the saints in Paradise, and the divine pageant in the Earthly Paradise which is the centre of the whole process is an apocalyptic vision of the judgment and the reformation of the Church and the Empire in the fourteenth century.

Dante's great poem seems to sum up the whole achievement of the Catholic middle ages and to represent a perfect literary counterpart to the philosophical synthesis of St Thomas. But if we turn to his prose works—the *Convivio* and the *De Monarchia*—we see that his views on culture, and consequently on history, differ widely from those of St Thomas and even more from those of St Augustine. Here for the first time in Christian thought we find the earthly and temporal city regarded as an autonomous order with its own supreme end, which is not the service of the Church but the realisation of all the natural potentialities of human culture. The goal of civilisation—*finis universalis civitatis humani generis*—can only be reached by a universal society and this requires the political unification of humanity in a single world state. Now it is clear that Dante's ideal of the universal state is derived from the medieval conception of Christendom as a

universal society and from the tradition of the Holy Roman Empire as formulated by Ghibelline lawyers and theorists. As Professor Gilson writes, 'if the *genus humanum* of Dante is really the first known expression of the modern idea of Humanity, we may say that the conception of Humanity first presented itself to the European consciousness merely as a secularised imitation of the religious notion of a Church'.⁷

But Dante's sources were not exclusively Christian. He was influenced most powerfully by the political and ethical ideals of Greek humanism, represented above all by Aristotle's *Ethics* and no less by the romantic idealisation of the classical past and his devotion to ancient Rome. For Dante's view of the Empire is entirely opposed to that of St Augustine. He regards it not as the work of human pride and ambition but as a holy city specially created and ordained by God as the instrument of his divine purpose for the human race. He even goes so far as to maintain in the *Convivio* that the citizens and statesmen of Rome were themselves holy, since they could not have achieved their purpose without a special infusion of divine grace.

In all this Dante looks forward to the Renaissance rather than back to the middle ages. But he carries with him so much of the Christian tradition that even his secularism and his humanism have a distinctively Christian character which make them utterly different from those of classical antiquity. And this may also be said of most of the writers and thinkers of the following century, for, as Karl Burdach has shown with so much learning, the whole atmosphere of later medieval and early Renaissance culture was infused by a Christian idealism which had its roots in the thirteenth century and especially in the Franciscan movement. Thus the fourteenth century which saw the beginnings of the Italian Renaissance and the development of Western humanism was also the great century of Western mysticism; and this intensification of the interior life with its emphasis on spiritual experience was not altogether unrelated to the growing self-consciousness of Western culture which found expression in the humanist movement. Even in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the humanist culture was not entirely divorced from this mystical tradition; both elements co-exist in the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa, in the culture of the Platonic Academy at Florence and in the art of

⁷ *Dante the Philosopher*. By E. Gilson, p. 179.

Botticelli and finally in that of Michelangelo. But in his case we feel that this synthesis was only maintained by an heroic effort, and lesser men were forced to acquiesce in a division of life between two spiritual ideals that became increasingly divergent.

This idealisation of classical antiquity which is already present in the thought of Dante developed still further with Petrarch and his contemporaries until it became the characteristic feature of Renaissance culture. It affected every aspect of Western thought, literary, scientific and philosophic. Above all, it changed the Western view of history and inaugurated a new type of historiography. The religious approach to history as the story of God's dealings with mankind and the fulfilment of the divine plan in the life of the Church was abandoned or left to the ecclesiastical historians, and there arose a new secular history modelled on Livy and Tacitus and a new type of historical biography influenced by Plutarch.

Thus the unity of the medieval conception of history was lost and in its place there gradually developed a new pattern of history which eventually took the form of a threefold division between the ancient, medieval and modern periods, a pattern which in spite of its arbitrary and unscientific character has dominated the teaching of history down to modern times and still affects our attitude to the past.

This new approach to history was one of the main factors in the secularisation of European culture, since the idealisation of the ancient state and especially of republican Rome influenced men's attitude to the contemporary state. The Italian city state and the kingdoms of the West of Europe were no longer regarded as organic members of the Christian community, but as ends in themselves which acknowledged no higher sanction than the will to power. During the middle ages the state as an autonomous self-sufficient power structure did not exist—even its name was unknown. But from the fifteenth century onwards the history of Europe has been increasingly the history of the development of a limited number of sovereign states as independent power centres and of the ceaseless rivalry and conflict between them. The true nature of this development was disguised by the religious prestige which still surrounded the person of the ruler and which was actually increased during the age of the Reformation by the

union of the Church with the state and its subordination to the royal supremacy.

Thus there is an inherent contradiction in the social development of modern culture. Inasmuch as the state was the creation and embodiment of the will to power, it was a Leviathan—a sub-moral monster which lived by the law of the jungle. But at the same time it was the bearer of the cultural values which had been created by the Christian past, so that to its subjects it still seemed a Christian state and the vice-gerent of God on earth.

And the same contradiction appears in the European view of history. The realists like Machiavelli and Hobbes attempted to interpret history in non-moral terms as a straightforward expression of the will to power which could be studied in a scientific (quasi-biological) spirit. But by so doing they emptied the historical process of the moral values that still retained their subjective validity so that they outraged both the conscience and the conventions of their contemporaries. The idealists, on the other hand, ignored or minimised the sub-moral character of the state and idealised it as the instrument of divine providence or of that impersonal force which was gradually leading mankind onwards towards perfection.

It is easy to see how this belief in progress found acceptance during the period of triumphant national and cultural expansion when Western Europe was acquiring a kind of world hegemony. But it is no less clear that it was not a purely rational construction, but that it was essentially nothing else but a secularised version of the traditional Christian view. It inherited from Christianity its belief in the unity of history and its faith in a spiritual or moral purpose which gives meaning to the whole historical process. At the same time its transposition of these conceptions to a purely rational and secular theory of culture involved their drastic simplification. To the Christian the meaning of history was a mystery which was only revealed in the light of faith. But the apostles of the religion of progress denied the need for divine revelation and believed that man had only to follow the light of reason to discover the meaning of history in the law of progress which governs the life of civilisation. But it was difficult even in the eighteenth century to make this facile optimism square with the facts of history. It was necessary to explain that hitherto the light of reason had been concealed by the dark forces of super-

stition and ignorance as embodied in organised religion. But in that case the enlightenment was nothing less than a new revelation, and in order that it might triumph it was necessary that the new believers should organise themselves in a new church whether it called itself a school of philosophers or a secret society of *illuminati* or freemasons or a political party. This was, in fact, what actually happened, and the new rationalist churches have proved no less intolerant and dogmatic than the religious sects of the past. The revelation of Rousseau was followed by a series of successive revelations—idealist, positivist and socialistic, with their prophets and their churches. Of these today only the Marxist revelation survives, thanks mainly to the superior efficiency of its ecclesiastical organisation and apostolate. None of these secular religions has been more insistent on its purely scientific and non-religious character than Marxism. Yet none of them owes more to the Messianic elements in the Christian and Jewish historical traditions. Its doctrine is in fact essentially apocalyptic—a denunciation of judgment against the existing social order and a message of salvation to the poor and the oppressed who will at last receive their reward after the social revolution in the classless society, which is the Marxist equivalent of the millennial kingdom of righteousness.

No doubt the Communist will regard this as a caricature of the Marxist theory, since the social revolution and the coming of the classless society is the result of an inevitable economic and sociological process and its goal is not a spiritual but a material one. Nevertheless the cruder forms of Jewish and Christian milleniarism were not without a materialistic element since they envisaged an earthly kingdom in which the saints would enjoy temporal prosperity, while it is impossible to ignore the existence of a strong apocalyptic and Utopian element in the Communist attitude towards the social revolution and the establishment of a perfect society which will abolish class conflict and social injustice.

There is in fact a dualism between the Marxist myth, which is ethical and apocalyptic, and the Marxist interpretation of history, which is materialist, determinist and ethically relativistic. But it is from the first of these two elements that Communism has derived and still derives its popular appeal and its quasi-religious character which render it such a serious rival to Christianity. Yet it is difficult to reconcile the absolutism of the Marxist myth with

the relativism of the Marxist interpretation of history. The Marxist believer stakes everything on the immediate realisation of the social revolution and the proximate advent of the classless society. But when these have been realised, the class war which is the dialectical principle of historical change will have been suppressed and history itself comes to an end. In the same way there will no longer be any room for the moral indignation and the revolutionary idealism which have inspired Communism with a kind of religious enthusiasm. Nothing is left but an absolute and abject attitude of social conformism when the revolutionary protest of the minority becomes transformed into the irresistible tyranny of mass opinion which will not tolerate the smallest deviation from ideological orthodoxy. By the dialectic of history the movement of social revolution passes over into its totalitarian opposite, and the law of the negation finds its consummation.

Thus, in comparison with the Christian view of history, the Marxist view is essentially a short-term one, the significance of which is concentrated on the economic changes which are affecting modern Western society. This accounts for its immediate effectiveness in the field of political propaganda, but at the same time it detracts from its value on the philosophical level as a theory of universal history. The Marxist doctrine first appeared about a century ago, and could not have arisen at any earlier time. Its field of prediction is limited to the immediate future, for Marx himself seems to have expected the downfall of capitalism to take place in his own lifetime, and the leaders of the Russian revolution took a similar view. In any case the fulfilment of the whole Marxist programme is a matter of years, not of centuries, and Marxism seems to throw no light on the historical developments which will follow the establishment of the classless society.

The Christian view, on the other hand, is co-extensive with time. It covers the whole life of humanity on this planet and it ends only with the end of this world and of man's temporal existence. It is essentially a theory of the interpenetration of time and eternity: so that the essential meaning of history is to be found in the growth of the seed of eternity in the womb of time. For man is not merely a creature of the economic process—a producer and a consumer. He is an animal that is conscious of his mortality and consequently aware of eternity. In the same way the end of

history is not the development of a new form of economic society, but is the creation of a new humanity, or rather a higher humanity, which goes as far beyond man as man himself goes beyond the animals. Now Christians not only believe in the existence of a divine plan in history, they believe in the existence of a human society which is in some measure aware of this plan and capable of co-operating with it. Thousands of years ago the Hebrew prophet warned his people not to learn the ways of the nations who were dismayed at the signs of the times. For the nations were the servants of their own creatures—the false gods who were the work of delusion and who must perish in the time of visitation. 'But the portion of Jacob is not like these, for he that formed all things has made Israel to be the people of his inheritance.' The same thing is true today of the political myths and ideologies which modern man creates in order to explain the signs of the time. These are our modern idols which are no less bloodthirsty than the gods of the heathen and which demand an even greater tribute of human sacrifice. But the Church remains the guardian of the secret of history and the organ of the work of human redemption which goes on ceaselessly through the rise and fall of kingdoms and the revolutions of social systems. It is true that the Church has no immediate solution to offer in competition with those of the secular ideologies. On the other hand, the Christian solution is the only one which gives full weight to the unknown and unpredictable element in history; whereas the secular ideologies which attempt to eliminate this element, and which almost invariably take an optimistic view of the immediate future are inevitably disconcerted and disillusioned by the emergence of this unknown factor at the point at which they thought that it had been finally banished.