



Msgr. Eugene Kevane was engaged in catechetical teaching of all types and levels from the very beginning of his ordination. After doing doctoral studies in the field of Christian Philosophy, he was for some years Dean of the School of Education at the Catholic University of America in Washington. In 1969 he was appointed Founding Director of the Notre Dame Pontifical Catechetical Institute, Middleburg, Virginia. In 1971 he was appointed Visiting Professor of Catechetics at the Angelicum University in Rome, and in 1974 Professor of Catechetics at Saint John's University in New York City. Msgr. Eugene Kevane died on November 20, 1996.

Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior; our only hope. St. Peter in Acts 4:12 puts it plainly: "Of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved." Who else will raise us up on the Last Day?

Jesus Christ is "The Redeemer of Man," as the 264th successor of St. Peter explains fully in his first Encyclical. "Revelation tells of a creating and redeeming God," wrote Pope St. John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation on Catechetics, "whose Son has come among us in our flesh, and enters not only into each individual's personal history, but into human history itself, becoming its Center."

Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of History. Therefore, this book concerns not just scholars, not just novices and seminarians, not just catechists, not just priests and religious, but every Catholic and indeed every Christian in all the Churches, and all peoples everywhere.

THE LORD OF HISTORY



KEVANE

# THE LORD OF HISTORY

Christocentrism and the Philosophy of History

**EUGENE KEVANE**



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### ***The Catholic Fact***

A New Israel is being formed by means of these *ecclesiae*, an eschatological Israel arising out of Abraham's seed and formed out of Jews and Gentiles without the distinctions and national customs of the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> The Hebrew Torah is recognized as preparatory for this new fact. St. Paul, and the entire Early Church with him, recognizes what is beginning to take place as the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures in their prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles into the worldwide New Testament which is to succeed in the times of the Coming One. The emergence of this New Israel on the stage of universal history, furthermore, is in turn preparatory to coming events regarding the Hebrew nation itself. For the refusal of this people to join the universal movement of the Gentile nations into the unity of the New Israel is seen by the Apostles as an apostasy which is itself a fulfillment of prophecy; and Saint Paul in his profound chapters to the Romans looks forward to the conversion of a remnant of the Hebrew people sometime in the future, on the eve of the final manifestation of divine power.<sup>32</sup>

This is the substance of the Christian understanding of history. The Fathers of the Church from Justin through Augustine to Gregory the Great will develop it greatly, but they will not change it.

The Catholic Fact emerges in this way and becomes visible on the panorama of universal history. It results from the apostolate, through the distinct yet interrelated processes of evangelization and catechesis. It is the work of the catechumenate, the apostolic teaching program which explained the creedal facts about Jesus *secundum Scripturas*, as the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures, and then baptized into membership in the New Israel of God and its way of life. Thus the Catholic Fact follows upon the Hebrew Fact, and is one thing with it in the continuity of religious succession, the succession of the Testaments as an actual happening of history.

## **III.**

### ***The Patristic Understanding of History***

Thought about the fact and the meaning of this succession in time was an essential component of Catholic intellectual life from the beginning.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the early Christian thinkers were keenly aware of their own participation in the fulfillment of the Hebrew prophecies; they actually saw the conversion of the Graeco-Roman world to God in the universal Church of Jesus Christ and experienced it personally.

#### ***St. Justin Martyr***

"We will now offer proof," writes St. Justin Martyr in the Second Century, " ... regarding Him whom we call Christ...., not trusting mere assertions, but being of necessity persuaded by those who prophesied [of Him] before these things came to pass, for with our own eyes we behold things that have happened and are happening just as they were predicted.... There were, then, among the Jews certain men who were prophets of God, through whom the prophetic Spirit published beforehand things that were to come to pass, before ever they happened.... In these books, of the prophets then, we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin, growing up to a man's estate, and healing every disease and every sickness, and raising the dead, and being hated, and unrecognized, and crucified, and dying, and rising again, and ascending into heaven, and being, and being called, the Son of God. We find it also predicted that certain persons should be sent by Him into every nation to publish these things, and that rather among the Gentiles [than among the Jews] men should believe in Him."<sup>34</sup>

This is the experience of the Catholic Fact as it is in the process of being built into history. In further chapters of his *First Apology* Justin elaborates in detail upon the Hebrew prophecies, explaining that Moses predicted Christ (Gen. 49, 10), that Isaiah foretold the

manner and place of His birth, that the prophets in general foresaw details of His life, His crucifixion and His life in heaven after death, and that His rejection by the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem had been foretold. "When the Spirit of prophecy speaks as predicting things that are to come to pass," Justin continues, "He speaks in this way: 'For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations...' (Is. 2, 3). And that it did so come to pass, we can convince you. For from Jerusalem there went out into the world, men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking: but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God; and we who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war on our enemies, but also, that we may not lie or deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ."<sup>35</sup>

The fulfillment is really happening: the Gospel is being heralded out of Jerusalem. It is an event of contemporary history for Justin, who simply reports the manner of seeing and judging the course of events which was general among the early Christians.

Then he gives the characteristic Christian linear orientation toward the anticipated end of history. "Since, then, we prove that all things which have already happened had been predicted by the prophets before they came to pass, we must necessarily believe also that those things which are in like manner predicted, but are yet to come to pass, shall certainly happen.... For the prophets have proclaimed two advents of His: the one, that which is already past, when He came as a dishonored and suffering man; but the second, when, according to prophecy, He shall come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also he shall raise the bodies of all men who have lived...."<sup>36</sup> Justin proceeds to cite Ezekiel 37; Isaiah 45; 46; 63; 64; and Zechariah 12. "Though we could bring forward many other prophecies," he concludes, "we forbear, judging these sufficient for the persuasion of those who have ears to hear and understand.... So many things as these..., when they are seen with the eye, are enough to produce conviction and belief...."<sup>37</sup>

### **Tertullian**

Justin was a seminal thinker whose fundamental insights on the meaning and direction of universal history were developed by Ire-

naeus and the Greek Fathers, and by Tertullian, from whom they passed to the great Latins, especially Augustine.

*"That which will teach us [regarding the divinity of the Sacred Scriptures] is right at hand,"* writes Tertullian; *"namely, the world, all time, all events. All that is now happening was foretold...."*<sup>38</sup>

And he cites the troubles which were besetting the Roman Empire in his day, the same domestic social evils and foreign barbarian inroads which the pagans were attributing to the Christian refusal to worship the gods of Rome.

*"Even while we experience these happenings,"* he continues, *"they are being read; while we recall them, they are being fulfilled. The actual fulfillment of the prophecy is, I dare say, sufficient indication of its inspired nature."*<sup>39</sup>

Tertullian proceeds to the Hebrew doctrine on the Coming One, and the fulfillment of it in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Then he takes up the second aspect of Hebrew prophecy, the apostolate to the nations which is to raise up a new Israel.

*"The disciples, too, hearkening to the command of God, their Master, spread throughout the world, and, after enduring with constancy much suffering from the persecution of the Jews, finally, because of the savage cruelty of Nero, sowed the seed of Christian blood at Rome...."*<sup>40</sup>

Tertullian then takes up the burning question of his day, whether Rome's prosperity and greatness are being jeopardized by the Christian movement away from the worship of her pagan gods, toward the worship of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The pagan deities did not give Rome her Empire, Tertullian answers; it is a work of the Christian God who is the Lord of history, who has a providential control over the rise, the fall and the succession of earthly empires.

*"Watch out, then,"* Tertullian warns the pagan Romans, *"lest the one who dispenses kingdoms...and who has made the world a unified system of times has ordained changes in the ruling powers during certain periods in the course of time; lest He under whom the race of men once lived before there were cities at all be the One who raises cities and destroys them."*<sup>41</sup> "In our case," he continues, *"we pray for the welfare of the emperors to the eternal God, the true God, the living God...."*<sup>42</sup>

"There is also another, even greater, obligation for us to pray for the emperors; yes, even for the continuance of the Empire in general and for Roman interests. We realize that the tremendous force which is hanging over the whole world, and the very end of the world with its threat of dreadful afflictions, is arrested for a time by the continued existence of the Roman Empire. This event we have no desire to experience, and, in praying that it may be deferred, we favor the continuance of Rome."<sup>43</sup>

### St. Augustine

St. Augustine, who in so many ways synthesizes the thought of the Early Church in his person and his work, describes most copiously and vividly this eye-witnessing and experience of the Catholic Fact. For him, it is nothing else than the *metanoia*, the conversion of the Roman Empire, the Graeco-Roman education and culture (and for him, this was effectively the whole of mankind) to God in the Catholic Church. He builds upon this Catholic Fact as something given in history, that understanding of history which has its abiding masterpiece in the City of God.

It is of course not possible here to do an extended study of Augustine from this point of view. Only the salient features of his thinking can be outlined, together with some indications for further research. Perhaps the best introduction to his personal view and experience of the Catholic Fact is his treatise on *The True Religion*, conceived among the Dialogues of Cassiciacum and written about three years after his own conversion, while still a layman, for his friend and patron Romanianus.

Augustine sketches what a great *metanoia* it would be if the peoples were to "change their minds and seek the one God who alone is superior to our minds, and by whom clearly every soul and the whole world has been created."<sup>44</sup> Plato aspired to something like this, Augustine continues, but inefficaciously. "Some great and divine man" would have to intervene, "to persuade the peoples that such things were to be at least believed if they could not grasp them with the mind."<sup>45</sup>

"Now this very thing has come to pass," Augustine concludes. "It is celebrated in books and documents. From one particular region of the earth in which alone the one God was worshiped and where alone such a man could be born, chosen men were sent throughout

the entire world.... Their sound teaching has been confirmed and they have left to posterity a world illumined."<sup>46</sup>

It would be difficult to state more succinctly the perception of the Catholic Fact as a reality observed and experienced. It is the Catholic Church seen as a dynamic turning movement of the peoples that had been gathered into the Roman Empire. It is their "conversion to the one true God.... These things (the Gospel teachings) are read to the peoples throughout all the earth...as far afield as among barbarian nations.... All over the inhabited world...multitudes enter upon this way of life from every race..."<sup>47</sup>

Augustine is careful to distinguish between what we today call "philosophy" and "theology." In his short treatise *On Faith in Things Unseen*, he introduces the Church as calling attention to her own presence and reality, fulfilling the Hebrew expectation of a New Testament embracing the Gentile peoples. This is something the unbeliever can see and know. "Truly, this you have not seen [namely, the events of the historical Jesus in Palestine], but you do see His Church."<sup>48</sup>

"Those who were believers at that time in the land of Juda learned of the marvelous birth of Christ of a Virgin, learned of His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, and being present there learned all His divine words and the deeds first-hand. These things you have not seen, and hence you refuse to believe them.... Therefore, direct your attention to and reflect upon the things which you behold, which are not narrated to you as of the past, nor foretold to you as of the future, but are clearly demonstrated to you as present. Now,...do you think it is either a little or no divine miracle that all mankind runs its course in the name of One Crucified? ...You are seeing what was prophesied in Ps. 21 [that] *all the ends of the earth...shall be converted to the Lord...and he shall have dominion over the nations.*"<sup>49</sup>

### The Conversion of the Roman Empire

The Catholic Fact, the historical reality of the Church as a sudden illumination visible in the whole world, *in toto orbe terrarum*, is the constant intellectual background for all the writings of Augustine. It recurs in his sermons, particularly in the *Enarrationes in psalmos*. It is the fundamental theme of the *De civitate Dei*, the treatise which seals the intellectual victory of Christian thinking within the Catholic Faith over the ancient pagan philosophy, education and culture.<sup>50</sup>

In Book III of his *De doctrina christiana* Augustine explains in detail his evaluation of this worldwide conversion taking place before the eyes of classical antiquity.<sup>51</sup> Citing Ezechiel 36, 23-28, he concludes to the Catholic Fact which he is experiencing: "Now that this is a prophecy of the New Testament, to which pertain not only a remnant of that one nation..., but also the other nations which were promised to their fathers and our fathers; and that there is here a promise of that washing of regeneration which, as we see, is now imparted to all nations, no one who looks into the matter can doubt."<sup>52</sup>

It remains to sketch briefly Augustine's understanding of the meaning and direction of universal history, the result of his reflection upon these two Facts, the Hebrew and the Catholic.

In the first place, completing the work of Julius Africanus and Eusebius, Augustine brought *historia* and *philosophia*, distinct disciplines on the curriculum of the classical Liberal Arts, into a correlation which the fragmented pagan mind was unable to achieve. This becomes clear in his very concept of history with its openness to the Lord of history by means of the new philosophical recognition of the doctrine of creation.

"When the past arrangements of men are recounted in historical narration," he writes, "we must not consider history itself among those human institutions. For, things which have now passed away and cannot be revoked must be considered to be in the order of time, whose Creator and Administrator is God."<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, there is this "order of time" to be considered in itself. The very concept expresses an openness to the God who is the Creator, and therefore the Lord of history. Hence it is a matter which introduces the very heart of the Judaeo-Christian understanding of universal history. This order is first visible to the eye of the intellect in the world-wide conversion of the peoples: when natural reason realizes that this fulfills the Hebrew Prophets, it dawns that there is an ordered succession in the very stuff of history, a movement in time from the Prophets to this Catholic Fact. Someone is doing something in history. His plan is visible in history. Hence He is the Lord of history.

"The things which were related concerning Christ and the Church," Augustine writes, "have come to pass according to their preordained succession."<sup>54</sup> "In following this religion," he tells Romanianus, "our chief concern is with the prophetic history of the

*dispensation of divine Providence in time — what God has done for the salvation of the human race, renewing and restoring it unto eternal life.*"<sup>55</sup>

Here an intellectual well versed in the *historia* of the pagan culture recognizes the historical writings of the Hebrews as *historia*: the same in substance and intent, however different in literary mode and genre. Athens and Jerusalem are coming together.

### **The Ordered Succession**

From this religious succession of the Testaments, Augustine, culminating the work of his Christian predecessors, turns to the civic, social and cultural succession which the pagan *historia* records, the sequence of the great Empires of antiquity. He finds the basis of correlation between the two successions in the Sacred Scriptures themselves. For the Lord of history exercises His rule over both sequences, and is almighty in His power to coordinate them. With Jerome and early Christian thinkers generally, Augustine recognizes Rome as the Fourth Empire foretold in the Book of Daniel, and thus comes to a fundamental insight regarding the meaning of the conversion of the peoples which he and his fellow-thinkers are experiencing. It is nothing else than the conversion of the Roman Empire itself to God in the Church. The Christian Rome of Peter and Paul is in the process of succeeding that other, earlier Rome, exercising a wider sway by the Catholic Faith than pagan Rome had been able to subdue with its marching legions. And this mighty fact, raised up high in universal history for all to see, is under the rule and administration of the Lord of history, who determines the order of times and of successions in the temporal order of the Empires. This is the concept of the *translatio imperii*, the succession of the empires, which the Fathers of the Church derived from the Scriptures. Regarding the troubling dream of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said:

"May the name of God be blessed forever and ever, since wisdom and power are his alone. His to control the procession of times and seasons, to make and unmake kings" (Dan. 2, 19-21).

Then came Daniel's moment of truth before the pagan ruler:

"After you another kingdom will rise..., and then a third which will rule the whole world. There will be a fourth kingdom, hard as iron.... It will crush and break all the earlier kingdoms.... In the time of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that

shall never be destroyed and shall not pass into the hands of another race: it will shatter and absorb all the previous kingdoms, and itself last for ever" (Dan. 2, 37-43).

"This fourth empire," Jerome writes in his Commentary, "obviously pertains to the Romans.... And at the end of all these..., our Lord and Savior..., victorious over all these Empires, has become as a great mountain, and has filled the whole earth."<sup>56</sup>

It is this concept which completes the Christian intellectual understanding of the meaning of the Catholic Fact. When Constantine recognized the Catholic Church and began to make it the official cult of the Empire, a process continuing unto completion in the later Fourth Century, the Second Coming seemed now indefinitely postponed.<sup>57</sup> More superficial Catholic thinkers, including not a few prelates across the Fourth Century, accepted the conversion of Rome and the consequent Christianized condition of social laws and custom as the Kingdom or City of God on earth. Others, however, and Augustine above all, recognized the imperfect character of the social *metanoia*. When Alaric sacked Rome in A.C. 410, the pagans took new scandal at the imperial policy. The gods who made Rome great have been abandoned by the Christian conversion, they were saying bitterly, and the Christian God is demonstrably powerless to maintain the Roman power and glory.

### ***From Christian Education to Christian Culture***

Augustine recognized the critical character of the question, and his immense treatise on the *City of God* was the result. The conversion of the Roman Empire does indeed fulfill the Prophets: the Christians have succeeded, and the Roman Emperor is now a member of the Church. The political and social order has an opportunity to share in the Christian renewal. But he does not expect this political and social order to be or to become the final and perfect condition of mankind. There are two Cities, built by two loves, and they are intermingled in the present Sixth Age, despite the conversion of the Roman Empire, until the Second Coming.<sup>58</sup>

To grasp Augustine's thought fully, the *De doctrina christiana*, his treatise on the Christianization of the classical *paideia*, must be correlated with the *De civitate Dei*.<sup>59</sup>

For the Christian Roman Empire, the Christian social order now ready to move forward into times Augustine could not foresee

(although he knew their principles), the times of Charlemagne and Edward the Confessor and Innocent III and St. Louis of France, was dependent upon the new Christian *paideia* which was bringing pagan education and culture under the sway of Christ and passing it on as heritage of Christian humanism to the on-coming generations. The classical *paideia* itself was thus converted, to find for itself a new home and mode of action in the Catechumenate of the Catholic Church. It had begun to serve the mission of Jesus Christ, the Divine Teacher. All seven of its Arts function now within the Church and help to maintain this spiritualized Roman Empire, this new Christian culture, in being.

Another term for this spiritualized and converted Roman Empire is simply Christendom, denoting by its suffix the sway or kingship of Christ over hearts, minds, social law, popular custom, and over the political order as King of the kings. The Catholic Fact grows mightily after the times of the Fathers who experienced its beginning, and it stands high on the human scene as a luminous landmark on the ordered succession of largest human social entities which the Prophets foresaw.<sup>60</sup>

The seventh Art, philosophy, is now "Christian Philosophy." Does it have a branch called "Philosophy of History," which understands this order and succession in time? Is this the discipline, exactly, which projects the intellectual life of the Early Church to the coming generations of the Christian Era? This question remains to be analyzed. But before it can be done, attention must be given to a new and quite different understanding of meaningful succession in history. And then men will face an agonizing question. Is this new and different concept perhaps what the philosophy of history sees?

## IV.

## The Modern View of History

Petrarch, historians commonly agree, was the first to see history differently.<sup>61</sup> He recognized with St. Augustine that history is constituted by the succession in time of the largest socially-organized entities on the human scene. But he no longer perceived the same entities: by some shift of perspective like an optical illusion, both the form and the content of the entities he saw in his mind's eye were suddenly quite different. He saw "Classical Antiquity," the cultural achievement of pagan Greece and Rome, clearly and with enthusiasm for all their art forms, their literary style, and in particular the beauty of Ciceronian Latin in contrast with the ecclesiastical Latin in common use around him in the Schools of Christendom. He was keenly conscious of the burgeoning culture of the Italian cities in his own day, for him a "Modern Age." Then there was the *medium aevum*, the Age between them. Three concepts are born in this fashion and a meaningful succession between them is conceived. Furthermore, the focal point of interest, the "center," is no longer Jesus Christ, with the fact of the Christianized Roman Empire as the supreme social and political order and reality of the interval between the First and the Second Coming: what Augustine had called "the Christian times" resulting from the conversion of the Roman Empire and what Denis the Little had confirmed in his system of reckoning the years of this new Christian Era from the birth of Christ.<sup>62</sup>

From such a beginning, the Modern view of history began to grow and to ripen. How did it happen? What was the background?

Ultimately, it is a question of the Christian perception of this world. Augustine, it has been noted, was careful not to identify the City of God with the earthly temporal order which the conversion of Rome had ushered onto the human scene. Gregory the Great seriously considered the times ripe for the final events which lead directly to the Second Coming. There always have been Christians in every

epoch of the Christian Era, who have perceived the state of affairs on earth in this way. The Christian Roman Empire is essentially a base for the Worldmission, the on-going effort to carry forth and to announce the original message of Jesus Christ to all the remaining nations. This base is dependent upon the pastoral ministry for its solidity, upon the personal *metanoia* of the succeeding generations of baptized Christians.

### Deficient Causes

But Augustine's *causae deficientes* are in full operation.<sup>63</sup> The Christian centuries are not perfect. The two Cities continue intermingled in them. There were families for whom baptism was a perfunctory social enrollment; the children were not raised in the actual practice of the Catholic Faith. The *metanoia* was not perfect. The Fathers of the Church knew it already.

Then there were the Jews: an entire people continued its own unconverted existence, dispersed throughout the Christian sway. They were a contrary influence affecting the highest level of Christian leadership; if ever they became unfaithful to the principles of the Revealed Religion which gave them their being, that influence could become an acute problem.

Then there was the problem of Christian leadership at the level of its intellectual formation in what were now called "Universities," the Schools of Christendom in their developing and ripening form. Christian Philosophy and Sacred Theology were both frequently taught in a routine and even in a decadent manner.

There was a long interregnum at the Holy See in the late Thirteenth Century: it caused many Christians to sense a malaise in the Christian social order.

Furthermore, the Worldmission had been blocked by the rise of Islam, confining the message to the old Roman West. Kublai Khan requested two hundred scholars from the Holy See to introduce the Christian *paideia*, the Patristic Christianization of the Seven Liberal Arts, into the cultural life of China. The delay in answering him was very long. At last two men set out over the arduous route across Central Asia and one turned back. When Prince Henry the Navigator finally circumvented the Islamic block on the land routes to India and China by opening up the seaways of the planet, the propitious moment was gone for China to become another Catholic people

like Ireland or Poland or Hungary. The opportunity to win China for Christ never really knocked again at the door of universal history.

### ***The New Historiography***

In any case, Petrarch sensed something about Augustine's Christian times. He was not enthused. The Patristic concept of the Christian Era and its meaning did not enlist his intellectual support. He could not see the received division of history into the Six Ages based on the Hebrew Fact, and the concept of the Four Empires culminating in Rome and passing to the Christians by a true *translatio imperii* under the rule of the Lord of history.

*"The hallmark of the new historiographical temper,"* writes Patrides, *"is to be found in novel schemes of periodization. Their extensive variations are not nearly so important as is the concerted effort itself to formulate and to adopt non-traditional schemes. One such scheme was proposed impressively clearly, had clear-cut implications, and exercised a decisive influence upon later historians. Petrarch, its author, located history's most crucial point in the decline of the Roman Empire, thus neatly disavowing the Christian claim that the Incarnation stands as history's central event.... The period of Greece and Rome thus became 'classical,' the age ushered in by the humanists became 'modern,' while the intervening centuries were termed — not always with consistency — 'Middle Ages.' All three designations were standardized by the end of the seventeenth century and represented a scheme of periodization in diametric opposition to the Christian division of history into 'B.C.' and 'A.D.'"*<sup>64</sup>

The humanists of the Renaissance sealed the new understanding of universal history as a succession of these three distinct and self-contained epochs: The "Ancient," meaning classical (pagan) Greece and Rome; the "Medieval," meaning the Christian period extending for a thousand years from the Fall of Rome, variously dated; and the "Modern," their own times, felt to be so utterly different from and superior to the *medium aevum*. The Renaissance was never simply a rebirth of classical antiquity; always "modernity" was also present, as the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns demonstrates.<sup>65</sup> As a matter of fact, thanks chiefly to the triumphs of mathematico-physical science, the Moderns gradually won the victory, so that the Renaissance came to be simply the earlier part

of the Modern Age as a whole.<sup>66</sup>

### ***The Advent of Modern Philosophy***

Philosophy, the seventh of the Seven Arts, is the one which gives the first six their orientation and character. Hence, from the viewpoint of education and culture, of the Christianized *paideia*, the most fundamental single intellectual event in the development of the Modern Age was the birth of a new kind of philosophy, replacing Christian Philosophy on the level of higher education. This is the significance of Descartes, commonly recognized as the Father of Modern Philosophy. It would be difficult to over-emphasize the contrast, for he actually substituted the new mathematical physics for Metaphysics, "the science of wisdom and virtue," as Augustine termed it, which had been cultivated in the Schools of Christendom across the centuries since classical antiquity. Anything which had been so cultivated was now called "scholasticism," a term of opprobrium sharing the common intellectual attitude toward the "Middle Ages" which was ripening across the centuries of the Modern Age.

But since Metaphysics is the natural science of intelligible reality first underneath and then beyond the phenomena of this cosmos, the natural science of God the Creator, this philosophical substitution has fateful consequences for education and culture. For mathematical physics, in itself, has no way of knowing any order of reality beyond the phenomena of this cosmos. The consequences will take time to emerge in their logic; but when they do, a qualitative character attaching to Modernity as such will come into view which perhaps will prove to be significant for the philosophy of history. For this qualitative character will be the reverse side of Modern Philosophy, the rise and spread of Modern Atheism with Spinoza as its metaphysician.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that this view of the world sees cosmic matter as the supreme and eternally abiding reality, and that God the Creator and Lord of history is eliminated from intellectual life.

With this kind of philosophizing ripening in the colleges and universities of Higher Education, it is obvious that the Judaeo-Christian understanding of history will encounter increasing difficulty. During the four centuries between Petrarch and Voltaire, the two understandings, the "Judaeo-Christian" and the "Modern," are intermingled, each having its exponents and its treatises. Bossuet published his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* full in the pattern



of St. Augustine only a few years before Voltaire came on the scene. But while catechetical teaching proceeded everywhere in Christendom in terms of historical revelation and saw salvation history as extending to the present times of the Church,<sup>68</sup> Higher Education, the cultivation of the Seven Arts, and especially of the Seventh, Philosophy, turned more and more toward that historical atheism which philosophical atheism logically implies and must therefore necessarily beget. Jean Bodin wrote his impassioned attack on the very concept of the Four Empires and their meaningful succession.<sup>69</sup> Boyle published the seminal Encyclopedia in historical atheism. Richard Simon began to introduce this specifically "Modern" type of philosophical and historical thinking into the study of the Bible itself, initiating a type of Scripture scholarship, perhaps best denoted by the phrase, "purely rational exegesis," that will have its career and its ripening.<sup>70</sup>

Thus the tide rose in Higher Education against the Judaeo-Christian understanding. The "Modern" view seemed ever more self-evident, the inescapable truth of the educated man. There is no personal Supreme Being. At most, there is only the *Deus sive natura* of Spinoza. Hence the Prophets do not communicate a Word of God. Hence some explaining and interpreting must be accomplished in the case of Jesus Christ, by understanding the historical writings of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in a new way. Hence the conversion of the peoples to the Catholic Church is not a work of God standing high and beautiful as a great City on the human scene, but rather the beginning of an unfortunate interlude in between, lasting a thousand years, which is better either passed over in silence, or if one is so disposed, exposed and attacked as an unrelieved interval of darkness, ignorance and superstition.

In other words, the development of Modern Philosophy seemed to confirm unto self-evidence the Modern understanding of history as a different kind of succession: that of the Ancient, the Medieval, and the Modern Ages conceived as distinct and self-contained entities. The self-evidence seemed to become apodictic when Fontenelle and Diderot, at the head of many lesser lights, attached a particular interpretation to the burgeoning and successful mathematico-physical sciences and their applications in technology. The meaning of modern science and technology, they asserted, is simply atheism. Atheism is the meaning! If anyone cannot as yet bear psychologi-

cally an outright philosophical atheism, let him have recourse to one of its disguises, pantheism or deism; but as to history, historical atheism has become a self-evidence and is incumbent upon all educated men.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Voltairean Philosophy of History*

Voltaire comes upon a stage set for him. "You wish that ancient history had been written by philosophers," he writes, "because you are desirous of reading it as a philosopher, *en philosophe*. You seek for nothing but useful truths, and you say you have scarce found anything but useless errors. Let us endeavor mutually to enlighten one another."<sup>72</sup>

With Voltaire, the "Modern" understanding of history wins the victory over the Judaeo-Christian, and the Middle Ages become confirmed as simply an interlude of darkness and superstition, the phrase of Edward Gibbon in his work. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written in discipleship to Voltaire.<sup>73</sup> Both were filled with feeling against Jesus Christ and the times when He ruled the minds and hearts of men in and through His Church. *Ecrasez l'infame!* The infamous thing which was to be crushed and eliminated from influence upon society was quite simply for them the Catholic Church, and for their more logical intellectual descendants and followers, in the century after Voltaire, the object of the attack was religion in any form.

Is "Philosophy of History," then, the invention of Voltaire? It is a common admission among scholars.<sup>74</sup> Certainly he brought the phrase into common use, as the title of his treatise bears witness. Whether his meaning for the word philosophy, and his application of the concept to history, are legitimate and able to bear analysis, is another question.

Beyond doubt, however, Voltaire sealed the victory of the "Modern" understanding of history on the campuses of Western Higher Education, and passed on to the coming 19th century the task of elaborating its meaning and of applying this meaning to programs of political and social action. For the 19th Century will be the great age of ideological "philosophies of history," those of Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and Comte, to name only the greater and more socially triumphant ones, all in the Voltairean pattern, and each a function of the "Modern" understanding of universal history in the now fixed

and "self-evident" categories of "Ancient," "Medieval" and "Modern." Each is accordingly an intellectual and social movement against Him who is the Lord of history in the understanding which has been by now generally replaced in the intellectual life proceeding from the institutions of Higher Education in the West.

### *The Triumph of Secular Humanism*

It is difficult to exaggerate the completeness of the Voltairean victory across the 19th century up to the fateful year of 1914. It was an intellectual victory which was rapidly becoming also a social one. For all social welfare, the advent of a new and perfect Society, and even the creation of a New Man, were conceived to be the function of departure from the influence of the Middle Ages and entry into that of Modernity, with its contrasting man-centered and scientific kind of culture. In the study of this phenomenon of historical understanding, one cannot forget that social welfare, the building of the better world, is attached directly to the atheistic mode of philosophical and hence of historical thought.

The concept "Modern," in the three entities conceived to exist and to succeed in time, has ripened in the period extending from Petrarch to Voltaire. One way or another, in Comte's way of positivism or in that of Marx' and Lenin's Communism, the intellectual life of the 19th century was certain of its Modernity: it was absolutely certain that its science and philosophy gave it the keys to social welfare and the tools for building that better world, that City of Man, which had been since Petrarch the meaning of the contrast with and the departure from the "Middle Age."<sup>75</sup>

### *Christ on Trial*

The French historian Paul Hazard puts it graphically, "What had the long process of [Christian] time resulted in?" they asked in a mounting flood of scholarly and popular publication; 'Disaster.' Why, they asked, was this? Thereupon, they openly professed a charge the like of which for sheer audacity had never before been heard of. Now, the culprit was dragged into open court, and behold, the culprit was Christ! It was more than a reformation that the 18th century demanded, it was the total overthrow of the Cross, the utter repudiation of the belief that man had ever received a direct communication from God; of the belief, in other words, in

Revelation. What the critics were determined to destroy was the religious interpretation of life. That is why we call Part I of our work 'Christianity on Trial.'<sup>76</sup>

This points up dramatically the fact that the understanding of the meaning and direction of history as the succession in time of the three self-contained epoch-entities, "Ancient," "Medieval" and "Modern," was essentially against Christ in His Body, which is the universal Church to which the peoples of antiquity had turned. For Modern Philosophy, ripening in a way that Petrarch personally did not foresee nor apparently even desire, generated in the decades from Voltaire through Comte and Marx up to the fateful year of 1914 a new Religion of Progress, a religion without God, a philosophical faith that seemed to be a self-evidence in the intellectual life of the time.<sup>77</sup>

But the very mention of 1914, and World War I which it introduces, brings the Voltairean Philosophy of History abruptly into a new situation, one which leaves it historically dated, and which reveals it as intellectually untenable.

God  
vs  
Man