

NOTE

THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY*

Under this somewhat mysterious title I would like to present a synthetic and substantial description, more objective than personal, of the general agreement which has been reached on this subject by European scholars as the result of their work on it during the last few years. I do not intend to go through the great historical civilizations in an attempt to discover the laws of the rise and decline of the great historical cultures, empires, and civilizations. Nor is it my intention to establish the relations, close or distant, which may have existed between these civilizations before the coming of the biblical revelation. Still less do I intend to study the development and expansion of Christianity in the Mediterranean world, the Western world, or the world in general. And it is even farther from my mind to discuss the grave problems which arise from the meeting—whether it lead to harmony or conflict—between Christianity and our social, political, and cultural structures. There are masterly treatments of all these subjects in English, too well known to need any mention here.¹

None of the authors of these treatments, it seems to me, approaches our subject with the same problematic and the same preoccupations as the European authors. The latter look on it from the viewpoint of religious philosophy—I might almost say theology. The most striking thing at first glance about the recent writing on the subject is that this theme, which is the focal point of the preoccupations of English, French, Swiss, German, and Belgian thinkers today, interests philosophers more than historians, and theologians more than philosophers. There is a reason for this, and it will be clear in a moment. Of the historians, about the only one that I can mention is Henri Marrou, Professor of Primitive Christianity at the Sorbonne and a specialist on St. Augustine, who is really a lay theologian.²

* Translated, with the kind permission of the Trustees, from the original French text of the Philip Maurice Deneke Lecture, delivered at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, Feb. 23, 1950.

¹ Cf. e.g., Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (abridged from six-volume edition by D. C. Somervell; New York: Oxford, 1947), which traces the tragic crises of the various civilizations; Christopher Dawson's profound books, like *Progress and Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931) and *Beyond Politics* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939); Kenneth Scott Latourette's dynamic panorama, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 volumes; New York: Harper, 1937-45); and a very recent work, whose point of view is closer to the one we will take, Eric C. Rust's *The Christian Understanding of History* (London: Lutterworth, 1947).

² Henri Marrou, *L'Ambivalence du temps de l'histoire chez s. Augustin* (Montréal: Institut d'Etudes Médiévales, 1950).

Among the philosophers or historians of philosophy, I should mention Raymond Aron and Jean Hyppolite, although their contributions have been made much more by word of mouth than through their writings.³ Attention should likewise be directed to Jean Guitton, also a religious philosopher and almost a theologian.⁴ The Jesuit Fessard should be mentioned as well; like Hyppolite, he is an authority on Hegel and follows him to some extent.⁵ Finally we should not forget Jules Monchanin's remarkable article on the concept of time in Hinduism and Christianity.⁶

Principally, however, it has been the theologians who have raised the question; and they have tried to find an answer to it from the Catholic point of view, the Protestant, and even the Orthodox.⁷ On the Protestant side it is worth noting that the two theologians who are perhaps the most influential on the continent, the "fraternal enemies" of dialectical theology, Karl Barth of Basel and Emil Brunner of Zurich, have written on the subject.⁸ The most prominent figure on the Protestant side, however, has been the exegete of Strasbourg, Paris, and Basel, Oscar Cullmann, whose book, *Christ and Time*, has exposed the intensely temporal and specifically historical character of the vision of the world and destiny which is found in the authors of the New Testament.⁹ On the Catholic side there is a great number of names—French,¹⁰ Belgian,¹¹ German,¹² and Italian¹³—which

³ Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939); Jean Hyppolite, "L'Existentialisme de Hegel," *Etudes germaniques* (April-June, 1946).

⁴ Jean Guitton, *Le temps et l'éternité selon Plotin et saint Augustin* (Paris, 1933).

⁵ Gaston Fessard, S.J., "Théologie et histoire," *Dieu vivant*, 8 (1947), 37-65.

⁶ Jules Monchanin, "Le temps selon l'hindouisme et le christianisme," *Dieu vivant*, 14 (1949), 109-22.

⁷ Cf. Nicholas Berdiaeff, *Essai de métaphysique eschatologique* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), and the last chapters of Serge Boulgakof's book on the Incarnation, *Du Verbe incarné*, tr. by A. Andronikov (Paris, 1943).

⁸ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie und die Kirche* (Munich, 1928); *Gotteserkenntnis und Gottesdienst* (Zurich, 1938); Emil Brunner, "La conception chrétienne du temps," *Dieu vivant*, 14 (1949), 15-30.

⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1951).

¹⁰ Louis Bouyer, "Christianisme et eschatologie," *Vie intellectuelle*, XVI (1948), 6-38; H. M. Féret, O.P., *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean: Vision chrétienne de l'histoire* (Paris: Corrèa, 1943); M. I. Montuclard, O.P., "La médiation de l'Eglise et la médiation de l'histoire," *Jeunesse de l'Eglise*, 7; Jean Daniélou, S.J., "Christianisme et histoire," *Etudes*, 254 (1947), 166-84; "Existentialism and the Theology of History," *Month*, I (1949), 66-70; "The Christian View of History," *ibid.*, II (1949), 68-72; "Christianity and History," *Downside Review*, LXVIII (1950), 182-90; "The Conception of History in the Christian Tradition," *Journal of Religion*, XXX (1950), 171-79; "The Meaning of History," *Month*, VI (1951), 41-44.

¹¹ Roger Aubert, "Discussions récentes autour de la théologie de l'histoire," *Collectanea*

should be mentioned, but I cannot pass over a little book which, though no longer new, is still drawing attention because of its enthusiasm and profundity. I mean Fr. Laberthonnière's *L'Idéalisme grec et le réalisme chrétien*,¹⁴ it is only very recently that the seeds of thought sown by that book have borne their fruit.

The names of some of the most influential modern exegetes and theologians are proof enough that the problem has stirred the souls and minds of our day. And it is highly significant that, no matter what point of the compass they come from—philosophers as well as historians, exegetes as well as systematic theologians, whether they be Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—all these authors, despite their disagreements (and they are by no means negligible), are unanimous in their admission that Christianity alone has given and can give a meaning to history, and that outside Judeo-Christian revelation or Islam (which is to some degree a Christian heresy) there is no philosophy of history. They admit that there may be a physics of history, which analyses its laws and discovers its constant elements, but there is no progress—we can say that time does not exist either in the destiny of the human race or in the destiny of individuals. Even more, pure philosophy, metaphysics, Greek as well as Indian, knows nothing of becoming, time, evolution. Independently of the fact of Christianity, there is no history in the objective sense, that is to say, there is no direction in the unfolding of events or of historical structures. Independently of Christian thought, even though it may be at times distorted or actually denied, there is no historical knowledge which can be raised to the level of a philosophy

Mechliniensia, XVIII (1948), 139–49; Leopold Malevez, S.J., “La philosophie chrétienne du progrès,” *Nouvelle revue théologique*, LIX (1937), 377–85; “La vision chrétienne de l’histoire, I: Dans la théologie de Karl Barth,” *ibid.*, LXXI (1949), 113–34; “La vision chrétienne de l’histoire, II: Dans la théologie catholique,” *ibid.*, LXXI (1949), 244–64; “Deux théologies catholiques de l’histoire,” *Bijdragen der Nederlandse Jezuïeten*, X (1949), 225–40; Gustave Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres, II: Théologie de l’histoire* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949).

¹² H. Frankenheim, “Christliche Schau der Geschichte,” *Der katholische Gedanke* (Münster, 1947), pp. 62–73; H. Rahner, “Grundzüge katholischer Geschichtstheologie,” *Stimmen der Zeit*, CXL (1947), 408–27; “La théologie catholique de l’histoire,” *Dieu vivant*, 10 (1948), 91–116. We can also mention: Th. Haecker, *Der Christ und die Geschichte* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1933); H. D. Wendland, *Geschichtesanschauung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen, 1938); Eric Seeberg, “Geschichte und Geschichtsanschauung dargestellt in altchristlichen Geschichtsvorstellungen,” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, LX (1941).

¹³ Petruzelli, *Il valore della storia* (Rome, 1939); L. Alfonsi, “Il problema della storia negli antichi scrittori cristiani,” *Humanitas*, 11 (1946); F. Battaglia, *Il valore della storia* (Bologna, 1948); F. Bartolone, *Il problema della storia del cristianesimo* (Messina, 1948).

¹⁴ L. Laberthonnière, *L'Idéalisme grec et le réalisme chrétien* (Paris, 1904).

of history or in which can be found the meaning of history. That is certainly an imposing and astonishing affirmation. It is a statement which should be tempered and made more precise, but I state it bluntly because—whether it be right or wrong—it is the unanimous conclusion of the authors whose names I have just mentioned.

Once this thesis is established (and the proof will itself indicate the limits of this surprising statement and show its precise bearing), we must in a following part (which will be quite brief and schematic) point out a basic lack of accord in this apparent unanimity. The point here is this: Not only is Christianity historical, but since together with Judaism which prepares for it, and Islamism and Marxism which both depend upon and distort it (the first along lines definitely religious; the latter in the direction of an atheism which pretends to free itself and to surpass the Christian conception of history by secularizing it)—since Christianity is the *only* religion, the only body of thought which is essentially historical, does it thereby follow that the Christian, because of his transcendent vocation, must labor to shape the course of human history and thus “integrate” himself with this transitory world; or must he on the contrary remain indifferent to human progress that apparently has nothing in common with his supernatural vocation? The first view is called the Incarnationist view: Christ by His Incarnation, prolonged in the Church, has consecrated the universe through and through, and all its human and cosmic values. The other view is called the eschatological view: the transcendence of religion is such that it can do little to achieve or help human progress.

Before answering that question, let us try to show how Christianity alone possesses a philosophy of history and a sense of the temporal.

Neither Greek philosophy nor the idealist philosophies which stem from it have any sense of time, of events, of history, of a destiny for either the human race itself or for the individual. Greek philosophy is dominated by the *idea* of *law*, and the “idea” is something fixed and eternal. While not a mere appearance or image as in Indian philosophies, “becoming” is still only a participation in the idea, and time is qualitatively different from eternity, of which it is but the degraded reflection, the weak image. Eternity is ever contemporaneous with time and entirely present to its each successive instant. On this point Aristotle’s definition of time is most characteristic: *καὶ γὰρ ὁ χρόνος δοκεῖ εἶναι κύκλος τις*. “Time is a cycle”; it is the doctrine of the eternal return. There is nothing really new under the sun; nothing has an absolute beginning, nothing ever ends, because all begins anew. Nothing is decisive, nothing is ever finally achieved. And since the idea has an inexorable necessity and there is never any escape

from the idea, there can be neither true liberty, choice, nor anything gratuitous. Necessity (*ἀνάγκη*) is master of all. This cyclic conception of time which governs the process ("devenir"), more apparent than real, of the cosmos and the universe, also controls the "becoming" in that part of ourselves which at first glance would seem to escape the *ἀνάγκη*: the *ψυχή*, the soul. It too is subject to the perpetual return, a perpetual re-beginning. That is the doctrine of metempsychosis.

Such is the feature of a metaphysics which starts from the observation of matter, reduces psychology to a kind of physics, seeks to contemplate the eternal laws of motion and thereby tends to discard the genuine movement which is progressive and has a definite direction. The consequences in the fields of ethics and literature are evident. Greek thought is penetrated throughout with an intellectual determinism, pessimism, and individualism. With individualism, because there is no continuity of one person with another, and society itself is nothing more than the translation in this world of the eternal laws that result from the combination of unchangeable ideas. And with pessimism, because nothing ever comes to term, nothing is of any real utility, and the supreme happiness consists in an escape from this fiction which is time to the contemplation, through knowledge, of the eternal laws. Salvation lies in flight—flight achieved through knowledge. Let us note that for Greek philosophy not only is the idea itself eternal but so too is its limitation, its negation; matter also is eternal. And the nearest that Hellenic thought ever came to the notion of creation was the demiurge imposing order, that is to say, reason or idea, upon the flux of the multiple.

In such a philosophy of the eternal and in a religion where salvation is found wholly in the contemplation of an idea, there can be no history in the full sense of the term. It is remarkable that no Greek historian has ever been preoccupied with rehearsing the history of even a nation or a people, let alone that of humanity at large. Herodotus never goes beyond anecdote or chronicle, as has been shown by Collingwood. And Thucydides, for technical reasons no doubt, but probably also because he was a philosopher and profoundly Greek, never thought of describing anything more than a brief period of the life of Greece. By way of objection one might cite the Greek epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But here again we are given the tale of an individual or of a small group of individuals rather than the history of a nation or of two nations in conflict with each other. Following the tragic events depicted for us by Homer nothing has really changed in the world. And I believe it is Aristotle who said that there is nothing to prevent the *Iliad* from happening again. It is apparent, then, that nothing is ever

decisive and that the singular event is of no significance. Of course there are the Greek myths on the origin of humanity but these are much more in the nature of fables with a temporal moral, and representations of permanent moral conflicts and perpetually recurring situations, such as those wherein man's *ὑβρις* (pride) arouses the jealousy of the gods of Olympus, rather than genuine descriptions of a destiny so definitive as never again to repeat itself. Or if there should chance to be any real change, it is always for the worse; if there is any movement, it is not progress but decline. It has been remarked that antiquity has always seen its golden age in retrospect; the further on man moves, the worse his plight becomes. His perfection is found in a "return" to his origins, never in a forward march. The modern idea, often wholly secular, which sees progress in the future—even a sheerly material future—would have been impossible without the "Christian fact."

All philosophies have inherited this tendency to dichotomize the idea and the temporal, and in their desire to rationalize and to sift out the laws of history they have as a matter of fact tried to discard the event, which as part and parcel of the *ἄπειρον* (indefinite) cannot be an object of science and is consequently without true value. The most ingenious attempt along these lines is undoubtedly Hegel's dialectic of history. Here we have an effort to rationalize the irrational, to insert necessity into the contingent, and to find liberty itself in the most absolute determinism. In reality, it amounts to the actual denial of history.

Such is the picture, very sketchily drawn, that we find in the writers whom I am now interpreting. It would be easy to show that Hindu philosophies move in an atmosphere which, if not exactly similar, is at least analogous. There too the world is but an appearance, and time a cycle; there too souls undergo successive reincarnations; there too salvation is sought in an escape from time and history. Nothing that ever happens is important; nothing ever really happens; nothing begins, nothing ends.

Personally, I think that we must correct this picture which is somewhat one-sided. To me it seems certain that the Roman world had some appreciation of what we call history. Granted that the Iliad and the German epics are not genuine epopees involving a race, much less humanity itself, yet the Aeneid of Virgil is a national epic in which the temporal factor comes into play and which has a meaning that carries over to the empire of Augustus and which concerns the destiny of the whole inhabited world (*οἰκουμένη*). From the beginning of the poem the end is foreseen, and this end itself is, in the author's thought, the beginning of a new expansion. Likewise, if Greek art presents us with an ideal type of beauty, a "canon," that is, a law of aesthetics, Roman art has created the portrait; it has, in

its faces with their strongly-marked features, delineated individual destinies in plastic form. And if Greek philosophy was ignorant of the "person"—in Greek the word signifies only a mask, an appearance, a fiction—Roman law gave life to the concept and to the reality. But I would not even dare to say here that the exception confirms the rule, for the Roman is not a philosopher; he is not concerned with ideas; he is entirely oriented towards action. On this account a Christian thinker can be of the opinion that the mediation of the Romans was providential and necessary to assure the fusion, in our Christian West, of Greek idealism and biblical realism.

We shall remember, then, that philosophical thought—Eastern as well as Western—when left to itself, is incapable of integrating time and of discovering the meaning of history.

The situation is quite different with biblical revelation, which is not a metaphysic but essentially a history. It is not concerned with an idea but with life. It seeks to penetrate the meaning, not of nature and its laws, but of man and his destiny. We are here in a radically different world, faced by concepts, or, if you prefer, by existential categories that are almost incapable of being incorporated into Greek philosophical thought or Hindu mysticism: linear time, creation, the meaning of the destiny of the race and of the individual, the promise, prophecy, providence, the event, and finally faith which always implies a relation to past, present, and future. Time is no longer cyclical but linear. There is a beginning in the true sense: creation; and there is an end in the true sense: the Parousia, which is not the denial of time but the fulness and consummation of time. Together with the cosmos time is born. Brunner has observed in this connection that by the power of his religious intuition Augustine has here anticipated Einstein in linking the extension of the material world with temporal succession. Creation is truly an absolute beginning, even of matter. Above all, there is at the heart of the biblical revelation this history of the origins of humanity, this Genesis; there is at the other end of the Bible the Apocalypse, announcing the end of time. There is this fact, that God is concerned with the destiny of humanity and directs it. Providence is truly a *πρόνοια*, a thought which foresees (the prefix is temporal); it is not only this universal law immanent to the cosmos, the idea of necessary sequence; it is a value which supposes a sovereign Liberty that concerns itself with, and orients itself towards, other liberties. For a Plotinus, providence is quite an inferior function, belonging to the Universal Soul, the third and last of the divine hypostases; for the Judeo-Christian revelation, it is an attribute of God, of the Absolute. Cullmann has shown how the very vocabulary of the New Testament was penetrated with words indicating time: the hour, the day,

the opportune moment (*καιρός*), the moment for a decision, a choice; *αἰών*, a word we would be tempted to translate as "eternity," but which is something quite different. In biblical revelation the opposition is not between a "here below" and a "beyond," but between a "before" and an "after." *Αἰών οὗτος* and *αἰών μέλλων*, the present age, the age to come. Morphology itself is here revealing; think of the whole metaphysic of becoming and of destiny that is implied in such words as *providence*, *predestination*, *prophecy*. God Himself is not above time, indifferent to time and history, but before the beginning of time and after the end of time. It is not without reason that Genesis and the Prologue of St. John both begin with the same temporal words: In the beginning God created; in the beginning was the Word. God is, in both directions, beyond this straight line represented by time; He prolongs this straight line by a dotted line that extends indefinitely *a parte ante* and *a parte post*. Furthermore, God even breaks into history, from which the Pure Act of Aristotle, the Idea of the Good of Plato, and the One of Plotinus carefully remained apart in their majestic and immobile indifference. Actually, we are dealing with two different conceptions of God. It is Laberthonnière's merit that he stressed this point strongly. Cullmann contents himself with the remark that the Bible is concerned only marginally with the intimate life and eternal being of God; God, as it were, would exist only in the degree in which He would manifest Himself in history, by a revelation either of word or, especially, of action. This, it seems to me, is an incomplete view. For by the logic of this conception God, in His innermost nature, would be, in a way, conditioned by time. Moreover, it is certain that the Jewish revelation already speaks to us of absolute attributes of God, such as His sanctity, His unicity, His transcendence. And as for the Christian revelation, is not its very substance the revelation of the interior being, the interior life, of God—through temporal constructions, of course, but nonetheless of a triune God, whether one speaks of it as above time with the Greeks, or before and after time according to the so-called Judeo-Christian conception?

It is quite true that the Christian and Jewish God is not simply the prime immovable mover of Aristotle or his self-thinking thought, a faceless God. Neither is He the high point of a pyramid of ideal forms resting in the heaven of intelligible realities; nor is He the dialectical residue of a flight of the mind from multiplicity to unity. He is the living God, living in Himself and revealing Himself in life. He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God who intervenes in the destiny of the human race, of the Chosen People, of the flock of Israel; the God of the Promise made of old and prepared in the course of the present and which will, in the future,

see inevitable fulfillment. He is the God of decisions, of free choices, a God who changes the order of the world. He is above all, for the Christian, God who has become Incarnate, that is to say, who shares our temporal condition, who, like us, is born, lives, and dies, to live again—not several times but once only and with a definite and perfect life. It is, then, not merely the conception of time, linear in the one case and cyclic in the other, which distinguishes philosophy, the work of reason, from the Judeo-Christian religion. Rather it is the conception of God Himself, which the Judeo-Christian religion has as a result of an historical revelation of a living God who has Himself a sort of history both in Himself and in His actions.

Just as God is the Word, that is, *dabar*, "act," and consequently acts in history through a succession of wonderful signs or miracles, a succession of absolute, free, unique, and unforeseeable initiatives, so also God is the Word in the second sense of that term. Not only does He make history, but, as Word or Expression, He also interprets history. This interpretation of history is prophecy; it is that which allows history to have a meaning for our intelligence. And the response to prophecy, that is, the historical word of God, throwing light on history's direction—that is faith. The three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—have each of them a temporal connotation. Faith rests upon a past promise; hope tends to the future, waits for the realization of this promise; and charity is that flower of faith working always in the present to hasten the realization of the promise made to faith and promised to hope. Fr. Féret has noted that the only religions based on faith are the religions where revelation is inseparable from history: Judaism, Christianity, and Islamism.

It is easy to understand, therefore, why this religion that is so eminently historical substitutes for the pessimism and individualism of philosophy an atmosphere of optimism and an acute sense of social and traditional values along with the primacy of free choice and, in the last analysis, of grace. Optimism is founded on the conviction that God concerns Himself with us, that God directs the destiny of the race and of individuals towards an end which is marked with the seal of the definitive and the perfect. Moreover it is through a heritage received and transmitted within the collectivity of the chosen people of God that this promise is transmitted and that omnipotence works in history. For the Greek, salvation is possible only by a flight beyond time and duration; for the Jew and the Christian, salvation happens in history and through history. This optimism is even more startling when we recall that biblical revelation professes that it is by the fault of but one man, by an event that for him also is unique and irreversible and forever destined to mark humanity, that our human race is born, lives, and dies in

sin and is, on the first level of its being, delivered over to the Prince and powers of this world.

But man knows that, if he is given up to sin, it is God the Savior who delivers him from sin with a sovereignty for good more powerful than the sovereignty of the devil and the flesh for evil. He believes in God's ultimate victory, in himself and in the world, over this negation of God which is sin. It is not *ἀνάγκη* which weighs man down under misfortune and sin; it is not a flight from his human condition which delivers him from sin. No, man's sin is free and the deliverance which comes to him from God is the fruit of an election, of a love, of a predilection, i.e., of a gratuity, I might almost say of a caprice. While the Platonic fall of souls takes place outside of time, in an ideal and intemporal pre-existence, and according to a "law," and while salvation for Plato and Platonists consists in an escape to the beyond, biblical sin and redemption are situated in time, constitute a destiny, and, far from suppressing history, transform it. It is the *μετάνοια* of man and the human race.

Within this historical revelation, made by the miraculous divine action and expressed by promise and prophecy, a revelation common to Judaism and Christianity, what is the specific and distinguishing character of the latter? For both religions time is linear, destiny is a life, and God is a living God. For both time has a beginning and an end and an intermediate period. Both recognize a threefold division: before creation, from creation to the Parousia, after the Parousia or the end of time; also a twofold division: this world and the world to come. The only difference—but it is a capital one—is in the position occupied by the center, or point of gravity, of this line of salvation. For the Jews this center coincides with the Parousia. It is uniquely in the future. Judaism is only a messianism and its only fundamental virtue is hope. For the Christian the center is in the middle of the second period. It does not coincide with the end of the intermediate period but it cuts it in half; it divides the present age of humanity into the part before Christ and the part after Christ. For Judaism the future alone lights up the present; for the Christian it is the past, gathered up and always actual in the present, which by prolonging itself lights up the future and permits us to know the meaning of history even before we have arrived at the end of history. One event, decisive, capital, unique, lights up the whole line of salvation—the event of the Incarnation. In a certain sense Christ is the end. After Him there is no further decisive event; victory and salvation are virtually but definitively acquired: all that remains is to profit by it. Thus the *date* of the return of Christ, the date of the Parousia, is of minor importance; it matters little when Christ returns, for He has *already* come.

The Christ who dominates history is perhaps the Christ of the Parousia, but this Christ is only a reflection of the resurrected Christ of the eternal Easter.

For the philosopher and for the historian Christianity's claim to see in the Incarnation the unique fact *par excellence* is folly and scandal. How, then, can an anecdote, the life and death of a Galilean Jew, be the center of history? Why should this fact, this strictly individual fact, hold a privileged place? How can one center the history of all civilization and of all humanity around the thirty years of Jesus of Nazareth, which besides ended with a resounding failure? And yet right there you have the very heart of the Christian faith, but it is a *faith* with which we are dealing, not historical science or philosophical speculation. History can doubtless reveal the influence of this individual destiny over an entire section of human destiny, but it will always refuse to recognize that Jesus is unique in the sense that faith understands Him to be so, and that He is the end of history. Raymond Aron, in his book on the philosophy of history, has noted that for the pure historian history cannot have *meaning*, because, in order to discover its direction, one would have to be situated at the term of the historic evolution. It is only at the end of the world—if this expression makes any sense—that we shall be able to know the guided virtualities that it developed in the course of its becoming. But precisely the Christian does know, because he has the faith, that with Jesus we have entered into the "last age of the world," that He is truly the *end*, and consequently that, as soon as He inserted Himself into our becoming, our history acquired a meaning. Before Him, everything centers about Him, prepares for Him, announces Him; and after Him who is the Unique, the incarnate presence of God radiates within our universe and within historical time. The whole of human destiny converges on Christ—from the many to the One—and then expands Christ—from the One to the many.

This expansion of Christ, this drive towards the fulness of humanity and of the world in Christ, takes place in time and through history. It is the time of the Church: the period of tension, between a past that is always present, and a future already radically present, but to be realized progressively. It is in this period of tension that the Church builds herself up and the Christian lives his life. Here we find ourselves confronted by two temptations, each of which would, in its own way, try to suppress the tension that is proper to the period situated between the Christ of Easter and the Christ of the Parousia. The one would "absolutize" the *past*, the other the *present*. The first is the temptation natural to the Protestant who strives, by a sort of simultaneity, to get back to the beginnings, to make

himself by faith a contemporary of Christ. Hence the *zurück zum Altertum* (back to antiquity) of Luther and that anguish of Kierkegaard to find Christ anew, that exclusive cult of the Bible, that refusal to admit that it is inserted and prolonged in tradition. On the other hand, Catholicism (I do not intend, by this term, to exclude the Orthodox, any more than I mean to include Anglicanism or Episcopalianism in the term "Protestantism") has the tendency to absolutize the present. It puts tradition above the Bible, or rather it inserts the Bible, as a privileged moment, within tradition which gives to it a Christ who is perpetually present and acting. When you think of the tranquil assurance of the Catholic who believes that Christ continues to speak to him, now as ever, through the councils of His Church, still directs him through His bishops, is and remains with him through the sacraments—especially through the sacrament of his "real presence," you can understand the anguish of Protestantism, which despairs of ever being able to recapture this physical presence of the historic Christ whom it seeks to know, and with whom it craves a sort of immediate contact. You can understand the almost scandalous optimism of the Catholic who knows that Christ is always with him, through the Church, His Mystical Body—prolongation of the Incarnation. But this optimism does not imply laziness. For the Church knows that she is called "to complete what is wanting to the Passion of Christ," to capitalize on the victory of her Head in the individual destinies of her members. There is a third attitude, an unchristian one, which looks exclusively to the future, which deems itself able to surpass the past and the present that is Christ and expects everything from the future. It is, for example, the attitude of Marxism, that materialistic messianism that has laicized Christian hope. For Marxism Christ is only a stopover from which to pass beyond, a dialectical moment of the historical becoming. It is in a sense a revival of the Jewish idea that puts humanity's center of gravity in the future. It is the negation of the unicity and finality of Christ. However, between Judaism and Marxism there is this tremendous difference: Judaism awaited the salvation of divine liberty, while Marxism envisages salvation at the end of a necessary chain of revolutions. The *ἀνάγκη* and determinism of Greek philosophy are introduced anew; the Judeo-Christian revelation of progress is rationalized. But the Marxist dialectic of history could arise only in a Judeo-Christian climate. It is a religion but a religion without God.

Such, in its essential traits, is the Christian philosophy of history, the only philosophy of history, really a theology of history which the authors, whose names I cited at the beginning of this paper, have set forth with a striking unanimity.

We should point out their divergences. The most essential bears on the duty of the Christian in face of present realities. I shall say only a word about this. Two theologies of action and of the Christian attitude are here opposed to one another. The first can be called "eschatological"; it claims that the Christian can and, in a certain measure, ought to disinterest himself in culture and in human progress. The final reason for this position is the incommensurability of the transcendence of revelation, pure gratuity passively received. There is no Christian humanism. The figure of the world passes; it is ephemeral. At first glance, many affirmations of the New Testament tend in this direction and invite us, following the word of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to be here only as "strangers and travellers." The extreme form of this conception is that given by K. Barth, but it also appears in more than one Catholic author, such as Louis Bouyer and Jean Daniélou, who insist on the rupture introduced by the Incarnation, which is the Cross and laceration. Others (Incarnationalists), in greater number, especially on the Catholic side—and I range myself among them—think that the Christian cannot be indifferent to natural values, to human progress; they believe that the Christian has not only the right but also the duty, and therefore the possibility, of working with all his forces for the construction of a better world, the natural substructure of a world spiritualized by grace. He has confidence in reason, in thought, in human action, inserted in Christ, and the prolongation of His action in the unfolding of time and in the extension of space. I believe that in the New Testament there are elements which support this conception of a theology of the Incarnation prolonged by the action of the Christian in the bosom of the Church of Christ. Before all else the appeal addressed to Christians to build the Body of Christ, the Church, a society not only divine but human. By the Incarnation Christ has reconciled us with our "human condition" and invites us to make of this world a real anticipation, a beginning of the world to come. This is possible because the grace of God transforms us within and because the charity of God radiates in us and through us in order to ameliorate the lot of our fellow men, all men. The eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans expresses the formidable idea that the material world itself participates in the hope of the children of God and will partake in their lot of resuscitation by a spiritualization of itself. I believe that in this line of thought one must say that all technological progress, all the conquests of science, all the expressions of the human in the arts and in letters, all social progress will forever remain inscribed in the body of man, that body which in and through the Body of Christ is promised to the Resurrection. The cosmos itself, which is like the body of the body of man

and of the Christian, is therefore summoned to a glorified transformation. This, it seems to me, justifies a moral of complete commitment in all human tasks that are properly human and that are in store for humanity. The Christian cannot disinterest himself in the world, because this world will disappear only to be transformed into "new heavens and a new earth," the natural and necessary milieu of its spiritualized and resuscitated body. The insertion of the Christian into the world, his duty to contribute to the march of progress, appear to me to be the logical consequence of this philosophy of history, which proclaims that Christ is the center of history, that He gives it its meaning, that He is forever working within it in the eternal present of His Incarnation continued in and through the Church.

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