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# The Christian Historian: Some Considerations\*

by John F. Kutolowski, M.A.

For centuries Christians have espoused a particular view of history which was integrated with their theology and general philosophy of life. The "Christian historian" has accepted a view which, interlaced with transcendent and metaphysical preconceptions, dates from the days of the Old Testament. To the Jewish people God had revealed Himself as the Creator of man and of the universe and as the Providential Ruler of His Creation; after His Covenant with man, history became the story of human attempts to fulfill the pact in the temporal-spatial dimension; and, finally, the revealed end of history pointed toward the Messianic culmination. St. Paul, according to Jacques Maritain, founded the theology of history when he discerned the transition of the ancient Jewish law, which stressed ceremonial observances, to Christ's new law which emphasized purity of heart and mind and thereby ushered in "the state of Gospel freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Dawson finds the seed of the "Christian philosophy of history," while germinal in God's initial Covenant with Israel, actually sprouting in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition with its conflict of Babylon and the spiritual order; in addition, another source is in the Gospels' prophecies of coming disaster and world crisis.<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, the father of the first comprehensive and systematic Christian interpretation of history, also began his *City of God* with the revelation of the Old Testament. He construed man's past since the time of Cain as one of six epochs corresponding to the six days of Creation; symbolically, the human past has been a relentless struggle between the *Civitas Dei*, the spiritual sphere and faith governed by self-sacrifice, humility, and obedience, and the *Civitas terrena*, the temporal city of unbelief ruled by expediency, egotism and ambition. This cosmic conflict of *veritas* and *vanitas* would end in the Last Judgement and the Resurrection; in the interim between the origin and the conclusion of history, the central happening was, of course, Christ's advent which provided the real meaning of history: the salvation of mankind.

Chroniclers, annalists and historians of the Middle Ages unquestioningly incorporated the presuppositions of the *City of God* into their understanding of past

\*This is an exploratory study; major problems are touched lightly, others are not at all treated.

1 Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History*, ed. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 83-85.

2 Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulley (New York: Mentor Omega Books, 1962), pp. 249-52.

human experience. Gregory of Tours (538-594), the Venerable Bede (ca. 673-735) and Otto of Freising (ca. 1114-58), among others, believed that the secular and mundane sphere was symbolic of Divine purpose. Joachim of Fiore (1131-1202), however, went a bit further as he not only divided history into the epochs of the Father and the Son, but also predicted a future era of the Holy Ghost which would begin in 1260.

The union of Christian theosophy and history was shattered in large part in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the development of critical historical methodology. Today many professional historians no longer consider it a legitimate liaison; yet some eminent Christian historians, theologians and philosophers, representing various sects and denominations, continue to view man's past in terms of Christian doctrine. Herbert Butterfield, Dawson, Reverend Peter Guilday, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Nicholas Berdyaev, Karl Löwith, Reinhold Niebuhr, Maritain, and Paul Tillich maintain that the ultimate meaning of history lies in its Providential and theological dimensions.<sup>3</sup> Dawson, for example, declares unequivocally that:

The Christian view of history is not merely a belief in the direction of history by divine providence, but 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.<sup>4</sup>

Berdyaev subscribes to a similar notion:

History is a progression; it possesses an inner significance and mystery, a point of departure and a goal, a center and a purpose. It both ends and begins with the fact of Christ's revelation. This fact determines both the profound dynamism of history and its movement towards and away from the heart of universal history.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in a more narrow and sectarian view, Father Guilday insists that:

History is still, to the Catholic, 'the realization of religion—not of various religions, but of one; the working out of one divine plan.' It is still 'a

3 Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: Fontana Books, 1960); Dawson, *op. cit.*; Guilday, *An Introduction to Church History* (St. Louis: B. Herder Co., 1925); Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (2nd. ed.; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963); Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936); Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949); Maritain, *op. cit.*; Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* trans. N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).

4 Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

5 Berdyaev, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

vast supernatural process, more God's than man's.' It has still but one interpretation—the supernatural . . . The Catholic concept of history does not exclude the economic, the sociological, the idealistic, or the political theories of historical interpretation. It may, if it wishes, embrace them all, on condition that what is frankly materialistic in their processes be eliminated.<sup>6</sup>

All of these writers generally accept the principal premises of early Christian and Medieval thinkers that the real meaning of history is found in its supernatural interpretation; that it has an origin, a purpose, and an end; that Christ is the center of history; and that God's retribution is apparent in man's past. The phenomenological and existential aspect of history is accidental and of secondary importance, like the thin, bitter though necessary skin of a savory fruit. In order for the scholar to be a genuine "Christian historian," he must accept this view of the human past since "it lies at the very heart of Christianity and forms an integral part of the Christian faith."<sup>7</sup>

It is the view of this essay that such premises are unacceptable bases for a precise definition of the "Christian historian;" they indiscriminately blend many notions which defy mixture; in general, they disregard and fail to demarcate the particular lines of approach of history, of philosophy, and of theology to reality. To be sure, upon occasion a discipline profitably borrows another's techniques or material; to maintain, however, that the studies are "distinct, but they must not be separated," is rather tenuous.<sup>8</sup> They do not represent a three-laned highway with dotted dividing lines; rather, they are three separate and well-defined roads each of which has its unique composition and direction. Theology, based on a study of Sacred Scripture and tradition, focuses principally on God and the supernatural; it presupposes that truth is attainable by faith and distilled by rational, disciplined investigation.<sup>9</sup> Philosophy, dealing with abstract and universal problems relating to man, the universe and reality—or to the true, the good and the beautiful—is concerned with a rational and speculative means of inquiry. History, on the other hand, examines particular people, events and forces which have existed in the spatio-temporal realm; its chief instrument is critical empiricism. All three disciplines draw from the springs of imagination, insight and intuition which frequently yield brilliant truths of reality—the common destination of the three roads. But each "science" is an autonomous, self-contained study with its unique procedures, rules, standards of judgement, and subject matter.

6 Guilday, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

7 Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 232; also, "the Christian is bound to believe that there is a spiritual purpose in history," p. 258.

8 The quoted phrase is from Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 113, footnote.

9 These definitions are oversimplified and subject to many interpretations; obviously, there is no one universally accepted and "correct" meaning of any of the three terms.

Strictly speaking, to the historian the phrase “theology of history” is contradictory and meaningless; it is comparable to such expressions as a “theology of sociology” or a “theology of literature.” The theologian certainly considers issues bounded by time and space; but they are within an eternal purview and presuppose an article of faith as, for example, do von Balthasar’s studies of “Christ’s Mode of Time” and “The Inclusion of History Within the Life of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Theologians frequently profit from historical, anthropological and archaeological methodology and findings. The investigations of the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and of ancient Egypt have cast new and penetrating light on the word of the Old Testament; the Dead Sea Scrolls have illuminated Christ’s historical milieu; indeed, “form criticism” is at heart historical. Although the theologian can utilize some of the historian’s discoveries and techniques, it is not a reciprocal arrangement; the historian cannot benefit from the supernatural-oriented material of the theologian. Von Balthasar recognizes this:

Precisely because Christ is the absolute he remains incommensurate with the norms of this world; and no final accord between theology and the other disciplines is possible within the limits of this world. The refusal of any such agreed demarcation on the part of theology, though it may look like and be called arrogance, is really no more than respect for the methodological demands of its subject.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian historian is under no obligation to view man’s past from an eternal framework. Of course he accepts revealed truths as intrinsic to his spiritual beliefs and moral values; they provide, unlike historical conclusions, ultimate answers to final questions. As the great Protestant theologian Niebuhr states, “The Christian Gospel as the final answer to the problems of both individual life and man’s total history is not proved to be true by rational analysis. Its acceptance is an achievement of faith, being an apprehension of truth beyond the limits of reason.”<sup>12</sup> But history is a rational inquiry into the transitory, temporal and mundane sphere of reality; to superimpose theological concepts on particular historical situations is anathema to the historian’s craft. A uniquely “Christian view” of history, it must be remembered, is in itself a product of historical development: St. Augustine’s *magnum opus* has as its full title *De Civitate contra paganis* and was occasioned by the Romans’ arguments that Alaric’s sack of the eternal city in 410 occurred because the pagan gods had deserted the Empire;<sup>13</sup> medieval monks and historians, reflecting their particular

10 These topics constitute chapters in Balthasar’s book: *op. cit.*, pp. 25-43, 49-74.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 14. But throughout his book Balthasar mixes theological and historical truths; in fact, he does not recognize the autonomy of history.

12 Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 151; also see Tillich, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-29, 264-5, *et passim*.

13 For an excellent discussion of the *City of God* as a *livre de circonstance*, see Christopher Dawson, “St. Augustine and His Age,” in *St. Augustine: His Age, Life and Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 15-77.

*Zeitgeist*, interpreted reality as symbol and allegory. To continue to view man's past through such spectacles is deleterious to the historian's standards. The profound British scholar, Geoffrey Barraclough, observed that "there is no more certain road to misunderstanding of the past than the 'teleological' view of history, the doctrine that historical developments are the result of an overriding purpose or design, and that what stands aside from this supposed purpose is accidental, irrelevant and negligible."<sup>14</sup> The Christian historian, not unlike his non-Christian associates, pursues only what human minds, motivated by human considerations, have recorded. His object of study is the meticulous, detached and dispassionate ascertainment of relative truth; he assumes, like the great German historian, Wilhelm Dilthey, that "life is like a melody the notes of which are not the expression of hidden realities within. Just as the notes of a melody express nothing but the melody, so life expresses only itself."<sup>15</sup> He searches for understanding of existential reality; he seeks meaning which is everywhere in life, although it is not *the* meaning of life. Thus he finds significance in man's past political institutions, in his social and economic activities, in his cultural achievements, and in his religious experiences. Though he does not discover ultimate purpose in history, he believes that there are many purposes of studying history: to better understand the contemporary world (and not the future—history does *not* repeat itself); to know himself better, as his own personal history is an integral segment of the recent past; to develop the habit of thinking historically, that is, along lines of process and development, which can open innumerable vistas of knowledge; to acquire knowledge which, as Cardinal Newman maintained, is a good in itself; to satisfy a human craving which seeks to know the past; and finally, to enjoy discovering the drama, pathos, glory, infamy, and excitement of the human past.

The assassination of President Kennedy provides an excellent illustration of the Christian historian's approach to truth. During the first days after the event many hollow expressions declared that "It was God's Will"; some persons linked JFK's death to martyrdom for the civil rights cause—God saw that only such a catastrophe would awaken America's moral sensitivity to a gross evil. Such statements are puerile. Of course, an omnipotent and omniscient God is ultimately responsible for everything; but it is not possible for man to divine His precise purpose in particular historical happenings. Rather, the Christian historian attempts to uncover the demonstrable causes and effects of the outrage. Why, how and by whom were the fatal shots discharged? What impact did the death have on the Kennedy family, on American society and politics, and on international affairs? What type of assessment does President Kennedy's administration merit? Answers to these and similar questions, although never complete and never totally satisfactory, lend tangible and concrete meaning to the event.

Thus the Christian historian must avoid, in Boyd C. Shafer's words, "specu-

14 Barraclough, *History in A Changing World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 25.

15 Dilthey, *Pattern & Meaning in History*, ed. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper and Bros., 1962), p. 108.

lations about the ultimate meaning of history [which] seem more often than not to be imaginative guesses which arrogate to men wisdom which might better be left to Jehovah.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to ultimate meaning, four other closely interrelated issues frequently contribute to the traditional “Christian view of history:” (1) the end of history, (2) morality in history, (3) natural retribution, and (4) free will and the nature of man. Most of these are intermingled with philosophical assumptions which, like theological premises, lie outside of the precise historical domain. Some historians divide the concept “philosophy of history” into two branches: “critical” or “analytical” and “speculative.”<sup>17</sup> The first concerns such problems as whether historical knowledge is *sui generis* or identical with other forms of knowledge; what is historical truth and fact? what is the nature of historical explanation? The latter relates to universal explanations about man’s entire past; it attempts to discern metaphysical principles which explain the dynamics of historical development. Neither aspect presupposes fundamentals of faith; rather, they are matters of critical and abstract reason. However, in examining the above four issues concerning “Christian history,” it is apparent that some Christian intellectuals make no such strict delineation.

The Catholic Josef Pieper insists that no philosophy of history is possible without the illumination of theology, for the essential question of the philosopher who contemplates history is: what is the end of history?<sup>18</sup> Löwith agrees that the true focus of history is eschatological and is “comparable to the compass which gives us orientation in space, and thus enables us to conquer it, [while] the eschatological compass gives orientation in time by pointing to the Kingdom of God as the ultimate end and purpose.”<sup>19</sup> Berdyaev, Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann concur that “the Christian philosophy of history is essentially apocalyptic”; the end of history is external to history itself and cannot be confirmed by empirical investigation, but rather, in Bultmann’s words, “it becomes an event repeatedly in preaching and faith.”<sup>20</sup> Maritain, while accepting the eschatological position, posits three other “natural ends” in world history: the mastery of man over nature, the development of man’s spiritual and self-perfecting activities, and the manifestation of all the potentialities of human nature.<sup>21</sup> A genius of speculative thought, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, states that the end of the world will bring “the overthrow of equilibrium, detaching the

16 “The Study of History in the United States; Some Confirmations, Some Doubts,” *AAUP Bulletin*, L (Sept. 1964), p. 235.

17 W. H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History; An Introduction* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 13-28.

18 Pieper, *The End of Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).

19 Löwith, *op. cit.*, p. 18, *et passim*.

20 The first quotation is from Berdyaev, *op. cit.*, p. 203; also pp. 197-206; Bultmann, *History and Eschatology; The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 151; Tillich, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-84, *et passim*.

21 Maritain, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-27, 138, 161-62.

mind, fulfilled at last, from its material matrix, so-that it will henceforth rest with all its weight on God-Omega.”<sup>22</sup>

The problem of ends is, strictly speaking, ahistorical; it may concern the philosopher and the theologian, not the historian. Some academicians like Karl Marx, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee claim to have discovered, by empirical investigation, streams in history which flow into the deltas of the future. Despite their assertions to the contrary, their patterns stemmed not from rigorous historical methodology, but from creative imagination and from a gaze into a crystal ball. Pieter Geyl, the perceptive Dutch historian, declares that:

[The] large systems in which history is made to go through a course of so many stages to some end either of salvation or perdition are not based on observation of the facts of history. They do not spring from history, they are imposed upon it. They spring from the philosopher's or the prophet's mind, dominated by the enthusiasm of faith . . .<sup>23</sup>

It is commonplace among historians to define history as a process of past events; beginning, central and terminating points are purely relative. There is no definitive date, for example, for the fall of the Roman Empire; in fact, some historians claim that it did not end but merely changed its character. It is impossible to state with certainty that the Middle Ages began in the sixth century and ended in the fifteenth century. How difficult it is to determine precisely the inception and the conclusion of the American Civil War! Because the historical process is cumulative, with ages and events blending into one another and the old mixing with the new, it is exceedingly difficult to determine the end of any major occurrence. Moreover, it is not necessary for the historian to consider ultimate ends; does the biologist necessarily find meaning only in predicting the evolutionary development of animals and plants?—or the geologist in envisaging the earth's crust of 4000 A.D.? The enormously complex truth about the past is elusive; the most that the Christian historian can hope for is a relative partial rendering, an approximation, of the actual past which exists absolutely only in the mind of God.

The second and third issues, morality and natural retribution in history, are closely interlaced and shall be considered together. They have long been an integral part of the “Christian philosophy of history”; morality, constituting such an essential part of life, was the legitimate concern of the historian who was obliged to pass judgments on man's actions; at the same time, the historian found God's retribution engraved on the pages of historical documents. As late as the mid-nineteenth century the American historian George Bancroft found God showering blessings on the United States as the final hope of Western civilization; Thomas Carlyle constantly hurled

22 *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 287.

23 Geyl, *Use and Abuse of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 36.

Olympian-like judgements upon historical personages and events; Lord Acton, one of the profoundest of modern Catholic historians, declared that "it is the office of historical science to maintain morality as the sole impartial criterion of men and things."<sup>24</sup> Such notions still pervade some twentieth century Christians' views of man's history. "The philosophy of history," Maritain observes, "is in connection with, and even belongs to moral philosophy"; Toynbee's masterful *Study of History* is deficient primarily because "it resides in a sphere entirely extraneous to moral philosophy adequately taken."<sup>25</sup> A professor at Fordham University, Ross J. Hoffman, declared that:

In the texture of historical life, one may discern . . . the uninterrupted reign of the universal moral law, which our race never violates without a judgement falling upon it, even though the crimes of one generation may be punished upon a generation that comes later. One sees the grinding of the mills of God, and the wonderful, divine act of drawing good out of evil.<sup>26</sup>

To Löwith and Berdyaev, the Christian views secular history as the story of evil, sin and human failure; indeed, the former maintains, "history is not an autonomous realm of human endeavor and progress, but a realm of sin and death and therefore in need of redemption. Within this perspective the historical process as such could not be experienced as all-important."<sup>27</sup> And lastly, Professor Butterfield states that God's retribution is imminent in history; Germany, for example, has awakened the nemesis by her pernicious excesses of power.<sup>28</sup>

The Christian who is an historian does not necessarily need to endorse such positions. Man's past is neither a record of triumphant benignity or of disastrous maleficence; obviously both are apparent, but it is the epitome of pretension to judge morally an era, person or nation, let alone the entire scope of the human past. The historian aims to understand, not to condemn or to condone; understanding and sympathy do not preclude a critical assessment, but in relating the story of Hitlerian Germany, for example, he must not apply a Christian moral gauge to Nazi doctrines and practice. Historical judgements must consciously strive, as best possible, to be

24 Quoted by Herbert Butterfield, *Man On His Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 96.

25 Maritain, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 173. At another point Maritain declares that "there is no complete or adequate philosophy of history if it is not connected with some prophetic or theological data," p. 170.

26 His article, "Catholic Philosophy of History," in *The McAuley Lectures, 1957: Some Aspects of History* (Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, Conn., 1957), pp. 216-17.

27 Löwith, *op. cit.*, p. 193. Berdyaev: "The world and historical processes are based upon the freedom of good and evil . . . The freedom of evil, indeed, forms the real foundation of history," *op. cit.*, p. 77.

28 Butterfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-91. He qualifies his position by stating that such judgements are "private," not academic: "I know . . . that I have no *right* to say any such thing, and I very much doubt whether it would be within the competence of the technical historian to assert it," pp. 85-86.

within the purview of historical phenomena. As the great poet J. C. F. Schiller stated, "*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.*" In other words, the scholar must try to analyze the historical causes and effects of the Third Reich in the context of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious events; he must not place himself outside of history and emulate God by casting moral indignation at Adolph Hitler or the German people. The great French medieval scholar, Marc Bloch, aptly declared that:

Unfortunately the habit of passing judgements leads to a loss of taste for explanations. When the passions of the past blend with the prejudices of the present, human reality is reduced to a picture in black and white . . . Today, we should laugh at a chemist who separated the bad gases, like chlorine, from the good ones like oxygen.<sup>29</sup>

The Christian must beware of sanctioning past human actions as "right" and "good" because God's Providence allowed them and therefore nothing else was possible.<sup>30</sup> Man's precise knowledge of God's natural retribution—that is, knowledge of particular judgements in time and place—is unclear to human reason. Recall Job's profound anguish at the inscrutability of evil, or St. Paul's cry: "Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgements, and how unsearchable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). The words of the father of modern historical method, Leopold von Ranke, succinctly summarize the Christian historian's standard of reference: "before God all generations of humanity appear as having equal right, and this is the way in which the historian also must look at the matter."<sup>31</sup>

The fourth and final element of the "Christian view of history," free will and the nature of man, is certainly a monumental problem in philosophy and in theology; there is, at least for the historian, no final or definitive answer to the questions it raises. Guilday and Maritain, however, insist that a Christian historian must accept the spirituality and immortality of the soul and the existence of free will; otherwise, he has no "genuine" philosophy of history.<sup>32</sup> Professor Hoffman underscores their position:

[The historian] needs a Christian philosophy of man as a creature above the beasts and below the angels in the order of Creation: a creature naturally social and religious, endowed with conscience, reason, and free

29 *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 140, 142.

30 Leonard Swidler, "The Catholic Historian," in Samuel Hazo, ed., *The Christian Intellectual* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), pp. 122-23.

31 Quoted by Barraclough, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

32 Guilday, *op. cit.*, pp. 11 and 12; Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

will, but wounded in his nature from an ab-original calamity. Such a philosophy of Man is an indispensable light to the study of men.<sup>33</sup>

Such viewpoints, the outgrowth of theosophic and especially Thomistic predilections, have little relevance to the historian's understanding of the human past. The Bible and tradition provide man with moral guidelines to life and general wisdom concerning existence, not with detailed and systematic principles of psychology. Rather than benefit the Christian scholar, absolutized abstractions from Scripture could impose blinders on his perspective. It would be ludicrous, for example, to maintain that "there can be no determinism in history because man has free will." There have been occasions, such as after Kaiser Wilhelm II's "blank check" to Austria in July, 1914, or after the election of Lincoln in November, 1860, in which, because of circumstances of the times, events followed their inexorable logic with slight possibility of human decision avoiding catastrophic holocausts. How free was the German nation to determine its own course on January 1, 1946?—or even today? Most assuredly, wars cannot be explained historically by reference to original sin and the depravity of human nature. The Christian historian obviously has emotional fixations, moral and ethical values, an epistemology, a metaphysics, a psychology—in short, a unique outlook on life which is his framework for understanding past reality. The exceedingly difficult problem of the reciprocal relationship of the historian and historical evidence can here be no more than mentioned in passing. Granted, facts do not speak for themselves—historians today reject Ranke's aim of pure objectivity, of discovering "how it actually happened" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), as overly optimistic; but, on the other hand, neither do facts arbitrarily say just what the investigator wants them to mean. The historian applies his general knowledge to understanding the particular past; yet while enriching his historical knowledge, he expands his own intellectual framework which in turn provides new insights into the past. In any case, for the historian consciously to accept dogmatic and rigid concepts of human nature, as do the Marxists, he destroys the possibility of discovering subtle nuances of historical meaning.

In summary, the "Christian historian's" view of the past is primarily professional; his assumptions about man's past are no different from those of a non-Christian humanistic scholar. He aims, in his studies, at two ideals: objectivity and comprehensiveness. Objectivity cannot be totally attained; as a Christian he must avoid the pitfalls of incorporating divine purpose, eschatology, morality and retribution, and theological concepts of man in his studies. In investigating areas related to his faith, such as early Christianity, for example, the historian must present the "historical" Christ as well as Christ as the Evangelists knew Him; he must analyze objectively—in a natural fashion—the reasons why Christianity has taken root in Europe. As Bloch observed;

33 Hoffman, *loc. cit.*, p. 214.

Human reasons . . . for the assumption of divine intervention would be unscientific. In a word, the question is no longer whether Jesus was first crucified and then resurrected, but how it came to pass that so many fellow humans today believe in the Crucifixion and Resurrection.<sup>34</sup>

The problems concerning revelation and supernatural occurrences must be left to the theologian. To declare that "Christ is an historical fact" says so much as to mean nothing; dozens of Christian sects accept this "fact" but differ radically in their understanding of it. Objectivity tells the Christian historian that certain and unquestionable facts about Christ's history are unfortunately all too sparse; did not the last Gospel declare that "There are . . . many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself . . . could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21: 25)? Consequently there is no room for polemical and dogmatic assertion, based solely on historical evidence, that Christianity is the "true faith." A Christian historian may, however, because he has experienced and lived his faith, better understand areas of Christian history than a non-Christian; his personal identity and empathy with these areas can be of inestimable value. Yet this is not necessarily true since a perceptive and sensitive humanistic scholar, looking at Christian history from the outside, may have unique and in some ways more objective views. Some of the best commentaries on American life, for example, those by Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord Bryce, D. W. Brogan and Father Bruckberger, were written by foreign observers. In any case, the Christian historian must avoid the temptation to defend his faith by perverting history; there are many aspects of Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and other histories which do not excite admiration, and they must be recognized as such. A Catholic clergyman, in editing Lord Acton's correspondence, excluded the English scholar's severest criticisms of the Papacy;<sup>35</sup> such "apologetics by omission" was not only a disservice to the Church, but an inexcusable offense to truth. Above all, the Christian historian must revere objectivity which, existing absolutely in God, is above his limited understanding; his unceasing pursuit will never be fully satisfied. Although he may spend years mastering a particular topic, he cannot assume a monopoly of wisdom; a sense of realism—which is another term for humility—is incumbent upon him. The attitude of St. John the Baptist best expresses the Christian historian's regard for the Truth: despite a lifetime of labor, he recognizes that "he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to bear" (Matthew 3: 11).

The second objective, comprehensiveness, is similarly associated to the Christian historian's vocation and to his veneration of truth. Simplistic, narrow and mono-

34 Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

35 See Herbert Butterfield, "Gasquet and the Acton-Simpson Correspondence," *Cambridge Historical Review*, X (1950), pp. 75-105. Acton probably would have criticized Gasquet; he once declared that "a crime does not become a good deed when committed for the good of the Church," quoted by Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 162.

lithic interpretations, contrary to the accepted historical canon of multiple causality, have little value in explaining the past. Although the historian may explore a small area or event and may prefer one approach to others, he must recognize and be fair to other explanations. The scathing, biting and satirical book review, which belies the essence of charity, must not flow from the Christian historian's pen. No one definitive approach or philosophy should provide a rigid standard of historical assessment; as Bloch put it;

Science dissects reality only in order to observe it better by virtue of a play of converging searchlights whose beams continually intermingle and interpenetrate each other. Danger threatens only when each searchlight operator claims to see everything by himself, when each canton of learning pretends to national sovereignty.<sup>36</sup>

In researching an area of Christian history, especially since the Reformation, the Christian scholar in an age of ecumenical development cannot use narrow sectarian gauges of truth; the Catholic must be catholic in fact, while the Protestant need no longer concentrate protest against the Papacy. A breadth of understanding should preclude such Catholic judgements as this:

It was incipiently recognized [in the sixteenth century], as it is more clearly understood today . . . that Protestantism, as an intellectual movement, is doomed to disintegration and is devoid of any inner constructive force which might leave a lasting impress on world progress.<sup>37</sup>

The "fortress mentality" of the Council of Trent and after—throwing up walls around one's faith, manning the towers, diligently cannonading approaching outsiders, and staging expeditions against alleged diseased communities—is repugnant both to the academician's and the Christian's standards.

36 Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

37 Guilday, *op. cit.*, p. 248. Another Catholic clergyman, Joseph Schrembs, associates the Protestant Reformation with pure evil: his article "The Catholic Philosophy of History" (vol. III, *Papers of the American Catholic Historical Association*; New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1936), pp. 10-11, 16, 26, 29, 37, 39.