

CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL THINKING AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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I. INTRUSIVENESS OF HISTORY IN THINKING BETWEEN THE HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW AND ESCHATOLOG- ICAL SALVATION: SIMILARITIES AMONG JEWS AND CHRIS- TIAN

Building a bridge between the biblical-Christian concept of history as it has been subsequently laid out in many presentations, and the modern age in which historical processes tend to accelerate, may seem risky. And this problem is not only rooted in hermeneutical difficulties. History is based on the understanding of the former epoch and therefore it is not the same as an inclusion in another.

Despite this insight which one always has to bear in mind, it is undisputed that there are turning points in the historical awareness that still cast their shadows in much later periods. It is essentially due to the belief in an eschatological final goal at the end of time that the focus moves into the future. Those who feel committed to such thinking – and there are many people, especially in modern times – know that they come from the past and live in the present;

one of the driving forces behind their actions, however, lies in the hope for a better future. Marxist thinkers in particular have made this “principle of hope”¹ strong, whereby this remains in the area of the profane well-being.

Of course, such a belief in a tomorrow rather more refreshing than the present may reveal different motives. They have been more or less strong at almost all times of world history. Looking back, there is a caesura that needs to be examined more closely: The biblical view of history reverses the meaning of the Greek expression “*historein*,” which primarily refers to present and past events:² The focus is now in the future. Unlike other cultures, hope spreads in the biblical scriptures that it is people who make a crucial contribution to the improvement of their own circumstances. The wish that everything, or as much as possible, may turn to the better rests on them.

The fact that human activity in the culture as a whole is given a relatively large scope for action, which of course also has its limits, only seems trivial at first glance. In comparison to other cultures, the opposite becomes evident. In the Bible, it is usually great men, such as the prophets and the patriarchs, who are entrusted with important actions for the community as a whole. As is well known, they play no small role in the biblical continuum. But the significance of history in Judeo-Christian thinking shows in other ways, too.

Let us consider for comparison: the registration of historical processes is not natural, not even in the later Christianized cultural areas.

One only needs to take a look at the power of the mythical traditions. The myths which have produced countless forms of meaning over a very long period of time, place only a little or no value on history and temporality. Here, Christianity brought an important turning point, regardless of the survival of some myths under Christian conditions.

1 As most important representative to be quoted see Bloch, 1985.

2 Löwith, 1990.

As a contrast to that change which still remains relevant, a short look at different cultures is required. In both Indian and Chinese traditions in philosophy and religion historicity as a culturally significant factor has a significantly lower status.³ So, in Chinese Universism the order of heaven is the eternally constant guideline for human activity. The Tao marks both moral and cosmic law. The harmony of Heaven and Earth is fixed in this way. Of course, within the framework of such an order, human activity also has a certain value. This is, however, fundamentally strongly restricted by the unconditional requirement of the millennia-old tradition not to abandon the traditional cosmic structure.

We encounter something similar when analyzing the Indian concept of Dharma. Even in this time-honored Eastern tradition cosmic, ethical and social aspects are closely intertwined. The behavior of the individual should be referred back to the cosmos. Buddhist traditions deviate from such ideas insofar as they postulate an emergence from the cosmos. Even in this vision an independent political-social scenario that has the potential to lead into an open future is nevertheless neither explicitly nor implicitly revealed. Seen from this perspective, a draft of progress that could at least have the independence to differentiate itself from the past in the sense of a new, previously unknown space of possibilities, is unthinkable. Every historical action is ultimately tied back to cosmic forces of existence. Basically, in the important, millennia-old religious conceptions, there is no room for secular-autonomous models of action.

In comparison, these decisive impulses emerge particularly with regard to modern history, which can easily be derived from the biblical specifications. In the course of this are the often-mentioned tendencies of demythologizing and decosmization of central importance. Of course, they do not mean that mythical and cosmic influences have not left important traces in the Bible.⁴ The

3 References to be found in Ratzinger, 2005, 11 f.

4 The Noachistic covenant that can serve as a model of a cosmic rule to be

debates about it have been countless, especially in the last century.

Nevertheless, the events that we find in the Holy Scriptures of Jews and Christians – in the following the focus should be more on the Old Testament – open a horizon that directs the focus on the future in particular. Historical theological models are constantly being drafted. Multiple starting points can be found in the Bible. In particular, the work of the prophets is to be mentioned. Their approach and theological processing mark differences to the Egyptian belief in the hereafter, to Babylonian astrology as well as to Greek-philosophical speculation, as we find it in Plato. He is always discussed in his dependencies on biblical thinking. Of course, the biblical authors are probably more influenced by him than the other way around (as was often assumed earlier).⁵ The biblical theology of history shows lasting effects on the modern age. This connection becomes also clear in the Exodus story, which like hardly any other account in the Bible shows the interplay between an active God and his acting in history.⁶

The Old Testament vision of King Nebuchadnezzar in the second book of Daniel may be another, later much receipted, example of biblical history on the horizon of apocalyptic together with its multifarious facets.⁷ At this point the reader is met by an image composed of golden, silver and bronze components, partly out of iron, partly out of terracotta. The image is crushed by a stone that loosens, but not by human hand.

Daniel interprets the dream of the ruler. The last, fourth kingdom, destroys the other three. The regime of oppression ends violently. In this apocalyptic view lies a huge potential of hope for the enslaved Israel. Those who feel they are chosen by the Lord put

quoted as an example Ratzinger 2005, p. 12.

5 References to be found in Ratzinger 2000, 108 f.

6 To that from the newest literature cf. Assmann 2015.

7 For apocalyptic thinking of the Bible that entailed many secular implications, pls. see detailed considerations in Taxacher 2010.

emphasis on tomorrow – they virtually have to – not on that which is always the same. Given the desperate situation in which the seer of the God’s chosen people is, this outlook is understandable.

Of course, very different interpretations of the vision are possible – and this is still the case today.⁸ In the interpretation of these imaginations one has always seen a sequence of different empires. Four empires succeed each other: the Babylonian, the Persian-Median, the Greek, and lastly the Roman Empire, in which one is at the moment. In the seventh book of Daniel four animals appear, this time in Daniel’s dream, that God judges over finally. After the judgment over the earthly empires, the Son of man is supposed to come and create an eternal kingdom, such is the eschatological expectation of Christians.

Although the focus of hope lies on extra-historical forces, the category “history” does not focus on a cosmic basis. The exploited pray to God, who is expected to interfere in history and change their fate. Herewith it is indisputable that even the individual has to do something, to improve his situation. The Maccabees have understood this appeal and rose up against the Greek occupiers, the Seleucids.

The Apocalypse of the New Testament, written by an author named Johannes, probably on Patmos, can connect to such requirements. This time it is the Romans who suppress the chosen nation. In the present context, it would lead too far to highlight the central breaking points of both Christian and Jewish thinking, regardless of similarities. Wilhelm Kamlah has shown a lot of material in an investigation published in 1940, that is intended to show that early Christian thinking had the necessary consequence of a renunciation of “historical self-assertion.”⁹ The author focuses his approach cen-

8 Recently the opposition against the force of destruction of big empires has also been presented in the context of contemporary debates on World government and World state. Important is the question, how Catholics, especially right-wing Catholics, should relate to contemporary trends of the globalization. (Cf. Dirsch, 2020, esp. p. 86).

9 Kamlah 1940. Pp. 36-39 (summary).

trally on the topic “expectation.” Hence he emphasizes that there are hardly any of Jesus’ concepts towards the political-social future of his nation handed down. At the same time (according to Kamlah) a renunciation of the historical self-assertion in Christianity is accompanied by a renunciation of the self-assertion of an individual in general. In the New Testament we encounter many testimonies that expose the Christians as an Unworldly (literally). It is the Romans who noticed this trend towards segregation and outsiderhood from the beginning. Another point which also affects the early Christian approach to history and its abolition in the apocalypse is the rivalry between the Jews who confess to Jesus and those who (in view of Jesus’ disciples) seem stubborn. This dispute is particularly evident in the Paulinic scriptures and intensifies in the figure of Katechon, the hold-up.¹⁰ It is him, as it is often assumed in the end time controversies, who prevents Christ’s return. The debates referring to the *locus classicus* in the second letter to the Thessalonians (II Thess 2,1-12) were severe up until the 20th century.¹¹ Who can be identified as a “hold-up” remains unclear to this date. The “antichrist” was frequently associated in the reception of the cryptic point with the Jews who did not want to convert. The damage caused by such an interpretation for the coexistence of Jews and Christians can only be called considerable.¹²

Already in the New Testament, but also by the church fathers and other early Christian authors, a salvation historical scenario is unfolded: the curve reaches from the creation via the Old Covenant to the redemption in Christ and the final dawn of the kingdom of God. Characteristic is the focus on God’s providence and on a

10 From the extensive literature with the countless suggestions for interpretation cf. Metzger 2012.

11 With reference to the revival with all genuine accents in Carl Schmitt see Meuter 1994.

12 Also, Romig (2011) who, when at some points exaggerated, takes seriously the rivalry of Jews and Christians who are most strongly relativized (in front of the background of the long shadow of the Holocaust).

connection between action and outcome, as well as the teleological argumentation, which also takes into account events that are envisaged in the future. Looking into the future remains central. There lies the salvation, even in eschatological terms. However, things in detail look more complicated again. The double meaning of the early Christian historical view between the “already” and the “not yet” testifies to that – a separation coming to light with the appearance of Jesus Christ.¹³ This oscillation does not contradict a historical view of events; for it is unarguable that Christ has come in fullness of time.¹⁴

Has the kingdom of God already arrived or is it still to be expected? For the Christians of the first generation the historic act and the resurrection of the Lord already lie in the past. With an incising of the chronological distance from these events it naturally becomes more plausible to interpret the coming of the resurrected in the futuristic way. The draft by the Calabrian abbot Joachim von Fiore, which still had an impact on the 20th century, bears witness to this shift in emphasis. In any case, the tradition of the Christian historical thinking has meant, at least in the consequence, that the antic-cyclic thinking is finally being overcome. Here, biblical influences have their crucial influences, although detailed research has not been able to determine more precise details.

2. BETWEEN THE APOCALYPSE AND PROFANE HISTORICAL COURSE: THE ACTUAL CHRISTIAN ‘IN-BETWEEN’ WITH AUGUSTINE AS CONSEQUENTIAL HIGH POINT AND FURTHER STARTING POINT

The turning point that Augustine represents for the Christian historical thinking should not be overestimated. He is considered as the “Old Church’s biggest thinker in history”¹⁵ – and far beyond that.

13 Summarized in Schwaiger 2001, pp. 43-45.

14 Cullmann, 1948.

15 Loewenich, 1947, p. 11.

If, looking at the primeval church, it can be denied that self-assertion has been one of its goals; church at the time of the later bishop Augustine could not denounce the defense of its terrestrial existence.

Why are we bringing Augustine's approach as paradigmatic for Christian historical thinking? Augustine is not the only great historical thinker in Christianity, but he influenced several important texts of this genre that have been published after him. To name especially the magnificent conception of the Empire Bishop Otto von Freising (*Weltchronik oder die Geschichte der zwei Staaten*, 1143-46), but also the historical theology of the Saint Bonaventura, who exposes the critique of the encroachment of pagan influences in the course of the high medieval Aristoteles-reception.¹⁶ One has to mention especially Philipp Melanchton's *Chronicon Carionis* (1532) among the outstanding Christian interpretations during the early modern age. In the 17th century, the influence of Augustine was still evident in the work of Bishop Jacques B. Bossuet. After that we will no longer find comparable interpretations of history from the biblical point of view, at least not in a comprehensive style, apart from the little-known work of the Württemberg pietist Christian Gottlob Barth (*Allgemeine Weltgeschichte nach biblischen Grundsätzen bearbeitet für nachdenkliche Leser*) from 1837. During the 20th century Christian ideas play only a marginal role at best in the context of much noticed presentations of history by Oswald Spengler (*Untergang des Abendlandes*) and Arnold Toynbee (*A Study of History*). A noticeable and outstanding effort we owe to the historian Axel Schwaiger.¹⁷ He bypasses the historic flood and biblical events to date in a fascinating manner. Even though the scientific community is likely to fundamentally object to his approach – he lets dinosaurs appear with humans and understands the narrative of the Bible in the sense of historical facts – the approach deserves attention. Like Augustine, he applies biblical standards to history, however in a world much more complicated than before.

16 Fundamental to that cf. Ratzinger, 2009.

17 Schwaiger, 2017.

Augustine's historical-philosophical thinking should also be reflected in the light of some predecessors of the Old Church. The thinking of early Christian authors (church fathers, apologists) had to – some more, others less – deviate from the thought of being time's witnesses of the dawning reign of Christ on Earth. You couldn't help but get involved in the story to find out its ending. In the course of this, biblical references provided the chronological framework. One launched out trials in order to determine the last days. The early Christian author Hippolytus, for example, kept an eye out for signs that could indicate a nearing end of the world.¹⁸

Until the early 4th century it couldn't be expected of Christians to assess the progress of the profane history in any other way than skeptical. The pagan environment was considered mainly and over a long time as hostile, even during phases without persecution. Changes only occurred after the so-called Constantinian turning point. The Rome and Empire theology, – Eusebius of Casarea, Lactanz and Paulus Orosius can be cited as outstanding representatives – saw the Roman Empire having reached its peak after the triumph of Christianity. From this perspective of victory it was possible, and even necessary, to take a positive look at Roman history for the first time – namely insofar as its progress represented a necessary, even though not a satisfactory, prerequisite for the birth of the Messiah. In such a position of triumph the retrospective looked different than in times of hardship and persecution. So prophecies of pagan authors such as Vergil (in his famous fourth *Eclogue*) can be referred not only to emperor Augustus, as intended by his court poet, but to a consecrated child whose special significance will be understood later.

The direction set up by Eusebius and then continued by Orosius and others, may be seen as exemplary for the understanding of history among Christians propagated after the Constantinian turning point. The increased number of comforts in everyday life (tolerance, return of confiscated buildings, partial possibility to take advantage

18 Schwaiger, 2001: 69.

of the civil infrastructure and so on) seems to have led to not few Christian strangers of the early time becoming indigenous since the 4th century. Not everyone who has followed this trend has been pleased by this. The number of martyrs has gradually decreased in the Roman empire. Here and there laxism has crept in. These changes may have dampened the passion for eschatological considerations. However these imaginations have not completely disappeared.

The most famous historic thinker of Christianity, Augustine von Hippo Regio, has early registered this trend towards profanation. The scholar tried to counteract this development by means of his highly extensive literature. In his great work *De civitate dei* he set the course for a large-scale show of history as a whole which caused a big echo even in the Modern times. Augustine's perspective is also important for the evaluation of profane Modern times major events, including the French Revolution in the most prominent sense. He provides a key for the classification within the Christian horizon. Ultimately, a Christian interpretation of history has to include events that do not explicitly arise from Christian actions. It is probably in no small part due to this insight why the time-honored genre of historical theology, to which Augustine's master plan can also be attributed, has produced only a few outstanding concepts in the 20th century.¹⁹

The first emperor's conversion to Christianity, and decades later also the elevation of Christianity to state religion, led to a new view of the profane history, at least in central works. Even Augustine cannot ignore this trend. The starting point of these extensive discussions is an incident that is highly important for Christians as well as for Pagans: the conquest and sack of Rome by Alaric's troops in 410.

Unlike the theologians of Rome and the Empire, who ushered in a time of ruler panegyrics under Christian auspices, Augustine

19 On the Catholic side Balthasar (1959), on the protestant side Thielicke (1964), count to the outstanding exceptions; Essen (2016) to be used as current overview.

noticed a disastrous continuity between the pagan regime and the regime that had been officially Christian for a few generations: representatives of the old pagan religiosity such as Symmachus were structurally not so different in their arguments from the apologists of the new regime. Ultimately, both sides assume a close concordance of religious and political rule. Since time immemorial, a catastrophe, whether natural or man-made, has been viewed as the result of culpable action that is responsible for God's ensuing punishment. Such a deeds-consequences connection seems fundamentally plausible and even indispensable for the believer, regardless of the specific confession.

After decades of formal Christian emperors' ruling, Christianity can be taken hostage by pagan relicts that must have seen themselves on the losing road of history. Doesn't the defeat prove that the old gods, who were responsible for the Grandeur of Rome, got angry after not being brought any more offerings from the official side? The Christian god seems weaker than those who were previously worshiped by the state.

Augustine also knew that due to the increased global responsibility since Constantine, Christian actions in government needed to be justified. This action can perhaps be justified pragmatically, such as the task of the state as a whole, which is primarily supposed to ensure peacemaking. The North African Roman does not see a theological apotheosis as appropriate beyond profane considerations of benefits, although he definitely rejected an escape into the afterlife. But the theological writer is clear that earthly Rome, as it has a long and lasting pagan tradition, has not and could not change completely. He sees a decoupling of the Christian fate from the Roman one as theologically necessary. It was also advisable from a diplomatic perspective given the expectation of doom. To him and many others, standing up to the last for an empire that has persecuted Christians for long periods of time hardly seemed worth it.

This assumption is not surprising, as religion and politics in the Antiquity nearly everywhere were considered as two sides of a medal. But it is surprising that opponents of Augustine, who critically examines such a connection, overlook the fundamental innovation which Christianity was responsible for in the old world: namely for the fundamental difference of the spheres of politics and faith. The numerous similarities cannot hide away the differences. The famous pericope wasn't handed down by Jesus by accident, according to which the emperor should be given what should be his, and God should be given what belongs to him. The Lord could not have distanced himself stronger from the political eschatology that was spread widely at the time. Violence is unknown to him which doesn't mean that one won't be able to attribute special sympathies to him.

It can be assumed that Augustine is well aware of everyday advantages that the end of persecutions mean for believers. His actions as a bishop, when he called on the secular arm to help in the African church dispute against the Donatists, show him this benefit very clearly.²⁰ This (if one so wishes) church-political action must be separated from the theological reflection.

Nevertheless, the action of the now nominally Christian emperors is definitely a proof of continuity. It is, however, not necessarily hopeful in central points of regency: Augustine is, with regards to the Christian proprium of political rule, rather skeptical: it is perfectly understandable, when he notices, that generally not worse politics were conducted among the Christian emperors. This judgment is rather sober, though! He knows that a fundamental approach of the pagan emperors, who often pursued a religiopolitical program as part of their reign and placed certain gods at the center of their actions, cannot be copied by Christians: what is meant is the close connection between the preference for one Cults and the victorious actions of armies and emperors – a connection that can also be

20 It was mentioned often that Augustinus' relationship towards the state was not negative in all aspects (Loewenich 1947: 17).

reversed. A defeat means thereafter insufficient practice of the cult. A common belief was that the gods get angry. If one were to follow such a pattern, Christians would get into trouble. They would be in need of justification and would have to excuse their god's weakness; after all, their emperor belongs to the Christians who have counted as state religion for decades. Augustine breaks with this idea, which was very common in antiquity, and the close correlation between the performance of traditional cult rituals and political success. Even in much later eras, such views of gods as partisans of their own cause were widely accepted, but also criticized.²¹

In contrast to the Christian adulation of the emperors Augustine is reflected more theologically: he sees the Christian as an inhabitant of two *civitates*, though: the terrestrial (*terrena*) as well as the heavenly (*coelestis*). Nonetheless they couldn't be more different in existential regard. Augustine recognized their roots in two basic attitudes, two ways of living.²² The earthly community bases in self-love, the heavenly ultimately in the love of God. It is differentiated between angel and demon. The deep gap between both existential living spaces is central for Augustin.

Such an opposition makes a Christian state, the close connection of throne and altar that acted as an ideal in long historical times, hopeless. Augustine was skeptical towards such forms of symbiosis. He sees the Divine kingdom granted to the pious, every terrestrial kingdom populated by the pious and the impious.²³ So far, the earlier often popular translation "State of God" makes little sense in its theological intention, Augustine has looked at the phenomena of the state critically. The famous Alexander anecdote stands for his undisguised skepticism as well as the hint to structural agreement with robber bands. They, as well as the rich, lack justice, who in reality don't have more to offer than oppression. Only Judgment Day will

21 Revealing a letter exchange from the 1970s, see Lobkowicz / Hertz 1984.

22 Instead of others, see Maier 1986, pp. 94-109, here 105 f.

23 Augustinus 1991, p. 269 (Book V, Ch. 21).

free us from such forms of violence and evil. Augustine's attempt to place salvation in the future has been drawn into modern times, which of course only offer earthly alternatives to liberation from earthly vales of misery, which sometimes cause even greater weeping and gnashing of teeth.²⁴ The visions for a better world reach from the utopias of the medieval ages until the *Reich der Freiheit* and the *Tausendjährigen Reich*, lastly a perversion for the Johannes-apocalypse. They have never brought a better life.

If one looks at modern times against the background of such a perspective, attempts at symbiosis between both citizens are reduced to absurdity. The fact that even architects of theocratic models were able to rely on Augustine is not only due to the increasing Christian influence in the secular community in the Middle Ages as well as to shortened and incorrect reading, but also to different, even contradictory, references in the very powerful scripture. Augustine's study of the New Testament highlighted those passages that particularly appealed to him. This also includes the separation of the chaff and the wheat at the end of days. The earthly community is one of the temporary things, not the last. When looking at the earthly community, realism prevails: evil and good are gathered in the world state. You have to wait for the separation.

Augustine probably saw the eschatological heritage of the old church, which has probably faded a little since the overall situation for Christians has improved, as a trump card. If the Roman empire sinks in the Orcus of history, for which there have been not a few indications even before 410, so it may be grievous even for Christians, as for them the seemingly eternal empire is also a home to which duties exist. But Augustine knew: Christ's empire is not from this world. This realization creates hope, especially then, when a temporal great power stands at the end of its existence and before the ruin of its own pomp – as so many political figments before. Even genera-

24 Löwith, 1990; Sternberger, 1984: 309-380, count towards the more influential interpretations in this respect.

tions before Augustine the outstanding theologian Origenes referred triumphantly that the downfall of an empire didn't mean the end of Church that was primarily aligned towards the kingdom of God. The following applies to the Old Church as well as for Augustine: love for the homeland and prayer for the (even non-Christian) emperors, but no theological apotheosis. Only God deserves worship.

There have been endless debates about how the two "citizenships," as a popular translation goes, relate to the empirical variables of church and state. Is there a close relationship between the two or should they fundamentally be kept apart? The church father's exegetes have found evidence to consider both plausible.

The triumphant Church of the Middle Age, from time to time also in the Modern times, has claimed the "God's State" for itself. However, Augustine's skepticism has been verified in many phases of Church History. Pope Gregor VII and his court stand for the underpinning of claims to curial power. As part of a rather unintended consequence he didn't only fight for the *libertas ecclesiae* (Gerd Tellenbach), but also achieved a (albeit careful) liberation of the empire, the secular power. This (slow) separation will continue in later epochs and under different circumstances.

3. STRUCTURAL CONSENSUS OF THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE 18TH CENTURY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUGUSTINIAN HISTORICAL THINKING

Even during the age of Enlightenment, despite all hostilities, Christian historical thinking was very popular. An example is provided by the already mentioned, outstanding personality of Bishop Bossuet (1627 – 1704) who also influenced Ludwig XIV's politics. He compiled a universal history. Compared to Augustine, this contemporary of the early Enlightenment came to a more positive judg-

ment of the political history.²⁵ Instead of the God's State, it is the History of the Church, still a triumphant one, that stands at the focal point of his grand historic story. This extends from the beginnings of the world into his time. The destiny possesses a wide status. It is here he meets Augustine who, as is generally known (despite all the high respect of the free will), has fought for the priority of the mercy of God and (at least in reception), was claimed to be a defender of the doctrine of predestination. Bossuet, as Augustine, embraces light and shadow in history. The actors ought not to know their mission in the Devine plan of history. What seems to be coincidence and fate, often falls into place in the bigger plan.

While historical thinking during the 17th century was still widely Christian, despite a few free-thinkers, an ideological turning point occurs in the 18th century. The Enlightenment period proceeded, and at the same time some emphases shifted permanently. The historical outlook is no exception.²⁶

Reflection about historical progress in the discourse of the elites is taking a much stronger profane-secular alignment orientation, especially in France. Among individual representatives – the Marquis de Condorcet can be cited as an example – a pointed-hyper optimistic view of the future can be noticed.

Condorcet embodies the euphoric Enlightener. This connects him with Voltaire and Turgot. The contrast to the huge civil pessimist Rousseau is obvious. Condorcet is an influential science politician of his epoch. He stands out through his enormous universality. He even presents a constitutional draft that unfortunately doesn't find a majority.

Given his confidence in the future it is not surprising that he – similar to Descartes – looks for a safe foundation that is supposed to underlie both the moral and the political science. This task shall be

25 Löwith. 1990, p.130; Bossuet was, other than Fenelon, accepted rather less in Germany, as an exception. Cf. Voegelin, 2004.

26 To be used as an overview, cf. Demandt, 2011, pp. 140-163.

fulfilled by mathematics once again. It awakens at that time – as frequently until the 20th century – an actual fascination. Condorcet may be considered one of the prototypes of modern social engineers and technicians. His optimism goes so far to say that correct application of mathematics may lead to peace and prosperity. He even considers the possibility of a long life and long health if basic thoughts of the enlightened mind found further dissemination. Unfortunately, so far only a small upper class has internalized these ideas. In his opinion, all that is required is the correct transfer of theory into practice, then one comes close to the ideal.

In the present context it would lead too far to exemplify the secular Chiliasm of many enlighteners. The findings confirm a proposition of Löwith: the Christian eschatology postponed (with increasing temporal distance from Christ's terrestrial work) the salvation into the future. This shift, regardless of its dogmatic content, was a strategically smart move. It gave consolation and created hope even in the dark times – throughout the whole history of the Church. Important thinkers of the Enlightenment maintained this future-oriented perspective, but negated the beyond-orientated view. As in the early modern utopia, which seamlessly transitioned into the enlightened one, salvation was supposed to be earthly. Everything else was viewed by the mainstream of enlightened intellectuals as priest fraud and illusion. Hope was possible only in the here and now, therefore in a better future on one's own real planet. In practice though, this new accentuation means that one also had to give reassurance. The earthly paradise will definitely come – enlightened optimists such as Condorcet did not doubt that. One only had to wait and practice patience. This argument was also often used against the heir of the enlightenment philosophy, namely Marxism. As is well known, Marx dressed his secular hopes with the metaphor of the *Reich der Freiheit*. He didn't find more than a few floral decorations (*Hirten, Jäger, Kritiker*). Communist propagandists could

defer this blessed condition up to the communist stage, that has never occurred though.

The hope for a better future, conveyed by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, as well as an improved provision in 18th century France, similarly had a dedicated political dimension and corresponding effects. As is well known, the pre-requirements of “1789” are complex. Spiritual-philosophical (undercutting of the old order through *Literaten im Untergrund*) reasons were as dominant as the political crisis of the Ancient Regime (convocation of the estate generals!); further, economic causes are to be named that concretized especially in widespread hunger due to failed harvests. Furthermore, the French Revolution comprised three partial revolutions: firstly the political-social which flows into the proclamation of human rights in 1791, and which later turned into a model for the liberal reorganization of Europe. The uncontrolled dynamics resulted in the abolition of royalty in the second phase. From 1792 onwards the terror gradually made itself felt. With Robespierre’s entry into the Welfare Committee, the reign of terror became increasingly systematic. Thousands lose their lives before the practice of terror slowly ends in the period after July 28, 1794.

An event as Janus-faced as the French Revolution is not easy to bring to a common denominator in terms of its relationship to traditional Christianity as well as to traditional Christian historical thinking, which itself is not uniform. In all modern revolutions one finds Christian admixtures in more or less different ways. Even the French Revolution is no exception here.²⁷ It didn’t start, as was often noticed, as anti-Christian shock device. It is no coincidence that many of their followers come from the clergy, especially from the lower clergy, who benefited less from the symbiosis of traditional rule with the altar than the higher prelates.²⁸

27 References to be found in Maier, 1988, esp. pp. 75-80.

28 Cf. Erdmann, 1949.

Even at the end of the 18th century, Christianity and churches did not represent a unified block. This can hardly astonish in view of a strongly structured society, whose layering can again be seen in the church. In addition, the origin also shapes you even when you want to shed it. Even enlightenment thinkers and the later radicalized revolutionaries cannot completely eliminate their Christian origins, no matter how anti-traditional they behaved. This observation applies, of course, to modern times as a whole. No matter how differentiated this must be seen: Christian traces can be found everywhere. Modern times, the Enlightenment and the Revolution, which are connected in a well-defined way, can neither be baptized across the board nor declared un-Christian. Let us take protagonists of the later German Enlightenment such as Kant and Lessing as an example. They have never denied the relevance of Christian doctrine for their works – in view of their writings this view slightly hardens. At the same time, they make clear changes to the Christian message, which they – not dissimilar to other enlighteners – often view formally and in an instrumental way. For Lessing, the religious content is a crutch that, he hopes, will become superfluous in the future. The not yet fully enlightened humanity who doesn't view ethical behaviour as self-purposed, needs a pedagogical resource, in order to be encouraged to comply with certain commandments. This status of the definite stage of coexistence applies when reason doesn't only enlighten the manageable elite, but also wider parts of the population. Kant uses, as it is known, the belief in God in order to emphasize its necessity for the ethics. Naturally, such an attitude towards Christianity as it is briefly explained here exemplary to Kant and Lessing, doesn't portray the full scale of the Enlightenment. One can also find representatives of a radical atheistic Enlightenment, such as Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach and Julien Offray de la Mettrie, but also severe critics of the Church like Voltaire. Similarly, representatives of a Catholic Enlightenment can be determined,²⁹ who

29 As an overview cf. Maier, 1993, pp. 40-53.

can, in toto, count as Church friendly. Even critics of the events such as the (later magisterially sentenced) priest Lamennais could see something positive from the caesura. He considers the separation of state and Church as best for the latter, and can keep it free this way from worldly decadence and antipathy towards the political regime.³⁰ Lamennais saw the hatred towards the Church reasoned in its merge with the secular regime.

If you take a closer look at this background, it is not surprising that there was some agreement from Catholics rooted in the church at the beginning of the drastic incidents of “1789.”³¹ Among the activists, the later prominent priest Jacques Roux is to be mentioned, as representative of many. He supported the revolution in his sermons, soon gave up his Parish, radicalized quickly and swore an oath on the civil constitution. Later he worked in the environment of the Jacobins. He counts towards many “children” who were eaten by the Moloch of “revolution.” Followers of the revolution on the Christian side were fascinated especially by the revolutionaries emphasizing the equality of humans and following Christian basic principles this way.

The beginning of the great upheavals also divided the church. After all, there was an event that, for many, is suitable for separating the wheat from the chaff: the forced oath that priests had to take to the civil constitution. Two thirds of the clergy refused to take the oath, which had lasting consequences. The split could hardly have been documented more blatantly. Many had to leave the country. These measures are only a short step to the “history of violence” of the French Revolution.³² The crimes at the opponents in the Vendée

30 Maier, 1988, pp. 173-188.

31 Instead of many others, the opinion of the Sicilian theologian Spedalieri is to be mentioned, who protocolled 1791 (“Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood”) was to be understood as a Christian solution, exposed Christian roots (closer in Taxacher, 2015, p. 139).

32 Cf. Gebhard 2011, in traditional-Christian interpretation patterns this opinion can be found frequently, which is comprehensible, as in Stückel-

present one of the horrific highlights. These atrocities are sometimes viewed as the first genocide in European History.

This extremely short sketch is intended to prove that the “world” – without making any more precise distinctions – has hardly changed from the perspective of a realistic view of history – no matter how much one can distinguish (late) Antiquity from Modernity.

Probably the most influential historical thinker of Christianity, Augustine, summarized the ambiguities and ambivalences of “World history” in relation to “Salvation” with his consequent biblical-eschatological view: a clearly “Christian” world in toto does not exist. Even in detail the following verdict applies: “Christian” politics, economics, literature do also not exist from this point of view. Clearly, even Augustine knew that under the circumstances, Christian ways of living and influences could improve the world, create more justice, enlarge the ability to love and so on. It certainly is the responsibility of a Christian to strive for and implement inner-worldly improvements. Commandment of charity alone obligates him to that. But such possibilities for influence, especially on a moral level, are, in view of the last things, always insufficient. Christian emperors are very helpful, and a state that a bishop like Augustine can use as a “secular arm” if necessary also brings advantages. But they only ever complete penultimate tasks. They, too, can only be effective in culpable contexts. When Christian rulers use violence against heretics, such action may be justifiable under the (of course always controversial) assumption that the Catholic faith embodies the truth; but this does not change the reprehensibility of violence. Intellectuals of the Enlightenment in particular may have seen such connections more easily than would have been obvious over large stretches of the dominance of Christian culture.

According to Augustine, earthly existence is always determined by a mix of pious and sinners. No one can actually know whether they are among the saved or the damned. The leaders of the heavenly

legions do not dominate on earth. Rome is not the heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly kingdom always remains – regardless of whether the most powerful person is baptized or not. The state is not founded by and for angels, but by sinful people. The reference of the founding of the state to Cain speaks for itself.

Now the Rome of the Christian emperors probably gave some pious people a bit of earthly security. The conquest of the seemingly Christianized city led Christian panegyricists to sing the praises of the new era. One could ignore the manageable number of pagan remainders especially within the upper class. An analogy in the late 18th century comes to mind. France is still, in spite of an increase of the Church criticism by enlightened intellectuals from Voltaire over Rousseau to Diderot, who all died before 1789, a Catholic country. The salvation still lies on the State of the “most Christian kings,” the oldest sister of the Church. The excesses of 1793/94 were shocking, not least because one could hardly expect them – independently of how one stood towards faith and absolutistic monarchy.

Certain parallels in the outcome of antiquity and the late phase of the Enlightenment are palpable, at least in retrospect. The obvious difference doesn't change this: at the beginning of the fifth century AD – this date is also not known to contemporaries at the time³³ – Christianity still appeared as a relatively young religion. Its triumphal march seems unstoppable even after the caesura of the Constantinian turn. The progressive intellectuals of the 18th century often view Christianity as an aging force that hinders the progress towards a worldly-scientific paradise. The confession of Christ is no longer opposed by competing cults, but rather by secular views that claim to improve existence. This view can only be understood against the background of a certain secularization trend and a noticeable improvement in the everyday world in the 18th century – both of which were certainly discussed in contemporary sermons.³⁴

33 To the history of the Christian calendar Maier 2000.

34 Cf. Groethuysen 1978.

While in the generations before Augustine throne and altar came together – which was not undisputed even in his time, as pagan objections prove – after 1789 a gradual development began that went in the opposite direction. A Catholic liberal like Lamennais wants to encourage this tendency.

If one considers Augustine's historical thinking as paradigmatic, then one captures the situation of his time as much as the time of radical changes at the end of the 18th century. Neither Rome nor Paris anticipate the Divine Jerusalem. At both places one could see human weaknesses (casually expressed) – especially with the regard to the official politics. In this century an observer looking from a Christian perspective could recognize (as always) chaff and wheat. Much of the supposedly intact is rotten and – at least in retrospect – spirituality decayed. If one takes theorems of the Roman and empire theology, one could have grasped the time before 1789 step-by-step – but only when describing the façade as profane Christian, which would have been rather euphemistic, though. The alliance of throne and altar seems to work under the king Ludwig XVI (as under his predecessors) without any problems. A glorification of this connection (as from the point of view of state-theological assumptions) is only possible, if one glosses over drastically.

One may oppose the following against this mind game: it isn't reliable to apply historical-theological ideas that were conceived around 1600 years ago to events that occurred less than 250 years ago. But Augustine's pattern, his dualism of *Civitas dei* and *Civitas terrena*, is timeless, not only for pious Christians. His judgment on the terrestrial truth is more realistic from a Christian viewpoint than the cheering over assumingly inner-secular Christian structures, which mostly prove fragile on a closer look. So far it makes sense to understand even the multi-layered events of the French Revolution with the help of Augustine's historical-philosophical *specificati* that remain with the biblical foundations. Lest we forget that the traditionalist opponents of the French Revolution, primarily Joseph de

Maistre, reveal in the quintessence of their argumentation certain parallels to the Roman and empire theologians.³⁵

So it can be summarized: the biblical narratives – from the Exodus up to the book of Daniel – show that the old and new Nation of God is strongly rooted in historical processes. The incarnation of the Logos keeps revaluing the history, even though the Christian self-assertion is delayed by the Parousia expectation and only becomes more apparent in the course of early Christian development. This process was not yet complete at the time of the mass exodus. But Augustine's Apology, which rejects the arguments of the pagan accusers of the Christian faith, shows that this process is already well advanced. Augustine's anti-political "eschatology" (Sternberger) is based on a millennium of biblical revelation and apocalyptic allusions in the Gospels. This view prevents faith from being drawn too far into the depths of the state-earthly sphere. The salvation is projected into the future. Even Christian emperors also commit violence and can never fully reach the Christian ideal. The Enlightenment and the culmination during the French Revolution reveal an acceleration of the historical change, which was enshrined many centuries ago in the biblical worldview. With all diversity of the events: in view of Augustine's draft it is so far part of the tradition of Christian historical theory, as it refers the salvation (world immanent, though) into the future. This connection with Christian origins becomes all the clearer when one considers a conception such as that of the Calabrian monk Joachim of Fiore in the High Middle Ages,³⁶ which was subsequently condemned as heretical. He sees inner-worldly salvation as effective in the future, but it has already begun in his own time.

35 To de Maistre see an overview in Dirsch 2020, pp. 17-27; Maier 1988, pp. 143-150.

36 For the criticism, cf. Voegelin 1959.

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