

## A FEW CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF HUMAN HISTORY

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### Article abstract

This article presents views of universal history taken from the Bible and from two Christian authors. Those religious and theological interpretations of history are characterized by the concern to highlight a factor that is transcendent. This factor is seen as the overall meaning that underpins human existence in our world.

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## A FEW CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF HUMAN HISTORY

LOUIS ROY, O.P.

This essay will introduce views of the biblical trajectory throughout the Israelite people's history; that trajectory will include the views of some Jews who converted to Jesus Christ. We shall also explore the conceptions that two important thinkers – Augustine of Hippo and Bernard Lonergan – offer us with respect to the status of the human race's history.

### **Biblically-Inspired Views of History**

The Hebrew Bible narrates decisive divine interventions in the world: principally creation, the exodus from Egypt, and the gift of the Torah along with the gift of the covenant between God and the Israelites. The Jewish people's sense of history has been framed by a succession of covenantal agreements: with Noah in the Book of Genesis, with Moses in the Book of Exodus, with the Deuteronomist reform, with David, and with Jeremiah.

In contrast to such early expressions of a covenant that is basically *societal*, the authors of the late biblical "Writings" (*Ketuvim*) do not venture into the issue of a possible meaning of the Jewish people collectively; their reflections concern the existence and sometimes the biography of *individuals*. For instance, the Book of Ecclesiastes begins with these words, "Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (1:2). According to that book, the lives of both the wise and the foolish end after a few decades on earth. Since death levels all, the Israelites must rest content with the enjoyment of the present; there is no future beyond death. Hence this modest injunction: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (12:13b). It must be said that Qoheleth and the other biblical wise persons reduce the meaning of human life to naught or at least to a minimum.

For their part, the psalmists proclaimed that God was an active King: "God reigns," that is, is directing events in favour of his beloved nation. However, throughout severe repressions on the part of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, belief in divine assistance became precarious. In the

latter form of imperial occupation and rule, John Baptist's and Jesus' assertions that "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 3:2 and 4:17) must have been perceived first as stunning and later as incredible at the time when Jesus was arrested, crucified, and ironically named "the king of the Jews" by the governor Ponce Pilate (Mt 27:37).

After the two unsuccessful rebellions against the Caesars (in year 70 and in years 132-136), the rest of the Jewish population that had not yet emigrated to various cities of the Roman Empire fled Palestine and settled elsewhere, mostly in Alexandria and Rome. So we notice, for the Jewish people, the beginning of almost two millennia of marginality in the West. The last significant episode has been a return to Palestine around 1900 and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

The first *Christian* view of history was partly Jewish and partly novel. In Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection, his followers recognized an extraordinary act of God, the holy and powerful Father of Jesus. Then began a new period in one branch of Jewish history, to which pagans were soon associated. St. Paul argued in favour of including the pagans into the Church. He spoke of the Body of Christ, not as a static but as a dynamic reality; he insisted on "building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12) and on "holding fast to the head [Christ], from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God" (Col 2:19).

Jesus' parables of development (Mt 13: 1-23 and 31-43) and the narratives of many early conversions, in Acts of the Apostles, are indicative of a certain optimism despite the hostility of Jewish authorities and despite the Roman persecutions which intermittently took place until the fourth century. Nonetheless, according to the parable of the grain and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30) the good and the bad would grow together until the Last Judgment (Mt 13:47-50).

This outlook may be said to be eschatological. Its end, namely its *eschaton* (the "last event"), is both an "already and "not yet." This event is *vertical*, although it continually enters into the *horizontal*, namely into a relation with human time. The "already" may also be dubbed "the interim." Thanks to the passion-resurrection of Jesus, the final story of the human race can take up and illuminate the broken stories of all who suffer.

The biblical basis for the spatial metaphor of the vertical/horizontal is found in the following texts. The patriarch Jacob had a dream during which he saw a ladder stretching from Heaven to earth, with Angels going up and down upon it (Gen 28:10-17, confirmed by Jesus in Jn 1:51). Before giving the Torah to the people of Israel, "the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up" (Ex 19:20). In the New Testament, the key passage reads as follows:

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them, they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them' (Rev 21:2-3).

Furthermore God is introduced as the master of history from beginning to end: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8). According to the Christian interpretation of history, the reign of God is an energetic reality that began with the creation of the world, qualitatively increased thanks to the covenant with the Jewish people, and reached its fulfilment with the unfolding of the "mysteries" of Jesus, namely his birth, preaching, healings, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.<sup>1</sup> The return of Christ will be the consummation of history. This Christian sense of history is expressed and enacted in the Eucharist, which is celebrated as the Paschal Mystery, into which the whole humankind is incorporated.

Inspired by the Bible, Cornelius Ernst defined the Christian view of history as follows:

Christianity consists in the claim that (1) the why-question [that people sometimes ask] has a unique answer, that human destiny is determinate; (2) this destiny is disclosed in the destiny of Jesus Christ; (3) the destiny of Jesus Christ is a predestination, the fulfilment of the purpose of God; (4) this predestined destiny is ours to share in by way of our communion with Jesus Christ in faith.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of *praeparatio evangelica*, Eusebius of Caesarea (around 260-265 until around 339-340) singled out a few key events as "preparatory" to the advent of Christ. However, he and the vast majority of Christian thinkers were not interested in the possibility of key events as epoch-making *after* Jesus. Hence the neglect of the importance of human history on their part before the twentieth century. However, Hans Urs von Balthasar aptly re-expressed Eusebius's idea:

The 'education of the human race' which God undertakes primarily in the case of Israel does, for all its uniqueness, *make use of* ordinary 'evolution' *as a vehicle* – literally, as something that is already in motion and on its way up – in order to attain its own wholly different goal.<sup>3</sup>

This passage illustrates my earlier remark that the vertical can "make use of" – as von Balthasar puts it – some horizontal development. In the horizontal dimension of any society, not everything is moving vertically upwards; there is

1. The expression "les mystères de Jésus" comes from the seventeenth-century cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, who was anticipated by the Greek Fathers in this respect.

2. Cornelius ERNST, *The Theology of Grace*, Butler WI: Clergy Book Service, 1974, p. 70.

3. Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *A Theology of History*, San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 1994, pp. 135-136; his italics.

always an admixture of positive and negative, with sometimes overall growth and sometimes overall decline.

### Augustine of Hippo

As the western half of the Roman Empire was crumbling (at the beginning of the fifth century), St. Augustine (354-430) wrote a long treatise in which he proposed a distinction between a heavenly and an earthly city, namely the City of God and the City of Man, the first being eternal and the second being temporal. The first city rested on love for God and for fellow human beings, whereas the second rested on the principle of self-love.<sup>4</sup> The inauguration of the New Covenant by Jesus Christ was a worldly event that occurred in time, and yet with a definitive, irreversible and everlasting result, called the City of God. However, in the face of original sin Augustine's vision reduced human history to a succession of ups and downs bereft of any definitive progress. In that situation both unbelievers and believers had to endure the same vicissitudes during their time on earth.

Nevertheless Augustine has the merit of having *related* the two cities: "those two cities remain intermixed with each other until they are finally separated at the last judgment."<sup>5</sup> He observes that in the interim between Christ's resurrection and his return some sinners convert from their evil City to the City of God, whereas some of those who are only apparently Christian do not actually belong in the City of God.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he adds this description:

Two cities, one of impious and one of saints, have been forward from the beginning of humankind until the end of the world. They are now mingled together in body, but separate in will; on the day of judgment they will be separated also in body. All who take pleasure in pride and temporal domination, in the pomps and vanities of this world, and all minds who like such things and glory in subjecting others to themselves, all these are united in one city: even when they fight among themselves over such advantages, they are nonetheless borne down together in the same abyss by one and the same burden of cupidity, and bound together by common behaviour and deserts. On the other hand, all minds who piously seek the glory of God and not their own glory belong together in one society. However the merciful God is forbearing to the impious and offer them occasions of repentance and amendment.<sup>7</sup>

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4. See Saint AUGUSTINE, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, trans. William BABCOCK, Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 2013, book XIV, chaps. 4-9, and book XV, chap. 1.

5. AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, book I, chap. 35.

6. See AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, book XVIII, chap. 49.

7. AUGUSTINE, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, XIX, 31, which I have translated from the Latin of the critical edition that is given in Saint AUGUSTIN, *La première catéchèse*<sup>2</sup>, trans. Goulven MADEC, Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1991, p. 156.

Thus the believers' belonging in the City of God enables them to sanctify themselves in the City of Man, that is, in history, although history itself remains murky and cannot be salvaged. Here is how Augustine describes the concrete situation of the believers who are involved in the pursuit of justice:

An administration of temporal goods that is just, in accord with duty, and rather peaceful and tranquil for something of its nature, merits the reception of eternal goods, if it does not take possession of a man when he possesses it, does not entangle him when it increases, and does not completely absorb him when things become peaceful. [...] When, therefore, worries over temporal goods have been eased, let us seek stable and certain goods; let us soar above our earthly wealth.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly Augustine opined that a person who is detached from temporal goods does make a contribution to those goods themselves. Hence, being a sincere member of the City of God enhances the pursuit of justice in the City of Man.

Christopher Dawson helpfully summed up the relations between the two cities:

This divine order [of the City of God] is continually being deflected by the downward gravitation of human nature to its own selfish ends – a force which attempts to build its own world in those political structures that are the organized expression of human ambition and lust for power. This does not, however, mean that St. Augustine identifies the state as such with the *civitas terrena* and condemns it as essentially evil. On the contrary, he shows that its true end – the maintaining of temporal peace – is a good which is in agreement with the higher good of the City of God.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless Augustine did not envisage much hope for the City of Man. In a sermon he asserts:

There is some *one thing only* toward which we are making our way, as we cope with the multiple toils and troubles of this world, this age. We are still only making our way, though, as travelers, not yet residents; still on the road, not yet at home; still desiring it not yet enjoying it. All the same, let's go on making our way there, and making our way there without dawdling and without letting up, so that some time or other we may succeed in arriving.<sup>10</sup>

In a subsequent sermon he states:

What hope is urging us is this: to make light of the present and look to the future. [...] So there is nothing so inimical to hope as looking backward; which means placing one's hope in these things that are slipping by and passing away.<sup>11</sup>

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8. AUGUSTINE, Letter 15, in *Letters 1-99*, trans. Roland TESKE, Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 2001.

9. Christopher DAWSON, *The Dynamics of World History*, John J. MULLOY (ed.), London: Sheed and Ward, 1957, p. 240.

10. AUGUSTINE, Sermon 103, no. 1, in *Sermons III/4 (94A-147A) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund HILL, Brooklyn NY: New City Press, 1992; italics added.

11. AUGUSTINE, Sermon 105, no. 7; see the whole of this sermon.

In another sermon, he expresses this view in even stronger terms:

Why let yourself, while still mortal, be amused and distracted by mortal things, why put so much effort into holding on to this fleeting life, as if it were possible in any case? A far, far more brilliant hope has lit up the earth: the promise to earthlings of life in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

In sum Augustine is ambivalent with regard to the City of Men. He preached in these terms:

We love the world, but we should put the one who made the world before it. The world is great, but greater is the one who made the world. The world is beautiful, but more beautiful still the one who made the world. The world is alluring, but much more pleasing is the one who made the world. The world is bad, but the one who made the world is good.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, by separating the City of God and the City of Men, *medieval* Augustinianism promoted a dualism that established a dichotomy between a holy history and a secular history. In Modern times, this distorted Augustinian view of history had the upper hand among Christian thinkers – whose apologists, for example Bossuet in the seventeenth century, almost considered the Catholic Church as the City of God – an equivalence that Augustine would not have approved.<sup>14</sup> Thus Augustine's correlation between the two cities became Luther's dualistic outlook that split them up. Interestingly, unpersuaded by Luther's dualism between faith in God and earthly events, Calvin, under the influence of the Book of Deuteronomy, was less pessimistic than Luther regarding human affairs and had room for the individual success of the bourgeois, provided the bourgeois in question was honest in his dealings. For Calvin, such an honest success amounted to a sign of being predestined to heaven.

Moreover, in this Augustinian worldview, particularly in its modern form, what stands out is the antagonism of spiritualism versus secularism, supernaturalism versus naturalism, verticalism versus horizontalism, and an excessive exaltation of the Church at the expense of the political entities. Regrettably Augustine's distinction, later construed as an insuperable divide between the two cities, was almost unanimously adopted by the Christians, West and East, until it was superseded, at least in the West, by the Second Vatican Council's construal of the Church as the people of God involved in history.

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12. AUGUSTINE, Sermon 192, no. 1, in *Sermons III/6 (184-229Z) on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Edmund HILL, Brooklyn NY: New City Press, 1993.

13. AUGUSTINE, Sermon 96, no. 4.

14. In *Meaning in History* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949, p. 139), Karl Löwith states: "Bossuet is more of a churchman than Augustine is. His work is not so much a city of God as a history of the triumphant church."

To be fair, I must concede the fact that given the calamities that are recurrent in history, the Augustinian dualism expresses the desolate human experience more accurately than Thomas Aquinas's and the Second Vatican Council's less pessimistic interpretations do.<sup>15</sup>

### Bernard Lonergan

This section will introduce Lonergan's (1904-1984) view of human history according to the succession of those of his writings that appertain to that topic, with a few comments from Mark Miller, a Lonergan scholar.

Lonergan situates the unique role of Christ. Indeed, in an essay of 1935, titled "Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis," he has recourse to St. Paul and Irenaeus so as to contemplate Christ as the Head of his Mystical Body, who energetically "sums up all the beings" of the cosmos.<sup>16</sup>

Talking about "the human Christ, as head," Lonergan writes:

Christ made and makes actually happen in the members what, because of the exemplar, ought to happen in them. [...] Besides, Christ is the most historical of agents. For an agent is more or less historical depending upon the duration of his effect; but the effect intended by Christ perdures to the end of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Lonergan ascribes to Christ the foremost influence throughout history:

Although the emergence of a superior culture could be described as an axial period in history in the sense that there developed an idea of the good in a conscious and reflective way, nevertheless the coming of Christ remains the central event of human history and its principal axis, since it is through Christ our Lord and him alone that we not only will what is good and also do it.<sup>18</sup>

However, in an allusion to the good order that is necessitated in any society, Lonergan provides an instance of a religious preparation that made possible an historical advance:

All social or historical action presupposes a certain good of order already established. This is clearly evident in the case of Christ's action, which presupposes the lengthy preparation of the Jewish people, uses their expectations of a messiah, is

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15. Aquinas follows Augustine in integrating the cyclical and the linear, except that he insists more than his illustrious predecessor on the role of free human causes in the working of divine providence.

16. Bernard J.F. LONERGAN (henceforth LONERGAN), "Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, 9 (1991), pp. 139-172, especially section 6; see Frederick E. CROWE, *Christ and History: The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982*, Ottawa: Novalis, 2005, pp. 30-37.

17. LONERGAN, *The Redemption* [Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (henceforth CWBL), vol. 9], Robert M. DORAN, H. Daniel MONSOUR, and Jeremy D. WILKINS (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018, pp. 609 and 613. Part 1 of the Latin version of this track was published in 1964, and Part 2 in 1958. This quotation is from Part 2.

18. LONERGAN, *The Redemption*, p. 615.



directed towards the Jews, and is explained by both Christ himself and the early Christians in terms of the Jewish cultural heritage contained in the scriptures.<sup>19</sup>

Loneragan tells us that around 1937-38 he “became interested in a theological analysis of history” according to a model inspired by Newton’s three “approximations”:

In my rather theological analysis of human history, my first approximation was the assumption that men always do what is intelligent and reasonable, and its implication was an ever increasing progress. The second approximation was the radical inverse insight that men can be biased, and so unintelligent and unreasonable in their choices and decisions. The third approximation was the redemptive process resulting from God’s gift of his grace to individuals and from the manifestation of his love in Christ Jesus. The whole idea was presented in essay 20 of *Insight*.<sup>20</sup>

These three approximations are rephrased by Miller in a book on Lonergan that I found very helpful. That book focuses on Lonergan’s anthropology, which Miller situates within the theology of history.<sup>21</sup> He divides up his subject matter into Lonergan’s three fundamental situations concerning the human person as well as society. So Part One is titled “Progress: Nature as Good,” Part Two “Decline: Nature as Fallen,” and Part Three “Redemption: Nature Raised into Supernature.” He explains: “These three general categories account for human achievement, human failure, and divine assistance. They constitute Lonergan’s translation of the traditional categories of nature, sin, and grace into a broader, historical context that better accounts for changes over time.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Miller explicates:

Lonergan’s philosophy of history is comprised of three vectors or differentials: progress, decline, and redemption. Each differential is an abstraction of a particular aspect of the complex reality that is human history. Taken individually none of them provides an accurate account of human history in its entirety, because human history is never in a pure state of nature, a pure state of sin, or a pure state of grace. But taken together as a dynamic whole, progress, decline, and redemption provide a full and highly verifiable framework for understanding and explaining human history – in other words, for a theological anthropology that accounts for changes over time.<sup>23</sup>

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19. *Ibid.*

20. “Insight Revisited,” in LONERGAN, *A Second Collection* (CWBL, vol. 13), Robert M. DORAN and John D. DADOSKY (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016, pp. 228-229.

21. Mark T. MILLER, *The Quest for God & the Good Life: Lonergan’s Theological Anthropology*, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013. For a presentation of Miller’s book, see the review by Brian J. BRAMAN in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, New Series, 3 (2012), pp. 89-94. See as well the presentation by Louis ROY, in *Engaging the Thought of Bernard Lonergan*, Montreal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016, p. 15-16.

22. Mark T. MILLER, *The Quest for God & the Good Life*, p. xii.

23. Mark T. MILLER, *The Quest for God & the Good Life*, p. xiv; see p. 198.

The notion of emergent probability is crucial in Lonergan's view, both in the cosmic processes and in human life. Miller defines its kernel as "a recurrent scheme" and as "a series or a pattern of interdependent, regularly recurring things. Simply put, a recurrent scheme is a cycle. [...] What is important is that the events occur, that they are linked interdependently in a circular manner, and that they recur."<sup>24</sup> However, a general emergent probability can be increased by human agents and mostly by Christ, as Miller writes: "God works with us in Jesus Christ by transforming the evil effects of sin into a good that shifts the probabilities in human history toward the emergence of further goods."<sup>25</sup>

In a relatively short lecture titled "Healing and Creating in History" and given in 1975, Lonergan defines history, in very simple terms, as "human affairs" and he speaks of "a wheel of progress" and "a wheel of decline."<sup>26</sup> The former "moves forward through the successive transformations of an initial situation in which are gathered coherently and cumulatively all the insights that occurred along the way."<sup>27</sup> The latter wheel is conspicuous "when the flow of fresh insights dries up" and "when the process is distorted by bias."<sup>28</sup> He explains: "Increasingly the situation becomes, not the cumulative product of coherent and complementary insights, but the dump in which are heaped up the amorphous and incompatible products of all the biases of self-centered and shortsighted individuals and groups."<sup>29</sup>

About the availability and the use of understandings, Lonergan mentions "the intrinsic limitations of insight itself." He adds these words of caution: "A creative process is a learning process [...]. For insights can be implemented only if people have open minds. Problems can be manifest. Insights that solve them may be available. But the insights will not be grasped and implemented by biased minds."<sup>30</sup>

So, what can help people reduce the grip of their biased minds and acquire open minds? Lonergan's solution consists in divine grace, which generates three basic attitudes: faith, hope and charity. His book *Insight* contends that a part of the solution can be put in practice by citizens of good will who are at once critical of their culture and creative; such a practice is called "Cosmopolis."<sup>31</sup> The last chapter of *Insight* offers a full-fledged description of

24. Mark T. MILLER, *The Quest for God & the Good Life*, p. 16.

25. Mark T. MILLER, *The Quest for God & the Good Life*, p. 193; see p. 199.

26. LONERGAN, "Healing and Creating in History," in *A Third Collection* (CWBL, vol. 16), Robert M. DORAN and John D. DADOSKY (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 95 and 100.

27. LONERGAN, "Healing and Creating in History," p. 100.

28. LONERGAN, "Healing and Creating in History," pp. 99 and 100.

29. LONERGAN, "Healing and Creating in History," p. 100.

30. LONERGAN, "Healing and Creating in History," p. 99.

31. LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (CWBL, vol. 3), Frederick E. CROWE and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, chap. 7, § 8.6.

humankind's fundamental problem and a detailed sketch of what he calls "the heuristic structure of the solution."<sup>32</sup> I am simply mentioning this contribution of Lonergan's, without entering into the details, in order to continue focusing on the meaning of history.

In a later book, titled *Method in Theology*, he develops this solution which amounts to the primacy of a "transcendent value," whose effects are, as was stated in *Insight*, faith, hope, and charity:

Transcendent value links itself to all other values to transform, magnify, glorify them. [...]. Without faith, without the eye of love, the world is too evil for God to be good, for a good God to exist. But [...] he [God] calls them [human beings] to the higher authenticity that overcomes evil with good. So faith is linked with human progress, and it has to meet the challenge of human decline. [...] Faith places human efforts in a friendly universe; it reveals an ultimate significance in human achievement; it strengthens new undertaking with confidence. [...] Most of all, faith has the power of undoing decline. [...] It is not the promises of men but religious hope that can enable men to resist the vast pressures of social decay. [...] Human possessiveness and human pride have to be replaced by religious charity, by the charity of the suffering servant, by self-sacrificing love.<sup>33</sup>

In a lecture given in 1960, titled "The Philosophy of History," Lonergan focuses, first on historiography (the writing of history) – which I will not report here – and, second, on a methodology for a *philosophy* of history.<sup>34</sup> That methodology explains the concepts of human historicity, dialectic, and stages in the life of a civilization.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the methodology for a *theology* of history, Lonergan has only a brief and nonetheless important paragraph, in which he introduces "a basic group of operations," namely "experiencing, understanding, and judging." And he notes

that judging here [in theology] is of a different type, involving beliefs; that the understanding has a new type of inverse insight because of the mysteries; but that, just as there is a basic philosophic set of operations, so it can go on to a specialization into a basic set of theological operations; and then one proceeds as before to have a mutual illumination of philosophy, theology, and history, just as one has of philosophy and history.<sup>36</sup>

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32. LONERGAN, *Insight*, chap. 20.

33. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology* (CWBL, vol. 14), Robert M. DORAN and John D. DADOSKY (eds.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 112-114. In *Self-Actualization and the Radical Gospel*<sup>2</sup>, Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022, I propose a practical wisdom concerning the place of self-sacrificing love in Christian life.

34. LONERGAN, "The Philosophy of History," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964* (CWBL, vol. 6), Robert C. CROKEN, Fredrick E. CROWE, and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, pp. 54-79.

35. Some of those concepts, especially dialectic, decline, and renaissance, were introduced earlier by Lonergan, in 1937-38; see his text, "Analytic Concept of History," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, 11 (1993), pp. 5-35.

36. LONERGAN, "The Philosophy of History," p. 79.

This short paragraph presents a completely dynamic conception of the-ologizing, based on human operations, which allows for interactions between philosophy, theology, and history.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Theologies of history, especially those that are Jewish or Christian, envision the end of time not as abolishing human history, but as a fulfilment that is at once future and already present, namely the transformation of history. The history of the world is then construed from the perspective of a hope in what will come. In accordance with this prospect, the transcendent invests the immanent and propels it towards the future; thus the vertical (eschatological) dimension integrates the horizontal (secular) one. Such a conception turns out to be more complete than secularist conceptions, which are merely horizontal.

Spurred on by the Hebrew Scriptures' narratives, the thinkers I mentioned in this essay recognized the importance of the Jewish sense of a linear history, as they discarded the Greek representation of a cyclical history. Even today, Jews and Christians accept a messianic reading of history: the former maintain that the Messiah will come for the first time at this world's end, whereas the latter believe that the Messiah came 2000 years ago and will come again, for a second time, at this world's end. Both have a transcendent teleological view of human history, thanks to which a direction is recognized in history; however, for the Christians Jesus' resurrection indicates that the last age of the world has begun.

As a result, I proposed a Christian view of history that situates Christ in the line of St. Paul, Augustine and Lonergan. In that view, Christ is seen as the Head of a Mystical Body in which the whole of humankind and of creation is brought into a total unity. We can therefore say that the ultimate meaning of human history is found in Christ.

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### SUMMARY

This article presents views of universal history taken from the Bible and from two Christian authors. Those religious and theological interpretations of history are characterized by the concern to highlight a factor that is transcendent. This factor is seen as the overall meaning that underpins human existence in our world.

## SOMMAIRE

Cet article présente des conceptions de l'histoire universelle qui viennent de la Bible et de deux auteurs chrétiens. Ces interprétations religieuses et théologiques se caractérisent par un souci de mettre en lumière un facteur transcendant. Ce facteur apparaît comme le sens d'ensemble qui sous-tend l'expérience humaine dans notre monde.