Jacques Maritain *is perhaps the most distinguished philosopher in the Church today. Since his conversion (in 1906 under the influence of Léon Bloy), the 75-year-old leader of modern Thomism has won acclaim not only in Catholic circles (with professorships at the* INSTITUT CATHOLIQUE *in Paris and Toronto's Institute for Medieval Studies and unanimous election as first recipient of the Spellman-Aquinas medal), but at secular universities as well—he is currently professor emeritus at Princeton. Part of this century's revival in French Catholic letters, M. Maritain has 25 books to his credit in English. They include* ART AND SCHOLASTICISM, TRUE HUMANISM, MAN AND THE STATE, EXISTENCE AND THE EXISTENT, *and* PREFACE TO METAPHYSICS. *This month Scribner's will publish his most recent work,* ON A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY, *from which the following passages have been excerpted.*

Time linear, not cyclical. The devil's role in history. The inner structure of time. Movements upwards and downwards. The universal meaning of the parable of the wheat and the cockles. The good savage. The temporal mission of the Christian. The clash between atheist and Christian. The Christian end is beyond time. The Christian can never rest.

THE CHRISTIAN & HISTORY

by Jacques Maritain

CHRISTIANITY has taught us that history has a direction. History is not an eternal return; it does not move in circles. Time is linear, not cyclical. This truth was a crucial acquisition for human thought. We have a first great example of such a philosophy in Saint Augustine's *City of God*. Here we are given an interpretation of human history in the perspective of Christianity—an interpretation that opposed the oriental conceptions of the eternally recurrent phases of destruction and regeneration of the cosmos.

Saint Augustine's philosophy of history was a work of wisdom, both of theology and of philosophy, and more of theology. But in the mind of Saint Augustine both wisdoms, the philosophical and the theological, worked together. His *City of God* attempts to bring out the intelligible and, so to speak, trans-historical meaning of history, the intelligible meaning of the sequence or development of events in time.

It is in such a Christian perspective that I have, for a long time, brooded over my reflections on the philosophy of history. Let me, then, speak in this perspective. Saint Gregory wrote: "Men should know that the will of Satan is always unrighteous but that his power is never unjust," for "the iniquities he proposes to commit God allows in all justice." This saying goes a long way. It supplies an important principle of historical exegesis.

The devil hangs like a vampire on the side of history. History goes on, nonetheless, and goes on with the vampire. It is only in the kingdom of grace, in the divinely assisted life of the Church, that the devil has no place. He plays his part in the march of the world, and in a sense spurs it. Is he not eager for the better insofar as in his view the better, as a French saying puts it, "is the enemy of the good"? He does not scruple, on occasion, to court the better in order to destroy some good, not to improve it. And thus he happens to do in his particular way, which is a wrong way, and with perverse intention, what good people omit to do because they are asleep. . . .

The Christian knows that God has no opposite Absolute; there is no opposite prime principle. For the Christian there is indeed a struggle between light and darkness, between truth and error. But there cannot be for him in existing reality *pure* darkness or *pure* error, because all that is, in the measure in which it is, is of God, and is good. In the thought of the atheist or, if you will, of the "enemy of God," as Proudhon called himself, it is impossible that God be at the service of the enemy of God; whereas in the thought of the Christian the enemy of God is at the service of God. God has His adversaries, not in the metaphysical but in the moral order. Yet His adversaries are always, finally, at His own service. He is served by the martyrs, and He is served by the executioners who made the martyrs.

Vectorial versus cyclical views

EVERYTHING that happens in the history of the world serves in one way or another the progress of the kingdom of grace, and (sometimes at the price of a greater evil) some kind of progress is made in the world. Voltaire, while setting out to run down the Church and make fun of religious faith, was nevertheless in Christendom and in the history of Christendom as he was in the created universe and in the order of Providence. He served them in spite of himself. He fought for error in his campaign for tolerance, since he thought of "dogmatic" tolerance, as if freedom of thought were an absolute end without any law higher than subjective opinion; yet this campaign caused him at the same time to fight against another error, namely the modern error, which has found expression in the formula "*cujus regio ejus religio*," that the force of the State and social pressure have of their own nature a right to control conscience. In this respect, Voltaire was striving without knowing it for Article 1351 of the Code of Canon Law —"No one shall be compelled to embrace the Catholic faith against his will." He was instrumental in making modern societies recognize the principle of civil tolerance.

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THE SUBJECT MATTER of the philosophy of history is the unrolling of time, the very succession of time. Here we are confronted with the singularity of the

entire course of events. It is a story which is never repeated; it is unique.

Now I would merely observe that time, the time of human history, has an inner structure. Time is not simply a garbage can in which practical men would have to pick up more or less profitable opportunities. Time has a meaning and direction. Human history is made up of periods each of which is possessed of a particular intelligible structure, and therefore of basic particular requirements. These periods are what I have proposed calling the various historical climates or historical constellations in human history. They express given intelligible structures, both as concerns the social, political and juridicial dominant characteristics, and as concerns the moral and ideological dominant characteristics, in the temporal life of the human community.

With the question of the structure of time, which I just touched upon, the question of its irreversibility (or of its not cyclical, but "linear" or "vectorial" character) is closely connected. In this regard, I would like to call attention to some significant observations made by Mircea Eliade. In his book, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour,* he stresses the fact that the *acceptance* of time—and of history—far from being matter-of-course for man, is for him a difficult and dearly paid achievement. Man is naturally frightened by the irreversibility of his own duration and the very newness of unpredictable events. He refuses to face them. Hence the negation of time by archaic civilizations. They defended themselves against the dire reality of history either by constructing mythical archetypes, or by assuming a periodic abolishment and regeneration of time, and a periodic recurrence of the same historical cycles. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, acceptance of time and of history was a conquest of Christianity and modern times. But this very acceptance would be of a nature to drive man to despair if he could not decipher some transhistorical meaning in the awful advance of time into the night of the unknown, thronged with perpetually new perils.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY is no part of metaphysics, as Hegel believed. It pertains to moral philosophy, for it has to do with human actions considered in the evolution of mankind. And here we have either to accept or reject the data of Judeo-Christian revelation. If we accept them, we shall have to distinguish between two orders—the order of nature and the order of grace; and between two existential realms, distinct but not separate—the world, on the one hand, and the Kingdom of God, the Church, on the other. Hence, we shall have to distinguish between a theology of history and a philosophy of history.

The theology of history is centered on the mystery of the Church, while considering its relation to the world; whereas the philosophy of history is centered on the mystery of the world, while considering its relation to the Church, to the Kingdom of God in a state of pilgrimage.

Good and evil in history

BY WAY of elucidating this further, we might meditate on a famous parable in the Gospel. Of course, the Gospel is not concerned with the philosophy of history, but we do find in it the most illuminating statements for the philosopher of history —statements which we may use from our own philosophical point of view, in applying them to this particular matter, the philosophy of history. I am thinking of the parable in Chapter XIII of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew about the man who sowed good seed in his field, only to have his enemy come and oversow it with cockle.

This parable is a quite striking expression of the law we are now considering. It means that good is not divided from evil in human history—they grow together. Let us first consider its primordial, its religious meaning. Its proper object is the kingdom of grace; it refers to the ultimate end beyond the world. The evil works accumulated in time will burn in hell, and the good works will be gathered into the divine barn. But pending the end, sinners and saints will grow together. Thus, from the point of view of the history of the kingdom of grace, or of Christ's mystical body, it may be said that two imminent movements cross each other at each point of the evolution of mankind, and affect each of its momentary complexes. One of these movements draws upward (toward final salvation) everything in mankind that participates in the divine life of the kingdom of grace, or the Church (which is *in* the world, but not *of* the world), and follows the attraction of Christ, Head of the human race. The other movement draws downward (toward final doom) everything in mankind which belongs to the Prince of this world, head (as Saint Thomas says) of all evildoers. It is in undergoing these two external movements that human history advances in time. The Christian knows that, though constantly thwarted and constantly concealed, the work of the spirit is carried out in spite of everything, as history goes on, and that thus from fall to fall, but also from obscure gain to obscure gain, time marches toward the resurrection.

Degradation and revitalization

A PARTICULAR INSTANCE of this double movement is pointed out by Saint Thomas when he is considering the state of mankind during the

time between the original sin and the coming of Christ. Briefly, Saint Thomas says that with the development of time, sin began to make its impact felt more and more in the human race in such a way that the instinct of natural law became insufficient for man to act rightly, and it thus became necessary to have the precepts of written law. In this increase of the weight of sin we have the movement downward. But we have simultaneously the movement upward: there is the divine gift of the Decalogue; there are the sacraments of the Ancient Law; and there is the progressive increase in the knowledge of divine things; through the teaching of the prophets the elements of faith are disclosed bit by bit—until the full revelation achieved by Christ. This instance of the double movement concerns, of course, the kingdom of grace and the ultimate end beyond the world.

But what I would like to emphasize particularly now is that the parable of the wheat and the cockle has a universal meaning and bearing which is valid for the world as well as for the kingdom of grace. And we must say, from the philosophical point of view, that the movement of progression of societies in time depends on this law of the double movement —which might be called, in this instance, the law of the degradation, on the one hand, and the revitalization, on the other, of the energy of history, or of the mass of human activity on which the movement of history depends. While the wear and tear of time and the passivity of matter naturally dissipate and degrade the things of this world and the energy of history, the creative forces which are proper to the spirit and to liberty and which are their proof, and which normally have their point of application in the effort of the few, constantly revitalize the quality of this energy. Thus the life of human societies advances and progresses at the cost of many losses. It advances and progresses thanks to the vitalization or superelevation of the energy of history springing from the spirit and from human freedom. But, at the same time, this same energy of history is degraded and dissipated by reason of the passivity of matter. Moreover, what is spiritual is, to this very extent, above time and exempt from aging.

And, of course, in certain periods of history what prevails and is predominant is the movement of degradation; in other periods it is the movement of progress. My point is that both exist at the same time, *to one degree or another.*

We have here a notion of progress which is quite different both from the necessary, rectilinear and indefinite progress which the eighteenth century dreamed of, and in which future things were supposed always and by right better than past ones; and, on the other hand, from that negation of any progress and that disregard for the God-given élan at work in us which prevail among those who despair of man and of freedom.

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THE DEEPER our knowledge of anthropology becomes, the more, I think, shall we become aware of the fact that the most telling instance of the law I am discussing took place in the ages when mankind passed from its childhood to its adult state. No progress upward was more important than this coming of human thought and human societies to rational knowledge (as contradistinguished from mythical knowledge) and to political life (as contradistinguished from tribal life). Yet the simultaneous downward movement cannot be overlooked. The concept of the *good savage*, as cherished by the eighteenth century, was a silly notion of over-civilized people; there was no more *innocence*, absolutely speaking, in the primitive man than in the child each one of us was. The fact remains, nevertheless, that there was *a kind* of innocence in both. There were in the myths of primitive man an obscure grasping of essential truths—in his approach to things a power of imaginative intuitivity and a vital participation in nature—in his tribal life a real and probably heartening, though slavish, communion with the group, which have been lost in the process.

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SHALL WE LOOK for another instance? Let us think of a few striking features of modern history. On the one hand, we have, from the last decades of the eighteenth century on, an awareness of human rights and of the dignity of the human person, a longing for freedom and human fellowship, a recognition of the principle: of government of the people, for the people and by the people, a growing concern for civil liberties and for social justice, an assertion of man's power over nature which constitutes an exceptionally significant progress upward. But, on the other hand, we are confronted, during the same space of time, with the subjection of all citizens to military service, with more and more destructive wars, with the growth of mercantile materialism, then of nationalist passions, then of communism, of fascism, of racism, and, in those years which will always be alive in our memory, with the mass murder of six million Jews by Hitler; the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the enslaved conditions of life to which the industrial proletariat was then submitted; and our own times face the threat to human freedom raised by communist totalitarianism thriving in large regions of the earth.

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MAY I NOW ALLUDE to the problems of the temporal

mission of the Christian? From the genuine notion of progress, which I just emphasized, a practical consequence can be drawn with respect to the work of the Christian in the world. The work of the Christian in history does not aim to set the world up in a state from which all evil and injustice would have disappeared. If it did, then it would be only too easy, considering human history, to condemn the Christian as a utopian, or to say, as some Protestant theologians do, that, given the corruption of human nature, the very notion of a Christian (that is, Christian-inspired) civilization, and of an effort to make Christian justice and brotherhood prevail in the world, is a contradiction in terms. The work of the Christian is to maintain and augment in the world the internal tension and the movement of slow deliverance which are due to the invisible potencies of truth and justice and love, in action in the mass which goes counter to them. And this work cannot be in vain—it surely produces its fruit. We have no illusions about the misery of human nature. But we have no illusions, either, about the blindness of the pseudo-realists who cultivate and exalt evil in order to fight against evil, and who consider the Gospel a decorative myth which we could not take seriously without throwing the machinery of the world out of order.

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But what is the truth of the matter? In my opinion, it is that we must seek with all our power a genuine (imperfect as it may be) realization in this world of the requirements of the Gospel. The fact of so many millions of men starving and living in despair, in a life unworthy of man, is an insult to Christ and to brotherly love. As a result, the temporal mission of the Christian is to strive to eradicate such evils, and to build up a Christian-inspired social and political order, where justice and brotherhood are better and better served. Furthermore, there is a hierarchy of ends, and the Word of God comes first; it is imperative to transform terrestrial life according to the requirements of natural law and of the Gospel; nevertheless, the absolutely ultimate goal is not to transform terrestrial life, but to have souls enter eternal life and finally the vision of God; and the "horizontal" effort itself, directed to transforming the world, essentially needs, in the depths of human history, the "vertical" effort directed to expanding the realm of grace in souls; for both efforts are, in the long run, necessary to one another; but the most necessary is the vertical one. Thus, there will always be a clash between a Christian and an atheist with respect to the work to be achieved here on earth because in doing this work the atheist pursues his absolutely ultimate end, the Christian pursues his ultimate end in a certain order only (*finis ultimus secundum quid*), dependent as it is on an absolutely ultimate end which is supratemporal. The realization of the Gospel in temporal life that Christians must hope for and strive for will always be, in one way or another, deficient and thwarted; this world will never be fully reconciled with Christ within history. We will never have the Kingdom of God within temporal history. This is all the more reason why we should strive toward it. But we know that it will never come about before the end of history. There can be no rest for the Christian as long as justice and love do not hold sway over the lives of men. And since their requirements will never be completely fulfilled within history, the Christian will therefore never have rest within history—a fact that is perfectly proper to his condition.

Christian commitment in history

MY LAST REMARK has to do with the fact that in the Christian perspective—precisely because the Kingdom of God as fully accomplished will come *after* the end of history—the march of the world toward the Kingdom, and its progress toward its natural ends (together with the simultaneous progress toward evil) will unceasingly be in the making and unceasingly go on as long as history lasts. Here appears a basic difference between the Christian philosophy of history and the Hegelian, Marxian or Comtian philosophies of history. Be they dialectical or positivist, these philosophies of pure immanentist or atheist evolution are inevitably bound to a patent self-contradiction. On the one hand, they insist that Becoming is the only reality, and the process of change continues without end; and, on the other hand, they offer themselves as the definitive and final revelation, at the end of time, of the meaning of all history. The Christian philosophy of history is not liable to such inconsistencies. The end is beyond time, and never therefore can the movement of history come to a definitive and final state, or a definitive and final self-revelation, within time. Never can a Christian philosopher of history install himself, as Hegel, Marx and Comte did, at the end of time.

And never can Christians rest within time. As long as the world exists, the Christian must always search for new progress and new improvement, for more justice and brotherhood on earth, and for a deeper and more complete realization of the Gospel here below. For him there can never be enough. It is always imperative to *do more*. Just as Christians must unceasingly strive, each in his own individual life, for the eternal salvation of his soul and of the world, so they must, in the succession of centuries, unceasingly strive to foster and fulfill better and better, in this world, men's terrestrial hope in the Gospel.