

# THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN McNEILL'S "RISE OF THE WEST": AN OVERVIEW AND CRITIQUE<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE writing of universal history is an appallingly difficult task, and the ever-mounting tide of specialized monographs in the subject- and area-divisions of the historical field renders the generalist's life more difficult daily. Thus the publication of a global history by a reputable historian is an event of no mean importance; and when the work receives high acclaim from the author's own professional peers,<sup>2</sup> a veritable obligation is imposed upon the world of scholarship to examine it with the greatest of interest and care.

The present essay approaches *The Rise of the West* from the standpoint of Christian church history. No particular justification for such a treatment appears necessary, since few would deny that the church has loomed large in the general history of the West. If

<sup>1</sup> An invitational paper presented at the meeting of Evangelical Historians, held conjointly with the 79th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Washington, D.C., December 28, 1964. Professor McNeill was honoured guest.

<sup>2</sup> Reviews of *The Rise of the West* have in general been expansively commendatory. Toynbee has called it "the most lucid presentation of world history in narrative form that I know." L. S. Stavrianos of Northwestern University holds that McNeill "has demonstrated that world history is a viable and intellectually respectable field of study" (*American Historical Review*, LXIX [April, 1964], 715). British historian H. R. Trevor-Roper affirms that *The Rise of the West* is "not only the most learned and the most intelligent, it is also the most stimulating and fascinating book that has ever set out to recount and explain the whole history of mankind" (*The New York Times Book Review*, October 6, 1961, p.1). Carter Jefferson of Rutgers calls the book "a monumental work" (*Chicago Sunday*

Professor McNeill is right in his over-all contention that " 'Rise of the West' may serve as a shorthand description of the upshot of the human community to date",<sup>3</sup> it should be of more than passing interest to see what rôle the church plays in his account of the development of this human community.

In order to prevent the discussion from degenerating to the specialist-versus-generalist level—as illustrated by the numerous tiresome critiques of Toynbee which have often proved only the tautology that no one can know everything about everything<sup>4</sup>—we shall focus attention on two major and highly significant problem-areas: the origin of the church, and the subsequent development and influence of it. In the course of analyzing McNeill's approach in each of these spheres, a running critique will be offered; and having dealt in brief with particular issues, we shall attempt to isolate the general presuppositions that have influenced the total view of the church found in *The Rise of the West*. Some concluding remarks will then be in order concerning aprioristic options in the treatment of church history, and concerning the valuable lessons Christian historians can learn from McNeill's *magnum opus*.

#### I. PROFESSOR MCNEILL ON THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN<sup>5</sup>

Four pages in the 807-page text of *The Rise of the West* are devoted to the historic origin of the Christian religion in conjunction with the rise of the Greek culture (see *Tribune Magazine of Books*, September 8, 1963, p. 2). The most negative evaluation comes from M. I. Finley, a specialist in classical history, who argues that McNeill's treatment of Greek culture is badly wide of the mark (*New York Review of Books*, October 17, 1963, pp. 4-5); this is, however, a rather poor point of attack since McNeill's magisterial speciality was Greek historiography—and another reviewer, the historical generalist Carroll Quigley of Georgetown University, finds McNeill's treatment of "the rise of the Greeks brilliant"—the highpoint of his book! (*Saturday Review*, XLVI [August 24, 1963], 41-42).

<sup>3</sup> William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 807. Hereafter *The Rise of the West* will be designated in the notes as *RW*.

<sup>4</sup> The sheer bulk of this literature will be known to readers of *Historical Abstracts*, perusers of the bibliographies in philosophy of history published as Beihefte to the journal *History and Theory*, and to students of the final volume (titled *Reconsiderations*) of Toynbee's *History*.

<sup>5</sup> An apology is doubtless warranted at the outset for the negative tone which will characterize much of the critical material in this and the following sections—particularly since Professor McNeill and I are alumni of two of the same universities (Cornell and Chicago) and since during the years I served as a history department chairman in a university, I regularly and shamelessly cribbed lecture material from his admirable *History Handbook* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press Syllabus Division, 1958)! My only explanation (not excuse) is that the vital importance of the subject under discussion demands a bit of the traditional *rabies historicorum* (if not of the more terrible *rabies theologorum*).

tion with the life and work of Jesus and the apostolic community.<sup>6</sup> The most noticeable characteristic of this brief treatment is its contextual location: the beginnings of Christianity are subsumed under a more general rubric, "Religion", which covers the origins of the several major faiths that manifested the "high cultural tradition" of McNeill's "Eurasian Ecumene". Thus one finds parallel discussions of the rise of Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinduism; and ostensibly common elements among these three religions receive particular emphasis, while apparent differences are generally introduced as exceptions to the more obvious common characteristics. Thus, discussion of the "resemblances" between the religions precedes individual treatment of them; and in this background discussion, though mention is made of Christianity's theoretically uncompromising monotheism and "pervasive historicity of outlook" (in contrast to the Indian faiths), the thrust of the presentation is the argument that Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinduism "agreed in defining the goal of all human life as salvation", shaped an egalitarian ideal, and proclaimed "a savior God who was both a person and at the same time universal in his nature".

In *The Rise of the West*, therefore, the origin of Christianity is not discussed as a unique problem: it is regarded as one aspect of a more general religious phenomenon. And the casual source of such religious manifestations as Christianity is not primarily sought in the religious realm itself; rather, other features of the historical drama are relied upon to make Christian religious beginnings understandable:

Important resemblances between Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinduism may be attributed to borrowings back and forth among previously more or less independent and isolated religious traditions. But parallel invention should not be ruled out, for if the social and psychological circumstances of the submerged peoples and urban lower classes were in fact approximately similar in all parts of western Asia, we should expect to find close parallels among the religious movements which arose and flourished in such milieux.<sup>7</sup>

Here we see that, for McNeill, "social and psychological circumstances" in the Eurasian Ecumene constitute the essential explanatory backdrop for the religious movements, including Christianity, that originated there. Thus it becomes clear that the beginnings of Christianity are treated in *The Rise of the West* as a special case and illustration of the author's over-all thesis, well summed up by Stavrianos: "McNeill's approach is based on the propositions that

<sup>6</sup> *RW*, pp. 340-44.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

human history is more than the sum of the histories of separate civilizations, that there is a cohesion transcending peoples and continents, and that this cohesion arises from cultural diffusion."<sup>8</sup> Toynbee's syncretic approach to the "Higher Religions" has always stood in tension with his attempts to isolate the individual civilizations related to them; McNeill displays more consistency in maintaining an ecumenical attitude to religious origins on the basis of an ecumenical philosophy of world history.

Having opted for general social conditions in the Eurasian Ecumene as the basic interpretive factor in the rise of Christianity, McNeill is not greatly troubled by the specific difficulty facing the historian of Christian origins: how to explain, on the basis of the sources, the admittedly "enormous influence Jesus and a handful of humble Galilean country folk exercised upon subsequent human generations". Though "the birth of Christianity is one of the central dramas of human history", analyses of the phenomenon are limited by "the obscurities of early Christian history". For McNeill, "the really remarkable thing was that his [Jesus'] teachings survived his death"; the explanation must lie in the eschatological force of his message and in the subjective impact of the disciples' Pentecost experience, when they "suddenly felt the Holy Spirit descend upon them until they became absolutely convinced that their master who had just died on the cross was with them still". In the final analysis, the rise of the Christian church is to be understood in terms of the needs of the time: "Quite apart from any question of doctrinal truth or error, Christianity, Hinduism, and Mahayana Buddhism fitted men more successfully than ever before to the difficult task of living in a megalopolitan civilization."<sup>9</sup>

*Evaluation.* How does the foregoing account of Christian origins stand up under scrutiny? Not very well, in spite of its thought-provoking quality. McNeill runs into serious difficulty as a result of committing two methodological errors: he attempts to fit Christianity into a more general religious and cultural scheme instead of investigating the phenomenon on its own terms; and he neglects the primary documents concerning Christian origins in his interpretation of the beginnings of the Christian religion. Let us consider each of these problems.

There is obviously nothing wrong with the grouping of historical happenings under more general heads; indeed, the historian, as distinct from the chronicler, must employ generalizations in order

<sup>8</sup> *AHR*, LXIX, 713-14.

<sup>9</sup> *RW*, pp. 352-53.

to make sense out of the overwhelming mass of data for whose interpretation he is responsible. However, the historian must exercise the greatest of care in his categorizing; he must, to use Plato's expression, "cut at the joints". The only sure way to avoid forcing phenomena into procrustean beds is to subject them to full analysis on their own grounds before grouping them with other data. In the case of religious phenomena, this caution must particularly be observed, since superficial similarities often hide root differences. Indeed, the history of the field of "comparative religion" in the last fifty years is a living reminder of this point: late nineteenth-century attempts to view the higher religions of the world as little more than variations on the same theme have been discredited as violating the uniqueness of the individual faiths, and now students of the subject prefer to designate their field as "comparative religions" in order to illustrate the new inductive emphasis.

The general position of contemporary theological scholarship is that the differences between biblical religion and other world faiths far outweigh the similarities, and that one must therefore seek explanations for the Christian faith within the faith itself and not by appeal to general religious or cultural conditions.<sup>10</sup> R. E. Hume, translator of the Upanishads from the Sanscrit and former professor of the history of religions at Union Seminary, well expresses this approach when he sets forth the "radical dissimilarities" between Jesus' teachings and the great Indian religions: the personal God of the Bible, contrasted with Hinduism's Brahma—an impersonal, philosophical Absolute—and with Buddhism's original atheism; Jesus' high valuation of the physical world as God's creation and his high conception of the worth of the human personality, contrasted with Hinduism's view of the world as a temporary, worthless illusion (*maya*) and its promotion of caste, and with Buddhism's low regard for the material world and desire to end the tiresome round of reincarnations through absorption in *nirvana*; Christianity's understanding of evil as sin against a personal and loving heavenly Father, contrasted with Hinduism's *avidya* (philosophical ignorance) and violation of hereditary social conventions, and with Buddhism's attribution of evil to positive activity and desire; God's vicarious, freely given atonement for sin in the Christian faith, contrasted with the impersonal power of *karma* and the absolute necessity of self-salvation in the Indian

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the epochal monographs, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* by G. Ernest Wright, and *The New Testament Against Its Environment* by Floyd V. Filson (SOM Studies in Biblical Theology, Nos. 2 and 3).

religions; Christianity's physical resurrection of Christ in time and of all men at the end of the age, contrasted with the basic soul-body dualism of the Indian faiths; etc., etc.<sup>11</sup> Considerations such as these demand an evaluation of Christian origins in terms other than the general religious or social conditions of an Eurasian Ecumene.

To determine how Christianity originated, the historian must go to the primary sources dealing with the beginnings of the Christian religion: the documents comprising the New Testament, plus such collateral materials as are provided by first-century Roman and Jewish sources (Tacitus, Pliny, Josephus, *et al.*) and by the recently discovered Qumran materials. To some extent, McNeill does this—as all historians must in order to say anything significant about early Christianity. Thus he asserts that the account in Acts of the Pentecost event “still bears all the marks of authenticity”.<sup>12</sup> But his explanatory treatment of the rise of Christianity is not inductively derived from these documents, for the New Testament materials account for the success of Christianity after the death of its founder not on the basis of eschatological preaching or psychological assurances, but on the straightforward, objective fact of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>13</sup> The documents containing these claims were written by eyewitnesses or by men in contact with eyewitnesses, and the period between the recording of the resurrection appearances and the appearances themselves was so brief that theories

<sup>11</sup> Robert Ernest Hume, *The World's Living Religions: An Historical Sketch* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner, 1955), pp. 37-40, 81-82. The above contrasts represent only a few of the significant points discussed by Hume. It should perhaps be noted in passing that McNeill, like Toynbee, gives a somewhat skewed and overly “Christian” picture of Buddhism by focusing attention on its Mahayana variety, with little stress upon the Hinayana type; but the more radical differences between Christianity and Buddhism do in fact apply to Mahayana in any case.

<sup>12</sup> *RW*, p. 341. Cf. McNeill's *Past and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Phoenix Books, 1964), p. 35: “The sailor's life had its share of terrors for the peoples who lived around the Mediterranean in ancient times, as Paul's journeyings remind us.” Hereafter this edition of *Past and Future* will be cited as *PF*.

<sup>13</sup> See I Cor. 15, where Paul, as early as A.D. 56, names specific witnesses who had seen the risen Jesus, and gives the total number at over 500 people, most still alive. As C. H. Dodd has shown in his *Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, the resurrection forms the keynote in the sermons of the early church as given in the book of Acts; and F. F. Bruce has emphasized, in his *Apostolic Defence of the Gospel*, that the New Testament church rested its case for the truth of its message primarily on the historicity of Jesus' conquest of death.

of communal redaction by the church hold little credibility.<sup>14</sup> Passages such as the following ring true only on the assumption that, in spite of disappointed hopes of an immediate eschaton and in spite of psychological disbelief and discouragement, Jesus' disciples were transformed by the sheer weight of empirical evidence for their Lord's resurrection:

As they [the disciples] were talking, . . . there he was, standing among them. Startled and terrified, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, "Why are you so perturbed? Why do questionings arise in your minds? Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; no ghost has flesh and bones as you can see that I have." They were still unconvinced, still wondering, for it seemed too good to be true. So he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They offered him a piece of fish they had cooked, which he took and ate before their eyes.<sup>15</sup>

The eschatological-psychological explanation of Christianity's amazing growth following the death of Jesus really does little more than beg the question; for what would have motivated the disciples, in the face of their overwhelming discouragement, to create imaginary—yet closely detailed—resurrection accounts such as the one just quoted? When in A.D. 44 the pseudo-messiah Theudas failed to divide the Jordan river, his movement died; and the same occurred when another messianic pretender in A.D. 52-54 attempted

<sup>14</sup> The foremost biblical archeologist of our day, William Foxwell Albright, has recently argued that "every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about 50 and 75 A.D.," (quoted in an interview for *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1963). A movement away from the debilitating *Formgeschichtliche Methode* of Dibelius and Bultmann is now evident in many quarters. As A. H. McNeile and C. S. C. Williams have pointed out in their standard *Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), even students of the English ballad have rejected redaction theories because of the lack of sufficient time periods for oral development—and "no Gospel section passed through such a long period of oral tradition as did any genuine ballad" (p. 58). Homeric scholarship long ago discovered the futility of subjective-literary redaction theories (see H. J. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Literature from Homer to the Age of Lucian* [London: Methuen, 1934], pp. 42-43). Though many New Testament specialists still ring the changes on redactionism, the present "post-Bultmannian" alteration in the European theological climate is an encouraging sign that theologians are beginning to reject approaches that have proved unworkable in other fields of scholarship.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 24: 36-43 (written, note well, by the same author as produced Acts, which McNeill, together with virtually all classical historians, regards as an authoritative source). Cf. also John 20: 25-28. For those troubled by the advancement of "miracle" claims in conjunction with an historical argument, we ask temporary indulgence: several words will be said on the subject toward the close of the paper.

to shout down the walls of Jerusalem;<sup>16</sup> if Jesus had failed to rise from the dead as he promised, is there any real likelihood that his message would have become the basis of a church that eventually conquered the Roman world? Moreover, had the resurrection been a myth and not a fact, would Jesus' followers have been so foolish as to proclaim its facticity as a matter of common knowledge—in the very Jewish communities that desperately wished to stamp out the Christian heresy?<sup>17</sup>

It would appear that Professor McNeill, with his usual perspicacity, has, in another connection, revealed the very difficulty that plagues his account of Christian origins:

The Reformation without Luther, the Jesuits without Loyola, or modern science without Galileo are really unthinkable. It is a defect of historical essays such as this that the unique individual career and the strategic moment of personal thought or action can easily be obliterated by the weight of inexact generalizations.<sup>18</sup>

Had McNeill concentrated more fully on the primary sources for Jesus' life and on the "strategic moment of action" in that life—the resurrection that displayed his Deity—his interpretation of the origin of Christ's church would have been eminently more successful. For any explanation of the origin of the church that tends to short-circuit its founder through generalizations about the social and religious needs of the time or about the psychological state of early Christians, is doomed to failure.<sup>19</sup>

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH

An unsatisfying account of the church's origin does not lead per

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, II, 13, 4. 259; *Antiquities*, XX, 8, 6. 170.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Acts 2: 22 where the apostles not only say, "We are witnesses of these things", but also, "As you yourselves also know". This point has been strongly emphasized by F. F. Bruce of the University of Manchester, one of the leading contemporary experts on the Dead Sea scrolls; see especially his *New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

<sup>18</sup> *RW*, p. 599 (concluding the section on "The Transmutation of Europe, A.D. 1500-1650").

<sup>19</sup> I have gone into considerably more detail on the crux issues discussed in the preceding section in a series of lectures delivered at the University of British Columbia on January 29 and 30, 1963; these are currently appearing under the title "History and Christianity" in *His Magazine*, the first two articles of the series having been published in the December, 1964, and January, 1965, issues. See also my book, *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards, 1963), *passim*. In the course of my discussion of the historical credibility of Jesus' claims, I there argue, *contra* the (now generally passé) Schweitzer thesis upon which McNeill so obviously depends, that "Jesus never claimed that His death would mean the immediate end of the world; He claimed that He would immediately send the Holy Spirit after His ascension, and that His *second* advent would ultimately terminate human history" (pp. 158-59).



se to an unsatisfactory description of its subsequent history and influence. Indeed, only a particularly dull-witted church historian could miss the lucid and illuminating discussions of particular problems of ecclesiastical history interspersed throughout *The Rise of the West*. Worthy of particular note, as marvels of condensed precision in historical writing, are the author's treatments of the ecclesiology of the Patristic era; of the church in the great cultural synthesis of the High Middle Ages; and, especially, of the character and development of the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>20</sup> These sections and others like them in *The Rise of the West* show how fully McNeill benefited from the writing of his *History Handbook*: the merits of a superlative textbook are transferred to a superlatively important interpretation of world history.

And yet, as the church historian moves through McNeill's fascinating narrative, a sense of disquiet grows upon him. "Suppose", he asks himself, "the material dealing strictly with the history of the church were isolated from the total narrative and put together; would a balanced summary of church history result?" The answer to this question is certainly No, particularly if one considers the last third of *The Rise of the West*, covering the period 1500 to date. McNeill's discussion of the Renaissance-Reformation<sup>21</sup> is a barometer of what is to follow: contrary to usual practice, he deals first with the Reformation and then with the High Renaissance, so as to make the latter a connecting link with the secularistic, scientific *Weltanschauung* of eighteenth-century rationalism. The tacit implication of such an arrangement of material is that the Reformation—whose "theological passions" the author finds "easier to understand than to share"—deserves to be aligned with a thought world that largely passed away when the Renaissance heralded a new, anthropocentric perspective. This impression is fully supported by the spotty coverage of church history from this point on in *The Rise of the West*. Neither the Wesleys nor Whitefield are mentioned by name at all, and a passing, single-sentence reference to Methodism<sup>22</sup> is the only indication the reader receives of the tremendously influential eighteenth-century "awakenings", both in Europe and America, that established a permanent pattern of eleemosynary work and revivalistic faith in modern times.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Respectively, *RW*, pp. 405-412; 547-58; 519-24, 606-608.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 589-98.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 685.

<sup>23</sup> For an authoritative, book-length treatment of this vital subject, see A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze: Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the Eighteenth Century* ("The Advancement of Christianity Through the Centuries", VI; London: Paternoster Press, 1960).

Indeed, American church history is for all practical purposes totally disregarded, in spite of the indisputable contributions of such scholars in the field as William Warren Sweet; though it seems almost unbelievable, Roger Williams, Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight, Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, and Billy Graham—to name only a few persons who have had a powerful impact on American religious life—are omitted entirely from McNeill's history. What is even more amazing is the general neglect of nineteenth-century, world-wide Christian missionary expansion; McNeill's half-dozen occasional references to missions in conjunction with other topics<sup>24</sup> stand in stark contrast with Kenneth Scott Latourette's monumental seven-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, in which three full volumes are devoted to the nineteenth century as "The Great Century" of Christian expansion!<sup>25</sup>

When we move to the question of the church's influence through the centuries, *The Rise of the West* provides an even less adequate guide. True, tantalizingly brilliant suggestions appear from time to time (generally in footnotes), such as the democratizing effect of Christianity in the Roman Empire,<sup>26</sup> and Christianity's contribution to the process of social differentiation within Frankish society.<sup>27</sup> But vast areas of church influence, particularly in modern times, are completely passed over: the positive impact of the Reformation on education, science, and letters;<sup>28</sup> the religious

<sup>24</sup> It is indicative that David Livingstone receives no mention in *The Rise of the West*—though McNeill does refer to him once, *en passant*, in *Past and Future* (p. 58).

<sup>25</sup> Only one citation to Latourette's great *History* appears in *The Rise of the West*, and this is to Vol. I, which deals only with the first five centuries of the Christian era (*RW*, p. 344, n. 80). McNeill cites Latourette's *History of Christian Missions in China* three times.

<sup>26</sup> *RW*, p. 405, n. 81.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 445, n. 39: "Christian doctrine both exalted the powers and sacrosanctity of the king and, by virtue of the very principle of hierarchical ecclesiastical organization, introduced a new, non-tribal, and authoritarian concept of social organization into the backwoods."

<sup>28</sup> See Émile Léonard's *Histoire générale du Protestantisme*, of which two volumes have already appeared (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961—). See also my articles, "Luther and Libraries", *The Library Quarterly* [University of Chicago], XXXII (April, 1962), 133-47; and "Cross, Constellation, and Crucible: Lutheran Astrology and Alchemy in the Age of the Reformation", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 4th ser., I (1963), 251-70 (also published in the British journal *Ambix*, June, 1963, and shortly to appear in French in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*). Both of these articles contain numerous references to primary and secondary source material on the subjects treated.

motivations for the age of discovery and exploration;<sup>29</sup> the synthesizing effect of Protestant theology on seventeenth-century life and thought;<sup>30</sup> the influence of the church on the development of modern hospitals and social service; etc., etc. Writes Latourette of Christianity:

It was the main impulse in the formulation of international law. But for it the League of Nations and the United Nations would not have been. By its name and symbol the most extensive organization ever created for the relief of the suffering caused by war, the Red Cross, bears witness to its Christian origin. The list might go on indefinitely.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the list does not appear—much less go on indefinitely—in *The Rise of the West*.

For McNeill, the West does not of course "rise" without the impact of the Christian church, but this impact is understood strictly in terms of McNeill's dialectic contention that "unusual instability, arising out of a violent oscillation from one extreme to another, may in fact be the most distinctive and fateful characteristic of the European style of civilization".<sup>32</sup> The Christian church is thus regarded as but one of the relativistic elements contributing to characteristic western "oscillation": the church produced the "transcendental, mystical" tone of the fifth and sixth centuries, temporarily replacing classical "naturalism and rationalism";<sup>33</sup> the Christian heritage, in combination with the Greek-Roman, created "polar antitheses" in the very heart of European civilization—and "the prolonged and restless growth of the West, repeatedly rejecting its own potentially 'classical' formulations, may have been related to the contrarities built so deeply into its struc-

<sup>29</sup> Columbus's letter of March 14, 1493, to Ferdinand and Isabella, in which he states that he made efforts to conciliate the natives "that they might be led to become Christians" is symbolic of much of subsequent exploratory and colonization activity. William Warren Sweet, the late dean of American church historians, has made this point well in his *Religion in Colonial America* (1942) where he analyzes *in extenso* the colonization motives expressed in Richard Hakluyt's "Discourse on Western Planting". Though McNeill refers once to the "Prester John" legend (*RW*, p. 613), he apparently does not recognize in it the outworking of Christian paradise-longings in relation to exploration and colonization (cf. Elaine Sanceau, *The Land of Prester John* [New York: Knopf, 1944]).

<sup>30</sup> See the Editorial Introduction to my *Chytraeus on Sacrifice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962); my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 52-54; and my as yet unpublished Strasbourg dissertation for the degree of Docteur de l'Université, mention Théologie Protestante (1964).

<sup>31</sup> K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 1474.

<sup>32</sup> *RW*, p. 412.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 410-12.

ture";<sup>34</sup> the Reformation, interacting and colliding with the Renaissance, "by heightening the tensions between the incompatible inseparables at the core of European culture—the Hellenic pagan and the Judaeo-Christian heritages—increased the variety, multiplied the potentialities, and raised the intellectual and moral energies of Europe to a new height".<sup>35</sup> For McNeill, as the preceding section of this critique has made clear, Christianity did not arise because of its revelatory truth; therefore it is perhaps only natural that from his relativistic viewpoint the influence of the church should be largely restricted to its part in the Hegelian-like dialectic antiphony that sounds throughout *The Rise of the West*.

The problem cuts even deeper than this, however. In general, for McNeill, the church does not so much influence the "rise of the West" as the pattern of western history influences it. Just as the origin of Christianity was subsumed under, and largely explained by, more general factors (the religious needs of the Eurasian Ecumene), so the development and influence of the Christian church is continually viewed from within the essentially non-religious structure of the author's thesis.

This can be seen with particular clarity in McNeill's *Past and Future*, which has correctly been termed "a kind of trial run for *The Rise of the West*",<sup>36</sup> and of which the author himself says in his 1964 Preface (written after the publication of *The Rise of the West*): "It remains a fact that if I were writing the chapter on the past over again today, I would wish to alter a few turns of phrase, but nothing fundamental."<sup>37</sup> In *Past and Future*, as in *The Rise of the West*, the over-all periodization is determined by "the methods and geographical channels of contact between alien peoples and civilizations";<sup>38</sup> thus the "pedestrian epoch" (to about 2000 B.C.) is succeeded by the "equestrian period", which continues until the substitution of an "ocean centered ecumene" for the "land centered ecumene" with development of ocean-going ships (ca. A.D. 1500), and the latter era has, in very recent times (about 1850), been itself replaced by the age of mechanical transport over land

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 539.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 588-89. McNeill's general evaluation of the Protestant Reformation reminds one somewhat of the views of Bertrand Russell (*A History of Western Philosophy*) and Will Durant (*The Reformation*), who somewhat gleefully picture the Protestants and the Catholics of the time knocking each other senseless, thereby clearing the field for the rise of the secularistic, scientific world-view in the late seventeenth century!

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Walters, Jr., in *The New York Times Book Review*, October 6, 1963, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> *PF*, p. viii.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and sea, and by a "polar centered ecumene" since the advent of practically efficient jet aircraft (ca. 1950).<sup>39</sup>

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a critique of this typology here, and we are even willing to concede the illumination that such an essentially economic thesis produces by focusing attention on the importance of potato growing and the moldboard plow<sup>40</sup>—Professor McNeill's Cornell Ph. D. thesis, not so incidentally, dealt with "The Influence of the Potato on Irish History"! But has not something serious gone wrong when the development of his argument in *Past and Future* permits a complete disregard of the B.C.-A.D. time division, and no mention either of the birth of Christ or of the Protestant Reformation? Evidently, a geographical-economic point-of-view has gotten out of hand, and has come to engulf historical interpretation to a degree inimical to the entire fabric of historical fact. Such a pre-occupation with the economic phase of life results continually in that grave sin of "reductionism"—the explanation of one thing by another so as to remove inherent significance from areas of life that have causal value in themselves. Thus Christianity is cited for its contribution to the European bellicosity (!) that produced, in McNeill's view, a "tough-fibered society";<sup>41</sup> for its supposedly pessimistic attitude to the things of this world;<sup>42</sup> and for its allegedly scapegoat philosophy that encourages "lines of social demarcation".<sup>43</sup> Reductionistic passages such as the following are by no means uncommon—and they are most definitely not balanced by religious explanations elsewhere:

Habits of activity were inculcated by the weather itself. For most of the year, to be up and doing was the only way to keep warm. No Indian holy man could long contemplate infinity while shivering in Europe's winter; and, when the medieval monks imported Middle Eastern asceticism into Europe, it underwent a characteristic adaptation to the climate.<sup>44</sup>

My good friend Professor Donald Masters, F.R.S.C., has argued that the Christian historian is preserved from such reductionisms, for "regarding God as the great initiating force" in all of history,

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the pictogram in *RW*, pp. 766-67.

<sup>40</sup> *PF*, pp. 33, 37. The moldboard plow is heavily emphasized in McNeill's *History Handbook*.

<sup>41</sup> *PF*, pp. 29-30. McNeill possibly commits a "Freudian error" when, in the course of this discussion he states that "European peasants have often turned their plowshares into swords"—exactly reversing the biblical motif!

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109ff., 186ff.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

"he believes that God acts through the physical universe, but that He also communicates directly with the minds of men".<sup>45</sup> Dr. McNeill's relativism would seem to have left him at the mercy of a chaotic human history which must be ordered at all cost, even by the radical subordinating of vital religious factors to geographical-economic considerations.<sup>46</sup>

### III. APRIORI IN THE TREATMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY

How is it possible that a Latourette and a McNeill can differ so radically in their inclusion and exclusion of facts and in the interpretations they attach to the data of church history? The answer is quite obviously that they come to their subject matter with very different philosophies of history, that is to say, with very different philosophies of life; for, as the French existentialistic historian Raymond Aron has well put it: "The meaning of 'total' history is the meaning which we attach to human existence and to the succession of forms that it takes through time."<sup>47</sup>

What meaning does Professor McNeill "attach to human existence"? By what aprioris does he interpret the human drama? A quarter of a century ago, in writing his magisterial thesis on the presuppositional element in Herodotus and Thucydides, McNeill wisely observed:

The issue is not, I think, between a historian with preconceptions and one without, but between a man whose preconceptions are conscious and have been examined and the man whose preconceptions are unconscious.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Donald C. Masters, *The Christian Idea of History*, intro. by John Warwick Montgomery (Waterloo, Ontario: Waterloo Lutheran University, 1962), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Particularly indicative of the reductionistic element in McNeill's work is the criticism delivered by Carroll Quigley against the last third of *The Rise of the West*. Quigley, whose social-science-orientated *Evolution of Civilizations* I have analyzed in my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 86-88, wishes that McNeill had extended to the Old Regime his (McNeill's) argument that weapon development and defence needs among the Greeks largely conditioned their social and intellectual life ("The Greek miracle"). (See *Saturday Review*, August 24, 1963, pp. 41-42.) Here Quigley, whose analogy between "quartz crystals" and human societies in his *Evolution of Civilizations* reduces the human drama to a sociological case-study, recognizes a certain (though incompletely developed) affinity in McNeill's reductionistic tendencies.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Aron, "Evidence and Inference in History", in Daniel Lerner (ed.), *Evidence and Inference; the Hayden Colloquium on Scientific Concept and Method* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> W. H. McNeill, "Herodotus and Thucydides: A Consideration of the Structure of their Histories" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1939), p. 98.

McNeill's own aprioris are very definitely conscious and examined, though they are not always explicitly set down in his books.<sup>49</sup> In general, it is easy to see that he favours the rational approach to life over contemporary irrationalisms, and a "heroic optimism" concerning the fate of Western man, even though a nuclear holocaust is a live possibility in our time.<sup>50</sup>

But what is not so directly evident—though the present essay doubtless helps to make it so—is that McNeill's axiology is a thoroughgoing secular one. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the single passage in *Past and Future* where the phrase "in the fullness of time" appears:

It is an interesting coincidence, perhaps a significant one, that just as the nomadic irruption into the partial cultural vacuum of Europe at the beginning of the equestrian epoch created *in the fullness of time* the dominant world center in the epoch of ocean shipping, so the irruption of Europeans into the partial cultural vacuums of North America and of central and northern Asia during the epoch of ocean shipping has led to the establishment of the two great political states—the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—which currently exhibit the most successful adaptation to the fourth of our epochs: the epoch of mechanical transport.<sup>51</sup>

The contrast with the original context of this allusion could hardly be greater, for St. Paul uses it in setting forth the heart of the Christian philosophy of history:

When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.<sup>52</sup>

When we recall that the birth of Christ is not so much as mentioned in *Past and Future*, and note that the "fullness of time" passage in that volume sets out a brief summary of McNeill's general historical thesis, we are brought to the conclusion that our author is offering an alternative historical philosophy to that proclaimed by the Christian faith: a secular, rather than a transcendent-religious, view of man's past.

This conclusion is supported further by a poignant footnote in *The Rise of the West*, where we are reminded that everyone born

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Trevor-Roper on *The Rise of the West*: "A critic might wish that he had, at one point, detached his general conclusions from this crowded but lucid narrative" (*New York Times Book Review*, October 6, 1963, p. 30).

<sup>50</sup> See the concluding sections both of *Past and Future* and of *The Rise of the West*.

<sup>51</sup> *PF*, p. 52 (italics ours).

<sup>52</sup> Galatians 4: 4-5. It is perhaps worth pedantic mention that the phrase τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου can signify only a built-in historical purpose.

into the Christian religion "rejects only regretfully the comfort [the religious] explanation of man's place in the universe affords".<sup>53</sup> And in a recent Chicago television discussion on "The Historical Jesus", Professor McNeill, in answer to a question by Norman Ross concerning his religious viewpoint, stated that he is agnostic in relation to all religious traditions—that he feels no pressure to change his position in this regard—but (consistent with his relativism, note well!) that he does not necessarily recommend his approach to others.<sup>54</sup>

The essential question is, however, precisely whether one approach to historical interpretation should be recommended over another. Are we to assume, as existentialist historian Raymond Aron does, that one can never rise beyond "the plurality of systems of interpretation",<sup>55</sup> or with theologian David Granskou, who in the television discussion with McNeill lamely asserted that the same facts leading McNeill to agnosticism formed the background for his faith?

The answer to such relativism (which, it is worthwhile pointing out, is uncomfortably close to philosophical solipsism) has been given, in another connection, earlier in this paper. It is the resurrection of Christ. Not without reason does Latourette conclude his seven-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity* with the affirmation: "The Christian holds the resurrection of Jesus to be fact."<sup>56</sup> The facticity of that historical event on which all of Jesus' claims depended can be demonstrated by the same canons of historical method to which other, non-religious events are subject; and the result, as J. V. Langmead Casserley stated in his 1951 Maurice Lectures at King's College, London, is "like a knife pointed at the throat" of a-christian philosophies of life.<sup>57</sup>

If it is objected, as McNeill himself would object, that to consider seriously the historical evidence for the resurrection is to admit the possibility of the miraculous,<sup>58</sup> the answer—strange to

<sup>53</sup> *RW*, p. 338, n. 76.

<sup>54</sup> "Off the Cuff", 12.35 p.m., December 20, 1964, Channel 7, Chicago.

<sup>55</sup> See his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (2. ed.; Paris: Gallimard, 1948); and cf. my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 94-95, where his viewpoint is discussed in some detail.

<sup>56</sup> Vol. VII (2nd ed.; New York: Harper, 1945), p. 505.

<sup>57</sup> Langmead Casserley, *The Retreat from Christianity in the Modern World* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), p. 82.

<sup>58</sup> In the TV conversation mentioned earlier, Dr. McNeill stated that, not as a historian but simply as a twentieth-century man, he could not accept the miraculous; he admitted, however, that for him this was no more than a tenet of faith, accepted in light of the modern scientific world-view.



say—comes from *The Rise of the West* itself, where the author correctly emphasizes that the Newtonian "world machine" and "the elegant clarity of nineteenth-century physics" based upon it has been "dissolved" by the Einsteinian revolution.<sup>59</sup> As the late Cambridge professor C. S. Lewis has well argued in his classic refutation of Hume, the universe since Einstein has opened up to the possibility of *any* event;<sup>60</sup> the question is no longer what *can* happen, but what *has* happened. And an unprejudiced confrontation with the primary sources for Jesus' resurrection will lead to the conclusion so well expressed by Erlangen historian Ethelbert Stauffer:

What do we do [as historians] when we experience surprises which run counter to all our expectations, perhaps all our convictions and even our period's whole understanding of truth? We say as one great historian used to say in such instances: "It is surely possible." And why not? For the critical historian nothing is impossible.<sup>61</sup>

Such an attitude is in every sense the mark of a truly modern historian; and, leading as it does to the resurrected Christ, it provides an avenue beyond historical relativism to a conception of man's past which is characterized by true "fullness of time".

#### IV. RECIPROCAL VALUES

If the Christian world-view is in fact true, then its perspective on history should constitute no mean asset in evaluating *The Rise of the West*. At the same time, Professor McNeill's impressive contribution to the literature of universal history cannot help but provide the Christian church historian with insights into his own task and responsibilities. We shall now, in conclusion, say a few words on both aspects of this historical equivalent of a chemical "reversible reaction".

The Christian philosophy of history can do at least four exceedingly important things for McNeill's presentation of the history of mankind. First, as suggested previously, it can serve as a corrective to the geographical-economic reductionism—the creeping materialistic determinism—that not infrequently rears its head (in spite of the best humanistic intentions!) in McNeill's work.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *RW*, pp. 684, 756-58.

<sup>60</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> A nightmarish example of this tendency appears at the close of McNeill's 1964 Preface to his *Past and Future*: "Computers already exist that are capable of maintaining an indefinite number of bits of information about every living human being. Appropriate information fed into such a monstrous machine might in time create such an intimate and precise interaction among whole populations and individual persons as to reduce

Secondly, as we have also stressed by implication in the previous sections of this paper, the Christian *Weltanschauung*, focusing as it does upon God's redemptive act in Christ and the proclamation of that act through the church, protects the historian from neglecting the vital facts of church history and from overlooking their impact upon the general history of the world.

Thirdly, in line with the point just made, the Christian perspective can offer a central insight of tremendous value to McNeill's basic theme of "the rise of the West". Why, McNeill must ask, has the West displayed such long-term dynamism? His answer, as we have noted, is the "drastic instability" of the West—the "ferment incompatibles" operative in western history. Yet such a causal motif, like Toynbee's "challenge-and-response" theory, is more a formal principle than a concrete explanation.<sup>63</sup> Does not the answer really lie in the "progress" idea which the linear, goal-orientated Christian view of history injected into the West, and which has constituted the underlying element in the western approach to life from that day to this?<sup>64</sup> McNeill is aware of the distinction between the cyclical, non-progressive, a-historical orientation of the non-Christian world and the Christian focus on Creation, Incarnation, and Last Judgment which "gave meaning and hope to ordi-

(or raise) us all to the level of the separate cells of some loosely organized creature like the Portuguese man-of-war, whose constituent parts are controlled and co-ordinated by chemical and electrical interrelations among the clustered cells that constitute the whole. We seem, in short, to be galloping toward the creation of the Leviathan of which political philosophers once dreamed—a Leviathan in which each man will have his place and proper function, calculated and assigned to him on the basis of most careful and precise statistical studies, sustained by data-storage and retrieval systems whose refinements we can only begin to imagine today. The technical means for such an evolution of humanity certainly appear to stand within our grasp" (*PF*, pp. x-xi). No one is more quickly reminded of a *particular* Leviathan—namely Hobbes's—than the Christian who reads this passage!

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Gerhard Masur on Toynbee: "Toynbee still believes that the idea of 'challenge and response' constitutes a magical key to the why and how of human creativity. But is it not, after all, little more than a formal principle, like Hegel's dialectic, which cannot provide us with a canon of interpretation?" (Review of *A Study of History*, Vol. XII, in *AHR*, LXVII [October, 1961], 79).

<sup>64</sup> Canadian philosopher George P. Grant writes: "What must be insisted is that the very spirit of progress takes its form and depends for its origin on the Judaeo-Christian idea of history" (*Philosophy in the Mass Age* [Vancouver: Copp Clark, 1959], p. 49). Cf. John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), *passim*.

nary terrestrial human life".<sup>65</sup> But he does not see the tremendous significance of this fact for his thesis. For if, as I have argued elsewhere, western "conceptions of historical progress—whether religious or materialistic, Christian or Marxist—take their origin ultimately from the biblical idea of history",<sup>66</sup> then it is in the realm of the West's biblical faith that the explanation for our civilization's amazing vitality and urge to "rise" ought chiefly to be sought.

The fourth contribution that the Christian philosophy of history can make to McNeill's analysis of world history lies in the realm of axiology. Both *Past and Future* and *The Rise of the West* bristle with value judgments as to what is ethically worthwhile (e.g., "heroism" and "kindliness" in the face of the challenges of our day)<sup>67</sup> and what is significant and important in history (we "should count ourselves fortunate to live in one of the great ages of the world").<sup>68</sup> But how are such value judgments to be justified? When we read in the closing paragraph of *The Rise of the West* that "good and wise men in all parts of the world have seldom counted for more" since they can help to realize "the generous ideals proclaimed by all—or almost all—the world's leaders", and that "evil men and crass vices" should not distract us, we are inclined to whisper "Amen" in our hearts, but before doing so we had better make sure that "good" and "evil" are properly defined and that "generous ideals" can be explicitly defended against those proclaimed by at least some of the world's leaders! And *why* should we rejoice to live in the present day or take its challenges upon us—why, indeed, should "the rise of the West" constitute a positive value in any sense?<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *RW*, pp. 339-40.

<sup>66</sup> *The Shape of the Past*, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> See *PF*, p. 212. Stringfellow Barr appropriately titles his review of *The Rise of the West* "Heroically Grappling with Man's Long Saga" (*New York Herald Tribune Books*, August 11, 1963, p. 3).

<sup>69</sup> This same problem of ungrounded values plagues and vitiates the effectiveness of E. H. Carr's "evolving ends" philosophy of history, as set forth in his Trevelyan lectures (*What Is History?* [London: Macmillan, 1961]); Boyd C. Shafer preceptively writes of Carr's approach—and the point applies almost equally to McNeill: "Carr is persuasive. As one reads him, one agrees, quickly and easily. Later, in sober aftermath, one asks, what 'sense', what 'direction', whose 'sense of direction' [for the historical process]? That of Marx or Wells? of Hitler or Churchill? Gandhi or Toynbee? Mao Tse-tung or Khrushchev? Nehru or Kennedy? or that of the enlightened, liberal, hopeful professor at Trinity College [i.e., Carr himself]?" (Review of *What Is History?* in *AHR*, LXVII [April, 1962], 676-77).

Questions of this kind are not answered in McNeill's writings,<sup>70</sup> nor, indeed, can they be answered successfully apart from a revelational absolute. Out of flux nothing but flux can come, and out of the relativism of the human situation no permanent values can be categorically established. Only if absolutes are supplied from outside the "human predicament" can man stand firmly—and the central Christian affirmation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" signifies that the answers to man's axiological dilemma have been provided by the only One who could do so. McNeill reveals that he understands the ethical dilemma facing modern man (himself included) when he writes: "One can argue plausibly that the liberal, democratic society of the West is, in the twentieth century, living upon a humanitarian capital inherited from religious minds of past generations",<sup>71</sup> and when he speculates about the possible need of a new religion in the future:

Without religious revival on a grand scale, I should think it likely that moral lassitude and a spirit of indifference, a sense of futility, and, perhaps, a supine fatalism would increasingly gain hold of men's minds; and, having nothing much worthwhile to live for or strive for, they might even cease to propagate their kind in sufficient number to prevent a decrease in the population of the earth. Something like this frame of mind did come to possess the Greeks and Romans, and the curious demographic decay of those nations in the days of the Roman Empire may have been connected with the political and religious disintegration of their ancestral way of life.<sup>72</sup>

It is unfortunate that McNeill does not see that just as it was "the spirit of the Church which survived the catastrophe of the old [Roman] world, saving both itself and the best gifts of Europe",<sup>73</sup> so it is the same Christian faith that continues to provide the only solid grounding for historical ideals such as are displayed in *The Rise of the West*. With McNeill's heroism and hopes we have no argument, but we wish to stress with all possible seriousness that

<sup>70</sup> In this glaring omission, as in the rather naïve practical relativism characteristic of his writings, does not McNeill display the typical American pragmatism—the American impatience with "theoretical" issues—that his colleague Daniel Boorstin has so well described in his books, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958) and *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Phoenix Books, 1953)?

<sup>71</sup> *PF*, p. 110.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75. However, consistent with his personal philosophy of life, McNeill immediately adds: "I do not imagine that religion alone would suffice to restore a moral soundness to mankind."

<sup>73</sup> So Ethelbert Stauffer effectively argues in his *Christ and the Caesars*, trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 286 and *passim*.

many other minds look upon our age with existential despair, reminding us that a simple expression of ideals is hardly enough. The root question is whether justification for historical hope is possible in the face of man's all too frequent inhumanity to man;<sup>74</sup> and the only validated positive answer remains the one given by the resurrected Christ who not only established a focal point of salvation for human history, but also guaranteed its fulfilment at the end of the age.<sup>75</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Now for the other side of the coin: What can the Christian church historian gain from *The Rise of the West*? Though secularistic wineskins will burst if they attempt to hold the Christian story, the Christian *Weltanschauung* itself is capable of incorporating all truth present in secular philosophies of life and of history. Thus, when faced by a monumental achievement such as *The Rise of the West*, the Christian historian should exhibit, not carping criticism, but reverential awe for the truths about the human condition that are revealed therein. And he should do more than this: he should permit McNeill's universal history to drive him into his study to attempt, should he have the ability, analogous productions that would display the universality of God's working in time.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> M. I. Finley holds, not unreasonably, that the display of "Western power" in the Nazi period "challenges the optimism of his [McNeill's] vision and the neatness of his evolutionary pattern" (*New York Review of Books*, October 17, 1963, p. 5).

<sup>75</sup> Acts 1: 10-11: "While they [the apostles] looked stedfastly toward heaven as he [Jesus] went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." As Carter Jefferson has correctly noted, "McNeill has avoided the apocalyptic vision that too often goes with 'universal history'" (*Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine of Books*, September 8, 1963, p. 2); though this avoidance is commendable with respect to secular apocalypticisms, it leaves a truncated historical vision which only the Christian hope can remedy. See on this matter and on the general axiological issues discussed in the preceding section, my article, "Where is History Going?" in *Religion in Life*, Spring, 1964.

<sup>76</sup> A concrete example of the significance of McNeill's universal perspective for Christian historical interpretation is suggested by Stringfellow Barr, who notes that the present planetary melting-pot of civilizations described in *The Rise of the West* can be directly correlated with the common self-awareness of peoples which the late Christian thinker Teilhard de Chardin has called the "noosphere" (*New York Herald Tribune Books*, August 11, 1963, p. 3).

The responsibility which Augustine discharged in the fifth century through his *Civitas Dei* falls equally upon every generation of theologians and church historians; but, regrettably, few ages seriously respond to the mandate and challenge.<sup>77</sup> If Professor McNeill is willing, in the words of his prefatory quotation, to "seek to understand, and if I can/To justify the ways of man to man", can we not raise up twentieth-century historical Miltons who will, as in days of old, "justify the ways of God to man"?

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<sup>77</sup> Stavrianos is quite wrong when he claims that "globally oriented history" such as McNeill's "represents a return to the historiographic tradition of the Enlightenment, when the idea of universal history fitted in with the prevailing views regarding progress. Prior to that period Western historians had been constrained by the need to fit all historical events into a rigid Biblical context" (*AHR*, LXIX [April, 1964], 713). Actually, the universal biblical frame of reference of the medieval church is the true source of global history; and the Enlightenment, with its stress on unchanging Reason, was a particularly unhistorical epoch. (See on this my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 48, 66-70.)