

Spring 1956

# Judgement and the Meaning of History: The 1956 Faculty Lecture

Arthur O. Roberts

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc\\_journal](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc_journal)

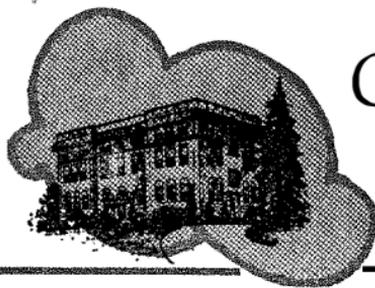
 Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Roberts, Arthur O., "Judgement and the Meaning of History: The 1956 Faculty Lecture" (1956). *George Fox College Journal, 1952-1966*. Paper 9.  
[http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc\\_journal/9](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc_journal/9)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in George Fox College Journal, 1952-1966 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.



# George Fox College JOURNAL

VOL. IV

SPRING, 1956

NO. 3

## Judgment and the Meaning of History

THE 1956 FACULTY LECTURE

Copyrighted, 1956, by George Fox College

BY ARTHUR O. ROBERTS, PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

President Ross, fellow faculty members, students, and guests: I am grateful for the privilege of giving this second annual faculty lecture at George Fox College. Not only for the election, but also for the donation which makes this lecturership possible, goes our thanks.

### I. INTRODUCTION

This has been the season of significant weddings. Of course, all weddings are significant; but two have stood out: the wedding of Grace Kelly and Prince Ranier, and the wedding of Margaret Truman and Clifton Daniel. In the realm of ideas, also, an important marriage has taken place during the past few years. It is the marriage, or better, a *remarriage* between philosophy and theology, in which history is the marriage officiant. The historian, whose narrow domain of truth consists of *describing* all that men ever recorded of his thoughts and words and deeds, has become a prophet to tell us the meaning of contemporary and future human experience. Nor is the historian "getting out of his realm" when he predicts the decline of "the West," or traces a pattern of meaning in the western expansion of Europe. In the search for the commanding ideas of any historical movement, and in selecting the most significant data with which to tell the story, historians reveal their sense of values and display in some measure a philosophy of life. Like the witch of Endor to the inquiring king, Saul, historians have sometimes only confirmed the fears of the inquiring political states.

The historian cannot forever remain in the cloister of his sectional histories and antiquarian research. The historian not only attempts to understand what meanings people of various nations and epochs and civilizations gave to life and history but he also attempts to give meanings which are more apparent in retrospect than in contemporaneity. Indeed, Arnold Toynbee, the great historian of the University of London, insists that for the first time in history we can see the history of civilizations as a whole instead of in partial visions, and we can see all aspects of human life as "so many facets of a unitary human nature, instead of compartmentalizing man artificially into a number of separate disciplines, sociology, economics, theology, history, psychology and the rest."<sup>1</sup> The historian attempts to look at the world process from a platform of rational investigation and insight and to try to give some ultimate meaning to the vast array of human events spread before him. Freedom is the presupposition of history. In theological terminology, such attempts to find final, or ultimate meaning to the course of human history is called "eschatological" thinking. "Eschatology"—a word which most folks never have occasion to use—refers to the doctrine of the last things, i.e., immortality, second coming of Christ, final judgment. In the last few years, the word has been getting a good work-out by preachers, by theologians who addressed the World Council at Evanston in 1954, and also by historians and philosophers. Indeed, the word is so widely used as to confuse the average person who is just learning to say the word and learn its meaning. Whether or not the historian had the right to start such preaching, he is doing it, and largely because the fears which beset man through threats of atomic and cobaltic warfare have driven men to consider not only their own survival but also the survival of mankind. Through this stimulus, the meaning of the whole of human history has been re-examined.

This lecture considers one aspect of eschatology, JUDGMENT, reaching for clues which it affords to the understanding of the meaning of the movement of men in time and space which we observe as "history." In Christian theology there are many views regarding the exact nature of the anticipated happenings which constitute the "end" time. Beyond the scope of this lecture are millennialism, post-millennialism,

classic descriptions of the Christian view of worldly and godly history is the parable of the wheat and the tares, the theme of which has been elaborated in many forms throughout the history of the Church.

... The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?" He said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, "No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time, I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

... He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil ones, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.<sup>3</sup>

The views of Divine judgment in history which appear below are really interpretations of Jesus' parable and of the problems which it raises.

## II. CONCEPTS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT AS HELD BY CONTEMPORARY THINKERS

### *Judgment Within Natural History*

Arthur W. Munk, in his book *History and God* relegates any thought of a final judgment, winding up the affairs of men before the throne of God, to the realm of the obscurantist. "Though apocalypticism was once the generally accepted Christian philosophy of history, it is no longer tenable," he states.<sup>4</sup>

His belief that such is no longer tenable rests primarily

pre-millennialism, and a-millennialism, and Biblical allusions to God's judgments upon the labor of believers. The central aspect of eschatology is final judgment, a doctrine which has certain relevancy to the study of history and especially to historical prognostications regarding the goals and destinies of mankind.

Certainly judgment in this sense of the word is limited to those systems which are theistic. The fatalists, positivists, the naturalistic evolutionists, are excluded by their very metaphysical skepticism. They would generally deny that there is any over-all goal, or purpose, or destiny toward which the road of history runs. For them meanings would all be relative and derivative, revealing no common hopes other than the preferential aspect of the human organism adjusting to its environment.

"Judgment in the widest sense, is simply the mental act of asserting (affirming or denying) an assertible content." It involves a truth claim. It implies a judge, which may be either principle or personal, or both. In this paper, it refers specifically to God's judgment. And unless in Hegelian fashion, one gives to the process itself complete reality, it is not correct to speak of the "judgments of history," but the judgments which come through history or project beyond it. Judgment testifies to human nature, that it is, or ought to be evaluated in a final form in some just way by the God of the universe.

From the Christian sources in the Old and New Testaments come many statements regarding God's judgment—both partial and final. Some of these will be noted later in the lecture. Suffice it to say that in the Old Testament, the Messianic hope dominates the theological and liturgical features of Judaism. The center of meaning in the Old Testament lies in the future, in the day of the Lord, in the "holy way," over which the "ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing . . ." As Lowith puts it, "only the Jews are a really historical people, constituted *as such* by religion."<sup>2</sup> God in His providence led the people of Israel, and His judgments hung heavily upon them—such is the theme. In the New Testament, the concept of God's judgment receives new impetus. Eschatology is a vital element in the thought of Jesus, of Paul, and of Peter. One of the outstanding and

upon acceptance of an evolutionary hypothesis and secondarily upon the canons of modern scientific Biblical criticism. He lists Barthianism as a kind of revival of apocalypticism of a highly sophisticated type, and Marxian communism as a non-transcendental, materialistic version (or perversion) of the same vision.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his graphic description of "irrational factors" which litter history, despite his belief in the ultimate doom of the universe (accepting the verdict of scientists,) and despite a parting shot that cosmic death may well end history unless man straightens up, he *does* hold to a definite pattern of progress which seems strangely deterministic to not be inevitable.<sup>6</sup> He accepts evolution not just as process, but as progress; for he writes of "the marvelous upward surge of life," and declares that "the goal toward which the processes of history are *relentlessly* moving is world unity, world order, and as a result, peace, justice, and freedom."<sup>7</sup>

For Munk, judgment is within the process of life. In his very short section of Moral Law and Judgment, he shows how "history does display a kind of rough justice" as wicked men overplay their hands. Judgment is hindered because pure evil is impossible (a kind of interpretation of the admonition to let the wheat and weeds grow together): the honor among thieves enables abuse to continue. This judgment is witnessed in two ways; "On the one hand there is man's growing moral sensitivity, and on the other hand, the evidence that his indulgence in evil is becoming increasingly more costly and destructive."<sup>8</sup>

In rejecting the older apocalyptic view of God, manifesting Himself in history only at certain points in terms of extraordinary events (such as creation, call of Moses, resurrection and second coming of Jesus), Munk claims a larger significance in that "all history is in a real sense a manifestation of God,"—a significance not detracting from but enhancing God's work through Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Nature is fulfilled in history (after ten billion years or so: a distance not close enough to be frightening) and history is fulfilled in eternity through the immortality of the soul, a goal toward which the stream of evolution is flowing. No "groveling earthling" can turn it back.<sup>10</sup> Judgment is actual-

ly upon the irrational evil which finds its source in the Given; "history is really the story of God's battles with the Given, and His greatest victories."<sup>11</sup>

It would appear that for Munk, both God and man are judged by Reason. Men like Commodus Tamerlane, and Hitler are monsters, partly "because of the blind, irrational Necessity with which God has to cope, and partly due to their own sinful willing, the measure of the latter being relative to the amount of reason and moral sensibility which they possess."<sup>12</sup>

An apocalyptic view of the end of man's probation is rejected, but it would appear to the writer that if the "vials of God" are dismissed through the door, the "inexorable, blind forces of nature," have crept back in through the window to bring an apocalyptic end of nature. The *ultimate* asserting of value is outside history, in the eternity which receives and conserves values in personal immortality. The "end of the world," in its spatial meaning, then, is not connected with God's judgments, but is something with which God has to cope, something over which He triumphs.

Shirley Jackson Case is not as cautious as Munk. He practically equated God with the progress of evolution. God has plenty of time, he thinks; hence, "when history is soberly viewed, it furnishes scant support for the existence of a vengeful Deity."<sup>13</sup>

He believes that the prophets' dire predictions of doom upon sinful men or nations are not born out in fact. He writes:

A closer scrutiny of the historical process shows that disasters overtake equally the righteous with the wicked, and historical events said to constitute a display of divine justice never really have any permanent influence upon the suppression of sinners.<sup>14</sup>

It is man's impatience which alleges divine interventions. God simply pours out His sunshine upon the good and evil. This duality has always been, he thinks, and will continue for a long time. We used to think, he states, that Adam's fall only needed to be nullified,

but modern knowledge of the origins of the natural man has set the whole problem in a new framework and rendered its natural solution much more difficult. Now we know that the natural impulses of men stem from a brutish ancestry, and religion faces the her-

culean task of making moral and spiritual ideals flower above the beastly strain of savage blood inherited perhaps from a Neanderthal man. It is fortunate, indeed, that we have eons of time for the accomplishment of this gigantic task.<sup>15</sup>

The above statement seems rather naive in assuming that "we" and God have things pretty well mapped out! It is a refined Manicheism which blames the nature of the body ("the beastly strain of savage blood!") for ills of the spirit. Evolution is the carrier of salvation. Divine judgment, though hardly admitted, resolves itself into the curse of future upon the present and the brutish past. The past is cursed, the present is excused, in hopes for a better man in the long eons of time that God, smiling at the impatient cries of the prophets, has at His disposal as He waits for good men to work out the processes of history. God working through evolving man within the "frame-work of endless time" is the key to the philosophy of history which Case sets forth.<sup>16</sup>

Arnold J. Toynbee, the great English historian, has an appreciation both for the processes of history and for high religious values. In his masterful synthesis of civilization and religion, he attempts a Christian and providential interpretation to historical cycles. He avoids the temptation to rest upon ultimate achievement in this world ("Leviathan-worship") or upon ultimate meaning for the soul outside of history. In his view, the world would be

a province of the Kingdom—one province only, and not the most important one, yet one which had the same absolute value as the rest, and therefore, one in which spiritual action could, and would, be fully significant and worthwhile; the one thing of manifest and abiding value in a world in which all other things are vanity.<sup>17</sup>

He had confessed his personal adherence to "the traditional Christian view that there is no reason to expect any change in unredeemed human nature while human life on Earth goes on." The sense of spiritual progress comes by the enlarged *opportunity* for closer communion with God. He calls it "a growing fund of illumination and grace." Opportunities for salvation have always obtained, but there are chances for individual spiritual progress, with side-products of improved social conditions on earth.<sup>18</sup>

His idea of judgment, then, might be interpreted as the

determinate measure of the line upon the indeterminate circle. It is the judgment of the vehicle upon the weary windings of the wheels, of religion upon history, of the soul upon the social body.<sup>19</sup> The goal in the world is "the enduring reign of the Church Militant on Earth," whose forms cannot help but follow to some degree the institutionalization of the Catholic Church which stands armed with the spear of the Mass, the shield of the Hierarchy, and the helmet of the Papacy. But even at best, and while proving superior to mundane civilizations, the Church on Earth would still be clothed in mundane garments; it would be a province of the Kingdom of God, but one not fully acclimated.<sup>20</sup>

Toynbee's sense of judgment extending beyond time seems to be limited to the personal sense. He does have a keen sense of the judgment impending and falling upon civilizations who supplant the personal equation and are drawn into self-worship.

In challenge-and-response, Toynbee declares: we can hear the beat of an elemental rhythm . . . and in listening to it we have recognized that, though strophe may be answered by antistrophe, victory by defeat, birth by death, creation by destruction, the movement that this rhythm beats out is neither the fluctuation of an indecisive battle nor the cycle of a treadmill. The perpetual turning of the wheel is not a vain reputation, if, at each revolution, it is carrying the vehicle that much nearer to its goal.<sup>21</sup>

The vehicle may reach goals within history, but they are only partial, and the final act, for one who accepts the cycle as events but not as ultimate reality, is personal. The bridge across from time to eternity is narrow. The vehicle may be sent from heaven but the passengers must walk the last mile alone.

Herbert Butterfield, in *Christianity and History*, has a chapter on judgment, in which he uses Germany as an example of God's visitation upon Prussian militarism. He hastens to assure the British that a God "who could use even the Philistines in order to chastise His chosen people may similarly use us for the purpose of chastening Germany, while still reserving for us a terrible judgment later."<sup>22</sup>

The processes of time reveal the concealed faults of systems of government. He warns those who believe Christianity

to be compatible only with a society based on liberal-democratic principles that they must not think that the world would be without meaning should such organizations collapse. "The river of time is littered with the ruins of these various systems."<sup>23</sup>

Though these systems perish, the judgment is basically upon the "inadequacy in human nature itself . . . for in the course of time, it is human nature which finds out the holes in the structure, and turns the good thing into an abuse."<sup>24</sup>

Butterfield considers that one could scarcely deny that judgment exists in history. He does insist that its verdicts are interim and not final.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the relation of judgment to God, Butterfield shows that the Christian concept draws its force out of historic Judaism with its deep emphasis upon a God concerned in history. If God works upon our lives in any intimate detail at all, Butterfield thinks, "we can hardly avoid projecting the idea of judgment on to a broader canvas and saying that there is a judgment imbedded in the fabric of history."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the universality of judgment, and the priority of values which often seem disproportionate, reveal that "judgment in history falls heaviest on those who come to think themselves gods, who fly in the face of Providence and history, who put their trust in man-made systems and worship the work of their own hands."<sup>27</sup>

He notes, too, that "sometimes . . . it is only by a cataclysm that man can make his escape from the net which he has taken so much trouble to weave around himself; and that is why the judgments of God so often appear to be remedial to the future historian."<sup>28</sup>

Any "end" which might conceivably come would only relate to "a globe which we always knew was doomed to a bad end in any case"; in fact, it might well be typical of human history that men should contrive to hasten that end in executing Divine judgment upon themselves. So life's purpose is not found in the future, far away or around the corner, but is wholly found here and now "as fully as it ever will be on this planet." History is, then, not like a train running to a destination; its meaning is rather to be found in the analogy of a Beethoven symphony—each note in its context is valuable as any other. So that ultimately each individual exists for

the glory of God.<sup>29</sup>

*Judgment Beyond History*

Neo-orthodoxy, or neo-liberalism as it might better be called, has given emphasis upon the transcendence of God and His impingement upon history. Emil Brunner asserts that the real idea of justice and judgment has been lost by the secularization of the historical process. "The Christian Church never had a *lex naturae* conception other than a Christological one," he writes.<sup>30</sup> From Grotius on, believes Brunner, decay came in the concept through the detachment of the idea of justice from theological, religious or metaphysical contexts. The steps were: religious foundation, transcendental (sans religion) hypothesis, then the assertion of justice on naturalistic grounds, and finally justice as "a fictitious idea forming an instrument of self-preservation."<sup>31</sup>

He warns that "if there is no *jus divinum*, there is no limit to the sovereignty of the state, there are no rights which the state has to protect, but only rights which the state may give or take."<sup>32</sup>

He shows that even in Rousseau's *contrat social* the submergence of personality was inevitable and leads to totalitarianism. Egalitarianism and secularism bring society to totalitarianism over either road, politics or economics. Communism is the result of Marx's search for individualistic, absolute freedom, and the absence of any state. Brunner continues,

Without Christian faith and Christian understanding of justice, the world faces therefore, a fatal alternative, either humanity tries to return to, or to preserve, an individualistic liberalism, defending the rights of man, but leading to the destruction of community, or it goes on along the road to totalitarian collectivism, organizing community by the complete effacement of personality. There is a middle road, namely the combination of personal finality and functional structure which derives its inner coherence entirely and exclusively from the Christian faith; or, to be more exact, from the Christian conception of justice. . . .<sup>33</sup>

For Brunner this "all one in Christ Jesus" view is eschatological, and therefore the final point of view. Equal dignity and individual differences are its marks.<sup>34</sup>

Karl Barth shows the flavor of this eternity-in-time concept in his exposition of I Corinthians 15 (Paul's great chap-

ter on the Resurrection). He writes, "that *He calls* is what really decides the reality of the resurrection; not that we live, and not that we die."<sup>35</sup>

The expression "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" is thus a-temporally described: "Only the present is really a moment between past and future . . . faith's tension is not of a successive order but of an intertwining character."<sup>36</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr has a much more transcendent view of judgment—and a much dimmer view of the modern idea of progress—than Case or Munk. He believes that the whole series of revelatory events culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ clarify the mysterious design of God's sovereignty and show history as a drama and not as a pattern of necessary relationships which could be charted scientifically.<sup>37</sup> God is contesting with men in their defiance; and "an outer limit" for defiance is ultimate self-destruction of the forms of life which, by either isolation or domination set to serve their own ends. The confrontation of God is a judgment upon man's self-deceptions. Thus,

Whenever men penetrate through the illusions and self-deceptions of life to confront this God, as revealed in Christ, finding His judgment upon their sin not less but more severe, because of the disclosure of the love which prompts it, they may be converted and renewed. History is thus a realm of endless possibilities of renewal and rebirth.<sup>38</sup>

The expectation of "heightening forms of human defiance of God in history" of which Jesus expressed himself (Matthew 24; see also Paul in II Timothy 3:2,4) shows by symbol the tremendously wide frame of meaning which Christianity has for history, invisaging antinomies and tragic realities without succumbing to despair.<sup>39</sup>

The judgment of God is upon both Catholic and Calvinist assumptions of the unambiguously righteous will of either Church or saint. It is likewise upon the assumptions of sectarian Christianity, that sinful elements can be eliminated; and upon Marxism, whose illusions are "the end-products of a Christian civilization which either failed to realize the highest possibilities of life in history or which claimed the realization of a perfection which can never be achieved in history."<sup>40</sup>

For Niebuhr all provisional judgments are tainted in discernment and action by the evil which they seek to resolve.

There are renewals, but no rebirth; "history therefore awaits an ultimate judgment" . . . the Christian awaits a "general resurrection" as well as a "last judgment."<sup>41</sup>

But Niebuhr will not be forced into a position of taking these things literally. Such, he feels, would reduce history to darkness illumined "only by the hope of final divine completion." He finds provisional judgments which are kept provisional by the trans-historic final judgment. This is the tension of Biblical faith: renewals of life in history, both individual and collective, held in humble relativity to the ultimate judgments, of which the love of Christ is the clue.<sup>42</sup> The provisional judgments upon men and nations arise out of abuse of freedom, just as their life and renewal comes by return to freedom—a freedom in which the perils and promises are inextricably interwoven. This is Niebuhr's understanding of the wheat and the weeds. The "harvest" is the mystery of the love of Christ in which the increasing antinomies of good and evil find an ultimate answer through triumph over sin and death.<sup>43</sup>

The "end" in his thought, then, is purposive, not conclusive, *telos*, not *finis*. Hence he dismisses all speculations of an actual end of history in the future. They cause either complacency or despair. The urgency of eschatology is "from the feeling that the ultimate judgment and the ultimate issues of life impinge upon each moment of time, and is substantiated by the words of Jesus that only God knows the 'day and hour'."<sup>44</sup>

This paragraph catches the kernel of his thought: The "symbol of the last Judgment" . . . emphasizes the moral ambiguity of history to the end. It negates utopian illusions in progressive interpretations of history as rigorously as the symbol of the Resurrection rejects the Platonic flight into an eternity of "pure" being. These eschatological symbols transcend the rational, but they do justice to the temporal and eternal dimensions of man's historic existence. Platonism and modern utopianism are only superficially, but not ultimately, more rational. For in elaborating frames of meaning in which eternity exists without time or time without eternity, they tear the two dimensions of human existence asunder.<sup>45</sup>

Paul Tillich asserts that Christ is the center of history because he is the "manifestation of transcendent, uncondi-

tioned meaning." But he rejects as irrelevant the problems of historical inquiry into the facts behind the rise of the Biblical picture of Christ. "The exposition of those facts can only lend probability—and with respect to the historical Jesus, a very faint probability," he declares.<sup>46</sup>

To look at the center today, that is Christology for today. But it would appear to this speaker that Tillich defines the "center" of history as "Christ," and then proceeds to define "Christ" in terms of the "Center," without having adequately appraised the historicity of Jesus Christ.

This view of his bears out his existential approach to God. That is, he discounts ordinary procedures of reason in making God the object of conceptual thinking. He is somewhat like Immanuel Kant, whose postulates of God, immortality, and freedom were transcendental ideas not grasped by speculative reason but necessitated by moral reason. With Tillich, however, God is not found at the end of obligation but at the end of the religious act or encounter; that is, by the participation of a man as a being with God as being. This participation is by faith and is mediated or explained by the use of religious symbols. Hence in his eschatology he discards scientific approaches in favor of what he calls "phenomenological intuition."<sup>47</sup>

Although he rightly rejects a cyclical view of time as being untrue to the obviously "one-sided direction forward" of time, he yet wrongly treats eschatology in a completely non-temporal way. He holds that eschatology "is the theoretical expression of the Christian belief that in every historical event in past and future there is a relationship to an ultimate fulfillment, which lends meaning to relative and conditioned fulfillment."<sup>48</sup>

The term "last judgment" is used by Tillich as a symbol for decision in history, in which an act is infused with transcendental meaning; and the term "kingdom of God" is a symbol of the fulfillment intended in every act. "purgatory" and "hell" are symbols of the decision against ultimate meaning. And "history" is the "realm where the ultimate is intended."<sup>49</sup> He believes that the concept of an end of time, in a temporal sense cannot be maintained in other than the thought of a discontinuance, which is a contradiction.<sup>50</sup>

This is, of course, a transcendental view of eternity, for which he seeks confirmation in the emphasis in John upon the reality of eternity within time, "He that hath the Son, hath life." But he fails to treat adequately the Johannine emphasis that the Word "became flesh and dwelt among us," and that the whole of redemption, including the Final Judgment, involves meanings which stem from their actuality and not from their utility as symbols alone.

Nicholas Berdyaev, (Russian Orthodox theologian, and expatriate,) describes history in these words:

History is in truth the path to another world. It is in this sense that its content is religious . . . In its perpetual transition from one epoch to another, mankind struggles in vain to resolve its destiny within history. Disappointed . . . it realizes that its problem cannot be solved within the process of history, but only on a transcendental plane . . . We must admit within the hermetic circle of history the super-historical energy, the irruption within the relations of terrestrial phenomena of the celestial nuomenon—the future Coming of Christ. This concept of the ineluctable end of history is at once the final conclusion and fundamental premise of the metaphysics of history.<sup>51</sup>

The tragic failure of modern history, thinks Berdyaev, is that man has become a slave to both nature and to society. There is no "immanent solution" to be found but history points up the transcendent goal which gives history its deep significance.<sup>52</sup> History has not been solved on the human scale. "Nietzsche and Marx exhausted the possibilities of humanism: the former on the peaks of culture, the latter among the masses on the plain below."<sup>53</sup>

He declares that "the only possible solution of universal history . . . is in terms of a victory over time, over its disruption into past, present, and future,"—time's "corruptible nature" must be overcome.<sup>54</sup> Time must not be deified. Inevitable progress has not the slightest scientific, philosophical or moral justification.<sup>55</sup> The real significance "lies not in a possible solution at any given moment or period of time, but in the revelation of all its spiritual forces, contradictions and inner tragedy; and finally, in the withholding of the all-illuminating truth until the ultimate end."<sup>56</sup>

Death is "a continual judgment passed by eternity upon time." It is a bridge between life in time and life in eternity.

It is a judgment of God upon the world which would like to carry out its endless (but not eternal) life.<sup>57</sup>

The Apocalypse ends all perspectives of cosmic, or racial immortality. It is a paradox of time and eternity. Here is his description :

The end of our world will come in time, in time as we know it. But it is also the end of time as we know it and therefore lies beyond its limits . . . When the end comes, there shall be no more time. And therefore, we must paradoxically think of the end of the world both in time and in eternity . . . like the end of each individual man . . . an event both immanent and transcendent . . . For every one of us and for the world as a whole there comes a catastrophe, a jump across the abyss . . . If our sinful temporal world as we know it were endless, this would be an evil nightmare, just like the endless continuation of an individual life. It would be a triumph of the meaningless. And the presentiment of the coming end calls forth, together with horror and anguish, hope and expectancy of the final revelation and triumph. Judgment and valuation of all that has happened in the world is the final revelation of meaning. The last Judgment of individuals and of the world, interpreted in an inner sense, is nothing other than the discovery of meaning and the affirmation of qualities and values.<sup>58</sup>

In these writers, one sees an attempt to find the meaning of history by transcending it. Not that they hope for that meaning *without*, in the sense of having no real need, but without in the sense of "beyond" history. It is the perpendicular shaft of the cross bisecting the horizontal piece. The line of history does not broaden out into the pastures of the Kingdom. Although Berdyaev speaks of the world's catastrophe, he has redefined time and cleansed it of the phenomenal elements of past, present and future. His speculations are reminiscent of early Gnostic expressions and somehow fail to meet the actual needs of physical man. Niebuhr is much clearer in relating the transcendent solution to the temporal life. In the provisional judgments time and eternity are interwoven. It is not escape that he seeks, but transfiguration of the temporal process.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Judgment in Redemptive History*

The Neo-orthodox thinkers conceive of redemption as a drama of eternity which gives dimension to the temporal process. The following men represent an effort to portray re-

demption historically while at the same time preserving a healthy distance between God and the historical process as such.

Karl Lowith has declared the emancipation of "philosophy of history" from its homeless state since it was set adrift by the gradual dissolution of the eighteenth century belief in reason and in progress. He would restore to the waif its older guardian of theology. He would disprove the theory that proper historical thinking began only when Voltaire, in his *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, turns out God and substitutes the will of man and human reason. Lowith proposes to show "that philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfillment and that it ends with the secularization of its eschatological pattern."<sup>60</sup>

To fulfill this task, he works backwards through Burckhardt, Marx, Hegel, Comte, Condorcet and Turgot, Voltaire, Vico, Bossuet, Joachim, Augustine and Orosius, and the Biblical view.<sup>61</sup> According to his interpretation of the Christian message, it is not a new epoch of history which is inaugurated, but a redemption. The world stands judged; its history has come to an end through Jesus the unique redeemer. "Christian times are Christian only in so far as they are the last time," he writes. The hopeless history of the world, a story of sin and death, is redeemed and dismantled.<sup>62</sup>

Lowith asserts that neither the ancient classical, cyclical view, nor the early Christian view of life considered history as a developing process. "The modern over-emphasis on secular history as *the* scene of man's destiny is a product of our alienation from the natural theology of antiquity and from the supernatural theology of Christianity," is the view.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while classical antiquity found meaning in the imitation of the cosmos, in its perfection; Christianity found meaning in the imitation of Christ. Modern thought has betrayed both. "The world after Christ has assimilated the Christian perspective toward a goal and fulfillment and, at the same time, has discarded the living faith in an imminent *eschaton*."<sup>64</sup>

Lowith cites as an example of the perversion of the Christian perspective of the end of history the influence of Joachim of Floris, who lived in the twelfth century. His emphasis on the "Age of the Spirit," (shared later by the Spiritual Franciscans and by certain of the radical Puritans and Dispensa-

tionalists) which sought to restore vitality to the Church and to awaken her eschatological passion was thoroughly secularized. In the hands of the heathen it became a belief in a materialistic age of plenty, achieved by man's own means and on his own level. Lessing, Comte, and Schelling reveal philosophical adaptations, and on the political scene, thinks Lowith, "the third dispensation of the Joachites reappeared as a third International and a third Reich."<sup>65</sup>

One may infer from his writing, that judgment, which is the rightful activity of God in the final sense, is wrongfully assumed by those who are themselves part of the judgment. Thus a philosophy of history which was impossible within the framework of classical thinking is provided by the Christian scheme of history, particularly with its eschatological perspective. But reason will not accept the yet unfulfilled proclamation of a last judgment and final redemption. Striving to find a dependable continuity without this acceptance, however, leads back to the cycle theory, for (to conclude Lowith):

how can one imagine history as a continuous process within a linear progression, without presupposing a discontinuing **terminus a quo and ad quem** . . . The modern mind . . . eliminates from its progressive outlook the Christian implication of creation and consummation, while it assimilates from the ancient world view the idea of an endless and continuous movement discarding its circular structure. The modern mind has not made up its mind whether it should be Christian or pagan. It sees with one eye of faith and one of reason. Hence its vision is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or biblical thinking.<sup>66</sup>

Oscar Cullmann shows the position of redemptive history. The Christian message must be viewed from the inside and not from sceptical presuppositions. Hence he objects to Rudolf Bultmann's "demythologizing," or stripping away of the unwanted temporal framework to get at the kernel of Christian truth. Cullmann likewise objects to Werner and Schweitzer, for their views of an essential but distemporalized eschatology. He unites with Barth in recognizing the Christocentricity of New Testament theology but differs with him regarding the temporal element.<sup>67</sup>

Cullmann considers Christ as not only the central point by which our calendars figure time, but also as the actual mid-

point of redemptive history. This is his argument:

The unique element in the Christian conception of time as the scene of redemptive history is of a twofold character . . . In the first place, salvation is bound to a continuous time process . . . Here the strictly straight-line conception of time in the New Testament must be defined as over against the Greek cyclical conception and over against all metaphysics in which salvation is always available in the "beyond" . . .

In the second place . . . all points of this redemptive line are related to the **one historical fact** at the midpoint, a fact which precisely in its unrepeatable character, which marks all historical events, is decisive for salvation. This fact is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup>

The line is not drawn between "super-history" and history, or between time and eternity; but it is drawn between the various phases of time with which redemptive history has to do. The Biblical view of time is summarized in these ways:

1. Time in its entire unending extension, which is unlimited in both the backward and forward direction, and thus is "eternity."

2. Limited time, which lies between Creation and the eschatological drama, and thus is identical with the "present" age, "this" age.

3. Periods of time that are limited in one direction but unlimited in the other, and specifically:

a. . . . the time that lies before the Creation . . .

b. the time that extends beyond the end of the present age . . .<sup>69</sup>

Jewish eschatology is realized in Christ, in the thought of Cullmann, hence the peculiar value lies in the completion of that which has decisively occurred. He draws on the analogy of V-day. Victory day does bring something new but it is based upon a decisive battle of the war and would be impossible without it.<sup>70</sup> In opposition to Barthian "super-history," Christianity, thinks Cullman, puts the eschatological drama in a setting that includes the earth. Completion must be in the same sphere: the Resurrection is the decisive battle, the Holy Spirit is the promise, and the Parousia (second coming) the victory. The idea of judgment derives from the Lordship of Christ, manifest during the "intermediate period" by the missionary proclamation of the Church and in the end by redemptive history again becoming world history, as the consummation brings all redeemed into the elect and a

new heaven and a new earth are created.<sup>71</sup>

The determinant for every point of history is found in the Christ-event, the mid-point. History is not futuristic in expecting a decisive meaning, but awaits only that which has been assured within historical context.

Wilbur M. Smith has devoted considerable space in his book, *Therefore, Stand*, to a treatment of what he feels is a neglected area of study among Christian thinkers, namely, the judgment. He differentiates among the various types of judgment mentioned in the Bible and concentrates especially upon the final judgment, as the ultimate verdict against man's rebellion. In words suggestive of Cullmann, Smith calls this "a final and complete victory . . . which shall put an end to the war."<sup>72</sup>

The concept of Christ as Judge, for Smith, is a logical completion of redemptive history. He asserts that the Greeks had no concept of final judgment and could not hold to any because of the lack of righteousness in their gods.<sup>73</sup> The last judgment is an aspect of that relationship, and it comprehends all mankind in its scope. By its finality it gives the lie to the indefinite hopes of reincarnations. It is a moral necessity. He writes:

Judgment is not only a scriptural doctrine. It is the inevitable, inescapable end of history, if there is anywhere ruling in this world a righteous God. It is not only that God has appointed a day of judgment, but also that the injustices of history, the unjudged cases of all sin, the inequalities of life, the unpunished blasphemies of men, the silence of God throughout most of the centuries—a holy and righteous God—demand a day of judgment.<sup>74</sup>

Smith cites with approbation James Denny, "it is because the Bible is so intensely ethical in spirit that it is so rich in eschatological elements—in visions of the final and universal triumph of God, of the final and universal defeat of evil."<sup>75</sup>

The position of these men is a stated objection to the transcendental eschatology of Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr, Tillich and Berdyaev. It is in opposition to the evolutionary tenets of Munk and Case, and it stands to complement the Christology of Butterfield and Baillie. The view is outspokenly committed to the uniqueness of events constituting

redemptive history, and is thereby charged with bias and *a priorism*. But while classical, or conservative theology does not deny empirical demands for perspective, it does insist upon the validity of God's revelation in time and space as an hypothesis which sustains both faith and reason. Once the prejudice of thinking God cannot be present in other than the empirically perceived creative (or evolutionary) process has been dispelled by faith and religious experience that God *does*, and *can* break into and work through history, then the redemptive process does not have to be made speculative or illusory. One has the feeling that some of the Neo-orthodox writers lay metaphor upon metaphor in an attempt to gain the results of a fully historical redemption history but will not accept the sting of the miraculous.

For the Conservatives, then, the final judgment is to be the completion, in a temporal sequence, of God's act of redemption—a completion which involves both extension and intensity, or endless and eternal provisions. As part of redemptive history, final judgment cannot be conceived as occurring in immortality—a term consonant with Greek cyclicism, not Biblical thought—but rather occurring in the care of God who redeems into fullness and not into emptiness.

### III. THE BASIC FEATURES OF A BIBLICAL VIEW OF JUDGMENT

From the Christian sources, the Old and New Testaments, come many statements regarding God's judgments. The Covenant spoke of blessing and cursings. The prophet Zephaniah wrote of "the great day of the Lord . . ."76; Isaiah speaks of the "latter days" when the Lord shall judge among the nations;77 and the visions of Daniel and Ezekial are apocalyptic. In the New Testament the large place which eschatology takes is evident to all. Although some critics have denied to these teachings little moral and no historical relevancy, most scholars attempt some sort of interpretation. Jesus' teachings are recorded in the Gospels, especially in Matthew. He indicates that the end will come upon the testimony of the Gospel to all nations, and at His coming upon the clouds of heaven the angels will gather the elect. The judgment depicted is that of separating the sheep from the goats—granting to individuals either eternal life or

eternal punishment.<sup>78</sup>

Paul shows a goal of the Lord's return which includes the element of judgment, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he had done in the body."<sup>79</sup> Peter and Jude write of a judgment with fire.<sup>80</sup> and John the Revelator depicts the Judgment scene in this way:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.<sup>81</sup>

After this scene come the new heavens and the new earth: God dwells now with men, he wipes away every tear and the former hurtful tragedies of life are gone.<sup>82</sup>

#### *A Logical Norm for Freedom*

Herbert Butterfield has noted three Christian convictions which relate to the question of human destiny: "the doctrine of original sin, which affects any notion of history as judgment; the idea of a future life, with a redistribution of fortunes in another world; and the Christian scheme of salvation."<sup>83</sup>

Final judgment certainly indicates God's authority to appraise the nature of man in the light of freedom, personality, and moral values. The greatest struggles within history are not those in which the "battle-historians" glory. Such are but the social aspects of the war of good and evil which is conducted in the interior of human personality. Without a proper respect for final judgment, the ordering of events becomes ensnared by a kind of fuzzy collectivism because the "greatest good" cannot be known in the mass if it is not known individually. The "good of humanity" becomes a utopian bubble, the idealism of which bursts under the malicious prodding of the dictators. The final judgment rebukes those who would destroy the individual under the guise of advancing

humanity. To quote from Butterfield again:

I am not sure that there exists a firm barrier against this kind of error save for those who hold the Christian view that each individual soul is of eternal moment and has a value incommensurate with the value of anything else in the created universe. Human souls are in this view the purpose and the end of the whole story, so far as the world is concerned—not merely the servants of the species and not ever mere means to some other mundane end.<sup>84</sup>

Against the pride which man would lift against God in the development of personality, God erects barriers which make personality meaningful. Freedom means nothing unless one can be bound. It is preposterous to assert that because man is free God has no business tampering with his fate by the finality of heaven or hell. Throughout the Gospels Jesus warns that “there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth,” asserting that God’s wrath will descend upon people who will not obey his voice nor receive his grace. There are sheep, yes; there are also goats. And despite the problems of equity about which men speculate, one recognizes that the judgment, in its emphasis upon the finality of man’s probation, provides the backdrop for his freedom. Man can be free in the present because he will be bound in the future—bound either to the “joy of his Lord” or to the banishment of the Lord, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>85</sup>

It is precisely by God’s “laws” that man makes free and intelligent choices. Final judgment implies that such “laws” have a final sanction in reality and are not a “never-coming” Divine threat akin to the parental dodge, “next time I’ll spank.” It was Sren Kierkegaard who wrote in his “Philosophical Fragments” that one “forges the chains of his bondage with the strength of his freedom.”<sup>86</sup>

The Bible teaches divine recognition for devoted service. Although to the typical modern, unacquainted with Biblical symbols and types, white robes, crowns, and all the other paraphernalia of “glory” appears almost ridiculous; they show, nevertheless, that to the one who is childlike before God the greatest possible boon is a show of appreciation from God. The essential Bible teaching is that of the Divine accolade, as given in the parable of the talents, “Well done, thou good

and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”<sup>87</sup>

The Bible indicates that those in the Kingdom of God are not in a big hurry for justice. The Christian can afford to turn the other cheek, to heap coals of fire upon an enemy, to let dirty digs lie unavenged. As Paul declares: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.”<sup>88</sup> However much that vengeance may work in the self-poisoning effects of sin, yet the sun shines on the just and on the unjust, the wicked prospers as the green bay tree, and the righteous die at the hand of the wicked and the careless. The scales are not balanced up completely in this life. Christians can take martyrdom and abuse while praying for their enemies, confident that the judgment of God will fall true and sharp and infinitely wise, one day. And this is not just vindictive, it is also redemptive: the Christian hopes that his enemy will find repentance and faith while there is yet time. The Christian need not try to square up every perplexing corner of life. He is more interested in life’s privileges than in life’s rights. It is the doctrine of Divine judgment which provides a standard for moral values which is unshaken by the insistent demands of expediency.

The hope which holds him steady is hooked into the next life. As Paul said, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”<sup>89</sup>

#### *Theistic and Providential View of Nature*

The second basic feature of the Biblical view of judgment is that it gives to nature a cosmological significance which is theistic and providential. Scientists and philosophers are inclined to consider that life on the planet cannot last forever. Roger Shinn writes:

Whatever the probabilities for fairly long-range success presumably history is destined to a final doom. Whether with a whimper or with a bang history may be expected to run out; the planet, perhaps the universe, will know human life and history no more.<sup>90</sup>

As has been noted above, the Biblical view inclines toward the “bang” theory and not the “whimper.” Furthermore, the day and hour is not known to man and hence it is to us always imminent. Considered casually the end of the world and perhaps of human life would seem to indicate either that God would come to an end, too, or to indicate that God is not half so interested in man as the religious suggest. The Bib-

lical account of the judgment, and the correlative doctrine of personal immortality, indicates that man is important enough to have a new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness dwells. The Bible is supernaturalistic; that is, what men term "nature" does not enjoy independent ontological status. The Bible teaches that the creation is directly in God's purposes, that it is good, that because of evil the earth is corrupted, that the creation groans under its bondage and awaits the full redemption of man.<sup>91</sup>

John Baillie, lecturing before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in Edinburgh, 1951, declared that the Hebrews first conceived man, alone, as having "dominion" over nature. The Christian Gospel, believes Baillie, exorcises the demons and introduced man to the full exercise of his dominion, for even under the Greek view, "man was under nature's tutelage"—but an "intellectualized form of nature worship."<sup>92</sup>

The Bible asserts not only that nature has meaning as the sphere of God's creation and man's soul-making, but also that God, and man through God, may hold dominion over the created world for which the Bible declares God's redemptive purposes. One weakness of Neo-Orthodoxy is that for all its speaking of sin and grace, man's course seems to be left under "nature's tutelage," with both creation and consummation hidden in trans-temporal, trans-spatial meanings alone.

#### *A Coherent Part of Redemption*

The Bible shows that judgment coheres with the Christian witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and appears as a part of redemptive history. A real judgment is needed to cohere with a real creation and a real incarnation of God in Christ. Furthermore, the nature of God's judgment is determined by the nature of man's response to Christ. Jesus in his trial, not only declares his Messiahship, he tells the high priest that "hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."<sup>93</sup>

The parable of the eleventh hour workers and the incident of Jesus' forgiveness of the penitent thief, co-sufferer upon the Roman cross, attest the teaching that belief in Christ, and not the extent of man's accomplishments, constitutes the basis for judgment.

The central truth that the Word became flesh and dwelled among men indicates that the knowledge of God's purposes is not left to intuitive cognition alone: The vision of Paul and the proof of Thomas are complementary. And if, in the purely empirical sense, one cannot prove God at creation and judgment, one has the authentication which Jesus Christ gives. For Jesus Christ is the "object of faith" and not just a concept from which other concepts are drawn. He remains historically witnessed. He is not a distemporalized condition of religious truth. The presence of the Risen Christ, once empirically observed and witnessed, and which is now witnessed by direct spiritual perception, will again be witnessed, as it were, empirically. As Luke records, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."<sup>94</sup>

Because of man's limited comprehension, much symbol attaches to Biblical truth; yet the reality must be greater than the symbol, not less. In this case, the promise of the return and lordship of Jesus Christ is the completion of the redemptive act, of which the final judgment stands as the moral aspect.

Creation, resurrection, judgment, these three stand as the supreme acts of God. The first provides man with the capacity for freedom—the soul—and with the conditions for freedom—space-time—and with the liability of freedom—sin. The second provides man with the capacity for righteousness—grace—the conditions of righteousness—sacrifice—and the assets of righteousness—sonship or salvation. The third provides man with the capacity to extend this sonship, or salvation, on the basis of enlarged dimensions of existence.

#### IV. JUDGMENT AND THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Roger Shinn states that history is a "three stranded thread." One strand, the dynamic one, is concerned with creative historical activity. It is non-cyclical movement of the sovereign God. Another strand is ecclesiastical, that is, the

community of faith, or *ecclesia*, which knows the first fruits of the kingdom of God. The third strand to the thread of history is eschatological. "Without it," he writes, "we are compelled to say either that history has no meaning (whatever partial meanings we may put into it) or that the meaning is encompassed in some historical movement, process, or method."<sup>95</sup>

### *No Pride in Progress*

In six major ways the Biblical view of final judgment gives meaning to history. In the first place, it reveals that progress affords no justification for secular pride. As John Baillie has shown, the very conception of history as we now possess it, derives from the Old Testament revelation of God's providence among men.<sup>96</sup> He adds, "it is within Christian civilization and nowhere else that the modern belief in progress has arisen."<sup>97</sup>

In the unity of nature and grace God marks out his purposes. But these spheres have been forced apart. In the Italian Renaissance, which provided an entrance into the so-called "Modern Period," the scholars stopped with the ancient Greeks only long enough to lose the importance of the Christian revelation, and not long enough to lose the Christian view of progress. Consequently with the rise of inquiry concerning natural science, progress has been divorced from Providence; and process became equated with reality. The impress of the secular idea of progress was stamped on politics by Marx, on social theory by Comte, and upon ethics by Huxley. In various forms, these attach to the "American Dream" which men are now rethinking. It is surely true that "technical advance does . . . make a difference to the social scene, but it does this rather by changing the terms of the social problem than by assuring its solution."<sup>98</sup>

The Biblical view of final judgment stands as a standard against which technological advances are given moral and spiritual evaluation. It keeps the line of history from becoming a whip laid upon the back of the individual who is sacrificed to future humanity or to the present tyrant. It tears away the rope of circumstances because of which one excuses his moral conduct or indulges his comfort. It tears down the perennial towers of Babel and gives to history a sense of what is vital.

### *Hope in the Midst of Tragedy*

The second way in which the Biblical view of final judgment gives meaning to history is by providing hope in the midst of tragedy. No occasion is given to fatalism, or to a secular or sacred reversion to a past "golden age." Through the interim judgments which God gives to nations his providence is yet working to redeem tragedy. The cross "stands for judgment upon the guilt of all men and the promise of redemption for all who are contrite."<sup>99</sup>

Final judgment assures men that the best lies on ahead. Neither life nor death can shake the hope which radiates in Biblical literature. But in almost every other literature, hope is regarded as an evil thing. It is *ignis fatuus*, the great deceiver.<sup>100</sup> Snap the taut line of heavenly hope by despair, scepticism, or materialism, and the line of history curls. History becomes cyclical and loses meaning. The Christian hope redeems the world and thus allows no nostalgic retreat to the "golden age of Augustus" or to the "good old-fashioned days of grandmother."

### *All Generations Are Significant to God*

The third way by which the Biblical view of Final Judgment gives meaning to history is by insuring that all generations, and not just a final or utopian one, have significance to God, whose purposes are met without the short-changing of any human beings. The nontheistic idea of progress is unfair to the past and dishonest with the present. William Horndern stresses this point in regard to Communism, "From the Christian point of view, the Communist interpretation of history is inadequate because it presents a view of history which has an end without a consummation."<sup>101</sup>

In contrast, the apocalyptic vision of final judgment, preserves individual, spiritual values, not just materialistic values, declares Horndern, for it "does not sacrifice the individual of the present to the future, for the dead shall be raised, and all the saints will dwell in the coming Kingdom."<sup>102</sup>

Promise, struggle, the poor as heralds of the kingdom, the evil world combatting the hopes of the elect, and the apocalyptic end—cataclysmic and "here but not now"—these are the features of the Christian hope which Communism has secularized more openly than other materialisms. That all

men shall "stand before the judgment seat of Christ" proclaims that God's purposes are not simply an excruciatingly painful and interminably long process of selecting a race of supermen. Such is Nietzschean but not Galilean. For God's purposes are redemptive and not selective; and the final judgment stands as a curtain against which good and evil are truly revealed. There are no "common people" with God, no pawns to be moved about, human beings known only by numbers, no decadent nations or insignificant tribes. The pretensions of nationalism and racism crumble before this Christian doctrine. All true history is social history and it is theological.

### *Nature a Sphere of God's Activity*

The fourth way by which the Biblical view of final judgment gives meaning to history is this: nature is a sphere of God's activity, and history is concerned with His revealed purposes as known by men. The worship of the God of nature is idolatry, declares Butterfield, whereas the worship of the God of history is distinctively Judeo-Christian. Paul, in noting a succession of evil practices, listed in descending order in the letter to the Romans, charges that such sinners "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . ."104

In the twentieth century men have supposed that a cold war exists between the realm of nature and the realm of religion. Even theologians aver, like those in the last period of Scholasticism, that science says one thing and religion another and that "never the twain shall meet"—except, thanks to the transcendental existentialism of Neo-Orthodoxy, in the land of Ambiguity across the Sea of Symbol! John Baillie, in the address already referred to, has given a brilliant rebuttal to this compartmentalizing of life. He shows that the very presuppositions of modern science are found in the Christian revelation.<sup>105</sup> He concludes that "if faith should languish, the scientific impulse would in the end languish no less. For science does not possess in itself the necessary nourishment of its own vitality." For a *perception of significance* and value, not mere curiosity sustains scientific pursuit; and "when science turns positivist it becomes at the same time pragmatic and utilitarian."<sup>106</sup>

Christianity is concerned with purpose and meaning, and

the doctrine of judgment reflects the standard of integrity and devotion to truth which prevents intellectual curiosity from bending its efforts into the pursuits of sophistry in which there is no obligation to factual data other than its utility. Liquor advertising and war propaganda illustrate the point, as does the rigidity of certain Soviet scientific policies. Only recently was the Russian "party-line" geneticist, Lysenko, dismissed from his post. And the lack of a positive Soviet contribution to the field of astronomy was noted in the October, 1955 issue of *Science Monthly*: The "expanding universe" theory was reported officially rejected because it implied some sort of creationism and thus went counter to their ideology.

The substitution of "natural law" for "divine law" in regard to justice, which Emil Brunner noted, may be observed in the realm of physical things. The word "Nature" has squeezed God out of his created world and has left only a capital "N" as an apology to the religiously inclined people. Bernard Ramm has stated as well as any other Christian apologist the need to recognize Divine purpose in the world of things:

Without theology science sets forth the vast universal scheme as blind, meaningless, purposeless, never knowing an hour of creation, never knowing of an hour of consummation, and in the perspective of an infinity of years and an immensity of space our human hopes, joys, tragedies, aspirations, civilizations, intellectual and artistic achievements, are meaningless, insignificant and trivial. The humanist who tries to put a little color and thrill back into human existence—while still believing in a universe that is inhuman and meaningless and impersonal—cannot but sound either cheap or ironical.<sup>107</sup>

The Biblical view of Judgment rejects the retreat from fact implicit in the Modernistic and Neo-Orthodox denial of the historicity of the major Christian doctrines of *creation*, *incarnation*, and (by logical inference) *judgment*. Judgment not only asserts a relationship between history and nature but also that such relationship has ultimate meaning. Without a concept of final judgment, with its assertion of real and ultimate values, nature is posited as ending its relationship to history and history its relationship to man, who in the projected immortality can scarcely be thought of as "personal" if he has neither nature nor history against which to make identity.

### *A Realistic View of Man*

In the fifth place, the Biblical view of final judgment gives meaning to history by providing a realistic view of man. In view of the catastrophes of the century, modern historians are pretty well in harmony with the Biblical view that man is endemically evil and that the mere passage of time does not make him better. The doctrine of the final judgment asserts this, of course; but it also asserts man's redemptability. As all students of the writing of history realize, the fundamental presupposition upon which interpretation is made is his view of the nature of man. The doctrine of final judgment gives clues to the nature of man which the historian would do well to keep in mind.

### *A Norm for Moral Values*

The sixth and final meaning which the Biblical doctrine of the final judgment gives to history is that moral values have an ultimate, theistic norm, which is the will of God. The Neo-Orthodox writers have preached this admirably, from the standpoint of the ever-impinging judgment of God which lies upon every finite system and institution. There is a danger, however, that the non-temporal aspect of this teaching will allow men to excuse themselves in terms of natural causes. "I can imagine nothing more convenient to my sloth," writes Baillie, "than a philosophy which persuaded me, in the name of scientific outlook, to regard myself only as part of nature and as subject to none but nature's laws."<sup>108</sup>

Divine judgment asserts that man is not the sole arbiter of his choices. Observations of history enable men to read the "handwriting on the wall" but does not empower them to write it. It stands as a witness against getting away with sin, and against all moral shortcuts. The implications for social ethics are tremendous. It stands, for example, as an indictment of the over-anxious judgment of capital punishment. It is at the heart of the evangelical motivation out of which Christian social action has sprung, and which is usually forgotten within a generation. Final judgment indicates that deeds of love and kindness or of hate and unkindness have an impact which is everlasting and eternal.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion let it be noted that Biblical teaching about

final judgment and the meaning of history ought to be accompanied by personal, moral watchfulness. Eschatology has inflamed many by its heady truths, until they have said of this or that dictator: "he is the anti-Christ," and of this or that year, "this is it!" In view of the faithfulness of the Lord, the Church ought to listen to His words, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming,"<sup>109</sup> and to heed the words of the apostle Peter, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . ." <sup>110</sup>

1Arnold Toynbee, *New Opportunities for Historians*, the Gideon Seymour Lecture (University of Minnesota, 1954), p. 12.

2Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History, the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (University of Chicago, 1949), p. 194.

3Matthew 13:24-43. All Biblical references are from the Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1952)

4Arthur W. Munk, *History and God: Clues to His Purpose* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1952), p. 29. See also pp 25, 201-202 and 269.

5Ibid., pp. 29-33.

6Ibid., see Chap. 5, also p. 290 n. He denies inevitable progress as an "exploded idea," p. 202.

7Ibid., p. 144; italics mine.

8Ibid., p. 16 i. See also pp. 156-165.

9Ibid., p. 16j. 10Ibid., see pp. 251, 259.

11Ibid., p. 232. 12Ibid., p. 234.

13Shirley Jackson Case, *The Christian Philosophy of History* (University of Chicago, 1943), p. 211.

14Ibid. 15Ibid., p. 213. 16Ibid., p. 216.

17Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (New York: Oxford, 1948), see Chap. 13, "Meaning of History for the Soul."

18Ibid., pp. 248-252. 19Ibid., pp. 235-236.

20Ibid., pp. 242-243.

21Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford, 1948) VI, 324.

22Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York: Scribners, 1950), p. 52.

23Ibid., p. 55.

24Ibid. He cites as a particularly rapid example the French Revolution, "where, within three or four years a liberal movement had turned itself into a totalitarian autocracy; while only ten years after the outbreak in 1789, the establishment of democracy led to a new corruption—the modern type of dictatorship based on a popular plebiscite."

25 Ibid., p. 57. 26Ibid., p. 59. 27Ibid., p. 60.

28Ibid., p. 61. 29Ibid., pp. 66-67.

30Emil Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1949), I, 108.

31Ibid., 109. 32Ibid., 110. 33Ibid., p. 114, ff. 34Ibid., p. 118.

35Karl Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Revell, 1933), p. 208. He is recalling Romans 14:8.

36Ibid., p. 208-212.

37Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History, A Comparison of Christian Modern Views of History* (New York: Scribners, 1949), p. 27.

38Ibid., p. 28. 39Ibid. 40Ibid., p. 212, Chap. XII.

41Ibid., p. 214. 42Ibid., p. 215. 43Ibid., p. 233.

44Ibid., p. 233; cf. Matt. 24:36. 45Ibid., p. 237.

46Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. N. Rasetzki and E.

- Talmby (New York: Scribners, 1936), pp. 359.  
 47Ibid. See Chap. "Eschatology and History."  
 48Ibid., p. 278. 49Ibid., see pp. 279-283. 50Ibid., p. 280.  
 51Nicholas Berdyaev, **The Meaning of History**, trans. George Reavey  
 (New York: Scribners, 1936), pp. 197-198.  
 52Ibid., pp. 182-183. 53Ibid., p. 159. 54Ibid., p. 190.  
 55Ibid., p. 187. 56Ibid., pp. 183-184.  
 57Nicholas Berdyaev, **The Destiny of Man**, trans. Natalie Duddington  
 (London: The Centenary Press, 1945), see pp. 249-252.  
 58Ibid., p. 261.  
 59Niebuhr, **Faith and History**, p. 237.  
 60Lowith, **Meaning in History**, Intro. p. 2.  
 61Ibid., pp. 191-192. 62Ibid., pp. 196-197.  
 63Ibid., p. 192. 64Ibid., pp. 197-198.  
 65Ibid., p. 159. 66Ibid., Epilogue, pp. 204-207.  
 67Oscar Cullmann, **Christ and Time**, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Phila-  
 delphia: Westminster, 1950), see Foreword, pp. 12-13.  
 68Ibid., pp. 32-33. 69Ibid., p. 48.  
 70Ibid., p. 141. 71Ibid., p. 189.  
 72Wilbur M. Smith, **Therefore, Stand** (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1945), p.  
 445. His book is a disquisition on Paul's Athenia address on creation, resur-  
 rection and judgment.  
 73Ibid., p. 449. See his chapter on "Ancient Greek Civilization."  
 74Ibid., p. 445.  
 75Ibid., pp. 457-458, citing Denny, **Studies in Theology**, pp. 239-241.  
 76Zephaniah 1:14-18. 77Isaiah 2. 78Matthew 24,25.  
 79II Corinthians 5:10. 80II Peter 3.  
 81Revelation 20:11-15. 82Ibid., 21:1-4.  
 83Butterfield, **Christianity and History**, p. 77.  
 84Ibid., p. 28. 85 Matthew 25:41.  
 86A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. by Robert Brettall (Princeton Univer-  
 sity, 1949), p. 161.  
 87Matthew 25:21-23. 88Romans 12:19.  
 89I Corinthians 15:19.  
 90Roger L. Shinn, **Christianity and the Problem of History** (New York:  
 Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 12.  
 91See Romans 8:18-25.  
 92John Baillie, **Natural Science and the Spiritual Life** (New York:  
 Scribners, 1952), pp. 29-31.  
 93Luke 22:69-70. 94 Acts 1:11.  
 95Shinn, **Christianity and the Problem of History**, pp. 263-268.  
 96John Baillie, **The Belief in Progress** (New York: Scribners, 1951),  
 p. 73..  
 97Ibid., p. 94. 98Ibid., p. 179.  
 99Shinn, **Christianity and the Problem of History**, p. 204.  
 100Baillie, **Belief in Progress**, pp. 64-65.  
 101William Horndern, **Christianity, Communism, and History** (New  
 York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 123.  
 102Ibid., p. 132.  
 103Butterfield, **Christianity and History**, pp. 5-6.  
 104See Romans 1.  
 105Baillie, **Natural Science and Spiritual Life**, p. 20.  
 106Ibid., pp. 34-35.  
 107 Bernard Ramm, **The Christian View of Science and Scripture** (Grand  
 Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 35.  
 108Baillie, **Natural Science and Spiritual Life**, pp. 41-42. ..  
 109Matthew 23:32. 110II Peter 3:11,12.

---

*Published quarterly by George Fox College at Newberg, Oregon, by the Public Relations office in cooperation with the Office of the Dean. The annual Faculty Lecture is one of the four issues each year.*