

# The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World

## A Study of two Traditions

When, in the early sixteenth century, the historian of the reign of Louis XII, Claude de Seyssel<sup>1</sup>, divided the history of France into four periods, comparable to the infancy, childhood, manhood, and old age of the individual, " ainsi que Lucius Florus a divisé l'Empire des Romains " <sup>2</sup>, he was making use of an image familiar to both the Pagan and the Patristic literary tradition. It comes as a surprise, at first glance, to discover that De Seyssel, a Catholic bishop, cites a Pagan, rather than a Christian author as the presumed source of his metaphor. It would seem more natural for a Christian historian to think instinctively of Augustine's use of the ages of man to illustrate the ages of the world in the *De Civitate Dei*<sup>3</sup>. But it was characteristic of a Renaissance humanist, albeit a churchman, to be more conversant with the Pagan authors than with the Church fathers. Without pretending to be exhaustive, this study is an attempt to trace, in summary, the image of the ages of man, with reference to the ages of the world, in both Pagan and Christian literature from Antiquity to the present. This study does not merely correspond to the wish of its author to catalogue the many authors who have, at one time or other in Western literature, made use of the image in question ; it is especially an attempt to trace the development of the metaphor of the ages of man in its long and adventurous history. It is the purpose of this study to demonstrate when, and in what historical or literary circumstances, the metaphor was used ; how it was passed on from one author to the other, and from one tradition to the other ; how it served various uses under the pen of different writers. Since, as it will soon become obvious to the reader, the image occurs especially in historical works, the larger purpose of this study will be to prove that the preference of Wes-

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1. For a summary of the life and works of Claude de Seyssel, I refer the reader to the article of J. MERCIER, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, t. XIV (2), Paris, Letouzey, 1941.

2. *Histoire du Roy Louis XII* (Paris, 1587), 8-9.

3. Bk. X, 14 ; XVI, 43 ; XXII, 30. Our discussion of Saint Augustine follows, *infra*, part II.

tern historians, now for the Christian version of the image, now for the Pagan original, stems directly from the broad historical conceptions each of them held, or from the dominant philosophy of history of their period.

### I. *The Pagan Tradition.*

The idea that the life of man, like the history of the world, can be divided into periods is an ancient theme in Western literature. A number of authors in Antiquity were aware of the traditional division of life into component periods. The most obvious division was that of youth and old age, which were poetically set in contrast, as was day to night, morning to evening, summer to winter<sup>4</sup>. Aesop, Empedocles, and Seneca favored a threefold division of life, based either on empirical observation, or on the science of numbers<sup>5</sup>. Hesiod, Pythagoras, and Xenophon, among others, spoke on occasion of the four ages of man<sup>6</sup>. The division of life into seven periods was, however, the most common and the most popular in Antiquity. According to Censorinus, Hippocrates had divided the life of man into seven periods, or cycles; and Solon had listed ten periods, each lasting seven years. "As far as I am concerned", Censorinus concluded, "those authors are closest to the truth who divided the life of man into periods of seven years"<sup>7</sup>. The intrusion of Chaldean astrology into Hellenistic thought after Alexander's conquests gave added prestige to the seven-fold division of life: Oriental students of the stars had established an exact correspondence between the seven ages and the seven planets then known. Ptolemy, in the second century A.D., had demonstrated that each of the seven ages was lived under the patronage of a different planet<sup>8</sup>.

There existed a parallel conviction, during Antiquity, that the history of the world could also be divided into periods. Hesiod, in the eighth century B.C., had recalled the five successive ages since the beginning of time: the age of gold, the age of silver, the age of bronze, the age of heroes, and the age of iron<sup>9</sup>. There existed a Judaic tradition, concurrent in time with the Greek, which divided the history of mankind into millenia, periods, or empires<sup>10</sup>. As illustrative of this tradition, it is noteworthy

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4. A. LUNEAU, *L'Histoire du salut chez les Pères de l'Eglise: la doctrine des âges du monde*, Paris, 1964, p. 50.

5. AESOP, *Fab.*, 173; Empedocles, in ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, 21; SENECA, *Epist.*, 121. For further information on these references, v. LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, 51.

6. HESIOD, *Works and Days*, vv. 109-201; Pythagoras, acc'ding to DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VIII, I, 10; XENOPHON, *Symposium*, IV, 17. For these references, I am indebted to LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

7. *De die natali*, c. 14.

8. LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

9. *Works and Days*, vv. 109-201.

10. LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

to recall the interpretation given by the Prophet Daniel to the dream of the Babylonian King : the statue which had appeared to Nabuchednezzar during his dream, composed of four different metals, signified the succession of four great empires, the last of which would last forever<sup>11</sup>. Among the Roman writers, Varro had mentioned certain Etruscan annals that prophesied the duration of Rome, how many *saecula* had elapsed, how many were yet to come<sup>12</sup>.

Who first made an explicit comparison between the ages of man and the ages of the world is difficult to ascertain. Cicero pictured the Roman Republic as " nascentem et crescentem et adultam et iam firmam atque robustam... " <sup>13</sup> Lucretius described his age as " spatio aetatis defessa vetusto " <sup>14</sup>. Vergil's fourth Eclogue praises the *saturnia regna*, symbolically referred to, first as a child, then as an adolescent devouring the legendary exploits of his ancestors, finally as a *virum*<sup>15</sup>. Livy makes fairly explicit use of the metaphor, by ascribing to the Roman *imperium* periods of existence or states of being normally attributed to man : *parvum, auctum, labente disciplina*. The Roman Empire has, according to Livy, traversed its infancy and its growth ; already its period of decline has begun, " donec ad haec tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra, nec remedia pati possumus " <sup>16</sup>.

The most widely known text on the subject under discussion is that of Lucius Annaeus Florus, who compares the ages of Rome to four traditional divisions of human life. In the " Prooemium " of his opusculum on the history of Rome, the *Epitomae*<sup>17</sup>, Florus, who is presumed to have lived during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian<sup>18</sup>, states that the " aged " Roman Empire, under Trajan's power, " regains its strength, and against all hope recovers health in its old age, almost a return of

11. *Daniel*, II : 29-45.

12. *De die natali*, c. 14.

13. *De republica*, II, 3.

14. *De rerum natura*, II, 1175 : these words terminate a long passage on the " old age " of the world, vv. 1150-1175. The last two verses are as follows :

Nec tenet, omnia paulatim tabescere, et ire

Ad capulum, spatio aetatis defessa vetusto.

15. Verse 18 : " At tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu ". Verse 26 : " At simul heroum laudes et facta parentis / Iam legere... " Verse 37 : " Hinc, ubi iam firmata virum te fecerit aetas... "

16. *Ab urbe condita*, " Praefatio ", par. 3 : " Quae ante conditam... "

17. Sometimes entitled *Epitomae de Tito Livio bellorum omnium annorum DCC libri duo*. Florus' work was long, and mistakenly, thought to be an abridgment of Livy's history of Rome : v. Villemain's discussion in L.A. FLORUS, *Abrégé de l'histoire romaine*, Paris, 1826, p. XI.

18. Praise for the living emperor, in the preface of any work, is a fairly accurate means of dating the time of composition, especially if, as is the case here, the emperor is spoken of in the present tense. We may therefore suppose that Florus composed his *Epitomae*, and lived at least a part of his life, during the reign of Trajan (98-117). Cf. Villemain's discussion, in L.A. FLORUS, *Abrégé de l'histoire romaine*, " Notice ", p. XI.

youth<sup>19</sup>... " The sentence concludes a long comparison, in which Florus has likened the duration of the *populum romanum* to the four ages of man. In the passage<sup>20</sup>, the ages are designated by four verbs, *coeperit*, *adoleverit*, *pervenerit*, *consenuerit*. The infancy of Rome, according to Florus, corresponds to the age of its Kings, lasting about two-hundred fifty years, during which Rome waged war " *circum ipsam matrem suam* ", within close range of its walls. Its adolescence, equal in length to its infancy, was spent in the conquest of the Italian peninsula. It was, like any adolescence, a period of great agitation, " *viris armisque incitatissimum*... " The two centuries that elapsed between the start of the Punic Wars and the age of Augustus constituted the youth of Rome, and " *quasi quaedam robusta maturitas* ". From Caesar Augustus until Trajan, there followed a period of senescence and decadence, under the rule of the indolent Caesars. Trajan appeared on the scene, however, and Rome discovered that its previous decadence did not preclude a " *reddita iuventus* ".

It does not seem as if a prolonged comparison of the ages of Rome and the ages of man was original with Florus. Lactantius, in paraphrasing a text rather similar to the one mentioned above, attributes it not to Florus, but to Seneca<sup>21</sup>. It has been supposed by some scholars in the past that Lactantius' attribution of the text to Seneca was incorrect, and that he was understandably confusing Lucius Annaeus Seneca with Lucius Annaeus Florus<sup>22</sup>. Seneca and Florus share an identical family name ; in fact, Florus has been presumed by some historians to be of Spanish origin, like Seneca, and to belong to the *gens Annaea*. It was supposed, therefore, that Lactantius had confused Seneca with his relative, Florus, and was paraphrasing Florus without realizing it. A juxtaposition of Lactantius' paraphrase with the text of Florus reveals, however, that Lactantius could not have had Florus in mind :

(FLORUS, *Epitomae*, I, 1-4)

Prima aetas sub regibus fuit, prope ducentos quinquaginta annos, quibus circum ipsam matrem suam cum finitimis luctatus est : haec erit eius infantia. Sequens a Bruto Collatinoque consulibus in Appium Claudium, Quintum Fulvium consules, ducentos quinquaginta annos patet, quibus Italiam subegit : hoc fuit tempus armis-

(LACTANTIUS, *Div. Inst.*, VII, ch. 15.)

Primam enim dixit infantiam sub rege Romulo fuisse, a quo et genita et quasi educata sit Roma : deinde pueritiam sub ceteris regibus, a quibus et aucta sit, et disciplinis pluribus institutisque formata : at vero, Tarquinio regnante, quum iam quasi adulta esse coepisset, servitium non tulisse et reiecta superbae domi-

19. " Proemium ", par. 2 : " sub Trajano principe movet lacertos, et praeter spem omnium senectus imperii, quasi reddita iuventute, revirescit ".

20. *Ibid.* : " Si quis ergo populum romanum quasi hominem consideret, totamque eius aetatem percenseat, ut coeperit, utque adoleverit, ut quasi ad quemdam iuventae florem pervenerit, ut postea velut consenuerit, quatuor gradus processusque eius inveniet ".

21. *Div. inst.*, VII, c. 15, CSEL, XIX, 633-4.

22. For a discussion of this point : PL, VI, 788 ; SÉNÈQUE *Œuvres*, ed. Du Rozoir, Paris, 1834, p. 440 ; G. VOSSIUS, *De historicis latinis*, Lyon, 1651, pp. 162-164.

que incitatissimum ; ideo quis adolescentiam dixerit. Dehinc ad Caesarem Augustum ducenti anni quibus totum orbem pacavit. Haec iam ipsa iuventa imperii, et quasi robusta maturitas. A Caesare Augusto in saeculum nostrum ... inertia Caesarum quasi consenuit atque decoxit ; nisi quod sub Traiano principe movet lacertos...

nationis iugo, maluisse legibus obtemperare quam regibus ; quumque esset adolescentia eius fine punici belli terminata, tum denique confirmatis viribus, coepisse iuvenescere. Sublata enim Carthagine, quae tam diu aemula imperii fuit, manus suas in totum orbem terra marique porrexit : donec regibus cunctis et nationibus imperio subiugatis, quum iam bellorum materia deficeret, viribus suis male uteretur, quibus se ipsa confecit. Haec fuit prima eius senectus, quum bellis lacerata civilibus, atque intestino malo pressa, rursus ad regimen singularis imperii recidit, quasi ad alteram infantiam revoluta. Amissa enim libertate, quam Bruto duce et auctore defenderat, ita consenuit, tanquam sustentare se ipsa non valeret, nisi adminiculo regentium niteretur.

Whereas Florus mentions explicitly the four ages of the development of Rome, followed by a "reddita iuventus", the paraphrase of Lactantius mentions "ages", without distinguishing their number. Moreover, the periods of Roman history in the text of Florus do not correspond, in time, to the ages in the "Senecan" text. Whereas Florus calls the infancy of Rome the age of its kings, the text attributed to Seneca restricts this period to the reign of Romulus, and calls "childhood" the reign of the other kings. According to Florus, the adolescence of Rome lasts until the consulates of Appius Claudius and Quintus Fulvius (ca. 500 B.C.) ; according to "Seneca" the same period ends with the last Punic war (ca. 150 B.C.). The manhood of Rome, according to Florus, lasted from the consulates mentioned above until the reign of Caesar Augustus ; according to "Seneca", the same period — much shorter in time — lasted from the end of the last Punic war until the time of the civil wars, after which began the decline, or "prima senectus". The difference between the two texts is perhaps here the most evident : Florus calls the reign of Augustus the "robusta maturitas" of Rome, after which decline sets in, provoked by the indolence of the later emperors ; "Seneca", on the other hand places the reign of Augustus during a period of senescence, and the "regimen singularis imperii" is clearly referred to as an unfortunate event.

Lactantius, then, could not have been paraphrasing the text of Florus. It is far more likely, according to the most recent opinions on the question<sup>23</sup>, that the "Seneca" in question was the philosopher, or his father,

23. Salluste, Jules César... Florus, ed. Nisard, Paris, 1837, pp. 621-623 ; Vossius, *op. cit.*, 164 ; Reall. für klass. Altertumswiss., VI, 2761-2770 ; I, 2239 ; *Suppl.*, I, 84-85 ; Reall. für Ant. und Christentum, Entwicklung, V, 494-495. Cf. also the following articles : F. BOLL, *Die Lebensalter, ein Beitrag zur Antiken Ethologie und Geschichte der Zahlen*, in *Neue Jahrb. f.d. klass. Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 31 (1913), pp. 92-154 ; A. KLOTZ, *Das Geschichtswerk des Aelteren Seneca*, in *Rh. Mus. für Theologie*, LVI (1901), 429-442.

Seneca the Elder, who is known to have written historical works, and to have bequeathed historical texts for his son to publish. The fact that Florus had a proneness to imitate the style of the great authors before him, and that he quite probably belonged to the *gens Annaea* makes it reasonable to suppose that Florus himself, like Lactantius, had the true originator of the image in mind when he wrote his *Epitomae*; but he evidently changed the image to suit his needs.

Flavius Vopiscus, in his *Vita Cari*<sup>24</sup>, was the next historian in line to compare the duration of Rome to the ages of man :

Nam si volumus *ab ortu* Urbis repetere, quas varietates sit passa Roma respublica, inveniemus nullam magis vel bonis floruisse, vel malis laborasse. Et, ut a Romulo incipiam, vero patre ac parenti reipublicae, quae illius felicitas ? qui fundavit, constituit, roboravitque rempublicam, atque unus omnium conditorum perfectam Urbem reliquit ? Quid deinde Numam loquar ? qui frequentem bellis, et gravidam triumphis, civitatem religione munivit. *Viguit* igitur usque ad Tarquinii Superbi tempora nostra respublica, sed passa tempestatem de moribus regis, non sine gravi exitio semel ulta est. *Adolevit* deinde usque ad tempora Gallicani belli ; sed, quasi quodam mersa naufragio, capta praeter arcem Urbe, plus paene mali sensit quam tunc boni habuerat. Reddidit se deinde in integrum ; sed eousque gravata est Punicis bellis, ac terrore Pyrrhi, ut mortalitatis mala praecordium timore sentiret.

*Crevit* deinde, victa Carthagine, trans maria missis imperiis ; sed socialibus affecta discordiis, extenuato felicitatis sensu, usque ad Augustum bellis civilibus confecta, *consenuit*. Per Augustum deinde reparata : si reparata dici potest, libertate deposita...

Unless there is a striking coincidence in thought, it is reasonable to suppose that this passage was written under the influence of the Senecan text, which we no longer have, or of the paraphrase of that text by Lactantius<sup>25</sup>. The divisions of Vopiscus are almost the same as those of Seneca : the infancy of Rome corresponds to the reigns of Romulus and Numa ; the childhood of the City (" *viguit* ") lasts until the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, after whom the monarchy is overthrown ; a shaky adolescence (" *adolevit* deinde..." ) comes to an end with the last Punic war, after which the manhood of Rome (" *crevit* deinde..." ) begins. Vopiscus, like Seneca, places the beginning of Rome's decline at the time of the civil wars. The reign of Augustus represents, according to Vopiscus, a rally of strength : but the rally is artificial, and bought at what a price ! " *si reparata dici potest, libertate deposita...* " The wording of certain phrases is similar. Seneca refers to Romulus as " *a quo et genita et*

24. FLAVIUS VOPISCUS (end of 3rd, beginning of 4th cent.), *Vita Cari*, II, 3. For this reference, KLOTZ, *op. cit.*, 436.

25. Klotz also enunciates this opinion in *op. cit.*, 436.

quasi educata sit Roma". Vopiscus calls him the King, "qui fundavit, constituit, roboravitque rempublicam". The Senecan phrase "sublata Carthagine" and the equivalent in Vopiscus, "victa Carthagine", are similar grammatical constructions and refer to the same historical event. The conquests of Rome after the last Punic war are designated with similar words: Seneca-Lactantius says, "in totum orbem terra marique porrexit." Vopiscus states: "trans maria missis imperiis". Other phrases are similar or identical: "bellis lacerata civilibus" (Seneca-Lactantius), and "bellis civilibus confecta" (Vopiscus); "intestino malo pressa" (Seneca-Lactantius), and "socialibus affecta discordiis" (Vopiscus); "amissa libertate" (Seneca-Lactantius) and "libertate deposita" (Vopiscus). It is quite probable, therefore, that Vopiscus was inspired directly by the original text of Seneca.

The case for Ammianus Marcellinus (born in 330 A.D.) is a different one. His image of the four ages of Rome<sup>26</sup> from Romulus to the "present" (350 A.D.) almost unquestionably follows in the tradition of Florus. Speaking of his own age, the late fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus declares that Rome owes its present glory to the happy alliance of Fortune and Virtue which presided over the birth of the city. From its cradle to the end of its infancy, a period of nearly three-hundred years (750-450 B.C.), the Roman people fought around their walls: "circummurana pertulit bella". The adolescence of Rome was spent waging difficult wars, in extending its power beyond the Alps and the sea: "post multiplices bellorum aerumnas, Alpes transcendit et fretum". Grown into manhood, ("in iuvenem erectus et virum"), Rome enjoyed a series of triumphs, during which it was victorious all over the world. From every foreign shore on which it had landed, Rome returned bearing the laurel wreath of victory. Now declining into old age ("vergens in senectum"), Rome still manages to win an occasional victory on the strength of its reputation alone ("nomine solo aliquotiens vincens"), yet already it is slipping into the "tranquilliora vitae".

The text of Ammianus Marcellinus bears more similarity to that of Florus than to the paraphrase of Lactantius. The four ages of Rome are clearly articulated, although the periods of Roman history to which *adolescentia*, *iuvenis*, and *senium* correspond are far less clear in Ammianus Marcellinus than in Florus. The wording of certain phrases is similar: Florus refers to the earliest wars of Rome as fought "circum ipsam matrem suam"; Ammianus Marcellinus calls them "circummurana bella". There is one major difference between the two texts: Florus, in praise of Trajan, speaks of a fifth age, "reddita iuventus", the return of youthful strength. As far as the pessimistic Ammianus is concerned, the period of *senium* marks the beginning of the end. Worthy of his model Tacitus in this instance, Ammianus Marcellinus spends the remainder

26. AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum*, XIV, 6.

of the chapter in which this image occurs, deploring the contemporary decadence of Rome. There is clearly no return of youth indicated for the future, as far as this historian is concerned.

Ammianus Marcellinus was, as far as we can ascertain, the last of the Pagan historians to use, in any explicit and prolonged fashion, the image of the ages of man with analogical reference to the ages of Rome. In their use of this image, these historians had certain characteristics in common. All of them lived during the time of the Empire, and imagined the decline of Rome as beginning with, or immediately before, the reign of Augustus. For all of them, without exception, the manhood of Rome was characterized by military success on the outside, and by civic liberty within. The apotheosis of Roman history was therefore the time of greatest *virtus*: the period of human life when a peak of physical strength is combined with a maximum of moral force and control. All of them finally, were interested in the history of Rome and of Rome alone. Lactantius, a Christian, although he was conscious of Seneca's image of the ages of Rome, was able to picture Rome in a far wider and more universal perspective than Seneca ever could. Such is the major difference one observes as his attention turns to the Christian writers of the period we have been describing. For the Roman historians, universal history was the history of Rome, and the ages of Rome were co-extensive with the ages of the world. The Christian fathers brought far wider and supra-mundane dimensions to the history of mankind; and whenever they made use of the image of the ages of man, they made them analogous not to the ages of any society or empire, but to the ages of the world, the ages of the history of salvation.

## II. *The Christian Tradition.*

The Christian writers of the first centuries of the new era inherited from the Graeco-Roman and Judaic literary traditions a rich store of metaphors to use with reference to the ages of society or to the ages of the world. Their knowledge of classical literature made them familiar with the traditional divisions of human life into two, three, four, seven, or ten periods. The division of world history into millenia, like the attempt to prognosticate the end of the world after a fixed number of millenia, was a Pagan theme to which several Christian writers of the first three centuries had attempted to give a Christian interpretation<sup>27</sup>. The Old and New Testaments, moreover, provided early Christian writers with an awareness of history even deeper, and a supply of metaphors even richer, than had done any of their favorite Pagan authors. Every Christian writer made use, at one time or other, of the Pauline division

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27. E.g., Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, among others, LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 209-235.



of history into four ages : the age of the law of nature ; the age of the Mosaic law ; the age of grace ; and the age of glory<sup>28</sup>. The Old Testament was in its entirety considered a historical document containing an evident notion of progression. The events of the history of salvation anterior to Christ fell naturally into discrete periods : Adam to Noah ; Noah to Abraham ; Abraham to David ; David to the Babylonian captivity ; the Babylonian captivity to Christ<sup>29</sup>. Apart from these historical periods, there was the Creation narrative in *Genesis*, which divided the history of the world into seven symbolic days. As early as the second century, an obscure Christian writer had attempted to relate the days of Creation with the Greek and Judaic myth that the world would last six thousand years<sup>30</sup>. A few parables of the New Testament provided the Church fathers with yet other schemes, according to which the history of the world might be ordered. The story of the Master's appearance at three successive vigils of night (*Luke*, XII : 38) might symbolize the three stages of God's revelation in history, or in the life of each individual man. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard, arriving for work at five different hours of the day (*Matthew*, XX : 1-19), designated, according to some interpretations, a five-fold division of ages in the history of salvation. The six jars of water miraculously transformed into wine at the Cana wedding feast (*John*, II : 6) provided still another symbol for the six ages of history, a number all the more attractive because it corresponded with the number of days in the Creation narrative<sup>31</sup>.

Such, in brief, was the vast metaphorical tradition inherited by the Fathers of the early Church. They managed on many occasions to put to use the classical metaphor of the ages of man, frequently in conjunction with other metaphors, Pagan or Christian. Tertullian, for example, compared the four stages of divine justice in history with the four traditional ages of man, and with the four stages of the growth of plants. The four stages of divine justice are quite similar to St. Paul's division of the history of salvation into four ages ; as for the natural image of the four stages of growth, it is unquestionably inspired by Cicero's *De Senectute*<sup>32</sup> :

Granum est primo et de grano frutex oritur et de frutice arbuscula enititur, deinde rami et frondes invalescunt et totum arboris nomen expanditur, inde germinis tumor et flos de germine solvitur et de flore fructus aperitur : is quoque rudis aliquamdiu et informis paulatim aetatem suam dirigens eruditur in mansuetudinem saporis. Sic

28. LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 47 : « La seconde [division de l'histoire] compte avec Paul les quatre âges de la loi naturelle, de la loi mosaïque, de la grâce, et de la gloire ».

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

31. A. SCHMIDT, *Aetates Mundi : die Weltalter als Gliederungsprinzip der Geschichte*, in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (LXVII, 1955-56), 288-317.

32. *De senectute*, 51. See also 33, discussion of the ages of man, and of the tendencies and virtues appropriate to each age.

et iustitia — nam idem Deus iustitiae et creaturae — primo fuit in rudimentis, natura Deum metuens, dehinc per legem et prophetas promovit in infantiam, dehinc per Evangelium efferbuit in iuventutem, nunc per Paracletum componitur in maturitatem<sup>33</sup>.

Saint Ambrose, rallied, in one of his letters, to the division of life and of world history into seven ages according to Hippocrates and Solon, and stated : " Itaque septima mundi aetas conclusa est ; octava illuxit gratia " <sup>34</sup>. On another occasion, remarkably like Tertullian, he juxtaposes the image of the four major divisions of life with the Ciceronian image of growth, and applies both metaphors, in turn, to the four ages of divine revelation according to Saint Paul :

Quatuor quoque aetates sunt hominis, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, maturitas ... Similis ratio his quae gignuntur solo. Ubi semen sparsum fuerit, solvitur humo ; et primo prorumpit in radicem, deinde germinat, formatur fructus, et postea maturescit. Arbores quoque ipsae primum fructum ferunt, deinde ipse adolescit fructus, accessu temporis mutat colorem, quarto ordine consummatur, hoc est, novissimo. Ita ergo et nos in terra hac afflictionis fugiamus lateres formare : sed lacrymis et gemitu provocemus Dei misericordiam ; ut mittet nobis Moyses et Aaron, hoc est, legem et sacerdotem : sed illum verum Sacerdotem et sacerdotum principem, qui licet inter homines versaretur, dicebatur : " Ecce spiritus ante faciem nostram Christus Dominus ... et liberet nos de terra Aegypti ... Feramus etiam fructum fidei, ab ipsa pueritia, augeamus in adolescentia, coloremus in iuventute, compleamus in senectute<sup>35</sup> ...

Lactantius, influenced perhaps by the theme of the decadence of Rome, referred to his age as the " ultimate old age of a tired and crumbling world " <sup>36</sup>. Saint Cyprian thought that the history of the world had reached its senescence and its end<sup>37</sup>. Saint John Chrysostome, on the other hand, stated that, the world being compared to the age of an individual man, his generation was living during a period of adolescence : maturity and old age were still to follow. Saint John Chrysostome, however, unlike many of the Christian fathers, thought the problem of the world's duration a secondary one. What mattered in history were the stages of God's revelation and love for mankind. The end of the world, as far as each individual man is concerned, is the hour of his death. What does it matter to try to compute the ages of the world, when the only thing that matters is to be ready when our life comes to an end<sup>38</sup> ?

33. *De virg. vel.*, CSEL, LXXXVI, 80.

34. *Epist.*, XLIV ; PL, XVI, 1136-1140.

35. *De Abraham*, II, c. 9, 65, CSEL, XXXII, I, 620.

36. *Div. inst.*, VII, c. 14, CSEL, XIX, 630 : « quasi fatigati et delabentis mundi ultimam senectutem. »

37. *Ad Demetrianum*, c. 4, CSEL, III, I, 353. *De mortalitate*, 25, CSEL, III, I, 313. Cf. *I Cor.*, 10 : 11 : « ad correctionem nostram in quos fines saeculorum deveniunt ».

38. *In I Thess. hom.*, IX, 1, PG, LXII, 447. *In Matt. hom.* VIII, PG : LVII-LVIII, 737-738. *In epist. ad Coloss.*, I, hom. 4, PG, LXII, 328.

Saint Augustine used the metaphor of the ages of man on many occasions, with analogical reference to the ages of the world. He frequently managed to combine this metaphor with others, gathered from the classical literary tradition, as well as from the Bible. Augustine usually enumerates six ages in the life of the individual man : *infantia*, *pueritia*, *adolescentia*, *iuventus*, *gravitas*, and *senectus*. In his treatise *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*<sup>39</sup>, written in 388-390, Augustine set out to refute a literal, anthropomorphic interpretation of the Creation narrative in *Genesis*, as the Manicheans had taught it ; it was an interpretation to which Augustine himself had almost fallen victim. In chapter XXIII of this treatise, " Septem dies, et septem aetates mundi ", Augustine juxtaposes three metaphors, drawn either from the Pagan or the Biblical literary tradition, which are used to illustrate the ages of the world : the metaphors of the ages of man, of the days of Creation, and of the historical periods from Adam to Christ<sup>40</sup>. The earliest period of the human race, when men first began to enjoy the light, can be compared, states Augustine, to the first day of Creation, when God said : " Let there be light ". We must consider this age as the infancy of the world (" *tanquam infantia ipsius universi saeculi* "), for the world, in this instance, is to be thought of as a single human being. This infancy lasted ten generations, from Adam to Noah. The Deluge might be interpreted as the evening of the first day, as our infancy is " destroyed " by the deluge of forgetfulness : " *tanquam oblivionis diluvio deletur* ".

The second age of the world, its *pueritia*, or childhood, lasted from Noah until Abraham, ten generations. Well might it be likened to the second day of Creation, when God made the firmament to separate the waters above the earth from the waters below. Was not Noah's Ark a sort of firmament, separating the waters on which it floated from the waters which poured down ? This second age was not destroyed by any deluge, quite as our childhood is never wiped out of our memory : " *pueritia nostra non oblivione tergitur de memoria* ". The adult remembers his childhood, although he may no longer be conscious of his infancy.

The vocation of Abraham proclaims the third age of the world : " *et succedit aetas tertia similis adolescentiae* ". It, too, might be considered similar to the third day of Creation, when God separated the waters from the dry land ; for it was during this period of history that the " dry land " of Abraham and his people, ever thirsting for the " rain " of divine law (" *sitiens imbrem coelestem divinorum mandatorum* "), was set apart from the " sea " of the Gentile nations, ever troubled by the chan-

39. LUNEAU, *op. cit.*, p. 288. Although this is perhaps the longest elaboration by Augustine on the ages of man and of the world, the ages of man are mentioned on other occasions, e.g., *Enarr. in Psalm.*, 127, 15 ; *De divers. quaest.*, 83, 9, 58, 2 et q. 64 (2) ; *Epist.*, 213. The correspondence between the ages of man and of the world is mentioned, apart from *De Genesi*, I, 23 and the references in *De civ. Dei* (see notes 43 and 44), in *De catech. rudibus*, XXII, 39.

40. PL, XXXIV, 190-193 : « Sed quare septimo die requies ista tribuatur... »

ging winds of heresy and falsehood. This age received the seed of Scripture and the Prophets, and was thus enabled to engender the People of God. The third age of the world is therefore known as its adolescence, for, as is characteristic of that time of life, "*filios habere iam potest*". Historically, it lasted from Abraham until David, fourteen generations.

The fourth age began with David: "*Haec aetas similis iuventutis est*". *Iuventus*, the summit of life, that revered age among ages, is compared quite rightly to the fourth day of Creation, when God made the stars in the firmament of heaven. Nothing seems more natural, in the mind of Augustine, than the juxtaposition of the three images, *iuventus, regnum David, excellentia solis*. The reign of David is the apotheosis of history, the "*firmum ornamentum omnium aetatum*". It is followed by an age of decline, *gravitas*, which extended from the time of the Babylonian captivity until the coming of Christ. As, in the life of man, *gravitas* is characterized by a decline of strength, so, in this period of history, was the strength of the Judaic monarchy broken. And, as the fifth day of Creation had witnessed the appearance of birds and fishes, the Jews of the Babylonian exile lived scattered in the sea of alien nations, and, like birds, had no dwelling of their own.

The fifth age ended, and the sixth began, with the coming of Christ. Augustine interprets this period to be the *senectus veteris hominis*. 'The Jewish nation had become like an old man, for its political power had come to an end, *extremam vitam*. Concurrent with the death of the "old man", however, is the birth of the new, *homo novus*, who has put away the things of the flesh, "*qui iam spiritualiter vivit*". According to the schema of the days of Creation, this is the day of the creation of man. Historically it is the "Christian era", and it will last until the end of the world. Its generations, says Augustine, cannot be numbered, for no one knows the time of the Lord's visitation. On the sixth day, one final evening will draw the curtain, the hour when, in the words of Scripture, "*filius hominis non inveniet fidem super terram*". At this darkest hour will dawn the seventh day, the second coming of Christ, heralding an eternal Sabbath. The virtuous will be rewarded for their good actions by an eternal repose in the Lord, quite as God Himself rested on the seventh day, seeing that all He had done was very good.

This passage, perhaps Augustine's longest elaboration upon the metaphor of the ages of man, is characterized by a certain literary ingenuity, and by an occasional blindness to history. The ingenuity lies in Augustine's successful fusion of metaphors, which he manages in very intricate patterns before tripping into banality or exaggeration. Comparing the first age of man (Adam to Noah) to an infancy which is wiped away by the *diluvii oblivio*, as the earliest age of life slips into the *memoriae oblivio* makes for a complex and imaginative metaphor. On the other hand, comparing the Jewish nation to dispersed fishes in the sea of nations, and to birds without a home, or calling the *novus homo* the "reptile with a living soul" of the sixth day of creation — this is carrying the point

too far. And what is one to say of a schema of history that places the reign of Augustus between the *gravitas* and the *senectus* of the world? It may be said in Augustine's favor that the only history he is considering is the history of salvation, that is Scriptural history, and that for such a vision of the world, the Roman Empire was a brilliant but accessory event. Whatever the pretext, to ignore the history of Rome in a chapter dedicated to the *aetates mundi* is to weaken the argument.

Whatever else might be said against the literary merits of the Augustinian text, one point is certain: Augustine put the metaphor of the ages of man to its fullest use. He enriched it by juxtaposing it with the Pagan myth of the ages of the world, with the Creation narrative, and with the periods of Jewish "history" from Adam to Christ. Saint John Chrysostome and Saint Ambrose had, before Augustine, referred to an adolescence, a maturity, and an old age of humanity<sup>41</sup>. As far as we can tell, however, Augustine was the first writer in Western literature to create a synthesis of three common literary themes before him: the theme of the ages of man, the theme of the ages of the world, and the theme of the world considered as a single man. The image of the ages of man would never again find a more ingenious literary proponent than Saint Augustine.

In several of his later writings, notably in the *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine evoked with some variations the correspondence between the ages of man and the ages of the world. In the second part of his treatise on the City of God, Augustine establishes another point of similarity between the history of the individual and the history of the world: they are both capable of evolving, of arriving at "correct learning" (*recta eruditio*), in stages:

Sicut autem unius hominis, ita humani generis, quod ad Dei populum pertinet, recta eruditio per quosdam articulos temporum tamquam aetatum profecit accessibus<sup>42</sup> ...

In Book XVI<sup>43</sup>, Augustine provides an interesting variation to the theme of *recta eruditio*, characteristic of man the microcosm and of the world. In the text of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (v. supra), Augustine had already anticipated the idea, developed more fully in *De Civitate Dei*, that man, like the world, evolves into fuller consciousness of self, into physical and spiritual maturity. As adolescence, he said, is marked by a capacity to bear children, *filios habere*, so the adolescence of the world was characterized by the conception and birth of the Chosen People through Abraham. In Book XVI, Augustine widens the theme of *recta eruditio* to include *infantia* and *pueritia*. The first age of the world, its

41. See notes 37 and 38.

42. Bk. X, c. 14.

43. XVI, 43, part 3.

*infantia*, was so called because the People of God had as yet no capacity to speak : " quia fari non potest ". The period between Noah and Abraham " velut pueritia fuit ". As Augustine explains,

et ideo prima lingua inventa est, id est hebraea. A pueritia namque homo incipit loqui...

In his conclusion to *De Civitate Dei*, finally<sup>44</sup>, Augustine takes up the comparison in its entirety, and likens the ages of man not only to the ages of the world, but to the days of the week. Drawing his information from Scripture, he computes the number of generations separating each of the first five ages, and succeeds in finding even these numbers symbolic. He repeats his assertion that the sixth age, beginning with Christ, contains an unknown number of generations, after which the seventh day will dawn.

The comparison of the ages of the world to the ages of man, as transmitted by Augustine, was a theme known to the innumerable readers of the *De Civitate Dei* and of other Augustinian works. It would be safe to say that most if not all of the mediaeval writers who made use of the metaphor did so in imitation or under the inspiration of Augustine. This seems to be the case, even for that strange work of Fulgentius, " *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* ", written at the start of the sixth century<sup>45</sup>. Fabius Claudius Fulgentius meant to divide the life of man, like the history of the world, into twenty-three periods, so as to correspond to the twenty-three letters of the Latin alphabet. Although he left his work unfinished after the fourteenth age, it is clear to see that his division of the ages of the world are simply the Augustinian divisions cut into finer subdivisions. The same can be said for his divisions of the ages of man<sup>46</sup>.

The two purveyors of the Augustinian tradition to the Middle Ages were Isidore and Bede. The debt owed by Isidore to Augustine, and by Bede to both these predecessors, is obvious after an examination of the texts in which they compare the ages of man to the ages of the world. Isidore summarizes the Augustinian division of history on several occasions :

Aetas autem proprie duobus modis dicitur : aut enim hominis, sicut infantia, iuventus, senectus ; aut mundi cuius prima aetas est ab Adam usque ad Noe ; secunda a Noe usque ad Abraham ; tertia ab Abraham usque ad David ; quarta a David usque ad transmigrationem Iuda in Babyloniam ; quinta deinde usque ad adventum salvatoris in carne ; sexta, quae nunc agitur, usque quo mundus iste finiatur<sup>47</sup>.

44. XXII, 30, 5.

45. F. C. FULGENTIUS, « *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* », in *Fulgentii Opera*, ed. Helm, Leipzig, 1898.

46. E.g., the first age extends from Adam to Enoch, the second from Enoch the Noah, the third from the foundation of Babylon to Abraham, etc.

47. *Etymologiarum*, V, c. 38, 5, ed. W. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911, tomes I-II. Cf. *Different.*, II, 19.

Bede, in his chronicle of universal history from the beginning to the year 729<sup>48</sup>, adopts the Augustinian divisions of human life and of the ages of the world. His treatment of the metaphor is remarkably like Augustine's, even in detail, and in phrasing. Like Augustine, he compares the annihilation of the first age by the Deluge to the "annihilation" of infancy by the deluge of forgetfulness. Childhood, in similar fashion, is the age when both man and the world acquire speech. The age of Abraham corresponds to the adolescence of life, because, as adolescence is the period when man acquires his capacity to beget children, so Abraham was designated as "pater gentium". The manhood of the world corresponds to the reign of King David, for "iuvenilis... dignitas regno est habilis". The wording of this passage is remarkably similar to the corresponding passages of Augustine in the *De Civitate Dei*<sup>49</sup>.

An interesting offshoot of the Augustinian metaphor, in the widespread use which it served throughout the Middle Ages, was the theme of the old age of the world. Fredegarius, influenced no doubt by Cyprian and Lactantius, but especially by Augustine's comparison of the sixth age of the world to the *senectus* of life, states in his chronicle, "Mundus iam senescit, ideoque prudentiae argumen in nobis tepiscit..."<sup>50</sup> It is beyond question that Augustine, in spreading the popularity of the image of the ages of man during the Middle Ages, had also given impetus to the theme of *senectus mundi*, already current in the literature of the Augustan age<sup>51</sup>. The theme of the senescence of the world adapted itself quite well to a fundamental pessimism which impregnated much of mediaeval thought and mediaeval sensibility. The theme "mundus senescit", bequeathed to primitive Christianity in the midst of the tribulations of the late Empire, was still alive in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Otto of Freising states in his chronicle, "mundum... nos iam deficientem et tamquam ultimi senii extremum spiritum trahentem cernimus"<sup>52</sup>. The conviction that the present age is a period of decadence usually went hand in hand with a concurrent belief in the valor and virtue of times past. Such seems, in any case, to be the lesson derived from the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, in the various versions of the poem from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries :

Bon fut le siècle au temps des anciens  
On y trouvait foi, justice et amour,  
Croyance aussi, dont il reste bien peu ;  
Tout est changé, perdu a sa couleur ;  
Ne sera plus tel que pour nos aïeux

48. *Chronicon*, MGH, *Scriptores*, ed. Mommsen, III, 247-237. Also *De temporibus liber*, in *Bedae opera de temporibus*, ed. C.W. Jones, Cambridge, 1943, p. 303.

49. Especially XVI, 43, and XXII, 30.

50. FREGEDIARIUS SCHOLASTICUS, *Chronicarum*, in MGH, *Script. rerum merov.*, II, 123 : « Mundus iam senescit, ideoque prudentiae... »

51. LUCRETIVUS, II, 1175 ; cf. *I. Cor.*, 10 : 11.

52. *Chronicon*. Lib. V, « Prologus ».

Au temps Noé et au temps d'Abraham  
 Et de David que Dieu chérissait tant,  
 Bon fut le siècle, n'aura plus tel valeur :  
 Vieux est et frêle, tout s'en va déclinant  
 S'est empiré, le bien plus n'y fait-on<sup>53</sup>.

Such touching lamentations on the sterility of the present recur in the epicurean yet pessimistic *Carmina Burana* ("Floreat olim studium..."), and in the works of the man whose genius perhaps best summarized the spirit of the entire Middle Ages, the poet Dante<sup>54</sup>.

Apart from those writers who perpetuated the incidental theme of *senectus mundi*, the image of the six ages of man and of the world continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages. In tracing the history of the image after Bede, it is interesting to remark how pronounced was the stamp of the Augustinian style upon it. In the middle of the ninth century, Raban Maurus, in enumerating the six ages of the world, practically copied the text of Bede on the subject in *De temporum ratione*. The texts are identical, save for a difference of one word :

(BEDE, *De temporum ratione*, c. 66)<sup>55</sup>

(RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo*, X)<sup>56</sup>

De sex huius mundi aetatibus, ac septima vel octava quietis vitaeque coelestis, et supra in comparatione primae hebdomadis in qua mundus ornatus est aliquanta perstrinximus, et nunc in comparatione aevi unius hominis, qui *microcosmos* Graece a philosophis, hoc est, minor mundus nuncupari, de iisdem aliquanto latius exponemus.

De sex huius mundi aetatibus ac septima vel octava quietis vitaeque coelestis et supra in comparatione primae hebdomadis, in qua mundus ornatus est, aliquanta perstrinximus : et nunc in comparatione aevi unius hominis, qui *microcosmos* Graece a philosophis, hoc est, minor mundus *solet* nuncupari, de eisdem aliquanto latius exponemus.

John Scotus Erigena, whose division of the world into eight ages is undoubtedly a variant of the Augustinian divisions, which he knew very well<sup>57</sup>, does not make explicit use of the Augustinian comparison, although he compares the perfection of the Mystical Body of Christ to the perfection of man "in mensuram aetatis"<sup>58</sup>. The *Annales Quedlinburgenses*<sup>59</sup>

53. J. LE GOFF, *La Civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, Paris, 1964, p. 213.

54. For these references I am indebted to J. LE GOFF, *op. cit.*, 213-214. Dante discusses the four ages of man in *Convivio*, IV, c. 24 et sq. *Carmina Burana*, ed. A. Hilka and O. Schumann, Heidelberg, 1930.

55. MGH, *Scriptores*, ed. Mommsen, III, 247-327.

56. PL, CXL, 306-307.

57. Augustine's *De Civ. Dei* is quoted frequently in *De divisione naturae*. For a discussion of the ages of the world in J.S. Erigena, see H. REUTER, *Geschichte der religiösen Aufklärung*, I, p. 61.

58. *De div. nat.*, V, 38, PL, CXXII, 995.

59. Written in 1025, MGH, *Scriptores*, III, p. 22 et sq.



and the *Annales Lamberti*<sup>60</sup>, both written in the eleventh century, compare the six ages of the world to the six ages of man according to the exact wording of Bede and Isidore. The Byzantine monk Theophanios, in an interesting attempt to compute the duration of the world, offers an infrequent example of the intrusion of the Augustinian theme into mediaeval Byzantine literature<sup>61</sup>. In the twelfth century, Ekkehard computes the ages of the world according to the dream of Daniel (another influential text throughout the Middle Ages), and to the *aetates mundi et hominis* of the Augustine-Isidore-Bede tradition<sup>62</sup>. Honorius of Autun, in *De imagine mundi*<sup>63</sup>, divides the history of the world into the six traditional ages, as does another twelfth century chronicler, Romuald of Salerno, whose comparison of the ages of man to the ages of the world is practically copied from Isidore of Seville<sup>64</sup>. The comparison returns, or is perpetuated, in the historical, theological or grammatical literature of the thirteenth century. Vincent de Beauvais uses the Augustinian divisions and the Augustinian image in his *Speculum naturae*<sup>65</sup>. His wording is close to that of Isidore. Papias of Pavia, sometimes referred to as Papias Grammaticus, like Isidore in the *Etymologiae*, adopts the sevenfold division of life according to Hippocrates and Solon, and states that the word *aetas* can be applied in reference to both the ages of man and the ages of the world<sup>66</sup>. His enumeration of the ages of man is inspired by the Hippocratic tradition, and the corresponding ages of the world by the Augustinian tradition. Perhaps the most distinguished successor to the Augustinian tradition in the thirteenth century is Saint Bonaventure. In his *Breviloquium*<sup>67</sup>, he cites, first, the Pauline division of history into three successive eras: "tempus legis naturae, tempus legis scriptae, tempus legis gratiae". He then enumerates the six ages of the world, followed by the eternal Sabbath, according to Augustine, and concludes by establishing their correspondence to the ages of man, and the days of Creation. The thought of Bonaventure is Augustinian, but the wording of this passage is indicative of a certain literary independence, absent from the other texts we have mentioned:

60. Written in 1077. *Ibid.* This historian is not to be confused with LAMBERT de SAINT-OMER, author of the *Liber Floridus* (1120), in which the Augustinian and Isidorian ages of man and of the world appear. The wording is that of Isidore, PL, CLXIII, 1010.

61. E. v. DOBSCHÜTZ, *Coislinianus* 296, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XII, 566-567.

62. *Chronicon universale*, in MGH, *Scriptores*, VI, p. 55.

63. PL, CLXXII, 165 et sq. The image of the ages of man is absent, however, although, implicit.

64. *De aetatibus* (1181) in L.A. MURATORI, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, tome VII, Milan, 1725, col. 9, c-d.

65. Lib. XXXII, c. 26.

66. PAPIAS G., *Vocabularium latinum*, art. « Aetas », Venice, 1496.

67. « Prologus », part 2.

Et sic distinguuntur hae septem aetates propter insignia facta, quae fuerunt in earum exordiis, ratione quorum respondent diebus formationis mundi. Vocatur autem prima aetas infantia, quia, sicut infantia tota oblivione deletur, sic illa prima aetas per diluvium est consumpta. Secunda, pueritia, sicut enim in pueritia loqui incipimus, sic in secunda aetate est distinctio linguarum. Tertia dicitur adolescentia, quia, sicut vis generativa incipit tunc in actum suum exire, sic tunc vocatus est Abraham et data est ei circumcisio, et facta est promissio de semine. Quarta dicitur iuventus, quia, sicut in iuventute floret hominis aetas, sic quarta aetate sub regibus floruit synagoga. Quinta, senectus, quia, sicut in senectute vires minuuntur, et decedit pulchritudo, sic et in transmigratione factum est de Iudaeorum sacerdotio. Sexta aetas dicitur senium, quia, sicut illa est, quae copulatur cum morte, habens tamen magnam lucem sapientiae; sic sexta aetas mundi terminatur cum die iudicii, et in ea viget sapientia per doctrinam Christi.

Although we have listed, in the previous pages, the complete list of mediaeval authors in whose works we have discovered the Augustinian image, it would be foolish to pretend that this is an exhaustive catalogue. There may well be other authors, particularly of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who continued the Augustinian tradition which we have been pursuing: but if there are such cases, we are unaware of them. The interest in universal history declined in the late Middle Ages, and with it, perhaps, an interest in classifying the ages of the world. Historians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, writing in their own vernacular, were far more interested in the particular histories of the monarchy or the duchy in which they lived, and by the leader of whom they were frequently patronized. Moreover, the world-shaking events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly those of the hundred years' war and its aftermath, enforced the attention of historians upon the history of the times, rather than upon the history of the world. It is interesting, for example, that Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Histoire Universelle*, written in the late sixteenth century, should be a detailed history, not of the world, as was the case in the mediaeval chronicles, but of contemporary events, particularly in France<sup>68</sup>. It is certain, however, that the Augustinian image of the ages of man and of the world survived to the letter, at least until the seventeenth century. Bossuet, in his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*<sup>69</sup>, was perhaps the last author of renown to attempt a history of the world in the literal Augustinian tradition. Bossuet divides his history into six ages and twelve *époques*: the *époques* are merely subdivisions of the ages, and are obvious devices on the part of Bossuet to place, in the interstices of the traditional Augustinian ages, historical

68. A. d'AUBIGNÉ, *Histoire universelle*, Paris, Renouard, 1886-1897, 10 vols., and 1 vol. suppl. A history of France from 1553-1602.

69. « Première partie », is divided into twelve *époques*, and six ages. The ages are exactly those of Augustine. The *époques* are Bossuet's own subdivisions. In the « Avant-propos », Bossuet also cites the three ages, according to Saint Paul: law of nature, written law, evangelical law.

events relating to the mythology of Greece and to the history of Rome<sup>70</sup>. For Bossuet, although he considers the true history to be the history of salvation, wrote a synthesis of all ancient history, Judeo-Christian and Pagan, in demonstration of his thesis that, although the empires of this world have their rise and their fall, the linear history of the revelation of God endures forever<sup>71</sup>. The *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* might, without exaggeration, be referred to as the *De Civitate Dei* of the seventeenth century, and of modern times. It is certainly one of the last examples of its kind in historical literature. For already before Bossuet, the spirit of Western historiography had changed...

### III. *The Return to the Classical Tradition.*

It can easily be presumed that most Christian writers of the Middle Ages who used the metaphor of the ages of man with reference to the duration of the world ignored the Pagan origins of the image. The Christian writers of the Middle Ages had larger interests than investigating the origins of such and such a literary device. What mattered to them was not the ingenuity of a metaphor, even less its original source, but the use which it might serve to illustrate the homiletic, exegetic, or apologetic argument at hand. Renaissance humanists, on the whole, returned to the classical sources in citing the origins of the metaphor of the ages of man. The "rediscovery" of this literary device in Pagan sources at the time of the Renaissance was, of course, merely a fragmentary aspect of a larger return to the cyclical notion of history held by the classical historians and philosophers. It is understandable that the Renaissance, the very essence of which was the spirit of rebirth, should be favorable to the natural image of the ages of man, as used by the classical authors, rather than to the Christian interpretation of the image by the early Christian writers, and in particular by Saint Augustine. The latter writers had transformed the classical image almost beyond recognition, and had enlarged it with Old- and New-Testament accretions. The idea of cycle, or renewal in the history of the world, had been eliminated by the Christian philosophy of history, for the Incarnation was considered as a central historical event, to be neither repeated nor reversed. In the Augustinian view of history, the sixth age of the world is to be its last. The conception of renewal or "cycle" is transferred from collective history to individual history. The only renewal of any importance for the Christian is the renewal of the "old man"<sup>72</sup>. The only historical

70. BOSSUET, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1670), in *Œuvres*, 1862, IV, 94. « Première partie », Époque 12 : « Je n'ai pas oublié, dans cet abrégé, cette célèbre division que font les chronologistes de la durée du monde en sept âges... si j'y en mêle quelques autres [époques], c'est afin que les choses soient plus distinctes...

71. *Ibid.*, p. 141 : « mon principal objet est de vous faire considérer, dans l'ordre du temps, la suite du peuple de Dieu et celle des grands empires ».

72. *Rom.*, 6 : 6.

problem that matters is the salvation of one's soul. The only collective history is the history of salvation advancing in a linear and irreversible direction toward the edification of the City of God. The return by Renaissance humanists to the cyclical views of the ancient historians was an implicit rejection of the Augustinian and Christian philosophy of history.

It does not surprise us, therefore, to find the name of Florus designated in the early sixteenth century<sup>73</sup> as the originator of the metaphor of the ages of man. Florus was cited and Augustine ignored, ironically enough, by Claude de Seyssel, in his laudatory *Histoire du Roy Louis XII*, written before 1515<sup>74</sup>. In the third chapter of his chronicle, entitled "Des quatre aages du regne des François", De Seyssel, conscious of his imitation of Florus' *Epitomae*, calls his work "un epitome et abrégé sommaire" of all that had previously been written about the Kings of France. He continues: "Nous diviserons le regne des François en quatre aages, ainsi que Lucius Florus a divisé l'Empire des Romains". He then proceeds to enumerate the four metaphorical ages of French history, as well as the historical periods to which these ages correspond. The "infancy" of France, De Seyssel, affirms, is its "pagan" period, beginning with Pharamond and including his four successors, "qui furent payens". The "second aage qui est de jeunesse et adolescence" was ushered in by Clovis, the first Christian King, and it lasted until the reign of Pepin the Short. The second age might be divided into two periods: a "jeunesse", marked by great feats of arms, but also by "grand insolence et appétit désordonné". Then followed a troubled, lascivious, almost transvestite adolescence:

Et apres devindrent les roys effeminez, et regnerent oysivement et voluptueusement, comme font jeunes gens, lesquels ainsi qu'ils commencent à croître de force et de cœur entreprennent audacieusement toutes choses... mais après bien souvent se laissent vaincre aux cupiditez lascivetez et lubricitez...

The "tiers aage" of France was heralded by a period of self-renewal, of "withdrawal and return". The French Kings acknowledged, by turning within ("en retournant à eux-mêmes") how ill-fated had been their lapse into lubricity and evil; and leaving behind them their "pailardises et oysivetéz", they decided to become Kings worthy of the name. The *inventus* of France, according to De Seyssel, began with Pepin and lasted until the reign of Hugues Capet. The reign of Charlemagne marked the summit of French history, as the reign of David had been, in the words of Augustine, "firmum ornamentum omnium aetatum"<sup>75</sup>. But such vigor could not last forever. Already the successors of Charle-

73. The first printed edition of Florus' *Epitomae* appeared in 1570.

74. *Histoire du Roy Louis XII*, Paris, 1587.

75. *De Genesi* c. Manich., I, 23.

magne showed signs of decline, and at the time of Lotharius and his sons, France lapsed into illness and almost passed away. A new strength was here provided by the Capetian dynasty which, if it did not signal a new beginning, at least permitted the French monarchy to enjoy a prolonged and robust old age. The reign of Louis XII, we are not surprised to learn, represents a second youth, a "reddita iuventus"<sup>76</sup>. De Seyssel spends the better part of his treatise comparing the reign of Louis XII, to whom his *Histoire* is graciously dedicated, to the four previous ages of France, each in its turn. At the conclusion of his "épitome", he sees himself forced to repeat a conviction already stated in the presence of Henry VII during his recent mission to England:

le royaume de France est si peuplé, si opulent de tous biens, garny de lieux fors et de bonnes villes, uny et paisible, sans aucune division ne partialité, qu'il ne fut jamais si suffisant à soustenir tous grans frais, n'à entreprendre grans choses comme il est à présent"<sup>77</sup> ...

After the death of Louis XII, De Seyssel retired from his post as "conseiller du Roi" to dedicate himself to his spiritual duties, first as Bishop of Marseille, then as Archbishop of Turin. It was during this short period (1515-1520) that he wrote his best-known work, *La Grand' Monarchie de France*, a political treatise dedicated to the young successor to Louis XII, François I<sup>er</sup><sup>78</sup>. It is fruitful to reflect that De Seyssel composed this opusculum during the same period, approximately, that Machiavelli was preparing the most famous of his political treatises<sup>79</sup>. Both authors were concerned with composing a summary of their political thought for the benefit of an illustrious contemporary Prince. The contrast between both works is striking. Machiavelli demonstrates that the confusion reigning in the Italian city states can only be abolished by an absolute monarchy comparable to that of the Turk. De Seyssel uses his rhetorical talents to convince François I<sup>er</sup> that the French monarchy is "mieux réglée que nulle autre"<sup>80</sup>, since it is a balanced form of rule capable of conciliating the King's right to rule with the claims and privileges of the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the third estate.

What concerns us principally about *La Grand' Monarchie* is that its author again uses the metaphor of the ages of man and of the world, and develops it more fully than in his previous *Histoire de Louis XII*. In a chapter dedicated to reflections on the oligarchic empire of the Veni-

76. De SEYSSSEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

78. *La Grand' Monarchie de France, composée par Mess. Claude de Seyssel lors evesque de Marseille, et depuis Archevesque de Thurin, adressant au Roy tres chrestien, François premier de ce nom*, Paris, 1557.

79. Machiavelli's *Il Principe* was composed around 1513.

80. *La Grand' Monarchie*, part I, c. 7.

tians<sup>81</sup>, De Seyssel remarks that this state, like any other, bears within itself the germ of mortality. For nothing, he continues, is perpetual under the sun ; that which has a beginning must one day come to an end. As it is with the " corps matériels et humains ", the sustenance of which can be assured only so long as its four component humours and elements remain in harmony (" s'accordent "), so too, the " corps mistiques " of societies and empires are condemned to an eventual dissolution. The elements and humors of the human body, in their normal course, are assembled, grow, and reach a tenuous prime of life. When physical decline sets in, however, " diminution advenant ", some elements and humors grow weaker than others ; and the succour brought to one part of the body for remedy's sake turns out to be harmful to another part. Dissolution is nothing other than a progressive loss of equilibrium, or harmony, in the human body. So it is with the " corps mistiques de la société humaine ", for,

après qu'ilz sont assemblez par une civile et politique union, ilz vont par quelque temps en accroissant et multipliant, après demeurent en leur estat quelque autre temps, puis pour aultant qu'ilz sont composez par plusieurs entendementz et volentez discordantes et repugnantes, commencent à decliner et finalement<sup>82</sup> viennent à neant.

Such are, De Seyssel concludes, the ages of human as well as political bodies : childhood, which is the beginning ; youth, which is the development (" augmentation ") ; manhood, which is the " estat " ; old age, which is the decline ; and decrepitude, which is the dissolution.

The second text of De Seyssel is more fruitful, in some ways, than the first. In *La Grand' Monarchie*, the author mentions a fifth age, " dissolution ", whereas in the first, the " corps mistique " of France had been rescued from its decrepitude by the " reddita iuventus " represented by Louis XII. Presumably the author of *La Grand' Monarchie*, freed of the encumbrances of his post at the royal court, felt himself free of the obligation to flatter. The second text, unlike the first, serves as a reminder to the young Monarch of France that *all* kingdoms, even the French throne, must one day come to nothing. The second text is also more interesting than the first, in that the phrase " corps mistique " is used, quite originally, with reference to the symbolic body of societies and empires. There is some sort of necessity at work behind the fateful dissolution of empires, and the word " mistique " quite correctly intimates that such a necessity is of " secret " ; or religious origin. De Seyssel's insistence, finally, on the need for total harmony of humors and elements for the sustenance of the " corps mistique " gives a picturesque expression to his conviction, shared by many contemporary political philo-

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81. *Ibid.*, part I, c. 3.

82. *Ibid.*

sophers, that the longevity of societies can best be assured in the form of government known as "balanced monarchy".

Such incidentally, was a conviction De Seyssel held in common with the Machiavelli of the *Discourses on Livy*<sup>83</sup>. At least on one occasion in that brilliant work, the social body is compared to a human body. Both bodies are mortal, the author concedes, yet the body that runs the longest course ordained for it by heaven is the one that maintains itself "in modo ordinato", and allows itself only those changes that operate for its health, not for its destruction, "danno". Since we are speaking of "mixed bodies", Machiavelli continues, such as republics, kingdoms, and religious sects, the best kind of change is a renewal ("rinnovazione"), that is, a return "inversi i principii loro". It is clear that if these bodies are not renewed, they do not last. All republics, sects, and kingdoms bear within themselves principles that are essentially good, and by means of this *bontà*, societies can only profit from a return toward their "prima reputazione ed il primo augumento loro". The social body is corruptible, like the human body, says Machiavelli, who sustains his argument with the medical aphorism: "Quod quotidie aggregatur aliquid, quod quandoque indiget curatione". ("Whatever is in a daily state of composition is in daily need of care".) — Despite some resemblances with the thought of De Seyssel, this text does not acknowledge any indebtedness to Florus. Machiavelli's comparison might easily have been original, or inspired by the implicit metaphor of the human body in the "Praefatio" of Livy's *Ab urbe condita*<sup>84</sup>, a text with which he was evidently familiar.

Another humanist to make explicit use of Florus' text on the ages of man and of Rome was Gerhard Johann Vossius, in his treatise *De historicis latinis*<sup>85</sup>. Vossius attributes the origin of the image to Seneca the philosopher, as well as to "alter ex Annaea gente". The "alter" is Florus, since it was the conviction of Vossius, who possessed a manuscript of the *Epitomae*, that Lucius Annaeus Seneca had written a text no longer extant on the ages of man and of Rome, and that his relative Florus had written another text merely inspired by the first<sup>86</sup>. Mindful of the image rendered so famous by both Seneca and Florus, Vossius decides to divide his own history of Latin historiography into four periods, for,

habet historia quasi pueritiam suam : habet adolescentiam : item aetatem suam, quam Graeci ἀκμῶ vocant : denique ei quoque senectus

83. N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, III, c. 5. c. 1.

84. See note 16.

85. G. VOSSIUS, *De historicis latinis*, Lyon, ed. J. Maire, 1651.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-164. On the Vossius ms., *Reall. für klass. Allertumswiss.*, VI, 2761-2770.

fuit : nec minus ea gradibus fuit suis distincta quam variare illam in hominibus videmus<sup>87</sup>.

It would prolong our investigation to delineate the periods of Latin historiography to which, according to Vossius, each of the four "ages" of man corresponds. His work begins with the Latin historians of the earliest times and extends as late as his contemporaries in the seventeenth century. It suffices for our purpose to know that the author of *De historicis latinis* possessed a manuscript of Florus, placed Florus among the Latin historians of the *aetas stata*, and used the metaphor of the ages of man in explicit imitation of Seneca (the philosopher), and Florus.

It is part of the logic of any age which holds a cyclical conception of history that its ideas are doomed to be supplanted by others. The spirit of veneration toward Antiquity, which so characterized the works of De Seyssel, Machiavelli, Vossius, and other humanists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was slowly giving way, as early as the seventeenth century, to a spirit of "modernist" reaction, or, at best, of tempered admiration for the classical authors. The metaphor of the ages of man continued to be used, but in an entirely different spirit from that of the historians of Antiquity, or with reference to different or far wider periods of world history. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular, somewhat like Saint Augustine in the early fifth century, frequently employed the image of the ages of man to fit a universal conception of history. But the city of God was substituted by the city of Progress. The age we are considering might be considered as an age of the "secularization" of the City of God.

In the early seventeenth century, Francis Bacon (1560-1626) was one of the first to proclaim a new spirit toward Antiquity. His classical formation is evident throughout his works, in his essay "Of Vicissitude of Things," for example, where he compares the existence of states and of learning to the cycles of life :

In the youth of a state, arms do flourish ; in the middle age of a state, learning ; and then both of them together for a time : in the declining age of a state, mechanical arts and merchandise. Learning hath its infancy, when it is but beginning and almost childish : then its youth

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87. *Ibid.*, p. 2. After Vossius, Florus continued to be cited. The many editors of the *Epitomae* between 1609 and 1825 have indicated, in their prefaces, their awareness of the image of the four ages of Rome, as well as Lactantius' paraphrase of Seneca. See, for example, the editions of Salmasius (cited by Vossius), J.A. Fabricius, Titze, Schnell. Among some of the best-known figures in modern historical literature who cite Florus are : MONTESQUIEU, *Considérations*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, 1856, t. 2 ; SAINT-EVREMOND, *Réflexions sur les divers génies du peuple romain*, in *Œuvres*, Paris, 1927, p. 7 ; E. GIBBON, *History of the Decline and Fall*, ed. Bury, 1898, alludes to Florus p. 74 : "the glimmerings of an abridgment".



when it is luxuriant and juvenile : then its strength of years, when it is solid and reduced ; and lastly its old age, when it waxeth dry and exhaust.<sup>88</sup>

Bacon had employed the four classical divisions of life : infancy, youth, strength of years, and old age, in describing the cycle of learning, or the cycle of states. He could not in good conscience apply the metaphor in the same spirit as the ancients, however, in referring to the ages of history, particularly to the ages of scientific learning. Bacon was quite convinced of the progress of all scientific knowledge, and refused to subscribe to the foolish idea that the modern age could do nothing more than repeat what the ancients had said. What we call " Antiquity ", Bacon said, is in reality the youth of the world : " Antiquitas saeculi, iuventus mundi ". Ours are the " antiqua tempora ", Bacon protested, for the world is already getting older. 'The antiquity of the world must not be computed by counting backwards in time, but by counting forward<sup>89</sup>. We know a great deal more than the ancients did, for we are a great deal older. As it is natural to expect from an older man a greater experience of humanity and a greater maturity of judgment than from a younger man, so too, a great deal more could be expected from our age than from Antiquity, if only our age took cognizance of its strength, and were willing to venture and experience. Indeed, our age is greater with historical experience, augmented by countless experiments and observations<sup>90</sup>.

When he refers to the ages of scientific development, therefore, Bacon employs the metaphor of the ages of man in a spirit different from Antiquity, or from the Middle Ages. The history of learning does not proceed in cycles, but in a linear and progressive direction. Modern history is not a falling off from the infancy of the world, nor must it bow in servile imitation of the so-called " ancients " who from our point of view were scientific infants. Bacon employs the phrase *senium mundi* in a far different spirit from the historians of the Middle Ages. The thought that history is cumulative, and that our world is older, fills him not with pessimism or nostalgia, but with hope. Our civilization need only acquire confidence in its own strength and, rather than repeat the discoveries of an ancient civilization, build a new science upon its foundations.

88. F. BACON, " Of Vicissitude of Things ", in *Works*, London, 1837, t. I, p. 308.

89. *De augmentis scientiarum*, in F. BACON, *Works*, I, pp. 229, 441.

90. *Novum organum*, in *Works*, II, p. 445 : « De antiquitate autem opinio, quam homines de ipsa fovent, negligens omnino est et vix verbo ipsi congrua. Mundi enim senium et grandaevitas pro antiquitate vere habenda sunt ; quae temporibus nostris tribui debent, non iuniori aetati mundi ; qualis apud antiquos fuit. Illa enim aetas, respectu nostri, antiqua et maior ; respectu mundi ipsius, nova et minor fuit. Atque revera quemadmodum maiorem rerum humanarum notitiam, et maturius iudicium, ab homine sene expectamus, quam a iuvene, propter experientiam et rerum, quas vidit, et audivit, et cogitavit, varietatem et copiam ; eodem modo et a nostra aetate (si vires suas nosset, et experiri et intendere vellet), maiora multo quam a priscis temporibus expectari par est ; utpote aetate mundi grandiore, et infinitis experimentis et observationibus aucta et cumulata ».

Bacon's attitude toward Antiquity was quite similar to that of his contemporary, René Descartes (1596-1650)<sup>91</sup>, and, later in the seventeenth century, of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)<sup>92</sup>. It is an attitude which can be said to summarize the "modernist" spirit in the well-known quarrel of the ancients and the moderns; and it is not surprising that the image of the ages of the world should recur so frequently among the literary figures involved. Charles Perrault (1628-1703), in his major work, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*<sup>93</sup>, compares the history of culture to a stream and to the life of man: such are the principal and recurrent metaphors of the treatise. In sum, Perrault says, our age knows far more than the venerable ancients. We need not be their servile imitators, for cultures evolve with the history of the world<sup>94</sup>. A great poet like Homer lived during the infancy of the world. It is possible that the seventeenth century represents the manhood, the full maturity of literary culture. There is no reason for the writers of the age of Louis XIV to imitate Homer, or any of the Graeco-Roman authors. Even our century, Perrault admits, has had its infancy, its adolescence, its manhood, and its old age<sup>95</sup>.

Perrault's contemporary, Bernard de Fontenelle (1657-1757), was another articulate defender of the moderns. Like Bacon, Pascal, and Descartes, he was convinced of the unlimited perfectibility of man, at least in the domain of science. More emphatically than Perrault, he affirms that the late seventeenth century is superior to the ancients in letters as well as in science<sup>96</sup>; but unlike his contemporary (to whom Perrault had addressed an "épître"), he dares not proclaim that his age is the "manhood" of the world. Nothing assures us, Fontenelle argues, that human progress has reached its fullest development, or that it will

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91. « Il n'y a pas lieu de s'incliner devant les anciens à cause de leur antiquité : c'est nous plutôt qui devons être appelés anciens. Le monde est plus vieux maintenant qu'autrefois et nous avons une plus grande expérience des choses ». (Descartes, in a fragment of a ms. kept by Baillet, quoted in PASCAL, *Œuvres*, ed. ; Brunschvicg, Paris, 1897, p. 80, note 1.)

92. Pascal's ideas on science are close to Bacon's : « Toute la suite des hommes pendant le cours de tant de siècles, doit être considérée comme un même homme qui subsiste toujours et qui apprend continuellement : d'où l'on voit avec combien d'injustice nous respectons l'antiquité dans ses philosophes ; car, comme la vieillesse est l'âge le plus distant de l'enfance, qui ne voit que la vieillesse dans cet homme universel ne doit pas être cherchée dans les temps proches de sa naissance, mais dans ceux qui en sont les plus éloignés ? Ceux que nous appelons anciens étaient véritablement nouveaux en toutes choses, et formaient l'enfance des hommes proprement ; et comme nous avons joint à leurs connaissances l'expérience des siècles qui les ont suivis, c'est en nous que l'on peut trouver cette antiquité que nous révérons dans les autres ». (*Fragment d'un traité du vide*, in *Œuvres* ed. Brunschvicg, Paris, 1897, pp. 80-81. Pascal also mentions « les six âges », in conjunction with the days of creation, and with the biblical ages, *Ibid.*, p. 626. The latter texts are unquestionably inspired by Augustine).

93. C. PERRAULT, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris, 1688-98, 4 vols.

94. *Ibid.*, I, 68.

95. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 32, 54-55.

96. B. de FONTENELLE, *Œuvres*, Amsterdam, 1754, IV, 412-413.

not continue indefinitely. Fontenelle divides the past history of the world into three broad periods : the period of infancy, when man's first preoccupation was to procure for himself the necessities of subsistence ; the period of youth, which witnessed the development of poetry and art ; the period of maturity, finally, which began when man became seriously interested in science, and began to think in a scientific way : such an interest, Fontenelle suggest, is characteristic of our age<sup>97</sup>.

Like Perrault, Fontenelle did not prescribe a decline for the history of human culture. Indeed, it is interesting to notice that, during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, whenever the ages of the world are compared to the ages of man, *senectus* is either omitted or put off in an indefinite future. Either the history of the world will progress indefinitely, or its decline is so far off in the forward of time that it is a subject more fit for prophecy than for historical analysis. Bacon and Pascal, it is true, sometimes referred to their age as the " *se-  
nium mundi* " ; but the old age here in question signified a maturity of human and scientific experience. Bacon and Pascal were not repeating the time-worn mediaeval complaint, " *mundus senescit* ". They were sounding the theme of the " maturity " of their age, but on a note of optimism. In the full optimism of the nineteenth century, as we shall see, some historians will ascribe an old age to their civilization, convinced, despite the vision of universal progress that surrounds them, that decline and death are inherent in the composition of human civilizations ; but they usually place the *senectus* of their civilization far off in the future. If, like Hegel, their allegorical conception of history admits of an old age, it is an old age of maturity and fullness, rather than of decline, that they imagine.

In the full wave of eighteenth-century optimism, the idea of old age was rarely, if ever, employed with metaphorical reference to contemporary civilization. The development of history continued to be compared,

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97. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 249, 250, 255. In *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, Fontenelle states : « Un bon esprit cultivé est, pour ainsi dire, composé de tous les esprits des siècles précédents ; ce n'est qu'un même esprit qui s'est cultivé pendant tout ce temps. Ainsi cet homme qui a vécu depuis le commencement du monde jusqu'à présent, a eu son enfance où il ne s'est occupé que des besoins les plus pressants de la vie, sa jeunesse, où il a assez bien réussi aux choses d'imagination telles que la poésie et l'éloquence, et où même il a commencé à raisonner, mais avec moins de solidité que de feu. Il est maintenant dans l'âge de virilité, où il raisonne avec plus de force, et a plus de lumières que jamais ; mais il serait bien plus avancé si la passion de la guerre ne l'avait occupé longtemps, et ne lui avait donné du mépris pour les sciences auxquelles il est enfin revenu. Il est fâcheux de ne pouvoir pas pousser une comparaison qui est en si beau train, mais je suis obligé d'avouer que cet homme-là n'aura point de vieillesse ; il sera toujours également capable de choses auxquelles sa jeunesse était propre, et il le sera toujours de plus en plus de celles qui conviennent à l'âge de virilité, c'est-à-dire, pour quitter l'allégorie, que les hommes ne dégénéreront jamais et que les vues saines de tous les bons esprits s'ajouteront toujours les unes aux autres », (Fontenelle, in PASCAL, *Œuvres*, ed. Brunschvicg, Paris, 1897, p. 80, footnote 1).

however, to the growth of the individual<sup>98</sup>: but unlike man, history would continue to grow in science and wisdom, and would never decline. Such is the implicit image of the *Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle*, written by one of the most curious minds of the eighteenth century, Michel Étienne Turgot (1690-1751)<sup>99</sup>. "Tous les âges sont enchaînés", he declares, "et le genre humain, considéré depuis son origine, paraît aux yeux d'un philosophe un tout immense, qui lui-même a, comme chaque individu, son enfance et ses progrès"<sup>100</sup>. Turgot's enumeration of the ages of the world according to the dominant occupation of each period, renders more explicit, in our opinion, the threefold division of Fontenelle. The first three ages according to Turgot's scheme (hunters-shepherds - plowmen), correspond to what Fontenelle calls "the age of necessities". What Fontenelle describes as the age of art and poetry can easily be equated to the fourth, fifth, and sixth ages according to Turgot: the age of cities, the age of artisans, and the age of art. The scientific age, in Turgot's scheme as well as in Fontenelle's is comparable to the maturity of man.

The titles of at least two of the works of Johann von Herder (1744-1803), contain an explicit comparison of history to the life of the individual. In *Von den Lebensaltern einer Sprache*<sup>101</sup>, Herder declares that the development of language is parallel and analogous to that of nations and of individual men. Each of them traverses a "Kindheit", a "Jugend", and a "männliches Alter". In another work, entitled *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*<sup>102</sup>, Herder makes cautious use of the image of the ages of man. If nations evolve in accordance with the cycles of life, nothing tells us that history evolves in the same way. Antiquity, to be sure, had its infancy, its youth, its manhood, and its old age. After the collapse of Rome, "da ward im Norden ein neuer Mensch geboren": this was the Germanic civilization. Yet history is a veritable

98. Florus continued to have his admirers in the eighteenth century. See footnote 87.

99. M.É. TURGOT, *Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle*, in *Oeuvres*, 1844, t. II (1750).

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 597-8. Quoted in TOYNBER, *A Study of History*, London, 1939, vol. IV, pp. 37-38, note 3.

101. « Eine Sprache in ihrer Kindheit bricht wie ein Kind einsylbichte, rauhe und hohe Töne hervor, zu welchem sich heftige Geberden gesellen. So wie sich dann das Kind oder Nation ändert, so zugleich auch die Sprache; Geberden spielen bei Äusserungen über Gegenstände, die mit dem Auge wahrgenommen werden, eine grosse Rolle; es entstehen Bezeichnungen, mit denen Naturtöne nachgeahmt werden und der Wortschatz ist noch ganz sinnlich... Das Kind erhob sich zum Jünglinge: Die Wildheit senkte sich zur politischen Ruhe und der Gesang der Sprache, die Poesie floss von der Zunge. Begriffe, die nicht rein sinnlichen Gegenständen entsprechen, gelangten unter bereits bekannten sinnlichen Bezeichnungen in die Sprache. Je älter der Jüngling wird, je mehr ernste Weisheit und politische Gesetztheit seinen Character bildet: je mehr wird er männlich... » (J.G. von HERDER, *Werke*, Berlin, 1891, V, p. 488).

102. HERDER, *Werke*, V, pp. 477 et sq., "da ward im Norden..." p. 515.

Proteus, and who knows whether the Germanic civilization does or does not represent the full maturity of universal history ?

The ideas of Herder and Turgot were with many variations, representative of the great current of historical thought in the eighteenth century. The comparison of the evolution of history to the ages of man continued to be employed, principally in accordance with the classical tradition, and with variations that never betrayed the optimistic historical conceptions of the Enlightenment. Noteworthy among these are the divisions of history according to J.G.A. Forster, Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and of Gotthold E. Lessing (1729-1781). Forster compares the age of savages, the age of barbarians, and the age of civilization to the childhood, adolescence, and manhood of the individual<sup>103</sup>. Schiller employs a threefold division, but with different terms<sup>104</sup>. Kant describes the evolution of philosophical thought in three stages, the most perfect stage being the stage of criticism<sup>105</sup>. Lessing's use of the image of man's growth is perhaps the most original, among the historians mentioned<sup>106</sup>. Lessing is one of the rare thinkers in modern times to combine a vision of progress with a theology of history indebted to the Christian fathers. History, according to Lessing, is the development of God's revelation to mankind. This revelation is accomplished in stages. In the childhood of mankind, the Old Testament was a sufficient primer ; in the youth of mankind, the New Testament was adequate to inform humanity, in symbolic terms, about the nature of

103. J.G.A. FORSTER, *Reise um die Welt*, 1783, The thought of this work is summarized by J.A. KLEINSORGE, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Lehre vom Parallelismus der Individual- und der Gesamtentwicklung*, Jena, 1900, p. 32. I am indebted to Kleinsorge for a number of references.

104. F. von Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Brief XXIV, divides the history of man the individual and of humanity into three "Zustände" : physical, esthetic, and moral. The "Naturvölker" are representative of the "physical" period ; Greek civilization represents the aesthetic point of view ; Christianity represents the moral point of view. For this reference, see KLEINSORGE, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

105. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Riga, 1781, quoted in KLEINSORGE, p. 32 : « Der erste Schritt in Sachen der reinen Vernunft, der das Kindesalter derselben auszeichnet, ist dogmatisch. Der zweite Schritt ist skeptisch und zeigt von der Vorsichtigkeit der durch Erfahrung gewitzigten Urteilstkraft. Nun ist aber noch ein dritter Schritt nötig, der nur der gereiften und männlichen Urteilstkraft zukommt, welche feste und ihrer Allgemeinheit nach bewährte Maximen zum Grunde hat, nämlich nicht die Facta der Vernunft, sondern die Vernunft selbst, nach ihrem ganzem Vermögen und Tauglichkeit zu reinen Erkenntnissen a priori, der Schätzung zu unterwerfen, welches nicht die Censur, sondern Kritik der Vernunft ist... So ist der Skepticismus ein Ruheplatz für die menschliche Vernunft, da sie sich über ihre dogmatische Wanderung besinnen und den Entwurf von der Gegend machen kann, wo sie sich befindet, um ihren Weg ferner hin mit mehrerer Sicherheit wählen zu können, aber nicht ein Wohnplatz zum beständigen Aufenthalte. »

106. G.E. LESSING, *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, 1780, summarized in R. FLINT, *The Philosophy of History in France and Germany*, London, 1874, pp. 370-371. I am indebted to this major work for several references, and for summaries of the thought of several important historians, including Lessing, Hegel, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Herbart, and others.

God. But the human race has grown older and more mature ; it needs to express ancient truths about the Almighty in more scientific and less childish terms. Nature and history provide us with the full revelation of God ; the revelation made through Christianity is fragmentary and needs to be surpassed. Had Lessing understood Christian theology more deeply, he might have seen how gratuitous was his conviction that the " childish " revelations of Christianity had been surpassed. His aspiration for a more adult revelation of God in Nature and History would perhaps have been fulfilled, had he understood the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and the notion of the development of dogma<sup>107</sup>.

In the nineteenth century, Claude-Henry de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) gave full expression to an idea contained implicitly in Turgot's seven divisions of history. Adopting the conviction of Condorcet and Fontenelle that general intelligence and individual intelligence develop according to the same law<sup>108</sup>, Saint-Simon combined the image of the ages of man with Turgot's divisions of history according to dominant occupations. The result obtained was slightly fantastic. The childhood of the world, according to Saint-Simon, is the Egyptian civilization, for the Egyptians, like children, had a marked fondness for building and using tools. The youth of the world, the Greek civilization, was characterized by the development of music, painting, and poetry, for such, according to Saint-Simon, are the amenities of individual man during that period of life. Roman civilization heralded the manhood of the world, for the Romans, like man in the fullness of strength, were fond of military valour. The age of the Saracens is comparable to man in his advanced age : as the individual, after the decline of his physical strength, becomes interested in the study of science, the Saracens, were responsible for the development of algebra, chemistry, and physiology<sup>109</sup>. Saint-Simon's incredible classification provides an excellent example of the madness that possesses historians who try to fit the ages of the world into categories established in advance.

Saint-Simon, despite his naiveté, was one of the most influential historical thinkers of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The human race, in his opinion, had reached about the middle of its course,

107. FLINT, p. 371.

108. « L'intelligence générale et l'intelligence individuelle se développent d'après la même loi », states Saint-Simon, according to FLINT, p. 163. For Fontenelle, see notes 96, 97.

109. FLINT, pp. 163, et sq. Also pp. 278-279. Littré practically copied the ideas of Saint-Simon when he spoke of the four ages of the world : " l'âge des besoins ; l'âge des religions ; l'âge de l'art ; l'âge de la science ". This is somewhat like Fontenelle's divisions, except that Fontenelle does not mention an « âge des religions ». Compare the three *états*, according to Auguste Comte (summarized in FLINT, pp. 259-284) : " âge théologique ; âge métaphysique ; âge positif ". Comte himself compares these ages to the infancy, the youth, and the maturity of man. Later, John Stuart Mill accepts the idea of Comte's *trois états*, according to FLINT, p. 275.

when the human mind was in fullest possession of both the imagination characteristic of the earlier historical periods, and of the scientific reason that it had more recently developed. Such was not the opinion of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), whose philosophy of history, although it makes full use of traditional divisions of past history, adopts far different conclusions as to the position of the present age. Like Herder, to whom he is indebted, Hegel divides the history of the world into an Oriental period, a Graeco-Roman period, and a Modern or Germanic period. These ages correspond to the childhood, manhood, and maturity of the individual. The Germanic period, the period of maturity, has itself evolved in three stages: the era of Charlemagne; the collapse of Charlemagne's empire, which provoked a dissociation of the spiritual from the secular; finally, the synthesis of the spiritual and the secular, introduced into the historical process by the Protestant Reformation, and, later, by the French Revolution. The age of Hegel is the fullness of time, an age of synthesis between matter and spirit. The Spirit has neared the end of its course, history is at an end. But its old age is a period of full strength, a synthesis of the entire past<sup>110</sup>.

The image of *senectus*, relegated to the shadows, with some exceptions, since the Middle Ages, or given an optimistic interpretation by Bacon, Pascal, Hegel, and others, makes its reappearance — with its traditional connotation of "decadence" — in the nineteenth century. It is, in general, placed in a future so distant that it carries no connotation of imminence or pessimism. Thus Charles Fourier (1772-1835), in an interpretation of history even more fantastic than that of Saint-Simon, prophesies the old age of the world seventy-five thousand years hence<sup>111</sup>! Charles Christian Frederick Krause (1781-1832) foresees a manhood in which all human knowledge will reach its fullness, after which history will descend into a happy old age<sup>112</sup>. But the vision of the future, even in the nineteenth century, is not invariably optimistic. Ernst von La-saulx (1805-1861), at the very crest of nineteenth-century optimism, states that decadence and death are instinct in the nature of human history, as it is of individual men and of things. He dares not venture an opinion as to what stage of its evolution contemporary European civi-

110. Hegel's thought is summarized in FLINT, pp. 515 et sq. For Hegel's borrowings from Herder, *Ibid.*, p. 533.

111. The major works of François-Marie-Charles Fourier are: *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808); *Le nouveau monde industriel* (1829). According to Fourier, the infancy of the world, which is not yet over, will have lasted a total of five thousand years; youth will last thirty-five thousand years; maturity an equal number of years; finally, old age and dissolution, a period of five thousand years. Fourier's thought is summarized, with pointed criticisms, by FLINT, pp. 169-171.

112. KRAUSE's major work is entitled, *Reine, i.e. allgemeine Lebenslehre und Philosophie der Geschichte*. He calls the first three ages of the world *Keimalter*, *Wachsalter*, and *Reifalter*. The *Reifalter* will be an age of pantheism and of world union, after which the world will enjoy a happy old age. Summary of Krause's thought in FLINT, pp. 483-484.

lization had reached, although he detects signs that the West had already entered its period of decadence<sup>113</sup>.

The voice of Lasaulx was, in the nineteenth century, a faint one in the wilderness of optimism with which it was surrounded. Few historians dared predict that they, or their children, would see the day when the decline of the West would be a fact capable of verification. Most thinkers of the late nineteenth century, in France and Germany, rallied to the optimism of Hegel, in believing that the Spirit had neared the end of its glorious journey ; or, adhering to the indefinite progress of science they were confident that the history of humanity's progress had barely outgrown its infancy. Iohann Herbart's refusal of Hegel's synthetic view of history <sup>114</sup> was characteristic of the reluctance on the part of all historical thought that considered itself as scientifically oriented, to submit the course of history to any deterministic laws, whether these be ordained by the Spirit, or by the natural cycles. The Great War convinced the sensibility of Western thinkers that our civilization, like any other, is subject to the laws of nature. It has been characteristic of Western historical thinking, in the dark moments of history as in the periods of optimistic euphoria, to find ways to break the ineluctable determinism of the cycles of nature. The Greeks had resigned themselves to the ceaseless repetition of historical events, and to the infinite sameness of things. After the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 A.D., Saint Augustine had tried to demonstrate that, if the history of worldly empires obeys the fatality of nature's laws, the history of Grace is not answerable to such laws. The City of God is supra-mundane, therefore supra-natural. There is no determinism within nature to ordain its rise and fall. Saint Augustine held a theology of history which broke the natural cycles on the level of Grace, while remaining obedient to them on the level of history. The Renaissance, in endowing the idea of nature with a new prestige, had reintroduced into Western thought the cyclical conception of history. The Enlightenment and the nineteenth century had secularized the City of God, by substituting in its place the idea of Progress. Enlightenment historians continued to subscribe, of course, to the rise and fall of nations. But above and beyond these terrestrial cities, there was a city which, in its forward progress, had broken the cyclical laws, without resorting forasmuch, as Augustine had done, to the intrusion of

113. Ernst von Lasaulx conceives of humanity as a single man, and approves of Bacon's essay, "Of Vicissitude of Things". (See note 88). Summary in FLINT, pp. 566-574.

114. JOHANN-FRIEDRICH HERBART (1776-1841), one of the most influential psychologists and pedagogues of the nineteenth-century, disapproved of Hegel's historical position, stating that humanity is in its infancy, rather than its old age. Herbart repeats the conviction of Pascal, Bacon, Fontenelle, etc., that the history of humanity allows for indefinite progress in the future. The idea that humanity is still in its infancy has been re-stated in the twentieth century, especially by scientists, e.g., Sir J. JEANS, in A.J. TOYNBEE, *A Study of History*, IV, p. 9. (Summary of Herbart's thought in FLINT, p. 580).



Grace. Unaffected by historical laws was History itself, for History stood synonymous with fatality.

In the minds of many, History also stood synonymous with Western civilization. Perhaps this blessed segment of the universe would avoid the sentence of death! The Great War and its aftermath brought back into credibility, if not into favor, the classical conception of historical cycles. "Nous autres civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles!" exclaimed Paul Valéry shortly after the Great War<sup>115</sup>. Oswald Spengler reminded Western historians that, if nations are to have their infancy, their youth, and their maturity, it is inevitable that they have their old age. *Senectus*, so long forgotten or put off, was upon us once again after 1918. "The Romans", Spengler said, "defined their concepts of *pueritia*, *adulescentia*, *iuvēntus*, *virilitas*, *senectus*, with an absolutely mathematical exactitude. The Biology of the future will undoubtedly find the point of departure for an entirely new formulation of its problems in the concept of the pre-ordained life-span of the genera and species... These relations are also valid for all civilizations... Every civilization, every archaic age, every rise and every downfall, and every inevitable phase of each of these movements, has a definite time-span which is always the same, and which always recurs with symbolic emphases<sup>116</sup>. Elsewhere, Spengler states: "Every civilization passes through the same succession of ages as an individual human being"<sup>117</sup>.

Something like an Augustinian vision of history, which incidentally was not without its proponents even in the nineteenth century<sup>118</sup> has been proposed more recently, in answer to Spengler, by A.J. Toynbee. Toyn-

115. Paul VALÉRY (1871-1945), *La Crise de l'esprit*, « Première lettre », in *Œuvres*, ed. J. Hytier, 1957, I, 988. Valéry's celebrated exclamation is the opening sentence of the passage. He continues: « Nous avons entendu parler de mondes disparus tout entiers, d'empires coulés à pic avec tous leurs hommes, et tous leurs engins... Nous voyons maintenant quel abîme de l'histoire est assez grand pour tout le monde. Nous sentons qu'une civilisation a la même fragilité qu'une vie. »

116. O. SPENGLER (1880-1936), *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, München, 1923, vol. I., p. 149: « Die Römer verbanden mit ihren Begriffen *pueritia*, *adulescentia*, *iuvēntus*, *virilitas*, *senectus* eine fast mathematisch genaue Vorstellung. Die Biologie der Zukunft wird ohne Zweifel die vorbestimmte Lebensdauer der Arten und Gattungen... zum Ausgangspunkt einer ganz neuen Problemstellung machen. Die Dauer einer Generation — gleichviel von was für Wesen — ist eine Tatsache von beinahe mystischer Bedeutung. Diese Beziehungen besitzen nun auch, in einer bisher nie geahnten Weise, Geltung für alle hohen Kulturen. Jede Kultur, jede Frühzeit, jeder Aufstieg und Niedergang, jede ihrer innerlich notwendigen Stufen und Perioden hat eine bestimmte, immer gleiche, immer mit dem Nachdruck eines Symbols wiederkehrende Dauer. » (Translated by A.J. TOYNBEE, *Study*, IV, p. 13).

117. « Jede Kultur durchläuft die Altersstufen des einzelnen Menschen. Jede hat ihre Kindheit, ihre Jugend, ihre Männlichkeit, und ihr Greisentum ». (O. SPENGLER, *Ibid.*, I, 145. Translated by TOYNBEE, *Op. cit.*, IV, 11).

118. Representative of the "Augustinian" philosophy of history in the nineteenth century are Schlegel (cf. FLINT, p. 22), and P. Buchez (cf. FLINT, p. 249). A study of the survival of the Augustinian philosophy of history since Bossuet is beyond our present scope and possibility.

bee, whose knowledge of all things classical — one should rather say “*de omni re scibili*” — is overwhelming, is, of course, aware of the classical divisions of human life, and of the age of nations. Toynbee has, in fact, entitled volumes two, three, four, and five of his study as follows : II. *The Geneses of Civilizations* ; III. *The Growths of Civilizations* ; IV. *The Breakdowns of Civilizations* ; V. *The Disintegration of Civilizations*<sup>119</sup>. Despite the strong influence of Graeco-Roman thought on Toynbee's formation and despite the fact that sixteen of the twenty-five civilizations he has studied have, by his own admission, obeyed the law of growth, decline, and decay<sup>120</sup>, Toynbee refuses to submit the course of history to an unconditioned fatality. There is in all things human a net of determinism and a net of freedom<sup>121</sup>. Like Augustine, to whom he is greatly indebted<sup>122</sup>, Toynbee is confident that our civilization can provide the exception to the laws of nature. Unlike individuals, nations need not submit to the cycle of infancy, adolescence, maturity, and old age. The spark of creativity can be maintained within any civilization which has the will and the strength to resist artistic decadence and moral or physical decay<sup>123</sup>. Toynbee's emphasis on human will to break the chain of natural cycles is a restatement in more worldly terms — at least this is our conviction — of the Christian doctrine of Grace. As Grace can intrude into the life of man, so did it intrude into the life of all nations with the Incarnation. Grace has broken the total bondage of men and of civilizations to the Greek goddess Nemesis.

### Conclusion

It has been our purpose to trace the evolution of a familiar image, used throughout Western literature to illustrate an ancient conviction : that the development of nations, empires, and civilizations follows a pattern similar to the development of the individual. It is fruitful to observe how the metaphor in question has been employed by various authors, Pagan and Christian, each for a specific but different purpose. In the *Epitomae* of Florus, the image of the ages of man, while it illustrates the

119. A. J. TOYNBEE, *A Study of History*, titles of vols. II, III, IV, V. Toynbee's study is intended as a refutation of Spengler : see vol. IV, pp. 11-13.

120. TOYNBEE, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 39.

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*, pp. VIII-IX : “ Of course... [Augustine] had a supra-mundane range of vision, in comparison with which no appreciable difference is made by a few thousand terrestrial miles or years more or less ; and a glimpse of this vision is the boon for which the present writer is the most deeply grateful to the writer of *De Civitate Dei*. ”

123. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 39 : “ The divine spark of creative power is instinct in ourselves ; and if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then the stars in their courses cannot defeat our efforts to attain the goal of human endeavors ”.

growth and decline of the Roman Empire since its origins, is especially intended as an instrument of praise for the "reddita iuventus" which the Empire has regained under the rule of Trajan. In the history of Ammianus Marcellinus, as in the *Vita Cari* of Vopiscus, the metaphor bears melancholy witness to the past grandeur of Rome, now afflicted by decadence and moral squalor. Lactantius paraphrases a lost historical passage of Seneca the Elder to illustrate the mutability of all temporal empires, the "mundi vastatio et mutatio imperiorum". In the hands of Lactantius the image becomes an apologetic weapon, a proof in favor of the spiritual destiny of the universe, which is "divinely instituted". An apologetic weapon the metaphor continues to be throughout the Middle Ages, where it is frequently found in conjunction with the ages of the world from Adam to Christ, and with the schema of the days of Creation. In the passages of Tertullian, Saint Ambrose, and Saint John Chrysostome, the metaphor is employed in comparison with the various stages of divine revelation or divine law; the ages "infantia", "adulescentia", and "iuventus" become, in the works of these Church fathers, a familiar illustration of the ages of divine law according to Saint Paul. In the writings of Saint Augustine, the theme of the ages of man is combined with that of the Biblical ages, with the scheme of Creation, and sometimes with the days of the week. Although the literary brilliance of his complex metaphors is quite secondary in comparison with his important theological arguments, it is Augustine who makes the widest and most original use of the image of the human ages, not only during the Middle Ages, but undoubtedly throughout Western literature.

The Renaissance represents a return to the classical image, as it was used by Seneca and Florus. In the works of De Seyssel, Machiavelli, Vossius, Bacon, and many other historians of the Enlightenment and of the past two centuries, the metaphor of the ages of man is freed of the "accretions" which the mediaeval writers, especially Saint Augustine, had brought to it. The ages of man are no longer juxtaposed, save in the *Discours* of Bossuet and of a handful of other modern historians, with the biblical ages, with the days of Creation, or with the ages of Saint Paul. This change in the evolution of the metaphor, which originates with the Renaissance, but continues to the present day, corresponds to a widening of the dimensions of history far beyond the temporal bounds of the Old Testament; it is also indicative of a dechristianization of Western historical thought, and of the fact that the Bible is taken far less seriously as a historical document. In modern times, therefore, the image of the ages of man in historical use is the classical image. In past centuries of optimism, the age of *senectus* was infrequently invoked, for historians were confident that progress and human perfectibility were unlimited. In the twentieth century, the application of the classical image has regained the full use which it had in Antiquity. Spengler and Toynbee have both reminded us, the former more dogmatically than the latter, that decline and death are as much a part of the cycle of civilizations as are birth and growth.

The image of the ages of man has, then, adapted itself to two major traditions of historical reflection in the West. To call the one "Christian", and the other "Pagan" is only partially true. It seems more accurate to call the one tradition cyclical, deterministic, and entirely naturalistic; while the other might be called linear and spiritualistic. It is impossible to oppose these two traditions entirely one to the other; rather, they are woven together, like two strands composing the fabric of history. It is certain, from the point of view of empirical observation as well as of the Christian faith, that there is in human affairs a net of necessity as well as a net of freedom. It is, therefore, possible to discern in both the Pagan and the Christian tradition a vision of the historical process which is at times ruled by the concept of Necessity, and which at other times allows for the intrusion of Grace and human freedom in the mechanism of historical events. The metaphor of the ages of man lends itself to both the linear and the cyclical conception of historical progression. It is a literary instrument, enabling some historians to demonstrate the inevitable turn and return of the wheel of human fortune, and others to illustrate their conviction that the fate of civilizations, like human destiny, is open to divine Grace, moral resurgence, spiritual renewal. For whether history proceeds by cycles or whether it is linear; whether it is entirely ruled by Necessity or whether it is open to Grace, one thing about it is certain: the duration of human affairs will ever be analogous to the duration of human life. To the entire historical process, or to any fragment of the whole, there must always be attributed a period of infancy, of growth, of full strength, and of decline. Whether the decline leads to a new birth, whether the death imposed by Necessity opens upon a new life of Grace, is, as our study has shown, the point on which the historians have not been in accord. Even on this uncertain and debated point, however, the history of the world is analogous to the life of man. The most important problem in the life of man, as in the history of nations, is to determine whether *senectus* is the prelude to a new beginning or whether our final dissolution will be nothing more than a mingling forever with the elements.

Paul ARCHAMBAULT.

Amherst College