

THE ORIGATION OF HISTORY

The editor of our journal, Karl Pellens, requested me to explain to its readers the meaning and the main contents of my book 'Hoe ontstaat geschiedenis?' which is reviewed in this issue by Raf de Keyser. The Dutch title signifies 'The Origination of History'. In this context the word 'history' does not refer to history writing or historiography, or, more in general, to the 'memoria rerum gestarum', but to the events themselves, to the 'res gestae'. We have a lot of philosophy and theory of history; its students occupy themselves with questions of the meaning of history, of the conceptions people have of history (or had in the past), of the way history is written, and how history writing is or was received by people. However important questions such as these may be, they are, in a certain sense, secondary with regard to another question. This other question is, of course, why things happen, why there is history as 'res gestae'. Natural and self-evident as this question may seem, it is hardly ever put, either by scholars or by the general public. Science and public opinion take it for granted that things happen, or, to put in more scholarly terms, that we live in an historical world.

Let me specify what I mean. We all know the saying : 'Happy people have no history'. Perhaps we may also state that 'happy marriages have no history'. Harmoniously married couples and peaceful families give no occasion for being talked about. As soon, however, as the harmony has been disturbed there is something to relate : conflicts, quarrels, separation, divorce and its aftermath; in other words, then there is 'history' in abundance. What I mean by this example will be clear : history is basically connected with unhappiness, conflict, disharmony, with not being well-adjusted.

In contending this I am taking a stand already - a stand that is not specifically historical. It cannot be deduced from historical scholarship nor even from the way in which people in general think of history. I prefer to call this stand 'anthropological' which implies a wider view of what is human than obtains in modern historiography. This anthropological position is, therefore, preliminary to historiography and historical scholarship. Now in a pluriform society like the modern one it is unthinkable that there might exist consensus on an important issue such as this one. Our several ways of thinking, our philosophies, yield different viewpoints from which to consider the field of history. More than one preliminary sketch of this field may be drawn before we enter it. In my opinion there are four separate 'gateways' to the field of history : 1. the conservative; 2. the liberal-humanistic; 3, the (neo-)marxist; 4. the biblical-christian.

The 'gateways', or points of view, have not at all an equal (practical) significance. A biblical-christian viewpoint has at present become largely hypo-

thetical. Furthermore, the viewpoints overlap somewhat, for instance the neo-marxist one may be seen as a variant of the humanistic, while there also exists a relationship between humanism and Christianity. But having admitted this I am, nevertheless, of the opinion that the viewpoints vary sufficiently to make different philosophies of history possible. Seen in this light the famous conflict over the Hessische Rahmenrichtlinien in Germany becomes a violent clash of the liberal and neomarxists points of view.

Up till now every critic, with one exception only, has overlooked the most fundamental thesis of my book. I did not write, in the first place, to win over others to my philosophy. The crucial issue is an invitation to historians with different philosophies to state, to define, to elaborate, to describe their own theory. For, in order to start a conclusive discussion on the fundamentals of history writing (and history teaching) - which in my opinion is more important than whatever else -, we must have before us three or four well-elaborated preliminary theories which explain why a given historian prefers to handle history in such and such a way. I seize this opportunity to repeat this invitation to all concerned; we are in much direr need of this than of, to give an instance, a historical demography of the city of Rouen between 1342 and 1478, however useful such a study may be.

It does not surprise me that hardly anybody took heed of my invitation, let alone gave effect to it! The prevailing viewpoint is the liberal-humanistic one, and this is so firmly entrenched that it seems utterly self-evident and in no need of justification. Of course, it is criticized by the neomarxists of the Frankfurter Schule - for this school is 'critical', if anything, 'critical' being its very catchword. Although I feel an unmistakable affinity with emancipation as a main objective of this school, I have, nevertheless, my problems with the Frankfurters and my doubts. In some important respects the liberal and the neomarxist viewpoints seem to me so intimately related that they must necessarily arrive at the same kind of subject matter. This is not to say, at the same topics, for with the didacticians of the Frankfurter Schule these are now emancipation, revolution, the common people, women in history, and the like - topics which never were the favourite ones of historicism. But these new themes are, like those of the historicists, mainly political, which means a very considerable narrowing down of anthropological possibilities.

Without denying or rejecting what is good in liberal humanism and neomarxism the historian whose thoughts go in another direction must necessarily take a stance that is as different as possible from all other ones - in order to facilitate the basic discussion that I mentioned already. For this reason I am glad that Raf de Keyser writes that I 'present my ideas without taking any account of the ideas that are the fashion' - which, of course, may not be taken to mean

that I am not intrigued by such ideas! It is high time now to present my own 'gateway' to history. My preliminary point of view is a biblical-christian one, and it is one that has obviously become utterly obsolete it seems. However, I do not want to be classified with conservatives, since I have my reasons to doubt whether an authentically biblical-christian view of history did ever exist, even in the Middle Ages.

I knew beforehand that my choice is not only an unusual but also an unpopular one. As we use to stress, we live in an open and pluriform society - the hallmark of which is that there is 'discussion on everything' - but, to vary a famous dictum of George Orwell, some ideas are obviously more pluriform than others. Several Dutch publishers refused my book exactly on account of my viewpoint. One of them wrote to me that 'the position you adopt - in particular the significance you attach to Genesis - will not boost the sales'. And another told me bluntly : "Your viewpoint conflicts with the prevailing fashion". At last, Kok Agora, in Kampen, accepted my manuscript for publication. Of course, I was grateful for this but at the same time I knew that my brain-child would never become a bestseller. However, sales figures up till now are some 50 % better than my (admittedly) very low estimate.

My starting-point are, indeed, the first three chapters of the biblical Book of Genesis, the stories of the Creation and the Fall that is. I have no room here to explain my attitude with regard to these creation stories in a satisfying manner. However, permit me to state categorically that I am not a creationist nor a fundamentalist; in my opinion Gen. 1 and 2 do not intend at all to give a factual description of how the world and mankind originated. The fact - nearly always overlooked - that there are two creation stories - the 'wet creation' in Gen. 1, and the 'dry creation' in Gen. 2 -, and the fact that these two stories contradict each other (give different sequences of the events) is sufficient prove of this.

Instead, the real significance of these chapters is that they present a biblical anthropology to us, a fundamental statement respecting the human condition as it actually is, contrasted with the condition of 'justitia originalis', as it was meant to be. Now I ask nobody to accept the tenets of this biblical anthropology. What I, however, want to stress is that it offers a coherent explanation of human condition. And it is from this 'conditio humana' that, in my view, history originates. This situation is basically one of conflict, arising from the fact that man, 'homo sapiens' as he is now (which means, after the Fall) is not well adapted to surrounding nature (to his environment, as we might put it), to his fellow-men, to himself, and, finally, to God. This basic situation of all-embracing conflict forces man, always and everywhere,

to try adapting himself better - without ever fully succeeding in this. This never ending struggle gives rise to historical situations, it makes things happen, it causes history. It is therefore that I ground historical anthropology on biblical anthropology.

This biblical anthropology is, in the first place, important for our view of history since it comprises our linear time concept. Although our, in fact very recent, arithmetical chronology, was still unknown to the biblical authors, nevertheless, they make history develop in a straight temporal line starting with a beginning (the word 'beresjit' = in the beginning, is actually the very first word of the Bible), and finally carrying time over into eternity ('for ever and ever' being the last words of the Apocalypse proper). This makes history finite in time and restricted to mankind; God, nature and the animals have no history. Within this temporal content I detect seven 'factors' of history - as many motors of it - which, taken together, form the subject matter of historical anthropology. These factors are : 1 man does not live on bread alone; 2 man does not accept death; 3 man cannot go naked; 4 man is not able to stay alone; 5 man is incapable of being free; 6 man is incapable of staying at home; 7 man is enmeshed in stories ('in Geschichten verstrickt'). All these factors have their starting-point or origin in or very near the first three chapters of Genesis. These seven factors are elaborated in as many essays, Chapters IV-X of my book. That they have a biblical origin does not mean that I am constantly referring to the Bible. What I try to do is to show their effect on human life and history. It is, of course, impossible, to give a complete idea of the contents of these essays in a few pages. However, I shall do my best to present a picture that is of sufficient interest to the reader.

'Man does not live on bread alone.' Everyone will understand what this means. Mankind's preoccupations reach very much farther than food, shelter, and a sexual mate. In fact, man has 'culture', he always founds a 'civilization'. Here, however, a first great problem arises. There exists a rupture between 'nature' and 'culture'. "Nature is all that is not culture", says the Dutch scholar H. de Vos. If we equate 'history' with 'culture' we have the following dictum of Burckhardt : "History is the rupture with nature by virtue of the awakening of consciousness". Often this rupture is painfully felt; we may consider evolutionism is an attempt to heal it, since historical development is regarded as obeying the same fundamental evolutionary laws as nature.

My book rejects the dualistic opposition of nature and civilization, without, however, adhering to evolutionism. The philosophical concept that is capable of triumphing over this dualism is that of 'analogia entis'. Having been develop-

ed by Thomas of Aquinas in the 13th cent. it became of the main tenets of Scholasticism. It says that there is an 'analogy' (not an identity) between God and creation, in consequence also between God and man, whereas even a relationship between God and human history may not be excluded beforehand. Being a philosophical concept it is based on Reason, since man's highest and most specific quality, Reason, was created by God 'in his image', which means, first and foremost, that there is an analogy between divine and human reason. This, again, means that a study of history based on biblical premises does not grow out of mysticism or religious sensibility but is firmly built on rationality.

A biblical-anthropological view of the 'conditio humana' signifies that it may be equated with civilization. Human beings not only suffer or endure this world but rather they try to shape it, rationally and consciously. I know that there are a great number of definitions of 'culture'. Therefore, I feel entitled to draft one of my own making that fits my general concept. 'Culture (or civilization) is every human act that is consciously imitable.' The word 'human' excludes the repetitiveness of natural forces; with the adverb 'consciously' added, it also locks out all animal acts. The great advantage of my definition is, in my opinion, that it avoids all connotations of an 'elitist', even of a 'classical' culture but comprises human manifestations all and sundry. This will make it possible to posit 'cultural history' as the contents of history teaching. In doing so the history teacher will be able to widen the range of his subject matter immensely.

For instance, one could imagine a 'history of Death'. That 'man does not accept death' is one of the basic elements of his existence. Death, indeed, is an anomaly, it does not tally with life. Because man does not really accept his fate he has always been in great need of 'survival'. The cult of the dead is, in fact, the oldest manifestation of human civilization, even occurring in the form of burial with flowers in some sites of the not yet fully human Neanderthals. Death is one of the great 'rites de passage' celebrated as such by the relatives and the community. This is an enormous source of history; actually, almost all our knowledge of Egyptian civilization originates from their tombs. Special attention must be paid to the prevailing conception of our modern era which is that Death is ignored, banished and removed. It has become unfashionable not only to mention death but even to die. Dying is no longer a communal event as it was in so many civilizations; dying has to be done in hospitals or old people's homes; the dead are buried outside our residential quarters, even outside our towns and villages - when they are not disposed of by cremation.

This general negating of Death is all the more remarkable since we are living through the most murderous century of history. We are living in an age of killers the greatest of whom was Adolf Hitler, the Killer par excellence. Death has assumed a new face : it has become anonymous, wholesale, impersonal, lonely, and senseless. The countless dead of the trenches of World War I, of the bombed cities of World War II, of the gas chambers, of the collectivization in the Soviet-Union and the restructuring of Kampuchea are there to testify of this. And what about history teaching in this respect? Might it not be possible that there is some guilt on its part since, as Canetti said, 'wars are sacred to historians'?

That man cannot be nude does, of course, not mean that he may not put off his clothes but that nakedness is an embarrassing situation. The body itself is 'unfashionable' and is made more 'fashionable' by vestments. This makes the French philosopher Jean Brun remark that 'fashion is the motor of history'. With 'fashion' is, of course, not meant Parisian 'haute couture' but the general human tendency to express values and status by means of dress, for instance for indicating the difference between male and female. Man is not able, like a tiger in the jungle, to roam freely about in the jungle relying on claws and velocity. He needs implements to cope with nature and to defend himself against animals and his fellow-beings. From the earliest artefacts of the oldest Stone Age to the most recent communication satellite mankind has always developed the tools he needs to survive - the whole complex of what is nowadays called 'technics'. These 'technics' - or technology - may be dubbed man's 'second clothing' which he envelops himself so tightly that he seems to have become incapable of coming into real contact with nature. This dress, heavy as lead, nowadays hinders man probably more than it helps him.

The fact that man is not capable of staying alone leads our thoughts first to the subject of sexuality. My book takes a more sober view of this than often is the case in this period of a second sexual revolution. Sex, indeed, unites people in love and serves to create new human life. At the same time, however, it is, like Death, a 'wild force', not easily to be controlled and causing a lot of trouble and evil. Marriage is the human institution in which mankind has always tried to tame this force; it is also one of the great 'rites de passage'. From marriage we arrive at the more extended forms of living together, of society in particular, and at what society means historically and anthropologically. The problem is that society, basically a means to escape loneliness, perhaps is making man more lonely than ever in the present time, as Riesman showed in his book 'The Lonely Crowd'.

This brings us to the fact that man is not able to be free either. More often than not he seems to shrink back from freedom. Paradoxical as it may seem school is a place of liberty - it is essentially a place of quiet contemplation. Modern society, however, does not really value contemplation. What it honours is the 'vita activa', perhaps not so much 'labour' - toiling in the never ending circle of producing and consuming on short term (the household chores, for instance) - but rather 'work', the work of the 'homo faber' who makes durable things. The highest form of activity is 'acting', that is commanding, ruling, governing, deliberating, performing. What is meant is public, even 'historical' activity. 'Acting', however, includes the work of the scientist and scholar, now more than ever, since utility is becoming more and more the standard, effectiveness, political results, financial profit, and useful output.

That man is not able to stay tranquilly at home (as Pascal said) has always caused much 'history', in the form of migrations and discoveries. But in our present age mankind seems to have become more restless than ever. Migrations have assumed unbelievable proportions, wars displace millions of soldiers and civilians, tourism keeps a large part of mankind moving. Taken together, these phenomena point to a serious destabilization, an alienation even of man from his world. The fact that nearly everyone looks every day, hour after hour, at the moving images and shifting scenes on his t.v.-screen is also an element in this loss of stability.

The last subject is, at least for historians and for didacticians of history, perhaps the most important. We are, indeed, 'enmeshed in stories'. What I mean is that we present ourselves to others, and others and the world to ourselves, by means of stories. I could, of course, not do full justice to the other six essays in this short article. This special subject, however, would be garbled out of recognition if I should devote only one or two short paragraphs to it here. Therefore, I intend to return to it later.

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe asks your attention for an important publication which surely is of interest for history teachers and didacticians of history. It is a report published by the ~~its~~ Council for Cultural Co-operation, Strasbourg, 1986, called : 'Against bias and prejudice : the Council of Europe's work on history teaching and history textbooks'. It contains the recommendations adopted at Council of Europe conferences and symposia 1953-1983. Each conference treated a textbook subject ('The Middle Ages', 'The Period 1870-1950' etc.), each symposium a special type of school. This 47-page volume is worth having.