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HISTORICAL ESCHATOLOGY, POLITICAL UTOPIA AND EUROPEAN MODERNITY

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Abstract: The powerful impact which Christianity has had on the distinct culture of the Occident can hardly be overstated. Indeed, its tremendous influence in virtually every single aspect of the European existence is ultimately recognisable in many secular quarters. In order to understand the link between the project of modernity and European Christendom and its state in the present, it is necessary to trace the development of several key features. Thus, the paper consists of two major parts dealing with: 1) the Joachimist tertius status 2) aspects of the Löwith-Blumenberg debate and 3) depicting the connections – at times, the concordance – between eschatology, utopianism and totalism, and their role in the triumph, decline and transformation of European Christianity.

Key Words: eschatology, political utopianism, totalism, secularism, modernity

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The powerful impact which Christianity has had on the distinct culture of the Occident can hardly be overstated. Indeed, its tremendous influence in virtually every single aspect over the European existence is ultimately recognisable in many secular quarters, albeit in disguised forms. Religion and politics in Europe are traditionally linked in one way or another to the Christian substratum, which has undergone a steady, if momentous secularization under the aegis of the great experiment of modernity. This was possible due to a series of traits which was unique to the European case: the politicization of utopia, the secularized historicization of temporality and the impact of heterodoxies which threatened to overthrow the established institutional order and radically reform society. It is thus necessary to trace a general development of this most important triad in order to come to the fulfilment of the project of modernity and the slow decline of the Christian substratum from the centre of political discourse, along with the decline of the Church as an institution and power network. This means understanding the impact of eschatology, political utopianism and the formation of the modern idea of progress within the Löwith-Blumenberg debate, a debate which is still unparalleled in its sophistication and depth.

There have been several works taking into account the importance of eschatology[1], temporality[2], utopianism[3] and religion[4] in the rise of secularism and modernity in Europe, although usually concentrating on a single aspect. Within the limited space allowed, the purpose of my paper is to show that the origin of historical progressivism and secular philosophies of history should be sought in a series of intertwined layers, uniting eschatological thought, political utopianism, temporality and the impact of totalist heterodoxies.[5] This collision and congruence between seemingly disparate strains attained a critical impact during the late middle ages and the early modern period, when the key shifts occurred. The paper consists of two major parts dealing with: 1) aspects of the Löwith-Blumenberg debate and the Joachimist *tertius status* and 2) depicting the connections – and, at times, the concordance – between eschatology, utopianism and totalism[6] and their role in the transformation of European Christianity.

Trascendence, Temporality, Immanence

In the following paragraphs I will briefly discuss Joachim of Fiore's Trinitarian vision of history, which introduced an interpretable temporality within an Augustinian-dominated eschatology.[7] I will also discuss its relationship to secularization and modernity within the Löwith-Blumenberg debate. His writings on the coming of a Third Stage, the end of the material church, its replacement by a "spiritual church" guided by the new "spiritual men" and the coming of a new leader had an immense

influence in the establishment of a Western teleological narrative of history.

Departing from its beginnings as an eschatological movement, European Christianity evolved towards an all-encompassing system, integrating morals, ethics, politics and economics, ostensibly in accordance with the principles of Scripture. The base of the Hellenistic-Roman world was gradually replaced by a distinctly Christian substratum, which, for several centuries, stood supreme at the centre stage of public discourse. During the 12th century, the Christian ecclesia in Europe could seem stronger than ever before, even with the Great Schism of 1054. After half a millennium of mostly reversals at the hands of Muslim powers and pagan states, its borders had expanded far from its Mediterranean core to Scandinavia and Russia, whilst recapturing parts of Spain, the south of Italy as well as its birthplace in the Levant. Institutionally, the Western Church had temporarily secured a precarious edge over the secular powers through the institution of a "papal monarchy".[8] As the Roman Church grew increasingly involved with the secular realm the end-result of its endeavours led the greatest organization in Europe. This increased capability – which went hand in hand with the revival of Roman law – allowed it to better establish normative pacification[9] as well as its supremacy versus foreign enemies and internal heterodoxies. Theologically, the consolidation and implementation of catholic orthodoxy meant the increasing persecution of Christian heterodoxies. And despite the efforts of the centre, bitter theological disputes continued unabated. One such debate was centred on the Holy Trinity. The Latin West differed from the Greek East in its method of representing the doctrine of the Trinity, yet there also existed struggle between factions which often accused each other of heresy. For the Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore, the Trinity lay at the heart of his work, a work eventually culminating in a tradition which profoundly influenced, directly or indirectly, the ideals, vocabulary and the worldview of many totalist heterodoxies.

Over the course of twenty years, Joachim would expand on his concepts in a highly complex system which could, at the same time, stay true to the basic Augustinian view[10], divide all of history from Adam to Christ and from Christ until the End Times, as well as include his own view of a future in which man and his existence were to be perfected inside history. This was all the more important since, in Joachim's historical analysis, divine grace had been transferred westwards from the time of the Old Testament. The Jews had lost the grace they had received through their covenant when they failed to understand the mystery of Christ. The Greek gentiles then lost it due to the schism between the Churches and the great devastations which they suffered since the latter reign of Heraclius, when their empire had been all but conquered by the Muslim Ummayyads. Finally, grace had come in the Latin West, manifested in the union

between the Frankish Empire and the Roman papacy.[11] Soon enough, Joachim believed, the age of the Holy Spirit would become manifest:

> The First Age of the world began with Adam, flowered from Abraham, and was consummated in Christ. The Second began with Oziah, flowered from Zachary, the father of John the Baptist, and will receive its consummation in these times. The Third Age, taking its beginning from St. Benedict, began to bring forth fruit in the twenty-second generation, and is itself to be consummated in the consummation of the world. The First Age, in which the married state was illustrious, is ascribed to the Father in the personal aspect of the [Trinitarian] mystery. The Second, in which the clerical state in the tribe of Juda was illustrious, is ascribed to the Son; the Third, in which the monastic state is illustrious, is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.[12]

Joachim's Three Stages were, in themselves, based on a tradition going all the way back to the Old Testament. Although he was seemingly a traditionalist at heart[13], Joachim's concerns were not part of the allegorical and dogmatic aspects of scholasticism, but rather, he devised a system which could guide him in his understanding of Scripture, and by extension, history and future. His was not a prophetic work based on direct revelation from God[14], but on his "spiritual intellect" (donum spiritualis intellectus). It was this illumination that helped him understand the principle of concordance between Scripture and History. Eventually, the material church of the Second Age – or the Augustinian Sixth Age – of which Joachim was himself part, would be replaced by a Church of the Spirit, during the final revelation of a divine scenario within historical time. Even as Joachim maintained the necessity of divine intervention for the establishment of the *tertius status*, his own unique contribution to the patristic tradition was to imagine the fulfilment of a Third Stage *within* history itself, rather than in a post-historical context.

The power of Joachim's *tertius status* would gradually mark an increasing tendency towards the departure from the Augustinian worldview and the pursuit of a *historical* eschaton. Only once this last historical stage was achieved could there be time for the advent of the *transcendent* eschaton, the Second Coming of Christ and the eternal Sabbath. This grand, saving, simplifying principle, through which all the religious, material, political and social ills of mankind could be solved, was dependent of the coming of the Third Stage.[15] The culmination of history would thus witness the advent of the Kingdom of the Spirit[16], the rise of

"spiritual men" (viri spirituales)[17], a communistic paradise free of possessive instinct and the coming of a *novus dux* which would renew the Christian faith. The presence of the spiritual men represents the increased involvement of human agency in the arrival of the perfect era. Whether in eschatological movements or utopian projects, the human agency is often represented by the members of a chosen minority, the Elect. They must lie at the forefront of the movement and its ideals, whether they represent achieving security, converting non-believers, materially dominating rivals or redeeming those groups or societies which exist in a state of untruth.

Ultimately, we can distinguish the makings of a veritable proto-utopian system hidden within Joachim's teleological narrative of history, even if his vocabulary, expectations and symbolism were shaped by patristic tradition and 12th century eschatological thought. Nevertheless, what matters most is not the extent to which Joachim himself differed from Church orthodoxy, but, rather, the way in which his work was received by many diverse factions, with some of its features being faithfully preserved, some slightly altered, with others being completely left out or completely reinterpreted. There had been cases of preachers or even popes expecting the Second Coming during their own lifetime, but none had devised a system of thought which could present the fulfilment of a perfect human life on earth as an inevitable historical process. This aspect, describing a historically achievable perfect era, can be recognized in the development of European political utopianism – especially since the 16th century onwards – which increasingly shifted from depicting the moralising borders of a theoretically ideal society towards the blueprints for its active implementation.

The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate

Joachimism or what was *assumed* to be Joachimism played a critical role in the development of a pattern describing a teleological narrative of history in the here-and-now. Having said this, we need to proceed with caution on the road ahead, without automatically joining the "Joachim bandwagon" yet still attempting to assess – as much as it is relevant to the scope of the thesis – the impact of Joachim's revolutionised vision of history in modernity.[18] Nevertheless, due to the originality of the abbot's system and the similarities between medieval heterodoxies and modern totalist movements, Joachim's influence could, at times, seem truly universal, a viewpoint which can be encountered in thinkers of all political persuasions, such as Eric Voegelin and Ernst Bloch among many other disciplines, from literature to marketing[19]. Take the following fragment for instance:

> The very language used in the descriptions of successive paradises, the foretelling of a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, and the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore have remained alive in the discourse of all European societies. Millenarian speech has been adopted by scores of secular revolutionary movements. Joachim of Fiore's conceptions reappeared, often by name, among Christian utopians from Müntzer in the sixteenth through Campanella in the seventeenth and Lessing in the eighteenth centuries.[20]

Furthermore, we can recognize this important factor in the way in which some scholars define "political religions" or "secular religions", as well as in approaches to modernity and secularism. Most notably, this was encountered in the tendency to explain modernity as the secularization of the transcendent eschaton into the unstoppable march of a historical progress. In the following paragraphs I will discuss Joachim's theology of history and its relationship to secularization and modernity within the Löwith-Blumenberg debate.

In his influential *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*[21], Karl Löwith sought to present the way in which the pattern of the Judeo-Christian fulfilment of history was secularised and implemented in the modern doctrine of progress. For Löwith, this was an aberration, a dangerous and unprecedented illusion which presented history as "a progressive evolution which solves the problem of evil by way of elimination."[22] He then goes on to describe how the West was shaped by a powerful structure, namely the identification of the future as the *true* focus of history, whereas:

> [...] the truth abides in the religious foundation of the Christian Occident, whose historical consciousness, is, indeed, determined by an eschatological motivation, from Isaiah to Marx, from Augustine to Hegel, and from Joachim to Schelling. [...] Not only does the eschaton delimit the process of history by an end, it also articulates and fulfils it by a definite goal. The bearing of the eschatological thought on the historical consciousness of the Occident is that it conquers the flux of historical time, which wastes away and devours its own creations unless it is defined by an ultimate goal.[23]

Thus, for Löwith, the modern mind lives in a state of constant tension between its two principal heirs, the Ancient and Christian visions. From the former, it uses the principle of an endless and continuous movement, whilst lacking its cyclical structure. From the latter, it has adopted a progressive outlook, at the same time removing the "Christian implication of creation and consummation."[24] The principle of the secularization of the City of God is pointed out, time and time again, throughout of the entire book, perhaps especially so in the chapter on Marxism.[25] To be sure, Löwith's thesis can be criticized for a variety of reasons, such as failing to provide a clear sequence of transformation. Nevertheless, *Meaning in History* went on to possess a distinguished career and its basic idea contributed, for almost two decades, to the formation of a powerful consensus.

The most comprehensive and systematic refutation of Löwith's work has been, and remains, the one undertaken by Hans Blumenberg in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.[26] Two main ideas form the basis of Blumenberg's response. Firstly, he sees the future as resulting from an immanent process, instead of a transcendent one. Secondly, he believes that the idea of progress has its origins in a twin development of the early modern period, the reliance on long-term methodical scientific progress and the changes to the artistic ideal following the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. For my purpose, there is less need to insist on the other aspects of the book, therefore I shall concentrate the most on Blumenberg's dichotomy of transcendent eschaton versus immanent eternal progression of history. He seeks to be clear from the onset that the Abrahamic eschatological tradition and the modern vision of historical progress are systems whose basic differences make it impossible for one to give birth to the other:

> What signs are there that even suggest a likelihood that theological eschatology, with its idea of the 'consummation' of history by its discontinuance, could have provided the model for an idea of the forward movement of history according to which it was supposed for the first time to gain stability and reliability through its consummation or its approach to its consummation? [...] Regarding the dependence of the idea of progress on Christian eschatology, there are differences that would have had to block any transposition of the one into the other. It is a formal, but for that very reason a manifest, difference that an eschatology speaks of an event

> breaking into history, an event that transcends and is heterogeneous to it, while the idea of progress extrapolates from a structure present in every moment to a future that is immanent in history.[27]

Thus, there is no place in Blumenberg's view for the direct transformation of a system whose boundaries are delimited by Scripture and a transcendental telos into a system dominated by historical progressivism. Instead of an identifiable transposition of theological contents into "secularized alienation" Blumenberg sees the "reoccupation of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated".[28] Ultimately, there can be no link between the transcendent Civitas Dei and the immanent progress of modern man, since, for Blumenberg, the combination of the finitude of history with infinite progress into a single conception cannot be resulted from secularization, "whether of an infinity usurped by history or of an eschatology transplanted into it".[29] There is thus an insistence on his part on the importance of distinguishing a transcendent principle breaking into history from the immanent action which man alone may take within history itself.

Yet, I believe, herein we find one of the crucial problems, if not *the* problem with Blumenberg's entire effort to unseat Löwith's secularization thesis. As it has already been pointed out[30] *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* inexplicably fails to mention – even in passing or in a footnote – Joachim of Fiore and his vision of history. In doing so, Blumenberg – correctly – analyses *Augustinian* Christianity with its *atemporal*, strict division between the City of God and the City of Man and seeks to prove its incompatibility with modern immanent progressivism. Still, without acknowledging the processes started by Joachimism and its influence in the conceptualization of perfect eras as *part* rather than *apart* from history, Blumenberg's position appears untenable.

This would, at first glance, seem to automatically validate Löwith's secularization thesis and the historical immanentization of the Abrahamic transcendence in general as the origin of modern progressivism. There is even place for some corrective alterations to political religion historiography, differentiating between partial and complete secularization.[31] These are good points, yet ultimately we need to go even farther if we are to avoid an incomplete picture, if only because the details of the transformation from transcendent eschaton to immanent progress are somewhat lacking in the secularization thesis. In this respect, this enables both Löwith and Blumenberg to be right and wrong at the same time. Löwith is right in depicting the seemingly eschatological *structure* of modern progressivism yet he is less thorough in describing the *way* in which the atemporal eschaton became historical eschaton and, finally, a

secular philosophy of history. Blumenberg is right in identifying, firstly, the incompatibility between modern progressivism and atemporal transcendent eschatology and, secondly, in drawing attention to the *reoccupation* principle. Yet his case unravels due to his ignoring the powerful immanent dimension present in radical eschatology starting with Joachim.

As I see it, the modern spirit of progress and the birth of secular philosophies of history cannot be adequately explained as the result of an immanentization of a deep-seated transcendental final principle, nor can it be reduced solely to a revolution of knowledge. Yet this does not mean we cannot reconcile the two visions in certain areas. Once again, the impact of Joachite patterns is a good starting point, as we observe the mixture of gradual transformations and violent revolutions which led from the Christian substratum towards all-encompassing philosophies of history and monistic ideologies. The focus should be on the concordance, if we are to use a Joachimist phrase, between the predominance of a monistic system of thought, the shift towards an immanent telos, the achievable political utopia, along the later rise of rational-bureaucratic statism which enabled the transformation and the later decline of the Church as a power network.[32] On a general level, we can outline several key changes.

Utopianism, Eschatology, Modernity

As stated before, there are several broad patterns which can be traced to the doctrinal core of Joachite-inspired heterodoxies, although Joachite traditions were mixed with many political tendencies – not surprising at all given their eventual reach and the resilience of their ideas throughout the centuries. They include a future perfect age which is inevitable, a devalued present state which must be replaced and a sense of intense expectation.[33] We thus have a renovative-utopian ideal within a teleological narrative of history, held together by a state of heightened expectation. Gradually, what had been a debate between various factions with the Church became an increasingly complex – and dangerous – hybrid, which involved and captured the imagination of sections of lay society. On one end, the Dolcinites mark one of the first transformations of Joachite patterns from a more or less purely theological eschatology towards popular eschatology. On the other, the spread of Joachite themes mixed with the precepts of the Franciscan Spirituals – such as Olvi and Arnold – in oral and printed vernacular was brought about by sects like the Beghards.[34] The writings themselves were sown on fertile land. Thus, a progressive temporality was bound to an inevitable redemptive material telos, the advent of which was – increasingly – within man's grasp to calculate and foresee. Concerning the gradual transformation of eschatological expectations, one might generalize that the key change was

the shift from the Augustinian transcendent eschaton achieved through divine intervention towards the Joachite historical eschaton, also achieved through divine intervention but with increased involvement of human agency. As usual, there are always exceptions or partial similarities – in this respect we can perhaps compare the early Joachites to the Mahdist movements in the peripheries of the Islamic world or to the doctrine of the militant Nizari Isma'ili Shi'ites.[35]

In any case, the highpoint of "eschatological" utopianism did not make its mark at the centre of the Catholic world, in the troubled Italian peninsula, nor would it yet be successful along the Rhine. It would ultimately flourish – and culminate – in a city on a hill. The community of Tábor[36] is, perhaps, the single most fascinating case which mixed eschatological and utopian tendencies in the medieval period. Its multifaceted nature included chiliasm, communistic reform and the ruthless implementation of its principles which led to the creation of a unique society apart, yet still within European Christendom.[37] By the time Jan Hus was burned at the stake, Bohemia had already accomplished the first steps of a local reform program, which was aided by an increased importance of the models of the original charismata communities and their spirituality.[38] We can discover some distinctly Joachite patterns in the Bohemian Kingdom in the decades preceding the Hussite revolution, in the sect known as the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Like in other sects the Joachite substratum is most often – but not always – recognized in the presence of a form of *tertius status* within history. For the Taborites, history itself was fashioned according to what we can recognize as a Joachite Trinitarian principle, namely the Old Law, the New Law and the Age of the Renovated Kingdom, which would shortly replace the latter. The momentous transformations of the material world would be nothing short of spectacular. The elect were nothing less than the chosen army of God, meant to undergo a bodily resurrection and cleanse the entirety of the world of tyranny, injustice and unbelief. There was no salvation outside of the virtuous community; to be apart was to be marked for unbelief, impurity and death. Taborites were the only heterodoxy to successfully, if only temporarily, establish its own state within Christendom before the Lutheran reform. They used and interpreted some of the key concepts of Joachite thought in order to justify the overthrow of an existing, impure society, the preservation of a virtuous community led by a charismatic elite, and the building of a perfect society in the here-and-now. They are a good example of totalist heterodoxies which led to the coalition between reformist movements and secular powers in Europe. Characteristic of its immense resilience and potential for adapting to different historical circumstances, the Joachite strand – or at least its patterns – would survive in new and increasingly secular guiles, such as those depicted in the work of Gemistos Plethon.

Plethon's political writings aim at the establishing of an ideal community in the last real outpost of the free Greek world – the Peloponnese. In 1416 and 1418 – just as the Hussite movement was stirring in far away Bohemia – he wrote letters to the despot of Morea as well as the emperor in Constantinople imagining a complete social, political and cultural reorganization of the state. Peritore is probably right when he states that Plethon was one of the earliest proponents of the nationalistic myth while at the same time being able to base this myth on a socio-political and economic program.[39] His last work, the *Nómoi* or *Book of Laws*, was the result of a life-long preoccupation with both philosophy and political change, aiming to change the overall structural and spiritual aspects of the state. It included a new "civic religion" which incorporated Humanist rationalism and logic, which was supposed to culminate in a "Hellenic pagan theocratic state".[40] As Sinissoglou convincingly argues, it is highly possible that Plethon's radical reformism was a direct result of the Hesychast controversy, Tomism and the Palamist hegemony in the politics of the Byzantine state.[41] Although not one of Plethon's reforms was acted upon, the visionary potential of Plethon's synthesis taken altogether should not be underestimated, as his work represents a momentous step in political utopia. Plethon's views can be understood as organising the existence of the perfect *politeia* around human agency, and are thus in stark contrast to other political utopias in the West which, even as they gradually departed from the religious substratum, remained somewhat embedded in or indebted to an ahistorical structure. In this respect, Plethon is less an anticipation of More and Campanella, but rather of Spinoza, Saint-Simon and the various branches of 19th century utopian thought.[42]

Gradually, the shift from the spirit of early utopias to modern political utopia would mark the transition from a theoretically ideal society to an immediate political and social action. As it has already been shown in the space dedicated to Joachim of Fiore, the static image of a paradise in a distant future devised by Augustine gradually gave way to the idea of an achievable paradise set in the near future or the present. Culminating in the Reformation, the new tendency shifted from an emphasis on *individuals* which could be linked to sacred time towards the very *institutions* which perpetuated themselves throughout history, indirectly contributing to the advent of modern nation-states. The shift from theoretical ideal towards a mostly eschatological-utopianism and then towards a secular utopia, was often achievable due to a group of Elect. Naturally, this does not mean that we may identify a continuous evolution, but rather a general tendency, *punctuated by shifts and reversals.* Salvation, authority, rebellion, charisma, prophecy and political programs increasingly intermingled as the new spirit was built upon three massive, and altogether different theoretical columns. The first model made full use of the rationalist legacy of Greek utopianism in order to describe a

society whose pinnacle was a *citta perfetta*, serving more as an intellectual rejuvenation of Hippodamus and Vitruvius rather than as a model for political action. From the abstract reflections of Italian authors, and from More's escapism we are driven towards the destructive eschatology of Thomas Müntzer and the Dutch Calvinist apostles, the preachers of a paradise that was supposed to renew mankind by raising it on the blood and ashes of the old world.[43] In this cosmic duel against the vile "princes of the earth", the radical reformers of the early 16th century were acting in the traditions of famous precursors, such as the Hussite Taborites. On one side, Thomas More's utopian construct – indirectly influenced by Plethon's work – will arguably leave the greatest imprint in the Western mind, struggling as it did to reconcile the Greek legacy of the *Republic* with the eschatological depictions of New Jerusalem.[44] Yet it was the radical currents of the post-Taborite reformation with their populist, eschatological theocratic overtones during the Peasant's War and the Münster Anabaptist Revolt, which most resembled the fervour and the violent intensity of modern totalist movements. Although defeating the most dangerous movements, Protestantism could not achieve the same transcendent "society-creating force" as Catholicism did on a European level, but it could, in alliance with the State, create a more disciplined, homogenous society on a local level.[45]

On the morning of All Saints Day, the 1st of November 1755, a massive earthquake, followed by a tsunami and devastating fires destroyed Portugal's capital. The countless dead and the apparent *malice* with which nature had struck the city on one of the greatest Catholic holidays caused quite a controversy. If the devout could blame the catastrophe on the sins of the people, the philosophers of the Enlightenment were less convinced, forever relinquishing what remained of the alliance between Christian faith and natural science. This was either an act of evil, which could not be possible if God was by definition good, or an act of Nature, which ultimately led to the separation between God and his Creation. In the ripples of the Lisbon earthquake, Pansophia dissolved into the new, increasingly secular culture, with the French at the forefront of this movement.[46] In Europe, for both West and East, the consequences were to prove momentous. The *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment, seemingly resisting the illusory aspects of the traditional utopias, which reminded them all too much of a religious paradise[47], were closer to a purely theoretical discussion on the model of an ideal society. Their systems could pursue man in his original, uncorrupted, natural state or a world where the abolishing of existing hierarchies, vices, virtues and properties would be possible. There was ample, if limited time for the implementation of radical reforms, for the standard-bearers of the Enlightenment seemed to owe their allegiance more to the cyclical myth of Antiquity's Fortune, rather than the progressive path towards Christianity's eschaton. Nevertheless, their own eschaton was present in

Nature and in the unending trend of creation, apex and decadence, which marked the century's scientific analysis of the biblical Deluge. On this sometimes tumultuous background, the overt or unconsciously utopian models turned from the "static pictorial utopia of calm felicity"[48] and towards the more life-like scenario of a man living and shaping *his* world, a world of progress, where the old quarrels, fears, religions and identities, were to be swept away by the teleological march of reason.

At the same time, the late 18th and the 19th centuries would go on to be the era of great rediscoveries when it came to medieval heterodoxies and their visions of history. Different intellectuals all over Europe came across the patterns and ideas of Joachite thought. In such typically Joachite themes as the inevitable arrival of an imminent perfect historical era and the role of a chosen elite, the moderns could, at times, discover an anticipation of their own theories. One such intellectual was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose late work is an interesting balance between a defence of pluralist values and an exaltation of ultimately monistic tendencies. Interestingly, Lessing seems undecided between condoning a monistic framework in an apparent apology for pluralism in *Nathan der Weise* and supporting political and social differences in *Ernst und Falk*[49], before finally returning to a clearer monistic view in his last and highly influential work: *The Education of the Human Race*. In this book, Lessing advocates a peculiar type of historicist deism which he cloaks in religious imagery whilst, at the same time adapting the Joachite principle of an Eternal Gospel. Lessing himself was no prisoner to medieval Christian dogma, and he knew it all too well, since he envisioned a different type of monism. He and his freemason brothers lived in what was surely the brink of momentous change, a time when the third and final stage of history, the final answer to Man's endeavours, was within reach. By the time of the French experiment had run its course through all its streams, grand, complex, all-embracing philosophical systems stood poised to replace traditional utopianism through the use of a theoretical structure which sought to encompass, erode and replace the power of the Christian discourse – including the institutional power of the Church – as well as systematic philosophies.[50] Their creators, these often – but not always – politically inactive thinkers, which were part of or supported by high society, would be, soon enough, replaced by men of action, or became increasingly involved themselves. Taking it upon themselves to guide their sacred nation or the chosen class through the storm of History, the new professional revolutionaries would mark a new point in European history, when great restructuring of the existing social, political and moral order would mix violence, utopian aspirations and distinctly teleological visions[51] into what has become one of the most enduring facets of modernity and the precursor to the totalist experiments of the coming century.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting that the parallel between Joachim of Fiore – the pious medieval exegete – and Karl Marx – the atheistic modern theoretician – lies not only in the creation of an influential redemptive teleological narrative of history, but also in the way their works were interpreted by their disciples. In both cases, the complex if unclear orthodoxy of the master would give rise to alterations, deviation, perversion, reinterpretation and consolidation within wholly new systems of thought, whilst still maintaining the basics or at least the semblance of a doctrinal core. The moderate or quietist groups believed the great change would come about peacefully or independently, as the course of history was, after all, inevitable. Some sought withdrawal from the world and the creation of a new virtuous society in the hope of influencing the corrupt world around them and perhaps speeding up the age of perfection. Finally, other groups believed the Age was imminent or had already arrived and that it was their duty as the new Elect to redeem all those who lived in untruth. The formidable tension between the idealized symbol and the secular reality of the Church as an institution contributed greatly to the rise of such heterodoxies, whose belief in an imminent Age of Perfection legitimized radical action. They defied the established order, criticized the very foundation of the Church and sought its replacement with the original charismatic and apostolic community. The conflicts often took a social and proto-national character, which set them against the Church and State. The conflicts themselves and the new vision of history were also linked to the emergence and increased prevalence of the achievable, secular or partially secular political utopia.

Ultimately, the combination that became unique to Europe was the creation of secularised teleological narratives of history, achieved through human agency aided by reason, natural law and historical materialism. A critical change took place when the secular State allied with reformist groups - in order to push back papal influence – and, crucially, to counter the radical totalist heterodoxies such as the early Joachites, Taborites or Anabaptists, whose victory would have meant a complete and total transformation of society. And while religion would slowly decline from the centre of European public discourse, the Church was actually, at least temporarily, along with the state, able to influence the lives of individuals before it lost to the increasingly influential rival power networks and, most of all, before the all-embracing ideologies which provided competing forms of legitimacy and alternative sources of sole truths and final answers. The long running debate on the nature of secularism and European modernity has become more relevant than ever, also within the frame of the Löwith-Blumenberg debate. This is especially so at a time when the fragility of European values is becoming more pronounced

under the strain of an increasingly atomistic pluralism. In a society which seeks to accommodate the many different – at times incompatible – conceptions of the good, the reappraisal of the interaction between its Christian substratum and public secular culture will be vital for a new European project.

Notes

[1] Arthur H. Williamson, *Apocalypse Then: Prophecy and the Making of the Modern World*, (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2008).
[2] John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity,* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2009); Albert I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Apocalyptic Time*, (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000).
[3] Frank E., Manuel & Fritzie P., Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979).
[4] Michael Allen Gillespie, *Theological Origins of Modernity*, (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[5] Eisenstadt partially deals with both totalism and heterodoxies, yet his highly intriguing work is prone, at times, to far too sweeping generalizations. See S.N. Eisenstadt, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution. The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[6] I define totalism as an a superordinate system of thought which possesses an absolute, singular view of human existence and pursues the reshaping of public and private spheres in accordance to its Soteriological-Simplifying Principle, which is, in turn, explained and legitimized by its claim to interpretation-monopoly and towards Sole-Truth. By its very nature, such a system does not accept the validity of other truth-claims. In short, it offers an ultimate meaning, *the* final answer to material and spiritual existence. For example, the Islamic state of the 19th century Sudanese Mahdi was *totalist* in message, content as well as the implementation of its Sole-Truth claims. I also consider the term a viable alternative to the ultimately anachronistic use of Voegelin's *gnosticism*.
[7] Augustine denied the possibility of knowing *when* the Second Coming would manifest itself, even though the *saeculum* the Christians lived in was meant to be the last.
[8] See Collin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy. The Western Church from 1050 to 1250,* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1989).
[9] See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 500-507.
[10] According to Augustine, the world was divided into seven ages, one for each day of Creation. Where Joachim crucially differs, is when he expects his age – the Sixth – to pave the way for a *historical* Age, rather than the coming of an eternal Sabbath.
[11] Brett Edward Whalen, *Dominion of God. Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 109-114.
[12] Concordia IV, 33 (f. 56vb) (Venice, 1519, photomechanical reprint, 1964) cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Abbot and the Doctors*: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore, *Church History*, 40, 1, (March 1971): 33.

[13] He never openly criticized the Church, nor did he openly suggest that the institution should be abolished.
[14] Nevertheless, this would not stop several kings and popes from calling him a prophet or seeking out his insight.
[15] For a more in depth analysis on Joachim of Fiore and his system, see Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the prophetic future: a medieval study in historical thinking*, (Stroud: Sutton Pub, 1999).
[16] The third stage would possess *plenitude intellectus*.
[17] The *viri spirituales* were meant to possess *spiritual bodies* and *spiritual understanding*.
[18] I prefer the term *revolutionised*, since his disciples, the later Joachites, were responsible for the radicalisation of Joachim's original message.
[19] See Stephen Brown, "Trinitarianism, the Eternal Evangel and the Three Eras Schema", in *Marketing Apocalypse. Eschatology, Escapology and the Illusion of the End*, edited by Stephen Brown, Jim Belt and David Carson, (London, New York: Routledge 1998), 30.
[20]Manuel & Manuel, 33.
[21] The German edition clarified the original title, replacing "Implications" with "Presuppositions", thus matching the word "Voraussetzungen".
[22] Löwith, 5.
[23] Löwith, 18.
[24] Löwith, 207.
[25] Löwith makes some good points in his portrayal of Marxism as a secular yet redemptive ideology. For instance: "[...] the whole process of history as outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* corresponds to the general scheme of the Jewish-Christian interpretation of history as a providential advance toward a final goal which is meaningful. Historical materialism is essentially, though secretly, a history of fulfilment and salvation in terms of social economy." Löwith, 45.
[26] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, translated by Robert M. Wallace, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).
[27] Blumenberg, 30.
[28] Blumenberg, 65.
[29] Blumenberg, 86.
[30] Milan Babík, "Nazism as a Secular Religion", *History and Theory*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Oct., 2006): 394. Martin Jay, "The Legitimacy of the Modern Age", review of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, by Hans Blumenberg, *History and Theory*, 24, (1985): 192.
[31] The partial secularization "would encompass religious progressivisms that secularize the biblical story of salvation only in the limited sense of immanentizing the transcendent (Augustinian) City of God within the historical world as a goal of moral, political, and technological striving." Complete secularization would mean "progressivisms that allege to have abandoned the Bible and no longer consciously retain any religious content." Babík, 396.
[32] Gorski talks about how "the decline of church networks and other more authoritative forms of ideological power since the nineteenth century may have been offset by the emergence of more diffuse types of ideological power". See P. S. Gorski, "Mann's theory of ideological power: sources, applications and elaborations", in *An Anatomy of Power. The Social Theory of Michael Mann*, edited by

John A. Hall & Ralph Schroeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129.

[33] See R. Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The "Third Reich": A Fifteenth-Century Polemic against Joachism, and Its Background", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 18, 3, (1955): 247.

[34] Gian Luca Potesta, "Radical Apocalyptic Movements in the Late Middle Ages", *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, edited by B. McGinn, J.J. Collins, Stephen J. Stein, (New York, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), 305.

[35] In 1164 the Nizari ruler of the Alamut stronghold announced the arrival of the new epoch of Resurrection, claiming the abrogation of the Shari'a. This in not all too dissimilar from the way the Joachite Eternal Evangel was meant to supersede the Old and the New Testament. Also see J.J. Buckley, "The 'Nizârî ismâ'îlîtes' Abolishment of the sharî'a during the Great Resurrection of 1164 A.D./ 559 A.H.", *Studia Islamica*, 60, (1984): 137-165.

[36] The name was masterfully chosen, with powerful biblical and eschatological overtones (Matthew 28:16-20). The name of the Mount and of the hilltop, along with its implicit transformational power was thus transferred both to the new settlement as well as to the Elect themselves.

[37] It is important to state that they were the single most successful of the various heterodox movements in terms of secular power. Whereas the remnants of the Waldensians, Lollards and other Joachite-influenced sects could only survive in secret, the Hussite Taborites not only withstood their Czech rivals as well as several crusades, they spread terror across their borders into Hungary, Germany and reaching as far as the Baltic.

[38] Jan Hus was only one – if the most important symbol – of the Czech reformers, such as Konrad Waldhauser or Matěj of Janov. For the most up to date look at Jan Hus and the major influences on his theology – Scripture, Augustinianism, the Czech reform tradition and John Wyclif – see Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus. Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia*, (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

[39] N. Patrick Peritore, "The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer", *Polity*, *Palgrave Macmillan Journals* 10, 2 (1977): 168-191.

[40] Peritore, 191.

[41] Niketas Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium. Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12-40.

[42] His case also depicts one of the main differences between East and West related to the Church as a power network. The Byzantine state, fatally weakened by the Ottoman threat, could hardly compete against the power network of the Church which ensured the gradual monastic hegemony over the secular state.

[43] On the Reformation and its appeal in Europe, see Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[44] Manuel and Manuel, 114.

[45] See Phillip. S. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700", *American Sociological Review*. 65, 1 (2000): 138-167.

[46] Manuel and Manuel, 410.

[47] Manuel and Manuel, 416.

[48] Manuel and Manuel, 458.

[49] See Wilfried Wilms, "*The Universalist Spirit of Conflict*: Lessing's Political Enlightenment", *Monatshefte*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (2002): 306-321.
[50] Manuel and Manuel, 460.
[51] For the concepts above and the mixture of natural right theories and golden age utopianism with classical republicanism, see Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution*, (Chicago, London: University Of Chicago Press, 2009).

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