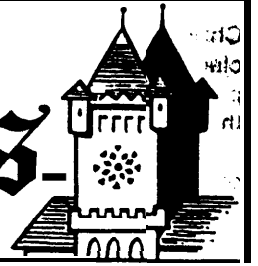


# The Geneva Papers



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## CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION: MEDIEVAL PERSPECTIVES FOR TODAY. A SYNOPSIS OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PROFESSOR WALTER ULLMAN

by D. E. H. Brown

Not far from where the writer lives stand the remains of a remarkable late medieval Cistercian Abbey — the finest of its kind in all Europe, it is said. Ravaged at the dissolution of the Monasteries, and then again by time, it now wears an apparently timeless aspect, and, although a ruin, it is in such a state of preservation that it attracts scores of visitors.

Some no doubt are close students of the period. Others quite simply enjoy the peace and natural grandeur of the spacious parkland setting. Few pause to reflect that it belongs to an age with connections with our own. The factors promoting a sense of discontinuity are too great for that. The gulf is fixed, not only by the lapse of centuries, but also by the intervention of Renaissance and Reformation, by the New World and Scientific discovery, by the Industrial Revolution and now the Age of Technology — and if those far off times manage still to speak of an Age of Faith, it is a Faith with which Protestantism broke at the price even of the blood of many."

A relic — of merely passing interest — is then inheritance enough. After all, the Dark Ages were just that, dark! Surely the matter can be left at that?

Yet it is no disloyalty to Protestantism, nor to our modernity, nor to the obligation to be future orientated, to ask if there is any positive and valid way in which the past speaks to us across such an immense divide. "ideas have consequences", and so are there any surviving from Medieval times still of use today, thus providing a continuity in spite of all those discontinuities?

The answer is perhaps slightly unexpected. "if ever the principle of historical continuity has relevance it is within the precincts of the history of political ideas." (Walter Ullman, *Medieval Political Thought*, p. 7.)

At this point some may be tempted to search for alternative reading matter. Not for them the supposed shadows of the Dark Ages! Even if we could conceive of specifically medieval political ideas — that is, without being impaled on a contradiction — what do political ideas have to do with Christianity?

Yet it is a strength — not a weakness — of medieval times that it was constantly asked what Christianity required to be done in the realm of government. That Age of Faith — for so it was in spite of all its manifest imperfections and inconsistencies — insisted that Christianity and a Christocentric emphasis play a dominant and decisive role in both the theory and practice of Government.

it is a medieval Historian, Professor Walter Ullman, who (particularly in the three works quoted in this essay) has done perhaps most first to release fellow Medievalists from the charge of "mere antiquarian", and secondly to put his readers in touch with relevant medieval roots because "the governmental and political ideas dominant in the Middle Ages have created the very world which is ours". (*Ibid.*, p. 229.)

Between the fifth and twelfth centuries, Europe, in establishing its own identity, was faced with the enormous task of learning from scratch "the fundamentals, the very rudiments, of how to manipulate the ordering of public life". (idem.) Emerging from barbarism there were few things to be taken for granted. Yet Christianity had survived and, more than that, was a victor. No matter what slips there were in practice between cup and lip, no matter what terrible inconsistencies there might be in concrete lapses, Christian faith was the guiding principle.

In following Ullman it is necessary to appreciate the general principles enunciated before becoming immersed in the many particulars that constitute the history of the Medieval period. This essay, in fact, will largely concentrate on these emerging generalities, since they are the factors to be kept in mind when considering the cause of Christian Civilisation today.

Ullman himself in his Preface to his work entitled *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* advises the reader to take full account of this. "Since this book treats of the general principles which can be abstracted from the historical development, the particular, exceptional and individual cannot, and should not, find a place in it . . . . Unless one knows the premises and bases. . upon which medieval government actions rested, one cannot successfully penetrate into the texture of the medieval scene. . . ."

From his extensive studies it is clear to Ullman that for most of what we know as the medieval period government, and the often unarticulated principles from which it was derived, were an integral part of "applied Christian doctrines".

This would be a significant point in itself, especially in terms of showing that medieval times at least made the effort to ensure that faith ensued in works and that works flowed from faith. it is, however, perhaps of equal importance to show that the application of Christian doctrines embraced the whole of life. This was not only quantitatively, "the

Christocentric standpoint which impressed itself upon all classes of society, from the lowliest vlllein to the most powerful king or emperor", but also qualitatively, because the prevailing view of society was holistic (*ibid.*, Introduction).

"It was the undifferentiated Christian wholeness point of view that indelibly impressed itself on all modes of thought. . . ." (Unman, *Law and Politics In the Middle Ages*, p. 12.)

"The Christian idea itself militated against any kind of departmentalisation. That one and the same human activity could be viewed from a moral and a religious and a political angle was not a way of thinking with which medieval man had been acquainted. What counted then was the undifferentiated Christian: religion was not separated from politics, politics not separated from morals and so on. What mattered was the Christianity of man. . . ." (*Medieval PoL Tho't.*, p. 16.)

It was therefore inconceivable for a public man to be judged by any other standard than Christian.

How different it is today. As William P. Kellogg argues in a series of articles, there is in modern times a persistence in imposing a duality on life. He says, in *Chalcedon Report* No. 202, June 1982, "We have noted in previous articles the modern dichotomizing of the life of an individual into private and public spheres. We are further told in our era that what one does in one's private life is irrelevant to what one does in one's public life. A U.S. senator or congressman can be an alcoholic and a lecher in his so-called private life, and still be a good public servant, we are told."

This brief essay will return to the question of dualism in man's thinking, but, for the moment, will simply note the absolute distinction between that duality of outlook and the essentially unified conception of thought and action" that prevailed for much of those times we designate medieval.

In order to see how this unity of thought and action was itself of the very fabric of society, it is necessary to appreciate that this "wholeness standpoint found its most conspicuous expression in the law". (*Law and Politics*, p. 12.)

Medieval society well understood that law was where life and logic met. They appreciated that law was the great educator. Indeed the first academic discipline in the History of Europe was a scholarly examination of law, particularly Roman law. There were special law schools at Ravenna and Bologna, the forerunners of the Universities of Europe. If "ideas have consequences", then the prevailing concepts of law forming part of the medieval corpus of ideas certainly had consequences. Moreover, the scholarship associated with the law was no mere "ivory tower" activity. "At no time did pure scholarship affect society and government to the degree that the civilians — and later also the canonists — did in the centuries between the Investiture Contest and the Reformation." (*ibid.*, p. 79.)

In terms of organizing Society the Medieval Age clearly saw that if the business of government is to govern, then that "government can be executed — within civilised societies — only by means of the law". (*Medieval PoL Tho't.*, p. 15.)

"That the historical process in the Middle Ages was overwhelmingly determined and conditioned by the law is now more and more recognised." There was a "close interlacing of law and history . . . ." Moreover, "it would indeed be true to say that medieval history, in the public field, resolves itself into and is reflected by, the law, for law was the vehicle through which government was exercised.

Government and law were at all times SO intimately linked with each other that they appear as one and the same, thing, seen from different angles." (*Principles of Government*, Introduction.)

Thus law had a role "which it did not possess either in antiquity or in the modern age. The law became the most crucial and vital element of the whole social fabric". (*Law and Politics*, p. 28.) Medieval thinkers were not overawed when reflecting on the primacy of law, and were not "frightened to consider law as "the soul of the body politic". (*idem.*) Moreover, it is the manifestation of this concept of the rule of law which constitutes "the most enduring bequest of the medieval period to the modern age". (*ibid.*, p. 29.)

Unman is fully aware that every system of law stands in close proximity to the nature and identity of the society to be governed by law. Equally he acknowledges that law will mean different things to different societies depending on whether or not they are, for example, Communist, Buddhist, or Christian. At this point, therefore, it is appropriate to ask what law — or better, whose law — informed medieval practice. Here again the answer may come as a surprise to the modern reader.

Unquestionably the source of law in the Middle Ages was the Bible. "Though it has only fairly recently been recognised, the Bible, and above all the Old Testament, was strongly imbued with legal material, and in consequence, quite a number of basic governmental principles in the Middle Ages had been modelled on the Bible." (*Medieval PoL Tho't.*, p. 21.)

The holistic view of man and society, and the idea that the Church universal was altogether a new society, required a basis in the Bible. Not only was the Scripture the source Book, but it was held to affect the whole of the body politic. Moreover, it was through the Vulgate that Western Europe slowly acquired an identity of its own. When, in the fifth century, the East and West split, the West was not only based on a doctrinally different platform, but also saw itself as not being the heir of the Roman Empire in the sense of having to identify with its traditions and provide unmodified continuity. The Roman foundation was to a great extent abandoned, and replaced with Christian precepts translated into legal terms. Of course, there was a certain borrowing from Roman Institutions, but whereas their form might be preserved their content was largely reinterpreted into Christian terms. Thus the source of Law for the West became the Scriptures.

"For some inscrutable reason this hardly ever receives mention. It is indisputable that the Vulgate played a most important role in the softening up of the fertile and yet untilld soil of Western Europe. . . . One has merely to state that the Bible was the one book with which every literate person was thoroughly familiar, in order to grasp its potent influence." (*ibid.*, p. 52.)

Today, with the translation of the Scripture into many tongues, and equally with an unfamiliarity with the "lingua franca" of the Vulgate, it seems strange that a Latin Bible — with all the obvious limitations this entailed — should have provided a common bond among tribes, nations, provinces, and regions.

In the realm of government the influence of the Vulgate was overwhelming, and the success of the Vulgate in this domain was also due to the fact that "on the virgin soil of Western Europe" its influence "culminated in an all pervading view of the wholeness of man". (*Law and Politics*, p. 48.)

It was, in fact, the abandonment of this holistic concept that surely and inevitably drove out the influence of Christianity and began the process of dismantling the grand alliance among Scripture, law, and polity.

It arose in the cosmological revolution — one world-and-life view replacing another — which began in the thirteenth century when the influence of Greek thought in the form of Aristotle, in particular, was revived. The wholeness point of view was lost from sight. The concept of Natural Law was resurrected to replace the prevailing dependence on Divine Law. The Aristotelian idea of the natural man came into its own. "Homo", man as such, was set over and against "Christianus", Christian man. Autonomous man reappeared. Unipolarity became bipolarity. Integration of spheres of function began to yield to departmentalization or specialization.

"Aristotle himself had shattered the (Platonic) wholeness concept by stating that man and citizen corresponded to two different categories of thought: the good citizen need not be a good man, and vice versa. This statement expressed a profound new dimension — it expressed the difference between politics and ethics." "This was the beginning of the process of atomization of human activities into moral, political, religious, and other categories." (*ibid.*, p. 270.)

In Thomism Aristotle was revived, and with the shift in cosmological thinking came the possibility of the modern concept of State — government that was valid in its own right, requiring to have nothing to do with Grace or Faith." Machiavellianism was its natural successor.

This essay has self-consciously restricted itself to a consideration of those general principles so clearly enunciated by Unman as being the essential bases of medieval attempts to order public life. Concentration on them, however, should not be allowed to convince the reader that Unman's work is limited to a detached overview of general principles. There is much to interest the Church historian and general reader alike, as Unman moves expertly into the many particular outworkings of the general principles which are so fundamental to medieval thinking.

Of no little interest is mistreatment of what heterms the Ascending and Descending Theories of government. The Ascending/Descending modes are aspects of a pyramidal model used to explain the structure of power and authority. In the case of the Ascending Theory, power is from the base of the pyramid upwards — the roots of power are in the "voluntas populi". Implicit in this theory is the right of the people to remove their leader, and which, in general terms, has become the "modus vivendi" in all revolutionary groups in subsequent history. Ultimately it is the tyranny of "vox populi, vox dei". On the other hand, the Descending Theory locates the source of power at the apex, and while it embraces the principle "Rex dei gratia" it also lapsed into absolutism. It is as though both positions with their tyrannous tendencies can only be checked — and that temporarily — by the one's being substituted for the other!

Unman also spends considerable time on the Papacy. (And see his *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages*.) It is of interest, in terms of the general principles surveyed above, to see how the office of the Pope, in true Aristotelian terms, came to be distinguished from the person of the Pope. It began with Leo I [440-61]. Assuming himself to be the "unworthy heir of Peter" he interpreted that in dichotomous terms, He could have none of the personal merit of Peter, but the status of heir

nevertheless conferred the status and authority of the deceased. The heir continued in law, in spite of unworthiness. The office was separated from the person, and the Papacy was placed in an unassailable position until challenged by Huss and by the successors in the Reformation who subscribed to the Hussite view:

"If the Pope is bad, he has no power over the faithful."

Many other aspects of medieval political thought are ably paraded by Unman for our interest. They range from Roman imperial political ideas, through a consideration of Canon Law, Theocratic and Feudal kingship, political ideas in royal coronations to Conciliarism, with many other facets besides, and not forgetting the theological framework which structured the reflections of the Age.

To end this essay perhaps allusion could be made to an observation Ullman makes in terms of the more Western and Frankish expression of the rule of law, for at that stage the error of Absolutism, so manifest in the conflict between Pope and Emperor was tempered by an emerging thesis that:

"the ruler was subjected to a higher law, that is, the Divine Law... This higher or basic law was prior to the king himself and wholly independent of him."

## AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

By Gary North

### No. 10: Ants and Sluggards

*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. (Prov. 6:6-8).*

In Western folklore, the story of the grasshopper and the ant is a familiar one. Aesop's fables — a medieval collection of moral parables in the form of children's stories — includes it. The diligent ant works through the summer, gathering food for the winter, while the carefree and careless grasshopper fiddles all summer. The grasshopper takes advantage of the summer weather to dance and sing, as if the good weather would last forever. He assumes that there are no future crises to prepare for by sacrificing today. When winter comes, he faces starvation. He then comes to the ant and begs for food. The ant refuses; there is not sufficient food for both of them. The influence of Proverbs on the creator(s) of this tale is obvious.

This passage in Proverbs forces us to consider the requirements of survival and success. The New English Bible translates the passage as follows: "... but in the summer she prepares her store of food and lays in her supplies at harvest." To imitate the ant, we must become future-oriented. We must begin to count the costs of our activities (Luke 14:28-30). If we are unwilling to work hard today, and ignore the lure of sloth, we will come to poverty. "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth [as a robber, NEB], and thy want as an armed man" (vv. 9-11).

*Sluggards resent the life style of the ants.* The activities of the ants testify to a different world-and-life view from that held by sluggards. The sluggard is content to sleep. He allows the events of life to pass him by. He assumes, that the peacefulness of sleep, the enjoyment of leisure, can be purchased at zero or minimal cost. There is no crisis ahead, or if there is, nothing can be done to prepare for it anyway. There is no need to prepare for the future.

Edward Banfield, the Harvard political scientist, describes this outlook as lower class in nature. He says that class divisions in society are not based on the size of bank accounts, or occupational status; they are based on people's time perspective. Upper-class people are future-oriented. Lower-class people are present-oriented. *What characterizes the upper-class person is his diligence' in sacrificing present pleasures for future productivity and achievement.* Ludwig von Mises would say that upper-class people, as described by Banfield, have very low time-preference; they will save for the future in response to very low interest rates. The upper-class society will therefore enjoy relatively low rates of interest. Upper-class investors respond to low rates of interest, whereas the lower-class investor will demand very high rates of interest in order to get him to forfeit the present use of his economic resources.

*Upper-class societies, being future-oriented, high-thrift societies, will tend to experience higher rates of economic growth.* People buy what they want: future consumption or present consumption. The lower-class individual puts a high premium on present consumption! and he sacrifices future consumption in order to achieve his goal. Ants and sluggards have different goals and different time perspectives.

*Pietism* (e.g., certain types of fundamentalism and monasticism) and *quietism* (e.g., mysticism) focus their interest on "spiritual" goals which are contrasted with material or "earthly" goals. Members of both groups believe that the proper perspective of New Testament believers is passivity toward the earthly future. They misinterpret Paul's words, "Be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4:6a), which can also be translated "be full of care for nothing," or better yet, "have no anxiety" (NEB). They argue that Paul meant that we should not devote lots of resources to planning for the future and investing in terms of our plans. Christ's warning in the Sermon on the Mount, "Take therefore no thought for tomorrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34), is interpreted to mean that all planning is unwise. Yet what Christ taught was the illegitimacy of a *paralyzing* worry about the future — a paralysis which leads to little planning, or planning to meet crises that never come. Such worry is wasteful. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). The material blessings will follow when men concern themselves with establishing God's kingdom.

The pietist interprets "kingdom of God" to mean the *kingdom of the internal*. "When men concern themselves with the details of prayer, church worship, and personal piety, then God will take care of them." This belief is basic

to the faith of the pietist. He believes that the practical, down-to-earth future-orientation represented by the behavior of the ant is a now-superseded Old Testament standard. With respect to material things, the pietist claims to be as unconcerned as the sluggard is. The pietist folds his hands for hours in prayer; the sluggard folds his hands for hours in slumber. In both cases, the approach is outwardly the same: *folded hands*. So is the outward result: *poverty*.

The biblical view is expressed by the actions of the ant: diligence concerning that which sustains life. "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich" (10:4). Slack hands, folded hands: the result is poverty. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and bath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (13:4). A fat soul and wealth can be compatible (although they can sometimes be incompatible: Ps. 106:15). Hard work, thrift, high income, and contentment under God: here is the Bible's "wealth formula."

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3b; Matt. 4:4). Yet man does not live by the word of God alone, either, if by "word of God," we mean an "internalized" word — reading only, prayer only, handing out tracts only, or preaching only. *What is forbidden is the concept of separation of word and bread.* We see this in forty years of manna in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3a), and in Christ's resumption of eating after the completion of His forty-day wilderness experience. We also see it in the celebration of the Passover and the Lord's Supper. What produces bread in the promised land of Canaan, when the manna ceases (Joshua 5:12), is not a program of strictly internal religious exercises, but *attention to the whole of God's word, including God's law*, and also including a thoughtful consideration of the ant, not to mention the sluggard.

Some American fundamentalists react in self-righteous outrage to Christians who spend paper money on dehydrated food storage programs, gold and silver coins, and the construction of bomb shelters. They say that such preparations for the future are a sign of a lack of faith in God, a humanistic concern with earthly cares of the world. Their shibboleth of shibboleths: "God will take care of me!" This really means that when a crisis comes, they will wind up on the doorsteps of those who did prepare, calling on them to show charity to them, which supposedly is their Christian duty. "God will take care of me" really boils down to "You ants will take care of me." It is the sluggard's cry.

God's answer to these hand-folding hypocrites is found in the parable of the ten virgins, who awaited the return of the bridegroom. Five were "wise" and took oil in their lamps. Five were "foolish" and took no oil. "And all the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matt. 25:8-9). The result: "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (v. 10). Such is the fate of foolish virgins, sluggards, and pietists. God takes care of them, all right, but not in the way they had hoped for.

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