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History, Theology and the Relevance of the Translatio Imperii

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History is not merely a record of the human past; it is as much about the present and who and what we are and hold valuable, as it is about our trepidations and anxieties and hopes, as much to do with the looming of the future as the burdens and triumphs of the past. History enfolds times past, present and yet to come. History is warning as well as record. From our present understanding of the past we attempt to eliminate possibilities taken which have thrown us into the hells that we must leave or perish within. But History is also the record of achievement, conquest of obstacles, founding, exodus and deliverance from some parts of humanity's own existence, from enemies who have emerged in space or across time (including the enemy of unbearable traditional practices and unsustainable oppressive social stratifications). Friends and enemy might be essential to the horizon of the political, but it is through History peoples are also instructed in the inimical nature of their own traditions.

History is also a record of events that have left such an indelible impression upon our species that they still matter— to switch metaphor, they still radiate and we still live within their radiance. Our historical impressions are intrinsic to us. Though it is not always obvious where history and History match up - while we have a plethora of evidence to confirm that the past incubates within the present, this does not mean that we are Historically aware. We must re-

member and re-collect the multiplicity of dismemberments that constitute the temporality of human action, the actions that still matter, even if merely to entertain our curiosity.

That re-remembering is evident in our institutions, in the names which are passed down to us, in habits and our moral choices – and moral philosophers to the contrary, reason has taught us far less about moral behavior than knowledge of the terrible things our forefathers have done: history is the autobiography of the human species.

This is also to say that history is meaningful –it speaks to our foreboding, it forewarns (if not of the unexpected, of the dreadfully familiar), it orientates, and the questions we pose to it emerge from the criss-crossings of forces, fears, hopes and possibilities which we as questioners are caught up in. We are the species who make meaning of everything we do. This is the result of having language, or better expressed, the result of us having a special and—as far as we know—a unique relationship to the universe. We realize that the universe, or at least that part of it with which we are engaged, expands not only through material relationships but through language – the commands and impositions, urgings and imploring which constantly change out material circumstances. Human language is not mere ‘signing’ of the sort that we can discern in other species, and that we may engage in with other species; it is different in kind. And the key to that difference is in the grammar and the scope of our intentions, retentions and projections. We might be able to explain the origin of the universe through physics, but we cannot explain the signing and breaking of treaties, declarations of war and peace, the foundations of peoples and constitutions, marriage ceremonies or marriage proposals, or the names that signify any of the great historical events, unless we resort to the peculiar fact that human beings are *speaking* creatures (cf. Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, 1981). Only human beings have a history because only human beings have institutions, and only human beings have institutions because only human

beings have speech; speech is the redistribution of possibilities within and accrued over time so that past and future become as meaningful as the present in our self and world making. Thus, too, only human beings participate in the universe the way they do because they are able to connect their intrinsic capacity to make themselves meaningful by seeing the universe of which they are a part as meaningful. For if we speak, then that must be a potentiality within the universe itself.

This condition is the real reason why the earliest human beings saw the universe as alive, as something that we commune with. (Frankforts, Wilson, and Jacobsen, 1946). Today we are more abstract—and more forgetful: we think ‘nature’ is a meaningful term, as if that should be obvious to everybody, when it is so far from obvious that it was not until the Greeks had city states that the term *physis* which enabled the dissolution of the entirety of living forms of life into the one *archē* that philosophers had disputed would be found in water (Thales), air (Anaximenes), the infinite (Anaximander), the four elements (Empedocles), atoms (Leucippus and Democritus), the word and fire (Heraclitus), Being itself (Parmenides) was chanced upon. Though even then the question of whether matter (*hylē*) or intelligence (*nous*) were the necessary conditions to make further sense of the nature of nature – that is some essence behind/ within *physis* - would continue.

If, though, living things emerge and are swallowed by time, as Cronus swallows his children, institutions and peoples too emerge, found, achieve and die. We are born into a reality where we are ever in this process, and thus find ourselves immersed in the birth, life and death of institutions and forces bigger than ourselves, which shape ourselves, which is to say history – just as we are always making history and institutions (which is our fate) so that we can survive and, where possible, prosper. Mechanistic metaphysics aside, experientially we encounter one vital power after another. Everything we know about human beings suggests that our earliest

ancestors did not isolate themselves from the world around them—as if mind and nature were separate ‘substances.’ Descartes knew that his dualism was a decisive break with how experience had always previously been grasped — ‘subjects’ were born when humans saw themselves as standing over life (even if, as in Kant, that standing over is a purely moral posture) rather than as other creatures participating, even if having a special place within life itself.

Ancient humans responded to the fact that the powers of life are not ever always visible, that all too often they emerge and overtake us. The earliest names for these powers that emerge and withdraw were the names of gods and spirits. They were powers so strong that they inspired awe in human beings, and humans would call upon and commune with them, for people knew their very survival depended upon the meaning of the spirits and forces that they encountered within the world. Concomitantly, ancient humanity did not separate something off from the rest of its life called ‘religion’; religion was as intrinsic to humanity’s self-expression, orientation and understanding as it was to the meaning of being in the world. We know this from the fact that almost wherever we have evidence of ancient humanity we have remnants of rituals suggesting the continuum between life and death—graves, altars, and monuments. And the earliest written records all point to human beings having been created by, and calling upon and having their lives compared with and frequently controlled by spirits and the gods (cf. Christopher Dawson, 1928). Religion was, as far as we can tell, along with the social rules of the tribe, the most primordial means of human orientation in the universe. Now many moderns look to science and art and the economy and suchlike to provide us with meaning, but religion still persists for many people because there is some aspect of life—for some the sheer awe and mystery of it, for others a sense of what is divinely designated as right and wrong, for others the palpable power of ritual and solidarity—that they feel is better grasped, in cooperation with fellow believers, and

communicated, through ritual and a certain kind of speech other than what science, art, the economy, etc., can provide. A 'scientific' approach religion, or its elements - God, the afterlife etc. – will treat them as 'objects' (however diaphanous the ontologies required to do so become), as well as the believers who appeal to such 'elements' as objects. But human beings are above all doers and symbolic creatures, and religion is constituted through deeds and symbols, not objective qualities nor logical demonstrations, which is why art always comes closer to conveying the depth of feeling and meaning that is intrinsic to religion (even if it is not a substitute for religion, but only an adjunct) than science.

Like History, religion is a cipher of who we are. Theology is the name we give to our analysis of the core terms and meanings of religion. It is not identical with religion, though it is often mistaken for being more like religion than it is; as is evident when we consider that while praying is a religious act, the explication of the meaning of a prayer is a theological one, and involves as little existential connection with the act of prayer as the scientist may have with the pain of an animal he or she is dissecting. Theology is a branch of philosophy. Indeed, it is one of its earliest branches. Plato may not have been the first theologian—Xenophanes's fragments are theological, and even Hesiod's transformation of Zeus into an all seeing ruler of moral rectitude suggests a theological mind at work—but as far as we know, Plato was the first to use the term 'theology' (in the *Republic* 379 A), and it was in the context of his critique of the poets and a philosophical argument about the nature of the gods. Plato's interest in the gods, as we recall from the second and third book of the *Republic*, was in the context of his ire at the poets for providing poor representations of the gods—for if the gods were truly as the poets had described them, they would be no better than the human beings they were supposed to rule and assist. Today, the number of philosophers who take theology as worthy of serious consideration is a

minority (though theologians invariably go about their business in a philosophical manner—albeit rarely reliant upon the dominant atomistic and naturalistic metaphysics of Anglo-American analytic philosophy). But if we are interested in the symbolic significance of history, and if we see history as a great store of symbolic significance, it is difficult to see how we can avoid theology, any more than we can avoid anthropology or sociology. For the overwhelmingly greater part of human history is redolent with references to the higher powers, the various gods, called upon by human beings in their social foundings and wars and trials and achievements. One can represent European history without a great deal of reference to religion, as for example Norman Davies does in his *Europe: A History*, but such a story has little to do with the names and signs—i.e. the building blocks—of the story that the Europeans who made that history used to express what they thought they were doing. In this respect, such overtly committed secularised Histories such as Davies' *Europe* whilst demonstrating a certain commitment to the paradigmatic politics of their time, invariably come at a significant anthropological sociological and historical cost. Though I concede that Davies' minority/ethnic/ marginalized peoples driven narrative is palpably an investigation, though driven by a matrix of social, broadly political concerns which in important ways define some of the features of our time, brings to light new aspects of who and what we are. But the problem we confront today is not so much the gathering of what has been lost in the distance, but that what was most prominent in the journey of how and where we got to be here is so widely forgotten. And I use this 'we' and 'here' fully cognisant of the varieties of social and cultural global differences the importance of which is not glossed over by merely deferring to and valorizing 'the different.' But two world wars and the subsequent global communications revolutions that assist the acceleration of other global scientific, commercial, financial and administrative techniques and technologies enforce a degree of homogeneity in

which the different is a responsive condition not a hermetically sealed one. Here now let me nuance the 'we' and the 'here' and speak to the 'we' and 'here' of the developed Western world. All romantic tales of what great achievements occurred within pre-Modern China or in the Iberian Peninsula over a thousand years ago aside, the greater systems which implicate peoples today from the school and university and workplace to the nation state to the global economic and financial system and so forth emerged out of wars and revolutions that originally took place within what, the little known social thinker and historian Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy termed, the 'Autobiography of Western 'Man' (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1969). If it was Marx who saw that revolutions are 'the locomotives of history' (Marx, 1973) and that the country that is 'the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to -the less developed, the image of its own future,' (Marx, 1887, 7) Rosenstock-Huessy, who engaged seriously and critically with Marx, devoted his life to laying out the history of the most elemental of larger scale social formations in the context of a universal history in which social break down, and war as well as revolution figure as 'the locomotives' which give humanity a shared history. That sharing is largely completed by the end of the First World War, and he would explore the great revolutions and wars (an early book of his would be called, if translated into English, *The Marriage of Wars and Revolutions*) which led Europeans to form the major nations that would pull the world into the War which, if we take seriously the chaos still ensuing from the collapse of the Ottoman and Russian/ Soviet and British empires, it can be argued has still not completely ended (see Rosenstock-Huessy 1969, 1987, and 2008/9). The scale of the vision and the ambition of Rosenstock-Huessy's enterprise is no less grand than Marx's, though eschewing the reductive temptations of finding a singular source of revolutionary and historical causality (something Engels tried, though hardly successfully to overcome in Marx) the enterprise is far more

complicated. Rosenstock-Huessy threw out ideas at an astonishing rate, but the symmetry and significance of his work has, with a few notable exceptions such as Franz Rosenzweig who deployed what Rosenstock-Huessy called the calendar method' (i.e. pausing upon events of such historical significance they are woven into official calendars) for his *The Star of Redemption*, largely been lost. His student Harold Berman has produced the most detailed example of the application of Rosenstock-Huessy in his two volume work which attempts to plot the innovations in the Western legal system from what Rosenstock-Huessy had called the Papal Revolution (or what is generally classified as the Investiture conflict in more traditional Histories of Political Thought) and the development and impact of canon law (Berman, 1983) through to the impact of Luther and Calvin upon the law and state in Germany and England (Berman, 2006). Drawing upon (while not confining myself exclusively) to Rosenstock-Huessy the rest of this essay will pause upon the religious roots of global History. Of course the irony is not lost on me that at the very time the world was becoming ever more integrated that at any time in its history, historians were becoming more and more uncomfortable with the very idea of global or universal History. One might note that the same paradox was at work in all other manner of ways – e.g. radical political action was becoming ever more valorized at the very moment the world was becoming increasingly less responsive to radical political action; the social amnesia of the West increases exponentially with the increase in Historical knowledge; ever more state managed and technocratic as the 'triumph' of neo-liberalism was announced; more geo-political religious turmoil as the world was becoming more modernized; more limitations placed upon freedom of expression and conformism as freedom and individualism have expanded etc. The paradox that the call for localism as occurring so loudly as the world was becoming ever economically integrated was identified by Rosenstock-Huessy in 1938, some thirty years before

Lyotard, when he wrote: 'Economy will be universal, mythology regional. Every step in the direction of the organizing the world's economy will have to be bought off by a great number of tribal reactions' (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1969, 718). Moreover as the following citation suggests he appreciated that this reaction was a healthy and necessary one.

With a conscious economic organization of the whole earth, subconscious tribal organizations are needed to protect man's mind from commercialization and disintegration. The more our shrinking globe demands technical and economic co-operation, the more necessary it will prove to restore the balance by admitting the primitive archetypes of man's nature also. (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1969, 715)

If, then as I have suggested, global History is necessary because peoples have become co-temporal and co-spatial to an extent impossible to avoid, and regardless of the good or evil narratives of the West – that is regardless of the triumphalist or degeneration/ declinist Histories of the West – the powers that were originally unleashed by the West are now the powers commonly confronting us all. In this tumult of the unification of the world it is easy for the most important and simple and direct questions to be lost in the white noise of political and ideological speech. Nevertheless, one important and simple question, which we can ask, though we may formulate it in slightly different ways, is: are human beings enriched spiritually by what is happening? That is, is our life more *spirited*, more open to the riches and joys of life, and more resourceful and resilient in dealing with its trials and sorrows than it would be were we still living in pre-universal history? I might even put it more simply and more bluntly – is our life and the world we participate in more *lovable*, or, to use a word favoured by Ivan Illich (Illich, 1973; Cayley, 2005) which brings out the social dimensions of the lovable, more convivial? That we

cannot give a categorical answer of yes to the question does not render the question meaningless, nor is it invalidated by the fact that it is the kind of question that many people, not to mention peoples, may have never considered asking. But once we consider that the question is laden with a depth of experience – the experience of the absence of convivial life, that is the experience of suffering inflicted by members of our own species, and the experience of thwarted possibility we must also notice that it is a question that is asked within time. And just as our time is a time in which different peoples each with their own ‘bodies of memory’ and hence of time – times past and future hoped for – find themselves aware of and dependent upon each other – we are forced to ask after ‘our history’. And that now means as much knowing each other’s history as our own – for now the other’s history is our history; thus now a river of works coming from other peoples, from/ on China, from/ on Islamic regions etc. with their different venerations and appeals appears to satisfy the overwhelming fact of our common historicity. The conflicting appeals and venerations are all too easily dissolved into a relativist white noise by those who leap too swiftly from experience to metaphysics, and seek and then fail to find neat geometric-like normative rules - and the absolutists who do find such rules are not a whit less useless. But the contrariety of appeals and venerations does not change the commonality of circumstance, even if phenomenologically we are confronted with different worlds within our one world. Thanks to Islamists we must be dead if we do not appreciate that there are those who would far rather retreat into a former time in which what some groups hold sacred is protected rather than be open to the dissolution and insults, the sheer negation of the modern. Further, the geo-political, strategic accompaniments of this process play themselves out in all manner of ways – from, *inter alia*, the obvious attempts to protect and expand US hegemony via liberal (human rights talk) and military means, the various Middle Eastern hegemonic aspirants, or China’s economic

colonial steps in Africa. We live on a precipice of dangers of the most violent collisions, and hopeful prospects which can never be realized simply by acts of will and calls to political actions of social solidarity (which is why it seems to me Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek today hold such appeal to those who increasingly call for genuinely political/social alliances, though they must invariably over-simplify the inherently conflictual bodies of time constituting the present to achieve their desired solidarity).

In so far as the religious is bound up with the recognition of the finitude of human powers and the recognition of powers beyond our own will, as well as the recognition that our survival and triumphs depend upon the unprecedented and incalculable, our unity today is every bit one of mere hope as it ever could have been. There are, of course, those who hold out the promise of our deliverance. But just as the deliverance that has been promised economically and infused Western institutions in the last fifty years has made many of our lives far less convivial (and let us not be duped into thinking that economic growth in the ‘undeveloped world’ has in any way benefitted from the managerial revolution which has completely transformed and corrupted public and private corporations) – as had been predicted in such works of the 1950s and 60s such as *The Organizational Man* (Whyte, 1956), *One Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) or *The Technological Society* (Ellul, 1967) – we must concede that our hopes are either foolhardy and idolatrous, in that we believe that the entire world could be managed/ steered by various organizations, laws, committees et. al., or that we remain, irrespective of the specificity of our *faith*, within a religious horizon, even if that horizon is what it is for so-called non-believers today and what Franz Rosenzweig had defined as the last ‘Age of Christianity.’ That is the Age that Franz Rosenzweig (following Schelling) saw as having Goethe as its first priest, in which all denominational indicators of Christianity be dissolved into hope in a future in which human

capacities and freedom and providence meet (Rosenzweig, 2005, 293-306) on the plane in which we are nevertheless required to 'love our neighbour.'

Like his teacher, Rosenstock-Huessy, Franz Rosenzweig had held that Western civilization simply could not be understood without knowledge of the institutional transformation provided by Christianity. Rosenzweig almost became a Christian, but after deliberation and an epiphany at a Yom Kippur service on the eve of his baptism, he decisively defined himself as a Jew in antithesis to the post-Nietzschean socio-cultural Christian commitment that his cousins, Hans and Rudi Ehrenberg, and Rosenstock-Huessy, all Jewish apostates and Christian converts, had adopted. In *The Star of Redemption*, in a work written in the white heat of the Great War and Germany's defeat, which had as one of its briefs an appeal to non-Jewish Germans to recognize the value and depth of their dependency as a Christianized people (of the Johannine Age) upon Judaism, Rosenzweig's argued that Christianity is the universalizer of an originally Jewish insight. This was the insight that God(s), human beings and the world were not simply discrete poles at the basis of our experience with their disparate sources of authority and appeal, but they potentially formed, as the Jewish people originally saw, a triadic union in which God's love of the world and humans was as reciprocal as the love craved by (Jewish) humans from their God and the world. Likewise, the recognition that this triadic union pointed to a loving source of creation who also revealed the secret that love was as strong as death (Song of Songs) and that we are redeemed if we respond to the commandment to love God and each other. What was originally a uniquely Jewish orientation to the cosmos, Christians would later appropriate, and as far as Rosenzweig could see no other peoples took up this insight – thus much of *The Star* considers Islam and he comes to the conclusion that Islam reverses the truths of revelation at every step of the way, and that such a reversal involves the

returning to the original differentiations between God, humans and world that is common to non-Jewish, non-Christian, i.e. pagan peoples. What Rosenzweig suggests, and what Rosenstock-Huessy demonstrates in far greater detail is that Christianity was a force for transforming the world, not just as Badiou (2003) suggests because of its solidarity. Though this is part of it, because the scale of solidarity it launched had been so successful – though, of course, Islam too is a universalist attempt at solidarity, and one, as we now see, which stands in striking geopolitical contrast and political ends to the (post)Christian - and this is not only true of Salafist Islam, but equally as true of most branches of Islam, whether Shia or Sunni, active in the Middle East and Central Asia. But every bit as importantly, Christianity took up forms of life that had previously entered into *dead* ends – including such forms as philosophy (consider Lucian's depiction of the dire state of philosophy in the 2nd century) – and reconstituted them by placing them under the commandment of love. Even pagan alternatives to Christianity such as Plotinus' neo-Platonism bears traces of the importance of that move. Rosenstock, further makes the important point that Christianity took the archaic forms of social existence, tribes and empires, as well as the legacies of Greeks and Jews and created a new fusion of life. And like his predecessor, Frederick Ozanam (see Ozanam 1867), and near contemporary Christopher Dawson (see Dawson 1991) (to take but two) he tracked the institutional legacy of the Church, from its genesis through to the ostensibly anti-Christian, yet messianic fraternal revolutions, in France and Russia. Indeed the most remarkable thesis, which he defends in two books of around 700 pages each (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1969, 1987) that the West has been formed by a sequence of total revolutions, each building upon and responding to the social conditions and evolving institutions and legacies (of what comes *out* of revolution). Arguing that European History is meaningless unless we factor in that its central achievement in the first millennium is the

Church, which in the second millennium is central for providing the social mosaic which in turn fosters the revolutionary impulse that runs through and galvanizes not only Europe but the globe, he plots out the sequence of revolutions and their legacies stretching from what he takes as the first total revolution – the Papal revolution through to the Renaissance (the Italian revolution), the Reformation (the German Revolution), the English Revolution, the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. Until the French Revolution all prior revolutions were grounded in the language and substance of Christian appeals. And this is also true of the American revolution which along with other revolutions as in Spain and Austria, which he classifies as a half-revolution because they do not of themselves innovate something so totally new that their legacies have completely shaped out common institutional heritage. If one considers the legacy of the nation state (the French Revolution) or private property (the English Revolution), the argument is a very plausible one.

Rosenstock-Huessy was not interested in something so trivial and ridiculous as establishing the moral superiority of the West, but he did detect that a particular attitude towards time, and experience which is of the essence of what I am arguing is the real value of History, and that essence was original bound up in religious experience. Furthermore, such a view of time and experience renders History something fundamentally different to what ancient dynastic chronicles did, even when there was a moral or normative purpose as in China to the chronicling. It was also different to what Greek historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides did – and allowing for Thucydides' realism he too has an instructional or moral purpose, even if his moral fiber is of far sterner and hard stuff than we more squeamish moderns possess. For it is the notion of the end time, and the messianic, as started to be appreciated again by social theorists thanks to Derrida and Agamben, and, of course, by a figure who inspired both of them,

Rosenzweig's admirer and acquaintance, Walter Benjamin, that is unique to the Jewish polyphonous chronicle of the relationship between a creator God and His people that extends, in the writing period alone, to some fifteen hundred years. And this stands in the closest relationship to something that both serves as a corrective to the idolatry I mentioned above (the idolatry of technocracy, economism, and statism etc.) and as a means of orientation, so palpably ubiquitous in our Western/ Johannine age, but whose original presence and significance remains veiled thus blunting its meaning as a resource now. I am speaking of the very power we exercise to judge what is worthy of continuing and what is not, what is redeemable and what is too evil to continue – this eschatological aspect of life within an institutional setting in which human improvement (I deliberately choose this vague term) is at the heart of social political action: from the refusal to accept slavery, the caste system, through to our present preoccupations with sexual discrimination. This idea of progress, which is neither instrumental nor straightforwardly sequential, that is progress of a sort commensurate with Benjamin's bleak but robustly honestly uncompromising attention to social suffering, is the social inheritance of a particular religious heritage which has flown into the institutions of a people, most of whom have forgotten the source of the original founding and flow. Saying this is not so much due to any desire on my part to plead for a return to the original semantic field or life-way which made these possible, but far more importantly to see where we stand in relationship to the past so that we Westerners are more conscious of who and what we are, more conscious of our 'autobiography, so that the social amnesia which plagues our contemporary condition be abated. And without a recognition that even our secularism is but the outgrowth of religious historical struggles we will be less likely to inspect our own classifiers of experience, our own semantic field. Not surprisingly, the corollary of our social amnesia and the failure to find the enchanted

and awesome within our own heritage is a mish-mash of infantilism (Walt Disney is fine for infants) and Romanticism – which is not to deny that enchantment and powers of the spirit exist wherever human beings have struggled and survived over time. But the critical powers of Enlightenment were from their inception accompanied by a hankering for spirited life elsewhere, as its glare had withered so much of the sacred modes of experience within its own heritage.

What had undoubtedly been a crisis brought about by the depth of clerical corruption within the Church in France, the price paid for its elevated association with the crown and the violent and uncompromising response to its Protestants became universalized and essentialized into the ‘scientific’ fairy-tales of Voltaire, Diderot, D’Holbach et. al. in which priests had ever plotted to dupe their idiot subjects into believing their malevolently designed superstitious fairy tales about reality. That the pathologies of Christendom, combined with multiple territorial and (especially France’s) hegemonic aspirations, had plunged Europe into the Thirty Years War, and that that very war would spawn a new type of thinker no longer capable of finding anything sacred or venerable in the Christian narratives and competing interpretations of the meaning of that faith and its names is amply evident in Descartes’ own relationship to that event. But it is equally the case that the new faith in man and nations would find itself being played out in the century of wars whose penumbra we still inhabit. Again, we recall that the thinkers of the Enlightenment would begin by a historical severance in which the imagination would be curbed by the understanding, which was itself to be governed by the sequence, i.e. laws of nature. Descartes would turn his back on History altogether finding it but the tale of errors and folly, Spinoza would find it useful to for the dissolving of the biblical heritage so that we could pick out the moral lessons that had been revealed through revelation, but which philosophers like himself could now recount in argumentative terms. Of course, this would spawn reactions, and Vico

having commenced a Cartesian realized that humanity shorn of its historicity was really nothing. History would be placed back in the mix and stage theory and tales of Historical progress be the corollary of Enlightenment – a ‘regulative Idea’ Kant would say, only to be trumped, for all his anti-Enlightenment sentiments, by Hegel who claimed that the expansion of freedom was the Absolute Idea. Of course since Rousseau’s mourning of original innocence, the West’s scientific expansion has been accompanied by narratives of spiritual loss and decline. It is true that our historicity combines great possibility and loss, and we live in the midst of this conflict between leaping further into the future and longing for exotic nostalgic retreat. My argument about the theological dimension of History is, however, not made in order to cater to one or the other of these modes of orientation. Rather it is to place us more consciously within a larger portion of lived humanity, a greater body of time than that which simply began with Descartes or the French Revolution. But I do wish to raise in the final section of this paper one other pressing issue of our time, which may be better appraised by consideration of our religious roots.

A great temptation today for those wishing to *seal* peacefully the unity of humanity is to call for some overarching political organization, thus the world would be an empire. Here, we have much to learn, from the Jewish/ Christian experience and narrative which offers an alternative that also alerts us to the fundamental flaw within empire as such. It is in the Book of Daniel that this is powerfully articulated. I cite it at length.

This *is* the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, *are* a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you *are* this head of gold. But after you shall arise

another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. (Daniel 2:36-44 New King James Version)

It would not be overstating the case to argue that Rosenstock-Huessy's corpus is one great historical exegesis and apology for the task laid out in this passage of Daniel. In the Second volume of his *Sociology* he explores how this idea of the eternal kingdom (Rosenstock-Huessy, 2008/2009, Vol. 2, 169-179) would be at the centre of the Medieval idea of the Church and would be formulated as the *translatio imperii*. The *translatio imperii* was based on the insight that a new form of life (the Church) had been found that did not obey the cyclical rhythms of empires past and future empires, and thus the logic of the birth and extinction of empires need not be repeated. The argument had been mounted in the context of his greater analysis of the birth and deaths of tribes, of empires spawning the Jewish nation and the evolution of the Greek

city states, and his argument that Christianity had occurred at the interface of these four ancient life-ways. In far more sociological and anthropological depth, and applying a far more elaborate account of classical, imperial, religious and Church history than is found say in Badiou, or Žižek (who both also draw attention to the uniqueness of the significance of Christianity in history), he argues that Christianity occurrence meant reconstituting the potentialities of each form of life on a new horizon. Further, he argues that in so as elemental social forms are built on the fundamental drive of human existence to conquer death by finding forms of life lovable enough to surmount extinction, Christianity's discovery of death as the condition of the life, and the spread of a teaching in which the victim came to the banquet of life to speak on behalf of all victims of suffering (anticipating Girard) so that even the highest (the God of the living and the dead himself) becomes the willing sacrifice to overcome suffering and death (see esp. Rosenstock-Huessy, 1978, esp. 55-57; Rosenstock-Huessy 1946)

Whereas ancient empires saw themselves as self-sufficient the dream of the Holy Roman Empire was the dream of *translatio imperii* 'forms all empires into one empire.' (Rosenstock-Huessy, *Ibid.*, 462.) The Church had undertaken to unify all the empires by abandoning the spatial organizing imperial principle by means of which empires aspired to reconcile heaven and earth, and replacing it with a principle of movement through the ages. Christianity, as another Rosenstock-Huessy's titles has put it, had introduced *The Multiformity of Man*, while it had provided a common spiritual orientation which could bring concord into the diverse multiformities - that was why even at its most profane the Church was never merely the terrestrial empire or state. The Church could, likewise, abide the differences of empire by uniting them spiritually within an oecumene, no longer conceived, as it was originally, in the known Greco-Roman as simply the inhabited world, but a world in spiritual concordance. Thus, according to

Rosenstock-Huessy, the eternal abyss between the aspiration of empire and its thwarted fulfillment is overcome as the Church transposes the necessity of reconciliation between heaven and earth into a spiritual reconciliation which seeks to unify all the empires across the times in so far as they themselves contribute to the greater body of times and potencies of the future. This mission and triumph, according to Rosenstock-Huessy, is visible in the great act of coronation of Charles the Great, as Holy Roman Emperor – Charles himself was caught unawares and he saw no need to be united with previous empires, just as his troops wanted nothing to do with either ancient Romans or their modern counterparts. And it is also true that Charles's empire was neither, as Napoleon famously quipped, Holy nor Roman nor even imperial (at least in the traditional sense), but says Rosenstock-Huessy 'Charles entered into universal history through defending the faith of the Church, through the requirement of embodying the Christian era, thus through entering the portal into eternity (Rosenstock-Huessy, *Ibid.* 175).' He had been incorporated into the Church's universal time body. And if the act of incorporation would not surprise for Christendom to remain undivided and fragmented, it nevertheless would provide a raft for peoples across times in which the love, faith and hope in universal unity was long sustained.

It is, then, for Rosenstock-Huessy, the creation of a universal history, not merely as an idea, but as a lived body that is behind Rosenstock-Huessy's vision of the Christian faith – a faith that is not so much a private decision, but a social force of transformation and unification. I have suggested above that Rosenzweig's idea of the Johannine Age retains its relevance precisely because neither the Petrine Church (which had been the basis of the *translatio imperii*) nor the Pauline Church any longer have the universal capacity to actualize the hope that is still widely shared by many (post)Christianized peoples of the West.

It is a widely shared, if not uncontested, sentiment in the West that the contemporary contiguity of disparate and inimical traditions within the world, as difficult and sometimes dangerous as it is, is an opportunity. Further, to simply dissolve traditions into the anodyne vacuum of spiritlessness of the Modern West neither enriches us or the Other. Rosenstock-Huessy had provided a name for a society of creative tension in which our most fundamental differences be retained but we find a way to mutually participate within this one world - the metanomic society. While, the idea is nothing new, his definition of the metanomic is a neat reminder of how Theology, History and contemporary circumstance and need neatly match-up: 'Metanomics ..might be interpreted as the omnipresence of God in the most contradictory patterns of human society', adding a paragraph later:

The equilibrium between the special social sciences in which man appears to differ, and the social philosophy which makes him appear eternally the same human being, is the secret of all research in the social field. We cannot give up one side of the social paradox, either by identifying all men as being the same, or by allowing them to become so different that they lose their power of identifying themselves with others. Peace is the term which expresses the existence of this paradox in society: that different people by having peace together, are identifiable.

(Rosenstock-Huessy, 1970: 42)

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