8. From the City of God to the City of Man

8.1 Archetypes, Patterns, Influences

8.1.1 Transcendent Eschatology, Immanent Progress and the Allure of Joachimism

Joachimism, or what was assumed to be the part of Joachite tradition which followed the Calabrian abbot, played a critical role in the development of a pattern which described a teleological narrative of history in the here-and-now. Having said this, one ought to proceed with caution on the road ahead, without automatically joining what Reeves calls the “Joachim bandwagon”, yet still attempting to assess – as much as it is relevant to the scope of the book – the impact of Joachim’s revolutionised vision of history in modernity. Thus, it is important to reiterate, if one encounters something similar to a Joachite structure in subsequent writings throughout Europe, this does not necessarily mean that it represents a direct use of Joachimist or Joachite sources. Indeed, it can also be either an indirect use of a similar vocabulary and rhetoric, or simply an independent approach towards an old concept. This is especially relevant when one compares the communistic Joachite vision of an overturned Church hierarchy with the Marxian vision of the higher stages of Communism, in the sense that, what influences survived most likely did so indirectly, if at all.

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. Even if this was not ultimately the case, this is a viewpoint which can be encountered in thinkers of all political persuasions, such as Eric Voegelin and Ernst Bloch among others, from literature to marketing. 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

559 The paragraphs dealing with the Löwith-Blumenberg debate have appeared partially verbatim or in a modified form in Murariu, “Historical Eschatology, Political Utopia and European Modernity”, 77-81.

560 The term revolutionised is, perhaps, more suited here, since his disciples, the later Joachites, were responsible for the transformation of Joachim’s original message and its usage among militant heterodoxies.

561 “Although the chiliastic viewpoint had practically disappeared by the fifth century, Joachim revived it as a systematic doctrine of God. It was even made into something of a program of practical action, in that one could work toward the awaited third age by founding suitable religious Orders. The hope aroused by Joachim’s teaching was first taken up by a segment of the Franciscan Order, but subsequently underwent increasing secularization until eventually it was turned into political utopia. The goal of the utopian vision remained embedded in Western consciousness, stimulating a quest for its own realization and preparing the way for that interest in concrete utopias which has become such a determinative element in political thought since the nineteenth century”. Joseph Ratzinger, Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life, trans. M. Waldstein (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988) 13.


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M. Murariu, Totality, Charisma, Authority,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-16322-8_8
utopians from Müntzer in the sixteenth through Campanella in the seventeenth and Lessing in the eighteenth centuries.  

Furthermore, one can recognize this important factor in the way in which some scholars define “political religions” or “secular religions”. 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. Thus, the following paragraphs will discuss Joachim’s theology of history and its relationship to secularization and modernity within the Löwith-Blumenberg debate. As mentioned previously, this debate remains relevant for the present due to its highly detailed and wide ranging nature, a fact which makes it perhaps the single most important dialogue on the topic.

In his highly influential work, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, Karl Löwith sought to present the way in which the pattern of the Judeo-Christian fulfilment of history was apparently 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.” 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.

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.” 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. Some have criticized Löwith’s thesis for a variety of reasons, such as

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563 Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 33.
564 The original German title, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen: Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* makes use of the word “Voraussetzungen”, which should be translated as “Requirements” or “Presuppositions” instead of “Implications”.
566 Ibid., 18.
567 Ibid., 207.
568 Löwith’s view on Marx is fully committed to a vision stressing the infusion of the secular with a religious aura: “He was a Jew of Old Testament stature, though an emancipated Jew of the nineteenth century who felt strongly anti-religious and even antisemitic. It is the old Jewish messianism and prophetism – unaltered by two thousand years of economic history from handicraft to large-scale industry – and Jewish insistence on absolute righteousness which explained the idealistic basis of Marx's materialism. Though perverted into secular prognostication, the Communist Manifesto still retains the basic features of a messianic faith: 'the assurance of things to be hoped for.'” Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 44. Löwith then continues in his portrayal of Marxism as a secularized 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