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OBSERVATIONS OF EARLY WESTERN THOUGHT

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PREFACE

My purpose in presenting this paper is to share with interested readers some ideas I have formed in my studies on the ancient world and the churches specific of that world (the Ancient, Israelitish and early Christian Churches). I have observed trends or developments in the ancient world which seem to have been *concurrent* and which I believe were *essential* for the preparation of the Christian Church. The pre-Advent churches of the historical Ancient Near East (c. 3000 B.C. to the time of the Lord's first coming), namely the Ancient and Israelitish Churches, were vastly different from the post-Advent churches of the Mediterranean world. That change was marked by the Lord's personal example and teaching when He revealed Himself directly to mankind. It is my contention that certain necessary developments in culture, especially in human thought, took place in the Ancient Near East and in Greece which prepared for the expression and spread of the Christian Church. My subject then is early western thought (pre-philosophy and early philosophy). My hope is that my readers will share with me insights, information, or counter-arguments after they have read this paper.

The observations offered in this paper were obtained through both a diachronic and a synchronic approach. The diachronic approach (diachronic meaning "through time") is the traditionally historical study of a subject focusing on its origins, development, and end in that order. The study of the development of thought would of course require such an approach. For example, Greek philosophy and Israelitish beliefs went through stages and can be described in this way, i.e. through stages. The synchronic approach (synchronic meaning "within time") views a subject in

its totality without a focus on its development. For example, both Greek philosophy and Israelitish beliefs may be characterized without regard to specific periods. The emphasis is on the characteristics. Three periods are discussed in this paper: (1) Ancient Near East (c. 3000–600 B.C.) and early Greece (c. 1200–700 B.C.); (2) the transitional period when Classical Greece grew and spread (c. 600 B.C.–0); and (3) the period of Christianity beginning with the Lord's advent. Each period is characterized (synchronic) and the periods are compared in the attempt to portray development of thought (diachronic).

OBSERVATIONS

Most of the educated western world is aware of the Greek contribution to western thought, and most of us in the New Church are aware of the role of the churches specific and something of their natures. But few people are aware of Ancient Near Eastern thought which had a known 2500 year history prior to the emergence of Greek philosophy. It is useful for the New Church to study this period since the Ancient Near East was the environment in which the Ancient and Israelitish Churches lived. We should learn something about these two churches and also about their successor, Christianity. The assumption here is that there is a connection between what the Writings say about these three churches specific and what scholarship is discovering about the ancient world.

It is important to note at this time the uniqueness or problem of ancient Israel. Israel arose in the Ancient Near East and existed mostly in the final millenium B.C. Israel's place in its environment has long been studied by historians and Biblical scholars, but the conclusions have differed and can be separated into three categories. Some see Israel as essentially similar to its Near Eastern neighbors; others see Israel as distinctly different; while still others conclude that Israel shares certain cultural characteristics with the other Ancient Near Eastern nations but differs dramatically in other respects. This final opinion seems to have the greatest evidence to support it and so is accepted for this paper. Israel indeed borrowed from the firmly established peoples around it, e.g., Egypt and the Canaanites. This borrowing is especially evident in "historical" Israel (i.e. Israel of secular history). Her royal court, architecture, worship of Baal and

many, many other things indicate this outside influence. But the teachings of the Old Testament (i.e. of "orthodox" Israel) differ tremendously in content and form from the thought of the rest of the Ancient Near East. Also, Israel's thought appears to have been somewhat like that developed in Greece long before the Ancient Near East became Hellenized. In short, in the history of human thought, Israel seems to fit between the Ancient Near East and Classical Greece. And perhaps Israel's role was that of a bridge between the two.

Israel's role in the history of the churches specific, as explained in the Writings, also seems unique. The Israelitish Church is described in some passages as the final stage of the Ancient Church. The final Last Judgment on the Ancient Church coincided with the judgment on the Israelitish Church. Israel's dispensation, the Old Testament, was representative as the Ancient Word also had been, but it was written in a more remote or external representative style. Thus, the Israelitish Church seems to have belonged to the Ancient Church, as Israel belonged to the Ancient Near East; but it did not completely fit into the Ancient Church as Israel did not fit entirely in its environment. The Israelitish Church apparently served as a bridge between the Ancient Church and the Christian Church. In other words, the culture of Israel and the Israelitish Church were a part of an old age, but looked toward the new.

The theory presented in this paper is that the change between the ages mentioned above took place during the middle of the first millenium B.C. (c. 700-400). At this time human thought in the Near East and Greece had completely changed in very significant areas, and this change was significant because it prepared for Christian thought and, through it, for New Church thought. Five general observations will be presented to support this theory: (1) the trend away from the use of poetry toward the use of prose; (2) the trend away from chronicle toward history; (3) the trend away from animation toward objectification; (4) the trend away from extroverted religion toward introverted religion; and (5) the trend away from group consciousness to a stress on the individual. It is important to note that absolutes are not dealt with in this paper. There is no specific time for these transitions. No one person or group is responsible for these changes. These observations describe prevalence or tendency. For example, regarding

observation number five, there was some individual consciousness prior to 700 B.C. and certainly group consciousness continued after the Lord's advent. But in general, the peoples of the Ancient Near East and early Greece were tribal and stressed the social group, whereas the western world since the Lord's coming has generally stressed the individual.

I. The Trend from Poetry to Prose

Poetry has been considered the language of emotions and direct religious experience and expression. In the literature of the Ancient Near East and of early Greece prior to the fifth century B.C. (e.g., Homer and Hesiod) the form of expression was poetry. During this period all literature, which excludes economic and bureaucratic tabulations, was religious in nature. The topics of literature were myths about the gods, legends about the heroes and their dealings with the gods, and treatments of religious questions such as why a righteous man suffers. After the fifth century, prose began to replace poetry as the form of literature both in Greece and the Near East; and prose has been considered the language of intellectual thought. Prose was used first by the historians, scientists, and philosophers, all of whom wrote after 600 B.C., first in Greece and then in the Near East. Later prose also served the priests and writers, although certain religious and literary genres, e.g., plays and of course poems, continued to use poetry.

Closely associated with this trend was the declining influence of religion in the cultures of the ancient world. Religion had been the foundation of art, literature, and thought. But other explanations of life began to take its place or to stand alongside it. As was just stated above, historians, philosophers; and scientists arose in Greece who used prose to express their thoughts on causation, and they concluded that causation was natural rather than divine. These two trends, namely toward prose and away from religion, were concurrent and served each other, and both began in Greece.

The role played by the Old Testament in the history of religion and literature is outstanding. Its purpose was indeed religious, but its form was unique. The Old Testament was the Word given to the Israelites from the time of their formation, and this dispensation was continuously added to as Israel went through history. The Lord revealed Himself in the events of the Exodus, the

Sinai experience, and the Settlement at the beginning of the Israeli-tish Church. He revealed Himself in Israel's contact with other peoples, such as the Philistines and Assyrians. He revealed Himself through the prophets whose literary activity spanned centuries after the great schism between Israel and Judah. The exact dating of specific books of the Old Testament is a problem, but the events mentioned in the history of Israel cover approximately a thousand years (certainly over 700 years). The form of expression is both poetry and prose, but prose is used much more than poetry. The narrative parts of the Old Testament in fact constitute the oldest prose work in the history of mankind. And yet scholars have noted the poetic elements in the prose used. This use of poetic devices is not so prevalent to be able to call the work poetry, but it is important to call the prose somewhat poetic. Also note that when the speakers of the Old Testament were directly inspired for the moment, poetry, the language of religious experience, is used, e.g. the Song of Deborah (Judges 5: 1ff.) and many sections of the prophets. To conclude, the Old Testament appears to be transitional in the use of poetry and prose in religious literature.

II. The Trend from Chronicle to History

Perhaps this observation should not be separated from the first, since the two are closely associated. Or perhaps the topic should be broadened to include all three major areas dealing with causation which arose to rival religious thought, for these three areas—history, philosophy, and science—originated and developed during the period discussed above when men turned away from religion. But history alone is the subject here because the author feels more equipped to deal with it and sees an especially significant trend in history which he as yet fails to see in philosophy or science.

There was no history before the sixth century B.C. That is, there was no attempt prior to that time to find causation in orderly sequence in human events. The two functions of history, to present data and explain causation, had been performed by chronicles and myths separately. Myths had explained causation and had been successful in satisfying man's curiosity. But causation was seen to be divine only in myths, and no attempt had been made to see an orderly sequence in that causation. Nor was every event subject to the question of causation among the myth-making peoples. On the other hand, chronicles merely listed data, often in

random order. Causation was not an issue. The purposes of these chronicles were simply to list reasons why certain things should be honored and/or feared, to list the economic gains made on an expedition, and so on.

History arose in Greece in the sixth century B.C., and the first historians, the most famous of whom was Herodotus, either denied or ignored divine action in history. For example, whereas Homer in his poetic work, the *Iliad*, described the gods as causing events in the Trojan War, Herodotus in his prose work, the *History*, made little mention of the gods, but rather spoke of the jealousies, the greed, the fears, the hopes, and the plans of men in the Persian War. Later historians were not so negative in their treatment of divine causation, but listed it as one type of causation among others. The point is that early history was a reaction against the myths and the myth makers. This reaction supported the evolution of science and philosophy as well as of history. These three fields of inquiry then helped to break mythology's hold on human minds. Later, after the reaction subsided, man was able to answer questions of causation for himself, examining both divine and natural sources of causation.

History, philosophy, and science entered the Near East from Greece during the course of human contact, through trade before 330 B.C. and then through the Greek conquest under Alexander. All three had a powerful effect on human thought there, as they had in Greece.

It is interesting to note here that the Old Testament is a history—a special history of the Israelites written centuries before Herodotus wrote. But it had been written with religious intent and for spiritual reasons. That is, the framework is historical while the essence is religious. The Old Testament is not history as we know it; it is historical. History has its purpose and its methods and these are only partially present in the Old Testament. Scholars call the history of the Old Testament *heilsgeschichte* or “salvation history,” a term which includes aspects of both religion and history. The concept of “history” in Israel was that of God acting in human events with a special purpose in mind, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. The Lord was the cause, i.e. causation was Divine. The only events or persons recorded were those which prove the point or support the overview that God acts in Israel's history. The concern is not with political material.

For example, Omri was the most powerful king of Israel after the schism in terms of politics and economy. But his life does not illustrate the purpose of the Old Testament. So he is given very little mention. However, Omri's son, Ahab, lived a life which fitted well into the Old Testament theme of salvation history, and he is discussed in several chapters. To conclude, the Israelites were the first people to have a sense of history, although it was the Greeks who evolved the study called history. The Old Testament can then be viewed as a transitional work in the change from chronicle to history.

III. The Trend from Animation to Objectification

In the historical period of the Near East and in early Greece there had been the tendency to animate everything which affected human life. Natural bodies and forces were regarded as beings who related with humans. The causes of events were explained in myths about these animate beings who were considered gods. The causes were acted out in ritual to influence or assure favorable responses in these beings, who would then cause desired events. As the Advent drew nearer, the tendency was reversed. First the Greeks and then the Near Easterners began to objectify nature, and even the gods themselves. The causal explanations of the historians, scientists, and philosophers were possible because of this objectification. The first Greek philosophers dealt with cosmology and described natural forces and materials. These men viewed creation in a totally different way from what myth had presented. For this reason, this tendency to objectify and seek natural explanations of causation is called "demythologizing." Demythologizing made it possible for men to view religion rationally, and therefore the trend to objectification was a very significant development in the history of human thought. And this trend coincided roughly with the trend from poetry to prose and the use of history.

The first literary work in history to show a demythologizing theme was the Old Testament. Scholars have long noted the uniqueness of the Old Testament in this regard. The natural assumption would be that every people of the Ancient Near East was basically like the others. According to this assumption Israel's religion and literature ought to have the same mythic elements and have them to the same degree that the other religions had. But the scholars note that this is not the case, and we of the New Church

know that the Old Testament has no mythic element. This means that the Old Testament has another unique quality as a piece of ancient literature.

IV. The Trend from Extroverted to Introverted Religion

The transition to introverted religion took place shortly after 700 B.C. in Greece, the Near East, and in Israel. Greece had gone through a period of obscurity c. 1200–800 after which the Greek civilization we know blossomed and grew to the height of the Classical Period. Around 700 B.C. the Greeks believed that spiritual forces were within each man as well as outside of him. The emotions and the intellect were seen as abodes of spiritual forces, all of which went to make up the individual man. Religion then dealt with these qualities of human beings which had been ignored before. That is, religion became introverted since men looked within themselves to see what they were, what they could be, and what they should be. (This is one reason why the great Classical Age was able to emerge, for confidence and pride in human capabilities increased steadily as men examined themselves.) When religious forces had been seen outside men, religion had been extroverted; i.e., religious attention was turned outward and religious experience centered on the external act of ritual.

In the Near East many religions arose after 700 B.C. which also turned to the examination of human qualities. Because of the limitations of space, only two religions will be here mentioned as examples: Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism. *Zoroastrianism*, which developed in the Persian Empire c. 500, taught that there were two somewhat equal forces of good and evil and that each man had a role to play in deciding which force overcame the other. The battlefield was within each person, and one's thoughts and actions contributed to the efforts of either the good or the evil. Consequently, Zoroastrianism taught adherents to view their own thoughts and motives. *Gnosticism* developed later and taught that a perfect, secret knowledge saved men, and that to gain that knowledge each person had to delve into his own mind, peeling off obscuring layers of sense and other perceptions. From these brief descriptions it is easy to see the introverted nature of Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism.

In Israel the prophets stressed the need for the Israelites to examine themselves, practice morality, and worship the Lord in

life rather than merely in ritual. The religion of Israel had until then been external, focusing on such matters as annual festivals and the Temple. The Writings tell us of this aspect of the Israelites' faith, that when the Israelites kept their ritual pure, the Israelitish Church could serve as the church specific. But in the period of the monarchy, and especially after the schism, the externals of worship became less and less pure. The Israelites were becoming less acquainted with the precepts of the Lord and were choosing rather to adopt the religions of their neighbors, particularly the Canaanites. In this situation the Lord called up the prophets to speak for Him against the deteriorating practices and to reestablish the true faith which was not to be dependent solely on the worship at the Temple at prescribed times. The prophets told the people that the Lord wanted mercy, justice, etc. rather than mere sacrifices (for examples, see Is. I: 11, 16, 17 and Micah 6: 8). Each man was to make himself good, and this could be done only through personal examination of motives and actions.

V. The Trend from Group-Consciousness to Stress on the Individual

Very closely related to the change from extroverted to introverted religion was the trend from group-consciousness to stress on the individual since this was the result of the awareness of the individual brought about by the introversion. Scholars have continuously noted the group orientation of Ancient Near Eastern and early Greek society in urban and rural areas. Both societies had been tribal in origin, and later changed from that tribal basis. But even though the tribal element weakened, especially in urban areas, both urban and rural societies maintained a group identity. The inhabitants of a Sumerian city-state and a Greek *polis* identified with the group; i.e. their identity was dependent on their belonging to a group. The inhabitants of Egypt belonged to their king and tradition. The Hittite king and Canaanite high priest sacrificed on behalf of their peoples as a whole. There were indeed individuals throughout the Mediterranean world sacrificing for personal reasons (e.g. guilt offerings), but even here the focus was not on the individual but on the attempt to bring the errant individual back into normative society. If a deviant was thought to be able to adversely affect society by his offensive presence, he was killed or banished. If a person was unclean, he would have to be iso-

lated and reintroduced to society through proper ritual. Gradually, after 1000 B.C., religious movements which focused attention on the individual began and spread. Although these movements maintained a group organization, the individual participated for himself, and it was through his salvation that the group and/or the world prospered. For example, the individual members of Gnosticism and the mystery cults gained personal knowledge and took certain steps toward personal salvation according to their own paths or at their own speed.

In Greece the change was very dramatic. After the religious awareness of individual traits and capabilities was established, the individual as a concept received attention. Greek religion in general spoke then to the individual. On the Temple of Apollo at Delphi the famous adage was recorded, *γνώθι σαυτόν*, which means "Know yourself." The command to the people was to examine themselves in order to discover what they were and what they could become. But the true significance here is the singular endings on both of the Greek words in the adage. It was the individual who was to practice a form of self-evaluation and better himself. This shows the new stress on the individual in Greek thought, and this stress was the basis of Classical Greece and its art, literature, politics, philosophy, and religion. Philosophy evolved from the attitude that the individual had an intellect with which he could discern causation. The individual also became the focus of attention in the anthropological period of Greek philosophy when great thinkers such as Socrates and Plato dealt with the nature of man. In terms of politics, the great concept of the *polis* arose in the sixth century B.C. with the goal of individual freedom for its citizens and with the need of individual participation in government. Artists experimented, encouraged individual creativity and achievements, and even signed their own works, whereas the custom prior to this period in the eastern Mediterranean world had been to maintain anonymity and follow tradition. The literature of Classical Greece treated of historical individuals or of traits found in individuals. For example, the early versions of Oedipus' story had focused on his relation with and harm to society, but Sophocles told the story in his play, *Oedipus Rex*, in such a way as to describe the error or weakness of Oedipus himself and his harm in order that the audience might recognize the human error.

In Israel there was also a change from tribal identity in religion to emphasis on the individual. This occurred long after the cen-

tral government of the monarchy (Saul, David, and Solomon) had broken down the tribal unit in political terms (c. 1000 B.C.). The change to individualism had to take place even after this period because the religion was still strongly centralized. Besides the spiritual reason for the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem (the recently established central capital of David), Solomon benefited from this new place of worship since the centralized religion supported his centralized government. And as long as the religion was so strongly centralized, the group remained the important social unit. But when the prophets arose to speak for the Lord, they led the movement toward individualism. The literary prophets, beginning historically with Amos (c. 750 B.C.), spoke directly against the priesthood and its established beliefs and customs. Within their words were the seeds which grew into the emphasis on individual redemption. According to the prophets, the national covenant established between the Lord and His people Israel on Mount Sinai was to be honored by individual adherence to ethical and spiritual commands. Individualism was preached particularly in the intertestamentum period (c. 550 B.C.–A.D. 50) when Judaism was established. The Pharisees and then the rabbis focused their efforts on the individual.

CONCLUSIONS

In simple and general terms, the religions of the historical Ancient Near East and early Greece c. 3000–500 B.C., including the Ancient Church in those places, were generally extroverted and group-oriented. All religions of this period expressed themselves in poetry and looked solely to divine causation for explanations of human and natural events. The religions of the time not in the church specific also believed in animate beings within nature. On the other hand, Christianity was generally introverted and oriented toward the individual. It expressed itself primarily in prose and established a dual explanation of causation, namely the Divine and the natural with emphasis on the former. The belief in nature deities was absent in Christianity and dying in western civilization by the time Christianity was established. In between these two periods the significant trends discussed above took place, i.e. during a transitional period which is coincidental with the intertestamentum period. These trends were present both in Greece and the Near East, and a special role seems to have been played by Israel and the Israelitish Church.

These changes took place under the direction of Divine Providence, whether they were truly providential or permissions. The assumption here is that they were providential because all five results (prose, history and understanding of natural causation in general, objectification, introversion of religious awareness, and individual orientation) *served* Christianity and are serving the New Church.

These changes have served the post-Advent churches in two ways. First, they enabled members of the churches to receive the new accommodations of Divine truth in a new way. Whereas the Lord had accommodated His truth to men through representative forms in the Ancient Word and the Old Testament, i.e. in the dispensations of the pre-Advent churches, He now offered His truth more directly and openly to the intellect of men. This could be done because of the trends described above. This new ability to see the Lord and understand His Word was also made possible because the changes had broken the hold which the religions of the Ancient Near East and the Classical World had on the minds of men. This then is the second way in which the five changes served the post-Advent churches.

In general, throughout the Mediterranean world, religions altered dramatically after 600 B.C., and, although they remained, they no longer maintained their *traditional* identity. They were affected by history, science, and primarily by philosophy. Now the turning from religion or the addition of science and philosophy to religion may be seen as a negative event. And this is true when the religion is genuinely good. But when the religion is degenerating or degenerate, preaching falsity and encouraging evil, then such a change has to be seen as good, especially when the change prepares for another genuine church, where science and philosophy serve religion. The Writings describe the spiritual state of the church and mankind just prior to the Lord's advent as being extremely bad. The Lord had to come (and come again) to save men because their state was so degenerate. Their minds had to be made ready to receive Him, and the five changes did so prepare mankind for that reception. The process of demythologizing was important for the liberation of men's minds and the process of introspection made men aware of their needs. Christianity could then be received.

Both the Ancient Near East (through Israel) and Greece served Christianity. The beliefs and teachings from the Old Testament and the method of logic used in Greek thought were both present in Christianity. There must have been a reason or reasons for this great development of human thought, and that reason seems to be Divine in origin. It is the author's opinion, therefore, that the intertestamentum period deserves attention. He proposes to offer at a later time his thoughts about the important sixth century B.C. during which this development was strongly in process.

THE WORSHIP AND LOVE OF GOD

A STUDY IN THEATRICAL FORM

NORMAN NEWTON *

PART TWO

THE CLEARING IN THE FOREST

I have referred in the previous article to the fact that the cosmology in *The Worship and Love of God* (and that of the *Principia* from which it is derived) seems to belong on a "line" of cosmologies running through Greek and Roman literature to a very early source. The image of the vortical movement of creation occurs all over the world: in megalithic design, in the Hindu myth of the "churning of the ocean" and in similar myths among the Pueblo peoples of the southwestern United States, and on the northwest coast of America, where it is usually symbolised as a whirlpool.¹ Our current knowledge of the pre-Greek literatures of the Middle East and the material collected by ethnographers enables us to trace this line with fair assurance; but this material was not available to Swedenborg. It is astonishing that he should have succeeded in finding this central line on the basis of a knowledge only of Scripture and of Greek and Latin literature.

It is clear that many peoples now dispersed over the face of the earth, peoples whom, in our arrogance, we have called "primitive," are heirs of a well-defined intellectual tradition. One finds such marked similarities among creation and flood traditions, cardinal-

* Second installment of a series of six articles.

¹ De Santillana, Giorgio, and Von Dechend, Hertha, *Howlet's Mill* (Boston: Gambit Incorporated, 1969), p. 319.