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FREEDOM IN THE WESTERN WORLD FROM THE DARK AGES TO THE RISE OF DEMOCRACY. By Herbert J. Muller (Harper & Row, 1963 $8.50)

This, the second of Professor Muller's three volumes on the History of Freedom, reaffirms my impression of his overly-praised first volume: the author has no real appreciation of the nature of freedom or the processes by which it has ebbed and flowed. Instead, he has merely written a history of Europe from 400 to 1800, reflecting his own unexamined prejudices, most of which are of late nineteenth century vintage: he likes the Greeks, ignores the Hebrews, dislikes the Dark Ages and the medieval period, sees "humanism" as the chief feature of the Renaissance, and thus marches through history along the paths set out by hundreds of conventional textbooks. The conventional nature of the whole approach is indicated in the 24 pages devoted to Islam, not because it contributed anything to the history of Freedom but simply because it is treated in every other textbook.

Muller dislikes the "Dark Ages" failing to see the double contribution it made to freedom by its shifting of European society from a slave basis in a unitary political system (imperium) to a free basis in a pluralist society (whose chief attribute, religion, was no longer merely an aspect of an autocratic state). The ending of slavery in the Dark Ages was based on the fact that it was a period of rapid technological progress which shifted heavy work from men to animals and thus made slavery obsolescent. Muller has two references to Lynn White's famous article on this (pp. 45, 75), but he does not see that it refers to the Dark Ages nor that it was the vital factor in the decline of slavery. Moreover, he fails to see how the Dark

Ages, by demonstrating in the West, that it was possible to have a society without a state, ended the rule over men's minds of the totalitarian Greek polis and the totalitarian Roman Imperium both of which, by continuing in the tradition of the East, provided the basis for Byzantine, Ottoman, Czarist, and Soviet despotisms. To Muller the Dark Ages is simply a period of regretably low civilization (p.33); But in the history of freedom, it was much more.

Muller has equally great misconceptions about the nature of Christianity, its impact on philosophy, and the boon to freedom from both of these. He misses the process by which the Christian emphasis on individual salvation led to philosophic recognition of the reality of the individual in the face of all-pervading Platonic and neo-Platonic emphasis on the reality of the universal. This led to later social individualism and philosophic nominalism with their great contributions to freedom. In a similar fashion, Hebrew emphasis on the goodness of this world and the body, handed down against the challenges of Zoraaster and Plato, contributed much to later humanitarianiam and social improvements. Muller's statement (p.57) about a Christian tradition of predestination "reaching back through St. Augustine to St. Paul" is doubly erroneous because he fails to see that the roots of "predestination" are Greek and that this was rejected in medieval times by all orthodox Christians (including the two Greek-influenced ancient Christians he names).

Much of Muller's difficulty rests on his neglect of the Hebrew influence (as contrasted with the Greek) in Christianity, which strengthened freedom by its emphasis on such factors as the importance of time and change, of the individual, and of the individual's freedom and responsibility (all factors which were belittled in the most influential Greek thinkers).

Muller fails to see that much of freedom has risen from the appeal of pluralism against unity (and especially uniformity) and that the great Greek contribution here was the effort to beach a social consensus by discussion in the market place. From this came the dialogue form of philosophic exposition (as in Abelard's Sic et Non or Aquinas' Quaestiones), and one of the sources of our Congressional debates (the other source, equally neglected by Muller, is the Indo-European assembly of warriors).

Muller also misses the medieval contribution to freedom from the period's emphasis on procedural matters (or on methods in general) rather than on goals. Most of our human freedom today rests on legal and constitutional emphasis on procedures of this type including rule of law, separation of powers, and methods of trial, all of which are medieval rather than ancient or modern.

The role played by legal changes is largely missing in this history of human freedom. The rediscovery of Classical antiquity in the West, especially the revival of Roman law and of its totalitarian

sovereign state, during the late medieval and Renaissance period, brought a new strength to despotism in the west from its assaults on pluralism (especially on all autonomous organizations, including religion). These assaults, to this day, are hampered by pluralisms and procedural techniques of medieval origin. Does Muller know that the Tudor Court of Star Chamber used Roman law and procedures and was established by the same dynasty which sought, by endowing Regius Professorships at Oxford and Cambridge to replace the Common Law with the more despotic Roman Law, as was occuring contemporaneously in Germany. Or, knowing this, does Muller see its significance?

Carroll Quigley

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