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EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION OF TIME IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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The historiography of past ages has taught us many things about the deeds and feats of men as well as the character of the greatest among them. The methods remain valid and will always teach us something. Many historiographers of today direct our attention to the concrete details of the economic and material conditions in which the lives of men flowed, and this kind of research has achieved results which allow us to expect much more from it in the future. But there remains an area in which less work has been done, namely that of the history of human sentiments: joy, sadness, love, friendship, hate, vengeance, sorrow, the meaning of death, family relationships—attitudes with regard to all the fundamental realities, elementary experiences which take in the whole of life.

Among these questions it seems there is one which must come before many others and which we cannot avoid facing the moment we become interested not merely in history, but also in the human beings who are its subject: what idea, or better, what experience or feeling of space and time did the men of the Middle Ages have?

The problem of distance would be worth considering in this century of so many widely displaced persons. An excellent study by Robert Fawtier, entitled "*Comment, au début du XIV^e siècle, un roi de France pouvait-il se représenter son royaume?*,"¹ has shown that in the fourteenth century a king could know only with a certain very limited precision the places he went. For lack of maps, or at least of sufficiently exact ones, he had only a vague notion of the rest of the world. The studies on cartography being made at present in various countries will certainly enlighten us, but only for relatively recent periods.

In the Middle Ages, especially the earlier periods, it seems that the absence—or in any case the universal rarity amounting to absence—of geographical maps prevented men from measuring distances. Even where formerly there had been roads marked with milestones, one could scarcely remember the fact. Moreover, space was not at all, as it is in the age of odometers, a quantity whose measure could be shown on a chart, a distance that one could cover within a determined, foreseen, controlled period—a period of which even the economic value could be calculated. Space resembled rather a sort of mysterious immensity, almost infinite, offering the possibility of an advance, a progress, which was always more or less something akin to an adventure.

I would like here to ask the same sort of questions about the subject of time; I do not intend to consider our methods of establishing chronologies, or of dating events, or of measuring duration, but to interview medieval witnesses on the experience which men had of time and duration in those days. I shall limit myself to an earlier part of the Middle Ages scarcely reaching beyond the end of the twelfth century; and I shall try not merely to sketch general ideas, but to disengage the contents of texts and even,

1. *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Compte-rendu des séances de l'année 1959* (Paris, 1960), pp. 117-23.

very simply, of words, of the very terms used for speaking of duration. This in turn will help to limit the inquiry. Our sources will be written documents only, the works of clerics and more particularly of monks. They will furnish us with information on some of the aspects of life, some of the human experiences met within other milieux. And this will allow us to attempt an inquiry bearing first on the rhythms which marked succession of time, and then on the contents of human time.²

I. THE RHYTHMS OF TIME

The thing which strikes one first of all in many documents relative to the period under study is the imprecision with which authors indicated the time when a particular event had occurred, or with which they measured duration. How often do we read formulas such as *quodam tempore* (at a certain moment), *alio tempore* (another time), *praeterito tempore* (formerly, in the past), *circa idem tempus* (about the same time). One would be tempted to translate, "one fine day"! This general way of designating time gives the impression that the authors were not very sure just when an event had taken place and therefore could not situate it precisely in its temporal relationship to other events. A formula of this kind in the life of St. Wynnebald by Hugeburge, "*transacto temporum indutio et annorum curriculo*,"³ reminds me of a nonagenarian who, speaking in 1950 of a past event, said: "I cannot remember now when it happened, but it was in this century!"

Other documents speak of a certain duration, a certain space of time—*aliquanto temporis spatio, post spatium temporis*—and all we know is that it was more or less long: *non multo post tempore, post longum tempus, in parvo tempore, ad modicum tempus*. We get exactly the same impression of a lack of precision when *tempus* is employed in the plural—*illis temporibus, nostris temporibus, quieta tempora, transactis tempora intervallis*—as if there had been a succession of periods all running into one.

Within this very imprecision, however, there are certain points of reference marked by objective data, exterior to man: the "times" are not all alike. Among the criteria determining succession, those which occur most frequently are borrowed from the rhythms of nature. First, of course, comes the alternation of day and night, of morning and evening, which is made more precise by liturgical practice, of which I shall speak presently. But beyond that one finds only rather vague notions, such as *nocturnum tempus, vespertinum, or matutinale tempus*. This is easily understandable. Day and night never begin at the same moment on two successive days, even in the same locality.

Almost as frequent, and no less imprecise, are allusions to the seasons contained in such expressions as *tempus autumnale or aestivum, tempore veris, tempus hiemis transegit*. This too is understandable since the beginnings of the seasons vary in different places and in different years. We find that the four seasons are also characterized by their manifestations and, as can be said for at least some of them, by their fruits—*tempore pomorum*. Each was referred to according to its climate, whether by simple allusions—*brumalis tempore, per tempora bruma, solstitii glacialis tempore, asperitas hiemalis temporis*—or by more detailed descriptions—*quando aestuale tem-*

2. I shall give here nothing more than a brief summary of a long study which I am preparing on the experience of time in the High Middle Ages.

3. *Vita Wynnebaldi, Monumenta Germaniae Historica [MGH], Scriptores [SS.]*, XV, 115.

*pus magna solis caumatio terram urire solet*⁴—when in summer the hot sun burns the earth, as Willibald wrote when he mentioned the peak of summer. The transition from one season to another was known only by the change in temperature: “when winter is over and the heat of summer is becoming white hot,” wrote Willibald.⁵ Since the transition was progressive, indication of time according to the season was always a certain approximation: *dum aestatis autumnique aliquantulum tempus praeteriret . . .*⁶

Wandelbert wrote a poem devoted to the climate and produce of each month, *De mensium duodecim nominibus, signis culturis aerisque qualitatibus*,⁷ and in his *Horologium per duodecim mensium punctos*⁸ he summed up this information in connection with the name of each month: *Ianua, Februum, Martius*, and so on. This way of distinguishing months was maintained especially in the calendars found at the beginning of certain liturgical books such as the martyrology. As a matter of fact, it definitely seems that in the memory and sensibility of most men, in their ordinary daily life, the annual cycle of the seasons determined the great units of time, the *tempora* of which they thought spontaneously. The liturgy, however, introduced its own proper cycles and marked the beginnings of the four seasons by fasts and prayers. It even seems that some counted by seasons in the same way that certain modern universities count by semesters or terms. *En quindecim tempora volvuntur quo et domum carui*, as Jonas of Bobbio had St. Columban say when he designated fifteen seasons, that is, nearly four years of exile.⁹ Bede stated that the English counted only two seasons of the year: *Principaliter annum totum in duo tempora, hiemis videlicet et aestatis, dispertiebant*.¹⁰ Even when, in a general way, one divided the year into four seasons, they were in fact characterized by the typical weather of each. It is “temperature” which indicates “time.” As is known, in certain Romance languages the word “time” can designate either of these realities, which is not the case for those tongues in which *Zeit* or *time* is not equivalent to *Wetter* or *weather*.

After nature, and parallel to it, was the liturgy which served most to indicate time. Cosmic time, as we have seen, is constituted by a succession of seasons occurring at fixed periods, clearly diversified in their ensemble, but having a flexible rhythm and an accepted variety. The religious cycles were fitted into the great natural rhythms of the year and the seasons, thus giving them a sacred character. In fact, the liturgy introduced into many lives realities which, though marked on calendars and time pieces, would otherwise have scarcely existed except as abstract notions.

There was first of all the annual cycle—*circulum anni*, the sacramentaries say—determined by the succession of celebrations centered on the mysteries of Christ: *tempore Nativitatis, tempus Passionis Domini, Paschali tempore*. These designations were sometimes accompanied by an adjective, *sanctum tempus Quadragesimae*, indicating that the observance of certain

4. *Vita Bonifatii*, 4 (ed. W. Levison), *Vitae s. Bonifatii*, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* [Script. rer. Germ.], p. 17.

5. “Cum vero hibernale iam tempus praeteriret et calor aestatis candesceret.” *Ibid.*, 5, p. 19, 12.

6. *Ibid.*, 4, p. 17.

7. Ed. E. Dümmier, MGH, *Poetae aevi Carolini* [Poet.], II, 604-616.

8. *Ibid.*, IV, 616-17.

9. *Vita Columbani*, 1, 3 (ed. B. Krush), *Ionae vitae s. Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, MGH, *Script. rer. Germ.*, p. 156.

10. *De temporum ratione*, 15, 21 (ed. C. W. Jones), *Bedaes opera de temporibus, Patrologia Latina* [P.L.] 90, col. 356.

periods was particularly sacred. Christian time was holy because it was both sanctified and sanctifying. There was also the succession of feasts of which the more important were points of reference; we read, for example, such phrases as: "Three weeks before St. Martin." It is true that some liturgical books had calendars in which each day was indicated by a number and sometimes in addition by the feast or commemoration of a saint; but, in fact, except in acts of chancelleries, it seems that during the year the major feasts were the distinguishing points in time.

Within the cycle of each day, the word *hora* designated in many cases the liturgical hour, that is, the part of the Divine Office corresponding to that particular part of the day. The *hora matutinalis* is that of lauds, while *hora vespertina* is that of vespers or sometimes of vigils. For clerics, and even more for monks, it was these hours, *horae canonicales* or *spiritales*, which actually determined the rhythm of life and told the time. They coincided with the successive phases of the solar cycle, and came not only to be identified with them but substituted for them in people's minds. The real hour was the liturgical hour. Many examples of this are to be found in monastic customaries. Thus at Cluny, throughout the summer, regardless of the solar hour, afternoon began only when all the prayers allotted to the morning had been said and the meal finished: *ut . . . per totam aestatem, postquam prandium fuerit peractum, tunc primum sit media dies*.¹¹ Sacred time ceased to be tied absolutely to natural time, which it absorbed and perhaps modified. In this connection it is worth mentioning that there was a complete theology of time, considered as the sacrament which enabled a mystery accomplished long ago in the life of the Savior to be mediated in the actuality of today (*hodie*), thus being renewed every time it was celebrated. But we are not dealing here with the history of theology, nor even with the theology of time. For our purpose here it is enough to say that in the Middle Ages—as is still the case today in places where life is regulated by the liturgy—each seasonal experience of time received special coloration from the liturgical cycle due to the ensemble of rites, usages, and texts which were centered on each phase of the work of salvation and thus recalled them effectively to mind.

The elements which made up temporal succession had their origin in nature and religion but also in events. These may have been happenings which were themselves cosmic occurrences, such as drought or famine: *siccitatis tempore, famis tempore*. They could also be connected with the life of a man, which thus became the point of reference to which were associated other events: *tempore Karoli imperatoris*. When it was a question of successive generations, it seems that the notions of time were very approximate. One simply distinguished "modern times," the present (*nostris temporibus, modernis temporibus*) from a vague past (*antiquitas, pristina tempora*).

I will not insist further on these expressions, which have been excellently studied by W. Freund.¹² They are mainly concerned with the ideas which the chroniclers had, and transmitted, of succession. For the majority of men in ordinary life, the rhythms were marked by the daily preoccupations determined by the solar cycle (*hora refectiois, hora convivandi*) or by religious duties (*hora orandi*). We also notice that periods of time were designated by specific pursuits, for example hunting (*tempore venationis*) or even by the kind of animals hunted, such as wild boars (*aprorum tempus*). Finally,

11. Ulrich, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses*, I, 18, P.L. 149, col. 668 C.

12. *Modernus und andere Zeitbegriffe des Mittelalters* (Köln, 1957).

in the Middle Ages as in every age, there were times when human affairs fared more or less well. The *tempora laeta* alternated with the *tempus amarum* or *pacis tempore*, but more often, it would seem, *tempore belli*. Events due to human intervention conferred, for better or worse, a certain quality on time: *pro qualitate temporum*. From this point of view again, medieval time does not appear primarily as an objective reality, exterior to man, or as an absolute to which man's situation is relative. It is truer to say that time was relative to man, to a succession of men; its value came from the use men made of it.

Does this mean that in the Middle Ages there existed no material means for measuring time, for comparing cosmic time, both religious and profane, to fixed and unchangeable durations? There did in fact exist an instrument, the clock, found principally, however, in the hands of theorists. It seems scarcely to have had any more place in the real life of the majority than the electric chronometers of our modern laboratories. Isidore, Bede, Rabanus Maurus, Wandalbert of Prüm, Honorius Augustodunensis, the specialists on computation, defined each part of time, from the *saeculum* to the *atomus*, which was then considered to be indivisible, beyond reach of any disintegration. Between the century and the atom there were several divisions of time: *lustrum*, *annus*, *mensis*, *hebdomada*, *dies*, *hora*, *quadrans*, *minutum*, *momentum*, and *ostentum*. The last and smallest unity, the atom, was equivalent to the *ictus oculi*, the space of a twinkling of an eye, an *Augenblick* as the Germans say when they mean a very short instant. It was calculated that the *ostentum* had 370 atoms, 22,560 of which were needed to make an hour.¹³

The sun-dial, sometimes called *horologium*, sometimes *horoscopus*, *horoscopium*, or even *horoscopus horologii*, served to determine the divisions of the day called the hour and its fractions. *Minutum est minus intervallum in horologio*, as Honorius Augustodunensis wrote.¹⁴ The sun-dial was a delicate instrument and had to be carefully regulated: *horologium temperet secretarius*, we read in one customary, or again, *horologium dirigit et temperat apocrisiarius*. It showed when the day had begun (*si dies est*) and then it told when the right moment had come to give the signal for each regular exercise. It should be remarked that formulas such as *horoscopo pulsante* or *ad sonitum horologii* do not mean that the instrument was equipped with an automatic percussion system. Little by little, it is true, in the later Middle Ages, the apparatus came gradually to be perfected and tended to become a machine. Already in the Early Middle Ages there was a type of clock adapted to the night (*horologium nocturum*), but we cannot go into details, since we are not writing the history of time-pieces.¹⁵ We must be content to notice in passing that it was considered preferable for a man to be able to do without these instruments. One learnt at school how to tell time by the stars, and the clock was available as a substitute for the use by the ignorant so that, as Bede said, "he who has not learned in school to read the signs of the heavens might at least be able to learn by the lines of

13. See H. Leclercq, "Heure," in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, VI, 2 (Paris, 1925), col. 2371.

14. *Imago mundi*, 2, 8, P.L., 172, col. 147. The beginning of book II, cc. 1-13, is entirely devoted to defining the different sections of time.

15. Indications will be found in H. Leclercq, *op. cit.*, col. 2370, and "Horloge," *ibid.*, col. 2770.

a terrestrial clock the times for necessary things."¹⁶ In another place Bede gave the meaning of the elements of which the hour was composed: "The hour is divided into four *punctos*, ten *minuta*, fifteen *partes*, forty *momenta*, [etc.] . . ."¹⁷

Now if we try to discover, not what time was objectively or how the theorists analyzed it, but rather what idea men had of it, what psychological form it took for them, what influence the reality "time" exercised on their lives, we discover that the most frequent designations were devoid of all scholarly precision. A particular food was to be cooked for "a short hour," (*parvula hora*); some other action took half an hour (*dimidia hora*), a measure of time which did not appear in Bede's enumeration. Sometimes the medieval authors used *hora* and *momentum* quite indifferently (*momentis atque horis*); one would think that they were speaking of a single instant instead of a duration (*velut sub uno eodemque horae momento*). Always *hora* occurs in a context where its meaning derives in relation, not to objective time marked on the dial, but to a preceding moment or event. Thus we read, for example, the "second hour" or the "eighth hour," or "from the third hour to the ninth," or again "at a later hour." It is quite true that we ourselves say "two hours later"; but for us in every hour there are exactly sixty minutes and in each minute exactly sixty seconds. For people living in the Early Middle Ages awareness of this fact, when such awareness existed, rarely corresponded to a precise experience of duration. Thus we hesitate to decide upon the objective duration of that *horae dimidium* which Peter Damian said was conceded to the monks of Cluny for conversation,¹⁸ or what we are to understand when a chronicler such as Thietmar of Merseburg said that a fire lasted "three hours," that a beautiful sunrise lasted "one hour,"¹⁹ or, as he wrote of a certain person, "he could not go one hour without something to drink."²⁰

We must also take into consideration the biblical ways of speaking of time. For example, W. Hiss states that, for Saint Bernard, ecstasy lasts thirty minutes,²¹ because he spoke of it in biblical terms: *Ibi modicum, hora videlicet quasi dimidia, silentio facto in caelo* . . .²² This leads Hiss to suppose that in the twelfth century an hour was equal to sixty modern minutes, which of course is false. But he seems to have forgotten that Bernard's words are biblical: *modicum* comes from John 16:16-19 and the half hour's silence in heaven comes from Revelations 8:1.

When we recall that, according to Wandalbert, it was the movement of light and shadows which indicated the length of the hours,²³ we understand that the latter were longer or shorter according to the season. Walafrid mentioned "long hours" (*longae horae*)²⁴ and a "short hour" (*brevis*

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16. ". . . Ut qui coeli signis intendere puerili in schola non didicit, saltem horologii lineis in terra, quae necessaria quaerit apprehendat." *De temporum ratione*, 38, P.L. 90, col. 468.
 17. *Ibid.*, 3, P.L. 90, col. 303.
 18. *Epistola* 8, 5, P.L. 144, col. 380A-B.
 19. *Chronicon*, 4, 19 (ed. F. Kurze), MGH, Script. rer. Germ., p. 75.
 20. *Ibid.*, 5, 23, p. 120.
 21. W. Hiss, *Die Anthropologie Bernhards von Clairvaux* (Berlin, 1964), p. 80, 36.
 22. *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, 21, *S. Bernardi opera* (edd. Jean Leclercq and H. Rochais; Romae, 1963), III, 33.
 23. *Horologium per duodecim mensium punctos*, 28-40, MGH, Poet., II, 617; *Martyrologium*, *ibid.*, pp. 577, 518.
 24. *Carmina varia*, 89, 3, MGH, Poet., II, 422.

hora).²⁵ Alcuin spoke of the difference between solar hours and lunar hours.²⁶ Put briefly, this means that the parts of time, even those fixed by the theorists or measured by instruments, were not absolutely and rigidly unchangeable. They continued to be, as they always will be, dependent on the pattern of change inherent to natural phenomena. That is why, as Gunther of Paris remarked, they remain natural: "these hours, of which there are twenty-four in one day, as such are called natural."²⁷ If God, explained Agius of Corvey, has so admirably divided time into a series of years (*annalis series*), it is by the instrumentality of nature herself and by that alternance of light and darkness which is inherent in her:

*per numerum solis varios lunaeque meatus,
per hunc stellarum calliginisque globum.*²⁸

II. THE MEANING OF TIME

Having attempted to discern the rhythms by which time imposed itself on the human awareness, thus becoming, so to speak, the fundamental experience, let us now try to consider how, at another level, that of reflection, men came to have a notion of the whole of time, a synthesis of it. The field open to exploration is certainly vast. I shall do no more than sketch a few notions relative to the psychological aspect, leaving aside doctrinal or speculative interpretation.

The first thing that strikes us is that time had a "meaning," a "sense," these words being taken in their twin connotation of "signification" and "orientation." Time *signified* something (*significat*). It had a meaning, it bore and transmitted to men God's message, a lesson which came from beyond time. The clock itself, as we have seen, continued to be bound up with the natural cycles which religion took up and used. Any form or part of time—be it cosmic, liturgical, historical, or even scientific—was, according to Rabanus, just one more means by which God speaks to us. "Time, which in Greek is called *chronos*, goes from the beginning until the end of the world, so that it is divided into moments, hours, days, months. It signifies an apt distribution of the Divine Will."²⁹ God speaks to man in time, man responds by praising time. Man speaks to the Creator of the time which He has created, and tells Him that he has understood its meaning. There exists a whole anthology of ancient hymns, which monks still recite each week and which have fashioned—more than in us—the mentality of long generations for whom the rhythms of nature had more importance than they have for us. The liturgy marks benefits offered by the times—plural, because of their variety—in order that this variety may put monotony and boredom to flight: *Et temporum das tempora ut alleves fastidium*.³⁰

Time was also invested with a sense, a meaning, because it oriented and

25. *Ibid.*, 5, and *passim*.

26. *Epistola* 155 (ed. E. Dümmler), MGH, *Epistolae*, IV, 250, 9.

27. *Historia Constantinopolitana*, 8, 2 (ed., P. de Riant), p. 164: "Et haec quidam horae, quarum viginti quatuor maiorem diem constituunt, ita ut sunt—naturales appellantur."

28. *Versus computistici*, 1-16 (ed. K. Strecker), MGH, *Poet.*, IV, 937-38.

29. "Significat autem opportunam distributionem divinae voluntatis." *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, 10, 1, P.L. 111, col. 285B.

30. Hymn *Aeternae rerum conditor Noctemque diem qui regis*, attributed to St. Ambrose, P.L. 16, col. 1409.

directed man towards God who had made time and used it to manifest Himself. It defined man as part of a whole, in relation to an absolute over and beyond nature. Time was characteristic of all that was changing and unstable and could only be understood in opposition to the unchanging, the eternal. Honorius Augustodunensis was the spokesman of many others when he said, "Time' comes from 'temperament,' and is only the restless changing of things."³¹ Ermenric of Ellwangen had already written before him: "Degree, measure, and time do not exist in the Godhead and, to say the same thing, it has neither more nor less."³²

Time was specific of all that is finite, limited, measured, quantitative—in a word, created—everything that, for man, was associated with the fact of being mortal. Bede wrote: "Time gets its name from *temperamentum*, whether it is a question of measuring any particular period or else because in any moment, hour, day, month, in all centuries and ages, everything is measured by the course of mortal life."³³ This text deals not only with the death of each man, but, since the author spoke of centuries and even ages (an allusion to the "six ages of the world"), there is also question of that mortality to which the whole human race is subject. Time recalls the existence of death, leads to it, and should prepare us for it. Rabanus said: "The times . . . signify the corporal vigilance which a man must temper in the present state of time, until the sleep of death shall come."³⁴ And it is there that lies the origin of the accent placed on the ephemeral and provisional nature of things, the contrast between *semper* and *ad tempus* or *pro tempore*. Walafrid wrote to a king in these terms:

*Namque caducus honor volitans et inutile nomen
Deficit et tempus rapidum dum cernimus illud
Esse, nihil poterunt transactae gaudia vitae.*³⁵

To say that time is short and fleeting—*brevis est tempus*,³⁶ *pro brevitate temporis*—is not to say, as might at first be thought, that it is of short duration and "passes quickly." It is the verb which is important: time "passes"; it will not last eternally. An excellent example to cite here is that of St. Dominic Hideskin, who filled St. Peter Damian with admiration: "He was so prudent in speech that we could apply to him that saying of St. James the Apostle, 'If anyone does not sin in words, he is perfect.'"³⁷ If someone should happen to ask him the time, he never replied absolutely by the indication of a full hour (*tota*), but gave an approximate answer, "about the third hour," or "about the sixth hour" (*Prope tertia hora est, prope sexta hora est*). "And when I asked him one day why he used such

31. "Tempus autem a temperamento dicitur, et nihil aliud est quam vicissitudo rerum." *Imago mundi*, 2, 3, P.L. 172, col. 147.

32. "In deitate gradus, mensura et tempora non sunt. Et, quod idem est, maius non habet atque minus." *Epistola ad Grimaldum*, 32 (ed. E. Dümmler), MGH, Poet., II, 527, 33.

33. "Tempora igitur a temperando nomen accipiunt, sive quod unumquodque illorum spatium seperatim temperatum sit, seu quod momentis, horis, diebus, mensibus, annis saeculisque et aetatibus omnia mortalis vitae curricula temperentur." *De temporum ratione*, 2, 1-5, P.L. 90, col. 298.

34. "Tempora . . . significant autem vigiliis corporis, quas homo debet habere temporanter in statu praesentis temporis, donec veniat somnus mortis." *De universo*, 6, 1, P.L. 111, cols. 146D-47A.

35. *Carmina varia*, 5, 88 (ed. E. Dümmler), MGH, Poet., II, 421, 10-12.

36. MGH, Poet., IV, 1165.

37. Iac. 3:2.

expressions, he replied: 'In this way I avoid lying. Is it not so that since the hour may be either approaching or already over, there is always another hour that is near, not far, that is, from the instant at which we are speaking.'"³⁸ This text does not merely inform us about a scrupulous hermit's care for truth; it also recalls how approximate a knowledge men had of duration, calculated habitually in hours which followed, not one by one, but three by three, with very little care for the halves and quarters. It helps us also to understand that, for the same reason, the principal idea they had of time was that it was passing: it was transitory, assuring a bond of continuity, a transition between the present and the future.

This conviction of the transitoriness of time does not entail a gloomy outlook. But there was at least one sad thought which was less tormenting for the men of the Early Middle Ages than for men of later times: that of the lack of time. Probably because of men's inability to measure time, to foresee with precision the duration of a possible action, it would seem that they made fewer projections in the old days than they do now. Though the texts scarcely ever mention the future, they are full of the eschatological sense.

Time, then, had a positive value since it led to an end which exists outside itself, provided it was well used. In connection with this there are many aspects that could be studied, of which not the least is the notion of time as being "lost" or "redeemed," a study which would give us grounds for a cheerful outlook. As St. Bernard declared: "There are three divisions of time: past, present, and future. No hour is lost for him who does penance rightly . . ."³⁹ Time was thus the occasion of a moral progress which was to be continued. In medieval culture, everything favored this evolutionary concept of human history in general and of each man's destiny in particular. It has been shown that the Greeks saw man in space, whereas the Bible situated him in time.⁴⁰

It seems necessary to mention also what I would willingly call contemplative time, that is to say, monastic time. For monks the concept of time sprang from a concept of life defined by a word which is today ambiguous, but which Christian tradition had, as it were, "converted" in such a way that, more often, it evoked a noble reality. I refer to leisure, that difficult *otium* which lies midway between the preoccupation with affairs which are its negation—*neg-otium*—and idleness, *otiositas*, which is no less opposed to it. The life of *otium*—*quies*, *vacatio*—was an existence full of the activities of asceticism and prayer, including "work" in all forms from manual labor to practices of mortification.⁴¹ These were wholly spiritual activities, not measurable by a result, conditioned by that silence which makes time lasting—only noise interrupted it—and by the absence of those purely human cares which enchain the spirit: *this* was the attention to God which created free time, *tempus liberum*.⁴² Life without haste, with no trace of "chronophobia"—that fear of boredom, of the emptiness of time, about which a psychiatrist in the United States has spoken—and of "chronomania," which is the fear of lack of time.

38. *Vita ss. Rudolphi et Dominici*, 12, P.L. cols. 144, 1022.

39. *Sermo de diversis*, 106, 1, *S. Bernardi Opera*, VI/1, 378.

40. I. Muilenburg, "The Biblical View of Time," *Harvard Theological Review*, 45 (1961), 225-52.

41. In a volume entitled *Otia monastica: Études sur le vocabulaire de la contemplation au moyen âge* (*Studia Anselmiana*, 51; Romae, 1963), I have cited many texts.

42. St. Bernard, *De s. Malachia, sermo 2, 4*, P.L. 183, col. 488.

One of the characteristics of the contemplative is that he who "takes his time," fills it calmly with all the activities which must occupy the soul—these are the real measure of time, not the contrary. At Cluny they estimated the length of certain pauses in the psalmody according to the time it took to say a Pater noster.⁴³ The lessons of matins had to be long enough to allow the circulators to seek out, in the choir and elsewhere, the remaining sleepers.⁴⁴ The Epistle to the Romans had to be read entirely in two office nocturns.⁴⁵ The interval during which speaking was permitted was equivalent to the time needed for the celebrant and ministers to prepare for High Mass.⁴⁶

Speaking of the night offices which, on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, began and ended while it was still daylight—*die adhuc clara*—Ulrich mentioned that on two days following, as he went out, he had the idea of looking at the time on the sun-dial—*Venit mihi aliquando in mentem ut ipsam horam solis radio notare, quem sequenti die, quando cantavimus nonam, in eodem vidi esse loco.*⁴⁷ Thus, duty must come first and it is only afterwards that one may work out how long it took. The important thing was not a certain quantity of time to be filled, but rather the activity in which it was spent and from which it derived its value.

Lastly, in order to be complete, we must mention the mystic and mysterious time, the paradoxical conciliation of time and eternity in union with God when the Timeless and Unchanging One comes to dwell in man, created in time but now affiliated, so to speak, while yet remaining in his human condition, to divine eternity. St. Peter Damian explained that just as the day is made up of twenty-four parts which we call hours, so the Lord, when he communicates himself to each creature made in his image, far from being himself divided, unites all creatures among themselves and gives this whole to participate in his intemporality.⁴⁸

May we, by way of conclusion, compare our modern experience of time with that of people in the Early Middle Ages? Obviously, such a comparison in no way implies an attempt to judge relative values. I have no intention of deciding which of the two experiences is the better; I merely wish to try to understand the experience one made of time in the past. Now the best way to do this is by a comparison. We know very well what time has become in an age when everyone has a wrist-watch constantly before his eyes and, we might say, fixed in his head. We always know approximately what time it is and how long each occupation takes. Time for us is an absolute quantity, always measured by objective instruments, of which the rhythm is fixed once and for all by a number of minutes and seconds, each of the parts of time having a value which can be estimated in terms of money. Do we not say, "Time is money"?

For the ancients, time was less a quantity than a quality of duration—free duration, not easily controlled. It thus readily came to have an illimit-

43. Peter the Venerable, *Statuta*, 1 (ed. G. Charvin), *Statuts, chapitres généraux et visites de l'Ordre de Cluny* (Paris, 1965), I, 22.

44. Ulrich, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses*, 1, 1, P.L. 149, col. 643D.

45. *Ibid.*, col. 645D.

46. *Ibid.*, 1, 40, col. 686A.

47. *Ibid.*, 1, 41, col. 688A-B.

48. "Manete," inquit, 'in me, et ego in vobis' (Io. 15). Ipse quippe nobis et intemporale tempus et illocalis est locus. Illocalis scilicet, quia non circumscriptur; intemporalis, quia nunquam finitur. Tempus itaque nobis est, dum dicit: 'Nonne duodecim horae sunt diei?' (Io. 11: 9). Se scilicet diem, duodecim autem horas totidem dicit apostolos."

able and mysterious character. Time was not so much an actuality as an expectation. It was divided less by numbers on a clock than by rhythms of nature, of cult, of human action, with certain risks of inexactness according to whether the dry or rainy season of the year happened to be shorter or longer, or according to whether the acts of one or another man affected the future of a group. Time was an open reality, directed towards eternity rather than towards the future.

In the past one used to speak of the *cursus temporis*, but these words do not refer to a course of time which was "a race against the clock." The man of the Early Middle Ages was generally a man of slow rhythm. He seldom ran. In a given period of time he would experience fewer sensations than we do; he had fewer ideas, fewer actions and reactions. Like us he enjoyed comparing time to a wheel—*rota temporis annos evolvit*—to a circular movement—*volvente tempore, tempore vertente*. But for us, when we speak of "time marching on" we think of the movement of the hands on a dial, whereas in the Middle Ages this phrase would have suggested the movement of the ambiant world. It is as if man saw himself following the signs of the zodiac. Today we have to enter into the movement, the cycle; the course of time is identified with us. The man who lived according to natural cycles, adopted by the liturgy, saw time as exterior to himself. He controlled it by giving himself up to the fulfillment of actions oriented towards the eternal God, without ever trying to run ahead of it. But we have time ingrained in our nature, and yet we do not easily master it or remain free with regard to it, because in us it is in the state of an objective quantity, the course and current of which carries us far beyond what our natural interior rhythm demands that we be or do. Ours is a more dangerous situation than that of medieval man, but it can also be more productive. We function in our specifically human quality at an accelerated pace.

It is not ours to choose between our own age and that of the Early Middle Ages. For every man, the best era is that in which he finds himself. But the contrast between our experience and that of the period we have studied helps us to have a better understanding of the grandeur of the ancient past. Human time, measured by the rhythms of nature and the liturgy, favored an attitude of expectation and desire. And man knew that this human attitude of waiting and longing was to find fulfillment.