

# A Not So Distant Mirror



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## The Lessons of the Fourteenth-Century New Dark Age

by William F. Wertz, Jr.

**W**e are today in the midst of a global civilizational crisis, comparable only to the catastrophic New Dark Age of the Fourteenth century. As Lyndon LaRouche has emphasized, the last thirty years have seen our civilization begin a descent into such a Dark Age, brought about by the same Black Guelph political faction—centered today in the British monarchy—which gave the world the calamitous collapse of a half-millennium ago. Building on the accomplishments of such creators of the Fifteenth-century

*The Black Death: Burying plague victims at Tournai, 1349.*  
(Flemish manuscript illumination, 14th century)

In the decades since publication of Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, the British-centered financial oligarchy has succeeded, to a significant degree, in returning the modern world to a feudalist universe, defined by the same axiomatic assumptions which prevailed in the Fourteenth century: usury, ecologism, free trade, and privatization.

Golden Renaissance as Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the Brothers of the Common Life, and Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464), LaRouche today leads the worldwide opposition to this on-rushing calamity.

The financial crisis facing us today is, in fact, far worse than the collapse of the Venetian-controlled Peruzzi and Bardi family banks in 1343-44. At that time, the sovereign debt default of one nation, England, was sufficient to pierce the speculative financial bubble, bringing in its wake the breakdown of civilization in Europe. Today, owing to globalization and the buildup of an unprecedented speculative bubble, several nations, including South Korea, Indonesia, Russia, and Brazil, are simulta-

neously on the verge of sovereign debt defaults, any one of which could trigger a global financial vaporization.

For the last more than three decades, since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the launching of the mid-1960's, neo-Malthusian youth counterculture, the world's population has been subjected to a concerted effort to eradicate the advances of the Golden Renaissance, which include the creation of the sovereign nation-state, quality public education, and a commitment to scientific and technological progress. The British-centered, Venetian-feudalist financial oligarchy has attempted, with significant success, to return the modern world to the same "Diocletian" universe, defined by the same Malthusian false-axiomatic assumptions, which prevailed in the Fourteenth century: usury, ecologism, free trade, and privatization.

This feudalist, philosophically Aristotelean faction, associated with Prince Philip's Worldwide Fund for Nature, the Club of Rome, and neo-conservative organizations like the Mont Pelerin Society, has also attempted to undermine the Christian religion, by attempting to maneuver leading Christian institutions into rejecting the Renaissance in favor of policies of free trade, post-industrialism, and globalization—all of which are opposed to the economic policies associated with nation-building. This same faction is also operating to pit nations against each other, based on religious conflicts—Christian against Muslim, Hindu against Muslim, etc.—reviving the outlook of the Crusades and the Inquisition, through the fostering of what Harvard's Samuel Huntington termed a "clash of civilizations."

As part of this, one can recognize in such contemporary movements as the Promise Keepers and the followers of neo-conservative televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, a proliferation of irrationalist cults reminiscent of the Fourteenth-century Flagellants. We see a deliberate effort to brainwash desperate layers of the population into irrational belief in such so-called "Biblical prophecies" as Armageddon and the "End Times," with the explicit purpose of convincing people that positive human intervention, as occurred during the Renaissance, is impossible.

Culturally, through the destruction of public education, we are witnessing an attempt to dumb down the vast majority of the population, and to educate only a five percent elite to be the new ruling oligarchy in the so-called Information Age, as advocated by British Lord Rees-Mogg. Through the popular culture promoted by Hollywood on television, in the movies, and on the Internet, a culture of death and violence is being spawned. Entire nations, like Colombia, are being overrun by private, mercenary narco-terrorist armies. In Africa, vast

regions have been devastated by the spread of epidemic diseases such as AIDS, and by genocidal wars launched by satraps of the British Empire. In Asia, populations of entire nations, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and South Korea, have seen their living standards, built up over decades, decimated overnight by pirate currency speculators like George Soros, and their national sovereignty destroyed by the International Monetary Fund.

But, if we look carefully at the Fourteenth century, we can also see the means by which to save humanity. By violating natural law, the financial oligarchy is today—as it was then—weakening itself, and thus creating the opportunity for us to finally free mankind from oligarchical oppression. As Barbara Tuchman writes in her 1978 book, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*: "Once people envisioned the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submission came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead. To that extent, the Black Death may have been the unrecognized beginning of modern man."

When Tuchman wrote her book twenty years ago, she suggested that our own century bore a striking resemblance to that last Dark Age. Developments over the last thirty years especially bear out her thesis, but in ways that she did not fully anticipate. For that reason, a review of her book now provides a unique opportunity to examine the current world crisis from the vantage point of universal history.

The purpose of this review is to analyze the false-axiomatic assumptions of the culture of the Fourteenth century, as empirically described by Tuchman; while at the same time to identify her errors of omission. In this way, such a review will serve the purpose of identifying both the cause of that Dark Age, and of the one we face today, while showing how mankind created a Renaissance in the mid-Fifteenth century, and what such a Renaissance must necessarily entail today.



## The Origin of the New Dark Age

The primary weakness of Tuchman's book is, that it fails to locate the historical origin of the Fourteenth-century Dark Age in a key turning point in the previous century. The origin of the mid-Fourteenth-century Dark Age lay in the success of the reactionary Guelph League in turning back the clock of history, following the death of Hohenstaufen Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, on December 19, 1250.

In 1239, a Venetian-controlled faction, known as the Guelph League, centered around the powerful Este family of Ferrara, launched a series of wars throughout Europe, against the then-existing trends toward the establishment of European nation-states, in order to consolidate an ultra-feudalist, usurious world order. This was part of a sweeping change in the correlation of forces in Europe, following financier-oligarchical Venice's successful exploitation of its control over the Fourth Crusade (1202-04).

After the killing of both Manfred and Conradin Hohenstaufen in 1266, the Black Guelph unleashed chaos, economic ruin, and the rising power of a group of Venice-sponsored "Lombard bankers," typified by the House of Bardi, throughout Europe. Through feudal wars, and "free trade"-linked financial speculation, Europe's culture and economy collapsed, and death rates skyrocketed. The collapse of the resulting debt bubble and ensuing bankruptcy of the House of Bardi, unleashed the final stage of that decay.

The primary political consequence of Tuchman's failure to identify the seeds of the Fourteenth-century Dark Age in the political ascendancy of the Guelph in the mid-Thirteenth century, is to potentially blind us today to their descendants' role in fostering the subsequent collapse. The Este, one of the leading families of the Guelph party, are represented today by their distant cousins, the royal family of Britain (the Hanover branch of the Bavarian Welf [Guelf] family), *primus inter pares* of the modern oligarchical faction; and, by such right-wing pro-feudalist families as the Pallavicini and the Colonna, who are today arrayed against Pope John Paul II and the tradition of Pope Leo XIII within the Catholic Church, as well as against the forces associated with Lyndon LaRouche globally. In other words, because of the continued "species existence" of Europe's oligarchical families, today's potential new Dark Age is being engineered by the descendants of the architects of the last one.

The second, related weakness of the Tuchman book is, that she fails to make intelligible the emergence of the Golden Renaissance in the mid-1400's. To give her credit, she describes the self-weakening of the fixed system which produced the Dark Age, the necessary emergence of the nation-state, and the significance of the intellectual contributions of the poets Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304-74), and of the teaching order known as the Brothers of the Common Life, who created the cultural basis for the Golden Renaissance of the Fifteenth century.

However, she fails to mention at all, either the decisive

role of the 1439-40 Council of Florence, or the work of Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa. Instead, she writes: "Times were to grow worse over the next fifty-odd years, until at some imperceptible moment, by some mysterious chemistry, energies were refreshed, ideas broke out of the mold of the Middle Ages into new realms, and humanity found itself redirected."

Contrary to Tuchman, who thus renders the emergence of the Renaissance entirely obscure—"some mysterious chemistry"—, the Renaissance occurred as a result of the Florentine Council's ecumenical re-affirmation of the "*filioque*" clause of the Nicene Creed. "*Filioque*" literally means "and the son." By stating that the "Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son," the Nicene Creed affirms the principle that, since the Son, Christ, is not only God, but also man, all men and women, who are created in the image of God, *imago Dei*, are capable of agapic reason. (In the Christian trinity, the Holy Spirit is love, and the Son is the *Logos*, or Reason.) Thus, the "*filioque*" principle uniquely emphasizes the cognitive capacity of each man and woman made in the image of the Creator—in opposition to the Roman Empire's Code of Diocletian, which created the political structure of European feudalism based on the anti-human condition of peasant serfdom.

The significance of Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, who himself was a product of the Brothers of the Common Life and the key organizer of the Council, was that he contributed directly both to the development of the sovereign nation-state, through his work *On Catholic Concordance* (1433), and to the founding of modern science, through his *On Learned Ignorance* (1440). Both contributions flowed directly from Cusanus' belief in the primacy of man's cognitive capacity, reflected in the *filioque* doctrine.

With these two weaknesses identified and corrected, we now turn to Tuchman's treatment of the "calamitous Fourteenth century." Our purpose is not only to give the reader a mirror image of the degeneration of our own culture over the last thirty years. Our purpose is also to identify the feudalistic, false-axiomatic assumptions of the last Dark Age, in order to arm today's reader against similar assumptions prevalent today. Moreover, just as the destruction of the last Dark Age resulted in a self-weakening of the enemies of humanity, thus creating the opportunity for a Renaissance, so today, by ridding ourselves of false-axiomatic assumptions and by becoming more self-consciously in the living image of God ourselves, we can and must seize the opportunity which the current global crisis affords us, to reverse mankind's descent into a new Dark Age, and to launch a new Renaissance.



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*The Chivalric Delusion: Knights battle during siege of a fortified town in the Middle Ages. (French manuscript illumination, c.1250)*

Our primary advantage today is that the Golden Renaissance, which saved mankind from the last Dark Age, gave rise to that institution—the sovereign nation-state—which the financial oligarchy has been attempting to obliterate in the name of supra-national globalism over the last thirty years. On the one hand, it is this very attempt that is propelling the world once again into a new Dark Age. On the other hand, it is the very existence of the nation-state inherited from the Fifteenth-century Renaissance, however currently weakened, that is the key to humanity’s future. By defending the sovereign nation-state, and by forging a family of nation-states committed to scientific and technological progress, we can complete the unfinished task of our forefathers, and eliminate the parasitical financial oligarchy once and for all.

## Return to Anti-Scientific Feudalism

The prevailing, false-axiomatic assumption today, is the Malthusian view that there are “natural” limits to both economic and population growth, along with the related view that mankind has reached these limits and entered a post-industrial Information Age, in which productive industry is no longer either necessary or desired. In fostering this view, the financial oligarchy has sought to return to a period—such as the Fourteenth century—before the Industrial Age and universal education, when almost the entire population were essentially ignorant slaves.

The feudal world was a fixed, primarily agrarian order, whose political structure derived from the decrees of the Roman Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284-305). In the year 301, Diocletian issued an edict which fixed the maximum prices of commodities and wages throughout the Empire. His accompanying rapacious system of tax collection, making civil officials responsible for payment of fixed sums, laid the basis for serfdom, by tying peasants to the land to meet their tax burden. Diocletian’s “reforms” were followed by those of the Emperor

Theodosius (346-395), which legally bound the Roman citizen to his occupation for life.

Related to these false assumptions of post-industrialism, is the idea that industrial development has caused global warming and similar ecologist concoctions, which can only be prevented by deindustrialization. This completely false idea is so pervasive, that it has been accepted by many prominent scientists and governments, *despite* the fact that the evidence suggests just the *opposite* to be the case, i.e., that the world is, in fact, entering the next Ice Age cycle.

The consequences of such an anti-industrial bias can be clearly seen in the Fourteenth century. Unrecognized at the time, the Fourteenth century was ushered in with the onset of what has since been recognized as the Little Ice Age, which lasted until about 1700. At the inception of the Little Ice Age, the Baltic Sea froze over twice, in 1303 and 1306-07. Years of cold, storms, and heavy rains followed, and the level of the Caspian Sea rose. Owing to this Ice Age, communication with Greenland was gradually lost, Norse settlements there were extinguished, and cultivation of grain disappeared from Iceland and was severely reduced in Scandinavia. Overall, a shorter growing season resulted.

Lacking an emphasis on scientific and technological progress necessary to increase agricultural production and improve transportation and preservation of food stuffs, the capacity of the population to sustain itself, including its immunological resistance to disease, was

significantly reduced. In 1315, unusually heavy rains came, crops failed all over Europe, and famine ensued. People were undernourished and consequently more vulnerable to hunger and disease. A contagion of dysentery prevailed in these years, and famines recurred intermittently after 1315-16, in 1328-29 and 1338-39.

Such natural disasters can indeed be overcome, but only to the extent that one rejects the limits-to-growth ideology reflected in the Diocletian decrees, and fosters instead the intellectual capacities of the entire population, for the purpose of improving economic productivity through scientific and technological revolutions. But, in the Fourteenth century, a demographic and financial-economic implosion ensued, similar to that which the world faces today, if today's financial oligarchy succeeds in turning back the clock.

## The Church Disintegrates

Just as we are today witnessing the disintegration of institutions such as the family, as well as political and religious institutions, under conditions of economic disintegration, so, too, in the first twenty years of the Fourteenth century, the Church, the mainstay of feudal society, itself began to disintegrate. The immediate issue was temporal (i.e., secular) versus papal authority. In response to the attempt of France's King Philip IV (the Fair) to levy taxes on the clergy without the consent of the Pope, Pope Boniface VIII issued a Bull in 1296 forbidding the clergy to pay any form of tax to any lay ruler. In 1302, Boniface issued a second Bull asserting papal authority in the most absolute terms: "It is necessary to salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman pontiff."

Philip responded with a council to judge the Pope on charges including heresy, blasphemy, murder, sodomy, simony, and sorcery. When Boniface then drew up a Bull to excommunicate the King, on September 7, 1303, agents of the King seized the 86-year-old Pope in his summer retreat near Rome to bring him before a council. After three days, Boniface was freed, but died within a month. A French Pope was elected as Clement V, who settled in Avignon, France, rather than going to Rome, thus beginning what became known as the "Babylonian Exile." He would be followed by six French popes in succession from 1305-78.

The false-axiomatic assumption which led to the Church's disintegration, was its concept of itself as a theocratic, supra-national government, having supreme authority over the state, including the fraudulent papal claim to exercise the right to crown the Emperor. (The

document upon which this claim was made, the so-called "Donation of Constantine," was later proved to be a forgery.)

The Church's maintenance of its Papal Estates in Italy, over which it held feudal suzerainty, also led the Church to engage in balance-of-power politics and feudal warfare in its own name, in opposition to the emergence of an Italian nation-state. Moreover, so enmeshed was the Church with the feudal system, that the Vatican bureaucracy, the Curia, and the Vatican's finances, were dominated by the most powerful feudal families.

As long as the Church insisted on this temporal power, it undermined its own proper universal moral authority.

With the papacy reduced to a tool of the French crown, the order among nations also rapidly deteriorated into a prolonged state of warfare. When Philip IV died in 1314, he was succeeded by his three sons, Louis X, Philip V, and Charles IV, each of whom reigned less than six years and died aged 27, 28, and 33, respectively, each without leaving a male successor. Philip of Valois, the son of a brother of Philip IV, became king. Edward III of England, son of Philip IV's daughter, Isabel, had also made a claim to the French throne, which was rejected. In 1337, Philip confiscated Aquitaine, a French province which the English claimed as their own, whereupon Edward III announced himself the rightful king of France. At the time, the population of France was 21 million, five times England's slightly more than 4 million. Nevertheless, England invaded France in 1339, thus beginning the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), in which both sides were manipulated by the Venetian-controlled Black Guelph Florentine banking families.

## The Chivalric Delusion

As Tuchman documents, the culture of the Fourteenth century was dominated by chivalry, an anti-Christian, pagan code, which was developed at the time of the Twelfth-century Crusades by Benedictines. The chivalric belief structure originated with feudalism, and was adopted by the caste of mounted warriors or knights, who made up the private armies bound to the feudal nobility.

In the Fourteenth century, the nobility in France amounted to 200,000 people in 40-50,000 families, out of a total population of 21 million. Thus, in France, the warrior class of chivalric knights derived from approximately one percent of the population.

The Church repeatedly intervened to temper the anarchy of feudal warfare (although it would later foster its existence). The Church condemned the judicial duel and

the tournament. Through two initiatives, called the Peace of God and the Truce of God, the Church tried to check the excesses of private warfare, by urging knights to pledge themselves not to attack the weak and the defenseless, such as widows, orphans, merchants, and unarmed clergy, and to refrain from use of arms on holy days.

However, with the Crusades, the Church embraced and gave a religious significance to a class of society and to an activity, which it had previously attempted to temper. An initiation ceremony was created by the Church, including a vigil of arms, the ritual bath, and blessing of the sword. Knighthood was received in the name of the Trinity after a ceremony of purification, confession, and communion. The feudal warrior was supposedly thus transformed into a Christian knight, whose task was to champion orthodoxy against heresy and schism, and to defend Christendom against the “infidels.”

The net result of this was not that the knights were transformed, but that the Church became complicit, under the guise of “just warfare,” in crimes of feudal barbarity.

The fulcrum of the chivalric principle was not passion for truth and justice, but rather loyalty to the feudal overlord. The relationship of citizen to the State did not yet exist, and the knight’s concept of loyalty derived from the time when a pledge between lord and vassal was the only form of government. A knight who broke his oath of fealty was charged with treason for betraying the order of knighthood. The concept of loyalty did not preclude treachery, however. As Tuchman writes: “When a party of armed knights gained entrance to a walled town by declaring themselves allies and then proceeded to slaughter the defenders, chivalry was evidently not violated, no oath having been made to the burghers.” Thus, rather than being a champion of justice, the knight increasingly became a predator and aggressor, on behalf of the narrowly defined self-interest and arbitrary whims of his lord, with whom he had a private covenant, and on behalf of his own vainglory, all under the guise of the Benedictine-supplied chivalric code.

In the warfare of the Fourteenth century, chivalry was a

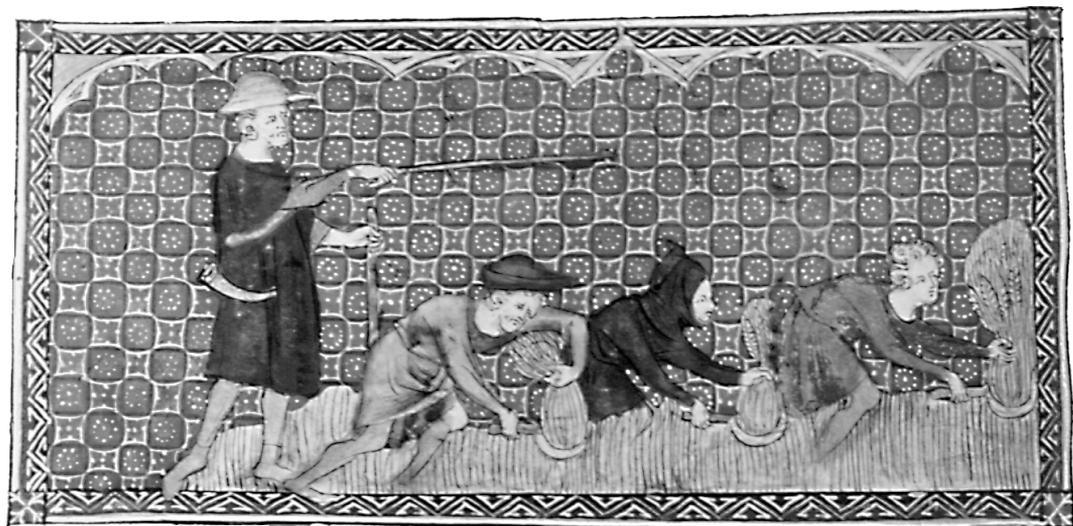
constant obstacle to victory, especially for the French, who were most imbued with the chivalric conceptions of personal honor and glory.

The French knight conceived of combat as necessarily personal and corporal. He therefore despised the “artillery” of the day, archery, which was engaged in at a distance, and could be undertaken by commoners, who lacked the expensive trappings of knighthood—horse, armor, and page to assist one in combat—available only to members of the feudal military caste.

As a result, from the very beginning of the Hundred Years War, the English repeatedly won crucial battles by virtue of a military innovation, the long-bow. In 1337, the English King Edward III fostered prowess in archery by prohibiting, on pain of death, all sport except archery, and cancelling the debts of all workmen who manufactured the bows of yew and their arrows.

Throughout the century-long warfare, including in such battles as Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356), and Agincourt (1415), French tactics refused archery an essential place, and French chivalry refused to concede a role in war to the non-noble combatant. Initially, this reflected both contempt for the common man and fear for the loss of chivalry’s primacy in battle. Later in the century, it reflected fear of insurrection. In 1393, the French government passed an ordinance prohibiting games, in order to encourage archery, but the nobles insisted it be revoked, fearing common people would gain too effective a weapon against the noble estate.

Thus, although most of the wars were fought on French soil and the French vastly outnumbered the English, the code of chivalry, which was based upon a rejection of the truly Christian view that all men and women



*Legacy of the Roman Emperor Diocletian: Feudal serfs harvest under the supervision of a bailiff. (English manuscript illumination, early 14th century)*

are created in the image of God, precluded an in-depth mobilization of the French citizenry, and thus, repeatedly resulted in French defeat.

The knights lacked innovation, held to tradition, and gave little thought or professional study to tactics. Scorning both archers and the use of commoners as infantry, the knights employed tactics relying upon their own cavalry charge, followed by hand-to-hand fighting on foot. Clad in weighty armor, which led one poet to describe a knight as “a terrible worm in an iron cocoon,” knights had limited mobility. Thus, battle was a more or less fixed, set-piece engagement. If a knight fell down, the weight of his armor prevented him from regaining his footing. Many knights actually died of heart attacks, rather than of fatal wounds.

In the Battle of Crécy in 1346, for example, the French knights opened battle by racing uphill against the English, without giving their crossbowmen a chance to soften the English line. When the English knights advanced on foot, they were preceded by archers and supported by pikemen and Welshmen with long knives, who went among the fallen and slew them on the ground. As Tuchman observes: “England’s advantage lay in combining the use of those excluded from chivalry—the Welsh knifemen, the pikemen, and, above all, the trained yeomen who pulled the long-bow—with the action of the armored knight.”

In her Epilogue, Tuchman describes how the same chivalric mentality on the part of the French resulted in the French loss at the battle of Agincourt. In this battle, described by Shakespeare in his *Henry V*, the French army outnumbered the English invaders by three or four to one. Repeating the mistakes of the past, the French Constable rejected an offer of 6,000 crossbowmen from the citizen militia of Paris. No change in tactics was introduced, and the only technological development was even heavier plate armor, which only further reduced mobility.

As rain fell during the night prior to battle, the French waded the horses, churning the ground into a soft mud. The French had not attempted to select a battleground where their superiority in numbers could be effectively deployed. With no commander-in-chief able to impose a tactical plan, the nobles vied for the glory of a place in the front line. The archers and crossbowmen were placed behind, where they were in fact useless.

In their overcrowding, the dismounted knights of the French front line could barely wield their weapons and, hampered by the mud, fell into disarray. The English archers, who, wearing no armor, were fully mobile, threw down their bows and rushed in with axes and other weapons. Many of the French, impeded by their heavy

armor, could not defend themselves.

As Tuchman also points out, William Tell’s legendary defiance of the Austrian Hapsburg tyrant Gessler, at the start of the Fourteenth century, personified the struggle against feudal tyranny and chivalry. William Tell, as immortalized in Friedrich Schiller’s drama, reflected the importance of the long-bow in warfare against the mounted knight. On two additional occasions, at Morgarten and Laupen in 1315 and 1339, the Swiss made military history by defeating the Hapsburg cavalry, by taking advantage of the mountainous terrain.

What contributed to the century-long blood-letting, was the fact that, on both sides, most knights went to war principally to advance themselves. Under feudalism, with the primary loyalty of a knight to his lord, neither a national army nor a unified command was possible, and without centralized national finance, an effective military defense of the nation could not be financed. A national strategic aim was not in their minds, because the sovereign nation-state would not come into being until its emergence in the year 1461 under Louis XI. Therefore, they had no republican concept of victory, which is based upon the defense and development of both one’s own and the enemy’s population.

## Banking Collapse, Famine, Plague

Edward III had financed the war against France through usurious loans underwritten by the Venetian-controlled Florentine banking firms of the Bardi and the Peruzzi, which were secured on the expected revenue

from a tax on wool. When the tax brought in too little (production of wool in England had begun to decline from about 1310) and Edward could not repay, the Peruzzi failed in 1343, the Bardi suspended a year later, and their crash brought down a third firm, the Acciovoli. England’s sovereign state debt default initiated a full-scale depression. Capital vanished, stores and workshops closed, wages and purchases stopped.

But the banking collapse of the 1340’s was not merely an immediate result of England’s default. The collapse was the result of a huge international “bubble” of currency speculation created by the Venetians from 1275 through 1350. The Bardi, Peruzzi, and Acciovoli family banks were all founded in the years around 1250. These were “Black Guelph” noble families allied to Venice. Even before the crash, the Venetian-controlled Floren-



tine banks, which operated free of any national regulation, as is the case today with globalization, progressively depressed the real physical economy in order to feed the speculative debt bubble. Through its monopolistic control over finances, and the imposition of I.M.F.-style “free trade” and conditionalities policies, Venice stopped the emergence of embryonic nation-states in France, England, and Spain.

Economic devastation in Florence and Siena resulting from the banking collapse, was followed, first by the renewal of war between England and France in 1346, then, by famine in 1347, and, finally, by the first outbreak of plague—the “Black Death”—in Messina in 1347.\*

Tuchman describes the symptoms of the victims of the Black Death as follows: “The diseased sailors showed strange black swelling about the size of an egg or an apple in the armpits and groin. The swellings oozed blood and pus and were followed by spreading boils and black blotches on the skin from internal bleeding. The sick suffered severe pain and died quickly within five days of the first symptoms. As the disease spread, other symptoms of continuous fever and spitting of blood appeared instead of swellings or buboes. These victims coughed and sweated heavily and died even more quickly, within three days or less, sometimes in twenty-four hours.”

The disease was present in two forms: bubonic plague, which infected the bloodstream, causing buboes and internal bleeding, and was spread by contact; and pneumonic plague, a more virulent type that infected the lungs and was spread by respiratory infection. The presence of both at once caused the high mortality and speed of contagion.

In Avignon, it was said, 400 died daily; 7,000 houses



*Religious Irrationalism: Procession of Flagellants during an outbreak of the Black Death. (Flemish manuscript illumination, 14th century)*

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emptied by death were shut up; a single graveyard received 11,000 corpses in six weeks; half the city’s inhabitants reportedly died, including nine cardinals, or one-third of the total. When graveyards filled up, bodies at Avignon were thrown into the Rhône River until mass burial pits were dug. Everywhere reports spoke of the sick dying too fast for the living to bury. Families dumped their own relatives into pits or buried them so hastily and thinly “that dogs dragged them forth and devoured their bodies.”

Perhaps even more devastating than the horrible loss of human life, was the breakdown of the moral social order. The response to the plague was not an increase in solidarity, but just the opposite. Out of concern for their own survival, parents abandoned their children, women left their husbands, and priests refused to take confessions. As Boccaccio wrote, “The Black Death froze the hearts of the people.”

By January 1348, the plague had penetrated France via Marseilles. In a given area, the plague lasted four to six months and then faded, except in the larger cities, where it abated during the winter, only to reappear in spring to rage for another six months. In 1349, it resumed in Paris, spread to Picardy, Flanders, and the Low Countries, and from England to Scotland and Ireland, as well as to Norway. From there, the plague passed into Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Iceland, and as far as Greenland. Although the mortality rate varied, the estimate of modern demographers is that for the area extending from India to Iceland, about one-third

\* Even transmission of the plague into Europe was not accidental, but resulted from the ecological devastation caused by Venice’s “geopolitical” sponsorship of the Mongol Horde’s rampage across Central Asia. See Paul Gallagher.—Ed.

of the world's population died. A third of Europe would have meant about 20 million deaths. By the year 1380, the population of Europe was reduced by about 40 percent, and by nearly 50 percent by the end of the century.

## Religious Irrationalism

In the Fourteenth century, the idea of animal- or insect-borne contagion did not exist. There was no suspicion of the real carriers, rats and fleas (in fact, the actual plague bacillus, *Pasturella pestis*, remained undiscovered for another five hundred years). Owing to the lack of a scientific outlook in the culture, and the collapse of the social order, there was widespread abandonment of public health measures which would have slowed the spread of the epidemic.

Increasingly, people resorted to astrological explanations, which doubled the irrationality, since the position of planets could not explain the ongoing contagion. In October 1348, Philip VI asked the medical faculty of the University of Paris for a report. The doctors ascribed it to a triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in the 40th degree of Aquarius, said to have occurred on March 20, 1345.

The devastation affecting humanity gave rise to irrational religious fundamentalism, which is increasingly characteristic of our own times, and for the same reason—rejection of real science. It was widely thought that the end of the world had arrived. The plague was viewed as the wrath of God to punish mankind for its sins.

By the spring of 1348, demagogues arose, who manipulated popular hysteria, blaming the Jews for the plague. Irrational religious movements, like the Flagellants, appeared. Although they originally only flagellated themselves, they soon found an easier victim: in every town they entered, the Flagellants slaughtered the Jewish population.

Pope Clement attempted to check the hysteria in a Bull of September 1348, in which he said that Christians who imputed the pestilence to the Jews, had been “seduced by that liar, the Devil.” He pointed out that, “by a mysterious decree of God,” the plague was afflicting all peoples, including Jews; that it raged in places where no Jews lived, and that elsewhere they were victims like everyone else; therefore the charge that they caused it was “without plausibility.”

Clement also issued a Bull calling for the Flagellants' dispersal and arrest; the University of Paris denied their claim of divine inspiration; and Philip VI forbade public flagellation on pain of death. But, without a scientific

approach to the epidemic causing their hysteria, the hysteria continued.

## The Seeds of Social Upheaval

With the vast loss of life brought about by the plague, production slowed, goods became scarce, and prices soared. In France, the price of wheat increased four-fold by 1350. At the same time, the shortage of labor brought a concerted demand for higher wages. In many guilds, workers struck for higher pay and shorter hours.

The response of the ruling feudal oligarchies was repression. In 1349, the English issued an ordinance freezing wages at 1347, pre-plague levels. Penalties were established for refusal to work, for leaving a place of employment to seek higher pay, and for the offer of higher pay by employers. In 1351, this ordinance was issued by the Parliament as the Statute of Laborers. It was essentially a recodification of the Diocletian Code. Every able-bodied person under sixty years of age, without means of subsistence, was forced to work for anyone who required him. (This statute, down to our own century, has been the basis for “conspiracy” laws against labor's efforts to organize.) Stocks were set up in every town for punishment of offenders. In 1360, imprisonment replaced fines as the penalty, and fugitive laborers were declared outlaws. If caught, they were to be branded on the forehead with an “F” for “fugitive.”

Clearly, what was lacking, was any concept of human labor power, that is, the cognitive capacity of man created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), as the source of all wealth generation, through the productive transformation of nature as mediated through science and technology. The failure to so develop the cognitive powers of labor and to raise the standard of the living of the population, something later pioneered by the Brothers of the Common Life, only led to further economic and social devolution during the course of the century.

## The Rise of the Free Companies in France

In 1351, the first year of Jean II's reign in France, the currency suffered eighteen alterations, and seventy in the course of the next decade. In 1353, Europe was under external attack, the Turks having entered Europe by seizing Gallipoli. The King's idea for dealing with the crisis, was to form his own chivalric order, called the Order of the Star, which was intended to rival King Edward's Order of the Garter. Thus, rather than breaking from the code of chivalry, Jean resorted instead to the very tradition which was at the center of France's devastation.

In 1355, King Edward invaded France once again, and in 1356, at the battle of Poitiers, France suffered a military debacle. Marshal Clermont had advised blockading the English, rather than attacking them in their protected position; but the dictates of chivalry forbade such a course of action. In the battle, the French king himself was captured by the English. In May 1357, King Jean, with his son and other noble prisoners, were taken back to London. France had thus been decapitated.

Under these conditions, the Third Estate of Paris, consisting of merchants, lawyers, and doctors, skilled craftsmen, day laborers, and peasants, attempted to impose limits on the monarchy. However, outside Paris, the breakdown of authority was catastrophic. This vacuum was filled by the Free Companies, composed of English, Welsh, and other mercenaries. Gathered at first in groups of twenty to fifty around a captain, they merged, organized, and spread. They exacted tribute from travellers, raided the countryside, imposed ransoms on prosperous villages, and burned poor ones. Companies of this kind had existed since the Twelfth century and proliferated especially in Italy. Led by professional captains, the companies, sometimes numbering as many as 2,000 to 3,000 men, were composed largely of exiles, outlaws, and landless or bankrupt adventurers. In the absence of organized national armies, they filled a need and became accepted. The companies in France, though primarily English, also attracted French knights. In the anarchy after Poitiers, knights and brigands became interchangeable.

The French provinces, believing the royal power to be their only defense against the Free Companies, backed King Jean's son, the Dauphin. In 1358, the Dauphin ordered the nobles to provision their castles. A peasant uprising ensued on May 28, in response to the seizure of their goods by the nobles. In theory, the tiller of the soil, and his livestock, were immune from pillage and the sword. However, chivalry did not apply outside the knights' own class. By June 24, 1358, 20,000 French peasants had been killed, and the countryside converted to a wasteland. Like every insurrection of the century, this one, too, was smashed, and with it, the Third Estate in Paris.

Although King Jean initially agreed to surrender virtually all of western France and a huge ransom in the Treaty of London, on May 8, 1360, the Treaty of Bretigny was signed, in which the terms were scaled back, but were still draconian. Newly discharged soldiers swelled the ranks of the mercenary private armies. In order to pay his ransom, King Jean himself sold his eleven-year-old daughter Isabelle in marriage to the nine-year-old son of the Visconti family of Milan, for 600,000 gold florins.

In the spring of 1361, twelve years after the onset of the first plague, the dreaded pest reappeared in France and England. With the return of the plague, people lived in constant fear of recurrence of the epidemic, just as they lived in fear of the return of the Free Companies.

When he was unable to fulfill the terms of the Treaty of Bretigny, King Jean, incredibly, voluntarily returned to captivity in England in January 1364. He died in April.

In a pastoral letter of 1360, Pope Innocent VI denounced the Free Companies: "Insensible to the fear of God, the sons of iniquity invade and wreck churches . . ." His successor, Urban V, issued two Bulls of Excommunication in 1364, which were supposed to have the effect of prohibiting any cooperation with or provisioning of the companies, and which offered plenary indulgence to all who died in combatting them.

In Italy, the companies were used as official mercenary armies in public wars. In France, they were out of control. But instead of creating a permanent national army to demobilize them, in 1365, an attempt was made by the Pope, the Emperor, and the King of France to free France of the menace, by paying them to go elsewhere—a crusade was declared against the Turks in Hungary. This, however, did not materialize until the end of the century.



## The Papal Schism

In 1367, Pope Urban V, a former Benedictine monk, decided to return to Rome from France, in order to restore the authority of the papacy and secure the papal estates. During the absence of the papacy, the population of Rome had fallen from 50,000 before the Black Death, to 20,000. In 1369, the goal of reunification with the Eastern Church seemed at hand, when the Byzantine Emperor, John V Paleologus, came to Rome to meet Urban. He hoped to obtain Western help against the Turks, in return for rejoining the Roman Church, but this possibility fell apart when the churches could not agree on ritual. (It was only in the year 1440, at the Council of Florence, that such a reunion was temporarily achieved, based upon the notion of unity in diversity with regard to ritual.) In 1370, harassed by renewed revolt in the Papal States, Urban returned to Avignon, where he died two months later.

Religious unrest was widespread throughout Europe,

owing primarily to the corruption in the Church. Petrarch, who remained loyal to the Church at Rome, described the papacy at Avignon as “the impious Babylon, the hell on earth, the sink of vice, the sewer of the world. There is in it neither faith, nor charity, nor religion, nor the fear of God. . . . All the filth and wickedness of the world have run together here. . . . Fornication, incest, rape, adultery are the lascivious delights of the pontifical games.”

Moreover, religious opposition to the Church’s corruption cohered with political opposition to the Church on the part of national interests. In England, John Wyclif proposed the disendowment of the temporal property of the Church, and the exclusion of the clergy from temporal government. These proposals obtained significant support from the national institutions of England, since the Church was allied to France under conditions of war. The extent to which the French controlled the papacy at this time, is indicated by the fact that, while at Avignon, the Popes named 113 Frenchmen to the College of Cardinals, out of a total of 134 nominations.

The Church was further discredited by its resort to the Inquisition in France. In 1372, a group called the Brethren of the Free Spirit was condemned by the Inquisition, its books burned in Paris, and a woman leader of the French group, Jeanne Dabenton, burned at the stake. The resort to such cruel methods merely fuelled the disintegration of the Church. Like the State’s use of the death penalty today (which the Roman Catholic Church supported until only recently, when Pope John Paul II announced his opposition to it), the institutional use of violence had the effect of undermining the moral authority of the administering institution.

In 1373-74, the Black Death recurred in Italy and southern France. In the Rhineland, a new hysteria appeared in the form of a dancing mania. The participants were convinced they were possessed by demons. Forming circles in streets and churches, they danced for hours, calling on demons by name to cease tormenting them. As the mania spread to Holland and Flanders, the dancers moved in groups from place to place, like the Flagellants. Sexual revels often followed the dancing.

In 1375, the war for control of the Papal States had



*Papal Schism: Coronation of Clement V in 1305, inaugurates the “Babylonian Captivity” of the Popes at Avignon. (Miniature from the Cronaca Villani)*

The Granger Collection, NY

resumed in Italy. Guelph-controlled Florence organized a revolt of the Papal States, and formed a league against the papacy. To reconquer the Papal States, Cardinal Robert of Geneva persuaded Gregory XI to hire the Bretons, one of the worst mercenary Free Companies. When the Bretons failed to take Bologna and suffered several defeats at the hands of the Florentines, Cardinal Robert determined to set an example through the commission of an atrocity. In the city of Cesena, swearing clemency by a solemn oath on his cardinal’s hat, he persuaded the men of the city to lay down their arms, then summoned his mercenaries and ordered a general massacre. The toll of the dead was between 2,500 and 5,000.

In 1376, Gregory XI returned to Rome, which he entered in January 1377. Fifteen months later, in March 1378, he died. Seeing a chance to end the reign of French popes, the citizens of Rome urged the election of an Italian. On April 9, a compromise Italian candidate, Urban VI, was elected, whom the French cardinals believed they could control.

According to Tuchman, papal power went to Urban’s head. He publicly chastised the cardinals and refused to return to Avignon. By July 1378, the French cardinals began to circulate the claim that the election had been invalid. On August 9, they pronounced his election void on the grounds that it had been conducted in “fear of their lives.” In a further manifesto, they anathematized Urban as “Anti-Christ,

devil, apostate, tyrant, deceiver, elected-by-force.”

In a conclave of September 20, the French cardinals elected an Anti-Pope from among their own ranks. Incredibly, the person they elected and crowned as Clement VII, with the support of France, was none other than Robert of Geneva, the “Butcher of Cesena,” who took up his residence at Avignon.

The papal schism was thus an attempt by France to retain the support of the papacy in her war with England. France was followed by Naples, Spain, and Scotland in supporting Clement VII. But England, Flanders, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and Portugal accepted Urban.

The moral damage done by the schism was incalculable. Half the Christian world regarded the other half as heretical and excommunicate. Each side claimed the sacraments administered by the other were invalid. Each side claimed that the other pope was the Anti-Christ. (In later centuries, Venice would use this same “divide-and-conquer” technique to manipulate the Protestant/Roman Catholic, Reformation/Counter-Reformation conflict.)

Moreover, since papal revenue was cut in half, the financial effect of the schism was catastrophic. To keep each papacy afloat, simony (the selling of church offices and favors) increased, benefices and promotions were sold, charges for spiritual dispensations (“indulgences”) were increased. Instead of reform, abuses multiplied, further undermining the faith. The rift in Christendom was to last for forty years.

## Working Class and Peasant Revolts

As Tuchman points out, what had happened in the last thirty years of the century, as a result of the depression, plague, and war, was a weakening of acceptance of the system, an awakening sense that authority could be challenged and that change was possible.

Beginning in 1378, the accumulated miseries of the working class gave rise to workers’ insurrections in Florence, and one year later in Ghent. Over five years, insurrections succeeded each other in Florence, Flanders, Languedoc, Paris, England, and then back to Flanders and northern France.

Membership in the guilds was shut off to the ordinary journeyman. In many trades, work was farmed out to workers in their homes, and often at lower wages, to their wives and children, whose employment was forbidden in the guilds. The imposition of 120-150 obligatory religious holidays a year kept earnings down. Workers were forbidden to strike, but they formed associations to press for higher wages.

In Florence, for example, employees worked at fixed

wages, often below subsistence level, for sixteen to eighteen hours a day. Their wages might be withheld to cover waste or damage to raw materials. Workers could be flogged, or imprisoned, blacklisted, or have a hand cut off for resistance to employers. Agitators for the right to organize could be hung. In 1345, ten wool-carders were put to death on this charge.

The Church, because of its alliance with the feudal system, effectively supported the oppression of labor. A pastoral letter issued by a Bishop in Florence at the time declared that spinners could be excommunicated for wasting their wool.

In England in 1381, a peasant revolt erupted, precipitated by the third poll tax in four years. The peasants wanted abolition of the old bonds, the right to commute services to rent, and riddance of all the restrictions heaped up by the Statute of Laborers.

However, none of the insurrections were successful. The leaders were hanged and the uprisings suppressed. They were unsuccessful, because they were merely rebelling against the symptoms of the crisis without any concept of its cause or of an alternative organization of society.

Today, the labor movement is similarly faced with an effort on the part of the financial oligarchy to lower its standard of living and deny it the right to organize and to strike. In the United States, despite its history of trade union organizations and labor legislation dating from the 1930’s, workers are being fired and blacklisted for organizing unions, and striking workers can now be permanently replaced by strikebreakers. In the last three decades, the percentage of American workers organized into unions has declined from over one-third to only 17 percent, which decline has only recently begun to be reversed, under the new leadership of the A.F.L.-C.I.O.

Unfortunately, thus far, today’s labor movement has failed to learn the lessons of universal history. Like the incipient labor movement of the Fourteenth century, it lacks a program for reorganization of the bankrupt financial system, and for global and national economic reconstruction.

Beginning with Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the Roman Catholic Church formally broke with feudalism’s anti-labor outlook and policy, and through its social teaching undertook to defend the interests of labor as primary. However, even today, that policy is compromised by the Church’s failure to break decisively with the neo-liberal policies of the International Monetary Fund, whose Managing Director, Michel Camdessus, is a nominal Catholic, and with the anti-labor policies of such Catholic neo-conservatives as Michael Novak and Rev. Richard Neuhaus.

## The End of the Century

The century ended in warfare, continued schism, madness, and regicide, the necessary consequences of the false, chivalric-feudal axiomatic assumptions which dominated the century as a whole. In the 1380's, the French engaged in three military adventures, all of which ended in failure. First, in 1382, the Duc d'Anjou crossed the Alps to make claim to the Kingdom of Naples; a secondary aim, not pursued, was to use force against Pope Urban. Then, in 1386, the French resolved to invade England to finish off the war and assure the supremacy of the French Pope. And finally, after a three-year truce was concluded with England in 1389, the French carried out an abortive crusade in 1390 against the Berber Kingdom of Tunis in North Africa.

In this same year, Pope Urban died and was replaced by Boniface IX. All of its adventures having failed, France then planned to march on Rome to oust Pope Boniface and install Pope Clement. This was called the Way of the Deed, conceived in opposition to the Way of Cession, or voluntary mutual abdication of both Popes, as advocated by the University of Paris. The latter course was fought for by Jean Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, who later distinguished himself by defending both the Brothers of the Common Life and Joan of Arc.

In 1388-90, the Black Death returned for the fourth time. The population of Europe was reduced to 40-50 percent of what it had been in the year 1300, and would fall even lower by 1450, before it would begin an exponential rate of increase in Europe and globally, as a consequence of the Renaissance sparked by the Council of Florence.

In 1392, the King of France, Charles VI, went insane. For the rest of his life, which was not to end until thirty years later in 1422, Charles was intermittently mad. Ultimately, the Way of the Deed was not pursued, owing both to the King's madness, and to an offer of peace from the English at the request of Pope Boniface.

On September 16, 1392, the French Pope, Clement, died. His successor was elected six days later, taking the name of Benedict XIII. However, the fact that he was Spanish and not French, diminished the French enthusiasm for the Way of the Deed. Nonetheless, for thirty years, Benedict resisted every pressure to step down. Retreating to a Spanish fortress, he died in 1422 at the age of 94.

The century closed with a final abortive chivalric adventure, a crusade to Nicopolis in 1396 against the Ottoman Turks, who were led by the Sultan Bajazet. The Turks were not immediately able to follow up their

devastating victory, because Bajazet had to turn eastward to defend against the Mongols led by Tamberlane (1336?-1405), whose forces met and defeated the Ottoman army at Ankara in 1402, capturing Bajazet alive. The latter events were to be portrayed in playwright Christopher Marlowe's two-part strategic study, *Tamberlane The Great*, which was first performed in 1588.

In 1398, the Emperor Wenceslas and the King of France met at Rheims, in a renewed effort to end the schism. However, as Tuchman writes: "Owing to the disabilities of the two major sovereigns, one incapacitated by alcohol and the other by insanity, the result was not what it might have been."

Finally, in 1399, Richard II, who was King of England from 1367 to 1399, was deposed by his cousin Henry of Bolingbroke. Compelled to resign the crown, Richard was imprisoned and, within a year, murdered. Bolingbroke, now Henry IV, would devote the remainder of his life to defending his usurped crown against Welsh revolt, baronial antagonists, and a son (Henry V) impatient to succeed him. In 1413, he died, and in 1415 his son invaded France to claim the French crown.

Thus, the calamitous Fourteenth century ended with usurpation and regicide, and consequently, the Fifteenth century commenced with perpetual warfare. It was a period much like the ending of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth centuries, which Friedrich Schiller characterized in his poem "The Commencement of the New Century":

Noble friend! Where is to peace imparted,  
Where to liberty a refuge place?  
In a storm the century is departed,  
And the new with murder shows its face.

## Cultural Paradigm-Shift

What occurred following the death of Frederick II in 1250 and the ascendancy of the Black Guelph in Europe, and what has occurred in our own century, since approximately 1962 with the onset of the neo-Malthusian youth counterculture, is a cultural paradigm-shift of an entropic type. The earlier, anti-entropic cultural values in both cases were shifted politically under conditions of traumatic shock. Under Frederick II, there had been a tendency toward the development of sovereign nation-states. So too, after World War II, the potential existed to



eliminate British-style colonialism and to implement American-style methods of economic development on a global scale. In both cases, the anti-entropic type of political-economic potential was deliberately reversed by the same oligarchical financial faction.

If we review the developments over the Fourteenth century, what we see is something analogous to a fixed Euclidean geometry. The cultural paradigm of the century is determined by a static, entropic *hypothesis*, i.e., feudalism, from which is derived a set of interacting definitions, axioms, and postulates. Insofar as qualitative change is precluded from such a

deductive geometry, the events which occur in such a geometry lead necessarily to devolution. A society which operates on this basis is a doomed culture, lacking the moral fitness to survive. It is like the society destroyed by the despot, whose ruined statue stands in the desert, which the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley characterizes in his poem "Ozymandias":

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

However, the very fact that a society is organized on the basis of an entropic hypothesis, which clearly violates the natural-law ordering of both human nature and the physical universe, dictates that such a society must necessarily devolve. This devolution, in turn, inexorably results not only in a self-weakening and discrediting of that society, but also in the potential for a reverse cultural-paradigm shift, back to an anti-entropic universe, in restored harmony with natural law. Again, as in Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," this potential for an alternative, anti-entropic course, is expressed "between the lines," through the principle of metaphor.



*Technological Innovation: English King Henry V's yeomen archers triumph over French feudal knights at the Battle of Agincourt, Oct. 25, 1415. (Manuscript illumination, 15th century)*

The Granger Collection, NY

The devolution itself poses an ontological paradox, which can only be resolved through cognition, that is, through the generation of a new, higher-order, anti-entropic hypothesis, a discovery of principle which leads us from a relatively inferior  $n$ -fold manifold, to a relatively superior  $n+1$ -fold manifold, as LaRouche has described it. Thus, the revolution or devolution of a physical-economic manifold, determined by scientific and technological progress or the lack thereof, is mediated through what Lyndon LaRouche has characterized as a moral, or  $m$ -fold, manifold of discoveries of Classical-artistic princi-

ples, including principles of history in the large.

At the point that the false-axiomatic assumptions of the Dark Age have shown themselves to be a deadly fantasy leading civilization to a tragic conclusion, a desire to abandon that failed ideology on the part of a population can be utilized by those world-historical individuals, who, owing to their passionate love (*agapē*) for truth and justice, have developed the required truthful ideas, through which justice can be secured, to effect the change necessary to continued human survival. To the extent that the cognitive capacity of a world-historical individual generates a validatable discovery of principle, the universe itself is so designed, that it is self-obliged to submit to mankind's will on that account.

## The Principles of Tragedy and Comedy in History

It is no accident, that such great dramatists as William Shakespeare and Friedrich Schiller turned to the Fourteenth and early Fifteenth centuries for the subject matter of many of their most important plays. Each, in his own way, attempted in his history plays, to give Classical

artistic expression to the quality of mind required to win the world-historical fight on behalf of the creation and defense of the sovereign nation-state, as the vehicle necessary to realize the divine qualities of man.

At the center of all great Classical art, both tragedy and comedy, is the paradoxical conflict between *agapē* and *eros*, anti-entropy and entropy. Tragedy conveys the necessity of *agapē* and anti-entropy negatively, through the entropic consequences of succumbing to *eros*. Comedy, as in Dante's *Divine Comedy* or in Schiller's play *William Tell*, conveys the positive resolution of this conflict, and the avoidance of an infernal Dark Age, through the agapic overcoming of entropy.

For example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a paradox is posed: "To be, or not to be." For the Danish state to continue to exist, Hamlet must resolve to act on the basis of love of justice and truth. Hamlet knows that the state of Denmark depends upon his overcoming his personal erotic fixations, to bring to justice his uncle Claudius, who has usurped the throne by murdering Hamlet's father. However, the solution to the crisis with which Hamlet is confronted, the leap from the  $n$ -fold manifold to the  $n+1$ -fold manifold, appears to him as a frightening, "undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns," the which Hamlet wishes to avoid at all costs.

One should compare Hamlet's comment, to that of Young Mortimer in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second*. Mortimer, who has deposed Edward II and is about to be beheaded for his crime by his son, King Edward III, says: "Weep not for Mortimer, that scorns the world, and, as a traveller, goes to discover countries yet unknown."

Hamlet, however, as opposed to the Young Mortimer in Marlowe's play, is the legitimate heir and not a usurper. In Hamlet's speech, Shakespeare transforms Mortimer's words embracing imminent death, to reflect Hamlet's fear of relinquishing his false-axiomatic assumption, despite the fact that his fear guarantees his own death and the destruction of the state. Hamlet recoils from the cognitive breakthrough and action required for him to be a legitimate agent of change. Consequently, he chooses "not to be," through a chivalric flight forward, resulting in a bloody denouement.

However, even in such tragic consequences, the audience sees in Hamlet their own capacity to act differently, to determine "to be," and not to shrink from the cognitive leap necessary to lead society from the  $n$ -fold manifold to the  $n+1$ -fold manifold. Hamlet himself identifies that capacity, which distinguishes man from a mere beast, as "godlike reason." But instead of acting upon his own *capax Dei*, he chooses to leave that capacity unused:

. . . What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more,  
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused.

(Act I, sc. iv, l. 33-39)

In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, we see a king, who, although he describes himself as "the deputy elected by the Lord," by virtue of the divine right of kings, not only fails to act on the basis of man's true nature as *imago Dei*, but having surrounded himself with flatterers, so oppresses his own people in violation of natural law, that he contributes to his own ouster. He procures the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, banishes and then deprives Henry Bolingbroke of his rightful inheritance, and converts England into a "tenement or pelting farm" and himself into a mere "landlord," rather than the king of the realm.

In contrast to Hamlet, Bolingbroke, who is the future Henry IV, does take action against a king unfit to rule. Hamlet, however, is the legitimate heir to his father's throne and his uncle, Claudius, the usurper; whereas Bolingbroke is the usurper and Richard II, the legitimate king. Thus, Richard II's ouster by Bolingbroke does not result in peace, but rather, as the Bishop of Carlisle prophesies, it leads eventually to the War of the Roses (1455-85) between the Houses of York and Lancaster:

Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny  
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd  
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls,  
O, if you raise this house against this house,  
It will the woefullest division prove  
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.

(Act IV, sc. i, l. 142-47)

In his fall from power, Richard II repeatedly compares his dethronement to the betrayal of Christ:

So Judas did to Christ; but he, in twelve,  
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand none.

(Act IV, sc. i, l. 170-72)

Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,  
Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates  
Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,  
And water cannot wash away your sin.

(Act IV, sc. i, l. 239-42)

However, in light of his arrogance of power, this false

self-comparison merely serves to underscore his failure as king to act in the living image of God.

In contrast to Hamlet, Richard II, and Bolingbroke (Henry IV), the characters of William Tell and Joan of Arc (1412-1431) in Friedrich Schiller's dramas, demonstrate the revolutionary quality of mind, which led to the liberation of humanity from the Dark Age of feudalism, by the creation of the nation-state.

*William Tell* is a comedy, in the Classical sense of Dante's *Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*). As Schiller writes in *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, the task of comedy is to bring forth and to nourish in us the freedom of mind, which derives from *agapē*, whereas the purpose of tragedy is to help reestablish mental freedom, when it has been violently annulled by erotic passion.

Like Joan of Arc, William Tell is not a member of the nobility. From the very opening scene of the drama, Tell is portrayed as an individual who acts agapically in the spirit of the Good Samaritan. When asked to help a fellow-countryman escape certain death at the hands of pursuing Hapsburg troops, Tell responds unselfishly:

The valiant man thinks of himself the last,  
Put trust in God and rescue the distressed.  
(Act I, sc. i)

In *William Tell*, which Schiller wrote in 1805, the Swiss nationalist forces are nearly defeated as a result of their failure to act in a timely fashion, but they are saved by Tell, who, at the *punctum saliens*, acts out of self-defense against the tyrant Gessler. Tell acts not for selfish, personal reasons, but rather as an instrument of the Creator above, on behalf of the inalienable rights of all mankind, the principles of which had only recently been expressed in the American Declaration of Independence of 1776. In contrast to Hamlet, William Tell does not shrink from the "undiscovered country," and, in contrast to Bolingbroke, he does not usurp power. As a result, the play ends not with the murder of the tyrant Gessler sowing entropy, but rather, anti-entropically, with the character Rudenz proclaiming the liberation of all his serfs.

Schiller's play *The Virgin of Orleans* is described by Schiller as a "Romantic Tragedy," which distinguishes it both from a comedy such as *William Tell*, and also from tragedies such as *Hamlet* or Schiller's own *Don Carlos*. In this play, Joan of Arc acts to save the French nation. As in *William Tell*, her ability to do so is based upon her agapic capacity. This is seen most clearly in her ability to heal the division in France between Charles VII and the Duke of Burgundy, who had fought with the British against his king. Not only does she effect a reconciliation between them, but she moves Burgundy to reconcile with Du

Chatel, the man who murdered Burgundy's own father. Thus, Joan of Arc says to Burgundy:

. . . A reconciliation  
There's not, which doth not free the heart in full.  
One drop of *hate*, which in the cup of joy  
Remaineth, turns the blessed drink to poison.  
—No crime so bloody be, that Burgundy  
Upon this day of joy it won't forgive.  
(Act III, sc. iv)

Joan of Arc differs from William Tell, in that in saving her nation, she must make the supreme sacrifice of her life in the course of completing her mission. Joan freely accepts the end of her own mortal existence in the furtherance of a higher, divine purpose. She thus demonstrates man's absolute moral freedom in the simultaneity of eternity. The play ends with her words, which Beethoven later set to music in a beautiful canon: "Brief is the pain, the joy shall be eterne!"

In writing this drama, Schiller was not only polemicalizing against the moral degeneracy of the Fourteenth-century Dark Age, but he was doing so, in order to address the failure of the French people to realize the potential of the 1789 French Revolution, owing to their own erotic self-centeredness. As Schiller wrote at the time in an epigram entitled "The Moment":

A momentous epoch hath the cent'ry engender'd,  
Yet the moment so great findeth a people so small.

In contrast to such erotic small-mindedness, the quality of mind that Tell and Joan of Arc share, is the quality of agapic reason, expressed by Plato, the Apostle Paul, and the "*filioque*" principle of the Nicene Creed. This is a quality, which is directly opposite to that which characterized chivalry and the Flagellants in the Fourteenth century, or which characterizes neo-conservatism and the youth counterculture today. This is the anti-entropic quality of mind, which led to the Golden Renaissance of the Fifteenth century; it is the quality of mind self-consciously in the living image of God (*imago viva Dei*), which Shakespeare and Schiller attempted to nurture in their times, and which must be evoked today, if we are to prevent humanity from descending into a new Dark Age.

## Making the Renaissance Intelligible

Contrary to Tuchman, the Renaissance that occurred in the mid-1400's did not take place "at some imperceptible moment, by some mysterious chemistry." In this characterization, Tuchman so obscures causality, as to have a

destructive political effect, serving to stifle actual change and the emergence of necessary historical agents of change. The ideas that “broke out of the mold of the Middle Ages into new realms” were indeed revolutionary “ideas,” in the Platonic sense of the term, advanced by individuals at the crucial moment of self-weakening of the Black Guelph forces. Without such concrete, historic men and women of ideas, as we saw during the Fourteenth century, mere rebellion leads inevitably to suppression and further devolution within the equivalent of a fixed theorem-lattice.

In a time of civilizational crisis, such as occurred in the Fourteenth century and is occurring today, irrationalism is deliberately induced by oligarchical forces. Under conditions of traumatic shock, particularly with regard to an uneducated population,

subject to superstitious beliefs and characterized by erotic infantile emotions, the creation of institutions which can foster intellectual growth is of utmost importance.

The war of ideas over a two-hundred-year period from 1250 to 1450, which led to the creation of the first sovereign nation-state in 1461 in France under Louis XI, was spearheaded by a series of individuals and institutions who are in fact identified by Tuchman in her book, including Dante Alighieri, the Brothers of the Common Life, founded by Gerard Groote (1340-84), and Joan of Arc (1412-31). However, as already noted, Tuchman fails to explicitly identify their contributions, and omits altogether the even greater contributions of the Council of Florence and Nicolaus of Cusa.

Dante, an opponent of the Black Guelph, who was exiled from his native Florence, wrote in *De Monarchia* (1310-13), that “the proper work of mankind taken as a whole is to exercise continually its entire capacity for intellectual growth.” In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, he argued that the creation of a literate form of vernacular language, common to an entire nation, is a necessary precondition for the intellectual growth of a people, and for the development of its capacity to exercise self-government. Dante was not able to implement this perspective during



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*Creation of the French Nation: Joan of Arc (1412-31) led forces against English occupation. (French manuscript illumination, 15th century)*

his own lifetime, but he laid the seeds for its implementation at the point of self-weakening of the Black Guelph.

The significance of the Brothers of the Common Life is that at the very end of the Fourteenth century, it began an educational movement which realized Dante’s program. As Tuchman indicates, the Brothers earned their living by teaching poor children, primarily orphans, and by two occupations not controlled by the guilds, copying manuscripts and cooking. Through this effort, the Brothers contributed significantly to educating the majority of the population, who were otherwise oppressed as mere feudal serfs.

What Gerard Groote and Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) emphasized in their educational work, was the use of primary sources, which the boys copied—the only means of reproduction

in that period,—and the replication thereby by the student in his own mind of the mental experience of great scientific discoveries. This approach was in opposition to the Aristotelean method prevalent in the universities of the time, which was based entirely upon formal knowledge and rote learning. This project laid the basis for the later development of the nation-state and the principle of self-government, as developed by Cusanus.

The significance of Joan of Arc is, that a woman of the commoners’ class engaged in political-military action to lead the French people in rescuing her nation, as a nation, from foreign tyrants. As the British knight, Lionel, laments in Schiller’s play, after Joan of Arc led the French to victory at Orleans:

Who will believe it in the coming times?  
The victors at Poitiers, Crécy  
And Agincourt o’ertaken by a woman!  
(Act II, sc. i)

Her courage and inspiration, even in martyrdom, led ineluctably to the creation of the French nation-state in 1461 by Louis XI.

What Nicolaus of Cusa contributed in his *On Catholic Concordance*, was the revolutionary concept of govern-

ment by the consent of the governed, which he derived from the self-evident fact that all men are created equal and have equal natural rights, insofar as they are created in the image of God and are thus endowed with the capacity for creative reason (*capax Dei*).

Moreover, it was this latter emphasis on human cognition, which led Cusanus to become the founder of modern science. In total opposition to the dominant Aristotelean view of the universe as essentially fixed, Cusanus argued in such locations as *On Learned Ignorance*, that man as a microcosm has the capacity to act on the basis of his creative intellect to further develop the potential of the macrocosm. In *The Game of Spheres*, he wrote that “the power of the soul is to reason and therefore the power to reason is the soul. . . . For this reason, the soul is the inventive power of the arts and of new sciences.” For Cusanus, insofar as man imitates Christ, who as Maximal Reason is the creator of the world, he is capable of being the instrument of the further unfolding of all things enfolded in God.

It is this concept of man as a second creator, which leads to the intelligible transformation of the world with the Renaissance of the Fifteenth century. And it is this concept of man, as further developed by Lyndon LaRouche, which is the basis for mankind completing the unfinished task of the earlier Renaissance today. That task is to rid the world once and for all of the anti-Christian concept of man as at best a “rational animal,” and to rid the world of the financial oligarchy, which is reducing man to such a bestial condition today, just as it

did during the Fourteenth century.

As creators, our task today is to complete the American Revolution, thus far the highest expression of the Fifteenth-century Golden Renaissance, on a global scale, through the creation of a “family of sovereign nation-state republics,” as LaRouche has proposed, which recognize only one supranational authority—natural law. We must free the world of such global oligarchical financial institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, just as Joan of Arc fought to free her fatherland of the British invader. We must create a true universal concord (*concordantia catholica*), through the creation of a New Bretton Woods financial system, in which every nation can cooperate with other nations, to the mutual benefit of the human species as a whole, in great infrastructure projects such as the Eurasian Land-Bridge. We must create a universe in which all societies, in emulation of the Brothers of the Common Life, promote the development and fruitful self-expression of that *divine spark*, which is the sovereign individual’s power of creative reason.

Like Joan of Arc in the last scene of Schiller’s play, who asks for her banner before dying on the battlefield, we must also be able to say:

Without my banner dare I not to come:  
It was entrusted to me by my Maker,  
Before His throne I must needs lay it down—  
I may display it, for I bore it true.

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\* Starred items available from Ben Franklin Booksellers. See ad p. 87.

*Cartoons by Hans Holbein, from “The Dance of Death,” woodcut series, 1530’s.*