

Influence of Christianity on Historiography:

The advent of Christianity greatly influenced human thought. The fundamental beliefs and doctrines of Christianity also influenced historical thinking, and consequently, historiography. For instance, the Biblical story of Creation and the idea of Original Sin, which argued that since Adam and Eve had committed the first sin of disobeying God by eating forbidden fruit, all human beings were born sinners, and thus, essentially evil-natured, greatly impacted the subsequent human thought. This assumption regarding the human nature later became one of the bases of the Christian philosophy of history as well as of other political philosophies. Similarly, the idea of Grace and Redemption, which argued that by the grace or blessing of God, human beings have a chance to attain salvation and be saved by repentance, also molded the human thought. Therefore, the historiographical tradition influenced by Christian doctrines has been labeled as Christian historiography.

Important Features of Christian Historiography:

The beliefs and doctrines of Christianity influenced the historical consciousness and human thought in a number of ways. The following were the important features or characteristics of the Christian historiography:

1. Philosophization of History;

The Christian historians of medieval times were able to philosophize the vast span of time, and critically reflect on the past historical events. One of them was St.

Augustine who propounded a systematic philosophy of history, which will be discussed later in detail in this unit.

2. Conceptualization of the-Beginning-and-End of Time;

The Biblical stories about the creation of human being and the beginning of time as well as the concept of Day of Judgment (Doomsday), which signified the end of time, helped the medieval Christian historians conceptualize and imagine the beginning and end of time. Hitherto, the Greeks had no clear idea about the beginning and end of time. It is important to recall here that the concept of time along with that of the space are the basic concepts in history.

3. Concept of Universal History or World History;

The idea about the beginning and end of time helped the Christian historians conceptualize time in its entirety or totality. Therefore, it gave them the idea of writing a universal history, also called World History, starting from the birth of Adam and the beginning of time and coming to a close on the Day of Judgment and the end of time.

4. Periodization of Time and History;

Since the medieval historians had tried to conceptualize time in its entirety, which was a difficult task owing to the vast span of time, therefore, they thought it necessary to divide time in various distinct periods (also called era or epochs). It gave birth to the notion of historical periodization, where rendered the vast stretch

of time intelligible and understandable for the historians and the general people alike. Consequently, a number of different schemes of periodization of history were devised by the historians. In general, time and human past was divided into two broad periods: the 'Period of Darkness', stretching from the birth of Adam to the birth of Jesus Christ, and the 'Period of Light', stretching from the birth of Christ to the Day of Judgment.

5. Dating Method;

Since the birth of Jesus Christ became the center-point of Christian historical consciousness, it also became the chronological reference point for dating of all the past events and the future. That was why time was divided into two broad divisions: the pre-Christ (BC) and the post-Christ (AD) period. All events happening before the birth of Christ were dated as BC, while the events taking place after the birth of Christ were dated as AD. In other words, historical events were dated backward and forward from the birth of Christ. Isadora of Seville (d. 636 AD circa) developed this dating method in the seventh century. It was applied to all history, and is still prevalent in contemporary times. 7th Century

6. Role of the Divine Factor in History;

The general approach of the medieval Christian historians was Theo-centric, unlike the Greco- Roman historical thought, which was largely anthro-centric, highlighting the role of human beings and the human agency in history. For

Christian historians of medieval times, the concept of God again formed the nucleus of historical thinking. They stressed on the role of God, who controlled the fate of the human beings, and divine factors in historical developments. This idea of fate and divine intervention in history also gave birth to the idea of a 'Grand Design' in history, which argued that human history was meaningful and had a purpose. In other words, history was understood as a play written by God for achieving a particular purpose.

7. Idea of Linear Movement of Time;

The Greeks had an implicit cyclical view about time, and they generally believed in its recurrent cyclical movement. But the thinkers influenced by Christianity propounded the view that history conforms to a linear development. According to this idea, events like the creation of the Adam, birth of the Christ, etc. are never repeated, and events like the Second coming of the Christ, and Doomsday, etc. would occur only once and would never be repeated.

Origin and Development of Church History:

During the fourth century AD, the medieval Christian historians paid attention to preserving the history of Christianity and the subsequent development of Catholic Church. The historians who wrote Church histories were themselves the members of the Church. Their focus was on important historical developments taking place in the religious realm. These saint-historians included, among others, Saint Pamphilus

of Caesarea (d. 309 AD), Saint Eusebius (d. 339 AD), Saint Ambrose (d. 397 AD), and Saint Jerome (d. 420 AD). However, the most renowned Church-historian was Saint Eusebius of Caesarea.

Eusebius of Caesarea-The Father of Church History:

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 AD) was a fourth-century Christian bishop, who is considered to the Father of Church History. His two most famous works-are Chronographia (Chronicles) a Historia Ecclesiastica (Church History), which were written in Greek language. In his books, gave a chronological account of the development of Christianity from its beginning till h contemporary times. He not only tried to preserve the life-histories of Jesus Christ and Christian priests and teachers, he also recorded the history of the heretical movements and group. However, he could not remain objective while writing the history of Christianity and the Church to which he himself belonged. Moreover, he failed to critically examine the sources he used for writing history.

Saint Augustine-The Founder of Christian Philosophy of History

Saint Augustine of Hippo (b. 354-d. 430 AD) was one of the greatest Latin Church Fathers as well as a medieval philosopher, who was born in the present day Algeria in Africa. Before joining the Christian Church, he had been inspired by Manichaeism, and joined it. Later, he converted to Christianity, and eventually became a Bishop. He was greatly influenced by Christian doctrines and beliefs, which found way in his

philosophical and historical thinking as well. He is considered to be the founder of Christian philosophy of history, though before him Ss-Ma Ch'ien in China had propounded a systematic philosophy of history probably for the first time in human history. Augustine's most important work on history is *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) in 22 volumes, written in Latin. His other famous book is "The Confessions", which is an autobiography. His ideas greatly influenced the thought and works of many later historians and philosophers of history.

He elaborated the idea of Original Sin, and argued that all human beings were intrinsically or inherently bad and evil-natured. On the basis of this assumption, he promulgated his philosophy of history, which was ethical and moralistic in character. He interpreted history to be a struggle between the two opposite forces of good and evil. For this reason, he is credited with an ethical interpretation of history. On the basis of this assumed dichotomy between the good and evil, which he borrowed from the dualistic religions such as Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, Augustine classified human beings into two categories or groups ever since the beginning of time;

- (i) The first group was labeled as the 'City of God' (the heavenly City), which consisted of the pious and righteous people, who were dominated by the love of God.

- (ii) The second group was that of the "City of Man/Satan' (the earthly City), which comprised of the sinful and wicked people, who were indulged in self-love.

According to Augustine, the first representatives of these two 'cities or categories of human beings were Abel and Cain two sons of Adam. (Abel was the pious one, and was murdered by Cain, who was wicked). Their clash represented the first conflict between the two forces of good and evil in human history. He argued that the Kingdom of God has already begun with the institution of the Church (the Catholic Church), which symbolized the Kingdom of God on earth.

Augustine also argued that the history of the "City of God, beginning with Adam, was a record of meaningful growth and development through the centuries to the time of Christ, whereas the history of the "City of Man/Satan' is a history of sin, death and human failure. He declared that history is "an account of the Profound and the profane dimensions of humanity", and thus made a sharp distinction between sacred and secular history. He focused on the sacred history (history of the pious people), and secular history (history of the wicked people) seemed to him an insignificant thing. In this way, he narrowed down or reduced the scope of history by allowing only the 'positive historical developments, in history-Writing, ignoring the 'negative ones. His approach to history was largely Theo-centric, placing the concept of God at the center of historical interpretation. He argued-that-God had-

laid-a plan or a design in history, and therefore history was meaningful and had a purpose

To Augustine, the birth of Adam signified the exact beginning of time, while the Day of Judgment suggested the end of time, along with the sudden end of the world and human race in a catastrophic manner, referred to as apocalypse in Christian doctrines. He was also-influenced by Hebrew Scriptures, from where he borrowed the scheme of periodization. He divided the whole history from Adam to the Day of Judgment into seven distinct periods.

In addition, he tried to combine or reconcile the two diverse modes of thought: determinism (a philosophical idea that fate and all human actions have been pre-decided and pre-determined by God, and human beings have no will of their own) and free will (a philosophical idea, contrary to determinism, which argues that human beings are endowed with free will, and have freedom to choose whatever they like). Though Augustine insisted that God had laid a plan in history, and He never deviates from his plan he rejected the idea or inevitability of historical events (i.e. being predetermined, events are bound to happen, and human efforts and choices cannot prevent them from occurring), which was believed by the Greeks. He declared that though the Providence of God controls all history, human beings have been given freewill to love God (and thus be saved) or to love their own self (and be lost). He also believed that the sacred Scriptures were the only-source-of guidance,

and argued that people should develop knowledge of the 'sacred sciences' on the basis of the principles in these Scriptures.

Augustine's concept of history and the movement of time was both unilinear (moving forward like a straight single line) and cyclical. He did not believe in the endlessness of time; rather he considered time and history to be of finite character, with a beginning and an absolute end. He conceptualized history to be situated or stretched between these two points. In this way, he sketched the image of a uniplanar progress of time and history. However, his idea of time and the movement of history was cyclical as well, having a one-grand cycle. He believed that human soul, separated from God was destined to reunite it after salvation. (This idea of the immortality and return of the soul to its origin or its Creator was borrowed from Platonic thought).

His critics assert that the aim of Augustine was not to write history, but to defend Christianity, and therefore, he was also apologetic. He wrote *The City of God* in order to refute the pagan accusation that Christianity was responsible for the decline of Roman power. In fact, Rome was destroyed by the Goths in 410 AD, and it was believed by many that it was due to Christianity. He also attacked the myth of Byzantium as the 'new Rome'. Augustine's critics have also challenged the underlying assumption of his philosophy that human beings are essentially evil natured.

Augustine was a medieval philosopher of history, who was profoundly influenced by the Christian doctrines. His theory interpreting all history to be a struggle between two opposite forces of good and evil seems to have some relevance for today. It is difficult to deny that many of the conflicts in the contemporary world are being perceived and interpreted by the conflicting parties by employing the Augustinian idioms of good and devil. The case of the on-going American War against al-Qaeda Network in Afghanistan is an example in point, since each party to the conflict claims to be representing the forces of good, and brands the other party as siding with the evil forces. Thus, contradictory perspectives of good and evil are still being used to explicate and describe conflict situations. However, the entire human history cannot be merely interpreted as a conflict between the forces of good and evil.