Today, every attempt at a self-understanding ultimately proves to be a situating oneself by means of the philosophy of history or a utopian self-dislocation. Today, all human beings who plan and attempt to unite the masses behind their plans engage in some form of philosophy of history. They accept the existence of the means of extermination, which modern science provides to every person in power. But the question as to what kind of people these means are to be reasonably applied to is obviously no natural scientific question. For a long time now, it is also no longer a moral or juridical question. Today, it is posed and answered only by means of the philosophy of history. Marxism in particular is a philosophy of history to such an intensive degree that every contact with it becomes a historico-philosophical contestation. The planning and steering elites design themselves and the masses they direct with the help of historico-philosophical constructs of meaning [Sinngebungen]. Any mass propaganda searches for its justification in proving that it is on the side of the things to come. Any faith of the masses is only the faith to be on the right, while the opponent errs, because time, and the future, and progress work against him. And even despair screams for the last time only through threatening that world history has lost its meaning.

There is no author who instructs us about this matter of fact with more historico-philosophical clarity and knowledge of the history of ideas than Karl Löwith in his book *Meaning in History* (1949). He provides a critical analysis that truly deserves this name. Starting with the present, i.e., with Burckhardt, Marx, and Hegel, and continuing with the positivists and Enlightenment thinkers, he turns to Bossuet, Vico, Joachim de Fiori, and to Augustine, Orosius, and the Bible. This is a path leading from the philosophy of history to the theology of history, and finally to eschatology. However, for Löwith, this is not a path of leveling history to the standard of today. Beyond all scholarly knowledge, it is a path of
initiation. On this path, the author gains the deep historico-philosophical consciousness, which substantiates the fact that he is superior to modern historians and philosophers of history, especially to Arnold Toynbee.

In light of this important work we may conscientiously leave aside the desert of traditional questions of method, on whose sands the conversations on time and history usually get stranded. Thus, our remarks can immediately start from the results and conclusions of the book. Following Karl Löwith, we are convinced that paganism is not at all capable of any form of historical thought because it is cyclical. The historical loses its specific meaning within the cycles of an eternal recurrence. We know that the Enlightenment and the positivist belief in progress was only secularized Judaism and Christianity, and that it obtained its “eschata” from these sources. We also see what we are dealing with in reality today: neither the one, nor the other; neither cyclical, nor eschatological convictions, but rather motivations or, even more fitting: constructed justifications [Sinn-Setzungen] for large acts of planning, which are imposed by human beings on other human beings, constructed justifications, which consequently become yet again a component of major acts of planning [Groß-planungen]. This is how we interpret the infinitely meaningful proposition by Löwith: the further we go back from today into the history of human historical thinking, the more the conception of an act of planning ceases to exist. Divine providence, which the human being can recalculate or even predict, is after all also just a human act of planning.

The first remark, which comes to mind after reading this unusual book, concerns the great historical parallel, which is manifested in the historical self-understanding of the last century. By way of creating a historical parallel between its own time and the time of the Roman civil wars as well as early Christianity, this century engaged in the peculiar attempt to understand itself historically through comparing itself with a wholly other time that dates back two thousand years. In spite of the entire Hegelian-Marxist-Stalinist dialectics of history, we, indeed, do not possess any other means of historical self-understanding. It is important to understand why it is especially this time of early Christianity that seems so plausible to us, considering the infinite quantity of historical events and ages. It is also crucial to consider with what kind of resoluteness this parallel is used, since the French Revolution, by opposing authors holding contradictory conclusions, while the historical parallel as such always remains self-evident. And it is especially noteworthy that a phenomenon in the history of spirit with such a level of obviousness and timeliness as this great parallel has so far not been addressed in the form of an independent monograph, be it from the domain of education or that of independent scholarship. Socialism starts with the “New Christianity” of Saint-Simon, i.e., with the appeal to the great parallel. In this sense, Jakob Burckhardt was already strongly influenced by Ernst of Lasaulx. Cyclical as well as eschatological thinking can draw on the great parallel. Both identify this parallel as the
proof of the end of an eon, the certainty of an exhausted age, of a *tempo esaurito*. Cyclical thinking draws from it the conclusion of a new world year; progressivist thinking infers the spiral-like augmentation of an ever more perfect time; eschatological thinking, however, infers from it the expectation of the immediate end. Christians have to elevate the parallel to the level of identity, because for them the essential events of the Christian eon, i.e., the Advent, Crucification, and Resurrection of the Son of Man, remain alive in immutable presence.

The other remark touches upon the question of whether eschatological faith and historical consciousness can coexist. The answer to this question is almost always negative. Both seem even less reconcilable than cyclical and historical thought. The vivid expectation of an imminent end seems to take away the meaning from all of history, and it causes an eschatological paralysis for which there are many historical examples. And yet there is the possibility of a bridge. For this we have astonishing examples in the history of the medieval empire. The bridge consists in the conception of a force, which defers the end and suppresses the evil one. This is the *kat-echoν* of the mysterious passage of Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians. The medieval empire of the German rulers understood itself historically as the *kat-echoν*. Luther still understood it in these terms, whereas Calvin takes a significant turn by no longer taking the empire but rather the preaching of God’s words as the *kat-echoν*. The conception of restraining [*haltender*] and deferring [*aufhaltender*] forces and powers can in some form probably be demonstrated to be active for every great historian. Nietzsche furiously identified Hegel and the sixth sense of the Germans, i.e., the historical sense, as the great deferrer on the way to expressed atheism. In Hans Freyer’s recently published *World History of Europe* (II, 616, 915), restraining forces appear as *katechontic* forces. Of course we have to be careful not to transform this term into a generalized designation of simply conservative or reactionary tendencies. We must not use it to add, along with the concept of restrainer and deferrer, a couple of exemplars to Dilthey’s typological collection of historicism. The original historical force of the figure of a *kat-echoν*, however, remains and is capable of overcoming the otherwise occurring eschatological paralysis.

Our third remark aims at the infinite singularity of historical reality. Let us take as our departure a passage (p. 196) of Löwith’s book, where he writes that the message of the *New Testament* does not consist in a call to a historical deed but in a call to repentance. It is, to be sure, in general the case that history does not consist in calls to historical deeds. Rather, it is like a passage through lack, hunger, and invigorating impotence. However, in order to clarify our thought, let us juxtapose Löwith’s proposition with a different one, which is supposed to keep us from any philosophical, ethical, and other acts of leveling, and let us dare to suggest: Christianity is in its essence no morality and no doctrine. It is no penitential sermon, and no religion in the sense of comparative religious studies, but a
historical event of infinite, non-appropriable, non-occupiable singularity. It is the
carnation in the Virgin Mary. The Christian Credo speaks of historical events.
Pontius Pilate belongs there essentially. He is not just a pitiful creature who oddly
ended up there. Christians look back on completed events and find a basic reason
[Ingrund] and an archetype [Inbild]. Through the active contemplation of them,
the dark meaning of our history continues to grow. The Marian image of history
of a great German poet, the Christian Epimetheus by Konrad Weiss, emerged
from it. In the Vienna journal Wort und Wahrheit [Word and Truth, April 1949],
Friedhelm Kemp published an essay, which provides an excellent introduction in
this respect. For Konrad Weiss, the merely restraining forces are not sufficient.
He claims that historical circumstances are more often to be seized rather than
to be restrained. One may dismiss his Marian image of history as mere historical
mysticism. However, its dark truth is thereby not disconfirmed, and neither is its
significance as a historical counterforce against the leveling of history to the status
of universal humanity, to the museum of the past, and an exchangeable costume to
conceal the bluntness of activist attempts to give meaning to the meaningless.

All of this—the great parallel, the kat-echon, and the Christian Epimetheus—
becomes for us an ardent theme because of Karl Löwith’s Meaning in History. By
way of expressing this, we distinguish his book from a variety of other publica-
tions that address issues from history and the philosophy of history. We draw
concrete consequences from the great impression of his critical analysis and dare
to once again speak of a history that is not merely an archive of what has been,
but also not a humanistic self-mirroring or a mere piece of nature circling around
itself. Rather, history blows like a storm in great testimonies. It grows through
strong creations, which insert the eternal into the course of time. It is a striking of
roots in the space of meaning of the earth. Through scarcity and impotence, this
history is the hope and honor of our existence.
A ecclesiastical historian specifically studies the history of Christianity, also known as ecclesiastical history. Within the historical method an ecclesiastical historian must study the tension between the free will of man and the possibility of supernatural intervention in any event. That God is an external causal agent acting in nature producing miracles throughout history cannot be analyzed by the scientific method. In 386 Saint Augustine, although raised as a Christian by his mother Monica, returned to Christianity from Manichaeism and became one of the most important Christian theologians in church history. It is the second of three ages of European history, which are: Classical Civilization, the Middle ages and Modern Civilization. History.com Editors. Studio Three Dots/Getty Images. Contents. Christianity Beliefs. Christians believe the conception was a supernatural event, with God impregnating Mary via the Holy Spirit. Very little is known about Jesus’s childhood. Scriptures reveal that he grew up in Nazareth, he and his family fled persecution from King Herod and moved to Egypt, and his earthly father, Joseph, was a carpenter. Christianity Fast Facts. CNN. The Basics of Christian History. BBC. Christianity. The historian’s education was that of any cultivated man: careful reading of general literature, followed by the study of rhetoric, the art of fluent and persuasive use of language that dominated ancient higher education. The ideal historian would combine rigorous truthfulness and freedom from bias with the gift of developed expression. As examples of literary art, early historical accounts are interesting and dramatically unified, though sometimes at the expense of truth or verifiability of evidence. Impartiality was at least a goal, if it was not always achieved. Many of these works set stan Today, every attempt at a self-understanding ultimately proves to be a situating oneself by means of the philosophy of history or a utopian self-dislocation. Today, all human beings who plan and attempt to unite the masses behind their plans engage in some form of philosophy of history. They accept the existence of the means of extermination, which modern science provides to every person in power. But the question as to what kind of people these means are to be reasonably applied to is obviously no natural scientific question.