

Preface

The distinction between the "medieval" and the "modern" world is a fixed part of the historian's terminology, but it probably obscures the truth rather than clarifies it. Many "modern" attitudes and institutions may be traced back to the great cultural changes which took place in western Europe in the decades around 1100. This book is an attempt to examine one of these, and to consider what signs may be discovered at that time of the respect for, and interest in, the individual, which was to be so marked a feature of later Western culture. It is certainly not designed as a total picture of twelfth-century ways of thought, but, while sticking closely to the theme of interest in the individual, I have deliberately sought examples across the frontiers which are often drawn between history, literature, theology, and the visual arts.

Some of the writers considered here have received relatively little discussion, at least in English, but a few have been the centre of a secondary literature of embarrassing abundance. To have discussed, as fully as they deserve, the various interpretations of the troubadour ideal of love would have distorted the balance of the book hopelessly, for the troubadours are no more important to the central theme than are the Latin satirists, about whom much less has been written. In certain instances, therefore, it has been necessary (like the pamphleteer of old) to take a brief way with dissent, although I have attempted always to indicate when an opinion is a matter of controversy.

It is part of the purpose of the book to introduce readers to twelfth-century literature by including a substantial number of quotations. In the case of poetry, it seemed faint-hearted to provide a prose rendering which contained none of the spirit of the original, and I have therefore tried my hand at a translation into an appropriate English verse-form. There is an admitted danger here of distorting a poet's true meaning because of the requirements of English rhyme or, worse still, of the author's argument,

and I have often included the original text, so that the reader can keep his eyes open for foul play.

The writer of a general study is bound to be heavily in the debt of others, and the suggestions for further reading and the footnotes indicate some of the scholars to whom I have been particularly indebted. To the names mentioned there, I would like to add those of Miss Beryl Smalley and Dr W. A. Pantin, to whose scholarship and personal friendship I owe a great deal. In addition I have received generous personal help. My thanks are especially due to Mrs D. R. Sutherland, who kindly advised me about the study of troubadour poetry, and whose comments saved me from many mistakes and ill-founded views; and to Dr R. W. Southern, President of St John's College, Oxford, who read the draft of the whole book in typescript, and whose views were of the greatest value, both in the clarification of the line of argument and the correction of particular errors. I am also indebted, for comments and advice on specific points, to a number of friends and colleagues, among them Dr J. M. Wallace Hadrill, Mr Hugh Farmer, Mr Douglas Gray, the Reverend H. E. J. Cowdrey, and M. l'abbé J. Pöhu, of Fontevrault; and I have benefited from the discussion of particular themes in this book with groups at the University of Reading and the Theological Colleges of Wells and Cuddesdon. I would also like to acknowledge the help of my cousin, Mrs Margaret Holmes, who patiently typed a great part of the book, and of the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Oxford, who made its writing possible by giving me a period of leave from normal academic duties.

For the opinions, and the mistakes, I am of course solely responsible.

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Chronological Table

The table below sets out in chronological order some works and writers mentioned in the text, and fixes them in relation to a few other events of importance. Only rarely can a book be dated to an exact year, and the table should be regarded as only approximate. Where the margin of error exceeds two or three years, a span of years, or a question mark, is shown.

1050?	<i>Ruodlieb</i>
1053?	Birth of Guibert of Nogent
1056	Death of Emperor Henry III
1066	Norman conquest of England
1070	Death of Otloh of Saint Emmeram
1072	Death of Peter Damiani
1073	Gregory VII elected Pope
1078	Death of John of Fécamp
1080	Deposition of Henry IV proclaimed Tomb monument of Rudolf of Suabia
1080?	<i>Song of Roland</i> in substantially its present form
1086	Succession of William IX to Aquitaine and Poitou
1090	Ivo appointed Bishop of Chartres
1093	Saint Anselm appointed Archbishop of Canterbury
1095	First Crusade preached at Clermont
1096	Hildebert of Lavardin appointed Bishop of Le Mans
1098	Foundation of Cîteaux Anselm, <i>Cur Deus Homo</i>
1099	Jerusalem captured by First Crusade

- 1166 Walter of Châtillon in service of Henry II
 1167 Death of Aelred
 1170 Murder of Thomas Becket
 1170? Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*
 1180 Death of John of Salisbury
 1180? Chrétien, *Knight of the Lion and Knight of the Cart*
 1185? Chrétien, *The Story of the Grail*
 1187 Fall of Jerusalem to Saladin
 1189 Death of Henry II of England
 1190? Death of Walter of Châtillon
 1200? Nicholas of Verdun, casket of Three Kings at Cologne
 1200? Tomb of Henry II at Fontevault

I *The Question*

THE INDIVIDUAL IN WESTERN TRADITION

Some thirty inches from my nose
 The frontier of my Person goes;
 And all the untilled air between
 Is private *pagus* or demesne.
 Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes
 I beckon you to fraternize,
 Beware of rudely crossing it;
 I have no gun, but I can spit.¹

Auden's words describe an experience of individual identity which is familiar to most of us. We think of ourselves as people with frontiers, our personalities divided from each other as our bodies visibly are. Whatever ties of love or loyalty may bind us to other people, we are aware that there is an inner being of our own; that we are individuals. To the Western reader it may come as a surprise that there is anything unusual in this experience. It is to us a matter of common sense that we stand apart from the natural order in which we are set, subjects over against its objectivity, and that we have our own distinct personality, beliefs, and attitude to life. In part, of course, we are justified in thinking that this is a common element in human psychology. Every adult human being is aware of a distinction between himself and the people and things around him. Nevertheless, it is true that Western culture, and the Western type of education, has developed this sense of individuality to an extent exceptional among the civilizations of the world. In primitive societies the training of the child is usually directed to his learning the traditions of the tribe, so that he may find his identity, not in anything peculiar to himself, but in the common mind of his people. Consider, for example, this advice given to his

son by a West African father, and contrast it with the words of Auden quoted above:

There is a certain form of behaviour to observe, and certain ways of acting in order that the guiding spirit of our race may approach you also. . . . If you desire the guiding spirit of our race to visit you one day, if you desire to inherit it in your turn, you will have to conduct yourself in the selfsame manner; from now on, it will be necessary for you to be more and more in my company.²

This relative weakness of the sense of individuality is not confined to those societies which we normally call primitive. The student of the Greek Fathers or of Hellenistic philosophy is likely to be made painfully aware of the difference between their starting-point and ours. Our difficulty in understanding them is largely due to the fact that they had no equivalent to our concept "person", while their vocabulary was rich in words which express community of being, such as *οὐσία*, which in our usage can be translated only by the almost meaningless word "substance". The Asiatic and Eastern tradition of thought has set much less store by the individual than the West has done. Belief in reincarnation virtually excludes individuality in the Western sense, for each person is but a manifestation of the life within him, which will be reborn, after his apparent death, in another form. Western individualism is therefore far from expressing the common experience of humanity. Taking a world view, one might almost regard it as an eccentricity among cultures.

Yet it is an eccentricity of great historical importance, because of the dominant role played by the West during the past five centuries, during which European power and European values have deeply influenced the development of other continents. Individualism takes many forms, and before we investigate its origins in our own culture, it will be necessary to outline the sense in which we shall understand it. With one of its more obvious manifestations this book will not be much concerned. Political thought in the West has been deeply influenced by individualistic assumptions. Whereas Aristotle began from the *polis*, the city which to him was the natural unit of society, the "classical" Western political

philosophers (among whom one must count Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) assumed that the individual person and his rights pre-existed any form of society. No modern writer, perhaps, would now adopt so extreme an assumption, but the idea that the individual has certain rights which society cannot properly take from him, is far from dead. It is embodied in the constitution of some modern states (notably that of the U.S.A.) and it lies behind many contemporary declarations about Human Rights.

This book will not be concerned with the origins of this political individualism, but with individualism at a more directly personal level: with that respect for individual human beings, their character and opinion, which has been instilled into us by our cultural tradition, and with its implications for personal relationships and beliefs. The hard core of this individualism lies in the psychological experience with which we began: the sense of a clear distinction between my being, and that of other people. The significance of this experience is greatly increased by our belief in the *value* of human beings in themselves. Humanism may not be the same thing as individualism (we shall have to consider this point later), but they are at least first cousins, for a respect for the dignity of man is naturally accompanied by a respect for individual men. On the reality of this respect for man's capacities, it is perhaps fair to use Shakespeare as evidence:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!³

In Christian tradition, this confidence in the individual's value has been expressed in the belief in his continued life after death. The implications of this were vividly stated by C. S. Lewis: "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat."⁴ In ethics there has been a similar tendency to assert the supreme value of the individual. This conviction lies behind Kant's famous dictum that a man must be treated as an end, and never as a means, and it has recently been argued to be the corner-stone of European ethics: "The idea of the

individual person as of supreme worth is fundamental to the moral, political and religious ideals of our society."⁵

It is therefore natural to find that Western literature has shown a strong interest in personal character. Europe has developed literary forms specially devoted to the exploration of the individual and his relationships, such as biography, autobiography, and the novel; forms which are unknown, or relatively undeveloped, in other cultures. There is also much truth in the view that the Greek tragedy was a drama of circumstance, whereas the Western tragedy is essentially a drama of character. The personal character of Oedipus is really irrelevant to his misfortunes, which were decreed by fate irrespective of his own desires. Conversely, the tragedies of Shakespeare turn on the flaw in the hero's own character. Othello would have had no difficulty in dealing with Hamlet's problem, nor Hamlet with Othello's. Even where there is a prophecy of doom spoken at the beginning of the play, as in *Macbeth*, we still feel that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are the authors of their own destruction. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings."⁶ The same concern with individuality may be found in painting, in which the portrait has played an important part. In a good portrait, we hope to find both the physical representation of a man's appearance and a reading of his character. Nor has the fascination with human character been confined to the observation of other men. There has also been in Western literature a strong element of self-discovery, expressed in highly personal lyric poetry or in the stress of personal experience in religion. This "inwardness" or acute self-awareness has been a distinctive feature of Western man.

These have been the main characteristics of Western individualism, as it will concern us in this book. It has not been equally influential throughout the whole period from 1500 to 1900; it has always met with some criticism or counter-action, and in some periods individualism has subsided almost completely under the weight of authority or convention. Yet it has been a very prominent feature of Western civilization during centuries in which the West has profoundly influenced the development of the rest of the world. It may be added that it now appears doubtful whether the old individualism will long survive; whether, indeed, some of

its main features have not already disappeared. That is not the subject of this study, but it perhaps increases still further the interest of an inquiry into the historical circumstances which brought about the discovery of the individual in the West.

The conventional account of the discovery of the individual attributes it to the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century. Until that time, it is often supposed, a powerful hierarchy had enforced rigorously orthodox modes of thinking upon the peoples of the West, until a new freedom was achieved by the rediscovery of classical humanism. Accompanied as this was by a return to the reading of the Fathers of the Church, and by the recovery of the of the Greek New Testament, it had an explosive effect upon thought and art. Self-expression, a respect for human reason, and a delight in the varieties of individuals arose to challenge, if not entirely to replace, the uniformity dictated by authority. Thinking of this sort helps to account for the conventional distinction between "medieval" and "modern" history, the dividing-line of which has been placed about 1500. This analysis of the situation is still prevalent, not only in old-fashioned textbooks, but in studies of scholarly importance. For instance, Bishop Stephen Neill has written that:

The Middle Ages were dominated by theology; and it is not surprising that the imaginative approach to the problems of human personality is rare until the Middle Ages begin to pass over into the Renaissance.⁷

That the achievements of the Italian Renaissance were great, no one would deny. An Erasmus or a Michaelangelo were able to express the human spirit in a way which would have been impossible fifty years before. Yet the more carefully the Renaissance is studied, the more evident it becomes that it was deeply rooted in the work of the preceding centuries. Luther's thought would have been inconceivable without the theology of the late medieval schoolmen; the cultivation of Latin letters goes well back into the history of the Italian universities; and the new forms of the visual arts can be traced back to Cimabue and Giotto about the year 1300. The very idea of the "Renaissance" itself was a late medieval one, rooted in the expectations of a Golden Age entertained by

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prophets and preachers long before 1500.⁸ The idea of a sudden rebirth of humanism in the late fifteenth century rested, moreover, on a very simple-minded view of the Middle Ages. In practice it was certainly not a pure "age of faith", free from the challenge of a secular view of man and uncomplicated by the use of human reason. For these reasons, Walter Ullmann, in his important book *The Individual in Medieval Society*, traces the origin of the new modes of thinking to a period far earlier than the fifteenth century. He sees some hints of them in the twelfth century, and growing development towards the formulation of an idea of the individual during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He has thus radically revised the older view of the Renaissance. The general pattern of the graph, so to speak, is still the same, for it shows a continuous progress towards a true concept of individuality. Instead of a rapid rise beginning about 1450, we have a steady ascent beginning as far back as 1200. There can be no doubt that, by taking adequate account of recent study of late medieval society, Professor Ullmann has produced a picture much closer to the truth. It must be appreciated, however, that the subject of his book is the individual's status in society, and particularly the emergence of the idea of a citizen, possessed of his own rights and equal before the law. He is dealing, in other words, with that political individualism which will not be a major theme in this book. It is important to bear this in mind, for we have now to consider an entirely different interpretation of the discovery of the individual. The divergence between the two accounts arises as much from differing subject-matter as from a disagreement over interpretation.

The alternative reading* of the course of events is perhaps most fully examined in R. R. Bolgar's work *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries*, but has also been powerfully stated by Dom David Knowles.⁹ These writers see the twelfth century as a distinctively humanistic age; a point of view often associated with the title, the twelfth-century Renaissance. One aspect of the

* For another important analysis of twelfth-century humanism, which differs substantially from those mentioned in the text, see R. W. Southern, "Medieval Humanism", *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford 1970) pp. 29-60.

enormously increased vitality of the age was a new respect for man and human possibilities. This humanism, however, was in the end frustrated, for a series of reasons which we must consider later. The graph sketched here is obviously very different from the one which we have so far been considering. There is a rapid rise in individualism and humanism in the years from about 1080 to 1150. Then, however, a peak was reached, which was followed by a progressive decline. Then, once more, the graph turned upwards, eventually to reach the new heights of the Italian Renaissance, which by the late fifteenth century had transcended all previous humanistic achievement. To talk in such terms is, of course, to oversimplify. One's reading of the course of events will depend on the criteria which are employed. If our main interest is in the role of the individual citizen within the political community, we shall certainly not find that this was a major achievement of the twelfth century. If we concentrate more on the development of self-awareness and self-expression, on the freedom of a man to declare himself without paying excessive attention to the demands of convention or the dictates of authority, then we may well find that the twelfth century was in this respect a peculiarly creative age. It is in this sense that Bolgar discerns in it "for the first time the lineaments of modern man".¹⁰

So far I have written somewhat ambiguously, as if "individualism" and "humanism" are the same thing. They are unquestionably connected, but it is important for us to consider more closely the relationship between the two. An examination of humanism as a concept is no mere matter of correct definition; it raises many of the most important questions which will confront us in a study of the period between 1050 and 1200. As applied to the twelfth, or for that matter to the sixteenth, century, the word carries two connotations. At a technical level it implies the ability to read Latin easily and to write it elegantly. (At Oxford, the course in classics still rejoices in the title *Literae Humaniores*, *Humane Letters*.) It may appear at first sight that skilful Latinity is a technical accomplishment which has little connection with individualism or any other view of life, but for the men of the age it was an essential preliminary to the imaginative exploration of themselves and the universe. What cannot be verbalized can

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scarcely be thought, and before 1050 the capacity of most writers to express themselves lucidly was poor. When, in the ninth century, Einhard attempted to describe Charlemagne's personal appearance—a bold undertaking, for there were few recent precedents to guide him—he built up a pastiche of quotations from Suetonius, to such an extent that some commentators have suspected that the passage is not a description of Charlemagne from the life, but a merely literary construction. It must be added that awkward writing of this sort did not stop with the coming of the twelfth century. The curse of medieval literature in general was a readiness to be content with descriptions which were dictated purely by convention or were copied from another, sometimes an inappropriate, source.¹¹ If we seek for genuinely individual description from the life, we must look to men who were able to write down fluently and naturally what they saw, men such as Guibert of Nogent or Peter of Blois. The same is true of the art of self-expression. The meditations of Anselm or Aelred of Rievaulx, who are able to express their affections and longings in a practised way, moving easily from one idea to another, would have been literally unthinkable a century before. One might gather many examples of this sort: the skilful satire in which the individual voiced his protest against society, the lyric poetry in which he declared his personal desire, the intelligent political commentary of a man such as John of Salisbury, all depended equally on the achievement of sensitive and elegant literary forms. Erasmus, in the early sixteenth century, declared that we are nothing without Greek, *sine Graecitate*; it can certainly be said of the men of the twelfth century that they would have been nothing *sine Latinitate*. It was the indispensable preliminary for the discovery of the individual. At this point, indeed, we may observe a paradox. The twelfth century was not only the age of a brilliant (if short-lived) flowering of Latin literary culture. It was also the period when the vernacular languages of western Europe established themselves as important modes of literary expression. This does not reduce the importance which I have assigned to the recovery of a true and skilful Latinity. However much the national languages might have developed in the course of our period, they were not yet capable of performing the function of Latin. The

world of learning in the twelfth century was very much an international one; monks belonged to orders with houses in many countries, scholars attended schools along with men of many nations. Of all the vernacular tongues, only Anglo-Saxon (so far as we know) had been used much before 1100 for purposes of learning and government; and Anglo-Saxon was doomed as a language by the long-term effects of the Norman Conquest. The leaders of the twelfth-century Renaissance were not, as a rule, contemptuous of languages other than Latin. Aelred of Rievaulx on his death-bed had an English phrase on his lips, "for Christ's love", but he wrote his books in Latin so as to address an international audience. Indeed, it might be argued convincingly that the Latin Renaissance did not impede, but actively assisted, the development of literature in the various national tongues.* The earliest Old French romances were stories of Greece or Rome, and Chrétien de Troyes, who raised the romance to a high level of artistry, had certainly had a sound education in the cathedral schools, and knew his Ovid. As to the emergence of the troubadour lyric, its origins are still a matter of much dispute, but one influence on it may well have been the work of composers (*tropatores*) of Latin verses for liturgical use. It is therefore reasonable, if at first surprising, to claim that the mastery of Latin composition was the most important contribution of humanism to the discovery of the individual. It made possible, for scholarly writers, a naturalness and immediacy of observation, and a subtlety of reflection, which had been impossible in previous centuries, and it assisted the development of vernacular literature, which at its best showed some of the same qualities.

Combined with this rather technical meaning of "humane letters", the word humanism also carries a more general significance. It expresses a sympathy with, and delight in, mankind; an idea expressed in Terence's famous line "I think nothing human foreign to myself". Such an interest in humanity was one of the dominant features of twelfth-century thought and literature, and will be extensively illustrated in this book. It is closely akin

* This is not to deny that the converse is also true. The natural ease of twelfth-century Latin was partly due to the influence of vernacular speech, which is evident in its style and constructions.

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to a respect for the individual, since (in spite of the remarks of some cynics) it is difficult to have a high regard for humanity if one does not value individual men. It is significant that the word *humanitas*, which since about A.D. 600 had been used almost without exception in a pejorative sense to indicate human frailty, now recovered its former dignity. Bishop Ivo of Chartres at the beginning of the twelfth century employed it in its classical sense of philanthropy or kindness, and *humanus* once more came to carry a favourable connotation.¹² This delight in humanity was in most writers theologically directed. The grandeur of man lay in his divine vocation and calling, and in the possibilities of fellowship with God which lay open to him; and it may be found side by side, sometimes in the same author, with a deep sense of the sin and misery of the present human condition. Yet even this limitation must not be stressed too much. As we shall discover, there was a real interest in man as he actually *is*, which was seen as the starting-point of the glory to which he might rise. We are able to observe a fascination with individual experience which is often (although not always) seen within a Christian framework, but which does not discount the value of human activity even when it falls far short of the perfection which was the ultimate goal.

ORIGINS

The men of the twelfth century were conscious of looking back to the past, even to the far distant past, to find guidance in the problems which were confronting them, and we must therefore ask how far they discovered their interest in mankind and in the individual within the framework of the ideas which they found there. Above all, they turned to Christianity and to the classical past for guidance. It is at once obvious that the Western view of the value of the individual owes a great deal to Christianity. A sense of individual identity and value is implicit in belief in a God who has called each man by name, who has sought him out as a shepherd seeks his lost sheep. Self-awareness and a serious concern with inner character is encouraged by the conviction that the believer must lay himself open to God, and be remade by the Holy Spirit. From the beginning, Christianity showed itself to be

an "interior" religion. It also contains a strong element of respect for humanity. Its central belief, that God became man for man's salvation, is itself an affirmation of human dignity which could hardly be surpassed, and its principal ethical precept is that a man must love others as he loves himself. The value of the individual and the dignity of man are both written large in the pages of the Scriptures. It is understandable that in the centuries before 1100 these convictions had made only a limited impact upon the primitive society of western Europe. It depended largely upon tradition, and therefore could give little scope to the individual, and, as we shall see later, social conditions were not such as to encourage a high view of human dignity. Yet, even in these unfavourable circumstances, the Church had maintained at least a silent witness to the humanist elements in the gospel. It is striking that in a Europe so predominantly agricultural, the Church maintained a liturgical year based not upon the cycle of seasons but upon the sacred history and the feasts of the saints, upon man and God's acts in man, thus preserving the belief that the key to the understanding of the world lay, not in the natural order, but in the history of man. Ultimately a Christian origin can be found for many of the elements in the European concept of the self.

Yet, if we turn to the Fathers and the writers of the New Testament, we find that their concept of personality qualified its stress upon the individual by the inclusion of some very important corporate elements. Jesus Christ was regarded not as another human being, separate from (although better and greater than) the believer. Saint Paul expresses his own experience in a quite different way: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2.20). The boundaries have been broken between Christ and Paul. It is not the relationship of two personalities, but the indwelling of one in the other. Since the believer is identified with Christ, he is therefore identified also with all other believers: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3.28). The way was thus open for the community-language which is so characteristic of the New Testa-

ment. The Church is the body of Christ, each member a limb in it. All believers share in the one Spirit, all are stones in the living Temple. This element in early Christian thinking severely modifies the strong individualism which we have also seen to be present, but it has received relatively little attention in the Western Church. The reasons are not far to seek. With the revival of learning and personal devotion in the years after 1050, men seized eagerly upon the message of individual salvation in ways which will be examined later, but the language of community meant less to them because it had arisen within a social situation so foreign to their experience. In a Europe where every man was, officially at least, a Christian, they could not be expected to enter into the faith and love which had, long ago, bound together the members of a small group, called to witness in a non-Christian society. The words of the New Testament were of course revered, but in so far as they related to the life of a tightly knit community, they could no longer be understood in their original meaning. There were, indeed, important exceptions to this generalization. The monasteries, and especially the Cistercian houses, still preserved something of the pattern of an early Christian Church: a community of moderate size, united in a common experience of conversion from the world and conscious of its own corporate identity. It is therefore not an accident that the Cistercians were more successful than any other group in uniting a contemporary outlook with one which preserved many of the traditional elements. For the Church in general the period from 1050 to 1150 was one of great and far-reaching reconstruction and reform, but scarcely any of these reforms increased the sense of community within the local churches. Indeed, the whole tendency was to diminish the sense of community. Two examples, of quite different kinds, will illustrate this point. The Eucharist had been, for the early Church, the supreme expression of its unity. By 1050 regular communion by the people had become rare, but there was no systematic attempt to restore it. The new practices which arose in the celebration of the Mass, such as the elevation of the host, were directed, not towards the restoration of community, but towards the kindling of personal devotion. Again, under the older canon law, the position of a bishop was safeguarded by the

rule that he could be deposed only by a synod of his colleagues. He was thus protected from injustice by recourse to the community of the local church. The canon lawyers of the twelfth century, however, turned to a quite different way of providing protection: appeal to Rome. The Church of the twelfth century thus saw a revival of personal piety, expressed in a variety of ways which we shall have to examine; but it failed to recover a sense of community for the faithful as a whole. The individual for the future was to be restricted, not by the mind of the local church, but by the authority of the hierarchy.

The second source of respect for the individual is probably to be found in the classical past. To summarize the role of the individual in Graeco-Roman civilization, within the framework of an introductory chapter, would obviously be impossible. It would also be useless for the purpose of our present subject, because large areas of the literature of Greece and Rome were entirely unknown to the men of the twelfth century. Indeed, the controversy whether it was proper for Christians to read the literature of the pagan past at all was still raging in the eleventh century, and was by no means settled in the twelfth. To a Cistercian such as Bernard of Clairvaux the inheritance of the classical past probably meant little. Quotations from classical authors are rare in his works, and nearly half of the entire total was included in the sermon to the clerks of Paris, for whose benefit Bernard had evidently worked up some appropriate passages. The twelfth century was inclined to help itself to what it wanted from classical literature, as the Hebrews had robbed the Egyptians of their jewels—an analogy which gave peace of mind to a number of uneasy consciences among the scholars of the time. None the less, the experiences of the classical age impinged upon the Middle Ages in a number of different ways, and it is therefore necessary to hazard some generalizations about the character of this influence. For a great part of the history of the Ancient World, traditional institutions remained strong, and inhibited interest in the person as distinct from his social group. The family, the city-state, and the tradition of reverence for Rome, all had this effect. There was, however, another aspect. The growth of great cities and vast areas of imperial government dissolved many of these traditional units. What Bolgar has called the

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"later world of rabbit-warren towns and monster autocracies"¹³ led to the emergence of quite different cultural forms. One of these, he rightly suggests, was "despair born of chaos". The individual lost any hope of influencing the course of events; indeed, he was deprived by imperial legislation even of the hope of changing his position and status in society. The result was the development, at various levels of sophistication, of religions of world-renunciation. The initiates of such faiths were given the power to escape from the confining shackles of the body and to find the hidden way to mystical union with the One. Here we are far away from a concern with the individual, as he has been understood in western Europe, for all that makes up his life and his experiences was regarded as irrelevant or even inimical to that liberation from the self which was the goal of Neoplatonism or of the Manichees. On the other hand, this dissolution of the older order could have a different consequence which has been well explained by Alan Douglas:

If, as has often been observed, the break-up of the classical system of internally close-knit independent "city-states" left the individual often bewildered and rudderless, at the same time it conferred new responsibilities and forms of ethical status. The frontiers are wider—and more like our own. For man confronts the universe not as a citizen but as an individual."¹⁴

The consequence, especially amongst the most highly privileged groups in society, was the emergence of thoughts and feelings which were both individual and humanist. Such a movement is observable at Rome about 50 B.C., and its influence endured in literary circles for a considerable time. The individual, freed from the conventional ethics which had formerly governed his actions, declared his desires in an outburst of lyric poetry; historians such as Sallust and later Suetonius reflected upon the motives and characters of statesmen, although they were still inclined to see them as types rather than as fully formed personalities. Among the many interests of Cicero was counted a keen observation of personal relationships, delightfully illustrated in the dialogues on Friendship and Old Age, which were extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Cicero (although he was known only through a very limited number of his works) and Seneca were,

for the men of the twelfth century, probably the most influential of the classical Roman writers, and it is interesting to observe that they were by disposition the most humanist of all, in that they saw an essential unity in mankind and even an equality of value among men. Thus Cicero could write: "There will not be different laws in Rome and in Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but all nations at all times will be under the sway of one law, everlasting and unchangeable."¹⁵ Seneca even applied such ideas to slavery, that classical institution which to our eyes constitutes the ultimate denial of a humanist ideal: "they are slaves; or, rather, men".¹⁶ The remarkable popularity of Seneca in later ages, however, did not depend so much on his humanism, as upon that vein of self-examination which is so evident a feature of his letters.¹⁷ The conscious and patient pursuit of virtue; the profession of a desire for leisure and meditation, conducted amid a life of simplicity; the choice of a guide and mentor, after whose example we may fashion our own conduct and disposition; all this commended him greatly both to scholars and to monks in the twelfth century. Alan of Lille described him as *optimus excultor morum mentisque colonus*, and Godfrey of Saint Victor produced an even more remarkable couplet:

To the counsels Lucilius from Seneca heard,
The Gospel itself can be scarcely preferred.

To the modern reader of Seneca's letters the chasm which separates him from Christianity appears enormous. It is true that, in his measured way, he was concerned with self-examination and the pursuit of disciplined virtue. But there is no passion in Seneca; indeed, as he was a Stoic, his ideal of the interior life was the elimination of passion. Nothing could be further from the intense affection which, in twelfth-century ideals, bound the lover to Christ. Seneca knew friendship, but he cannot be said to have felt love, which (in any passionate sense) he would have regarded as an intrusion into his inner peace. Yet the gap between Seneca and the gospel was not evident in the Middle Ages. Even those who severely criticized some of his views did not perceive that his approval of suicide, for example, was not an unhappy aberration but was the key to his whole understanding of life. His Stoic calm

and his cultivation of excellence of character were seen through Christian spectacles, and so were able to influence the age more than one would have thought possible.

This inclination to see Seneca as the fellow-traveller of Christ was part of a more general tendency to amalgamate classical culture and the doctrine of the Church. If some writers were hostile to any use of pagan authors, others defended their use on the ground that they were forerunners of the true revelation. It is convenient and logical from our standpoint to divide the influences upon the period from 1050 to 1200 into two, the Christian and the classical, but at the time this division was not clearly apparent, for by the very fact of its entry into Graeco-Roman civilization Christianity had become marked by its characteristic tendencies. The world-renunciation of the second and third centuries A.D. had influenced the Church deeply. The deserts of Egypt and Syria overflowed with hermits, in flight from, or in protest against, the great and luxury-loving cities of Antioch and Alexandria. From this root arose the monasticism of western Europe, which retained a clear line of communication with its past in the works of Cassian, whose account of the lives and sayings of the desert Fathers was prescribed for regular reading. At the same time the humanist tendencies of some Latin thinkers were also incorporated into Christian theology. Cassian himself was deeply influenced by Cicero's teaching on friendship, and Ambrose rewrote in Christian terms the *de Officiis* of Cicero. The massive works of Saint Augustine summed up many of the tendencies of both biblical and classical thought. His *Confessions* has some title to be regarded as the first autobiography ever written. It is obviously a product of Christian experience and reflection, profoundly influenced by the Bible and especially by the works of Saint Paul, but to be fully understood it has also to be seen within the general tradition of self-exploration in the late Graeco-Roman world.¹⁸ The *Confessions* may indeed be placed beside the great treatise *The City of God* as a critique, from the Christian point of view, of the philosophies which were popular in the Roman Empire in its declining years. The one recorded Augustine's personal involvement with them, and his slow movement towards Catholicism as the way of life and thought which most perfectly fulfilled his own longings: "For thou hast

made us for thyself, and our heart is restless till it find rest in thee". The other is a more objective analysis of these systems of thought, in a major attempt to create a Christian philosophy of history. The *Confessions*, as we shall see, lay at the root of a good deal of medieval autobiography, and helped to establish the sense of the importance of each individual's experiences within the purposes of God. *The City of God* was the starting-point for much of the medieval thought about history, and may be counted a deeply humanist work, not in the sense that it sees the historical process as determined purely by human purposes (which it most certainly does not) but in the sense that it envisages the course of history as controlled by purposes which may be advanced by human participation, and which are in the long term designed for the salvation of man.

The mingling of Christian and classical traditions is to be found in an extreme form in the work of Boethius (c. 480-525), a writer little known in the modern world, but whose influence upon the culture of the twelfth century was profound.* Boethius formed the great ambition to translate into Latin the great corpus of Greek philosophy, which the West was in danger of losing because of the disappearance of the knowledge of Greek. He was able to fulfil only a tiny part of this plan, but to him the twelfth century owed a great deal of its slender knowledge both of Aristotle and of the Platonic tradition. From our point of view, by far his most interesting book was his last, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. This work has always provided a *cause célèbre* in the question of the continuity of Hellenistic and Christian ideas. On the one side, it contains the last reflections of a Catholic statesman, disgraced and imprisoned by the Arian ruler of Italy. As Boethius was soon to die at his hands, he could with justice be represented as a martyr for the

* The question of the personal beliefs of Boethius, and the character of his influence, has given rise to an abundant literature. The best and fullest examination is that of P. Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, 1967). David Knowles is good on the extent of his influence (*The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London, 1962), p. 53), but is perhaps inclined to exaggerate the readiness with which the book was accepted as a great Christian classic. There was a fairly general awareness in the twelfth century of the problems which it presented.

faith. On the other hand, it contains nothing that is specifically Christian. Boethius is consoled by the rational reflections of Philosophy, who expounds to him the wisdom offered by Greek thinkers, especially those of the Neoplatonist school. The scholars of the twelfth century were as fully aware of this paradox as those of our own age, and they reacted in a variety of ways. Some condemned *The Consolation of Philosophy*, or at least expressed serious reservations about it. Others welcomed it in spite of its philosophical content, and yet others regarded it as a great book precisely because of its Platonizing tendencies. While it would therefore be wrong to suggest that the twelfth-century thinkers were prepared to accept the book as a Christian classic, without considerable criticism, it undoubtedly provided a point of contact between Christianity and the Greek past. Those inclined to philosophizing could use it as a charter of liberties, and even the most conservative were obliged to hesitate before rejecting the work of a great Catholic who had died for his beliefs. It also helped to bring them into touch with the classical approach to self-examination, which we also observed in Seneca. The great body of the book consists of a carefully reasoned consideration of the order of the universe, but it is at the same time a personal work, composed "while I was mutely pondering within myself, and recording my sorrowful complaints with my pen".¹⁹ The sovereign remedy against ills is seen as true self-knowledge: "It is because forgetfulness of thyself hath bewildered thy mind that thou hast bewailed thee as an exile, as one stripped of the blessings that were his."²⁰

When the scholars of the twelfth century turned back to the past, they therefore did not perceive a sharp contrast between their Christian and classical inheritances. When they turned to Boethius, to Cassian, to Augustine, to Ambrose, they read works which bore the imprint of the Hellenistic world as well as of the New Testament. Combined with Christian insights, they could find some of the humanism of Cicero and Seneca; a concern with friendship which was immediately derived from Cicero; a self-examination which showed some of the marks of classical tradition. Even those with tender consciences, who refused to read the pagan authors, imbibed something of the classical past at second hand, and bolder

spirits were encouraged to treat the classical authors as providing a preparation for the gospel. This was the varied tradition available to the men of 1100. We must consider now why they turned back to claim their inheritance.