

The Ides of March - A Peroration.  
Prof. Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy

Since 1947, the City of Berlin has been divided in the middle; its halves lie one in the Eastern, one in the Western hemisphere of our globe. Thus, this dividing line resembles the line that divides Korea. Before, "nation" was a term denoting unity. Since 1904 or since 1945, global policy has overwhelmed the national principle. It would seem that in these two divisions the globe even visibly entered a new phase as, for the first time, global considerations have outweighed continental and national interests. Berlin and Korea, in their division, seemed unthinkable before 1900, before a global policy began.

Now, it so happens that the post World War II division of Berlin runs through the city at the Potsdamer Platz. At this point, in the old days, the Royal "Wilhelm Gymnasium", a boys' school, was located. There, on March 15, 1901, I delivered a Latin oration in memory of Julius Caesar's death on the Ides of March in 44 B.C.

These Ides of March were then - as they are today - the one pre-Christian date preserved in our historical traditions and this makes the date memorable, even in 1967. On this day, it is easy to comprehend a period reaching from antiquity, via the Ides of March, to the end of time, via Labor Day. For we may look to the Ides of March as if it were a porthole through which to envisage the immense flood of pre-Christian eras as in one glance. Little as we care for their immensity, let me briefly emphasize their main distinction from our own times.

All non-Christian times were accepted as cyclical. They were either tribal or templar cycles. In the tribes, children followed parents; heirs followed ancestors. In the priestly states, sons resuscitated their fathers! The contract of the ancient calendar lore helps us to bring the openness of Christian chronometry into focus. Since 534 A.D., we have counted our years from the birth of Christ, but in antiquity cycles of eternal recurrence dominated all thought. Progress was unthinkable. Moses alone had led the children of Israel out of this whirl of cycles after 1318 B.C. In this year of 1318 B.C., the Great Astrological Cycle of 1460 years in Egypt, which the priests of Memphis started in 2776, had run its course for the first time. Then, Moses' protest led the Hebrews into their prophetic freedom; otherwise this Great Year was to be continued through a second cycle from 1318 B.C. And the end of the second cycle was conscientiously celebrated by the Emperor of Rome in the year 139 of our era. In such a Great Year, the order of the tribes - "sons equal fathers" - was reversed because the son, the Pharaoh, supposedly reinstated his dead father, Osiris, every year. To this reversal of the tribal order, we owe the doctrine of "resurrection". Through the love of his son (the Pharaoh Horus of the two countries of Egypt), the god of Fertility, Osiris, mysteriously rose from the dead. (1)

Eternal recurrence, then, was mankind's only organized belief, in Egypt and Rome, in Mexico and Cambodia, in China and Carthage. This was articulated very sharply by the Church Father Tertullian; he wrote that

(1) The details have been put forth in my "Sociologie II", 1958. This book is to appear in English as a publication of the Alabama University Press.

down to Christ, astrology was the only method the nations had to cope with time and history; astrology, by its materials, cannot help being cyclical. Hence progress was precluded.

When I delivered my Latin oration in the heart of Berlin on the Ides of March 1901 in honor of Julius Caesar; we, my listeners and I, looked across the boundaries of Christian progress into the cyclical, astrological, predictable past, as Shakespeare has shown. 1)

While I am writing these lines in 1967, I, on the contrary, look across the boundaries of the second millenium of All Souls into the global millenium of all Bodies, of Labor; and I am also fortified by the first millenium, that of All Saints. In these three stages, we have asserted -- against the cycles -- our divinity; our freedom and our solidarity; against the flesh and blood and the geography to which the medicine men and the astrologers had subjugated us and on trying once more to subjugate us.

Hence, the Ides of March may serve as a porthole on our ocean steamer of the Christian era; through this little porthole we may perhaps show our benighted "scientific" historians the distinction between dead times and a living era; between the pagan cycles of Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler, and the open progress of our tri-une Creator, Revealer and Redeemer.

1) "Julius Caesar", Act III, First Scene.