

*Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography
and Eschatology*

The "Fashion" of Messianism

Over the past ten years works on the various millenarianisms and different forms of utopia have increased considerably. And this is true not only of studies on the primitive messianic and prophetic movements — the most well-known being the "cargo cults" — but also of research on the messianisms of Judeo-Christian origin, from the beginning of our era to the Renaissance and the Reformation, and of works on the religious implications of geographic discoveries and colonization, principally the colonization of the two Americas. Finally, in recent years several efforts at synthesis have been published: historians, sociologists, and philosophers have tried to compare the different forms of utopias and millenarianisms, and to articulate them with a view to a final synthesis.

This enormous recent bibliography will not be presented here. Suffice it to recall the several efforts at synthesis: the work of Norman Cohn on the pursuit of the millennium, the works of Lanternari, Guariglia, and Mühlmann on primitive millenarianisms, the research of Alphonse Dupront on the spirit of the crusades, and

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the monographs of several American scholars on the eschatological implications of colonization.¹

The interest of Western scholars in millenarist movements and utopias is significant; it could even be said that this interest constitutes one of the characteristic traits of contemporary Western thought. The reasons for this interest are manifold. First of all, there is the curiosity aroused by the messianic cults that buffeted "primitive" societies in the last decades of the colonial period. Then there is the recent research on the importance of prophetic movements in medieval Europe, especially the movement of Gioacchino da Fiore and the Gioacchinists in Transalpine Europe. And, finally, there is the rigorous analysis of the religious implications of the colonization of America; for, as we shall see later, the discovery and colonization of the New World took place under the sign of eschatology.

The undertaking of such research and the posing of such problems betray an orientation of thought which tells us a great deal about the spiritual situation of contemporary Western man. Let us point out, to begin with, that contrary to systems of deterministic explanation of history, today we recognize the importance of the religious factor, especially the importance of movements of tension and frenzy — the prophetic, eschatological, millenarist movements. But there is something, in my opinion, still more significant: the interest in the *origins* of the recent Western world — that is, in the origins of the United States and the nations of Latin America — reveals among the intellectuals of that continent the desire to turn back and to find their *primordial history*, their "absolute beginnings." This desire to return to one's beginnings, to recover a primordial situation, also denotes the desire to start out again, the nostalgia for the earthly paradise that the ancestors

1. Cf. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2d ed. (New York, 1961); Vittorio Lanternari, *Movimenti religiosi di libertà e di salvezza dei popoli oppressi* (Milan, 1960); Guglielmo Guariglia, *Prophetismus und Heilserwartungsbewegungen als völkertkundliches und religionsgeschichtliches Problem* (Horn, 1959); Wilhelm E. Mühlmann, *Chiliasmus und Nativismus* (Berlin, 1961). Cf. also Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action* (The Hague, 1962); Alphonse Dupront, "Croisades et eschatologie," in *Umanesimo e Esoterismo*, ed. Enrico Castelli (Padova, 1960), pp. 175–98. On the eschatological implications of the colonization of America, see the works of H. Richard Niebuhr, Charles L. Sanford, and George H. Williams cited below.

of the American nations had crossed the Atlantic to find. (Indeed there have rarely been published more books with titles containing the word "paradise" than on the colonization of the Americas. Among works published in recent years, let us point out: *Visão do Paraíso: os motivos edênicos no descobrimento e colonização do Brasil* [Rio de Janeiro, 1959] by Sergio Buarque de Hollanda; *The Quest for Paradise* [1961], by Charles L. Sanford; *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* [1962], by George H. Williams, subtitled "From the Garden of Eden and the Sinai desert to the American frontier.")

All this betrays the desire to recover the religious origins, and thus a primordial history, of the recent transatlantic states. But the significance of this phenomenon is still more complex. One may also detect the desire for a renewal of old values and structures, the hope of a radical *renovatio*—just as one might interpret in the most recent experiments in art the will to destroy all means of expression already time-worn by history, but also the hope of beginning the artistic experience *ab initio*.

To return to our subject—Paradise and Utopia—I have chosen two sorts of illustrations. First of all I shall point out the eschatological and paradisiacal elements in the colonization of North America by the pioneers, and the progressive transformation of the "American Paradise," giving rise to the myth of indefinite progress, to American optimism, and to the cult of youth and novelty. Then I shall consider a Brazilian tribe, the Tupi-Guaranis, who, at the time of the discovery of South America, had already set forth across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a paradise—certain groups still continue the search today.

The Quest for the Earthly Paradise

Christopher Columbus did not doubt that he had come near the Earthly Paradise. He believed that the fresh water currents he encountered in the Gulf of Paria originated in the four rivers of the Garden of Eden. For Columbus, the search for the Earthly Paradise was not a chimera. The great navigator accorded an eschatological significance to this geographic discovery. The New World represented more than a new continent open to the propagation of the Gospel. The very fact of its discovery had an eschatological implication.

Indeed, Columbus was persuaded that the prophecy concerning the diffusion of the Gospel throughout the whole world had to be realized before the end of the world—which was not far off. In his *Book of Prophecies*, Columbus affirmed that this event, namely, the end of the world, would be preceded by the conquest of the new continent, the conversion of the heathen, and the destruction of the Antichrist. And he assumed a capital role in this grandiose drama, at once historical and cosmic. In addressing Prince John he exclaimed: "God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which He spoke in the Apocalypse by Saint John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah, and He showed me the spot where to find it."²

It was in this messianic and apocalyptic atmosphere that the transoceanic expeditions and the geographic discoveries that radically shook and transformed Western Europe took place. Throughout Europe people believed in an imminent regeneration of the world, even though the causes and reasons for this regeneration were multiple and often contradictory.

The colonization of the two Americas began under an eschatological sign: people believed that the time had come to renew the Christian world, and the true renewal was the return to the Earthly Paradise or, at the very least, the beginning again of sacred history, the reiteration of the prodigious events spoken of in the Bible. It is for this reason that the literature of the period, as well as sermons, memoirs, and correspondence, abounds in paradisiacal and eschatological allusions. In the eyes of the English, for instance, the colonization of America merely prolonged and perfected a sacred history begun at the outset of the Reformation. Indeed, the push of the pioneers toward the West continued the triumphal march of wisdom and the true religion from East to West. For some time already, Protestant theologians had been inclined to identify the West with spiritual and moral progress. Certain theologians had transferred the Ark of the Covenant of Abraham to the English. As the Anglican theologian William Crashaw wrote, "The God of Israel is . . . the God of England." In 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert asserted that if England had taken possession "of vast and pleasant territories," it was doubtless thanks

2. Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise* (Urbana, Ill., 1961), p. 40.

to the fact that the word of God, that is, religion, which had begun in the East, had gradually advanced toward the West, where, he added, "it is very likely that it will stop."

Solar symbolism

This is a rather frequent motif in English literature of the period. The theologian Thomas Burnet, in his *Archaeologiae* (1692), wrote: "Learning, like the sun, began to take its Course from the East, then turned Westward, where we have long rejoiced in its light." And Bishop Berkeley, in his famous poem which opens with these lines, "Westward the course of empire takes its way . . .," makes use of the solar analogy in order to exalt the spiritual role of England.³

Moreover, Berkeley was merely conforming to a European tradition already more than two centuries old. Indeed, Egyptian hermetism and solar symbolism, revived by Marsilio Ficino and the Italian humanists, had known an extraordinary vogue after the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, discoveries that for contemporaries illustrated above all the triumph of the sun and heliocentrism. Recent research has uncovered the religious implications, most often hidden or camouflaged, in the astronomy and the cosmography of the Renaissance. For contemporaries of Copernicus and Galileo, heliocentrism was more than a scientific theory: it marked the victory of solar symbolism over the Middle Ages, that is, the revenge of the hermetic tradition — considered as venerable and primordial, preceding Moses, Orpheus, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, and Plato — over the provincialism of the medieval Church.

The theme of solar symbolism in the Renaissance is too complex for consideration here, but this brief allusion is necessary in order to understand the emphasis placed on solar analogies by authors exalting the religious significance of the colonization of the New World. The first English colonists in America considered themselves chosen by Providence to establish a "City on a Mountain" that would serve as an example of the true Reformation for all Europe. They had followed the path of the sun toward the Far

3. See the texts cited by Sanford, *Ibid.*, pp. 52 ff. See also George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York, 1962), pp. 65 ff.

West, continuing and prolonging in a prodigious fashion the traditional passing of religion and culture from East to West. They saw a sign of divine Providence in the fact that America had been hidden to the Europeans until the time of Reformation. The first pioneers did not doubt that the final drama of moral regeneration and universal salvation would begin with them, since they were the first to follow the sun in its course toward the paradisiacal gardens of the West. As the Anglican poet George Herbert wrote in his *Church Militant*:

Religion stands tip-toe in our land
Ready to pass to the American strand.⁴

And this "American strand," as we have seen and shall continually note in what follows, was loaded with paradisiacal qualities. Ulrich Hugwald had prophesized that following the discovery of America humanity would return "to Christ, to Nature, to Paradise."

More than any other modern nation the United States was the product of the Protestant Reformation seeking an Earthly Paradise in which the reform of the Church was to be perfected.⁵ The relationship between the Reformation and the recovery of the Earthly Paradise has struck a very great number of authors, from Heinrich Bullinger to Charles Dumoulin. For these theologians, the Reformation hastened the coming of the great age of paradisiacal beatitude. It is significant that the millenarist theme enjoyed its greatest popularity just prior to the colonization of America and Cromwell's revolution. Hence, it is not surprising to note that the most popular religious doctrine in the colonies was that America had been chosen among all the nations of the earth as the place of the Second Coming of Christ, and the millennium, though essentially of a spiritual nature, would be accompanied by a paradisiacal transformation of the earth, as an outer sign of inner perfection. As the eminent Puritan, Increase Mather, President of Harvard University from 1685 to 1701, wrote: "When this Kingdom of Christ has filled all the earth, *this Earth will be restored to its Paradise state.*"⁶

4. Quoted by Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, p. 53.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 74. See also Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, pp. 99 ff.; H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1937).

6. Increase Mather, *Discourse on Prayer*, quoted in Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, pp. 82-83.

The American Paradise

Moreover, certain pioneers already saw Paradise in the various regions of America. Traveling along the coast of New England in 1614, John Smith compared it to Eden: "Heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation . . . we chanced in a lande, even as God made it." George Alsop presents Maryland as the only place seeming to be the "Earthly Paradise." Its trees, its plants, its fruits, its flowers, he wrote, speak in "Hieroglyphicks of our Adamittical or Primitive situation." Another writer discovered the "future Eden" in Georgia—a region located on the same latitude as Palestine: "That promis'd *Canaan*, which was pointed out by God's own choice, to bless the Labours of a favorite People." For Edward Johnson, Massachusetts was the place "where the Lord will create a new Heaven and a new Earth." Likewise, the Boston Puritan, John Cotton, informed those preparing to set sail from England for Massachusetts that they were granted a privilege of Heaven, thanks to "the grand charter given to *Adam* and his posterity in Paradise."⁷

But this reflects just one aspect of the millenarist experience of the pioneers. For many new immigrants, the New World represented a desert haunted by demonic beings. This, however, did not diminish their eschatological exaltation, for they were told in sermons that the present miseries were but a moral and spiritual trial before arriving at the Earthly Paradise that had been promised to them.⁸ The pioneers considered themselves in the situation of the Israelites after the crossing of the Red Sea, just as, in their eyes, their condition in England and Europe had been a sort of Egyptian bondage. After the terrible trial of the desert, they would enter Canaan. As Cotton Mather wrote, "The Wilderness through which we are passing to the Promised Land is all over filled with Fiery flying serpents."⁹

But, later on, a new idea was born, the New Jerusalem would be in part produced by work. Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) thought that through work New England would be transformed into a sort of "Paradise on Earth." We see how the millenarism of the pioneers gradually ends in the idea of progress. In the first

7. Texts quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

8. Cf. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, pp. 101 ff., 108 ff.

9. Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, p. 87. Cf. also Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, p. 108.

stage, a relationship was established between paradise and the earthly possibilities presenting themselves in the New World. During the next stage, the eschatological tension was reduced by the omission of the period of decadence and misery that was supposed to precede the "Last Days," and by arriving finally at the idea of a progressive and uninterrupted amelioration.¹⁰

But before the American idea of progress crystallized, the millenarism of the pioneers underwent other transformations. The first important crisis in this Puritan eschatology was provoked by the struggle among the European powers for the colonial empire. Rome and the Catholic nations were identified with the Antichrist, on whose destruction the coming of the future Kingdom depended.

At one particular time, English colonial literature was dominated by a single theme: the invasion of America by the Antichrist, who threatened to ruin the hope for the glorious triumph of Christ. For John Winthrop, the first duty of New England was to "raise a rampart against the kingdom of the Antichrist that the Jesuits are in the process of establishing in these regions." Other authors affirmed that the New World was a true Paradise before the arrival of the Catholics.

Obviously, the rivalry among the European powers for the domination of the transatlantic empires was in large measure economic in character, but it was exacerbated by an almost Manichean eschatology: everything seemed to be reduced to a conflict between Good and Evil. Colonial authors spoke of the threat that the French and the Spanish posed for the English colonies as a "new Babylonian captivity" or "an Egyptian bondage." The French and the Spanish were tyrants, slaves of the Antichrist. Catholic Europe was presented as a fallen world, a Hell, by contrast with the Paradise of the New World. The saying was "Heaven or Europe," meaning "Heaven or Hell." The trials of the pioneers in the desert of America had as their principal goal the redemption of man from the carnal sins of the pagan Old World.¹¹

The Return to Primitive Christianity

As long as the conflict between Good and Evil took concrete form, in the eyes of the colonists, in the struggle between Protestantism and Catholicism, England remained immune from attack. But

10. Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, p. 86.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 89 ff.

after 1640, tension began to arise between the colonists and the mother country. For the perfectionists in the colonies, the English Reformation was an imperfect reformation. Worse yet, the religious practices of England were considered as the work of the Antichrist. In the colonial apocalyptic imagery, England replaced Rome. The immediate consequence of this substitution was that the colonists—as the chosen people—began to judge their mission in the desert not only as the continuation of a traditional religious activity, but also as something altogether new. Hopeful of being reborn far from the European Hell, the colonists considered that they were about to initiate the final stage of History. In 1647, John Eliot, the apostle to the Indians, announced "The Daybreaking, if not the Sunrising of the Gospel . . . in New England."¹²

Such language indicates the profound break with the European past. And it must be made clear that this break had already been consummated long before the American Revolution and independence. In 1646, New England considered itself as a free state and not as a "colony or corporation of England." The reasons for this *prise de conscience* of autonomy were in the first place religious. Cotton Mather expected in New England the return to the early days of Christianity. "In short," he wrote, "the first age was the *golden Age*; to return unto that, will make a man a *protestant*, and I may add, a *Puritan*." This return to the Golden Age of Christianity was to bring about a transfiguration of the earth. As Increase Mather declared, the restoration of the Early Church would transform the earth into paradise.¹³

The break with England and the European past was accentuated to the extent to which the pioneers prepared for the millennium by returning to the virtue of the Early Church. For the Puritans, the major Christian virtue was simplicity. On the other hand, intelligence, culture, learning, manners, luxury were of the Devil's creation. John Cotton wrote: "The more cultured and intelligent you are, the more ready you are to work for Satan." The superiority complex of the pioneers and the missionaries of the Frontier was already forming. This return to Early Christianity that was supposed to restore paradise to earth also implied a disdain

12. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 96 ff.

13. Texts quoted in *ibid.*, p. 104.

for the erudition of the Jesuits, as well as a criticism of English aristocracy—cultured, elegant, sophisticated, accustomed to power and authority. Extravagance or luxury in clothing became the *sin par excellence* of the "gentleman." In his book *Simple Cobbler of Aggawam* (1647), Nathanael Ward contrasted the simple life and moral superiority of the colonists to the corrupt mores of England and drew from this contrast proof of the progress toward the paradisaical state of the Early Church.¹⁴

The colonists proclaimed their moral superiority over the English while recognizing their own inferiority in clothes and culture. According to Charles L. Sanford, the origin of the American superiority complex—manifest in foreign policy as well as in the enthusiastic effort to spread the "American way of life" across the whole planet—must be sought in the activity of the Frontier missionaries.¹⁵ A whole religious symbolism flowered about the Frontier, prolonging well into the nineteenth century the eschatology of the pioneers. The vast forests, the solitude of the infinite plains, the beatitude of the rural life are set in contrast to the sins and vices of the city. A new idea now arises: the American paradise has been infested with demonic forces coming from urban Europe. The critique of the aristocracy, luxury, and culture is now subsumed to the critique of cities and urban life. The great "revivalist" religious movements began on the Frontier and reached the cities only later. And even in the cities, "revivalism" was more popular among the poor than among the rich and educated population. The fundamental idea was that the decline of religion had been caused by urban vices, especially intoxication and luxury, common to the aristocracy of European origin. For, obviously, Hell was—and long remained—"the way of Europe."¹⁶

The Religious Origins of the "American Way of Life"

But, as we have already pointed out, eschatological millenarianism and the expectation of the Earthly Paradise were subjected in the end to a radical secularization. The myth of progress and the cult of novelty and youth are among the most noteworthy consequences. However, even in drastically secularized form, one de-

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 105 ff.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 93 ff.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 109 ff.

fects the religious enthusiasm and the eschatological expectations inspiring the ancestors. For, in short, both the first colonists and the later European immigrants journeyed to America as the *country where they might be born anew*, that is, begin a new life. The "novelty" which still fascinates Americans today is a desire with religious underpinnings. In "novelty" one hopes for a "renaissance"; one seeks a new life.

New England, New York, New Haven—all these names express not only the nostalgia for the native land left behind, but above all the hope that in these lands and these new cities life will know new dimensions. And not only life: everything in this continent that was considered an earthly paradise must be greater, more beautiful, stronger. In New England, described as resembling the Garden of Eden, partridges were supposedly so big that they could no longer fly, and the turkeys as fat as lambs.¹⁷ This American fair for the grandiose, likewise religious in origin, is shared even more by the most lucid minds.

The hope of being born again to a new life—and the expectation of a future not only better, but beatific—may also be seen in the American cult of youth. According to Charles L. Sanford, since the era of industrialization, Americans have more and more sought their lost innocence in their children. The same author believes that the exaltation of things new, which followed the pioneers to the Far West, fortified individualism over authority, but also contributed to the American irreverence toward history and tradition.¹⁸

We shall end here these few considerations of the metamorphosis of the millenarist eschatology of the pioneers. We have seen how, in setting out in search of the Earthly Paradise across the ocean, the first explorers were conscious of playing an important role in the history of salvation; how America, after being identified with the Earthly Paradise, became the privileged place where the Puritans were to perfect the Reformation, which supposedly had failed in Europe; and how the immigrants believed that they had escaped from the Hell of Europe and expected a new birth in the New World. We have likewise seen to what extent modern America is the result of these messianic hopes, this confidence in

17. Texts quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111.

18. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 112 ff.

the possibility of reaching paradise here on earth, this faith in youth and in the simplicity of the mind and soul.

One might continue the analysis and show how the long resistance of American elites to the industrialization of the country, and their exaltation of the virtues of agriculture, may be explained by the same nostalgia for the Earthly Paradise. Even when urbanization and industrialization had triumphed everywhere, the favorite images and clichés used by the pioneers retained their prestige. In order to prove that urbanization and industrialization did not necessarily imply (as in Europe!) vice, poverty, and the dissolution of mores, owners of factories multiplied their philanthropic activities, constructing churches, schools, and hospitals. At all costs, it had to be made plain that, far from threatening spiritual and religious values, science, technology and industry guaranteed their triumph. A book appearing in 1842 was entitled *The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, by Power of Nature and Machinery*. And one might detect the nostalgia for Paradise, the desire to find again that "Nature" of their ancestors, in the contemporary tendency to leave the metropolis and seek refuge in suburbia—luxurious and peaceful neighborhoods arranged with utmost care in paradisiacal landscapes.

But our concern here is not to present an analysis of the metamorphosis of the American millenarist ideal. What must be emphasized, as other authors have, is that the certainty of the eschatological mission, and especially of attaining once again the perfection of early Christianity and restoring Paradise to earth, is not likely to be forgotten easily. It is very probable that the behavior of the average American today, as well as the political and cultural ideology of the United States, still reflects the consequences of the Puritan certitude of having been called to restore the Earthly Paradise.

The Adamic Nostalgias of the American Writers

One can detect a similar eschatology in what may be called the revolt against the historical past, a revolt that is abundantly illustrated by almost all the important American writers of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. The paradisiacal elements—at least those of Judeo-Christian origin—are now more or less repressed, but we find the yearning for, and the exaltation of, a

new beginning, an "Adamic" innocence, a beatific plenitude which precedes history. In his book *The American Adam* (1955), R. W. B. Lewis has brought together a great number of illuminating quotations from which one has, if anything, too much to choose from. In "Earth's Holocaust," a fantasy composed in 1844, Nathaniel Hawthorne presents the vision of a cosmic bonfire which destroys the heraldry of ancient aristocratic families, the robes and scepters of royalty and other symbols of old institutions, and finally the total body of European literature and philosophy. "Now," declares the chief celebrant, "we shall get rid of the weight of dead men's thoughts."¹⁹ And in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1850), one of the characters, Holgrave, exclaims: "Shall we never, never get rid of this Past? It lies upon the present like a giant's dead body!" He complains that "we read in dead men's books! We laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos!" Hawthorne regrets, through his mouthpiece Holgrave, that the public edifices — "our capitals, statehouses, courthouses, city-halls and churches" — are built "of such permanent materials as stone or brick. It were better that they should crumble to ruin once in twenty years or thereabouts, as a hint to people to examine and reform the institutions which they symbolize" (Lewis, *American Adam*, pp. 18-19).

One finds the same angry rejection of the historical past in Thoreau. All the objects, values, and symbols associated with the past should be burned away. "I look on England today," writes Thoreau, "as an old gentleman who is traveling with a great deal of baggage, trumpery which has accumulated from long house-keeping, which he has not the courage to burn" (*ibid.*, pp. 21-22). Lewis shows how persistent the image of an American Adam was, how profound the belief that in America mankind has the unique chance to begin history anew.

The Adamic nostalgia also survives, in a camouflaged form, among many writers of the period. Thoreau admirably illustrates what an "Adamic life" can mean. He considered his morning bath in the pond "a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did" (*ibid.*, p. 22). It was, for him, a rite of rebirth. Thoreau's love for children has equally an "Adamic" character: "every child

19. Quoted by R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago, 1955), p. 14. As early as 1789, in a letter written from Paris, Thomas Jefferson solemnly asserted that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living; that the dead have neither power nor rights over it" (*ibid.*, p. 16).

begins the world again," he writes, unaware, perhaps, of the great discovery he was making.

Such yearning for the "Adamic," for the primordial, reflects an "archaic" type of mentality, resisting history and exalting the "sacredness" of life and body. Whitman, who calls himself "Chanter of Adamic songs," declares that the aroma of his body is "finer than prayer" and his head is "more than churches, bibles and all creeds" (*ibid.*, p. 43). Lewis judiciously recognizes an "Adamic narcissism" in such almost ecstatic proclamations: "If I worship one thing more than another, it shall be the spread of my own body"; or, "Divine am I, inside and out, and I make myself holy whatever I touch" — ecstatic proclamations that remind one of some tantric texts. Lewis detects in Whitman too the paradigmatic motif — the past is dead, it is a corpse — but "in Whitman's view the past had been so effectively burned away that it had, for every practical purpose, been forgotten altogether" (*ibid.*, p. 44). There was for Whitman and his contemporaries a general hope that man was born anew in a new society, that, as Lewis puts it, "the race was off to a fresh start in America" (*ibid.*, p. 45). Whitman expresses with force and glamour the contemporary obsession with the primordial, the absolute beginning. He enjoyed "reciting Homer while walking beside the Ocean" (*ibid.*, p. 44) because Homer belonged to the *primordium*; he was not a product of history — he had *founded* European poetry.

But the reaction against this new version of the paradisaical myth was bound to come. The old Henry James, the father of William and Henry, boldly affirmed that "the first and highest service which Eve renders Adam is to throw him out of Paradise" (*ibid.*, p. 58). In other words, only after losing Paradise did man begin to become himself: open to culture, perfectible, creatively giving sense and value to human existence, to life, and to the world. But the history of this demythologizing of the American paradisaical and Adamic nostalgia would take us to far beyond the theme of our discussion.

The Guarani in Search of the Lost Paradise

In 1912, the Brazilian ethnologist Curt Nimuendajú encountered along the coast near São Paulo a group of Guarani Indians who had ~~stopped~~ ^{stopped} there in their search for the Lost Paradise.