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EDITORIAL

IDOLS FOR DESTRUCTION

by Stephen C. Perks

ON 31 AUGUST 1997 DIANA, the Princess of Wales, was killed in a car crash in France. During the following week there was an astonishing outpouring of public grief that surprised everyone. People waited in queues for six or seven hours often in the rain in order to sign condolence books. Some who were interviewed on the television made it clear that even they themselves were surprised by their reaction to the news and their sense of grief. This extraordinary grief seemed excessive and even pathological to some. On the *Newsnight* programme on the Wednesday following the accident a psychologist was brought in to analyse the phenomenon. His conclusion was that this was an unhealthy response by people who had never known Diana. People were responding to her death almost as if they had known her personally, as if they had been close friends or part of the family. The nation's infatuation with Diana was surfacing in a morbid pathological grief that seemed inexplicable.

Like many people, when I heard the news early on Sunday morning it came as something of a shock. One does not imagine such things happening to such people. Members of the royal family are usually surrounded by body guards and their lives are planned in the most careful way to avoid any dangers such as the one that resulted in Diana's death. But the shock of the news for me was no more than one would expect on hearing of the tragic and untimely death of any well-known public figure—no more shocking than hearing the news of the untimely death of the leader of the Labour Party a few years ago. *Grief* certainly did not enter into it. The public response to Diana's death seemed more astonishing to me than her death itself. What could explain this enormous outpouring of public grief? In the week leading up to her funeral this show of public feeling developed into a kind of national hysteria. Diana was being treated like some national saviour whose effect on the life of the nation had been so significant that her death was a national calamity. The *Newsnight* programme reported that some people had claimed to have seen visions and apparitions of Diana after her death. These are common phenomena in normal personal bereavement. They are understandable when the person experiencing them is a spouse, a close friend or a relative of the dead person. But for people to be grieving in this way over someone who was not personally known to them is highly unusual. It transcends the normal. The psychologist interviewed on the *Newsnight* programme stated that such delusional experiences in people not personally close to Diana would be considered clinically to be a symptom of schizophrenia.¹

The reasons for this national grief are no doubt complex and no single explanation will explain the feelings of everyone. Some have suggested that Diana represented a kind of rebellion against the establishment that many can identify with.

1. I am using here a clinical definition of schizophrenia, not the popular notion of split personality. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines schizophrenia as "a mental disease [perhaps 'disorder' would be a better term here—SCP] marked by a breakdown in the relation between thoughts, feelings, and actions, frequently accompanied by delusions and retreat from social life."

Another explanation that surfaced was that as a result of Diana's position as a sort of *persona non grata* in the royal family she had become an unofficial figurehead for anti-monarchy feelings in the population. There is doubtless some truth in both notions. Others have been helped by the charitable causes she represented. This latter fact certainly explains the sorrow of many. But neither this nor the other theories explain the sorrow of the masses who waited in the queues to sign the condolence books and the tremendous outpouring of grief displayed by the nation. Compared with the masses demonstrating their sense of loss at Diana's death those who were touched by her work in a personal way are few. Of course there has always been a cult of the royals in Britain, but again, it is hard to believe that this accounts for the national sense of loss that followed Diana's death. If anything, the cult of the monarchy has been damaged by public sympathy for Diana at the appalling way she was treated by the royal family. What then can explain this intense sense of loss for the great mass of people who experienced it?

I think there is an explanation that helps us to understand this national phenomenon. The response to Diana's death must be seen in terms much broader and greater than Diana herself or a mere sense of grief at the death of a well-known and much loved public figure. The response to Diana's death was a *religious* phenomenon.

Any State or nation needs a national focus, something that gives meaning, coherence and significance to its life and institutions. Britain is disintegrating today because it has abandoned what had previously provided that national focus, that meaning and coherence: a Christian understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, a Christian world-view. Yet the need for such a focus remains. Man cannot escape this. But without God he seeks for the meaning, coherence and significance of life in some element of the created order instead. This is what idolatry is. In Britain the national focus is no longer a Christian focus. It does not take account of the transcendent being of God and the salvation that he has provided for mankind in the Lord Jesus Christ. Questions concerning the ultimate meaning of existence no longer play a part in our national life. Instead the national focus is on the mundane, the economic and particularly the political. People look to the great and the famous, to the State and the party, to their hobbies or their bank balance, even their annual holiday, anything other than the God of Scripture, and there they seek ultimate meaning and significance for their lives. But these things cannot provide what they are looking for. They will always disappoint. These are gods that fail. False gods always fail. But because so much hope, trust and expectation is placed in these things, when they do fail their failure has a devastating effect on those who put their trust in them. The failure of a society's god or gods causes national calamity, grief, an overwhelming sense of loss. The loss of faith that accompanies the fall of a god has a devastating effect on human beings.

I think this is essentially what has happened with Diana. It explains the visions and apparitions. These are common religious phenomena. And this is how cults are born: from idols. Of course Diana is now dead, but I suspect the cult of Diana is only just being born and will grow from strength to strength. Already there has been serious discussion on the *Sunday* programme on Radio Four as to whether Diana was a saint, with one contributor earnestly contending "Of course she is."

It is the absence in our society of belief in the one who can provide ultimate meaning, coherence and significance for the life of the nation that explains the response to Diana's death. Without God people seek for meaning in the ephemeral, in what cannot last, and thus in what must ultimately disappoint.

This happens even with Christians sometimes. I remem-

ber many years ago hearing a lady stand up in a Christian meeting and give her “testimony” to her faith in a well-known evangelical charismatic minister who had just died unexpectedly at an early age. She said her faith was shaken by his death. Why? She did not say. She could only express her shock and grief that God could permit such a thing to happen. She had made an idol of this man. Did she think God would not permit his servant to die? Obviously. Her faith was not in God but in man. When their gods fail the people are crushed in spirit. It is a personal loss to them, not because they knew the people who are so idolised personally but because those people have taken a place in their lives that only the God of creation can fill. A real, personal relationship with the person in question is irrelevant. One can make an idol out of a piece of stone or wood. Personal interaction is not necessary. The decisive factor is the place the idol takes in one’s life, the significance it has in determining the meaning of a one’s life. In some respects it is more difficult to idolise those whom one knows personally. Their defects get in the way. When such defects are not perceived the idol’s virtues can be romantically exaggerated ad infinitum. Lack of a personal meaningful relationship with the idol is preferable. Regardless of the fact that people do not know those whom they idolise, therefore, it is a personal tragedy when they die, and it is a personal tragedy because gods are not supposed to fail or die. They are supposed to be immortal. But only God is immortal. And he does not share his glory with another.

It is God alone who provides ultimate meaning, coherence and significance to the lives of human beings and societies. No one and nothing else can do this, no cause or ideology, however great, and certainly no mere human being. It is in terms of God that understanding must be sought in all things. Those who are grieving over Diana, whether personal friends and family, or the masses who queued to sign the condolence books, can only find meaning to her life and death when they turn to God. Without such a response no lessons will be learned and no sense can be made of her tragic death.

It would seem Diana was not a believer. She has been dubbed by Tony Blair “The people’s princess.” Unfortunately her own lifestyle since the breakdown of her marriage has hardly been an example to the nation. Doubtless she was, as far as her relationship to the monarchy was concerned, more sinned against than sinning. And she worked for many good causes. But this does not excuse her. It does not excuse any man’s sin. We are all guilty and stand condemned by our works. The good we do cannot undo the evil we do. Only Christ can do that. But the royal family must give a lead to the nation, and a credible lead at that. Their high position does not excuse their dissolute behaviour; it makes the burden of their responsibility greater. From those to whom much is given, much is expected.

In this sense our present monarchy has been a failure in some important respects. Queen Elizabeth II has given her name to legislation that has legalised the murder of millions of unborn children. Doubtless some will say, “But she had to do it; there would have been a constitutional crisis and the monarchy would have been abolished if she had not given royal consent.” But this is a poor argument: in the first place, it has not been proved, and secondly, if that *had* been the outcome, surely it would have been better to surrender the monarchy than preside over such obscene legislation. My response to such an objection is simply this: Do moral principles count for nothing against the monarchy? There is a King whose law is higher than that of Parliament and to whom even the Queen owes allegiance before all else; and indeed to whom she swore allegiance before all else when she was crowned. Preservation of the monarchy, it seems to me, surely does not take precedence over

faithfulness to the coronation oath, which was taken in the sight of God and before the whole nation. Betrayal of the coronation oath is treason against God and a betrayal of the nation.

Diana was treated badly by the royal family. The Prince of Wales is a self-confessed adulterer whose callous disregard for his wife and inability to control his own libido hardly recommends him as a suitable candidate for the monarchy by any reasonable standard. Of course there is nothing unusual about this. One could be forgiven for thinking that a complete lack of moral decency is part of the job description for an English monarch judging from the fact that most of our kings throughout history have behaved in the same deplorable way, or worse. But that does not mean higher standards should not be aimed at, nor that higher standards should not be *required* of the royal family. This is not meant to sound anti-monarchy. I am certainly not against monarchy per se. But I fear the present monarchy can do us no good and only harm. The Prince of Wales is to become the Defender of the Faith when he is eventually crowned (God forbid it!); and his own desire is to be Defender of Faith, i.e. *all* faiths. Yet he could not look after and protect his own wife.

Surely the time has come to get rid of this dissolute monarchy and appoint another royal family. Such a move is certainly not without precedent in our history. Parliament could set up a commission to appoint a new monarch to replace this present Queen and her ill-bred offspring (and as for the heir to the throne not being permitted to marry a commoner, I should have thought a few extra genes in the in-bred royal gene pool would not go amiss). Central to the role of the monarch should be a credible commitment to the present Constitution and the Protestant Reformed Religion established in law.

This is unlikely though. The nation cares very little now for those principles that do give meaning and coherence to our national life. Idols are in vogue today, and idols can do no wrong in the eyes of their devotees. The problem is, idols do not last. They always fail. The ephemeral, the political and the economic, the lives of the rich and the famous cannot provide meaning and purpose in life, nor can they provide meaning and purpose for a nation. And God does not tolerate idols. He brings them down. Idols are for destruction.²

This is not meant to cast aspersions on Diana personally. She did not make herself an idol. She was the victim of circumstances beyond her control to some extent. And I am not making ultimate statements about her standing with God. Only God knows her ultimate destiny, though as mentioned above it does seem from her behaviour that she was not a believer—and we must remember that Christ told us that it is by their behaviour, the fruit they bear, not merely their words, that we shall know who are his. Diana’s death was a tragedy. But there are greater tragedies occurring every day in our society that fail even to get a mention in the media. It seems to me quite extraordinary from a moral point of view that the nation can mourn in this way over Diana and yet blithely ignore the holocaust of murdered unborn children since the passing of the abortion act. This shows that the nation has lost its ability to reason morally, which, I suppose, is not surprising given the fact that both the use of reason and the practice of morality are at an all-time low in our society today. This situation is one that can only be explained by national apostasy

2. The place for idols is hell. Jesus used the word “Gehenna” to characterise the final state of non-believers. But Gehenna was a rubbish tip just outside Jerusalem where all the rubbish and dead criminals were burned. The fires were continually burning in this rubbish tip—hence the Western image of hell as a place of eternal fire. It was the equivalent of today’s municipal incinerator. And it was into this Gehenna that broken idols were thrown.

and idolatry. But it is also one that portends the judgement of God upon the nation for its apostasy. There is, therefore, a cautionary tale for the nation in all this.

When a number of Jews were killed in the accidental collapse of a tower in Jerusalem Jesus asked the people: “those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?” (Lk. 13:4). Obviously they were not, and their

deaths were not to be construed as personal judgement in this sense—a false conclusion to which men are too often all too ready to jump. But Jesus did not leave it there. He applied the lesson. We all stand condemned of our sin before God, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, said Jesus, “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:5). This is a lesson that the nation needs to heed. We are, as a nation, perilously close to the end, and soon we may be cast into the fire. *C&S*

ST AUGUSTINE: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

by Colin Wright

PART VIII: BIBLIOGRAPHY

In matters that are obscure and far beyond our vision, even in such as we may find treated in Holy Scripture, different interpretations are sometimes possible without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such a case, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search of truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it. That would be to battle not for the teaching of Holy Scripture but for our own, wishing its teaching to conform to ours, whereas we ought to wish ours to conform to that of Sacred Scripture.

The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Bk I, chap. 18, §37.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS bibliography is to present the reader with some of the literature relating to Augustine, both by him and about him. It is an extensive field and I have only included, on the whole, those that are accessible and likely to be of immediate interest to our readers. Anyone seriously interested in going beyond this list will find ample references to further works in those I have included. In any case this bibliography contains sufficient material to occupy the most ardent student for some time! Hopefully this series of essays has kindled some interest among our readers in a man many scholars consider to be of profound significance for Western culture.

Where to start? That's easy. The first port of call is Augustine himself and that means primarily the *Confessions* followed by *The City of God*. If the reader can master these two works he may consider himself a quite proficient Augustine student. Someone once remarked to me that the difference between Anita Bruckner and other modern novelists was that between a fine wine and a cheap beer. This is paralleled in Augustine's work. It needs to be sipped not guzzled; read thoughtfully phrase by phrase, not scanned at speed. Augus-

tine put his works together very carefully, constantly using his great skills developed as a public orator to express his thought in the most apt phraseology. Don't so much read what he has to say as consider it.

i. Works by Augustine

A definitive English edition of the complete works of Augustine, suitably edited, is a pressing need. It is unlikely to come about in the short term, so we will have to make do with the best of what is available.

The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

Edited by Marcus Dods, 15 vols
(Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871-6)

This is a fine, if incomplete, edition of Augustine's writings. Unfortunately, it is out of print and likely to remain so. Clark are now distributing the Eerdmans edition mentioned below.

Select Works of Augustine

First Series of the *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*, 8 vols
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)

This Series was first published as part of a 38 volume set of early church writings in the 1880s under the editorship of Philip Schaff. It is based on the Edinburgh edition of T. & T. Clark but does not slavishly follow it. It was reprinted in the 1970s by Eerdmans and is still available. The reprint suffers from one major drawback however: it has been photo reduced to the size of an average hardback (9.75" x 6.75"). This means that, with the double columns on a page, the print is quite small for sustained reading. The footnotes are positively tiny. Get the original edition if you can. (My attention has been drawn to a second drawback of recent reprints by Eerdmans: they are using perfect bindings, i.e., using paperback type bindings in hardbacks).

Although more "typographically challenged" than T. & T. Clark's volumes, the Schaff edition has some fine introductions by men like W. G. T. Shedd and B. B. Warfield. It is far from being a complete works but it covers all the major areas of Augustine's thought and is more than adequate for all but the very serious student.

All 38 volumes of the series can be read on, or downloaded from, the internet. You will find Augustine currently only in text format for ftp downloading.

The Fathers of the Church

(Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947-)

This is a series of new translations of patristic Greek and Latin texts from the Apostolic Fathers onwards. Augustine's writings take up many of the volumes so far published. Many volumes are no longer available from the publishers however. Those that are available are quite expensive. No doubt we shall be castigated in certain quarters for introducing our readers to RC literature but until Protestant scholars can be troubled to get off their haunches and give us something better we shall remain impenitent. As we mention below, this series contains the only English translation ever to be made of Augustine's *Retractions*. This is a Protestant scandal. If the Kuyper Foundation could raise the money it would consider a new critical edition of the complete works of Augustine in English a very high priority undertaking.

Confessions

Translated by F. J. Sheed

(Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Pub Co.)

This modern translation is both powerful and sympathetic. While largely (but not altogether) excising the *thees* and *thous* it retains the poetic strength of Augustine's Latin. I strongly recommend it. And like all Hackett books it is very inexpensive. This latest edition (it was first published in 1944) comes with a first rate introduction by Peter Brown, an acknowledged Augustine scholar.

Confessions

(Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1961), paperback

The City of God

Translated by Henry Bettenson

(Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1152 pages, 1991), paperback

Penguin give it its full title of *Concerning the City of God, against the Pagans*. But it is far too big for a single paperback and

should have been printed in two volumes. To my mind the best edition is still that of Marcus Dods in the T. & T. Clark edition.

Letters of St Augustine

Volume 1: Letters 1-82,

Volume 2: Letters 83-130,

Volume 3: Letters 131-164,

Volume 4: Letters 165-203,

Volume 5: Letters 204-270,

Volume 6: Letters 1-29

Translated by Sister Wilfrid Parsons, SND

(Catholic University of America)

The letters of Augustine in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series are far from complete and this modern edition (not cheap by any means) more than supplies the want. The sixth volume contains 29 letters more recently discovered and generally attributed to Augustine. (An Oxford UP edition of these letters is to be published shortly) The letters were discovered this century by Johannes Divjak in the mid-seventies. In the municipal library of Marseilles, while working on an Austrian Academy of Sciences project to catalogue all known Augustinian manuscripts in Europe, he came across a fifteenth-century manuscript of letters not previously known about. Later, he discovered the same letters in a twelfth-century manuscript at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

The Retractions

Translated by Sister Mary Inez Bogan,

(Catholic University of America)

Augustine set about a thorough review of all his published work in 428. The title—*Retractions*—however, implies denial of former views. This is not what Augustine meant. A better title would be *Reconsiderations*,¹ but the old title has stuck now. This work was regrettably and mystifyingly left out of the Eerdmans and T. & T. Clark sets. Last known price was \$31.95 in the USA. I have a copy and find it fascinating.

Political Writings

(Hackett Pub Co., 1994)

This is an anthology of Augustine's thought on political and related issues. Over four fifths of it is from his *The City of God*. It contains a short, but useful, introduction.

The Literal Meaning of Genesis, 2 vols

Translated by J H Taylor

(New York: Newman Press, 1982)

Regarded as one of Augustine's major works, though, strangely, left out of the *Nicene Fathers* series. In his *Reconsiderations*, written towards the end of his life, Augustine tells us of his initial attempt to write this book on the literal as opposed to the allegorical meaning of the creation account:

1. Thomas Williams (trans.) in a note on page 124 of *On Free Choice of the Will* by Augustine (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co., 1993) says, "Near the end of his career, Augustine undertook to review all his works, establish their chronology, and re-examine them in the light of his views at the time. He called this survey *Retractiones*, from the Latin *retractare*, to rehandle or take up again. It is a mistake to call them *Retractions*, since often Augustine is perfectly satisfied with what he finds in his earlier writings. A better English title would be *Reconsiderations*."

I wanted to test my capabilities in this truly most taxing and difficult work also. But in explaining the Scriptures, my inexperience collapsed under the weight of so heavy a load and, before I had finished one book, I rested from this labour which I could not endure. But while I was re-examining my writings in the present work, this very book came into my hands, unfinished as it was, which I had not published and which I had decided to destroy since, at a later time, I wrote twelve books entitled *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

Vernon J. Bourke reckoned that as *De Trinitate* treated the great theme of God and the soul, and *The City of God* treated the great theme of God and society, so this work treated the great theme of God and the created world.

On Free Choice of the Will

Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by Thomas Williams, 1993
(Hackett Pub Co.)

This little book (123 pages) is a dialogue between Augustine and “Evodius” in which Evodius begins the discussion by asking Augustine: Please tell me: isn’t God the cause of evil? Augustine’s argument is not easy for the modern reader but it is still worth reading. Calvin greatly improved upon Augustine’s formulation of the answer to Evodius. Like Jonathan Edwards’ classic *Freedom of Will*, Augustine’s book takes philosophical as well as theological issues into account.

Paul Spade of Indiana University says of this book: “Translated with an uncanny sense of the overall point of Augustine’s doctrine. The introduction is admirably clear. . . Williams is plainly a skilled writer and thoroughly sensitive to the way language works.”

The Pelagians claimed that Augustine supported their view of the human will in this book but in his *Retractions* he dispels this misunderstanding. His purpose here was to refute certain positions of the Manichees and his words must be read in that context.

Augustine: Confessions

James J. O’Donnell
(Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992, 3 vols)

Peter Brown calls this commentary on the *Confessions* “a monument, rare in our times, of philological erudition combined with fine judgment.” James J. O’Donnell has his own Web pages on the internet (see below for more details). It contains some fascinating material and, most importantly, a separate section devoted to Augustine.

2. Works about Augustine

Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine

by J. E. Merdinger
(Yale University Press 1997)

I review this book in this issue of *Christianity & Society*. A thoroughly researched and eminently readable work. My review says it all. This book should be on the Christmas list of every self-respecting Augustinian student this winter.

Augustine

by Henry Chadwick
(Past Masters Series, Oxford University Press 1986)

The Past Masters series is generally worth recommending but hardly so in this instance. This is a small and fairly

popular book, ideal as an introduction if it were not for Chadwick’s thorough Platonising of Augustine’s thought. One gets the impression that Augustine merely regurgitated Plotinus. Save your money; buy an ice cream.

Augustine

by James J. O’Donnell
(Twayne’s World Authors Series, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1985)

A useful volume that is centred around Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*, his *City of God*, and *Confessions*. It is easy to read and often very perceptive. Unfortunately its perspective (liberal Roman Catholic) is often evident. It is redeemed by an excellent bibliography of Augustine’s complete writings.

The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine

Jaroslav Jan Pelikan
(University Press of Virginia, 1986, 177pp)

I have not been able to obtain a copy of this book but anything by Pelikan is well worth perusing if you can get hold of it.

The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine
Vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600)*

Jaroslav Jan Pelikan
(University of Chicago Press, 1971)

A standard work by a renowned church historian that is well worth consulting.

Augustine and the Limits of Virtue

James Wetzel
Cambridge University Press, 1992, 261pp
This is a rewrite of Wetzel’s Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University. We have not seen a copy but understand it is worth reading.

Augustine on Evil

G. R. Evans
(Cambridge University Press, 1990)

We left this volume with a profound regard for the author’s erudition and admiration for the comprehensive treatment he has given the subject. But the book is marred by his insistence in seeing everything Augustine wrote as a direct outcome of Augustine’s reading of the neo-Platonists. Probably no man has had such a profound influence on Western culture in the last one and a half millennia, John Calvin not excepted, and yet scholars will not allow him one original thought!

Reading and Wisdom: The De Doctrina Christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages

Edward D. English (editor)
(University of Notre Dame Press, 1994)

De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture

D. W. H. Arnold & P. Bright (editors)
(University of Notre Dame Press, 1994)

Augustine of Hippo

Peter Brown
Widely regarded as the best study of Augustine’s life. Avail-

able in paperback but not cheap.

3. Related Studies

Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Ockham
Gordon Leff

(Harmondsworth: Pelican Books)

An excellent section on the thought of Augustine. A book always to be recommended anyway. Not currently in print unfortunately but so worth reading it just cries out to be included in any list of books on the medieval period.

Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine

Charles Norris Cochrane

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940)

Not strictly a book about Augustine, but it contains some excellent comment on the place of his thought in history, and provides a good background study to his times. This book first came to my attention through sympathetic footnotes in R. J. Rushdoony's works and I have not been disappointed by it. Not for the novice however. You will find it mentioned in the bibliography of virtually every other book on Augustine since 1940.

Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity

Peter Brown

(London: Faber & Faber, 1991)

A brilliant, and very readable, book. Robert Markus says of Brown that "His learning is vast, his imaginative sympathy and compassion limitless, his prose vibrant with glowing images." Not a bad description as it happens. Part Three entitled "Ambrose to Augustine: The Making of the Latin Tradition" takes up 90 pages. It surveys the thought of Ambrose, Jerome, and finally Augustine. He depicts the way in which Augustine turned from the mystical view of creation of his time, especially as taught by Ambrose and Jerome, and emphasised the physical reality of Adam and Eve. Augustine held to the value of perpetual virginity but at the same time preached the validity of marriage. He perceptively pointed out that it was in sinless Eden that God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply." Augustine's confusion, as he sought to drive his thought by purely biblical motives, must always be regarded with sympathy, and due recognition given to his powerful insights into Scripture that have since proved so salutary in Western culture.

4. The Internet and World Wide Web

Reading in bed is very difficult with a 17 inch SVGA computer monitor on your lap but the internet does have some advantages. Much of the material appearing on it has been unavailable in book form for years. In any case few would be able to afford it. The 38 volume *Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Library*, for instance, would severely dent most bank balances but here it is FREE! Download the parts you want in a few minutes to hard disk and read it at leisure. Also, you know that phrase that Augustine used but you can't remember where? Now you can search for it in

seconds! Take a look at:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html>

This is James O'Donnell's Augustine site. It has many articles on Augustine by himself, including brief sections from his *Commentary on the Confessions*. There are also links to other sites of related interest. O'Donnell's own Web homepage is at:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/>

Also extremely useful for Augustinian and other studies is his bookmarks page:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/bookmarks.html>

Another good site is the Wheaton College site and home to the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, which can be accessed directly at:

<http://ccel.wheaton.edu/>

Here you will find the 38 volumes of the *Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Library*.

5. Augustine's Works in Latin

Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

A critical edition published in the late nineteenth century under the direction of the Imperial Academy of Vienna

Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina

Published at Turnhout, Belgium by Brepols. More or less a reprint of CSEL

Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina

(J. P. Migne, 12 vols, 1841-49)

Patrol. Lat. volumes 32-47

This Herculean publishing effort includes an edition of Augustine's writings first published in Paris by the Benedictine monks of St Maur between 1679 and 1700. As one scholar has rightly remarked,

Although this edition by the monks of St Maur does not give all the information on the manuscripts and the kind of apparatus criticus that we expect in a scholarly edition today, it is a monumental achievement in the editing of patristic texts, and to this day it has not been superseded by any new edition of the opera omnia.² C&S

2. St Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, "Introduction" by John Hammond Taylor, p. 13. (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

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UGLINESS IN THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

ART AS A WINDOW ON HISTORY

by David Estrada[†]

PART I

THE WORK OF ART, besides its intrinsic aesthetic value and its wide ranging impact on man's sensitivity, has a very special value as a means of assessing the culture and spiritual conditions of a given historical period. On this account, the work of art becomes a sort of *window* through which we can see the main trends of a culture. Endowed with an inherent *porosity*, the work of art has a sponge-like capacity to absorb the general spirit of the age. The humanist drift of the Renaissance culture, for example, can easily be detected in the art of that time, just as the ostentatious loftiness of the Counter-Reformation can be seen in the pomposity of Roman Catholic baroque art. These are two examples of the many instances the history of art offers us.

The "window of art" which we propose to open in this essay is that of the so-called Theatre of the Absurd—one of the most significant phenomena of our time and a decisive clue for the understanding of our culture. As an opening remark we advance the thesis that what takes place on the stage of the Theatre of the Absurd is all that remains of reality once God has been removed from man's world-view. The Theatre of the Absurd is construed on the assumption that "God is dead." This "death" not only points to a radical religious vacuum, but also uncovers a situation of spiritual aridity and desolation in our contemporary culture. Arthur Adamov, one of the exponents of this theatre, plainly states that in his plays he attempts to describe a type of reality

"from which God has been completely eclipsed." What we see, therefore, on stage is man's predicament once God has been effaced from reality. The adjective "absurd," which singles out the nature of this theatre, qualifies very graphically the spiritual and cultural situation of a world without God: it is an *absurd* world.

The Theatre of the Absurd, more than individual plots concerning persons or situations, stages the plight of a civilisation which has lost its theocentric roots and spiritual values. To dispose of the God of biblical revelation is to do away with the fountain-head of faith and meaning. The God of Christianity is not only the foundation of genuine religious experience, he is also the basic presupposition on which all meaning and value rest. With the destruction of the God of Christianity the basic structures of our culture, ethics, and anthropology fall apart. This is something Friedrich W. Nietzsche saw most clearly when he wrote: "Christianity is a *system*, a consistently thought out and *complete* view of things. If one breaks out of it a fundamental idea, the belief in God, one thereby breaks the whole thing to pieces: one has nothing of any consequence left in one's hands."¹

With the "death of God," man ushered in a "new age" of a radical liberation from all forms of "theistic oppression." The "new times," anticipated by Nietzsche, of glorious heroism, have, in effect, taken people to an absolute loss of purpose and meaning in all spheres. With the "death of God" man has lost a most elemental sense of self-identity, and the world into which he finds himself hurled is enveloped in thick shadows of absurdity. With the "death of God" all that which was stable and permanent has also disappeared. No longer are there any firm grips to hold onto: everything is now immersed in the impetuous current of an absurd reality that empties into nothingness. The Theatre of the Absurd seeks to describe this cultural, spiritual, and existential plight *after* the "death of God." The merit of this theatre

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1. F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Gods*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1968), p. 69f.

lies precisely in the staged presentation of this terrifying *after*.

The Theatre of the Absurd also describes a situation in which modern forms of religion have also been swept away: faith in progress, nationalism, and the totalitarian utopias. In this theatre man has lost all certitude; there are no absolutes. There is no room for rationality or logic; all is incongruous, unreasonable, illogical. According to Eugène Ionesco, immersed as we are in absurdity, we can see nothing beyond absurdity. Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and spiritual roots, man is lost; all his thoughts are nihilistic; all his actions become ridiculously senseless and totally useless. The dramatists of the absurd have renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; their aim is to present the human condition in its unexplainable character in terms of concrete stage images deprived of any coherent structure.

In many respects the Theatre of the Absurd echoes the anxieties and perplexities of contemporary existentialism. The dramatists of the absurd differ from Sartre, Camus, Anouilh, Salacrou, and Giraudou in the method of presenting the irrationality and absurdity of existence. The existentialist philosopher resorts to “arguments” and “rational devices” to demonstrate the “irrationality and meaninglessness” of existence; the dramatist of the absurd declines to use reason to prove the irrationality of the world, and simply resorts to staging man’s thoughts, actions and words in their incoherent, senseless and absurd manifestation. As heralds of absurdity and nihilism, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco and other playwrights of today, are more effective and influential than Sartre or Camus. But on both the philosopher of the absurd and the playwright of the absurd the influence of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, and Dostoyevsky has proved to be decisive.

For Kierkegaard and his followers the sacrifice of reason, required by the God of Abraham, marks the path to be followed in man’s approach to the divine. Paradox, irrationality, and contradiction reveal the very nature of reality. According to Leon Chestov the only possible way to reach God is by sacrificing the intellect. From now on God becomes the very source of irrationality in the world. Absurdity finds now a divine sanction. The God of Christianity, who is the foundation of a world-view with purpose, law and rationality, is substituted by an ultimate principle of chaos and absurdity. If this is the reality we owe to God, concludes the contemporary hero of rebellion, why must we still cling to such a monstrous being? Couldn’t he have created a better world? “The concept ‘God’” writes Nietzsche “has hitherto been the greatest *objection* to existence. We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing *that* do we redeem the world.”² In his remarkable book *The Rebellious Man*,³ Albert Camus has defined the modern age as an age of radical rebellion against the God of Christianity.

In this rebellion against God, Nietzsche occupies a central place. This thinker, the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers, has become the prophet of the “Death of God” and has laid the foundation for an all-inclusive nihilism. Can we live without a belief in God? asks Nietzsche. He gives a positive answer to the question; atheism is both constructive and productive. Now that “God is dead,” argues Nietzsche, it is man’s task to impose order and

meaning on a senseless universe. Though surrounded on all sides by chaos, man has taken upon himself the task of choosing his own goals. Nietzsche’s nihilism is not final; only when nihilism is lived out, will it be possible to create a new order of things. Meantime, liberated from the *idols* of the past, man is alone; the Superman of the new era has not yet arrived. There is in Nietzsche a sort of faith in a “resurrection” from nihilism. “If God does not exist,” says Kirilov, one of Dostoyevsky’s characters, “I am God.” To kill God is to make oneself God. Since God and immortality do not exist, says Iván Karamazov, another of Dostoyevsky’s characters, “the new man can now become God.” But what does it mean to be God? To admit that “everything is permitted” and to reject all law which is not that of the individual. To become God implies embracing crime and vindicating the absolute principle of personal arbitrariness. With Cain, says Camus, “the first rebellion coincides with the first crime.”⁴ In Nietzsche and in the Hegelian political revolutionaries of Marxism and Nazism there is a call to power and to action. The hero of the liberating revolutionary movements is entitled to the use of all the means of power, even terrorism, death and extermination, to destroy the still surviving *idols* of the old Christian theocracy in order to establish and create a man-made world and society.

The Theatre of the Absurd accepts the nihilistic Nietzschean panorama of a reality without God, but it does not look forward to the coming of a better world. The Theatre of the Absurd has no philosophy for the future nor does it advocate formulas for bettering or improving reality. It accepts the absurdity of the world as something final, against which all human attempts are futile. The dramatist of the absurd appears as a defeated Nietzschean, as a passive spectator of a senseless reality. Adamov, who for a time, and on very personalistic terms, supported communist ideology, in his play *La Grande et la Petite Manoeuvre*, abandons his political revolutionary optimism. The efforts of the revolutionary to eliminate injustice are in vain, because all power, including the “just” power claimed by the revolutionary, is ultimately based on the exercise of brute force and leads to further destruction and injustice. In political revolutionary creeds, adds Adamov, *absurd* ideas are proclaimed as if they were eternal truths. The problem with religious sublimations, social and political utopias, and scientific optimism, lies in their attempt to conceal reality under some form of falsehood. All we can say and predicate of reality is absurdity.

Not only do philosophical nihilistic trends and political and social influences affect the general outlook of the playwrights of the absurd; most of the representatives of this type of theatre had experienced and witnessed the cruelties, atrocities, and sufferings of the World War II. Direct existential experience proved to them the nauseating absurdity of a world which exhibited everything but rationality and meaning. It was in the anguish of finding himself “thrown” into the trenches of World War I that M. Heidegger experienced the tantalizing question of being that prompted him to write his *Being and Time*. In the Theatre of the Absurd we sense the after-effects of a war that eloquently proved that the so-called progress and achievements of Western culture were nothing but empty expressions of vain ideals. The lack of initiative and the absence of social or political formulas to change and improve the world, so evident in the Theatre of

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³ *L’homme révolté*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

the Absurd, reflects the traumatic enervating effects of World War II on its writers. If any optimism was still left after embracing the Nietzschean views of a “resurrection” after the “death of God,” World War II left no more room for the “optimistic” side of Superman’s world.

While Nietzsche and his pupils laid down the principles of a philosophy of absurdity and nihilism, and World War II laid bare the falsehood of the religious and moral values on which Western civilization claimed to stand, the Dadaists and Surrealists were also active in launching a campaign of discredit on classical art. In opposition to the rationality and normativity of the traditional “beautiful art” of Western culture, they advocated an art free from rules and external impositions. As a mirror of true reality, art had to reflect the irrationality, the violence and the absolute liberty of the surrounding world. At first, the Surrealists only thought of destroying the Establishment and spreading chaos and disorder in all realms of cultural and social life. Their goal was the triumph of the irrational in all human acts and the recourse of violence as the only appropriate means of expression. Later, with their theory of the “gratuitous act” as the highest demonstration of “absolute liberty,” murder and suicide were perfectly justified. According to André Breton, the “simplest act” of Surrealism was to take a gun, go out in the street and shoot indiscriminately at the crowd. The destruction of *language* as a rational and coherent instrument of communication and the liberty to exteriorize the dictates of the unconscious—“the beasts of the unconscious”—and the free expression of sexual impulses, became also unrenounceable tenets of the Surrealist manifesto.⁵ The authors of the Theatre of the Absurd, without sharing the Surrealist formulas of violence, made theirs the basic ideas of the movement. A. Adamov, in his early Parisian days, wrote Surrealist poetry, and together with Paul Eluard carried out a notorious literary activity in the inner circles of the movement.

The representatives of the Theatre of the Absurd cannot be thought of as forming an integrated artistic movement. Its leaders, who lived in Paris and wrote mainly in French,⁶ represent a wide range of nationalities: Samuel Beckett, an Irishman; Arthur Adamov, a Russian of Armenian origin; Eugène Ionesco, a Rumanian; Jean Genet, a Frenchman; Harold Pinter, an Englishman; Fernando Arrabal, a Spaniard; V. Havel, a Czech; and others in Britain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States.⁷ The works of these men mirror and reflect the spiritual and cultural crisis of our generation. From purely personal and individualistic perspectives, these men echo in surprising accord the desperate anxieties of a large segment of their contemporaries

5. In his own flesh Beckett experienced the effects of a violent “gratuitous act.” In 1937 he was stabbed in a Parisian street by a robber who had accosted him for money, and had to be taken to a hospital with a perforated lung. Later he went to see his assailant in prison and asked why he had stabbed him, and received the answer, “Je ne sais pas, Monsieur.”

6. S. Beckett wrote his masterpieces in French because the danger of being carried along by the logic of language is greater in one’s mother’s language, with its unconsciously accepted meanings and associations. By writing in French, Beckett finds himself in a constant struggle with the spirit of language itself.

7. Other names which are directly or closely associated with the “Theatre of the Absurd” are those of Edward Albee, Dino Buzzati, Ezio d’Errico, Max Frisch, Günter Grass, Wolfgang Hildesheimers, Amos Kenan, Manuel de Pedrolo, Robert Pinget, Harold Pinter, Norman F. Simpson, Jean Tardieu, Boris Vian, etc.

in the Western world who seem to have lost both the values of the past and hope for the future. They speak to a generation of men and women who find themselves in the sinking sands of a meaningless universe. Their work is indeed a “window” to the moral and existential plight in which today’s men find themselves immersed.

The warm response this type of theatre has found in the general public, is more than a fashionable reception of a new type of theatre; it is rather an indication of the deep and existential *identification* theatre-goers have with the situation represented on the stage. The success of the Theatre of the Absurd, achieved within a short span of time, can be regarded as one of the most astonishing events of our time. This is particularly so with the plays of Samuel Beckett. His most famous work, *Waiting for Godot*, was first produced in Paris in January 1953, and after five years more than a million spectators had seen the play. In the summer of 1996, the Gate Theatre of Dublin came to New York City’s Lincoln Center with productions of all nineteen works Beckett wrote for the stage. The success of this festival corroborated, once more, the impact of the Theatre of the Absurd on the people of our time. These plays, which are often dismissed as nonsense or as cheaply surrealistic, depict the spiritual barrenness of the man of today. In the characters of these plays and the absurd situation in which they find themselves, the men and women of our day see a projection of their own existence. What they see on the stage strikes them as being familiar, as belonging to their day by day experience of reality. In this type of theatre they see themselves immersed in the senseless flux which leads to nothingness. More than didactic, these plays are mimetic representations of contemporary existence.

In most traditional dramatic literature, the characters pursue well-defined objectives: victory over injustice, marriage with a desirable partner, power, wealth, or something of the sort. All this is lacking in the Theatre of the Absurd. The basic plot in the plays is none other than the mystery of existence showing itself in its radical absurdity. Like the *Dasein* of M. Heidegger in *Being and Time*, “thrown” into existence, Vladimir and Estragon, the two heroes of *Waiting for Godot*, frequently referred to as tramps, find themselves in a situation they cannot account for. However, although they do not know what they are there for, led by the “old notion” that they are there “for a purpose,” they vaguely assume that their presence in the world, represented by an empty stage with a solitary tree on a country road, must be due to the fact that they are waiting for someone. But they are not sure of this: they have no conclusive evidence that this person, whom they call *Godot*, ever made such an appointment or, indeed, that he even exists. *Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; in fact, nothing happens.

As we already advanced at the beginning, the Theatre of the Absurd brings on stage the desolate panorama which follows the “death of God.” In *Waiting for Godot* we can easily discover some of the dreadful consequences which follow the “Divine death.” The characters of the play strike us as being totally lost in their situation: they don’t know where they are nor why they are in such desolate surroundings. They reach the vague conclusion that they are there because they have an appointment with an evanescent character they call *Godot*. From a biblical perspective, all we can say is that Beckett has been successful in describing the situation of confusion and perplexity man finds himself in once he

resolves to live without God. (Not that this was Beckett's actual intention). In *Waiting for Godot* we see that, apart from God, existence becomes an empty and absurd *wait*. Waiting points to an object. What does *Godot* stand for as the "object" of Vladimir and Estragon's expectations? For the tramps, *Godot* is the image of a sort of higher being or power that "somehow" can provide a remedy for their immediate material needs and a degree of stability to their existential uncertainties. It is on these grounds that they consider "waiting for him" worthwhile. What Beckett said of many of Joyce's characters, that they were beings simply "vegetating" on the earth of existence, could also be said of Beckett's characters: they absurdly drag their lives around in this world without any expectations beyond mortality. *Godot* could even symbolize the "Father" notion which many people today have of the State. Whatever the interpretation advanced to define *Godot*, it certainly cannot be a theological definition.

Vladimir and Estragon are not quite sure what *Godot* might do for them: "Tonight, perhaps we shall sleep in his place, in the warmth, dry, our bellies full, on the straw. It is worth waiting for that, is it not?" On another occasion Vladimir is not quite sure what it was they asked *Godot* to do for them; it was "nothing very definite . . . a kind of prayer . . . a vague supplication." Contrary to the ingenious interpretations given by some "Christianisers" of Beckett, *Godot* does not point to God, nor are the "petitions" of Vladimir and Estragon addressed to a divine being. The "petitions" of the tramps fall within the category of basic human needs. Even in the biblical allusions we find in the play, the Christian meaning is totally absent. When Didi mentions that only one of the two thieves who had been crucified had been saved, Gogo retorts: "Saved from what?" From hell, says Didi. How is it, he continues, that "of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved." But as the dialogue continues, it turns out that Didi is, certainly, not interested in salvation from hell. A second Gospel reference takes place when Estragon removes his boots and Vladimir says: "But you can't go barefoot!"

Estragon: Christ did.

Vladimir: Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You are not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him.

Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!

Estragon: Yes. And they crucified quick.

In the first instance, the interest of the tramps is "justice" for the two thieves; the death of Christ in the midst of the two thieves is totally ignored. In the second Gospel reference, the occasion that elicits the analogy between Estragon and Christ—with the final comment "And they crucified quick"—is certainly irrelevant and even irreverent. To pretend to find a religious Christian meaning in Beckett's biblical references is indeed mistaken and misleading. Yet the effort of Beckett's "Christianisers" is persistent. According to one of these superficially ingenious and naïve interpretations, the tramps, with their rags and their misery, represent the fallen state of man. The squalor of their surroundings and their lack of material goods symbolize the idea that here in this world "we can build no abiding city." Vladimir and Estragon's waiting is interpreted as signifying their steadfast faith and hope; while the two friends' mutual interdependence is seen as an expression of Christian love. The term *Godot* is taken by these

"Christianisers" as a loving neologism for God (God-ot). After all, we are told, Beckett was born and raised in a Christian home, and like W. B. Yeats, B. Shaw and O. Wilde, he came from the Irish Protestant middle class and was brought up "almost a Quaker."⁸ So, it is argued, his Christian background has left continuous marks on his writings. This is not a convincing argument. Beckett clearly stated that he had lost his faith and had become agnostic. Furthermore, Beckett was a man of immense learning, and besides biblical language and quotations, references to philosophical and poetical texts abound in his writings.

To the present, more than 150 books have been written on Beckett; as many books as interpretations, some of them very contradictory. The variety of interpretations given to Beckett's plays are not to be judged as a specific difficulty ascribed to this author alone, but rather to contemporary literature in general. The lack of objectivity in today's thought; the abhorrence on the part of our writers to make direct statements and clean cut distinctions on any specific subject, be it religious, philosophical, social or ethical, has plunged our culture in the chaos of relativism. Anything and everything can be interpreted in a thousand different ways. Since there is no objective truth, all dissolves in the flux of subjective relativism. The literary work of today, says Umberto Eco, "constantly changes its meaning and offers an inextinguishable range of different possible readings."⁹ As a striking example of this, Eco mentions Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, "a sort of a monstrous electronic brain in its stimuli and responses." T. S. Eliot writes: "A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant. The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid—it may even be better."¹⁰ The literary work is like the *mobile* sculptures of Alexander Calder, which move endlessly in a capricious and playful series of different shapes according to the blowing wind. Since his boyhood, writes Screwtape to Wormwood, modern man "has been accustomed to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head."¹¹

8. Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906. A brilliant scholar at Trinity College he enlarged his education in Paris and decided to establish his residence there. He lived in Paris for the rest of his life. In this city he became James Joyce's friend and assistant, taking dictation for some passages of *Finnegans Wake*. In wartime France, Beckett joined a Resistance group against the Germans. He earned the Croix for Guerre. In 1969 Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature. His main writings include: *En Attendant Godot* (1952; *Waiting for Godot*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1954); *Fin De Partie* (1957; *Endgame*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1958); *Acte Sans Paroles* (1957; *Act Without Words*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1958); *All That Fall*, 1957; *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1960; *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (*Happy Days*, 1961, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1963); *Play* (1964, *Comédie*, translated into English by S. Beckett); *Come and Go* (1966; *Va et vient*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1966); *More Pricks Than Kicks*, 1934; *Murphy*, 1938; *Watt*, 1953; *Molloy*, 1955; *Malone Meurt* (1951; *Malone Dies*, translated into English by S. Beckett); *L'Innomable* (1953; *The Unnamable*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1958); *Nouvelles et Textes Pour Rien*, (1955; *Stories and Texts for Nothing*, 1957); *Comment C'Est* (1961, *How It Is*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1964); *Magination Morte Imaginez* (1965; *Imagination Dead Imagination*, translated into English by S. Beckett, 1965); *Whoroscope*, 1930; and studies on Dante, Bruno, Vico, Joyce, 1929; Proust, 1931.

9. Umberto Eco, *La definizione dell'arte* (Barcelona: Editorial Martínez Roca, 1968), p. 158.

10. T. S. Eliot, *The Music of Poetry*, in *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 30.

11. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, in "The Best of C.S. Lewis" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 18.

C. S. Lewis wrote this in 1941. Today, the number of incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside the head of man has increased in a geometrical proportion. But this does not seem to alarm anybody: to hold different and contradictory ideas is taken as a sign of cultural maturity. Since no standard of objective truth exists, no valid criterion of discrimination can be applied to the incompatible philosophies of our time. The Theatre of the Absurd is a most telling exponent of this intellectual chaos.

The identity of *Godot* fades away in the obscure evanescence of capricious interpretation. But what about the act of *waiting*? What significance can be attached to the act of *waiting* in this play and in the general literary production of Beckett? In his concept of *waiting*, Beckett joins rank with the existentialist philosophers of our time. What Heidegger analyses in ontological terms, Beckett portrays on the stage with images of existential import. In a world without God, the poignant question which lacerates the human heart centres around the meaning of existence. Life is experienced as “waiting for something.” But this “something”—*Godot*—vanishes into empty expectations. All that is left is the *waiting*. As a “waiting being,” man becomes aware of his temporality and experiences his existence as a flaw of time. Furthermore, *waiting* without a definite “object” to wait for, is synonymous of *nothingness*. *Waiting* unveils temporal existence as *nothingness*. The events which fill the flux of time dissolve themselves in absurd emptiness. The ceaseless flux of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and useless. Pozzo, another character in *Waiting for Godot*, utters this lamentation:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? . . . One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we will die, the same day, the same second . . . They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it is night once more.

The flow of time confronts Beckett with the basic problem of existence: with the identity of the self; and since the self is immersed in time, it partakes also of its flux and remains ever outside man's grasp. The experience of time is inseparable from the ceaseless flow that characterizes mental activity, which, in the coined expression of William James, is known as “stream of consciousness.” Already in his early studies of Marcel Proust on “la recherche du temps perdu” as an attempt to relive the past in the present by means of memory, Beckett became obsessed with the problem of the relationship between the stream of consciousness and the flux of time in the inner experience of the self. Further reflection on the subject convinced him that through literary fiction more than philosophy, and by means of *interior monologue*, the attempt to capture the nature of this flow had greater possibilities. This literary technique had already been used by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (in Molly Bloom's interior monologue), and Beckett decided to use it extensively in his literary production. Although in his plays Beckett often resorts to a simplistic pair-dialogue, these “dialogues” are more of the nature of a soliloquized monologue. More than dialoguing, Beckett's characters engage themselves in monologuing.

But the attempts to grasp the self in the flux of time are unavailing. In one of Ionesco's plays, the characters are constantly asking the time; they look at the clock above the

stage, but the clock is silent and has no hands. A silent clock with no hands becomes Ionesco's symbol for the inscrutable mystery of time which engulfs in its flux the enigma of our own existence. For both Vladimir and Estragon their *waiting* becomes useless. Not only *Godot* vanishes into nothingness, but also the *waiting* becomes a monotonous *habit*, turning existence into a deadening routine of absurd activity. Vladimir finally admits that they are waiting *only from irrational habit*. “What's certain is that the hours are long . . . and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings . . . which may at first sight seem reasonable until they become a *habit*.” Vladimir becomes aware of the full misery and horror of the human condition: “The air is full of our cries . . . But *habit* is a great deadener.” He looks at Estragon, who is asleep, and reflects: “At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on . . . I can't go on.” The sensation of temporal evanescence becomes a feeling of anguish. At this point only two possible choices are envisaged: to lose himself in a “deadenning habit,” or to put an end to one's life. Suicide thus appears as a “rational” decision which opens up after the very first awareness of the absurdity of life. *Waiting*, as an experience of existential time is therefore a condition of man; it involves an acceptance both of death and life. (Here life in any form of its “deadenning habits.”) Estragon and Vladimir are aware that all they can do in this life is as nothing when seen against the senseless action of time, which is in itself a vain illusion. Consequently, they contemplate suicide, but both lack the strength to initiate the attempt, with the result that neither commits suicide—and besides the limb of the tree is too frail and it would break.

The theme of death and suicide occupies a central place in much of today's literature. It is a recurrent topic in the plays of the absurd, and in existentialist literature. After having killed God, modern man takes very seriously the possibility of killing himself—and killing others. The “death of God” has resulted in the highest number of deaths and massacres in the whole history of mankind. With the “death of God,” as Dostoyevsky very graphically anticipated in his writings, *all is permitted* and killing and murder fall within the “free choices of free men.” More than anything else, what prompts the subject and possibility of suicide in modern literature and philosophy is the absurdity of existence. Once man comes to grips with the fact that life has no meaning and that reality is senseless, suicide becomes the “logical” way out. The “show-window” of modern literature clearly proves the biblical doctrine that, apart from the living God, man drifts into irrationality and loses the meaning of reality. The nauseating sense of absurdity and nothingness experienced by modern man, can only be understood in the light of biblical revelation. As man drifts away from God, reality loses its meaning and intellectual and existential darkness takes hold of his world. To die voluntarily, writes Camus, is to admit the “absence of all profound reason to live”.¹² “If we do not believe in anything, if nothing makes sense and we cannot affirm any values, all is possible and nothing is important. With no pros and cons, the murderer may be right or not right. Crematory furnaces can be kindled just as well as one can attend lepers. Evil and virtue are nothing but chance and caprice.”¹³

12. Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphé* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 18.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Confronted with the absurdity of the world and existence, suicide is the only “rational” answer. Surprisingly, of all the authors of the Theatre of the Absurd, only one actually committed suicide: Adamov. Though suicide seems to be the “most logical” reaction to absurdity, a sort of “substitute action” may prove to be more positive, namely, the *rebellious and defiant* attitude.¹⁴ Man cannot change senseless reality; he can not overcome the radical absurdity of existence. All he can do is rebel against it. In this defiant attitude, remarks André Malraux, man finds true heroism. To defy the absurd is the greatest of all intrepidities man can engage in. According to Camus, Sisyphus symbolizes the heroism of the absurd. His hatred and contempt for the gods and his defiance against their despotic arbitrariness and abusing power, stand for the rebellious attitude of man against the all-embracing absurdity of the world and existence. And like Sisyphus, man also, in the Hades of his miserable fate, has been punished by being made repeatedly to roll a huge stone up a hill, which always rolls down again as soon as he has brought it to the summit. Both Malraux and Camus reach the brave conclusion that Sisyphus “must have been happy.” (After all, within the realm of absurdity, another absurd statement is not out of keeping). The philosophical exponents of defiance and rebellion, when they revolt against the absurd, seem to presuppose the existence of “someone” who is responsible for absurdity itself. Although they take for granted the “death of God,” in the tone and manner in which they develop their theory of defiance, the real target of their accusations and rebellions is none other than the biblical God of creation, whom they wish to suppress, changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image of absurdity and nothingness.

The rebellious attitude against the absurd is not the only mode of existence man can assume; there also remains the possibility of plunging oneself in some “great deadening habits,” as Vladimir envisaged, such as the “habit of hedonistic *sensuality*” or the habit of a “*machine-like* existence.” The erotic element constitutes an important ingredient in much of contemporary literature. Sexual instinct is vindicated as an original and free expression of human nature. In the name of this instinct Marquis de Sade denies the existence of God, and makes of brute sexuality and the infliction of pain a demonic destructive force. Under the absolute, despotic, and cruel tyranny of unrestrained sexuality, there is no room for an “I” ↔ “Thou” personal relationship, as Martin Buber would say. The “Thou” is regarded as the basest “object” of pleasure, a “thing” of vice and destruction. The absolute license to dominate and destroy, claimed by Sade, can also turn against the monster of unrestricted instinct: others will try to do the same with him. Therefore, he will have to struggle for domination. The law of this world is none other than the law of force and dominion. Adding a good dose of Freud to the basic tenets of Sade, Surrealism developed the erotic views which underlie much of contemporary sex tendencies. Against the nausea of the absurd many writers of today have resorted to the “deadenning habit” of the erotic in its wildest expressions. Jean Genet, direct forerunner of both Beckett and Ionesco, makes sex

14. Camus admits that the human body is reluctant to accept suicide; the body “wants to live.” Faced with annihilation, “the body withdraws.” The reason is that “we acquire the habit of living before the habit of thinking.” *Ibid.*, p. 21-21.

and obscenity the basic ingredients of “normal” human life. His autobiographical *Journall du voleur* (*The Thief’s Journal*) gives an uninhibited account of his life as a tramp, pick-pocket, and professional catamite in Barcelona, Antwerp and various other cities. The degraded, violent eroticism of his experiences runs through his entire literary production, always with the underlying message that the sexuality he describes reflects something essentially “normal and human.”

The novelist and dramatist Henry de Montherland (1896-1972) sets a pattern of a more “subdued sensuality” for the playwrights of the absurd. This extremely egocentric personality, while haunted by the thought of the absurdity of life, adopted the “deadenning habit” of a full surrender to sensuality as an expression of defiance and contempt. In a world without God, where everything flows into nihilism, the only positive thing left is *physical sensation*. The pursuit of sensual pleasure is the only positive concern man has to strive for in this life; the “body does not lie”: the mind has to surrender to sexual instinct. Montherland defeats the power of nihilism by glorifying the life of the senses. The darker the clouds of nihilism and the threats of approaching death the greater the incentive to plunge oneself into the “dream” of sensual pleasure. Although Montherland abolished God, and from time to time indulged in the “sport of blasphemy,” he admitted that he could not quite erase his religious upbringing, and practised “a Catholicism totally devoid of Christianity.” The literary nihilist, he boasted, has no intention of taking his own life; suicide would be a futile act of rebellion, an abject confession of defeat. Yet he died by his own hand.

Another possibility which falls within the “deadenning habits” man can adopt, in the face of a life devoid of purpose, is that of a *machine-like* existence. In this mode of existence, man surrenders his being to the routine of an enslaving automatism. This is the servitude of many who engage in big-money making and in “successful” business enterprises of capitalistic consumers society. This is the theme of Adamov’s *Le Ping-Pong*, one of his best plays.¹⁵ The central image of this gripping play is that of a pinball machine to which the characters surrender themselves in a never-ending aimless game of chance and fortuity. *Le Ping-Pong* presents the life story of two men: Victor, a medical student, and Arthur, an art student. They meet at Mme Duranty’s café and play the pin-ball machine installed there. The machine fascinates them: it has a poetry of its own, flashing lights, and is in some way an accomplished work of art. They suggest an improvement in the machine to the managers of the company and become members of the consortium that controls it. Soon the machine becomes the dominating

15. Arthur Adamov (1908-1970), one of the most important playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd, came from a wealthy Armenian family. He studied in Germany, Switzerland and France. He settled in Paris and reached a superb mastery of the French language. Strongly influenced by the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg and by Franz Kafka, for a time he associated with Surrealist groups. He spent almost a year of World War II in an internment camp in France and for a time he embraced a very idealistic form of Communism. Believing that God is dead and that life’s meaning is unobtainable, Adamov found anguish and tragedy everywhere—and this is what he endeavored to reflect in all his plays. Among his writings the following stand out: *L’Aveu*; *La Parodie*; *L’Invasion*; *La Grande et la Petite Manoeuvre*; *Le Professeur Taranne*; *Tous Contretous*; *Le Ping-Pong*; Paolo Paoli. *L’Aveu* (*The Confession*) is a most terrifying document of his tortured spirit.

influence in their lives, controlling their dreams, their emotions. If they quarrel, it is about the machine; if they fall in love, it is with the girl who works at the office of the factory; if they fear anyone, it is the boss of the consortium. Their interest in the society around them is dictated by the relevance of political and social developments to the rise and fall of pinball machines. And so they grow old. In the last scene we see them as two old men, playing ping-pong, a game as childish and as futile as their life-long preoccupation with a plaything. Victor collapses and dies. Arthur remains alone.¹⁶

In this striking play Adamov pretends to show that, in the long run, even the various forms of “deadening habits” fail to deaden the unavoidable and omnipresent reality of the absurd. In *Le Ping-Pong* the main characters lose themselves in a machine, in a *thing*. They alienate themselves from the world by taking the shadows of power, money, and love “promised” by the machine for reality. *Le Ping-Pong* is a powerful image of the alienation of man through the worship of a false objective: the deification of a machine, an ideology, or an instinct. In *Le Ping-Pong*, a number of the characters are destroyed in the service of the organization, or in its internal struggle for power. All this is conducted with the utmost fervor, seriousness, and intensity. *And what is all about?* A childish game, a pinball machine—nothing. But are most of the objectives men devote their lives to in the real world—the world of business, politics, the arts, or scholarship—essentially different from Arthur’s and Victor’s dominating obsession? In *Le Ping-Pong*, absurd ideas are proclaimed as if they were eternal truths. The real fact is that there is no safe-guard against absurdity. According to the Theatre of the Absurd, all man’s actions and thoughts are meaningless and lead to nothingness.

From a biblical perspective, Adamov’s analysis of the human drama cannot be judged lightly. The symbol of *Le Ping-Pong* stands for man’s sinful attempt to dethrone the God of creation, and to give ultimacy to finite reality. And when this happens, the true meaning of creation is lost and man finds himself in a senseless world. Without God reality becomes absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd is quite correct in the images and symbols of absurdity it uses to describe the tragedy of man’s existence; it is mistaken in identifying true reality with final absurdity. The world it describes is a reality without God—a panorama of what is left *after* the “death of God.” The Theatre of the Absurd represents the fulfillment of Nietzsche’s *deicide*, that “tremendous event” described by

... that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: I seek God! I seek God! As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God? he cried; I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is

there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need the light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. *God is dead*. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”¹⁷ C&S

17. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, text number 125. The speech of the madman ends as follows: “How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and who is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto. Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground and it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I have come too early,’ he said then; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. The deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves.’ It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: ‘What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God.’”

Cover Picture

“ABSURD—THE FOOL AND THE CLOWN”

A lino-print by Alan Wilson

THE CONCEPT BEHIND the image finds its source in a statement by Eugene Ionesco: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.” This made me think of the fool who says in his heart “There is no God.” Thus, I depicted the Theatre of the Absurd as a clown—one who not only plays the fool but actually is a fool and so wears the dunce’s hat.

The audience who admire and indulge such irrationalism are willing victims to intellectual folly; therefore, my ugly “head” represents these victims, these willing fools, who have eyes to see but cannot and who have ears to hear but cannot. One eye is black for the darkened soul, the other is white and empty, representing the empty-headedness of vain philosophy filling the head with vacant beliefs. The ear is bandaged to highlight his spiritual deafness to the truth and to reality. Yet the victim listens as the foolish clown opens forth his hot-air while attempting to walk and balance despite being blind—a fall is inevitable without eyes to see and with such clumsy shoes. The feet of nihilistic, absurd theatre are not firmly on the ground (reality).

Of course both are grotesque and in the darkness which they create and inhabit.

—Alan Wilson

16. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1961).

THE ORIGIN OF GENESIS

by Thomas Schirrmacher

THE ORIGIN OF THE Pentateuch has been disputed for the last four hundred years.¹ The so-called “historical-critical” method has committed itself to the opinion that the material contained in the Pentateuch was collected out of various ancient sources and assembled by several generations of editors. Too many of these theories, however, contradict each other much too often.

Conservative² and Bible believing³ students emphasize that such a pieced-together work would be unique in the context of ancient Middle Eastern literature. Most of them, particularly Bible believing scholars, suggest as an alternative the authorship of Moses, which the Pentateuch itself, as well as the New Testament, confirms.⁴ This is not as easy to prove for Genesis, however, since Genesis does not mention Moses, who could not have been a witness to its events as he was in the other four books (with the exception of Dt. 34:1-12).

It is often assumed that Moses was transmitting a “backwards prophecy.” Such an interpretation should not be rejected out of hand, but it does seem to be a last-ditch attempt to explain the phenomenon of Genesis. Beginning with the conservative position, I would like to try to present a model for a natural origin of Genesis, by using the text of the book itself and contemporary knowledge about ancient Middle Eastern literature, without, however, explaining away the divine inspiration of Genesis.

1. See Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, pp. 5-130; Samuel R. Külling, *Was lehren uns 250 Jahre Quellenforschung* (FETA: Basel), 1961, pp. 1-10 (Fundamental interpretation); Raymond B. Dillard, Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 38-48; Hans Joachim Kraus, “Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments” (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982) (historical-critical view), as well as current introductions to the Pentateuch.

2. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1965); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977); A. R. Millard, *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, GB, 1980).

3. See Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, *op. cit.*; Josh McDowell, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975); Wilhelm Möller, *Grundriß für alt testamentliche Einleitung* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958); Wilhelm Möller, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, (Zwickau, 1934); Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

4. See the works above. The opinion of the New Testament is particularly important for believers, because it represents a divinely inspired interpretation. Others believe that Jesus and the New Testament writers only repeat the views typical of their time. Is this opinion not too simple? Is the opinion of Jesus’ contemporaries not of great historical significance?!

Paul J. Wiseman, an archaeologist at the British Museum in London, presented this model for the first time in 1936.⁵ He was a conservative Christian, but did not attempt to refute Biblical Criticism, which he used himself.⁶ Meanwhile, his theory has been disseminated widely, not only in new editions of his own work, but also in various textbooks and in theological journals.⁷ The following study will filter the slack out of his material and present the relevant conclusions.

First, it is important to note that alphabets and writing are older than often supposed. According to the evolutionist interpretation of history, the alphabet must have developed over thousands of years. Earlier historians believed that Moses and his contemporaries did not then know how to write. We know, however, that mankind developed a very complicated alphabet very early in his history. The ancient Middle East produced such a wealth of material that hundreds of researchers are presently involved in reading and evaluating it. If our model fits the facts, it will then be clear that mankind has been able to write ever since his creation, or at least shortly afterwards, just as he was always, according to Scripture, able to speak.

The ancient Middle Eastern scribes wrote on clay tablets and employed many literary conventions, which Wiseman and others have investigated closely. Wiseman discovered certain rules in the collection and arrangement of texts:

1. The tablets were collected in chronological order, (in family chronicles, for example) and sorted, with key words at the beginning and the end of each tablet.
2. Title, author, date and location stood at the end of the text, not at the beginning.
3. Family chronicles, mostly of the royal families, were continued by the successor or the descendant, who took over and added to the narrative.⁸

5. Paul J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, 1936, (reprint: Paul J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation*, compiled by D. J. Wiseman (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977).

6. Not in the work cited above, but in the second part of the compilation by D. J. Wiseman, he supports the theory of theistic evolution and the theory of the “Days of Revelation” (i.e. the six days of creation are days of revelation of what came into existence during a long time), as well as other historical-critical views.

7. Not only in the work mentioned above, but in others, as well. In the second part of the new edition, he represents the theistic view and the “Day of Revelation” theory, along with other historical-critical interpretations.

8. This principle, which can be observed in the whole Old Testament, refutes the usual argument against Moses’ or Joshua’s authorship, that they could not have reported their own deaths.

The Toledoth of Genesis

The Hebrew expression *toledoth* occurs eleven times in Genesis. It means “This is the history of,” or “This is the chronicle of.”⁹ This formula apparently structures the whole narrative. Wiseman assumes that the *toledoth* ended each tablet, as he found key words, location and time close to it, material which he believed to be unnecessary in the text itself, unless for literary reasons (see below).

Let us take a look at the individual cases, which we will then evaluate, starting with the end and working backwards.

THE TABLETS AND THE FAMILY CHRONICLES OF GENESIS	
Tablet I: 1:1-2:4a	
Title 2:4a	“This is the history of the heavens and the earth”
Date 2:4a	“when they were created”
Key Word 1:1	“God created” = 2:3
Tablet II: 2:4b-5:1a	
Title 5:1a	“This is the book of the history of Adam”
Date 4:26	“Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”
Key Word 2:3	“God created”
2:4	“In the day that God created” = 5:1
Note:	Adam was a witness to the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of woman, the Fall, and the murder of Abel. He knew Cain’s descendants. (4:17-22)
Tablet III: 5:1b-6:9a	
Title 6:9a	“This is the history of Noah”
Date 5:32	“And Noah was 500 years old” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons).
Key Word 5:32	“Shem, Ham and Japheth” = 6:10
Note:	Noah recorded his account before the Flood and took the tablets with him into the Ark.
Tablet IV: 6:9b-10:1a	
Title 10:1	“This is the history of the sons of Noah”
Date 9:29	Noah dies at the age of 950.
Key Word 6:11-13—6:5-7	
Note:	Is this a combination of three separate accounts or a single one? The individual days were recorded by witnesses.
Tablet V: 10:1b-11:10a	
Title 11:10a	“This is the history of Shem”
Date 11:9	After the desertion of the Tower of Babel
Key Word 10:1	“After the flood” = 10:32
10:32	The nations scatter over the face of the earth. = 11:9
10:31	“in their nations” = 10:32
Note:	Shem added the confusion of language to the account.

Tablet VI: 11:10b-11:27a	
Title 11:27	“This is the history of Terah”
Date 11:26	“Now Terah was 70 years” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons. Compare 5:32).
Key Word 11:26	“Abram, Nahor and Haran” = 11:27
Note:	Terah repeated and continued the account (11:21ff). His father either died at the age of 69, which would fit, or at the age of 119, which would be too late, but is the better documented reading. This is problematic for the model.
Tablet VII: 11:27b-25:12a	
Title 25:12a	“This is the history of Ishmael”
Date 25:12a	“And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi”
Key Word 25:11	“Abraham’s son” = 25:19
Note:	Ishmael (and Isaac?) wrote about Abraham. They buried him together. = 25:9
Tablet VIII: 25:12b-25:19a	
Title 25:19a	“This is the history of Isaac”
Date 25:18	Ishmael’s descendants lived “from Havila as far as Shur”
25:17	After Ishmael’s death
Key Word 25:19	“his sons” = 25:12
Note:	Isaac added the death of his older brother.
Tablet IX: 25:19b-36:1	
Title 36:1	“This is the history of Esau”
Date 35:29	The death of Isaac
Key Word 35:29	“His sons buried him” = 25:9
Note:	Accounts which include both Jacob and Esau: Chapter 33 and 35:29
Tablet X: 36:2-36:9	
Title 36:9	“This is the history of Edom”
Date 36:8	“Esau dwelt in Mount Seir”
Key Word 36:1	Esau is Edom = 36:8
36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note:	This part was written by Esau after leaving Jacob. It names his new home.
Tablet XI: 36:10-37:2a	
Title 37:2a	“This is the history of Jacob”
Date 37:1	“And Jacob dwelt in . . . Canaan”
Key Word 36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note:	Jacob added his brother’s history. Compare Tablet VIII.

Comments on the outline

The story of Joseph (Gen. 37:2b-50), according to Wiseman, contains not Babylonian words, as does the section before it, but Egyptian ones. Its conclusion is also

different. Perhaps it was collected by Moses, in order to create a transition to the events which he had witnessed. Joshua then added Moses' death and continued the account, which had become the chronicle of the people of Israel. Joshua's death was then recorded by another (Joshua 24:29-33), and the history of Israel was then further recorded by other writers.

Tablet XI, written by Jacob ("This is the history of Jacob"), supplements Esau's Tablet X and Tablet IX, which describes Isaac's life and was written by both brothers. The description of location and the time is obvious.

Usually the oldest son wrote the continuation of the family chronicle, which was then taken over by the second son, so that the responsibility for the Genesis account reverts twice to the line of salvation history (Heilsgeschichte). This also occurs in Tablets VII and VIII. Ishmael took over the responsibility for the chronicle directly from his grandfather, Terah. Terah's account poses a problem for our model. If his father died at 119, the better documented reading, he died too late to appear in the account. The age of 69 for his death would fit better. Genesis 11:26 is interesting. The report of Terah's age, 70 years old, can hardly be his age at the birth of his sons, for they would then be triplets. It is mathematically impossible, as well, as Genesis 5:32 demonstrates. According to our model, the text indicates the time at which the chronicle was passed on to the next generation.

In Tablet V, Shem adds the account of the three books (Tablet IV). Tablets III and IV contains the history of the Flood. Noah recorded his account before entering the Ark and passed it on to his sons, who witnessed the Flood themselves. This explains not only the wealth of detail and the exact recording of the days, but also the source of all of the written accounts of the creation and of the Flood. Noah

and his sons passed their accounts on to their children, who later became the ancestors of the nations, who corrupted the reports they had received. In Genesis 5:32, we again find an inexplicable notation of age. As with Terah, 500 years can hardly be Noah's age at the birth of his sons, but it could indicate the date of the tablet, shortly before the Flood, when the sons already had families of their own.

Tablet II is also most interesting, as it deviates from the usual pattern, "This is the book of the history of Adam." It is clear that the *toledoth* formula is a literary method of indicating the transmission of a tradition. Adam wrote a "book" in which he recorded the facts of the creation which he had witnessed: the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of Eve, the Fall and the history of his oldest children, as far as he experienced it.

If Tablet II is difficult, Tablet I is explosive. If our model is accurate, the first tablet should be dated "the day of the creation of the heavens and the earth." Who, besides God himself, could have recorded this account? Note that the text names no author, in spite of the definite date. Did God give Adam a written account of the creation, which included all the facts which Adam had not witnessed?

This is, of course, only a model. It explains many of the details of the texts and their circumstances, but its greatest problem is the question of whether the *toledoth* formula belongs to the previous text (according to our model) or to the following one (the theory of most interpretations). It is also possible that Moses modified some aspects, as the description of some locations would seem to indicate. In any case, the model demonstrates that there are indeed scientifically credible alternatives to contemporary theories of multiple sources for Genesis, and that we need not sacrifice belief in the infallibility of Scripture to scientific research. C&S

Still believe the earth revolves around State education?

Since my youngest daughter has completed our family's home education programme, I have begun substitute teaching occasionally. I was recently subbing in an elementary classroom in a private school of some reputation. The second grade teacher from the class next door came in and asked me a question, but she prefaced it with, "Now did you always home school, or did you teach in a real school before that?"

"Before I had children I used to teach in a

conventional school," I replied. "OK, I can ask you this question then. Does the sun go around the earth? Or does the earth go around the sun?"

Surprised, I said, "Well, the earth goes around the sun."

"The teacher still needed clarification: "Does the earth go all the way round the sun in just one day?"

"No, no. It takes 365 days for the earth to go round the sun." This answer only puzzled her the more, and so I had to explain that we have night and day because the earth is rotating on its axis.

This was a 25-year old, state certified teacher . . .

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MESSIANIC STATISM: A POLITICAL TERROR

by Alan Wilson

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. (Pr. 14:12)

“THE DECLINE OF contemporary thought has been hastened by the misty phantom of socialism. Socialism has created the illusion of quenching people’s thirst for justice: socialism has lulled their conscience into thinking that the steam-roller which is about to flatten them is a blessing in disguise, a salvation. And socialism, more than anything else, has caused public hypocrisy to thrive; it has enabled Europe to ignore the annihilation of sixty-six million people on its very borders.

“There is not even a single precise definition of socialism which is generally recognised: all we have is a sort of hazy shimmering concept of something good, something noble—so that two socialists talking to each other about socialism might just as well be talking about completely different things. And of course, any new-style African dictator can call himself a socialist without fear of contradiction.

“But socialism defies logic. You see, it is an emotional impulse, a kind of worldly religion, and nobody has the slightest need to study or even read the teachings of its early prophets. Their books are judged by hearsay; their conclusions are accepted ready-made. Socialism is defended with a passionate lack of reason; it is never analysed; it is proof against all criticism . . . and there is that attractive sounding formula ‘socialist democracy’ which is about as meaningful as talking about ‘boiling ice’; for it is precisely democracy that the dragon [of socialism] is about to devour.”

These strong words of warning were uttered by the great Russia writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 for writing books highlighting the magnitude of Communism’s humanistic crimes, which sadly Western intellectuals had refused to see or attempted to justify (e.g. the Webbs, Sartre, Picasso, Victor Gollanc *et al.*). This trend of silence toward left-wing barbarism and mass murder was set when Bernard Shaw denied there was a famine in the Soviet Union during the large scale forced starvations by Stalin, when men, women and children died, literally, in their millions. In my own experience at art school during the early 1980s I encountered this from the artist Ken

Currie (then an ardent socialist), who decried the terrible crimes documented by Solzhenitsyn as lies.

Yet the great Russian writer speaks almost like a prophet. In his interviews and speeches in the West he gave stirring reminders of the folly and danger of those who would impose political solutions to life’s problems. In fact all his books highlight what Hoeldelin perceptively stated about the Utopian plans of men: “What has always made the state a hell on earth has been precisely that man has tried to make it his heaven.” It is the will of God that must be done on earth as it is in heaven, not the will of man. Solzhenitsyn’s “Gulag Archipelago,” which remains a classic, details this state of hell, the monster results of messianic political plans ruthlessly carried out in the Soviet Socialist Republic. For the Russian exile there is no convenient distinction between socialism and the labels “communism” or “Stalinism,” which has been the handy method employed by left-wing intellectuals to whitewash their ideology in connection with the inhumane cruelty in the U.S.S.R. (and elsewhere). Even today this situation remains: Kitaz, the left-wing Jewish artist recognised “there are a hundred armed camps calling themselves socialist” and that a “struggle and killing between socialists” existed; yet he still refused to admit it was basically wrong, still bleating out that it “seems a splendid thing . . .”! But socialism and communism are *not* different political animals.

It is indeed a tragic irony that after Hitler, the very words “right-wing” became identified with the vile theories of the Nazis; anyone who had a good word for Hitler in our own country or Europe being rightly hounded and pursued. But similar revulsion against the British left never erupted after the fall of the Soviet Socialist empire and the revelation of their crimes. Why the silence when the idea of “class struggle” had caused as much death, destruction and misery as the racialism of the Nazis? Could it not be that we have failed to hear any true analysis of socialism as a “vile ideology” because defenders of it still hold strong positions in the intellectual arenas of our land and for this reason leftist ideology gets soft coverage in comparison to the “right-wing”? Is it because it is more of a “worldly religion” as Solzhenitsyn said?

It should not be forgotten, however, that both Nazism

and Communism clashed not because they were opponents but because they were rivals. Marxism is not the only form of socialism—Hitler was a socialist also, with his National Socialist Party having a system in which the means of production were controlled by the State. As Hans Sennholz once stated: “In Russian all the owners were shot; in Germany, all owners who disobeyed were shot.” It is important, especially for Christians, to realise that fascism is a form of socialism, and the misunderstanding of this fact results in a failure to understand the term “right-wing,” used to mean Fascism. Stephen Perks has described this accurately: “Socialism and Marxism maintain the right of state ownership of the means of production, both legally and economically. Under fascism the individual has the right of legal ownership, but not economic ownership. Economic ownership in a fascist system is under the control of the state. Fascism is thus in no sense a capitalist phenomenon . . . a fascist state gives the impression to those outside that it is an economic order based on private ownership of the means of production.” What this means in reality is that under socialism the state is the owner of the means of production whereas under fascism it is the director: both amounting to the same thing—an elite central group of planners controlling people’s lives (i.e. Statism). F. A. Hayek’s famous but under-read book, *The Road to Serfdom*, exposes the myth that these systems are radical opposites.

What happens in historical experience is that these two systems lead to tyrannical control because this is inevitable when messianic politics apes the predestination of the living God. Predestination is an unavoidable concept; to hate God’s predestination is to accept man’s predestination. Herman Göring knew this when he told an American correspondent in 1946: “You are trying to control people’s wages and prices—people’s work. If you do that you must control people’s lives. And no country can do that part-way.” Hilare Belloc echoed this statement when he sarcastically repudiated those who sought “gradual socialism” with this rule: “If you desire to confiscate, you must confiscate.” In other words, every aspect of people’s lives, especially their resources, must be under the State (the new god) either by theft or extortion—the Eighth Commandment being completely overruled.

This demonic impulse for total control in order to attain an economic and social Utopia is a clear attempt to achieve a worldly salvation without the grace of God in Christ. A blasphemous manifestation of this humanistic drive became horribly evident during the National Socialist domination of Germany when the people cried out the greeting “Heil Hitler” (which had been established by law). As Thomas Schirrmacher, a German Calvinist and Reconstructionist scholar pointed out in an illuminating article on National Socialism, “‘Heil’ is the German word for ‘salvation,’ which is extensively used in the German Bible translations. ‘Salvation Hitler’ or ‘Salvation through Hitler’ was the message that every German, including Christians, preached to his neighbour daily.” To the church’s utter shame, little opposition was offered to this blasphemous humanistic greeting; instead the converted Jews were removed from the churches in compliance with the State’s ideology. As Schirrmacher describes the awful state of affairs at the time, most of the “free churches merged into one big denomination” by the order of the Nazi State. “The Lutheran Church did not want to get involved with politics.” What is really upsetting is that

the only real publicly vocal resistance came from a handful of neo-orthodox theologians, which demonstrates to us how far the German church had declined due to the higher critical movement and how much trust the ordinary German church-goer put in politics. They had obviously forgotten that Christians should “not put their trust in princes” or “a son of man, in whom there is no help.” This is no exaggeration, as the confession of an Austrian woman proves: “What the Führer has given me is not only a political ideology, but also a religion. He has given me a faith, which, in its true form, I never before possessed . . . this faith is the belief in ourselves . . .” Likewise, Baldur Von Schirach, a Reich Youth leader proclaimed: “. . . we serve God by being loyal to our Führer . . .”

In our day, with the Christian church in such disarray, it is important that we do not commit the same sin—i.e. trust in political systems or charismatic political figures to save us. To do so would be a grave religious and ethical error, as twentieth-century history has proved. This is why it is sheer folly to deny the messianic character of humanism, which connects both National Socialism and socialist philosophy, and pretend these two have nothing in common. The fact is they have had much in common besides their economic strategies, which has already been touched on. Obvious and terrible similarities, which they have employed in the quest to establish the Utopian dream of humanism, the perfect socialist community, are torture, starvation and concentration camps. As Solzhenitsyn points out: “forced labour is part of the programme of all prophets of socialism . . .”—and the Gulag Archipelago is the inevitable result.

However, two other areas that have been neglected for a long time by historians but are now discussed as important for a full understanding of these tyrannical regimes are occultism and the use of religious language (usually Christian). “Salvation Hitler” and “Führer,” as already stated, were blatantly religious terms and the clearest evidence of Hitler’s revolutionary desire to be god, to demand complete allegiance to his messianic programme. But where did this abuse originate in modern political terms? James Billington’s astonishing book *Fire in the Minds of Men* gives us the answer. Billington focuses on the revolutionary underground from the 1780s until 1917 and describes the origins and methods of “rational” (!) socialists—their secret societies, pornographers, occultists. He exposes the dark side of socialism and how this strategy of twisting and borrowing Christian language was influential: “Indeed, communism probably would not have attracted such instant attention without this initial admixture of Christian ideas.” And from this we discover how French revolutionary “priests” produced new liturgical formulas such as “this is the body of THE BREAD which the rich owe to the poor,” along with “the holy communist church” and the “egalitarian church, outside of which there can be no salvation.” In Germany a “Communists’ Lord’s prayer” was produced.

Christian language, however, has not only been borrowed in a deceptive way by secular materialists to justify and promote socialist and National Socialist causes; there has actually been a historical tradition of Christian socialism (often revolutionary) going back to the Anabaptists of the Reformation which stemmed from earlier Christian heresies in the Middle Ages. This whole history has been ably documented by the Russian scientist Igor Shafarevich in his book *The Socialist Phenomenon* (perhaps the best overall de-

scription of this ideology in print). He describes how these religious groups and movements had an awful hatred of orthodox theology coupled with antinomianism and violence. These socialist sects had all their belongings socialised, including wives who were shared, and they regularly indulged in orgies and blood-thirsty violence to act out a cleansing, as a means “to purify the impure through blood.” Having children was also frowned upon as evil. All this hatred and viciousness was a perfect expression and logical outworking of their envy and desire to cleanse society with human blood—a pagan ideal if ever there was one! The most famous anabaptist socialist was Thomas Münzer, who claimed, “It is impossible to be Christian and wealthy at the same time.”

This socialist envy was accomplished by disgustingly violent desires: “I would like to smell your [Luther’s] frying carcass.” Such hateful covetousness required atonement through the shedding of a scapegoat’s blood, now identified as the rich, the bourgeoisie, the middle classes, the capitalists, the Jews. This was to be repeated through the ferocious intolerance of Marx and Engels: “There is only one way of shortening, simplifying and concentrating the bloodthirsty death-throes of the old society and the blood-birth pangs of the new—revolutionary terror” and “The vengeance of the people will break forth with such ferocity that not even the year 1793 enables us to envisage it” and “Coercion [i.e. State power] is also an economic force.” Lenin used to say “terror renews a country” and Mao Tse-tung is famous for his phrase “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

In our own century and era political power gained by guns and terror has multiplied under the guise of “freedom” slogans and “freedom fighters” with dictatorships of elites being disguised as dictatorships of the proletariat. How can it be that this constant repetition of dictatorships and oppression (in the name of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality) took place? Is it not because in the absence of belief in the living God our age still shares fallen man’s idolatry of politics and its ability to save us? Is it not because of the Satanic origins of such a humanistic faith? This evil human pride, the idea that man can save man, is deeply ingrained in humanistic dogma and was captured in its context of power-religion by the Reconstructionist author R. J. Rushdoony in his 1974 article “Power from Below”:

. . . modern philosophy beginning with Descartes led to Darwin and the doctrine of evolution. This doctrine . . . [militated] against any higher world. Power from above was thus eliminated from the universe, in both its Christian and pagan versions . . . modern man became involved in a desperate search for power from below. This quest also became political, and a new breed of leaders from below began to dominate the twentieth century—Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and their paler counterparts in the democracies . . . the result has been the rise of magic, witchcraft, Satanism and related interests.

Satanism is not new, and its past history is an ugly one, but the new Satanism is the most vicious yet, and potentially the most dangerous . . . Power from below . . . is thus very much a part of modern man’s faith . . . we can only expect until this faith is shattered, a steady intensification of violence, crime and revolution.

Not only was this statement prophetic with the present day rise of serial killers, it was an accurate description of the escalating political mass murders during this century. The terrible forces of darkness which are and were denied by

blind secularists but which have been the focus of fascination for our century’s irrationalist philosophers have revealed their awful purpose: to murder God and God’s image. Is it not this wrath of Satan against man and God which has inspired the anti-human lust for death unleashed through all these political fanatics? Should Christians be surprised by the actual revelations of dark underworld connections in the lives of these killers; e.g. Marx’s apparent Satanism described in Richard Wurmbrand’s *Marx and Satan*; Hitler’s occult interest recorded by D. Sklar in *The Nazis and the Occult*; or Lenin’s, Stalin’s and Khrushchev’s specific hatred of the Christian church?

In the light of such facts it is tragic that Christians have so often equated Christian social thought with socialism, seeing the two as almost synonymous. This has led to a reluctance to identify socialism with evil and totalitarian forces. As a result socialism is used as a hermeneutic in reading Scripture and for this reason any related horrors associated with socialist ideology are denied or suppressed. Sadly, this is merely a reflection of the academic and entertainment world where the awful barbarities committed by the Nazis have been subject to abundant books and movies in comparison with those dealing with Soviet crimes, or Chairman Mao’s executions of millions in China, or the ruthless Cambodian murders by Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge, or the Cuban thug and butcher Castro. Men rightly grope in horrid fascination to explain the Nazi concentration camps and holocaust but historical tragedies like the two million killed during the first successful socialist revolution in Mexico remain of little public interest, practically unknown and neglected.

Although right-wing Statism has largely been discredited (and rightly so) a blinkered understanding of twentieth-century political history has meant people in many parts of Europe have retained false hopes in left-wing agendas. (In America many Christians have recently done the opposite and put their hope in right-wing agendas, allying themselves with traditionalists and conservatives: but conservative humanism is little better than liberal humanism.) What Christians really need is a realistic attitude to political solutions to injustice, economic scarcity and welfare. We need a restraint, moderation and a healthy degree of critical realism in regard to political promises and expectations. Unfortunately, the idealistic impulse in fallen man wants to forget this and the political ideology of both “left” and “right” can breed ferocious fanaticism, and it seems socialism with its emphasis on State control and the perfectibility of man is especially prone to this danger.

In all this Christian Reconstruction is salutary for it reminds us that there are laws of God deliberately designed to restrain the invasive urge of political rule, to curb political fervency and expectation: it is also salutary in impressing upon us that peaceable moderation declines in proportion to the decline in the vision of God in a society. Gary North stresses grace over law: “We are not saved either by the perfect spirit of the law or the perfect letter of the law. We are surely not saved by imperfect imitations of the spirit and letter of the law. We are not saved by law.” Without the true Messiah and God’s law man will seek political messiahs and humanistic law for their salvation.

What the Christian church has to acknowledge in our day is the urgent need for real sacrifice on its part if it is to offer an alternative to humanistic answers and humanistic

Statism. Western civilisation will not find new life unless the Christian community initiates it by regaining a vision which involves the Protestant work ethic, the cultural mandate, thrift, free market economics regulated by God's law and personal sacrifice: sacrifice to set up Christian schools, Christian hospitals and Christian charities. All of which are impossible without the grace of God giving us Bible-based revival.

Such a vision will clearly not be achieved overnight but without the desire to start, without the desire to emulate the past social activities of Spurgeon, Begg, Chalmers et al., there can be little hope of any true revival. I remember the late Professor Collins saying true revival always means reformation.

If we refuse to make such sacrifices God will continue to raise up evil men and empires to accomplish his own ends. These men will be merely pawns because they too forget that there is a God who sits in the heavens and laughs at the

designs of would-be conquerors and humanistic saviours: the time always comes when their hopes end in terrible judgement. The Rumanian socialist Nicolae Ceaucescu learned this at the turn of the decade and now he has all eternity in hell to contemplate it with Adolf Hitler, Stalin, Mao and their ilk. God will not be mocked!

For those interested in the background literature to this article I can recommend the following books:

Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (Harper and Row);
Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (Harper and Row);

James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men* (Temple Smith);
Francis Nigel Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (The Craig Press);

Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (Dominion Press);

Gene Veith, Jr., *The Judeo-Christian Worldview* (Concordia Publishing House). C&S

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ST ANSELM

PROVING OR PRESUPPOSING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD?

By Colin Wright

The so-called ontological argument for the existence of God has been the topic of many an argument and the basis of many an erudite tome. It is, in this writer's estimation, the only one of all the proofs of God's existence that really warrants continuing study. It has proved its mettle as a topic of debate for a millennium, exercising the most acute of minds both for and against its conclusions.

In effect, there is no single argument which can be labelled *the* ontological argument. The intense debate over its form has resulted in numerous attempts to improve upon it and to overcome the arguments raised against it.

I intend in this essay to analyse that form of the argument as it has been formulated by St Anselm. Before we commence, however, we need to clarify what it is that the argument is seeking to prove. For in every form in which we find it in our Western culture, it appears to be a proof of the existence of the Christian God, the God of the Bible. This is implicit, it seems, in the use of the form "God," which is always used, rather than "a god" or even "gods." Strictly speaking, therefore, the proof would have to include the proof of the existence of a divine being and a proof of the identity of this being with the God of the Christian Bible.

Anselm's Ontological Argument

Anselm (1033-1109)—sometime Archbishop of Canterbury and Abbot of Bec—may be said with some justification to be the originator of the ontological argument.¹ He elaborated it first in his tract (which was never intended for publication) entitled the *Proslogion*. In its unpublished form it had been entitled *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* ("Faith Searching for Understanding").

His argument had been hinted at in an earlier work, a meditation on the being of God, entitled the *Monologion*.

1. Earlier references to similar ideas are known, however. The most important later ones are those of Descartes and Leibniz, though a modern Reformed Scholar has tried to defend the "orthodox" argument. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974), and for an introduction to the subject *The Ontological Argument* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965) of which he was the editor.

After a severe but well-mannered and polite criticism by the monk Gaunilo, Anselm further published his *Apologion* in which he convincingly defended his argument against Gaunilo's strictures.²

The continuing interest in Anselm is a clear indication of the power of his thought. Professor Gordon Leff says of him that: "With Anselm we reach the first great original thinker in the West since John the Scot, and the first creator of a system in the tradition of St Augustine."³

The Argument in *Proslogion* 2

In any consideration of Anselm's argument, attention is generally concentrated on only a few pages to be found in the *Proslogion*, at the end of the second chapter and in chapter three.

Some have maintained that in the *Proslogion* Anselm really produced not one, but two, ontological proofs for the existence of God, quite distinct from each other. The first proof appears in the second chapter, and the second proof in the third chapter. The former has been regarded as a preliminary skirmish whereas the latter is regarded as being the full-blown proof. There seems to be some justification for this, if we take the words at face value and ignore their place in the context of the whole treatise. In *Proslogion* 2 he says:

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one than which a greater can be conceived. But this is obviously impossible. Hence there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.⁴

2. All four works are published in translation in a single volume by Hackett Publishing Company in cloth and paperback, translated by Thomas Williams. All Hackett books are well-produced and extremely good value for money. The same works are also available as *Saint Anselm's Basic Writings*, trans. by S. N. Deane, with an introduction by Charles Hartshorne (La Salle, Ill: Open Court Pub., 2nd ed., 1964 [1962]).

3. Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1970[1958]) p. 98.

4. *Proslogion*, chap. 2.

This logic, a seemingly standard case of *reductio ad absurdum*, may be broken down as follows:

To prove: That than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in reality as well as in the understanding.

Assume: That than which nothing greater can be conceived exists, but only in the understanding.

Deduce from assumption: A greater being than this can be conceived—one who also exists in reality.

Conclusion: The deduction from the assumption is absurd for it contradicts the assumption from which it is deduced. Therefore the assumption is false. That is, the conception in the understanding cannot be a conception of a being who exists in the understanding alone. It must exist in reality if logical consistency is to be maintained.

But it is not that easy to see what Anselm is really saying here. Gaunilo had criticised him for inferring the existence of “such a nature that nothing greater than it can be conceived” from a mental conception of such a being. That is, we can prove the existence of the “That than which nothing greater can be conceived” simply by reasoning about our ideas.

He drew this conclusion from the example he quoted of the story he had heard about a lost but absolutely perfect island:

Suppose someone tells me all this. The story is easily told and involves no difficulty, and so I understand it. But if this person went on to draw a conclusion, and say, “You cannot any longer doubt that this island, more excellent than all others on earth, truly exists somewhere in reality. For you do not doubt that this island exists in your understanding, and since it is more excellent to exist not merely in the understanding, but also in reality, this island must also exist in reality. For if it did not, any land that exists in reality would be greater than it. And so this more excellent thing that you have understood would not in fact be more excellent.”⁵

No logical inference of its empirical existence could be drawn from its being the most perfectly imaginable island, he maintained. So he puts his understanding of Anselm’s argument as: “For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.” And he concludes: “If a man should try to prove to me by such reasoning that this island exists, and that its existence should no longer be doubted, either I should believe that he was jesting, or I know not which I ought to regard as the greater fool. . . .”⁶

But has Gaunilo really understood what Anselm is asserting? Or is he merely shooting down an Aunt Sally? In his reply, Anselm insists that Gaunilo has in one very important aspect, at least, misunderstood him. The inference of existence from mental conception is only valid in the case of that than which a greater cannot be conceived; *it does not, and cannot, apply to anything else:*

You often repeat that I assert that what is greater than all other beings is in the understanding; and if it is in the understanding, it exists also in reality, for otherwise the being which is greater than all would not be greater than all. Nowhere in all my writings is such a demonstration found. *For the real existence of a being which is said to be greater than all other beings cannot be demonstrated in the same way with the real existence of one that is said to be a being than which a greater cannot be conceived.*⁷

Anselm does not appear to believe that Gaunilo has at all understood his argument. Nothing can be more emphatic than his “*Nowhere in all my writings is such a demonstration found.*” Gaunilo’s extension (if not perversion) of Anselm’s argument about the “That than which nothing greater can be conceived” to created, finite reality was invalid.

The Argument in *Proslogion 3*

I do not think that the *Proslogion 2* argument is a different argument to the one Anselm conducts in the *Proslogion 3*. As it stands the *Proslogion 2* argument is not very satisfying. For Anselm has not explained the rationale of the applicability of the argument to this unique case of the greatest conceivable being. He admits as much in his reply to Gaunilo. In *Proslogion 2* he was really only concerned with the existence of the “being than which a greater cannot be conceived” *in the understanding*. Anything else that he might have said was in anticipation of a later argument only. He puts it very clearly to Gaunilo: “I ought not to be blamed for saying that a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is understood and is in the understanding, even before I reached the certain conclusion that this being exists in reality.”⁸

Proslogion 3 adds the really essential ingredient to Anselm’s argument. It is the idea of the *necessity* of existence of “that than which a greater cannot be conceived.” That is, it is a being which cannot be conceived not to exist. To conceive of a being whose existence is contingent, a being who might but does not necessarily exist is not to conceive “that than which a greater cannot be conceived.” A real being may not be greater than a hypothetical one, but a *necessary* one is definitely greater than a *contingent* one.

Proslogion 2 seemed to be saying that the real existence must be posited because real existence is greater than existence in the understanding only. Anselm’s reply to Gaunilo makes this interpretation problematic. Indeed, if Aquinas and Kant could see through such an argument, it seems strange that a man of Anselm’s stature⁹ could not; especially as Gaunilo had accused him of this very thing *and Anselm had denied it*. That his argument only applies to this *one* being must mean that Anselm had more in mind than what lies on the surface of *Proslogion 2*.

Wherein, then, lies the meaning of Anselm’s argument for God’s existence? It must be found first of all, I believe, in the context of the whole of his book; indeed, in the context of his *whole* life, work and thought, and of his times. It is possible to view the ontological argument independent of this context. It is often done. But it is then no longer *Anselm’s* argument that is being considered. Descartes and Leibniz did this, but their “God” was not the God of Anselm. The denotation may have been the same, but the connotations were worlds apart. Anselm’s God was the God of the Christian Scriptures (and more specifically, the God of his mentor, St Augustine): the “God” of Descartes and Leibniz was little more than a limiting concept that gave the necessary unity to their otherwise non-Christian philosophies.

8. *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

9. To judge of Anselm’s scholarly acumen one only has to consider the effect of these few pages of his literary output on subsequent history. Any self-respecting scholar would give his eye teeth to write three or four pages like these that would tax the best brains for a millennium and ensure his literary immortality!

5. Gaunilo, *In Behalf of the Fool*. 6. *Ibid.* 7. *Apologion*, chap. 5.

Karl Barth in our own day perceived this and has written a famous book about it. He then proceeded to ignore it in his monumental theology and constructed a “God” based on ancient Thomistic and modern existentialist thought.

That Anselm was a Christian must be seen as fundamental to the understanding of what he had to say. It is often forgotten that Anselm was a devoted follower of St Augustine and a firm believer in his theology of grace and of the Trinity. The influence of this great thinker was decisive and formative in all Anselm’s thinking. The Christian triune God was the presupposition of his philosophical thought, not the consequence or product of it. He was not completely consistent in this. Indeed, the very formulation of his argument in places suggests the imminent arrival on the stage of history of the religious ground-motive of nature and grace, a schema that came to full fruition in the life and work of St Thomas of Aquino. But the inconsistencies cannot detract from the major thrust of his life and thought. Anselm did not live in a universe of ultimate contingency, but in the personal created world of the biblical Jehovah. *The biblical doctrines of creation, of the Fall and of redemption through the incarnate second person of the Trinity were fundamental presuppositions for all he thought and wrote.*

The original title, let alone the contents, of the *Proslogion* ought to have given the clue to this. We have already hinted at this—it is *Faith in Search of Understanding*. Anselm begins from the certainty of God’s existence. Indeed, *Proslogion* is largely in the form of a prayer to God—the God Anselm believed, loved and adored. His book is not an apologetic for the faith: it is a meditation on the nature and character of his *known* Creator and Redeemer. It is an attempt to reflect rationally, that is, philosophically or scientifically, on the accepted contents of his consciousness and experience, as well as on the contents of the Christian *dogma*. This is crystal clear from a significant passage at the end of *Proslogion* 1:

I do not endeavour, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. *For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe—that unless I believed, I should not understand.*¹⁰

In addition to Anselm’s *situatedness*—his presuppositions—we need also to think carefully about his understanding of the meaning of one word that is crucial to his argument: that word is *understanding*. What did *Anselm* mean by it? He is obviously at odds with Gaunilo about it, yet the term is never really explained anywhere in these four documents. Nevertheless, in a letter to pope Urban II Anselm makes a very telling statement that is crucial to our understanding of his thinking:

This very thing I assuredly affirm, that he who does not believe, cannot understand. *For he who does not believe can have no experience, and he who has no experience cannot understand.* For as experience is

10. *Proslogion*, chap. 1. Although Anselm does not acknowledge the source of this idea, it is clearly based on the work of his great mentor—Augustine of Hippo. See especially Augustine’s *Tractates on St John’s Gospel*, No. XXIX, §6 “. . . Dost thou wish to understand? Believe. For God has said by the prophet: ‘Except ye believe, ye shall not understand.’ . . . If thou hast not understood, said I, believe. For understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.”

superior to merely hearing about something, so knowledge gained through experience is far superior to that gained by merely hearing about things.¹¹

The *primacy of faith* in Anselm’s thought is unqualified. Anselm does not understand faith as referring to faith in revelation only. Faith is a necessary human function for understanding in general.¹² He is saying that we can only understand what we experience; we cannot understand what is outside our experience. Unfortunately, our idea of experience is largely governed by its humanistic connotations today, particularly empiricist connotations¹³ that refer it to mere sense impressions. But as every true Christian knows (however badly he may be able to articulate it) he has experienced God, for he has heard him speak—John 10:26-27, 14:17. Furthermore, says Anselm, how can I lay claim to experience of anything without faith in it? If I do not believe in the reality of what I am experiencing, how can I be experiencing it? Thus, *he who does not believe can have no experience, and he who has no experience cannot understand.*

The Argument in *Proslogion* 4

In the light of all this, *Proslogion* 4 begins to make sense. The fool has not understood, because he has no experience of, God. The fool does not have the conception of the “that than which a greater cannot be conceived” *in his understanding*. As Anselm clearly says:

But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive; or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart? since it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive.

But, if really, nay, since really, he both conceived, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive; *there is more than one way in which a thing is said to be in the heart or conceived.* For, in one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood. *In the former sense, then, God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter, not at all.*¹⁴

Anselm draws a clear line of demarcation between *understanding what the words signify* and *understanding the very thing itself which the mind conceives*. In the former sense, one can be said to understand the statement that *fire is water*; in the latter, one understands what fire and water are:

11. *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi* (Letter regarding the Incarnation of the Word) in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1946). “Nimirum hoc ipsum quod dico, qui non credideret, non intelliget. Nam qui non crediderit, non experietur; et qui expertus non fuerit, non intelliget. Nam quantum rei auditum superat experientia, tantum vincit audientis cognitionem experientis scientia . . .”

12. Dooyeweerd has worked out this idea much more consistently. See *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. II, page 298-330. On page 305 he comments: “. . . the function of faith is not merely a subjective terminal function of our individual human existence, but the transcendental terminal function of the entire (earthly) empirical reality. *Without faith this reality cannot exist. The view that it is possible to find a hold on reality neutral with respect to belief will then prove to be a fundamental error.*”

13. Our everyday discourse is far more infiltrated by humanistic thinking than we care to imagine. Our ideas and concepts are generally those of our culture, of which we are an integral part. We escape them with great difficulty and only by God’s grace, but rarely as much as we suppose. A century from now we will *all* be viewed as having been as “Aquarian” (or some other twentieth-century tag) as we now view C. H. Spurgeon to have been Victorian.

14. *Proslogion*, chap. 4.

For no one who understands what fire and water are can conceive fire to be water, in accordance with the nature of the facts themselves, although this is possible according to the words. So, then, no one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any, or with some foreign, signification. For, God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. And he who thoroughly understands this, assuredly understands that this being so truly exists, that not even in the concept can it be non-existent.”¹⁵

So, says Anselm, “. . . he who understands that God exists, cannot conceive that he does not exist.”¹⁶

Anselm’s ontological argument fulfils its purpose. It provides an insight, that is, a philosophical insight, into the nature of the God he knows. The argument has really nothing to say to the fool—except that his problem is one of the folly of his wickedness and its blinding effect. Since the fool is estranged from God he does not experience him, and thus he cannot have him in his understanding in the same way as Anselm does. He only has an understanding of what the words “that than which a greater cannot be conceived” signify propositionally. He cannot understand the “that than which a greater cannot be conceived” because he does not experience him.

Conclusion

If our thesis is correct, then all attempts to understand Anselm’s Argument as a means of scientifically proving God’s existence to the unbelieving are invalid. They read back into Anselm the problems of a later era of thought. Our contention is that Anselm’s Argument cannot be understood from the perspective of later medieval scholastic thought or even modern humanistic philosophy, let alone analytic philosophy. His rationalism is diametrically opposed to their rationalism. Anselm’s rationality is part of the structure of a God-created reality; humanistic rationalism is a pure, or abstract, rationalism independent of what “any god may say about it.” Reams of symbolic logic in this context cannot prove the existence of Anselm’s God. Such logic refutes itself demonstrably.

We may at this juncture be asked to reconcile this view with the statement of purpose in the preface to the *Proslogion* to the effect that Anselm was propounding “a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would demonstrate that God truly exists.”¹⁷ This is a valid enquiry. But we do not believe that Anselm’s statement at all conveys the intent it seems to do from our cultural perspective. Surely it must be understood in the light of Anselm’s thought as a whole; and this, we have clearly shown, *always presupposed God’s existence*. Anselm, too, makes it very clear that the understanding he seeks here is *founded on faith* and not vice versa. These two facts appear to us as conclusive.

Anselm, it must be noted, does not wish to demonstrate that God exists; he wishes to demonstrate that he exists *truly* (Latin: *vere*). This qualifying word—*truly*—is what Anselm is really getting at. But what does he mean by it? Can it be that he is merely using it as some sort of emphasis, as we say: God really does exist? Or is he perhaps saying that God exists *in reality*, not just in the understanding or intellect? The latter is almost certainly ruled out of court; Anselm always ap-

pears to use the Latin *in re* when he wishes to contrast *in reality* with *in the understanding*. The former is hardly supported by the context, and the beginning of *Proslogion* 3 appears to offer a more viable understanding of the term. This chapter is entitled *Quod non possit cogitari non esse*—“That which cannot be conceived as not existing.” Anselm is clearly concerned to express an important aspect of God’s being: his existence is *necessary*. That is, God cannot be even thought of as *not existing*. His first two sentences run as follows:

Quod utique sic vere est, ut nec cogitari possit non esse. Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid, quod non possit cogitari non esse; quod maius est quam quod non esse cogitari potest.

I translate this as: “For sure, this [the one described in *Proslogion* 2 as existing in the understanding and in reality] *so truly (sic vere)* exists that it cannot be conceived as not existing. For it is possible to conceive something as existing which it is not possible to conceive as not existing; and this is greater than anything that can be conceived as not existing.”

Anselm is seeking to show that *truly existing* means existing in this *necessary* way. He is seeking to demonstrate that God must exist, cannot but exist.¹⁸ More than this, in fact. He is out to demonstrate that the God who must exist is *his* God, the God of the Christian Scriptures. This becomes clear when we consider the train of thought that this demonstration is meant to supersede. *Proslogion* is a sequel to the *Monologion*, in which Anselm began with the bold claim that:

If anyone does not know, either because he has not heard or because he does not believe, that there is one nature, supreme among all existing things, who alone is self-sufficient in his eternal happiness, who through his omnipotent goodness grants and brings it about that all other things exist or have any sort of well-being, and a great many other things that we must believe about God and his creation, I think he could at least convince himself of most of these things by reason alone, even if he is moderately intelligent.¹⁹

Anselm goes on in this much larger work to argue that much of what we know about God and creation are, to use a modern idiom, pretty much common sense. Understand, he is not building up a neutral, natural theology type of definition of either God or creation. He begins here, too, as a Christian. And it seems plain common sense to him that much of what the Bible says about God is quite clear from creation. He is arguing for no more than Paul in Romans 1. He never claims that he can prove these things to an unbeliever; simply that consistent thinking should draw these conclusions anyway, without a great deal of intellect.²⁰ His *Proslogion* demonstration is consciously meant to be a concise replacement for the long chain of reasoning in *Monologion*:

18. After stating his intention in the Prologue of *Proslogion* to “demonstrate that God exists truly” Anselm added, as a qualifying remark: “that he is the supreme good, who depends on nothing else, but on whom all things depend for their being.”

19. *Monologion*, chap. 1. para. 1.

20. This is precisely what Cornelius Van Til was arguing in effect in his classic statement that “. . . if man could look anywhere and not be confronted with the revelation of God then he could not sin in the Biblical sense of the term . . . If man could press one button on the radio of his experience and not hear the voice of God then he would always press that button and not the others. But man cannot even press the button of his own self-consciousness without hearing the requirement of God.” In *A Letter on Common Grace*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955), p. 40f.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, “Preface.”

After I had published, at the urging of some of my brethren, a short work as a pattern for meditation²¹ on the rational basis of faith, adopting the role of someone who, by reasoning silently to himself, investigates things he does not know, I began to wonder, when I considered that it is constructed out of a chaining together of many arguments, whether it might be possible to find a single argument that needed nothing but itself alone for proof, that would by itself show that God really exists: that he is the supreme good . . .²²

21. I believe this makes it perfectly plain what the nature and purpose of Anselm's arguments were. They were a starting point for Christian meditations, definitely not for polemics let alone apologetics.

22. *Proslogion*, Prologue, para. 1.

This meditative reflection on the being of God is a matter of faith searching for understanding. Hopefully this essay has validated this thesis. Whatever use later apologetes made of the ontological argument, Anselm himself did not set out to prove that God existed, but to show that by the very nature of the case, what we believe about God—as Christians—must lead us to see and understand the sublime facts of his self-sufficiency.

In all this Anselm presupposed all that the Scriptures taught about God's existence, took for granted as the starting point of his meditation that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and his God—was really there, and was not silent. *C&S*

Book Reviews

ROME AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH AT THE TIME OF AUGUSTINE

By J. E. MERDINGER

New Haven, PA: Yale University Press, 1996,
249 pages (including index and bibliography),
hardback, £28, ISBN 0-300-04017-2

Reviewed by Colin Wright

One of the most exciting discoveries of modern times was the unearthing of some manuscripts containing hitherto unknown letters of Augustine in the mid-seventies. In the late sixties (If you remember them, you weren't there, so they say) the Austrian Academy of Sciences instituted the remarkable task of cataloguing all known Augustine manuscripts in Europe. Within a few years a certain Johannes Divjak, working on this project in France, had discovered a fifteenth-century manuscript of Augustine's letters in Marseilles municipal library. Later, at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, he discovered a twelfth century manuscript of the same letters. Merdinger's book is an attempt to rewrite the account of the African church's relationship with the church of Rome with special reference to these discoveries.

Under the leadership of Augustine at Hippo and his friend Aurelius at Carthage new life was breathed into the African church. Africans had always taken their religion seriously—witness the stern and fanatical Donatist movement there. But under Augustine and Aurelius the Catholic church regained its self-confidence as the true and orthodox depository of the Christian faith. Alongside evangelism and a vigorous engagement with Donatism they introduced a new discipline, virtually remodelling the church. Regular episcopal councils, both provincial and plenary, were instituted. They served as courts of appeal for cases of complaint but, more importantly, they developed an increasingly sophisticated system of canon law. Of fundamental importance for them were the Canons of Nicea, 325 A.D. Africa, unlike other churches, began to take these very seriously.

The African church, then, was foremost in the field when it came to developing a system of church law and of appellate

courts. It was because some clergy wished to take matters beyond the jurisdiction of Carthage that the church of Rome came into the picture. Indeed, the church itself—notably Aurelius and Augustine—sometimes chose to appeal to Rome for decisions or at least corroboration of its own decisions. Why did they do this? It appears there were a number of reasons. Often, Merdinger says, the clergy themselves did it simply as an excuse for foreign travel! More importantly, Rome was regarded as the mother church, since the African church had been formed as a result of Rome's evangelistic labours. And though relations between the two could become quite strained if Africa thought Rome was interfering, yet it was still viewed with a good deal of deference. Even more importantly, Rome was the only Western see that was apostolic. That is, it had been the church of an apostle (unique in Rome's case: it could appeal to Peter and Paul). Only Alexandria and Antioch enjoyed equal status in the early church. What's more, Rome was the capital of the Empire; its church had a special status.

Although Merdinger spends 250 pages documenting the changing face of this relationship—and, I must add, she does it with style—a far more important consideration is totally ignored. At least to my mind. It is this: why did they suppose that the Roman church would be able to provide better justice than the African? As Merdinger has clearly shown, Rome could be as flawed in its judgements as any church. Obviously it was useful for the African hierarchy to obtain approbation for its judgements from as wide a constituency as possible. But what seems to me to have been wrong in principle with much of the appealing to Rome—whether by African individuals or the African church institution—was the status that was accorded to the church there. Throughout this period there had been no-one at Rome with a fraction of the abilities of Augustine at Hippo or his friend and colleague Aurelius at Carthage. Rome did not earn its right to be consulted; it merely inherited the (wordly) prestige of hierarchical position. I believe this is doubly important in that, first, the appellants sadly mistook the Christian nature of true nobility, substituting instead a wordly, distorted view. Had not Paul clearly taught that there was truer wisdom and a finer sense of justice in the lowliest member of the church of Jesus Christ than in the courts of the highest echelons of Roman pagan society? It was not the

idea of an appellate system itself that was wrong so much as the basic principle on which it was being founded. Their system of values was unbiblical.

Second, it is important because it reminds us that after sixteen hundred years the problem has not gone away; we have still not learned the lesson. I have been as guilty as the next man in this regard. I recall the first time I went to Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, and felt not only the (quite legitimate) sense of historical connection (my great-grandfather whom I knew as a boy had heard the great man there himself) but the quite illegitimate sense of a still superior church. And if this nonsense had not been knocked out of my head not long after, then the recent diatribe of its current minister against Theonomy would have effectually done so. How often do we associate a "thriving" church with a numerically large or growing one? How often have we heard of pastors moving to larger churches speak of "being called to a wider sphere of influence?" When did you last hear of a pastor being called to a smaller church? Yet when did God ever judge anything in terms of size? Indeed, he gave Gideon (and through him all of us) a salutary lesson in this regard. Those of us associated with the Kuyper Foundation need to heed this lesson; the going is tough, there is little support and even less interest in our work, while others are awash with funds and have the following of crowds. But the true judgement of the worth of what we are doing must only be made in terms of the teaching of Scripture—of our faithfulness to God's Word—and, in the last analysis, will be made by Him who finally separates the sheep from the goats.

One chapter in particular reveals just how daft even an otherwise clever man can be, and just how damaging clerical error (no pun intended) and presumption can be. Chapter 10 deals with the case of Anthony of Fussala. In the wake of the imperial edict of 411 A.D. making Donatism illegal, large numbers of new "converts" needed pastoral oversight. Augustine carved out a new diocese in Fussala south of Hippo but on the morning of the bishop's ordination the prospective candidate changed his mind and refused to be ordained. One would have expected Augustine to come up with some sort of reasonable solution, if only to cancel the event for a week or two. But does he? Oh no! The primate of all Numidia is there to preside over proceedings, and is pacing up and down impatiently, as only African primates can. He can't possibly be sent away disappointed! So Augustine looks around for someone, anyone, who can fill the slot. His eyes light on a young man who has accompanied him from Hippo. Anthony had lived in the Hippo monastery from boyhood; he had even got as far in his studies as being able to read the Scriptures in church once in a while. And what's more, he could speak Punic, the local lingo. Ideal!

Within a year Augustine's folly was exposed: Anthony was running the local mafia; extortion, swindling, intimidation and immorality. It's at this point the story becomes almost unbelievable—and would be if we had not heard the same tale over and over again in our own day. For even though he only escaped by the skin of his teeth from the death penalty for criminal fornication, he was virtually unpunished. Even stripping him of his episcopate was regarded as too drastic. They attempted to move him to a quiet and insignificant parish. Anything but discipline, anything but open punishment of a fellow cleric, anything but justice for the despoiled at Fussala.

Anthony gave the church grief for years but they brought it on themselves. Defrocking and excommunication were clearly demanded. To use Gary North's favourite phrase: sanctions were demanded. They never came. It reminds me of an incident in the early seventies. Our church was planning a new constitution and asked for contributions. I handed in what

amounted to a new Westminster Assembly package. It was rejected with the reason: We do not need all these rules; we are Christian men and will handle each situation on its merits when the need arises. The need arose within a few years, but without clear guidelines chaos reigned and the church disintegrated in acrimony. This 28-page chapter is about as exciting as church history can get. One could almost make a movie of it. If you want to read of a similar situation in modern times, but on a grander scale, read North's first rate account of the demise of the Presbyterian Church of America—*Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church*. The problem is not that the church—then or now—is effete, but that it has an unbiblical standard, a pharisaic standard. It too often prefers to enforce its own morality rather than God's. Augustine could summarily defrock any of his clergy in Hippo who wanted to marry, but Anthony's reign of terror (as Merdinger describes it) is winked at. Smoking and drinking are virtually excommunicable offences in modern evangelical churches but heretical Bible translations, denying the reality of hell, or electing unmarried clergy (1 Tim. 3:2-5) are quite acceptable. If we learn anything from Augustine's example here, it is that we learn little from it. *Semper Reformanda*—always reforming; that should be our motto and our life. As fascinating as Merdinger's account of Augustine's life is, if we do not learn from it, if we do not improve our lives as a result of reading it, then it is likely we will end up where Augustine's beloved North Africa ended up: in the spiritual Sahara.

Merdinger's volume began life as a doctoral dissertation. You would hardly know it. She has done an excellent job of translating an otherwise dry-as-dust thesis into a very readable history book. Here and there telltale signs emerge but they are so few and the material otherwise so fine that she can be readily forgiven. I suspect too she is a keen reader of SciFi novels, particularly the likes of Raymond Feist, whose beautifully descriptive passages are clearly evoked in a number of places in this volume. Read particularly pages 67-68 which describe the journey of the bishops to the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. It's straight out of Feist's *Daughter of the Empire*. Nevertheless, it is clearly a work of exceptional scholarship and painstaking research, and will be a valuable addition to any scholar's *Augustiniana*. C&S

CROSSED FINGERS: HOW THE LIBERALS CAPTURED THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BY GARY NORTH

Tyler, Texas: ICE, 1996, 1086 + li pages, hardback,
\$34.95, ISBN 0-930-464-745

REVIEWED BY ROGER SCHULTZ

At last count, at least six members of my home congregation were reading Gary North's *Crossed Fingers*. When that many people—laymen as well as church officers—independently acquire and begin reading a fat (1200 pages) tome on a subject as potentially tedious as Presbyterian institutional and theological history, it is a noteworthy occurrence.

Crossed Fingers, subtitled, "How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church," is North's version of what went wrong in America's largest and most influential Reformed church. He places the Presbyterian conflict in a larger context, arguing that it is "the microcosm of the triumph of modernism in America, 1870-1940" (p. xxv). The book includes North's conspiratorial predilections: since humanists had to silence the denomination's conservative witness, there was a "liberal infiltration and

conquest of the Northern Presbyterian Church” (p. xviii). Like the reinterpretation of American Constitutional history in North’s *Political Polytheism*, *Crossed Fingers* offers an interesting and challenging theonomic reconstruction of American Presbyterian history.

North also writes with contemporary Presbyterian controversies in mind. The book is dedicated to Morton Smith, the best known “Old School” voice in the southern PCUS until 1973, and since then in the conservative PCA. North describes Smith as “the Machen of twentieth-century Southern Presbyterianism, who has seen all this before . . . at least once” (dedication).

The first section of *Crossed Fingers*, on “Theologies in Conflict,” sets the stage in terms of covenant theology. In recent years North has stressed a five point covenant model which is defined by the acrostic THEOS (Transcendence, Hierarchy, Ethics, Oaths, Sanctions). North argues that these themes are central to the Presbyterian controversy. American Presbyterian history as a whole, North contends, can be outlined according to this general model: legitimacy (1721-1869); authority (1869-1900); legality (1901-1921); sanctions (1922-1933); and inheritance (1934-1936). While this approach seems somewhat forced, it is worth noting that North writes from a self-consciously covenantal perspective.

North is also alert to confessional issues. All Presbyterian ministers take a solemn oath and formally subscribe to the Westminster Standards. Yet many ministers fudge, taking their oaths “with crossed fingers.” Even stalwart Old School Presbyterians fudged on a variety of vital issues. When conservative Presbyterians compromised on confessional issues in the nineteenth century, it paved the way for greater theological laxity. As North puts it, “Everyone on all sides of the Presbyterian conflict had his fingers crossed. The strategically relevant question was: on what issues?” (p. 20). The questions of confessional authority and the meaning of subscription oaths are still critically important for conservative Presbyterians. (The finest treatment of these issues is in David Hall, ed., *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995]. North does not mention this source.)

Crossed Fingers also challenges Machen’s thesis about the theological nature of the controversy. In *Christianity and Liberalism*, J. Gresham Machen argued that the fight was between two warring factions—true biblical Christianity and an anti-Christian naturalistic world-view. But North contends that there were three distinct religious ideologies: liberalism (power religion), fundamentalism/pietism (experiential religion), and confessional biblical Christianity (judicial religion). As it turns out, Machen once made this tripartite theological division, describing it as culturalism (modernism), anti-culturalism (pietism), and consecrationism (Calvinism). Much of North’s story deals with the evangelical pietists and why they broke ranks with Old School Calvinists to drift into alliances with modernism. (Though writing from a different perspective, Bradley Longfield makes the same point in *The Presbyterian Controversy* [N.Y.: Oxford, 1981].)

The second section of *Crossed Fingers*, “From Old School to New School,” deals with nineteenth century Presbyterian developments. The Presbyterian Church split into Old School and New School branches in 1873. (Both branches split along sectional lines during the Civil War. After the conflict, in 1869, the two northern branches reunited.) North outlines the main issues of the controversy, which are theological (Calvinism v. Arminianism), institutional (church hierarchy v. parachurch ministries), and moral (legitimacy of slavery v. abolitionism).

Central to the theological tensions of the 1830s were the heresy trials of Albert Barnes. North briefly comments on

Barnes’s Arminianism, but fails to mention his blatant Pelagianism. North is also silent on Barnes’s abolitionist enthusiasms and the humanistic hermeneutic upon which it rested. (North has employed abolitionist rhetoric in the past, sometime sounding much like Barnes. For an analysis of North’s hermeneutic, see my “The Problem of Evangelicalism” in *Contra Mundum* 2 [1922], pp. 41-47.) North’s failure to explore the heretical dimension of New School thought is a weakness of the study.

North does stress the slavery issue and is sharply critical of Hodge and other Old School Presbyterians. In the early 1800s, in response to an anti-slavery overture and subsequent protest, the Presbyterian Church refused to equate “man-stealing” and “slavery.” Writes North, “The Constitution of the church was elevated procedurally above the Bible [North’s emphasis]. From this time on, the Bible was regarded by the Old School as judicially irrelevant on this issue, and remained so. By thumbing its collective nose at the Bible in the name of a legal technicality, the Old School in 1818 set a precedent that would destroy its last remaining traces in 1936 . . .” (pp. 125, 129). For North, the Old School position on slavery was the unpardonable sin. Refusing to repent publicly, the church was left morally compromised and impotent (p. 291).

The book’s treatment of institutional and polity developments is much stronger. Because it was hostile to parachurch boards and required institutional loyalty, the Old School ultimately gave the heave-ho to the New School. A century later the tables were turned. North sees a delicious irony: “By 1935, the Old School had become, by 1835 Old School standards, a movement committed to New School organizational practices. Meanwhile, the New School members, in alliance with modernists, had adopted the Old School’s position in 1835: ‘Conform to the Church’s mission program.’ The Old School threw out the New School in 1837. The New School and the modernists threw out the Old School and the separatists in 1936” (p. 122).

Unfortunately, Princeton Seminary was unable to respond effectively to new theological challenges. Duped into “dialogue” with their opponents on issues such as biblical higher criticism, they inadvertently legitimized the modernist position. The Princetonians had also compromised on key confessional issues, since they embraced lower textual criticism, hedged on six day creation, equivocating on limited atonement and infant damnation, and employed sloppy apologetics (empiricism). North aptly describes what happened: “Every minister had mentally crossed his fingers on ordination day. This made them unwilling to prosecute others who had done the same thing, except for the most flagrant violations of the Confession—*flagrant* here defined as *rhetorically* excessive” (p. 297).

North stresses the importance of these new standards of politeness. In a theologically vigorous church, there is great attention to doctrinal standards. As North puts it, “the tree of orthodoxy is watered by periodic heresy trials” (p. 293). But as the church lost its theological identity, heresy cases became increasingly rare and there was a great push for institutional peace and unity. And the greatest hindrance to institutional unity was harsh and inflammatory rhetoric.

North deals extensively with the career and heresy trials of Charles Briggs, “the underminer of the faith,” and chronicles the role of Union Seminary in spreading modernism. The Briggs’ case, historians often argue, demonstrates that in the 1890s the church was still willing and able to deal with heterodox theology. North, on the other hand, persuasively contends that Briggs was silenced because of his belligerence and rhetorical excesses, and not because of his modernist views.

The third section of *Crossed Fingers*, “From Evangelicalism

to Liberalism,” describes the disintegration of the Old School-New School alliance and the rise of modernism. Liberals relentlessly pushed for a “religious confessional neutrality” (p. 532). By 1900, North argues, historic Presbyterianism was dead. Ministerial subscription oaths were meaningless. North’s analysis is accurate: “The defining characteristics of Presbyterianism then became ecclesiastical rather than theological: tradition over confession, form over content. The Confession’s words remained, but new interpretations were now in effect. *A hidden Confession had replaced the written Confession*” (p. 314).

The Westminster Confession of Faith was ultimately replaced by a generic statement of Christian theology. The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910 (reaffirmed in 1916 and 1923) identified five essential doctrines—the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the atonement, bodily resurrection, and the historic reality of miracles. Calvinists and pietists could both agree on the fundamentals, but even these minimal standards were ignored in some presbyteries. In 1910, the Presbyterian Church also endorsed a quasi-socialist political agenda. North correctly observes that the Deliverance is another sign of Presbyterian declension.

At the same time, modernists went on the defensive, seeking to gain control of the denominational bureaucracy. It was imperative that they gain control of the church’s courts—and the church’s money. By 1934, modernists had created a Presbyterian administrative law, requiring absolute submission by clergy *and* laymen to the denominational hierarchy. As North puts it: “The implicit content of the oath had therefore shifted: from adherence to the terms of the Confession to obedience to higher Church judicatories irrespective of the Confession” (p. 712f.).

North covers the familiar story of the controversy, describing the chief culprits (including the money behind the liberals—John D. Rockefeller, Jr.), the Auburn Affirmation, the reorganisation of Princeton, the birth of Westminster Seminary, the Hocking Report on *Rethinking Missions*, and Machen’s Independent Board for Foreign Presbyterian Missions. North mentions but probably doesn’t assign enough weight to the merger with the Cumberland Presbyterians.

Crossed Fingers features a lengthy and somewhat distracting background discussion of early twentieth-century cultural and intellectual developments. Included is a treatment of “the Establishment,” Progressivism, Darwinism, the Scopes Trial, eugenics, and even *Buck v. Bell*, a famous U.S. Supreme Court decision on Virginia’s sterilisation law. The discussion of the *Buck* case is a perfect example of the interesting but peripheral vignettes cluttering *Crossed Fingers*. Writes North: “Virginia also sterilised Carrie’s sister Doris in 1928. She found out about this 52 years later. The physicians had told her that the operation was to remove her appendix. When she found out, she broke down and cried, ‘My husband and me wanted children desperately. We were crazy about them. I never knew what they’d done to me.’ Obviously the woman was a hopeless imbecile; she should have said, ‘My husband and I,’ and she used an indefinite pronoun reference: ‘they.’ No children for her! The U.S. Supreme Court, the state of Virginia, and Progressive Darwinian science agreed: ‘The Bucks stop here.’” (p. 447). It’s a funny story, and it gives North a golden opportunity to thrash Progressives, but it has little bearing on the Presbyterian controversy.

Machen became the major conservative spokesman in 1923. North aptly describes Machen’s background, his political and theological allegiances, the important of *Christianity and Liberalism* and the awkward alliance he led. Machen’s opposition to Prohibition, for instance, cost him the support of some fundamentalists. Liberals invariably characterised Machen as belligerent—justifying their assault on him. Liberals feared

Machen because his Independent Mission Board threatened their control of church money. Ultimately, Machen was removed from the church because he refused to give absolute allegiance to church boards.

North also describes Machen’s blind spots. Machen wanted the liberals to leave the church—but was squeamish about heresy trials and never called for the excommunication of the unfaithful. A focus on sanctions is a key point in the book. In his refusal to demand sanctions, North argues, Machen “gave away the case for ecclesiastical orthodoxy” (p. 515). For a church to remain orthodox, it must be willing to excommunicate those who do not hold to the church’s confession.

(During important discussions at the 1997 PCA General Assembly a minister next to me kept muttering “sanctions, the answer is sanctions!” He had learned North’s message well. For whatever it’s worth, North also demands confessional conformity from the laity, arguing that a “creedless membership” will ultimately corrupt the church [p. 523].)

Princeton Seminary was also compromised and fatally weakened. It had bought into the myth of neutrality and had embraced apologetic empiricism. Seeking academic respectability, it hired men who were confessionally unqualified to teach there. North includes an excellent section on the inherent threat of an autonomous university model of seminary training (pp. 765-67, 833-38).

In the remainder of the book North elaborates on the themes he has raised. He repeats the importance of covenant structure, and especially focuses on the issue of sanctions. In the fourth section, on “Tactics of Subversion,” North revisits the relationship of money and power in the church. He includes an interesting section on “strict subscription” (pp. 906-912), a notion North doesn’t like, even though he has argued in favour of binding oaths based upon the Confession. North’s Question and Answer section in the Conclusion is also worth reading. For instance: what is the sign that a church is moving from orthodoxy to liberalism? Answer: a greater emphasis on church growth and academic respectability than Confession (p. 916). (Yet a few pages later North ridicules psalm-singing strict subscriptionists for having tiny churches—p. 929). North’s appendices are also worthwhile, including H. L. Mencken’s obituary for Machen, a North attack on Francis Schaeffer (something North frequently does), and a deconstruction of the Westminster Assembly.

Though I recommend the book, readers should be aware of its defects. First *Crossed Fingers* is long, rambling and repetitious. One reads one hundred pages (a warning, a note to the reader, preface, foreword, general introduction, introduction to the first section) before getting to the heart of the book. Like other self-published books, *Crossed Fingers* needs editorial oversight to eliminate redundancy and guarantee cohesion. (North’s fifth appendix, for instance, deals with an important book which North had overlooked. Rather than revise, he wrote the appendix. Explains North: “When you’ve written a book over a thousand pages long, what’s an extra appendix among friends” (p. 1068).

Second, the book suffers from North’s breezy style. North is the quintessential pamphleteer. He cuts a nice phrase, offers humorous asides, and is full of pithy observations. The style works well in newsletters, where clever comments are cute, but it becomes distracting in a work of this size.

Third, *Crossed Fingers* is dated. North admits that much of the book was written in the early 1960s, and has been subjected to a couple of revisions. Some important books have been overlooked, such as David Hall’s *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* and the series of volumes on twentieth-century Presbyterianism edited by Milton Coalter (published by Westminster/John Knox Press).

Despite these limitations, *Crossed Fingers* is a good book. I will make it required reading for courses in Presbyterian history. Its perspective is clearly Calvinistic and covenantal. North is undoubtedly correct about the need for clear doctrinal standards and he has contributed much to the discussion of the role of Confessions within the church. In dedicating the volume to Morton Smith, North hints that the “crossing of fingers” has not stopped. The bureaucratic manoeuvrings of anti-confessional Presbyterians in the northern Presbyterian church a century ago are strikingly similar to what occurs in the PCA today. *Crossed Fingers* will provide ammunition for confessionalists in this fight. Perhaps North, who reportedly is set to rejoin the PCA, would like to pitch in. *C&S*

**BATTLE TO DESTROY TRUTH:
UNVEILING A TRAIL OF DECEPTION**

BY CLARIS VAN KUIKEN

Manassas, Virginia: REF Publishing, 1996, 240 pages, plus 10 appendices and bibliography, paperback.

REVIEWED BY DOUG DAHL

“Let [Truth] and Falsehood grapple: whoever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?” Milton had it right, no doubt, that in a fair fight, truth will pummel falsehood every time. The problem, as Claris Van Kuiken learned to her lasting dismay, is that falsehood simply doesn’t fight fair. That’s what makes the war against the propagators of theological error an exasperating, exhausting experience. Van Kuiken’s book is eloquent testimony to that fact.

Battle to Destroy Truth is the narrative account of a four-year battle in one woman’s relentless war against the encroachment of New Age mysticism into her local church and her denomination. The battleground is the Orland Park Christian Reformed Church of suburban Chicago, and, more broadly, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The combat pits a homemaker and concerned parent against the entrenched nomenclature of the CRC. The concerned parent lost the opening battle but, to her lasting credit, fights on as a much wiser and more determined warrior.

Were I to suggest a title for this book it would be *Battle to Preserve Truth*. The fact is, the propagators of error never engage in a frontal assault on truth. They prefer to secretly introduce destructive heresies, in the manner the apostle Peter warned about 1900 years ago. Then, when someone questions their actions, they attack the questioner, accusing her of that greatest of modern sins, “divisiveness.” Their tactics are obfuscation, intimidation, accusation, deception, confusion, diversion, and, when necessary (and sometimes even when it’s not) out-and-out prevarication.

When I started the book I was expecting to read about some exceedingly subtle theological nuance that only the most discerning would be likely to catch in its nascent phase. Quite to the contrary, I soon learned that the materials in question at Orland Park CRC were as subtle as a Mohammed Ali uppercut.

At issue were the writings of one Madeleine L’Engle, an author who, despite her flagrant New Age Universalism, had become all the rage in Christian high schools and colleges through the 1980s. Mrs. Van Kuiken committed the unpardonable sin of taking an interest in the assignments her daughter was bringing home from her Christian high school. There followed an eye-opening odyssey in which Mrs. Van Kuiken and her confederates finally delivered the matter into

the laps of a most reluctant CRC judicial authority. The judiciary did the noble thing: they chickened out.

What amazed Mrs. Van Kuiken throughout the ordeal was the lengths to which the leaders of her school and church would go to defend an author whose denial of four essential Christian doctrines (atonement, unique divinity of Christ, unique authority of Scripture, eternal damnation for the lost) had been confirmed by an appellate body whose decisions on such matters were definitive and binding on all member churches. In the process she was forced to the shocking conclusion that her adversaries were not simply well-meaning but misinformed novices. Rather, they were deliberate subversives fully committed to propagating an alien gospel.

Mrs. Van Kuiken offers ample testimony of the duplicity and self-serving demagoguery practiced by the pastors and elders of Orland Park CRC. Her book presents their own words, taken from official and unofficial correspondence, and meetings she tape recorded (when not admonished to turn the tape recorder off in the spirit of unity, brotherhood, and mutual trust).

The author documents the pastors’ smug tactic of instructing the elders to instruct the pastors not to commit any more time to the wasteful nuisance of answering questions from the “appellants.” The pastors hid behind the protective skirts of their sycophantic elder board, from whence they fired broadsides at Mrs. Van Kuiken and her fellow appellants by way of transparent sermons attacking the enemies of “unity.” In all this they had the complicity of the church’s education committee and the denomination’s official newspaper which dutifully published incomplete and misleading accounts of events surrounding the conflict while refusing to publish responses from the appellants.

Throughout the conflict the appellants argued from Scripture while the respondents and their representatives appealed to “experts” in the denomination’s institutions and a vague, broad “Christian consensus” that found nothing objectionable in L’Engle’s works. The respondents intimated that the appellants had book-burning, and even heretic-burning, in their hearts. When confronted with direct questions such as: “Can a person deny these essential Christian doctrines and still be considered a Christian author?” they would wriggle off the hook by diverting attention to a side issue, and hope the presiding officials would not notice (which they generally didn’t).

It was particularly timely to read Van Kuiken’s book after having plowed through Gary North’s *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church*. Van Kuiken’s battle mirrors the one J. Gresham Machen fought on a somewhat loftier level for three decades after the turn of the century. The outcome for both was the same: the vanquished appellants trudging sadly out the door of the church they had grown up in while the victors heap contempt on them for threatening the sacred unity of the church.

Unlike Machen, however, Van Kuiken may live long enough to see her efforts bear fruit. She is now keenly aware of the permeation of New Age mysticism throughout the official institutions and publications of the Christian Reformed Church, as well as the larger evangelical church. She continues to confront and debate the universalists whose baseless sentimentalism threatens, most of all, a generation of young people growing up in an educational milieu that worships at the shrine of cultural diversity. To those who cry, “Let’s stop worrying about doctrine and be more inclusive,” she responds, “If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9). Such bold insistence on Biblical Truth will necessarily, in time, dispel the darkness of New Age feel-goodism.

Battle to Destroy Truth shows the folly of blindly trusting that our leaders will forever stand by the oaths and confessions they have sworn in order to get into the positions they occupy. We cannot place our trust in fallible men, but must vigilantly hold our leaders to the infallible standard of the unchanging word of God. When they start to fudge, as the leaders of Orland Park CRC did, we must be prepared to pay the high price of scorn, derision, character assassination, and even separation to call them to account. Claris Van Kuiken is paying that price. Her book sounds an alarm that all faithful Christians would do well to heed. *C&S*

**ROMANISM: THE RELENTLESS
ROMAN CATHOLIC ASSAULT ON THE
GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST**

BY ROBERT M. ZINS

Huntsville, AL: White Horse Publications, 1995,
285 pages, \$8.95, paperback, ISBN 0-9637151-4-7

REVIEWED BY TIM KAUFFMAN

In the Summer 1995 *Catholic Answers* fundraising newsletter, Karl Keating, the ministry's director, took exception to the growing number of "anti-Catholic" books on the market, and aimed his sights at one in particular: *Romanism*, by Robert M. Zins. Keating, author of *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: the Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians,"* boasts confidently in his letter: "If you have read my book, you will remember that I devote the entire second chapter, 24 pages in all, to debunking Loraine Boettner's *Roman Catholicism*, which I term the 'bible' of the anti-Catholic movement. I also debunk an anti-papal speech supposedly given at Vatican I (1870) by Bishop Josip Strossmayer. That speech has long been known as a forgery, but Fundamentalists keep parading it as a testimony against papal infallibility. I thought I had more or less taken care of Boettner and the phony Strossmayer speech, but here in Zins's new book is a chapter titled 'A Vindication of Loraine Boettner *contra* Karl Keating' and two pages devoted to the claim that the Strossmayer speech was no forgery."

A quick glance through the section of *Romanism* to which Keating refers causes one to wonder if Keating is willing to give anyone a fair hearing at all. Zins states clearly enough in his book that "precisely what he (Strossmayer) said at the council cannot be accurately retrieved" (p. 245). In other words, history has withheld from us the true contents of Strossmayer's speech. This is not a "claim that the Strossmayer speech was no forgery," as Keating asserts. Rather, what Zins devotes two pages to in *Romanism* is the fact that the Roman Catholic church herself is unclear as to the author of the Strossmayer transcripts but that Strossmayer's resistance to papal infallibility is unquestioned in Roman Catholic circles. Zins is content to leave the controversy of Strossmayer's *speech* behind him and go on to establish the much more critical issue: that Boettner did not err in his assessment of Strossmayer's *public resistance to papal infallibility*. As Zins makes clear, the 1913 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* did not hide the fact that "At the Vatican Council he (Strossmayer) was one of the most notable opponents of papal infallibility, and distinguished himself as a speaker." Even more interesting, Zins notes that "the article on Strossmayer in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967) . . . contains not a single reference to either his speech or the alleged forgery" (p. 246). Zins therefore observes, "Could it be that the farther removed we are from the actual events, the more unclear history becomes for the Romanist? . . . If Boettner is to be

criticized, it can only be on the grounds of not having given the Roman Catholic view of history" (p. 246f.).

The manner in which Keating addresses the Strossmayer controversy typifies his attacks on Boettner throughout his book, and it is his trademark method to attribute to Boettner what he did not say, and then, based on that, to undermine Boettner's research. This is why Zins, in *Romanism*, often uses Keating as a backdrop for his arguments. And here is where Zins reveals for us Keating's own tacit recognition of Boettner's scholarship. Keating's main complaint against Boettner is that his work was "nil in scholarly attainment" (p. 239). But Zins makes the astute observation: "Of course, in all these accusations there is not one shred of evidence from Keating to illustrate where Boettner has misrepresented the Catholic religion on matters of doctrine and practice. . . We are not surprised to find that Keating begins defending the Catholic positions rather than proving that they are a figment of Boettner's imagination!" (p. 243). Indeed, had Keating been more honest in his assessment of Boettner, he would have merely stated that he disagreed with Boettner's conclusions and left it at that. Instead, Keating was content to put words into Boettner's mouth and then criticize Boettner for saying them—no small offense, in Zins's eyes, and something which warranted Zins' thirty page defense of Boettner's scholarship.

But the bulk of Zins' book is dedicated to defending a much more formidable opponent to Rome than Boettner himself. Rather, Zins devotes most of his book to defending the doctrines of grace which Boettner championed, and makes it clear that it is by these standards that Rome must be judged. Zins is highly critical of what he calls "evangelical Arminians" and wonders out loud, as it were, how they can resist Rome at all: "The Arminian jettisons the Catholic system of salvation while retaining the same two pillars, i.e., freedom of the will and universal atonement of Catholic theology! Thus, in critically critiquing the Catholic religion, we are left with short-handled hoes and dull shovels if we try to correct the Catholic error with something which is at base Catholic! The Catholic apologist is well aware of this and that is precisely why he picks on the evangelical Arminian. He knows that the Arminian at heart believes in *autosoterism*" (p. 65).

In the light of such direct statements as these, we can see that Zins' book is a timely one. We live in times when evangelicals are willing to concede to Rome what it took the blood of the saints to protect in centuries past. And Zins points out exactly what the culprit is: "We must insist that foggy theology is at the root of much that is wrong in evangelical circles. Either we check up Rome here or we reduce our struggle with the Vatican to Rosary beads, scapulars, intrigue of popes, Latin Mass and other issues which never get to the heart of the matter. Our focus of attention must remain on the Catholic system of salvation. We are, however, gravely concerned with the indefensible position of Evangelicals who mistakenly grant so much to Rome by way of agreement. This puts them in a position of not being able to resist the sheer logic of Rome! When Evangelicals eliminate condemnation for all in Adam, boast of a universal atonement and champion the absolute freedom of the will to choose or reject God, they cannot safeguard the necessity of a spiritual birth from Heaven and a corresponding justification based upon the imputation of Christ's righteousness" (p. 65n.).

If foggy theology is at the heart of the problem, Zins' book *Romanism* provides the antidote. Zins understands that whether we know it or not, every Christian is a theologian. And if so, then every Christian, without exception, needs to be clear on his theology. This is what makes *Romanism* such a valuable book. Zins is able to state clearly the tenets of the Christian faith and the ground of our justification in terms which are under-

standable to all without ever compromising his academic viability. He dedicates his book “to the English martyrs of the Protestant Reformation,” and then two pages later quotes from a homemaker and mother who benefited from his book. This format demonstrates clearly Zins’ conviction that the spark which Ridley and Latimer ignited at Oxford in 1555 will be carried on by ordinary Christians who will neither settle for “foggy theology” nor grant to Rome what she claims for herself.

In his subtitle, Zins accurately defines the Roman system as “the relentless Roman Catholic assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” These direct words are fitting for a generation of Christians which has forgotten its roots in the Reformation as well as the doctrines of grace which the Reformers cherished. Boettner’s shoes are no doubt hard to fill, but men like Zins are formidable when they are unashamed to stand in them. *C&S*

THEONOMY AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

COMPILED BY Martin A. Foulner

Marpet Press, 1997, 64 pages, paperback

Distributed by James A Dickson Books, 12 Forrest Road, Edinburgh, WH1 2QN

REVIEWED BY CRAIG A KIRKWOOD

In the wake of the attempt to have theonomy declared heretical at the 1996 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, Mr Foulner has produced a booklet of quotations that is indispensable for the theonomist and required reading for all who would challenge theonomy’s link to the Westminster Standards and Puritan thought. Mr Foulner gives a useful, brief introduction to the categories of God’s Law and how these have been understood and applied. This is followed by the main body of the work, consisting of quotations from Reformed writers, often with illuminating footnotes.

The quotations come from: (1) Westminster Standards; (2) Members of the Westminster Assembly and those close to it; (3) Those who influenced the Assembly’s theology or subscribed to the Confession; (4) Various representatives of the Reformed faith to the end of the nineteenth century. Whilst all the quotations are certainly not “proof-texts” of a particular author holding a “theonomic” outlook they illustrate a profound respect for God’s law and a willingness to enforce both prohibitions and penal sanctions. This is a particularly valuable work as many of the sources are difficult to obtain and would require much browsing to obtain a pertinent quote. (Note that the quotations have not been modernised and therefore original spelling etc. has been retained).

To give a flavour of the richness of this booklet consider the following: (1) A definition of “theonomy” identical to Greg Bahnsen’s: “That whatsoever Law of God, or Command of His, we find recorded in the Lawe-booke, in either volume of GODS Statute, the N.T. or the Old, Remaines obligatory to us, unlesse we can prove it to be expired, or repealed.” Herbert Palmer, Assembly member. (2) Idolatry a capital offence: “But we have . . . an expressed commandment to kill and put out of the way all idolaters and false prophets . . .” Thomas Becon (1512-1567). (3) Witchcraft a capital offence: “That the witch truly convicted is to be punished with death, the highest degree of punishment, and that by the law of Moses, the equity whereof is perpetual.” William Perkins (1558-1602). (4) Application of Biblical Law in Massachusetts: “. . . it penalized with death: murder, sodomy, witchcraft, arson, and the rape of a child under 10 years of age. Added to these were idolatry, blasphemy, kidnapping, adultery . . . willful perjury designed to do another

to death, unprovoked cursing or striking of parents by children over 16 years of age.” (5) Continuity of Magistrate’s duty: “If it was the approved practice of Kings and Magistrates under the Old Testament to suppress Error, Heresie, and Blasphemy, then Magistrates under the New Testament are bound to do the like” James Fergusson (preached in 1692).

I hope this brief selection conveys how valuable a resource Mr Foulner has produced in considering the historical Reformed understanding and application of God’s Law. Highly recommended! *C&S*

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