

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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A Protestant World-View

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News reports of the last religious census contained some significant, if not encouraging, information. On the whole, the increase in church membership did not keep pace with the increase of population; but the Lutherans showed the greatest proportional increase among all Protestant denominations, and the Romanists showed the largest proportional increase of all religious organizations.

In view of Romanism's superstitions and idolatrous practices, repugnant to an enlightened age; in view of the dark history of Romanism with its persecutions and massacres, repugnant to human sympathy; and in view of allegiance to a foreign pontiff who claims spiritual and temporal power, repugnant to historic Americanism; it might prove profitable to speculate on the causes of Romanism's increasing strength in these United States of America.

One will make no mistake in looking for a variety of causes. The mere force of numbers—the momentum of geometrical progression, so to speak—undoubtedly produces considerable effect. There is a power in a crowd that draws a larger crowd, and when throngs pour in and out of a great cathedral, people are more inclined to follow the crowd than to generate the necessary stamina to attend a small congregation. There is political power with the crowds; there is money to be spent where it will do the most good; and in Romanism there is also a rather efficient organization for consciously giving

direction to this power. Two items testify to the truth of this: First, according to a three-month survey of fifty-six leading daily papers, Romanism got 26.8 percent of the newspaper space devoted to religious news, and the next highest percentage, that of Methodism, was 9.7 percent. And second, the president of the United States, violating a fundamental principle of the nation, appointed an ambassador to the pope.

For very obvious reasons, such denominations as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church will long be unable to gain Machiavellian wisdom by imitating the procedures suggested. But organization and the power of numbers, while they are elements of the situation and elements not to be despised, are not the only factors. They do not, for example, adequately account for the conversion to Romanism of a number of well-educated people.

Cardinal Newman is an illustration from last century. Heywood Broun, if we may join these two names, is an illustration from this century. Of course the organization takes pains to advertise such conspicuous examples, and there may be a psychological fallacy in using distinguished names as examples of Rome's gains in educated circles. But there is perfectly sound objective evidence of intellectual attainment sufficient to attract influential minds. If one were to examine the list of books, articles, and periodicals published by Roman Catholic writers, one would be amazed at the wealth of productivity. The subject matter, not confined to

theology as such, ranges through philosophy, anthropology, biology, education, history, and political science. Nor is it the mere quantity of books that is significant. The strength of all this production lies in the fact that Romanism is attacking all these problems systematically. Whether the author writes on psychology or politics, the views expounded and advocated are the implications of the Thomistic system. And it may be said pointedly that on the whole the discussions are very ably conducted. The Roman Church, with its European background, with its consciousness of the long past, with its willingness to make haste slowly, maintains standards superior to those of typically American Protestantism, whether modernistic or fundamental.

Now, when system and quality are combined, they make a tremendous psychological impact on society. Protestantism, on the other hand, suffers from what may most politely be termed an uneven quality in production, and what is worse, from a complete absence of system. The result is that in the learned societies of our country, Roman speakers are heard with respect, while orthodox Protestants either are rarely invited or else perhaps do not exist. Let no layman in the pew, let no evangelist in the pulpit, make any mistakes. The various learned societies may not number a large proportion of the total population; but their views, their honors, and their contempt are soon shared by civilization in general. If they give the impression that Romanism and modernism are respectable, while Scriptural views are indefensible, great numbers of people will be inclined in either of the former of two directions and influenced against the latter way of life. The work of the special evangelist and the work of the regular pastor are sensibly aided or hindered by the dominant intellectual outlook. People enter the pew either predisposed in favor of orthodox Christianity or predisposed against it. In times when the great majority of the population paid at least lip service to the Word of God, the faithful minister did not face extreme opposition; but in these days when books, radio, and periodicals generally condemn, deride, and distort the orthodox position—when they substitute another religion and bedeck it with attractive phraseology—the difficulties of the minister of the triune God are multiplied. For

example, it must soon be possible to notice the deteriorating effect of the articles on religion, prayer, and church attendance that have been reproduced during the past year in the *Reader's Digest*. These articles are religious, to be sure; they encourage church attendance, but they are a subtle attack on Christianity nonetheless.

If, then, the dominating outlook of a society may be called its philosophy, and if this popular philosophy is the result of a technical synthesis of all the fields of knowledge—a synthesis which postulates major principles to govern every particular investigation—one need not wonder that a Roman official asked the Knights of Columbus for funds to train ten young philosophers, for, he said, the coming battle is to be fought on the fields of philosophy. And the papacy intends to be ready for the battle. This determination and the resultant scholarly productivity have their source in a consciously adopted long-range policy.

Toward the end of last century, the Roman church was experiencing the disorganizing influence of modernism. Had the hierarchy allowed this influence to spread unchecked, there might well have been the same lack of philosophic agreement in Rome as there is now in Protestantism. But at the beginning of this century, Pope Pius X in his Encyclical *Pascendi* and in some other pastoral letters condemned modernism, and its advocates were soon deprived of prominent positions. Accompanying the condemnation of modernism was the acceptance of Scholastic philosophy, with the result that today the Romish scholars present a fairly well unified front. They differ, of course, on various details, but they all are obviously Thomistic.

In Protestantism there is no ecclesiastical machinery to enforce a particular system of philosophy, and we fervently hope there never will be such machinery. Even within the limited circle of a single, small denomination, such machinery would be both unwise and unwelcome. Nonetheless, we ought to consider what basic philosophic principles would best serve the Reformed faith. If individually and spontaneously each of us is convinced by clarity of argument that one particular philosophic approach

is best, we too, by continuing our discussions and pushing into every field of thought, may acquire greater unity and strength. Would it be too bold on this occasion to suggest such a basic position? A suggestion of this type would be a very serious matter with far-reaching implications and should not be made thoughtlessly. On the other hand, some may think such a suggestion not so much bold as unnecessary. At any rate, could we agree that of all the systems of history, the general philosophic position of Augustine is more promising than any other? The choice of Augustine as a point of departure is not made simply to be opposed to Thomism. Rather the choice is made, or more accurately, the choice suggests itself by a dim anticipation that the philosopher who came closest to the Scriptural doctrines of grace may also have come closest to their necessary philosophic context.

This may at first seem a bold suggestion; on second thought it may appear as useless. For one who chooses Augustine's guidance walks a harder road than one who follows Thomas. It is harder in the sense that Augustine is not nearly so explicit as Thomas. The latter obviously has a system; it is not so clear that Augustine has one. Thomas goes into great detail; Augustine leaves many questions unanswered. Hence the guidance may be less explicit, and we are in danger of losing our way; yet if Thomas is headed in the wrong direction, his more explicit instruction will not prove ultimately beneficial.

Progress, therefore, requires attention to the difficulties. A modern Augustinianism must supplement the teaching of its father by working out an enormous amount of detail. Broad views of the sovereignty of God as affecting all parts of the universe and the consequence that science and theology form a single, organized, intelligible system, are both inspiring and necessary; but the only proof of which they are capable is their application to the details of physics, psychology, education, politics, and all else. An Augustinian must guard himself with vigilance to avoid the charge Hegel made against the romanticists. "But if we look more closely at this expanded system," he says, "we find that it has not been reached by one and the same principle taking shape in diverse

ways; it is the shapeless repetition of one and the same idea, which is applied in an external fashion to different material, the wearisome reiteration of it keeping up the semblance of diversity. The idea, which by itself is no doubt the truth, really never gets any further than just where it began, as long as the development of it consists in nothing else than such a repetition of the same formula."

Plato in the *Philebus* expresses the same thought by the warning that a student should not jump from one to infinity or back again. The basic unity must be carefully divided and subdivided before reaching the multiplicity of individuality. To have any large effect on the educated world, therefore, the adherents of the Reformed faith must give detailed applications of their principles to particular problems.

Let us take several examples, not from the whole sphere of scholarly investigation, but merely from the more restricted sphere of epistemology. Let us ask whether Augustinianism can answer such questions as these: Is knowledge the result of forming a concept by the process of abstraction, or does no such process exist? Is the word *concept* merely a symbol for an embryonic concrete idea? And should we say that only a lazy mind contents itself with the vague, poorly defined objects called abstractions? Or, coming into closer grips with the concrete, one may ask whether in sensation we see an image, perhaps on the retina, or whether we see an external object. Detailed questions on other subjects—such as politics, education, and aesthetics—are more conveniently imagined than mentioned.

On this commencement occasion it would be ungracious, though certainly less dangerous, to leave such questions unanswered. Any technical discussion of these problems involves extreme difficulty; nevertheless, to implement the promise of Augustinianism one is under obligation to say something, however little and however cautiously. Accordingly, let us plunge into the middle of things and attack the crucial and plaguy problem of sensation and psychophysics.

In the history of modern psychology, the investigation of the relation between the body and

the soul has come to an impasse because the underlying assumptions require a mechanical production of a state of consciousness. The notion that a state of consciousness can produce mechanical action was early regarded as impossible; it has taken longer to see that the reverse process, of which sensation is the chief example, is equally impossible. For this reason epiphenomenalism, which held to the impossibility in one direction and denied it in the other, must be rejected as hopelessly inconsistent. The result of these considerations is that psychologists in general adopt a parallelism without subscribing to Spinozistic or other necessary philosophical bases for parallelism. To put the matter plainly, they have given up the problem in despair. Considerable sympathy is due them. The perplexities of the strictly philosophical problem and the complexities of the physiological data, not to mention the investigations and discoveries that must yet be made, make of despair an insurance against insanity.

Idealism has been acclaimed as furnishing a solution to these difficulties by reducing the so-called corporeal attributes to items of mental existence. It is with reluctance that this device must be judged inadequate. Perhaps idealism, rejecting the notion of an unknowable substratum in order to eliminate skepticism, has been of use in establishing the possibility of truth; but however that may be, the bare principle of idealism leaves practically untouched the difficulties in sensation. The reason is easy to state. Whether or not corporeal attributes are phases of mental existence, there is still the problem of relating the stimulus we call a sense object (whether idealistically conceived or not) with motor reactions on the one hand and with discursive knowledge on the other.

But can so ancient, not to say so unscientific, a writer as Augustine advance the study of sensation? The answer to this insinuation is that, if modern writers offer so little hope, help from any source ought to be welcome. And while Augustine and the Neoplatonism from which he drew inspiration fall far short of answering all questions, they may possibly start us on the right road instead of leaving us in a blind alley.

First of all, instead of attempting to explain sensation by an action of the sense object on the soul, these early writers prefer to think of the action as passing from the soul to the sense object. Given a sense object, a healthy retina and nervous system, and given light rays passing through the lens of the eye, it does not follow—as some modern, mechanical views would lead one to expect—that a sensation of color is produced. It can be made fairly obvious that the physical conditions do not explain the distinguishing of colors. Most people look at the sky and see blue. They fail to see green, purple, and pink. Trees are seen as green, and for some people even spruce trees are green. But if these people are forced to compare colors, or to duplicate them in oils, they will soon see many colors that previously they had only been looking at. This illustrates Augustine's point that sensation depends on attention and volition, that it is more our grasping the object than it is the object's affecting us.

But still further, it is not merely the distinguishing of colors, it is the seeing of any object at all and the hearing of any sound that requires attention. In studying the problems of sensation one may become so engrossed that sensation vanishes. The open eyes may see nothing before them, and the call for dinner, ordinarily awaited with impatience, goes unheard. Sensation, therefore, seems to require voluntary action, and it may be sound philosophy as well as orthodox theology and crisp English to say, There are none so blind as those who will not see.

Granted, this theory faces a little difficulty with a loud clap of thunder or a blinding light; these seem to be involuntary perceptions, but these difficulties are so slight when compared with the difficulties of opposing theories that one may confidently hope to dispose of them.

This Augustinian stress on vital action outward rather than mechanical action inward seems to provide a better basis for dealing with the details of epistemology. In the first place, it would remove the chasm that Kant dug between sensation and intellection. And it would remove it, not by going backward to the expedient of British empiricists in reducing mind to a complex of sensations, but on the contrary by recognizing intellectual activity in

the simplest stage of consciousness. Even those thinkers who have been powerfully influenced by empiricism are beginning to recognize that the old notion of a pure sensation is a hallucination. No one, perhaps, would accuse F. R. Tennant of being an Augustinian, and yet in his *Philosophical Theology* (Volume 1, page 41) he writes, "The purer we conceive our *sensa* to be, and the more passive we suppose their reception, the further we remove the possibility of a natural explanation of knowledge."

The language of Professor Blanshard of Swarthmore in his recent opus *The Nature of Thought* (Volume 1, page 57) will no doubt be more clearly understood. "We must so construe the world we first live in as to make escape from it conceivable. It is true that we must not read into the earlier what comes later, but it is also true that we must see it in the light of the later, if our account is ever to reach the later at all. Herbert Spencer once suggested that the qualities of sensation could be explained as rapid tatos of nervous shocks differing in their frequency. If such shocks a retaken as units of consciousness, the theory is instructive and interesting; if they are taken as nervous impulses we should be placing the beginning of thought in something from which its escape in *aliud genus* would be unintelligible. And this thought he summarizes admirably in a later phrase: 'We do not explain how one thing arises by saying that it was preceded by something radically different.' "

Obviously, then, thought and knowledge cannot be obtained from pure sensation; or, in other words, to preserve a connection between sense experience and rational knowledge, sensation must be understood as an incipient form of reason. The two types of mental action must somehow be united, and if empiricism in philosophy results in skepticism while in theology it removes revelation, the only possible expedient is to explain sensation in terms of thought rather than thought in terms of sensation.

But perhaps these elementary observations run the risk of becoming technical, and it may not be out of place to conclude the address with a few remarks to the graduation class. After all, it is their commencement. Advice given to young men on

such occasions as this can soar grandiloquently into the clouds of cosmic truth, or it can restrict its horizon so as to see one object clearly. In consonance with what has already been said about substituting the shapeless repetition of a universal principle for its detailed application, the latter course of definite detail will be followed.

You who graduate today are passing from a school in which it has been necessary to work with application and diligence. You are passing to another school in which the assignments are considerably more onerous, less explicitly stated, and in which the examinations and grades come at unexpected times and in unfamiliar forms. There are problems of church finance and congregational organization; of shepherding, multiplying, and edifying the saints; and of combating a Satanic opposition that threatens to increase in force. In view of this, should a comfortably fixed guest speaker lay any further burdens upon you? Or perhaps it is not an added burden; it may rather be a means of lightening the common load of us all.

The power we exert under God is reasonably calculated to vary directly with our mental ability. God has frequently used obscure instruments and has granted them temporary prominence; but the lives of Paul, Augustine, Calvin, and Machen—whose contributions have, or will, exert force over the centuries—prevent us from placing a premium on ignorance. Therefore, graduates of the class of '41, unless you are completely disappointed by the tenor of these words, make it the aim of your life to contribute something of genuine scholarly value to the propagation of the Reformed faith. To be sure, the daily duties of the ministry are heavy, and yet ...

There was a minister, not conspicuous above his fellows, who for forty-five years served one congregation. He prepared two sermons and a prayer meeting talk every week. He visited the people, he kept in touch with the various organizations; he had his full share of ill health and adversity. Yet with it all he managed to publish a few articles and two books, one of which was quite a solid volume. Compared with the literary remains of a Hodge or a Warfield, this record may seem

barren; but it may also set a commendable and not too distant goal for the average pastor.

Run over in your mind, therefore, the fields in which the need of scholarship is great; select the subject that interests you most—theology, epistemology, literature, or economics; reject courageously an encyclopedic inquiry of the whole matter, but, rather, decide tentatively upon some manageable detail; and ask whether you could not produce a worthwhile paper within the next ten years. Is it not reasonable to suppose that even a busy pastor can write twenty or twenty-five pages in ten years? Perhaps, on the contrary, some optimistic soul thinks that ten years is too long an estimate. But why discuss it? Five years or fifteen—it is not the speed but the quality that is essential. It is not volume but technical proficiency that is needed. And the second article will require less time and will be of more value than the first. To aid each individual in the preparation of such articles, mutual criticism could be obtained by developing, not just a Calvinistic Philosophical Society, but a research society of Calvinistic scholars. There would thus be provision for the study of subjects beyond the narrow range of the epistemological illustration of this address. Such a society, if it can produce technical proficiency, could hope eventually to publish proceedings. But to save our money for more pressing needs, why should we not make the devil pay our publication expenses? There are numerous technical periodicals that will accept offerings of value. Meeting their standards will test our ability, and after having practiced on them, the best articles could be collected, and... and.... and appropriate plans can be put into effect after we have achieved genuine recognition.

Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon
us.

Oh, send out thy light and thy truth;

let them lead me.