

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

Timothy G. Kimberley

Credo House

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Dedicated to my beloved children:

Hannah, Silas and Grace

I hope in these pages you'll one day
meet some of daddy's friends and
they'll become your friends too.

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10

TOP TEN

THEOLOGIANS



INTRO

INTRODUCTION

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

Aim of this Book

The title of this book is fairly self evident. My aim is to introduce you to the Top Ten Theologians of Church History. Yes, I will rank them in order. I will start with #10 and work my way down to the #1 person I believe to be the greatest theologian. My aim is wrought with danger. I am foolish to attempt ranking the ten greatest theologians. I will leave out some people you think should be in the top ten. I will have some people lower in the list than you might think. I will proceed, nonetheless, because these people need to be known by the Bride of Christ.

What is a Theologian?

A theologian is most simply someone who thinks about God. Is an atheist a theologian? Yes, an atheist has thoughts about God. Their thoughts lead them to the conclusion there is no God, but the Atheist is a theologian. Everyone is a theologian. Are there any Atheists on our Top Ten list? No. That leads me to the Criterion upon which led to the formulation of the Top Ten list.

Criterion

First, to make the Top Ten list you need to be a Christian theologian. I should have, technically, called this Top Ten Christian Theologians, but I simply opted for a shorter title. Have there been theologians beneficial to humanity who did not have Jesus as their Savior? Yes, but this list seeks a specific Christian purpose.

Second, to make it on the Top Ten list you must be a positive influence. Friedrich Schleiermacher was an incredibly influential “Christian” theologian, yet he had a negative influence on orthodox Christianity (what everyone has believed everywhere for all time). I would refer to Schleiermacher ultimately as a heretic. I know, harsh words, but my list of Top Ten Heretics and why each person should bear that title is for another series. Overall, each one of these Top Ten Theologians positively influenced the Church.

Third, each one of these theologians must have had a broad influence in how people understand God. Faithful pastors all over the world help their congregations, through God’s Word, better understand and live for Jesus. The Top Ten Theologians influenced not only their immediate congregations but also positively influenced people all over the world for decades and centuries to come. A man like Charles Spurgeon was a wonderful pastor and biblical teacher but he will not be on the list. I love Spurgeon dearly but these ten men on the list influenced the church at a deeper and wider level than Spurgeon. Spurgeon’s ministry stood on the shoulders of many of the men in this series.

The list does not purposefully exclude women. There are many amazing female theologians who have made an important impact on the Church. The top ten, however, all happen to be men.

We’ll look at each of these Ten Theologians through a consistent grid:

Their World

First, in order to appreciate each of these Ten Theologians we must have a certain understanding of their world. Our understanding of *their influence in their world* will help us to be benefited for the sake of *our world*. Each post in the series will contain enough background information to hopefully allow us to appreciate the setting within which these people lived.

Their Life

To appreciate the Top Ten Theologians we need to examine the life they lived. Many of the Top Ten Theologians experienced tremendous adversity. If you don't care about the details of their lives you will fail to appreciate what they accomplished through their circumstances.

Their Thoughts

Ultimately, it is their thoughts we are seeking to most understand and appreciate. Many of these people wrote volumes as they meditated upon Scripture. We will spend a considerable portion of every post getting an overview of their influential thoughts to hopefully deepen us in Jesus.

Their Influence

What has been the influence of each theologian? If their thoughts represent a rock falling into a lake, their influence looks at the ripples in the water spreading out from the impact. This is one of the key areas where these people will be set apart from many other people who could have been contenders for the Top Ten list. Why have the thoughts of these people influenced so many?

Their Foibles

A foible is defined as a minor weakness or eccentricity in someone's character: "they have to tolerate each other's little foibles". Only one person

who has ever lived deserves worship. Jesus Christ. Each of these ten theologians would fully agree with the previous statement. If you ask any of these people, “Are you perfect?” “Should I worship you or should I worship Jesus?” They would all plead with us to worship the living God.

Each one of the theologians had aspects of their thought and of their lives which I would not recommend for you to follow. Some acted in ways which would even be criminal at certain times and places. Every human being, if you dig deep enough, will have parts of their lives which are not admirable. Every human being desperately needs a living Savior. We will spend time in each chapter discussing the foibles of every person on the Top Ten list.

Their Effect on Us

We will then spend time explicitly seeing areas where each one of the theologians should positively affect our life. By becoming friends with these theologians my hope and prayer is your thoughts about God and your life lived before God will be the better for the time spent hanging out with a bunch of dead people.

My list is set. If you made a list right now who would be on your Top Ten? Hint, do not add yourself, you will be automatically disqualified.

Buckle your seat belt, I now offer to you our #10 Theologian.



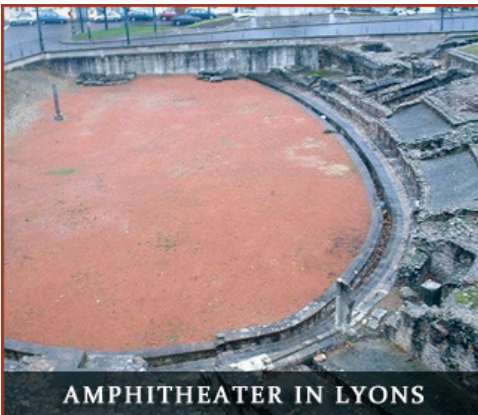
#10: IRENAEUS

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

Irenaeus' World

In order to appreciate the influential role Irenaeus played in the history of the Church, we need to have a working knowledge of three major elements that were significant factors in Irenaeus' world: the persecution of Christians, and two new approaches to Christianity, Gnosticism and Marcionism.

Persecution



In 177 AD several old men were eaten by wild beasts while the crowd cheered their approval. What was the crime committed by Alexander, Attalus, Espagathus, Maturus, Sactius and Pothinus? They were Christians.

Under the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD), persecution of Christians broke out

in a region called Gaul (modern day France). People from the two major cities in Gaul: Lyons and Vienne, wrote letters to other churches letting them know of the horrendous persecution in their land. These first-hand accounts were eventually preserved and published by the first great Church historian, Eusebius (263-339 AD). The letter states:

*“The greatness, indeed, of the tribulation, and the extent of the madness exhibited by the heathen against the saints, and the sufferings which the martyrs endured in this country, we are not able fully to declare, nor is it, indeed, possible to describe them.”*¹

The letters do, however, go on to describe the horrors of the persecution in Lyons. After enduring lengthy torture, which killed some of the oldest Christians, the rest were taken into the Amphitheater in Lyons and eventually killed by wild beasts.

The city of Lyons and the outbreak of persecution became a very important event for our tenth most important theologian: Irenaeus.

Gnosticism

Many people in the second century flocked to a new form of the Christian message known as Gnosticism. The Greek word *gnosis* simply means knowledge. Gnostics claim there’s secret knowledge you need, *in addition to the Bible*, which opens your eyes to the real truth and makes it possible to truly be a Christian. Would you like to know the secret of Gnosticism? I’m sure you do. Here’s what they taught:

The ultimate God is an amazing God too great to know. In the Pleroma (think: heaven), God lives and has many sub-gods. One of these sub-gods, known as Sophia, grew impatient and wanted to be like the unknowable supreme God. Pride and arrogance led her to take matters into her own hands and birth a son known as **Demiurge**. He had all the traits of his

¹ Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 5.1.4

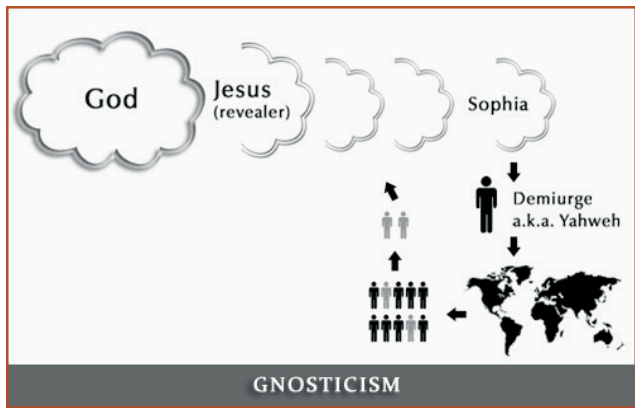
mother: sinful, prideful, arrogant, and evil. Gnostics taught that Demiurge then created the world, and everything in the world was evil.

The ultimate God placed on the evil earth some good spirits, known as **Aeons**. These Aeons occupy evil bodies and give them the chance to escape the world and rise to be part of the Pleroma.

Quite a cast of characters, huh? You might know Demiurge through another name - Yahweh. **According to Gnostics, the Yahweh we read of in the Old Testament is evil, everything Yahweh created is evil, and his people, Jews, are especially evil.** So what is the secret that allows evil people to be saved from the evil world? Here is the way a Gnostic would explain the way to salvation:

You might have an Aeon inside you, which is a “seed of light” that needs to be turned on in order for your eyes to be opened to the truth. How does your “seed of light” get turned on? Well, let me quote a verse you probably already know: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)*

You see, the true God, not that evil Yahweh sub-god, sent another glorious sub-god named Christ to enlighten select Aeons. Christ had to join up with the evil body of



a man named Jesus (luckily only for a little while) to give people the secret knowledge. A Gnostic would then ask you to believe in Jesus today as your Savior. He came for you to show you the way. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the unknowable God but through Him.

Gnostics would tell you that Jesus came to rescue you from the deceptions of the evil Yahweh and his people.

One of the leading Gnostics, who had a big following, was a man named Valentinus. He will become a huge part of Irenaeus' world. Valentinus gained so much popularity that he would become a leading candidate to be the next Bishop of Rome.

Marcionism

I will not go into as much detail on Marcionism. Marcion had many of the same ideas as the Gnostics. However, he is known uniquely for his approach to the Bible. Marcion rejected The Old Testament. He saw these as the writings which spoke of an evil god. He only liked the New Testament. He didn't, however, like all of the New Testament. He only acknowledged one of the Gospels, the book of Luke. He came up with a list of 11 total books which he believed to be the Scripture for Christians. Irenaeus would interact directly with the ideas of Marcion.

This is the world into which Irenaeus was called to fulfill his role in history – a world filled with persecution, Gnosticism, and Marcionism. Irenaeus would be called by God to contend with these three factors for the minds of the Christians he would influence.

Irenaeus' Life

Little is known of Irenaeus's life. He was born in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) in 130AD. As a young man he saw and heard Polycarp of Smyrna.² It is unclear how much Polycarp may have mentored Irenaeus. Polycarp was a well-known lead pastor (bishop).

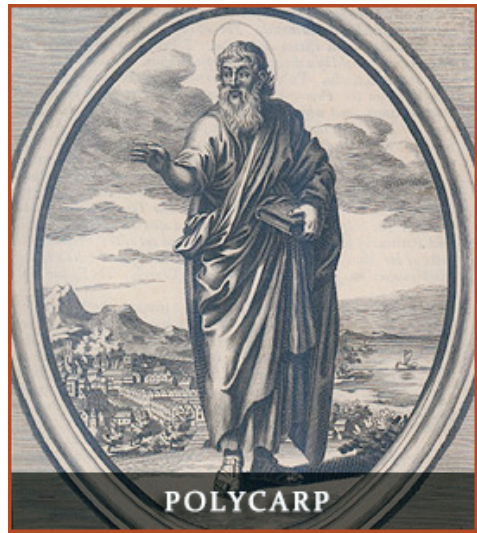
Polycarp is known for two things. First, he was directly discipled by John the Apostle. Yes, the same John who wrote the book of Revelation. How's

² Bettenson, Henry. The Early Christian Fathers. Page 12.

that for an impressive résumé? Second, Polycarp is famous for how he died. When Irenaeus was 25 years old, the aged Polycarp was given an ultimatum: Worship the gods of Rome, reject Jesus, or you will die. Honoring Polycarp for his old age, the proconsul insisted if he would only curse Christ he would be free to go.

Here's Polycarp's response in the face of martyrdom, *"For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?"*³

Polycarp was tied to a post and fires were lit to burn him alive. When the fire failed to touch him, he was then stabbed.⁴ Irenaeus describes Polycarp as *"a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics."*⁵



Irenaeus watched his mentor die for a faith which Valentinus and Marcion were seeking to corrupt.

In 177 AD, Irenaeus was offered a new job. Pothinus had just been martyred for being the bishop of Lyons. There was now a job opening. When both your mentor and your predecessor have been killed for their faith, it's clear the health benefits of the job aren't that good. Would you accept the position? Irenaeus courageously accepted the position and became the bishop of Lyons. An important position in an important city.

³ Gonzalez, Justo. The Story of Christianity. Page 44.

⁴ The Martyrdom of Polycarp

⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies. III.3.4

Irenaeus spent his life doing two things: shepherding the flock given to him by God, and refuting the beliefs of the Gnostics and Marcionites. Only



two of his literary works survived: the *Demonstration of Apostolic Faith*, and the famous *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-called Gnosis* – more popularly known by its Latin title *Adversus Haereses* (“Against Heresies”).

Tradition places the death of Irenaeus (some say by martyrdom) in the first years of the next century (202 AD).⁶ He survived for 25 years as the bishop of Lyons.

Irenaeus’ Thoughts

Irenaeus may justly be called the first biblical theologian; for him the Bible is not a collection of proof-texts as it is for the church leaders who came before him, but a continuous record of God’s self-disclosure and his dealings with man, reaching its culmination in the person and work of Christ.⁷

With Gnostics and Marcionites in mind, he upholds the importance of the entire Old and New Testaments. Jeffrey Bingham, Department Chair and Professor of Theological Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

*What distinguished Irenaeus from the heretics was his theme of unity and his commitment to interpreting Scripture within the parameters of the faith passed down from apostle to bishop. What has been entrusted from one faithful Christian to another always plays an important role in interpretation.*⁸

⁶ Bettenson. *The Early Christian Fathers*. Page 12.

⁷ Bettenson. P 13.

⁸ Bingham. *Pocket History of the Church*. P 42.

Irenaeus saw the Bible speaking to the importance of interpretive tradition:

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Tim. 6:20-21)

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Tim. 1:13-14)

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim 2:2)

It is clear to Irenaeus that Gnosticism and Marcionism were never taught by Jesus, the apostles, nor the earliest followers of Christ. We do not need secret knowledge to unlock the Bible. There is no hidden layer of meaning that re-interprets the entire Bible. He declares:

All Scripture, given to us by God (2 Tim. 3:16), will be found consistent. The parables will agree with the clear statements and the clear passages will explain the parables. Through the polyphony of the texts a single harmonious melody will sound in us, praising in hymns the God who made everything.⁹

No one can change the message of God. Irenaeus emphasizes this when he writes:

Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one

⁹ Irenaeus. Against Heresies. 2.28.3

who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one who can say but little diminish it. ¹⁰

Irenaeus became the first human to fully articulate the extent of the Word of God. He classifies as Scripture not only the entire Old Testament, but also most of the books known today as the New Testament. He quotes from 21 of the 27 New Testament books, while clearly excluding many Gnostic books which flourished in the 2nd century. Where Marcion only accepted a heavily edited form of Luke's gospel, Irenaeus asserted there were four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He states:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are...he that sits on the churbim and holds all things together, when he was manifested to humanity, gave us the gospel under four forms but bound together by one spirit. ¹¹

Irenaeus focused a great deal of his effort in refuting the Gnostic view of God (unknowable who is not Yahweh) and Christ (a sub-god sent to thwart Yahweh). He possessed an advanced view of the incarnation of Christ and of the Trinity.

He writes, "*The Father is Lord and the Son is Lord, and the Father is God and the Son is God; for that which is begotten of God is God.*" ¹² This wording is not so clearly articulated at a wide level until the Council of Nicea 200 years later!

To make it clear the Trinitarian God, not the Demiurge, created the world, Irenaeus writes:

For always with him are his Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, through whom and in whom he made everything freely and independently, to whom he also speaks when he says, 'Let Us make man after our image and likeness' (1:26), tak-

¹⁰ Ibid. 1.10.2

¹¹ Irenaeus. Against Heresies. 3.11.8

¹² Irenaeus. Demonstration. P 47

*ing the substance of the creatures from himself as well as the pattern of things be adorned.*¹³

Irenaeus wrote volumes, surrounded by persecution, articulating what he believes to be the biblical teaching on many topics being used by the Gnostics and Marcionites to confuse, mislead, and threaten the pure Bride of Christ.

Irenaeus' Influence

In a pivotal era where people are seeking to change the message of Jesus, Irenaeus is the distinct figure viewed as shaping orthodoxy (correct thought).¹⁴ The bishop from Lyons, with a Bible in his hand and a heart to accurately shepherd his people in the Way effectively labored to keep the church from embracing Gnosticism and Marcionism.

His articulation of Scripture, which was not yet in canonical form throughout Christian communities, helped to show a certain collection of writings to be Scripture.¹⁵

His surprisingly advanced view of the Trinity, along with contemporaries like Tertullian, became the foundation upon which the Church would ultimately build the famous articulation all of church history at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

John Lawson applauds the talent behind his legacy by saying, "Irenaeus is a man of many-sided genius."¹⁶

Irenaeus' Foibles

If Irenaeus is removed from the 2nd century and the chaotic influence

¹³ Against Heresies. 4.20.1

¹⁴ Green. Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy. P 59.

¹⁵ Ibid., P 51.

¹⁶ Ibid., p 60.

of Gnosticism and Marcion, his thoughts can be harmfully taken out of context. Some of his teachings could be misconstrued if not interpreted as a direct response to the Gnostic teachings.

For example, Irenaeus refutes the Gnostic belief that Jesus was not fully human by describing Christ as the second human Adam. In order to show the Gnostics the extent of Christ being human he depicts Mary as the second Eve. Christ must be fully human. His mother was fully human as well. However, in putting Mary and Jesus on the same level, some would charge Irenaeus with leading people into a heretical idea. This concept of equating Mary and Jesus is something that is today known in Roman Catholic circles of Mariology as the Co-Redemptrix (Mary as the co-redeemer of humanity).

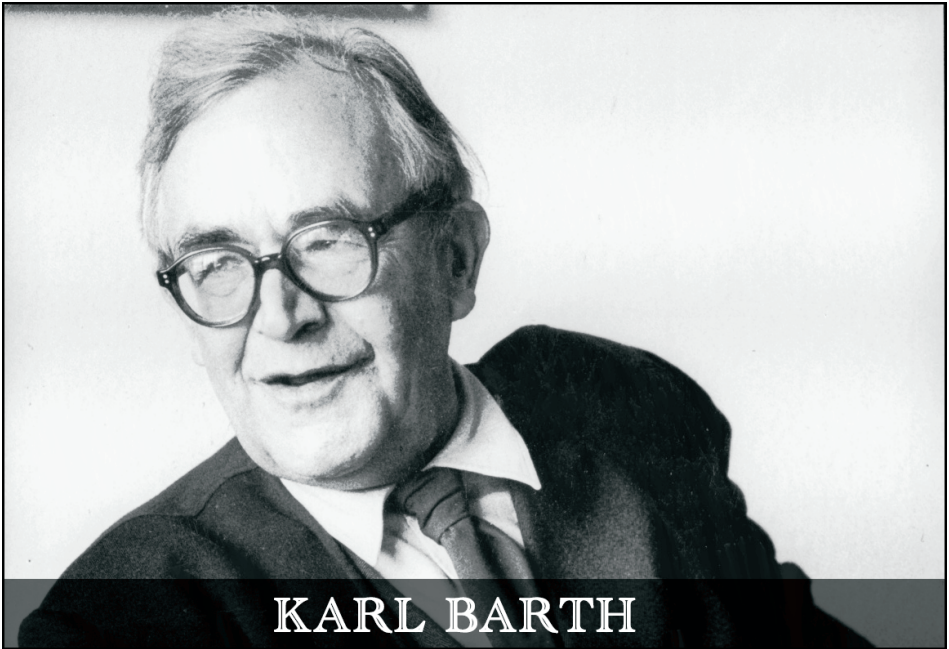
This unfortunate metaphor that Irenaeus used in his teaching, not aware how it would be interpreted centuries later, is a small foible on his otherwise spotless record as a theologian. Irenaeus lived so long ago we do not know much about his personal life. Most of his foibles, therefore, are lost to history.

Irenaeus' Effect on Us

I hope Irenaeus' legacy will fill you with new courage to step into an unknown situation and do anything possible to shepherd those around you in the entire Word of God. Irenaeus helped to direct his people to Jesus through every page of Scripture. Jesus is not only the messenger, but the message of all Scripture.

I hope you will find a renewed passion for the importance of the Word of God, the importance of understanding and teaching the Trinity, and the importance of living for a Savior who is both completely like us and completely God. The world in which Irenaeus lived threatened to erase all of those ideas from humanity. Please let Irenaeus inspire you to courageously uphold and live out these important realities in the sphere of your world.

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TO EXPERIENCE
IRENAEUS IN HIS
OWN WORDS**



KARL BARTH

#9: KARL BARTH

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

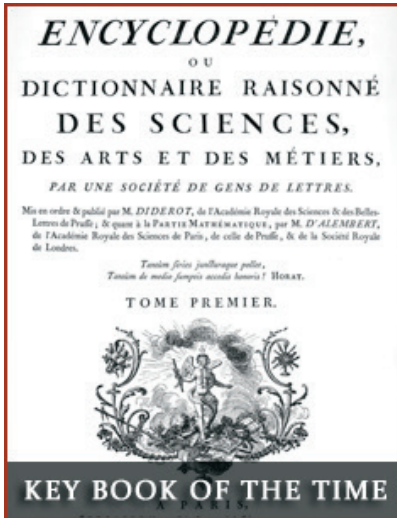
I anticipate, of all the Top Ten Theologians, Karl Barth (pronounced Bart) will be the most debated theologian in this book. I wrestled more with his inclusion and position on the list than I did with any of the other theologians. It is with excitement and yes, some trepidation, that I offer to you the life of Karl Barth.

In order to appreciate Barth, it is important to understand a couple people/movements playing a crucial role in Barth's world.

Barth's World

The Enlightenment

Imagine living in a world where you know more than your parents. Every teenager would respond, "That's easy to imagine! My parents are clueless." In the 1600's and 1700's, however, people genuinely knew more about life than those who came before them.



Guess what? The earth is actually round, not flat. For so many centuries we thought the earth was the center of our solar system. Not anymore. The sun, not the earth, is at the center of our little world.

A newly discovered land called America is being colonized across the Atlantic Ocean. The laws of the universe are being unlocked by Isaac Newton with the recent discovery of gravity. The Age of the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, is turn-

ing the world upside down. People felt they were emerging from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by reason and science.

If our grandparents and great grandparents had been so naïve about our world, where else were they naïve? [Warning: the next sentence is a spoiler alert!] Imagine the whole world, for centuries, believing Santa Claus flew in his sleigh, came down your chimney, ate your cookies, drank your milk and left you a gift. For the first time the world collectively understands our dad is eating the cookies. We're not little kids anymore; we see the world with adult eyes.

We know there was a man named Saint Nicholas who lived a long time ago. Our research shows he was born in 270AD in modern-day Turkey. He was a gracious man who secretly gave gifts to people. Yes, he existed but I'm not so naïve any more to believe he drank my milk, in my house, on December 24th. The scientific method, coupled with reason, allows us unprecedented understanding. The Age of Reason now turns its suspicious eye to the Church.

Many end up surmising:

We know there was a man named Jesus who lived a long time ago. Our research shows he was born around 5BC in the city of Bethlehem. He was a holy man whom we greatly respect. Yes, he existed but I'm not so naïve any more to believe he walked on water, was the actual son of God, and he definitely didn't die for the sins of the entire world.



Friedrich Schleiermacher

Could Christianity survive such inquiry? Would it crumble under the scientific method? Friedrich Schleiermacher came on the scene to save Christianity. He would become one of the most famous “Christians” of the last 400 years.

Schleiermacher loved the faith. Let's stay with our Christmas illustration. Just like everybody else, he didn't believe in Santa Claus anymore. Was he ready to

cancel Christmas? **No way, are you kidding me? He loved Christmas.** He loved the warm fuzzy feeling of Christmas. It was such a marvelous season of the year. Spending time with people you love, eating wonderful food, the glow of the fire warming your soul. Waking up early on Christmas morning is so delightful. Schleiermacher would never dream of cancelling Christmas. He actually wanted everyone to love the feeling of Christmas.

Schleiermacher could care less about Christmas; my illustration is merely to show the approach he took in trying to save Christianity from the Enlightenment. Schleiermacher reduced Christianity to a single aspect: the

romantic notion of *feeling*.¹ It didn't matter what you thought about God, the important response came from your feelings toward God. God is a powerful being, but He is not to be separated from the world. Think of it this way, Santa Claus really only exists within the atmosphere of Christmas. God does not exist in some objective sense; God exists within the feelings of the people. Why was Schleiermacher a Christian? Couldn't he have been a Buddhist? **He thought Jesus was the all-time best at feeling God.**

Jesus didn't have to be God, walk on water, or die for the sins of humanity. He believed we needed his example to show us how to best *feel* God. Schleiermacher was a follower of Christ because Christ was the most religious man who ever lived.² It is like Jesus had the greatest "Christmas Spirit" and those who follow Jesus closely will have the most "Christmas Spirit."

Friedrich Schleiermacher became the father of a movement called Theological Liberalism. Riding the wave of the Enlightenment seminaries from differing denominational backgrounds adopted Schleiermacher's thoughts. Princeton (Presbyterian), Harvard (Calvinist), Dartmouth (Congregationalist), Brown (Baptist), and Yale (Calvinist) all adopted much of Modern Theological Liberalism.

No one would stand toe-to-toe against Schleiermacher and theological liberalism as much as Karl Barth. In addition to standing against Schleiermacher, Barth also faced one of the most hated human beings to ever live. Instead of trying to "save" Christianity, Adolf Hitler looked to destroy the Church.

Adolf Hitler

Most of the men on our Top Ten list interacted with more than one "big time" issue during their lifetime. In addition to the rise of Theological Liberalism, Karl Barth lived in Germany during the rise of Adolf Hitler. Karl Barth was just 3 years older than Hitler. When Hitler became the leader

1 Bingham. Pocket History of the Church. P151

2 Bingham. Pocket History of the Church. P151

of Germany in 1934, Barth was 48 years old.

Hitler capitalized on the shameful loss of World War I and the crushing Versailles Treaty to once again try to make Germany a great country. Without getting into all the events and theology of the Third Reich it is beneficial to mention a few things.



First, Hitler secretly wanted to destroy Christianity but realized he would become more politically powerful if he used Christianity for his own purposes. Hitler adopted a strategy “that suited his immediate political purposes.”³ He worked to unify the entire church of Germany under the “German Christian” movement. He used Christians as pawns all the while believing, “*We do not want any other god than Germany itself. It is essential to have fanatical faith and hope and love in and for Germany*”⁴ He hoped to destroy Christianity in Germany once the war had ended.

Second, In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler refers to Martin Luther as a great warrior, a true statesman, and a great reformer.⁵ Hitler tried to position himself as following in the footsteps of Martin Luther.

Third, in 1933 the total population of Germany was 65 million people. 45 million people were considered Protestant Christians. In 1933 Germany had 18,000 Protestant pastors. **15,000 (83%) of them would support Hitler during the war.**⁶

3 Conway. The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-1945. P 3.

4 Heiden. A history of National Socialism. p100.

5 Hitler. Mein Kampf. Section 7.

6 Shirer. The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. pp234-240.

Karl Barth would play a crucial role in responding to Hitler.



Barth's Life

Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland on May 10th, 1886. His family moved to Bern, Switzerland due to his father being a professor at the University of Bern. In 1904, at the age of 18, Karl enrolled at the University of Bern for theological studies.

The University of Bern introduced him to Enlightenment thinker, Immanuel Kant, who's *Critique of Practical Reason* he called "the first book

that really moved me as a student."⁷

Karl Barth then studied in Berlin, Germany. What you must understand is that Germany was the bastion of theological liberalism. In Berlin he would study under liberal theologian Adolf Van Harnack with unbounded enthusiasm.⁸ Barth then continued his studies at the famous German Tübingen University before finally going to the oldest Protestant-founded school in the world, the University of Marburg in Marburg, Germany. Barth was drawn to Marburg in order to study under Wilhelm Herrmann. He states, "I absorbed Hermann through every pore."⁹ Herrmann was able to articulate a coherent account of Christianity which took Kant and Schleiermacher with full seriousness.

Here is the key: It would *appear* Barth was on the road to becoming the next

⁷ Barth, Bultmann. Letters 1922-1968. p157.

⁸ Webster. Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth. p2.

⁹ Ibid., p2.

great liberal theologian.

Barth went on to spend the next 11 years as a pastor back in Switzerland. While pastoring in Geneva, Barth plunged into Calvin's *Institutes* "with profound impact."¹⁰ As Barth's studying of the Christian faith increased he started lecturing in Switzerland and Germany. By 1921 he was appointed an Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen.

In 1935 Barth was removed from his teaching position in Germany and sent to Switzerland. He would teach at the University of Basel for the rest of his professional life.

Barth is best known for writing his 13 volume *Church Dogmatics* (nearly 8,000 pages in the English Translation). Barth's thoughts, as we will see, greatly shaped the 20th century and beyond.

Barth's Thoughts

Karl Barth completely believes the liberal theology of Schleiermacher as he leaves the university and first enters the pastorate. In his first two years of sermons he makes statements such as, "*the greatest thing is what takes place in our hearts*"; "*Calvin's view of the authority of the Bible would be quite wrong for us*"; "*Sometimes they [the Ten Commandments] contain too much for our needs and sometimes too little.*" In one sermon he dismissed the orthodox understanding of Christ articulated in the Chalcedonian Definition, commenting that "*if Jesus were like this I would not be interested in him.*"¹¹

August 1914

Everything changed for Barth with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Barth writes:

10 Webster. Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth. p154.

11 Franke. Barth for Armchair Theologians. p22.

One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counselors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th century theology no longer held any future.¹²

To continue with my Christmas illustration, **Karl Barth begins to recognize that if your faith is wrapped up in wanting to experience the warm fuzzy feelings of Christmas, you may one day kill people to ensure you get what you want to feel.**

Barth concluded such ideas were blasphemous and simply amounted to equating talk about humanity and human culture with talk about God.¹³ He declares religion to be a human effort by which we seek to hide from God. Barth is quickly on the road to becoming one of liberal German scholarship's top ten heretics.

How you ask? First he recovers the doctrine of the Trinity from liberalism. God is not existing as part of human knowledge, as Schleiermacher thought, for Barth God exists through God's self-knowledge apart from human involvement.

As if this were not enough, he then makes moves back toward a traditional understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. Regarding the Bible he states, *"It is not right human thoughts about God that make up the content of the Bible, but rather right divine thoughts about human beings."* This is a one-two punch in the face of his German mentors. God, who exists as Trinity, operates far outside the feelings of humans. The second person of the Trinity, Jesus, is far

¹² Barth. *The Humanity of God*. p.14

¹³ Franke. p.31.

from Santa Claus. He is indeed “*two natures who met to be thy cure.*” Unless two natures had met in Christ “*without separation or division*” yet also “*without confusion or change*”, neither reconciliation nor revelation, as Barth explained them, could have taken place. By 1916 Barth had fully rejected modern liberal theology.

Barth’s Influence

The influence of Karl Barth is most clearly apparent in two areas. First, his thoughts are seen as dismantling the tidal wave of modern theological liberalism. Webster writes, “*The brilliance of Barth’s account of the reality of Christ was enough to bring large parts of the edifice of 19th century liberalism crashing to the ground.*”¹⁴ Schleiermacher found his match in Barth.

Second, Barth’s rejection of liberalism for an objective Christ-centered faith made it possible for him to clearly see the evil of Hitler. Barth wouldn’t let Schleiermacher redefine Christianity and he wasn’t going to let



Hitler do it either. 15,000 pastors had already thrown their hat in with Hitler. Barth wrote the Barmen Declaration of 1934 which proclaimed:

the church cannot be run by Hitler because it is solely Christ’s property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance. Furthermore, the church cannot submit to Hitler, it only submits itself explicitly and radically to Holy Scripture as God’s

¹⁴ Webster. Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth. p.12.

gracious Word.

Barth provided much of the theological foundation upon which 3,000 German pastors stood against Hitler, many of them at the cost of their very lives. Heroic men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer were heavily influenced by and personally knew Barth.

Barth's Foibles

One of the complaints many people have about Barth is he didn't communicate clearly enough. Many times it is difficult to understand exactly what he's trying to say. Webster writes:

*Reading Barth is no easy task. Because the corpus of his writing is so massive and complex, what he has to say cannot be neatly summarized. Moreover, his preferred method of exposition, especially in the Church Dogmatics, is frustrating for readers looking to follow a linear thread of argument. Commentators often note the musical structure of Barth's major writings: the announcement of a theme, and its further extension in a long series of developments and recapitulations, through which the reader is invited to consider the theme from a number of different angles and in a number of different relations.*¹⁵

By far the greatest foible that conservative American Evangelicalism has charged Barth with is his seemingly liberal theology. However, when we understand the context of Barth's situation, what he was expected to accomplish (i.e. being the next great liberal theologian Germany was to produce), we should cut him more than a little slack. While Barth's theology would not be in line with some of our Evangelical theology, he, as many people have put it, "dropped a bombshell on the playground of theological liberalism". While his pendulum may not have swung back to the far right, his conservative stance on God, Christ, and the Scriptures would be a catalyst for the fall of the prominence, respect, and hope of liberal theology.

¹⁵ Webster. Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth. p.12.

Barth's Effect on Us

¹⁶First, Barth's theology intends to be comprehensive in its engagement with the Bible and the history of Christian theology. It is a theology which takes seriously Scripture and Tradition. We would do well to emulate.

Second, Barth helps us see that no matter how thorough and advanced your theology will become you will still merely be a human thinking about an infinite God who exists outside of your time, space and thoughts.

Third, Barth's theology understands itself to be bound at every point to God and to God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It is a theology of submission to God and, as such, naturally leads to worship. It is not a science of culture or even of religion; it is christocentric dogmatics.

Fourth, Barth shows dogmatics and ethics belong together in the closest possible relation. You can't separate what you know from how you act.

Fifth, Barth's theology makes the proper subject of theological existence to be the congregation. What emerges from Barth's concentration on the congregation is a call for congregations to become more "mature" as unified bodies, with pastors and laity engaging together in the work of ministry rather than leaving such work to a professional class.

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¹⁶ This section is heavily sourced from the great work, *Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, by Bruce L. McCormack from Baker Academic.



#8: ANSELM

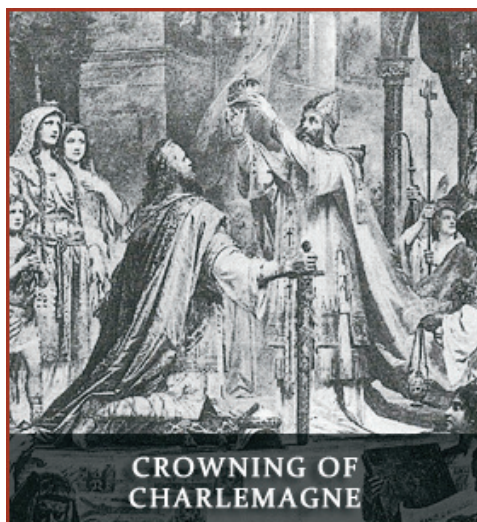
TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

In order to appreciate Anselm, #8 on our list of Top Ten Theologians, we must have a working knowledge of Anselm's world. Let's take a look at two events which need to be in our minds to appreciate him.

Anselm's World

Crowning of Charlemagne

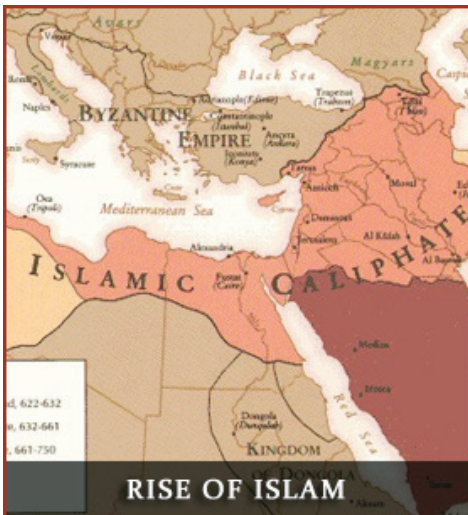
If you were a citizen of Rome in 450AD life stunk. Most parents kissed their kids good-night thinking they all would be dead soon. One of the most feared men on the planet, Attila the Hun, is on his way to be your nightmare. His army, consisting of more than 300,000 soldiers, seeks to destroy everything you love. As Attila



nears Rome an interesting strategy develops. Instead of sending out our army, let's do something different. Let's send out our head pastor, Leo, and see if he can get Attila to forget about destroying Rome. As Rome held its breath, Leo met Attila the Hun. Attila, remarkably, turned back from attacking Rome. Leo returned to Rome a hero. People started to see how powerful the church could be in preserving the state.

In 800AD the power of the church in relation to the state reached a whole new level. In order for Charlemagne to become the Emperor of Rome he had to be crowned by Pope Leo III. This was done on on Christmas day, 800AD. Imagine today if someone like Billy Graham needed to approve of any presidential candidate before they were sworn into office. Many of these church leaders did not seek such power. Understanding Leo's influence on Attila and Leo III's crowning of Charlemagne will allow you to see how Anselm could reluctantly become one of the most powerful men on the planet.

Rise of Islam



The spread of Islam started shortly after the death of Muhammad in 632AD. Muslims do not see Muhammad as the creator of Islam, but instead regard him as the last messenger of God. Muhammad is seen as following in the footsteps of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The Qur'an is believed to be the final revelation from God.

Conversions to Islam paralleled the rapid military expansion of the Arab Empire. Muslim dynasties were soon established in North Africa, West Africa, throughout the Middle East and in Iran. The Crusades were carried out as military responses from

predominately Christian nations to the military expansion of Islam.

Islam carried something interesting into their conquered lands: **learning**. In the 10th and 11th century a great wave of intellectual sophistication swept through the Islamic world. There are several reasons for such intellectualism:¹

First, the study of the Qur'an was encouraged for all Muslims. The Islamic world, therefore, had a very high literacy rate.

Second, classical texts from writers like Aristotle were lost to the Latin world with the fall of the Roman Empire, but were preserved (many times by Christians) in the Muslim world. Muslim countries had access to sophisticated thoughts which had become virtually unknown to the Western world.

Third, Islam had a positive view between the material and spiritual world. The material world is not at war with the spiritual world. This positive attitude led to greater openness toward science than in early medieval Europe. Our modern-day concept of science stems from the Islamic world.

Fourth, Muslims had schools of learning, called Madrasa, which were schools with resident students (precursors to the university). At this higher level, students would carry out formal logical disputations stating thesis, counter thesis, and conducting dialogue of objections and answers.

Christianity enjoyed nearly a thousand years without any major challenge from outside religions. Could the Christian faith withstand reasoned intellectual inquiry growing in the Islamic world? Anselm arrives to the scene to answer that question.

¹ Outline taken from the course notes of Loyola University Chicago professor Leslie Dossey. Transmission of Islamic Learning and European Scholasticism

Anselm's Life

Anselm was born in Northern Italy around 1033AD. He was born into a comfortable noble family, owning considerable property.

At the age of 15, however, Anselm wanted to enter a monastery but could not obtain his father's consent. His father thought it would be a waste of his noble life. Without his father's consent, the head of the monastery refused his entry. Anselm gave up his desire to study theology and lived a carefree life. His mother, however, soon died and his father's harshness became unbearable.



At the age of 23 Anselm left home, crossed the Alps and wandered through Burgundy and France.² It was common at this time, before universities, for there to be “wandering scholars” like Anselm who would seek out older, wiser people to learn from.

After wandering around for three years Anselm made his way to the monastery of Bec in central Normandy, France. Anselm was attracted to Bec by a famous fellow Italian countryman named Lanfranc. Lanfranc was the primary teacher at the Bec monas-

tery. Anselm's friend writes:

Lanfranc's lofty fame had resounded everywhere and had drawn to him the best clerks from all parts of the world. Anselm therefore came to him and recognized the

² Charlesworth. St. Anselm's Proslogion. p9.

*outstanding wisdom which shone forth in him. He placed himself under his guidance and in a short time became the most intimate of his disciples.*³

Lanfranc's discipleship of Anselm would be profound:

*When he got there, it was Lanfranc who started him on the course of religious and intellectual development which was to make him one of the outstanding figures in the history of Latin Christendom. He put himself entirely in Lanfranc's hands: 'So great was his influence over me' (Anselm later confided to his biographer) 'and so greatly did I trust his judgment, that if he had told me to go into the forest above Bec and never come out, I would have done it without hesitation.'*⁴

No longer to be content as just a student at Bec, at the age of 27, Anselm officially entered the monastery as a monk. He started out at the absolute bottom rung with the official title: Novice. Three years later, Anselm started to climb the ladder when Lanfranc was promoted to a different monastery. Lanfranc's promotion left Anselm as the primary teacher at Bec. **Anselm became very interested in training the minds of the monks in ways which would foster their spiritual as well as their intellectual development.**⁵ After a short while Anselm's students begged him to

write down his teachings. He wrote his first two works at this time: *Monologion* (Only Words) and *Proslogion* (First Words).

In 1078, at the age of 45, An-



3 Davies. Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works. VII

4 Stephen. Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape. p15.

5 Davies. Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works. VII

selm was promoted to the head (Abbot) of the monastery. By 1085, people were reading his *Monologion* and *Proslogion* in France, England, and probably in Rome. Anselm was gaining a reputation for himself which went well beyond the confines of his monastery.⁶

Much against his desires, Anselm was chosen in 1093 at the age of 60 to succeed Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop of Canterbury was the highest religious leader of all England. Since the church was seen in many ways as being above the state, Anselm had just become one of the most powerful men on the planet. What did he think about this new position? He wrote to a friend, “*I am so harassed in the archbishopric that if it were possible to do so without guilt, I would rather die than continue in it.*”⁷

Anselm’s position required him to be involved in politics. For example, soon after becoming Archbishop, King William requested £1,000 from Anselm to finance an expedition to Normandy. Anselm felt the funds could be better spent relieving the hardships and helping to reform the morals of those in the church. William would eventually send Anselm into exile. He stayed away from England until after William’s death in 1100AD. While Archbishop, Anselm wrote the works: *Why God Became Man*; *On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*; and *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*.

A new king led to some new disagreements and once again Anselm was exiled. He returned to England in 1106AD at the age of 73. His biographer wrote, “Anselm was received with great joy and honour by the Church and the King was heartily glad that he had made his peace with Anselm.”⁸ Anselm was writing his last major work *De Concordia* (On God’s Foreknowledge and Predestination) when he died at the age of 76.

Anselm’s Thoughts

Anselm wrote on many aspects of the faith, but he is best known for his

6 Davies. *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*. VII

7 *Ibid.*, VIII

8 Eadmer. *The Life of St. Anselm*. p138.

thoughts in three areas: harmonizing faith and reason; his thoughts on the atonement; and his ontological argument for the existence of God.

Harmonizing Faith and Reason

Anselm asserted the harmony of faith and reason. Faith and reason are not enemies, they can exist together. He desired to apply reason to questions of faith. What he sought in doing this was not to prove something which he did not believe without such proof, but rather to understand more deeply what he already believed.⁹ Anselm writes:



Lord I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding is no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand.¹⁰

Spirituality, life in the Spirit of God, was not to be viewed as a pious, hopeful wish in something basically irrational and unreasonable. Rather, spirituality involved thinking as much as feeling, pondering as much as sensing, brain work as much as willing, head as much as heart.¹¹

Reason assists faith by helping us grasp its reasonableness and its signifi-

⁹ Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p313

¹⁰ Anselm, Proslogion. 1.155-57, p244

¹¹ Bingham. p92

cance. But reason never substitutes for revelation or faith.¹² Scripture remains the final authority for Anselm.

Doctrine of the Atonement

In his greatest work, *Cur Deus Homo* (The God-Man), Anselm undertakes to make plain, even to unbelievers, the rational necessity of the Christian mystery of the Atonement.¹³ Most Christians, historically, viewed the death of Jesus on the cross as a ransom paid to Satan for the souls of mankind. Anselm's theory pointed people in a different direction.

Anselm explores the question of the reason for the incarnation, and offers an answer that would eventually become standard in western theology. The importance of a crime is measured in terms of the one against whom it is committed. Therefore, a crime against God, sin, is infinite in its import. But, on the other hand, only a human being can offer satisfaction for human sin. This is obviously impossible, for human beings are finite, and cannot offer the infinite satisfaction required by the majesty of God. For this reason, there is need for a divine-human, God incarnate, who through his suffering and death offers satisfaction for the sins of all humankind.¹⁴

In stunning beauty Anselm writes:

O hidden strength: a man hangs on a cross and lifts the load of eternal death from the human race; a man nailed to wood looses the bonds of everlasting death that hold fast the world. O hidden power: a man condemned with thieves saves men condemned with devils, a man stretched out on the gibbet draws all men to himself. O mysterious strength: one soul coming forth from torment draws countless souls with him out of hell, a man submits to the death of the body and destroys the death of souls... See, Christian soul, here is the strength of your salvation, here is the cause of your

12 Ibid. p92

13 Walsh, p75

14 Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p313.

*freedom, here is the price of your redemption. You were a slave and by this man you are free. By him you are brought back from exile, lost, you are restored, dead, you are raised.*¹⁵

Ontological Argument

Anselm seeks to prove, using pure reason, the existence of God. He starts with the idea that God would leave footprints in the minds of the rational creatures he had made to enable them to find their way to him by contemplation of their own deepest nature.¹⁶

In the Proslogion he develops what has come to be called “the ontological argument for the existence of God.” Anselm’s argument is that when one thinks of God, one is thinking of “that-than-which-no-greater-can-be-thought.” For example: Is Tiger Woods God? No, I do not believe he is God. Why? I can imagine an older being. I can imagine a stronger being. I can imagine a more ethical being (I can say this about all people so I’m not throwing Tiger Woods under the bus). I can imagine, at least for the time being, even a better golfer. Tiger Woods is not god because I can think of a greater being. If I was wrong, and there was no greater being than Tiger Woods, than Tiger would be God. God is the One upon which there is no greater. Therefore, it is nonsensical and unreasonable to speak of a God who does not exist. Even if an Atheist is asked if he believes in God, the moment he ponders the existence of God, he has proven the existence of God.

Anselm’s Influence

Anselm is called the founder of Scholasticism. He is the first person to provide a strong intellectual foundation for the faith while also maintaining the heart of the faith. He paved the way for the rise of the university to occur built upon these intellectual virtues. Bologna, Paris and Oxford num-

15 Anselm, Meditation on Human Redemption, pp230-231, 234

16 Davies. Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works. XI

bered among the most famous early locations.¹⁷

Anselm's view of the work of Christ, which was by no means the generally accepted one in earlier centuries, soon gained such credence that most western Christians came to accept it as the only biblical one.¹⁸ His ontological argument, additionally, is still pondered by philosophers and theologians to this day.

He touched the thought, the piety and the politics of the time at every important point; and whatever he touched looked different afterwards.¹⁹

Anselm's Foibles

The two greatest foibles I see in Anselm are as follows:

1. Anselm reasoned Mary must have been one of the purest human beings to be chosen as the mother of Christ. Anselm denied the Immaculate Conception, but Roman Catholics still look to Anselm as the one who invoked the ideas and laid the groundwork for the doctrine of Immaculate Conception.
2. Due to his affectionate letters to his friends and fellow-monks some authors accuse Anselm of being a homosexual. Author John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* makes this charge of Anselm. Most attribute his affectionate writing to a shared spiritual intimacy. This is similar to David's love for Jonathan. Some people accuse them of being lovers, most recognize however a strong bond that can form between very heterosexual men, think "band of brothers." Anselm even wrote, "It must be recognized that this sin of sodomy has become so common that hardly anyone even blushes for it, and many, being ignorant of its enormity, have abandoned themselves to it...they are warned that they are acting against God, and incurring damnation."

17 Bingham, p94

18 Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1.* p314.

19 Southern. Introduction.

Anselm clearly refutes homosexuality.

Anselm's Effect on Us

We live in an age where Christians are generally seen as brain-washed light-weights. Atheists are the intellectuals and Christians are idiots who can't naturally cope with life. Christians, additionally, are seen as moral hypocrites. The pastorate is no longer viewed as a dignified position but more popularly seen as an incubator for power-corrupted immorality.

Anselm is a great example of someone who fully interacts intellectually with his culture, on their terms, but is still absolutely saturated with the Word of God. In him we see hardly any distinction between head and heart, doctrine and practical piety, knowledge and prayer.²⁰ Anselm's mind is disciplined for God and his affections are for Christ. He has all the power in the world but seeks to serve the lowest of people. He is a man worthy to follow as he follows Christ.

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²⁰ Bingham, p86



#7: C.S. LEWIS

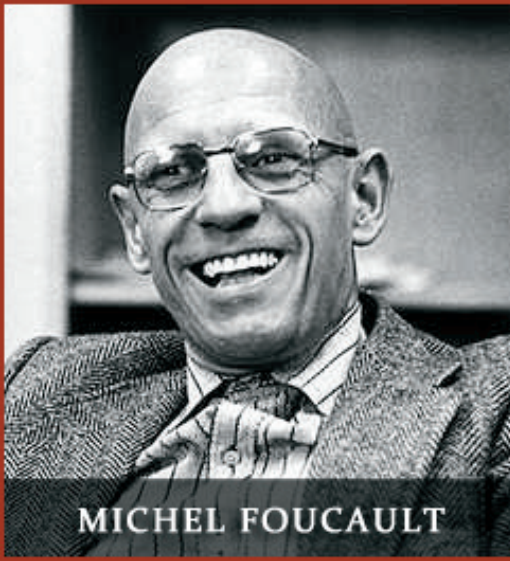
TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

Our count down of Top Ten Theologians continues with #7: C.S. Lewis. His inclusion on this list will be an obvious choice for some and a surprise for others. Yes, I completely agree it is risky and potentially short-sighted to have two 20th century people (Lewis and Barth) on the list. Time has not vetted these men as much as someone like Irenaeus or Anselm. Generations to come may downgrade the influence from any 20th century theologian. I am excited, nonetheless, to offer you C.S. Lewis.

Lewis's World

Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault (pronounced foo-ko) may be one of the most influential 20th century thinkers you've never heard of. He was interested in studying the development of ideas. How and why do we know what we know? He held a chair at Collège de France with the title, "History of Systems of Thought." He wrote several books on diverse subjects such as: psychiatry;



medicine; the human sciences; prison systems; as well as the history of human sexuality.

Foucault's observations and skepticism challenged many long-standing ideas. His first book wondered why some people are considered crazy? What if these "crazy" people lived at a different time in a completely different culture? Would they still be considered crazy?

How about, for example, John the Baptist? His clothes were

nasty. He lived out in the desert eating bugs. He yelled at people to repent. They responded by letting John hold them under water. In first century Israel John was viewed as one of the greatest prophets who ever lived. Transfer John the Baptist to New York City and he'd be locked up in a mental hospital. Crazyness is relative.

In Foucault's studies on sex he wondered why people seemed to possess differing ideas of sexual appropriateness. Why do women in certain developing countries walk around topless? Every person at that particular time and place believes topless women are normal. It is unimaginable to consider the same women walking around Victorian England. The sexual customs of these two cultures are worlds apart. Sexual morals appear to be relative.

Foucault believes periods of history have possessed specific underlying conditions of truth that constituted what he expresses as *discourse* (for example art, science, culture, etc.). Foucault argues that these conditions of discourse have changed over time, in major and relatively sudden shifts,

from one period's knowledge to another.¹

Different cultures have different ways of discussing and knowing reality. What is crazy? What is immoral? What is joy? Who is God? What is beautiful? Foucault shows how people answer these questions for themselves. There are no objective answers, knowing is relative to time and place.

Foucault's thoughts are very popular. Even though he died in 1984, he is currently the most cited author in the humanities.² For books published in 2007, for example, he was cited 2,521 times. During the same period, in comparison, Friedrich Nietzsche was only cited 501 times.³

Foucault is skeptical of ideas or realities which claim to exist for all people at all times. Christianity, however, claims a Savior who exists for all people at all times. C.S. Lewis will address Foucault head-on and become known as the "Apostle to the Skeptics."

Lewis's Life

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland on November 29, 1898. At the age of four, after the death of the beloved neighborhood dog "Jacksie," Lewis announced his new name would be "Jacksie." He eventually permitted friends and family to call him the shortened "Jack."

In 1905, at the age of seven, the family moved into a new home. Lewis writes:

The New House is almost a major character in my story. I am a product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics unexplored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles.

1 Robert, Holub. Crossing Borders. p57.

2 <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=405956> accessed September of 2011

3 Lewis, Surprised by Joy. p10.

Also, of endless books.⁴

The “endless books” certainly shaped Lewis; he writes:

My father bought all the books he read and never got rid of any of them. There were books in the study, books in the drawing room, books in the cloakroom, books



(two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled as high as my shoulder in the cistern attic, books of all kinds reflecting every transient stage of my parents' interest, books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not.

Nothing was forbidden me.

In the seemingly endless rainy afternoons I took volume after volume from the shelves. I had always the same certainty of finding a book that was new to me as a man who walks into a field has of finding a new blade of grass.⁵

C.S. Lewis was well-read by the age of eight.⁶ A complete list of the books he had read by the age of nine would be very long.⁷ His diary entry of March 5, 1908: “I read *Paradise Lost*, reflections thereon.”⁸ The epic, *Paradise Lost*, contains over 10,000 individual lines of poetic verse!

Lewis gravitated to not only reading but writing at an early age, due to a he-

⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. p10.

⁵ Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. p10.

⁶ Sayer. Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lewis. *The Lewis Papers*. 3:102

editary condition with his thumbs known as Symphalangism. He explains the condition:

What drove me to write was the extreme manual clumsiness from which I have always suffered. I attribute it to a physical defect which my brother and I both inherit from our father; we have only one joint in the thumb. The upper joint (that furthest from the nail) is visible, but it is a mere sham; we cannot bend it. But whatever the cause, nature laid on me

from birth an utter incapacity to make anything. With pencil and pen I was handy enough, and I can still tie as good a bow as ever lay on a man's collar; but with a tool or a bat or a gun, a sleeve link or a corkscrew, I have always been unteachable. It was this that forced me to write. I longed to make things, ships, houses, engines. Many sheets of cardboard and pairs of scissors I spoiled, only to turn from my hopeless failures in tears. As a last resource, as a pis aller, I was driven to write stories instead.⁹



Lewis was brought up in a Christian home. He states, “I was taught the usual things and made to say my prayers and in due time taken to church. I naturally accepted what I was told but I cannot remember feeling much interest in it.”¹⁰

Shortly after the death of his mother, in 1908, Lewis and his brother were sent to boarding school. The school Matron, Miss C., had been on a spiri-

⁹ Lewis. Surprised by Joy. p12.

¹⁰ Ibid. p7.

tual journey for truth and a way of life. Mysticism, Mythology and the Occult occupied a large part of her thoughts at this time. Lewis writes:

Nothing was further from her intention than to destroy my faith; she could not tell that the room into which she brought this candle (her ideas) was full of gunpowder.

Lewis began to doubt many aspects of Christianity. Prayer became a ludicrous burden of false duties. He felt it strange for all religions to be considered wrong except for his Christianity. He called the truthfulness of Christianity, in light of seemingly incorrect paganism, a fortunate exception. He writes:

In addition to this, and equally working against my faith, there was in me a deeply ingrained pessimism; a pessimism, by that time, much more of intellect than of temper. I was now by no means unhappy; but I had very definitely formed the opinion that the universe was, in the main, a rather regrettable institution.¹¹

Lewis considered himself an atheist by the time he was fifteen. He resonated with Lucretius's atheistic argument:

*Had God designed the world, it would not be;
A world so frail and faulty as we see.¹²*

Lewis explains, “*And so, little by little, with fluctuations which I cannot now trace, I became an apostate, dropping my faith with no sense of loss but with the greatest relief.*”¹³ Lewis viewed his Atheism in a very interesting way:

I was at this time living, like so many Atheists or Antitheists, in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for

11 Lewis. Surprised by Joy. p63.

12 Ibid., p65

13 Ibid., p66

*not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world.*¹⁴



In 1917, at the age of 18, Lewis left his studies to volunteer in the British Army. During World War I he was commissioned an officer in the Third Battalion. He arrived on the front lines and experienced

trench warfare for the first time on his nineteenth birthday. On April 15th, Lewis was wounded and two of his friends were killed by friendly fire. He was discharged in December 1918, and soon returned to his studies.

Lewis began his academic career as an undergraduate student at Oxford; he excelled in every area he studied. He won a triple first, the highest honors in three areas of study.¹⁵ By 1925, at the age of 27, Lewis began teaching at Magdalen College, a part of the University of Oxford. He taught at Oxford for most of his adult life and then spent the last several years as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge.

While teaching at Oxford, Lewis continued writing prolifically. In 1929, an informal group of literary friends from Oxford began meeting together on Tuesday mornings. The group named themselves the “Inklings.” Members of the group included: J.R.R. Tolkien; Nevill Coghill; Lord David Cecil; Charles Williams; Owen Barfield; and Lewis’s brother Warren. Concerning Tolkien, Lewis writes:

When I began teaching for the English Faculty, I made two other friends, both Christians (these queer people seemed now to pop up on every side) who were later to

¹⁴ Ibid., p115

¹⁵ Nicholi. The Question of God. p4 Cf. Wikipedia

*give me much help in getting over the last stile. They were H.V.V. Dyson... and J.R.R. Tolkien. Friendship with the latter marked the breakdown of two old prejudices. At my first coming into the world I had been (implicitly) warned never to trust a Papist (Roman Catholic), and at my first coming into the English Faculty (explicitly) never to trust a philologist (study of language in written historical sources). Tolkien was both.*¹⁶



Lewis slowly re-embraced Christianity, influenced by arguments with Tolkien. He was also largely influenced by reading George MacDonald and G.K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*. Lewis explains leaving Atheism:

*You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing: the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms.*¹⁷

Tolkien, upon Lewis's conversion, tried to get him to join the Roman Catholic Church. Lewis would be a committed Anglican (Church of England) for the rest of his life. He made a purposeful effort through his writings, however, to avoid promoting any one denomination.

¹⁶ Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. p216.

¹⁷ Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. p228-229.

Between 1929 and 1963 (34 years) Lewis wrote approximately 58 literary works. He wrote works in his academic field of Medieval and Renaissance English, as well as many books in the theological field of apologetics (defending the faith). He wrote in several genres including: non-fiction; fiction; science-fiction; and children's books.

Later in life Lewis corresponded with an American lady named Joy Gresham. She was a Communist and an Atheist who converted to Christianity mainly through the writings of Lewis. Lewis's brother writes, "For Jack the attraction was at first undoubtedly intellectual. Joy was the only woman whom he had met...who had a brain which matched his own in suppleness, in width of interest, and in analytical grasp, and above all in humor and a sense of fun."¹⁸ Lewis agreed to enter into a civil marriage with Joy so she could live in the UK. Joy was diagnosed with terminal bone cancer and their relationship developed to the point that they sought a Christian marriage. They were married at the side of her hospital bed in 1957, Lewis was 59 years old.

Joy's cancer thankfully went into remission and the two newlyweds were able to experience a couple years of "normal" married life. The cancer relapsed and she died in 1960. Lewis wrote the book *A Grief Observed* describing his experience coping with the death of his wife. The book was so raw and personal he originally released it under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk to keep readers from knowing it was written by him. Ironically, many friends recommended the book to Lewis as a method for dealing with his own grief.¹⁹ He allowed the book to reflect the name of the true author upon his death.



¹⁸ Haven, San Francisco Chronicle. December 31, 2005: 01-01

¹⁹ Lewis. *A Grief Observed*. Jacket Notes, Faber & Faber, London.

The last three years of his life Lewis struggled with health problems related to his kidneys. He eventually died in 1963, one week from his 65th birthday. Lewis is buried next to his brother at Holy Trinity Church in Oxford.

Lewis's Thoughts

The thoughts of C.S. Lewis place him at #7 on our list of Top Ten Theologians. Men like Michel Foucault were getting people to doubt the knowability of things. How do we really know what we know? Europe was transitioning at the time from being the center of Western Orthodox Christianity to being a post-Christian society. Lewis considers himself to be a layman, not a trained theologian. His expertise is in Medieval and Renaissance English. To the seeming embarrassment of many colleagues, Lewis continually returns to writing about his Christian faith. He was once one of the world's most skeptical skeptics. He is now a fully convinced believer in Jesus. One of the central themes of his life and faith is the concept of Joy.

Surprised by Joy

Lewis thinks about joy in a unique way. He explains:

I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that any one who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is the kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is.²⁰

Think of Lewis's concept of joy similar to an echo. When you are a child

²⁰ Lewis. Surprised by Joy. p18

you hear an echo that fills you with more joy than you ever imagined possible on earth. You live your entire life listening to hear the echo again. If you have ever heard the echo you will know there is nothing sweeter in the world than hearing the echo. Your pursuit of joy is almost a life of grief because you live most of your life not hearing the echo. You yearn for its return to your ears, if only for a moment. Many people, however, will turn to the pleasures offered in this world as a replacement for the echo because the echo is not in our power but seeking pleasure is possible at our whim. Lewis found he heard the echo most when reading Christian writers such as George MacDonald and G.K. Chesterton.

In *The Weight of Glory* (1949) Lewis writes:

A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread: he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating, and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In other words, If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Lewis understands the echo in a whole new way. He was wrong to yearn for the echo. When he heard the echo it would be gone as soon as he recognized its arrival. His famous Surprised by Joy moment is the realization that the echo has a source. The echo is no longer the center of Lewis's life; the echo comes from the voice of a person: Jesus Christ. He is the source of the joy.



Lewis, with strong intellectual moorings, asks a society heading toward post-Christianity and relative post-Modernism if they possess this joy? Lewis spends his life wordsmithing his way from book to book directing people to Joy found only in Christ.

Objective Reality of God

Lewis does not leave people to simply seek their own conception of Joy. He does not plead with people to listen for whatever echo works best for them. He explains:

There was no doubt that Joy was a desire...but a desire is turned not to itself but to its object...The form of the desired is in the desire. It is the object which makes the desire harsh or sweet, course or choice, 'high' or 'low.' It is the object that makes the desire itself desirable or hateful. I perceived (and this was a wonder of wonders) that just as I had been wrong in supposing that I really desired the Garden of the Hesperides, so also I have been equally wrong in supposing that I desired Joy itself. Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the value lay in that of which Joy was the desiring. And that object, quite clearly, was no state of my own mind or body at all.²¹

If you lose an objective God existing outside of your subjective thoughts, you lose Joy and can only hope for momentary pleasures. You can only hope for what you can control. We experience the most Joy, however, when we experience the most of God. Lewis writes, "The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify god and enjoy Him forever'. But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. *In commanding us to glorify Him, god is inviting us to enjoy Him.*"²²

Lewis makes a crucial link between Joy and Truth. Foucault is saying Absolute Truth is actually relative. So you see what is at stake. The entire mod-

²¹ Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*. p220

²² Lewis. *Reflections on the Psalms*. p97.

ern world – and even more so the postmodern world – were moving away from the conviction of an objective God. Liberal theology and emergent writers flowed with the world of subjectivism and relativism. Lewis stood against it with all his might.²³

Lewis's Influence

C.S. Lewis was a serious skeptic, a serious Christian and an intellectual powerhouse able to speak clearly to ordinary people. His BBC radio broadcasts during World War II provided a theological depth to people trembling under the Nazi bombing of London. These broadcasts became his classic work *Mere Christianity*.

The great influence of Lewis lies in his apologetic abilities. He sought to show how a Christian can be fully involved in their faith emotionally as well as intellectually. He did not try to prove the faith, in typical evidentialist ways, but he instead removed barriers to belief and helped those who were weak in faith to see that they could reasonably embrace Christ and remain intellectually honest. One British historian called Lewis the single most effective person proclaiming the gospel in England in the 20th century.²⁴

Lewis stands tall for anyone questioning a full intellectual embrace of the Gospel. Those who have spent time sitting at the feet of Lewis will walk away with a heart and mind more devoted to the Savior.

Lewis's Foibles

John Piper succinctly communicates some of Lewis's theological foibles:

23 John Piper. Lessons from an Inconsolable Soul. 2010 Desiring God Pastors Conference

24 John H Armstrong. The Influence of C.S. Lewis on Head and Heart. http://johnharmstrong.typepad.com/john_h_armstrong_/2009/10/the-influence-of-c-s-lewis-on-head-and-heart.html Accessed in September 2011

He doesn't believe in the inerrancy of Scripture²⁵, and defaults to logical arguments more naturally than to biblical exegesis. He doesn't treat the Reformation with respect, but thinks it could have been avoided, and calls aspects of it farcical²⁶. He steadfastly refused in public or in letters to explain why he was not a Roman Catholic but remained in the Church of England²⁷. He makes room for at least some people to be saved through imperfect representations of Christ in other religions.²⁸ He made a strong logical, but I think unbiblical, case for free will to explain why there is suffering in the world.²⁹ He speaks of the atonement with reverence, but puts little significance on any of the explanations for how it actually saves sinners.³⁰

Piper, however, who disagrees with Lewis on so many theological points, still considers C.S. Lewis to be one of the two men outside of the Bible who have had the greatest influence on his life. The other man is Jonathan Edwards.³¹ Piper writes:

So, in spite of all Lewis's flaws, the most fundamental reason why he has been so influential in my life, and so awakening to my own soul, is that he remained anchored as a Christian in the unfathomable rock-solid objectivity of God and his Truth and his gospel as infinitely Beautiful and infinitely Desirable and, therefore, as the unshakeable ground of unutterable and exalted Joy.³²

In response to people criticizing certain aspects of his theology, Lewis

25 C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces (London: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 45.

26 C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 37.

27 C. S. Lewis, Letters of C. S. Lewis, ed. W. H. Lewis and Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), pp. 223, 230.

28 Ibid. p468.

29 C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain.

30 Letters of C. S. Lewis, 1966, pp.197–198.

31 Piper. Lessons from an Inconsolable Soul. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/lessons-from-an-inconsolable-soul>

32 Ibid.

explains:

Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to tous exo [those outside]. . . When I began, Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a translator—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand. . . . Dr. Pittenger would be a more helpful critic if he advised a cure as well as asserting many diseases. How does he himself do such work? What methods, and with what success, does he employ when he is trying to convert the great mass of storekeepers, lawyers, realtors, morticians, policemen and artisans who surround him in his own city?’³³

Lewis’s Effect on Us

As we seek to reach the great mass of storekeepers, lawyers, realtors, morticians, policemen and artisans who surround us in our own city we are fools if we do not spend time sitting at the feet of C.S. Lewis. He combines a feeling artist with an intellectual. He is able to lecture at Oxford and Cambridge while writing stories for children. He is fully aware of the newest ideas, yet does not neglect the wisdom of the ages. He once said, “Every third book you read should be outside your century.”³⁴ Lewis encourages us to be anchored in the past, to stand intellectually tall in the present for the objective truth of God, while raising our hands joyfully in worship to the Savior.

33 C. S. Lewis. *God in the Dock*, pp, 181, 183.

34 C. S. Lewis. *God in the Dock*, pp, 201-202.

**C.S. LEWIS IS THE
ONLY THEOLOGIAN
NOT IN THE
READER HERE ARE
SOME RESOURCES**

The works of C.S. Lewis are easily available. If you are looking to get your feet wet with the more serious side of Lewis (outside of his fiction) then I recommend starting with *Mere Christianity*. It sounds silly but I recommend you skip chapter 1 and read it last. Chapter 1 can be difficult for some to grasp and I don't want you to get scared away before you can appreciate this side of Lewis. Once you get used to the way he thinks and writes then Chapter 1 will be easily to follow.

#6: THOMAS AQUINAS

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

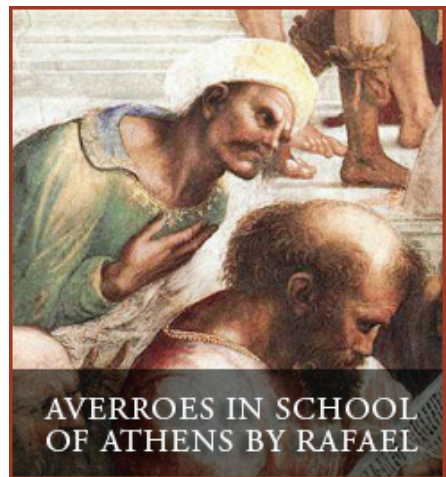
In order to appreciate the contribution of Thomas Aquinas, #6 on our list of Top Ten Theologians, it's important to place him within his world.

Aquinas's World

Averroes

In the 1100's AD a great threat arrived at the doorstep of Christianity. Islam was spreading throughout the known world. The tide of Islam brought with it many new ideas (which we learned about in the Introduction to Anselm). A Muslim man named Averroes threatened to crumble Christianity.

Averroes rocked the western world



beginning at the University of Paris. He did not wield a sword, instead he brought a new way of thinking that would challenge the way Christians had been thinking for a thousand years.

Have you ever heard a Christian use the terms “secular” and “sacred”? Did you know those concepts did not exactly come from the Bible? Thinking of the world in terms of dividing between what is spiritual and physical came mainly from the philosopher Plato. This view is known as dualism. Plato taught here are two parts of the world. The seen and the unseen. The perfect and the imperfect. The holy and the ordinary. Creator and Creation. Faith and Reason.

From the very beginning of Christianity, most theologians, especially those living in the West, had grown accustomed to what was essentially a Platonic philosophy.¹ Plato’s philosophy seemed to fit well with the Bible. The flesh is evil while the spirit is good. The earth is not as it should be, heaven is as it should be. Anselm, our #8 theologian, was so influential because he ultimately paved the way for Christians to fully embrace faith and reason. The two do not war against each other.

Averroes introduced to the West a competing view of reality which had been lost to all but those in the far East. *His major bomb-shell on western Christianity was making Aristotle available to the Latin-speaking world.* Aristotle was a student of Plato but did not agree with his mentor. Averroes, along with others, brought Aristotle to a new and hungry audience. Several professors in the Arts Faculty of Paris embraced the new philosophical ideas with enthusiasm.²

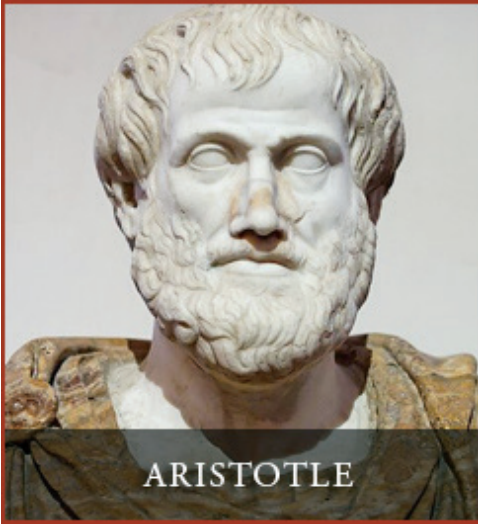
Theologians encountering Aristotle for the first time found his thoughts disturbing. Aristotle insisted on the independence between reason/philosophy and theology. Aristotle believed philosophy always trumped theology. Faith and reason do not exist side-by-side. Faith sits below reason. If reason ever came into conflict with theology, reason would win. Theology

1 Elliot, *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*. p341.

2 *Ibid.*, p316.

has to accommodate reason.

Here's a silly example. I am able to discover, through reason, that touching an oven is hurtful every time. I run an experiment where touching an oven ten times results in 10 wounds.



Philosophically it is clear ovens and humans do not mix together. When I read the Bible, however, Daniel's three friends are able to walk around in a super-heated oven. Does the Bible correct my reasoning? Are ovens now safe? Aristotle would say no. Reason wins every time.

Aristotle's followers, for example, used reason to determine matter must be eternal. Since there is something there must have

always been something. Something cannot come from nothing. The Bible, however, contradicts reason by saying God created everything *ex nihilo* (from nothing). Followers of Aristotle would say Theologians, not Philosophers, have some explaining to do.

Thomas Aquinas became one of the greatest philosophers AND theologians to ever live. He stepped up to offer an amazing solution between Aristotelian philosophy and theology.

Aquinas's Life

Aquinas was born in 1224AD. His parents were wealthy aristocrats in the area of Naples, Italy. He lived in a unique environment. He lived in a castle. How would you like to grow up in a castle? Thomas really couldn't tell you what it was like. He wasn't able to grow up in the castle. His parents had a different plan. At the age of 5 he was sent to start ecclesiastical training.

Yes, at 5 years old, his parents groomed him to be a successful church leader. High church offices led to substantial power and wealth.

The Benedictines who were educating this promising boy sent him to Naples for his liberal arts education.³ While in Naples, Thomas was won over to the Dominican order of monks, instead of the Benedictine order. The Dominicans were passionate about teaching the Bible. Unlike the Benedictines, the Dominicans took a vow of poverty. Thomas's family did not like his vow of poverty. It was social humiliation for a nobleman to become a monk. They envisioned great power and wealth for this budding theologian.

What did his family do? **In 1244, at the age of 20, they kidnapped Thomas and locked him in the castle tower for over a year.** They even brought by prostitutes to try to tempt him away from following the Dominican order of Christians. If he fell into temptation and eventually got married he would have to leave the Dominicans. His family even offered to buy him the post of Archbishop of Naples.⁴ Thomas ended up escaping from the castle tower and fled to the University of Paris. He would soon be learning from the epicenter of the new Aristotle way of thinking.

Thomas learned from those who explained the entire universe, following Aristotle, not by using Scripture, but simply by using powers of observation and logic.⁵ The question of the age was, "Could an intellectual person who held to the reasonable new philosophies retain their faith?" The powerful intellect of Aquinas would lead the way.

Many who knew Thomas in his early years, however, failed to see the genius in him.⁶ People actually thought he was an idiot. He was so tall and obese he earned the nickname, "The Dumb Ox." He was the object, not merely of mockery, but of pity.⁷ G.K. Chesterton writes:

3 Elliot, *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*. p341.

4 Christian History Magazine. Issue 28.

5 Ibid.

6 Gonzalez. p317.

7 Chesterton. *The Dumb Ox*. p33.

St. Thomas was a huge heavy bull of a man, fat and slow and quiet; very mild and magnanimous but not very sociable; shy, even apart from the humility of holiness... He was so stolid that the scholars, in the schools which he attended regularly, thought he was a dunce. Indeed, he was the sort of schoolboy, not unknown, who would much rather be thought a dunce than have his own dreams invaded, by more active or animated dunces.⁸

It doesn't appear to have bothered Aquinas for people to think of him as an idiot. The old saying goes, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Instead, Aquinas seemed to think, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open my mouth and make others feel like fools." But slowly his intelligence broke through his silence, and the Dominican order acknowledged his intellectual gifts.⁹ Chesterton writes of his love for books and learning:

*It was the outstanding fact about Thomas that he loved books and lived on books; that he lived the very life of the clerk or scholar in *The Canterbury Tales*, who would rather have a hundred books of Aristotle and his philosophy than any wealth the world could give him. When asked for what he thanked God most, he answered simply, "I have understood every page I ever read."¹⁰*

Aquinas went on to spend most of his life in the academic circles of Paris. He grew to become a famous professor. His introverted passion continued his whole life. According to one story:

His thoughts consumed him. He was dining with Louis IX of France (soon to be named "Saint Louis"), but while others engaged in conversation, he stared off into the distance lost in thought. Suddenly, he slammed down his fist on the table and

⁸ Chesterton. *The Dumb Ox*. p4.

⁹ Gonzalez. p317.

¹⁰ Chesterton. p4.

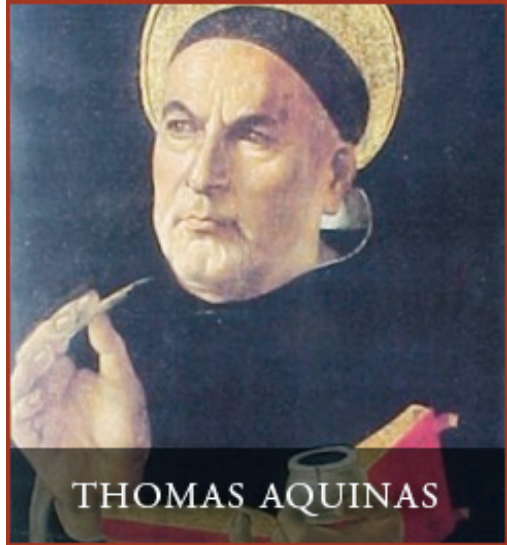
*exclaimed, "Ab! There's an argument that will destroy the Manichees!"*¹¹

Aquinas wrote a prolific amount of works. His two most famous are *Summa Contra Gentiles* (A Summary Against the Gentiles) and *Summa Theologica* (A Summary of Theology).

He died in 1274, when he had barely turned just fifty years old.

Aquinas's Thoughts

As Christians were running away from Aristotle, Aquinas ran toward him. He explored the possibility that the new philosophy offered for a better understanding of the Christian faith. It made sense to break the world into philosophy and theology.



Philosophy operates on the basis of objective principles which can be known apart from any needed revelation from God. A great philosopher does not seek to prove what the mind cannot understand. Truth is discovered by a well-reasoned method.

The theologian, on the other hand, does set out from the basis of revealed truths which cannot be known by reason alone. This does not mean, according to Aquinas, that theological doctrines are less reliable. On the contrary, revealed data are always more certain than those of reason, which may have error.¹²

Aquinas writes volumes showing the limits of philosophy. He is not seek-

¹¹ Galli & Olsen. 131 Christians Everyone Should Know.

¹² This paragraph is a paraphrase of Justo Gonzalez's excellent section on Aquinas's thoughts in his *The Story of Christianity*. p318.

ing to destroy philosophy. He simply acknowledges its limits. A philosopher who claims to prove the eternity of the world, and a philosopher who claims to prove its creation out of nothing, are both poor philosophers, for they ignore the limits of reason.¹³

It is in revealed theology, Aquinas writes, where mankind receives information about God and the world upon which we could not attain solely through reason. He writes, *“In order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty it was necessary for divine truth to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them as it were, by God himself who cannot lie.”*¹⁴



PAGE FROM A 1478 SUMMA THEOLOGICA

Aquinas realizes if we are to depend fully on our five senses to understand the universe then we would need to all be excellent scientists. If my understanding of God rests on my scientific method, an accurate understanding of God would be based on the highest of intelligence.

Aquinas beautifully articulates why the existence of God is a revealed theological truth. No one can plead lack of intelligence, even the most

ignorant person can accept it on the basis of revealed truth from a trustworthy God. But this does not mean that the existence of God is a truth beyond the reach of reason. In this case, reason can prove what faith accepts. Therefore, the existence of God is a proper subject for both philosophy and theology, although each arrives at it following its own method.¹⁵

13 This paragraph is a paraphrase of Justo Gonzalez’s excellent section on Aquinas’s thoughts in his *The Story of Christianity*. p318.

14 Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. p2149.

15 This paragraph is a paraphrase of Justo Gonzalez’s excellent section on Aquinas’s thoughts in his *The Story of Christianity*. p318.

For example, someone looking at nature could tell by their senses that an intelligent creator exists. But that person would have no idea whether the creator was good or if he might work in history. Philosophy and Theology are both needed.

Theologians like Anselm, whose thinking more aligned to Plato, did not trust the senses. Anselm wrote volumes combining pure reasoned ideas with faith. Aquinas took the opposite approach. He trusted the senses. He started with information known from the senses to learn as much about the universe as possible. When reason could take him no further, revelation would fill in the rest of the gaps.

Aquinas's Influence

Noted Boston College philosopher Peter Kreeft regards Thomas Aquinas as the greatest philosopher to have ever lived.¹⁶ He gives eight reasons to support the claim: truth, common sense, practicality, clarity, profundity, orthodoxy, medievalism, and modernity.

Many people of his day considered Aristotle a threat to the faith. The reading and teaching of Aristotelianism was often forbidden. Therefore, Aquinas's sympathetic writings were at first seen by many as a threat to Christianity.

The old Platonic bias had helped Christianity through many early struggles with paganism, for it spoke of an invisible Supreme Being, of a higher world that senses cannot perceive, and of an immortal soul. Yet, Platonism also had its dangers. It was easy for Christians to undervalue the world which God had created. It was also possible to devalue the incarnation of Christ, for Platonism was not interested in temporary realities. There was a danger that theologians would pay less attention to Jesus Christ as a historical figure, and more to the eternal Word of God.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kreeft, Peter. *Summa of the Summa*. II

¹⁷ This paragraph is a paraphrase of Justo Gonzalez's excellent section on Aquinas's thoughts in his *The Story of Christianity*. p319.

Over time Aquinas's influence grew. Aquinas's work was of great significance for the further development of theology. He influenced the history of Christianity by joining traditional doctrine with the new philosophical outlook. He used Aristotle to bring balance back from too much Platonic bias.

Aquinas did not reconcile Christ to Aristotle, he reconciled Aristotle to Christ.¹⁸

Aquinas's Foibles

Apart from his struggles with eating, Aquinas seemed to live a godly life. He believed only those following Christ were truly able to live virtuous lives.

For several hundred years, as Chesterton claims, people believed Aquinas had the ability to levitate. This claim is additionally interesting when considering his large size. Chesterton writes, "His experiences included well-attested cases of levitation in ecstasy; and the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, comforting him with the welcome news that he would never be a Bishop." Levitation and direct conversation with Mary are not foibles, but interesting tidbits we are left to only ponder.

Protestants will especially struggle with Aquinas's view of Purgatory. He provided one of the most scholarly justifications for purgatory which the Roman Catholic church later developed into their official doctrine. Aquinas writes:

It does at times happen that such purification is not entirely perfected in this life; one remains a debtor for the punishment, whether by reason of some negligence, or business, or even because a man is overtaken by death. Nevertheless, he is not entirely cut off from his reward... They must, then, be purged after this life before they achieve

¹⁸ Chesterton. p8.

*the final reward...And this is the reason we hold that there is a purgatory.*¹⁹

While the Roman Catholic church adopted Aquinas's teaching on purgatory, the reformers rejected it, believing it undermined the gospel of salvation as a free gift.

Aquinas's Effect on Us

Thomas Aquinas is important for us today in several areas.²⁰ First, he brought together science and faith. As our world continues to see biblical faith as the inferior neighbor to science, Aquinas mastered both. Aquinas was the culmination of the greatest MIT scholar and the greatest orthodox theologian. He did not do it by separating science and faith but became great through bringing them both together.

Second, Aquinas was able to be clear and profound. We oftentimes think we have to jettison depth for the sake of clarity. All people need to know the depths of God through clear communication. We do not hold back God's revelation for the sake of thinking it is beyond the comprehension of God's people. It is precisely for the masses God gave His revelation. Aquinas joined the Dominicans in forsaking fame and wealth in order to simply teach people the revelation of God. A refreshing example for us today.

Third, Aquinas is full of common sense yet able to match anyone with technical sophistication. It's easy for us to prefer one over the other. One will say, "*I preach in a way that people can practically apply the Bible for today.*" Another will say, "*I preach the Word of God with technical sophistication with no need to mention application, the Spirit will apply it for me.*" Aquinas reminds us of the need to know the "what" and the "how."

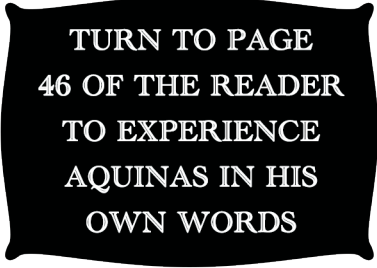
Finally, Aquinas shows us how to have a "big picture" united view of God's universe, and then also how to carefully sort out all the smaller distinctions. He majors on the majors but does not neglect the minor aspects of the

¹⁹ Lewis. Aquinas, *Rationes Fidei*

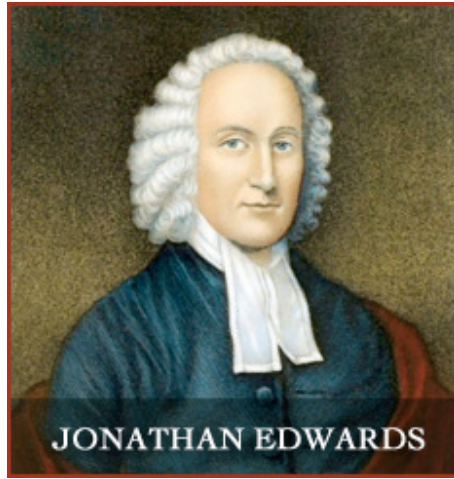
²⁰ Outline from Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, p13.

faith. Theology is not an ivory tower exercise for Aquinas. The focus of his thought is His living God. He maintains the focus on His God while also pondering all the smaller details. He writes thousands of pages in order to be as exhaustive as He can of what God has communicated to us through our 5 senses and through His Word.

His industrious passion for Jesus should encourage us all to “go all in” living our lives for Jesus.



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TO EXPERIENCE
AQUINAS IN HIS
OWN WORDS**



#5: JONATHAN EDWARDS

EDWARDS

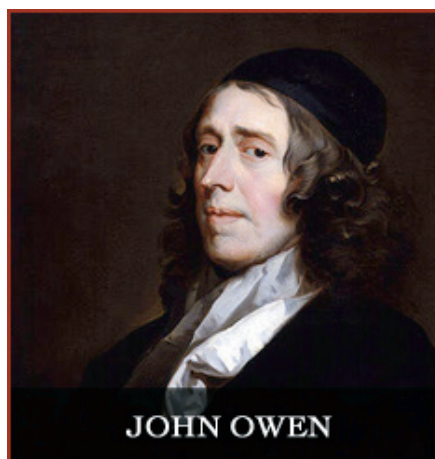
TOP TEN THEOLOGIANs

In order to appreciate the contribution of Jonathan Edwards, #5 on our list of Top Ten Theologians, it's important to place him within his world. A world full of lessons you can learn to change your world today.

Edwards's World

Puritans

In the early 1560's a term was coined to explain some "hypocrites". The name "Puritan" was used to speak of some prudish, conceited, "holier than thou", odd and ugly people trying to "purify" the Church of England. These Puritans lived in both England and the new American colonies. Unlike the Mayflower riding Pilgrims who had

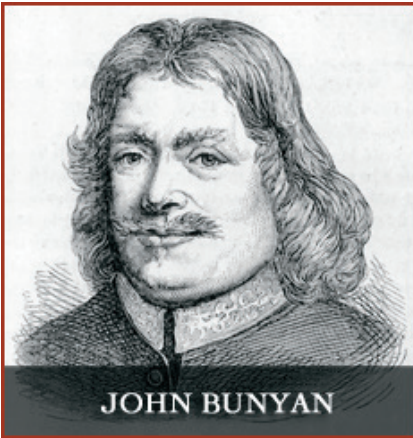


left the Anglican church, the Puritans sought to make reforms by remaining inside the Church of England.

Puritans have been demonized during much of the last 300 years. Over the last 50 years, however, scholars have started to see the true heart of the Puritans. Puritans were not wild men, fierce and freaky, religious fanatics and social extremists, but sober, conscientious, and cultured citizens: persons of principle, devoted, determined and disciplined.¹

These Puritans, encapsulated by men like John Owen, believed the Church of England stopped short of allowing the Reformation to fully purify the church. The Puritans at first, however, were not that successful. J.I. Packer writes:

The Puritans lost, more or less, every public battle that they fought. Those who stayed in England did not change the Church of England as they hoped to do, nor did they revive more than a minority of its adherents, and eventually they were driven out of Anglicanism (the Church of England) by calculated pressure on their consciences.



Those who crossed the Atlantic failed to establish new Jerusalem in New England; for the first fifty years their little colonies barely survived. They hung on by the skin of their teeth. But the moral and spiritual victories that the Puritans won by keeping sweet, peaceful, patient, obedient, and hopeful under sustained and seemingly intolerable pressures and frustrations give them a place of high honour in the believer's hall of fame, where Hebrews 11 is the first gallery. It was out of this constant furnace-experience that their maturity

¹ Packer. A Quest for Godliness. p22.

*was wrought and their wisdom concerning discipleship was refined.*²

A Puritan man like John Bunyan lived under the “sustained and seemingly intolerable pressures” of which Packer speaks. Bunyan was put in prison more than once for preaching. His blind daughter had to move into his prison cell so she would have someone to care for her life.

During his 12-year term in prison Bunyan wrote one of the greatest Christian books of all time. His *Pilgrim’s Progress* has been in print for over 300 years. It has been translated into 200 languages.

It was their lack of apparent success, however, that fueled their unforeseen influence. George Whitefield, the famous evangelist, writes of the Puritans:

*Ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross; the Spirit of Christ and of glory then rests upon them. It was this, no doubt, that made the Puritans... such burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew-act [the 1662 Act of Uniformity] and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in an especial manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak; a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour.*³

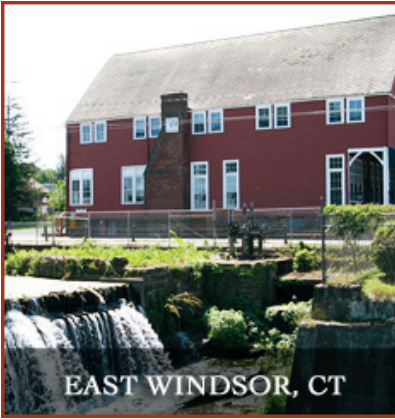
The hardships experienced by the Puritans led them to uniquely live out the Christian life. Packer explains their significance:

They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal-oriented and methodical, they were great believers, great hoppers, great doers and great sufferers. But their sufferings, both sides of the ocean (in old England from the authorities and in New England from the elements), seasoned and ripened them till

² Ibid.

³ Whitefield. Works. IV:306f.

they gained a stature that was nothing short of heroic. Ease and luxury, such as our affluence brings us today, do not make for maturity; hardship and struggle however do, and the Puritans' battles against the spiritual and climatic wildernesses in which God set them produced a virility of character, undaunted and unsinkable, rising above discouragement and fears.⁴



Jonathan Edwards would rise up, as one of the last great Puritans, to make an unmistakable mark on his and our world.

Edwards's Life

Jonathan Edwards was born in East Windsor, Connecticut on October 5, 1703. Edwards was the only son among ten daughters! He was born into one

of the most respected families in all of Colonial America. His father was a Harvard-trained pastor who served his congregation faithfully for more than sixty years. His mother came from one of the most well-known families in all of New England.

Edwards's mother was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard, one of the most popular preachers in all of the Colonies. Stoddard pastored his Northampton, Massachusetts congregation for 59 years.

Edwards showed intelligence as a young man. His father, Timothy, was his teacher. In addition to a general education, Timothy groomed him for ministry by teaching him the Scriptures, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and theology. The entrance exams at Harvard and Yale tested proficiency in Latin, New Testament Greek and biblical Hebrew, the classical languages on which the college curriculum was based.⁵ At the age of thirteen, Edwards was accepted and enrolled in the new Collegiate School of Connecticut,

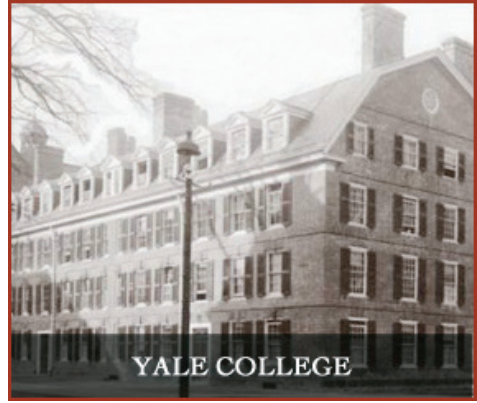
⁴ Packer. *The Quest for Godliness*. p22.

⁵ Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word*. p34.

later to be named Yale College.

He received a broad liberal-arts education, studying grammar, rhetoric, logic, ancient history, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, metaphysics, ethics, natural science, Greek, Hebrew, Christian theology, natural philosophy, and classical literature.⁶ He graduated at the head of his class with a bachelor of arts degree in

1720 and delivered the valedictory address.⁷ At the age of 16, immediately following his graduation, Edwards began the master's program at Yale.



Although Edwards appeared from the outside to be a believer since he was a little boy, he wrote to a friend, *“in process of time, my convictions and affections wore off; and I entirely lost all those affections and delights, and left off secret prayer, at least as to any constant performance of it; and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in ways of sin.”*⁸

During his second year of the master's program, however, he was converted to Jesus Christ. As he read 1 Timothy 1:17, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” He explains:

As I read these words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in heaven, and be as it were

6 Lawson, The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards. p6.

7 Ibid.

8 Edwards Letters and Personal Writings. p790-791.

*swallowed up in him.*⁹

He would preach years later:

*There is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgement that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man can't have the latter, unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay, but the latter only by seeing the countenance. There is a wide difference between mere speculative, rational judging anything to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness, and beauty.*¹⁰

Edwards had finally tasted the sweetness of the Lord. He would never recover. From 1720 to 1726 he wrote in his diary his famous *Resolutions for living a passionate life for God*.

He started out in full-time ministry as co-Pastor of one of the most popular and fashionable churches in all of America. He pastored alongside his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in Northampton, New Hampshire. He was a scholar-pastor, not a shepherding pastor. He was required to spend thirteen hours a day studying. In the same year, 1727, Edwards married Sarah Pierpont. Jonathan was 24 years old, Sarah was 17. Like Edwards, she was also from a well-known religious family. Her father, James Pierpont, was the founder of Yale. Sarah's walk with God was well-known to Edwards. He first spoke of her great piety when she was just 13 years old.¹¹

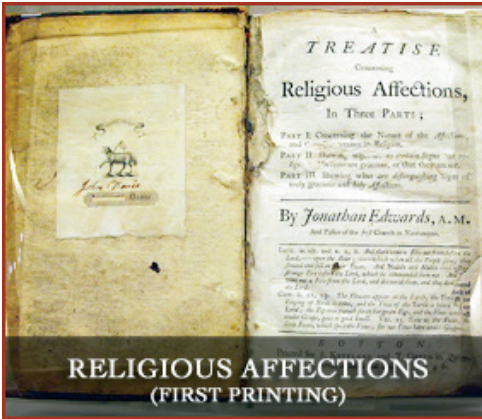
Two years later, with the death of his grandfather, Edwards became the Head Pastor at Northampton. He had been preaching for several years, with

9 Edwards. *Letters and Personal Writings*. p792.

10 Edwards. *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*. p127-128.

11 Marsden. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. p93-95.

average results, when his preaching began evoking a response that surprised him.¹² From 1734-35 people responded to his sermons with emotional



outbursts, remarkable life change, and with increased attention to their devotional lives. A few years later Edwards invited a well-known preacher from another denomination, George Whitefield, to speak at his church. It is said that while the visiting pastor preached, Edwards wept.¹³ The awakening had renewed momentum. In a remarkably short time, the movement spread beyond

his church into many areas of the colonies. It became known as *The Great Awakening*.

From 1742 to 1743 he preached a series of messages under the title *Religious Affections*. This famous work, published in 1746, was Edwards's way of explaining how conversion to Christianity happens. A few years later, in 1749, he published a biography of a young man named David Brainerd who had lived for several months with his family before dying in 1747. Young Brainerd had been a missionary and it was rumored he was to marry one of Edwards's daughters. His biography has become a source of inspiration and encouragement to many Christians.

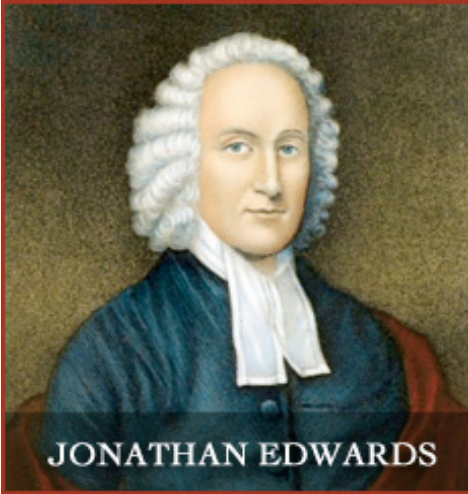
From 1743, however, Edwards was for various reasons at trouble with his church, and in 1750 he was dismissed from the pastorate.¹⁴ How comforting for those who labor in ministry to know one of the greatest pastors from church history was himself fired from his church after serving for 21 years!

12 Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity: Volume 2*. p228.

13 Ibid.

14 Packer. p309.

Edwards then, at the age of 47, moved his family to be missionaries to the Native Americans. They moved to the frontier mission station of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Yes, western Massachusetts, not western Nevada, was considered the Wild West. It was an extreme outpost during these early



years of the American Colonies. From Stockbridge he wrote two of his greatest works *The Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin*.

In 1757, at the age of 54, Edwards became the president of Princeton College. Immediately after becoming president, he decided to get inoculated against small pox in order to encourage the students to do the same. Never in great health, he unfortunately died of the inoculation on March 22, 1758. Edwards

had three sons and eight daughters.

Edwards's Thoughts

Since The Great Awakening was characterized by an emotional experience leading people to be converted to Christ, it was accused of substituting emotion for study and devotion. Interestingly, however, Edwards was not a very charismatic person, he was more of a scholar. The goal of the movement was not worship services marked by continual shows of emotion, but rather a single experience that would lead each believer to greater devotion and more conscious study of Scripture.¹⁵

Regarding the Word of God Edwards writes, “*Be assiduous in reading the Holy Scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. There-*

¹⁵ Gonzalez. p229.

*fore let not this treasure lie by you neglected.”*¹⁶

Edwards devoted himself and those he led to living a God-entranced, Scripture Saturated, Passionately Practical, Thoughtful life. His passion was: pursuing the glory of God; forsaking sin; making proper use of God-allotted Time; living with all his being for he Lord; pursuing humility and love; and making frequent self-examination. He writes:

*Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice . . . Practice according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more. . . . [According to Psalm 119:100] ‘I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.’*¹⁷

Similar to C.S. Lewis, Joy is a central focus for Edwards, he says:

So God glorifies Himself toward the creatures in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself. . . . God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are

16 Works, II, 162

17 Works, II, 162f

but streams. But God is the ocean.¹⁸

Edwards's sermons are not emotional tricks, but careful expositions of profound theological matters. Edwards believed that emotion was important. But such emotion, including the high experience of conversion, should not eclipse the need for right doctrine and rational worship.¹⁹

Edwards's Influence

Edwards was at the center of the first major spiritual awakening in the American Colonies. This movement influenced many by showing the power when someone clearly communicates the profound truths of God. People do not need a light show, they need the light of the World.

The Great Awakening brought together Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists and Methodists. The Awakening fueled a major connection between the Colonies. This was the first movement that embraced the thirteen colonies that would eventually become the United States. A sense of commonality began developing among the various colonies which would produce momentous events in 1776.²⁰

Edwards greatly influenced the modern missionary movement. Men like William Carey and Jim Elliot speak of Edwards's biography of David Brainerd as one of the main influences leading them to become missionaries.

Those who have sat most at the feet of Edwards will testify to what the Puritans called "logic on fire." Edwards brings together his mind and his heart to burn brightly for his God. As people are influenced by Edwards their view of God, passion for God, and knowledge of God grow.

This is why Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "I am tempted, perhaps foolish, to compare the Puritans to the Alps, Luther and Calvin to the Himalayas, and

18 Works, II, 244

19 Gonzalez. p229.

20 Gonzalez. p230.

Jonathan Edwards to Mount Everest! He has always seemed to me the man most like the Apostle Paul.”²¹

Edwards’s Foibles

Edwards had a few foibles we would do well to stay away from. First, he could spend up to 13 hours a day in his study. He welcomed people to his study for conversation, and he frequently taught private meetings in various neighborhoods as well as catechizing the young people in his home. As John Piper states, “In this pattern of pastoral labor we probably should not follow him.”²²

Second, Edwards is usually negatively characterized as a hell-loving wrathful fire and brimstone preacher in his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.” Edwards, however, simply sought to communicate to his people the entire counsel of God. Including the wrathful side of God. When Scripture speaks of the wrath of God, Edwards felt compelled to make sure his people understood this side of God. Ignoring a message like, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God”, would show a lack of love for his people. His people were aware of the gospel message, Edwards sought to make them aware of the necessity for them to fully respond. There are consequences for those who don’t respond to the love of Christ on their behalf.

The greatest foible is the reality that Jonathan Edwards owned several slaves. In 1731 Edwards travelled to Newport, Rhode Island to purchase a slave named Venus. Edwards, during his lifetime, did not view slavery as wrong. His main focus was on the treatment of slaves. He writes, “*We are made of the same human race. In these two things are contained the most forceable reasons against the master’s abuse of his servant, viz. That both have one Maker, and that their Maker made ’em alike with the same nature.*”

21 Lloyd-Jones. *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*. p355.

22 <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/the-pastor-as-theologian>

Edwards's Effect on Us

Jonathan Edwards's effect on us is what mainly propels him forward to #5 on the list of Top Ten Theologians. Jonathan Edwards is the model needed for church leaders in post-Christian America and Europe.

He brings together many components needed in our world today: a theologically grounded pastor who leads their church to be attractational; missional; loving God with their entire being; devotionally loving Scripture; and bringing other churches/denominations to do the same.

Edwards provides us with one word, "maturity." J.I. Packer explains:

Maturity is a compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity. The Puritans exemplified maturity; we don't. We are spiritual dwarfs. A much-travelled leader has declared that he finds North American Protestantism, man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental, as it blatantly is, to be 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep. The Puritans, by contrast, are a body of giants.²³

Our churches and our world need church leaders of today to be more like Edwards. We need to be theologically grounded and fully consumed with God.

John Piper states, "**Our people need a God-besotted man. Even if they criticize the fact that you are not available at the dinner on Saturday night because you must be with God, they need at least one man in their life who is radically and totally focused on God and the pursuit of the knowledge of God, and the ministry of the word of God.**"²⁴

Edwards leads us to radical singlemindedness in our occupation with spiritual things. He shows us to work like dogs to earnestly know the Scriptures. He pleads with us to redeem the time. Put down our Netflix streaming

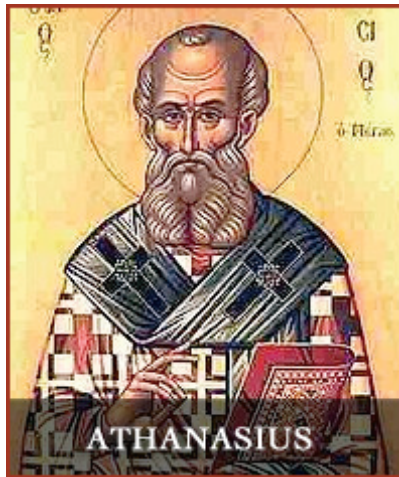
²³ Packer. *The Quest for Godliness*. p22.

²⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/the-pastor-as-theologian>

iPads and work with all our might for the Kingdom of God. The theological work of Edwards begs us to study for the sake of heartfelt worship and for practical obedience. Our lives and our world will be better by spending time with Jonathan Edwards.²⁵

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²⁵ Ibid. Paragraph modified version of Piper's great suggestions.



#4: ATHANASIUS

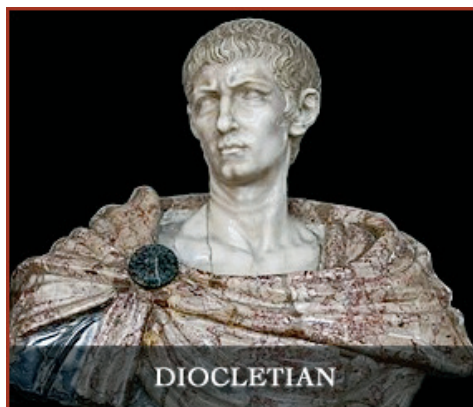
TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

“If Christian theology had superheroes,” scholar Kevin VanHoozer writes, “Athanasius would perhaps lead the list.”¹ Athanasius is relatively unknown to most Christians today. In order for us to begin appreciating the significance of his life, we need to understand the world from which this little man stood tall.

Athanasius’s World

Diocletian

In 302 A.D., when Athanasius was only 6 years old, two men sought an audience with the god Apollo. These weren’t ordinary men, they were two of the most powerful people on the planet. Diocletian and Galerius were both Roman Emperors.



¹ Back cover comment on the book: Leithart, Peter J. Athanasius. Baker Academic

They wanted Apollo to help settle an argument for them.

Christianity had been spreading like a virus. They knew the Roman gods weren't happy with so many Romans becoming Christians. Diocletian and Galerius wanted Rome, with help from the gods, to be greater than ever. How could they accomplish their wishes?

Diocletian thought the gods would be happy if Christians were prevented from positions of influence. Galerius, however, thought the gods wanted more. Galerius thought the gods would want Christians exterminated. The best way to settle the argument? Why don't we just ask the head god and see what he wants? The two men asked their questions through the oracle of Apollo at Didyma (modern-day Didim, Turkey).²

The oracle told the two men the "impious" on the Earth were making it hard for Apollo to even provide advice. Diocletian and Galerius agreed; Christians needed to be exterminated. On February 23, 303AD Diocletian ordered the newly built church in his city to be leveled. Life was hell for many Christians. The horrendous ways Christians were persecuted and killed during this time period are only for the strongest of stomachs. The executions continued until at least April 24, 303AD when six people, including the lead pastor of a prominent city, were decapitated.³



Constantine

While the Diocletian persecutions were still fresh in everyone's mind, a man named Constantine became Emperor of Rome. The new emperor, shortly after taking office, faced a coup. Maxentius, a military leader, organized a huge force to defeat Constantine. The two

² Barnes. Constantine and Eusebius. p21.

³ Ibid. p24.

forces met on October 28th, 312AD at Milvian Bridge, just north of Rome. Maxentius's army was twice the size of Constantine's. The night before, however, Constantine had a dream. He was advised in the dream to, "mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers...by means of a slanted letter X with the top of its head bent round."⁴ Eusebius describes the sign as Chi (X) traversed by Rho (P), a symbol representing the first two letters of the Greek spelling of the word Christos or Christ.⁵

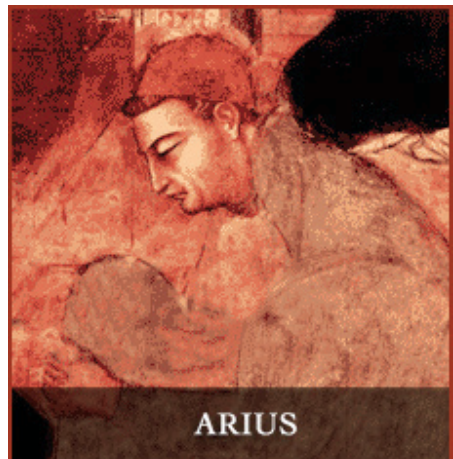
The battle was brief. Constantine's cavalry and infantry decimated the larger force. The mob of fleeing soldiers pushed Maxentius into the Tiber river where he drowned. Constantine's seemingly supernatural vision and victory would significantly change the way Christians were treated. Truth is stranger than fiction. No one who endured the Diocletian persecutions could have imagined such a drastic turn-around. Constantine credited his victory, not to Pagan gods, but to the Christian God who only decades before was seen as an enemy to Rome.

Just a few months after The Battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan proclaiming religious tolerance for all religions throughout the empire. The edict had special benefits for Christians, it legalized the religion and granted restoration for all property seized during Diocletian's persecution.

The newfound Christian freedom made it possible for everything Athanasius is famous for to transpire.

Arius

Arius was 63 years old when Constantine issued the Edict of Milan. Arius



⁴ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 44.4–6, tr. J.L. Creed, *Lactantius: De Mortibus Persecutorum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

⁵ Barnes. *Constantine and Eusebius*. p306.

led a church in Alexandria, Egypt. Alexandria was one of the most influential cities of the entire Roman Empire. Arius was one of the most prestigious and popular pastors of the city.⁶ Arius started preaching something that would shake the Christian world and dominate almost the entirety of Athanasius's life. Jeffrey Bingham explains:

Arius was preaching from the Bible, with Proverbs 8:22 as a central verse, that the Son is not eternal with the Father but is created by the Father. That verse reads: "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old." Arius and his followers argued their doctrine from this verse, which speaks of the creation of wisdom, and from the common early Christian understanding of Christ as "wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). These verses... subordinate Christ, the Son, to the Father, who alone is God and who had begotten – that is, created – a Son. Other passages they pointed to in support of their view were Psalm 45:7-8 and Isaiah 1:2 and the words "only begotten" in John 1:14, 18. Thus, according to Arius, it was not true to say "Always God, always Son" or "At the same time Father at the same time Son," meaning that God the Father and God the Son are co-eternal and both possess the quality of deity. Rather, Arius proclaimed that "before [the Son] was begotten or created or defined or established, he was not for he was not unbegotten" and that "the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning." For Arius, the Son is a creature and is not eternal.⁷

Is Jesus the Creator or is He a creature? Did Jesus have a beginning? Is Jesus truly God? These are some of the most important questions in the universe. Athanasius would spend most of his life, sometimes standing alone, answering these questions.

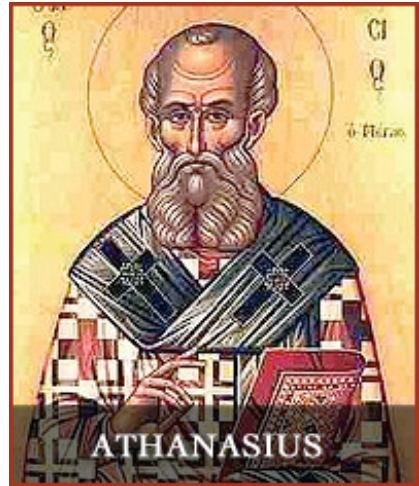
6 Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity*. p161.

7 Bingham, Jeffrey. *Pocket History of the Church*. p46.

Athanasius's Life

Early Years

Athanasius was born around 296AD. Little is known of his early life. A 10th century biographer, the Arabic speaking Severus, spoke about Athanasius's mother as having worshipped idols and having been wealthy.⁸



Sometime during his youth Athanasius and his mother were baptized as Christians. He was then discipled by Alexander, the head of the Alexandrian church. It was from Alexander that Athanasius obtained not only his cursory knowledge of contemporary philosophy, but also his thorough understanding of Scripture.⁹

Gregory of Nazianzus tells us:

He was brought up, from the first, in religious habits and practices, after a brief study of literature and philosophy, so that he might not be utterly unskilled in such subjects, or ignorant in matters which he had determined to despise... [rather] from meditating on every book of the Old and New Testament, with a depth such as none else has applied even to one of them, he grew in contemplation, rich in splendour of life, combining them in wondrous sort by that golden bond which few can weave; using life as the guide of contemplation, contemplation as the seal of life.¹⁰

It was now time for Athanasius to step toward the spotlight.

⁸ Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa. History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria.

⁹ Weinandy. Athanasius: A Theological Introduction. p1.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus. Oration. 21,6 quoted in Weinandy p1.

With Alexander at Nicea

The entire Christian world pondered the ideas of Arius. Is Jesus a creature? The greatest creature ever created? Arius believed Jesus predated coming to earth; he even believed Jesus predated the earth itself. The phrase that eventually became the Arian motto, “there was when He was not,” aptly focuses on the point at issue.¹¹

Athanasius’s mentor, Alexander, made the first move. Arius was a pastor under the authority of Alexander. Alexander, claiming his authority and his responsibility as bishop, condemned the teachings of Arius. Arius did not accept this judgment. He wrote to church leaders all over the world. Soon there were popular demonstrations in Alexandria, with people marching through the streets chanting Arius’ theological teachings.¹² The local disagreement in Alexandria spread beyond Egypt and threatened to divide the church.

In 325 AD, Constantine decided to intervene. He called a great assembly of Christian bishops from all parts of the empire to meet him at Nicea (modern-day Iznik, Turkey). Constantine paid the travel expenses for all involved. Athanasius, only 29 years old at the time, travelled to the Council of Nicea as the personal assistant to his mentor Alexander.

Athanasius, as he arrived with Alexander, would have seen a spectacular sight. This was the first time in human history that it was safe for the leaders of the Christian Church to get together. It would have been foolish for them all to previously assemble in one location before the time of Constantine. All the leadership could have been wiped out in one strategic swoop.

The more than 300 bishops who walked through those doors at Nicea were true heroes of the faith. In order to understand what Athanasius saw, it is necessary to remember that several of those attending the great assembly had recently been imprisoned, tortured, or exiled, and that some bore on

11 Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity*. p161.

12 *Ibid.* p162.

their bodies the physical marks of their faithfulness.¹³ Davis writes:

As confessors of the faith, some of the bishops bore the signs of the recent persecution on their persons: Paul of Neo-Caesarea had lost the use of his hands because of torture, the half blind and hamstrung Paphnutius of Egypt was kissed by Constantine himself in a touching diplomatic gesture.¹⁴

Eusebius of Caesarea, who was present, describes the amazing scene:

There were gathered the most distinguished ministers of God, from the many churches in Europe, Libya [i.e., Africa] and Asia. A single house of prayer, as if enlarged by God, sheltered Syrians and Cilicians, Phoenicians and Arabs, delegates from Palestine and from Egypt, Thebans and Libyans, together with those from Mesopotamia. There was also a Persian bishop, and a Scythian was not lacking. Pontus, Galatia, Pamphylia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Phrygia sent their most outstanding bishops, jointly with those from the remotest areas of Thrace, Macedonia, Achaia, and Epirus. Even from Spain, there was a man of great fame [Hosius of Cordova] who sat as a member of the great assembly. The bishop of the Imperial city [Rome] could not attend due to his advanced age; but he was represented by his presbyters. Constantine is the first ruler of all time to have gathered such a garland in the bond of peace, and to have presented it to his Savior as an offering of gratitude for the victories he had won over all his enemies.¹⁵

Did you know even Santa Claus was at Nicea? Yes, that's right! Saint Nicholas, bishop of Myra (modern day Demre, Turkey) was a voting bishop at the Council of Nicea.

For about two months, the bishops discussed the issue raised by Arius.

13 Ibid. p162.

14 Leo Donald Davis. *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787)*. p58.

15 Eusebius of Caesarea. *Life of Constantine*. 3.7.

The two sides argued and debated, with each side appealing to Scripture to justify their respective positions. It is unclear exactly how much influence Athanasius, as a non-voting member, had during the meetings.

Eusebius of Nicomedia, holding the same view as Arius, was convinced that a clear statement of his doctrine was all that was needed to convince the assembly. The reaction from the bishops was not what Eusebius expected. The assertion that the Word or Son was no more than a creature, no matter how high a creature, provoked angry reactions from many of the bishops: “You lie!” “Blaspemy!” “Heresy!”¹⁶ Eusebius of Nicomedia was shouted down, and we are told that his speech was snatched from his hand, torn to shreds, and trampled underfoot.¹⁷ According to many accounts, debate became so heated that at one point Arius was slapped in the face by Saint Nicholas!¹⁸

The assembly finally decided the best way to articulate the Bible’s teaching on the Trinity was through a creed. Eventually, the assembly agreed on the following creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father; God of God, light of light, true God of true God, not made, of one substance [homoousios] with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the

16 Gonzalez.p164.

17 Ibid. p164.

18 Bishop Nicholas Loses His Cool at the Council of Nicea. From the St. Nicholas center. See also St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, from the website of the Orthodox Church in America.

dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

But those who say there was when He was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from that which is not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance [hypostasis] or essence [ousia], or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes.

The Nicene Creed clearly rejected Arianism. Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia were both sent into exile. As the bishops all returned to their parts of the world, they hoped the Council of Nicea would end the controversy.

Defending Nicea as Bishop

Only three years after the Council, Alexander having died, Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria on April 17th, 328AD. Athanasius became shepherd of one of the most vibrant cities within the Roman Empire.¹⁹ Athanasius would now become the champion for the Nicene cause.²⁰ He would soon be swimming against the tide. Constantine, being won over to Arianism by Eusebius of Nicomedia, revoked the banishment of Arius in 328AD.

Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius, and other Arian leaders knew Athanasius was their strongest enemy. They soon plotted his downfall by circulating rumors that he dabbled in magic. They also claimed Athanasius had killed a bishop named Arsenius, and cut off his hand to use it in rites of magic.

Constantine summoned him to appear before a judge and answer to the serious charges brought against him. Here's what happened during his murder trial:

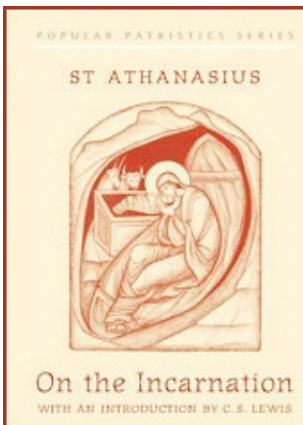
Athanasius brought into the courtroom a man covered in a cloak. After making sure that several of those present had known Arsenius, he uncovered the face of the

¹⁹ Weinandy. p2.

²⁰ Gonzalez. p166.

hooded man, and his accusers were confounded when they realized it was Athanasius' supposed victim. Then someone who had been convinced by the rumors circulating against the bishop of Alexandria suggested that perhaps Athanasius had not killed Arsenius, but had cut off his hand. Athanasius waited until the assembly insisted on proof that the man's hand had not been cut. He then uncovered one of Arsenius' hands. "It was the other hand!" shouted some of those who had been convinced by the rumors. Then Athanasius uncovered the man's other hand and demanded: "What kind of a monster did you think Arsenius was? One with three hands?" Laughter broke out through the assembly, while others were enraged that the Arians had fooled them.

The murder charges were dropped and Athanasius was able to go back to shepherding the people of Alexandria. His freedom, however, would be short lived. Eusebius of Nicomedia had convinced Constantine that Athanasius was dangerous. Constantine sent Athanasius into exile. By this time most of the Nicene leaders were also banished. When Constantine asked for baptism, on his deathbed, he received the sacrament from the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia.²¹



All exiled bishops, including Athanasius, were allowed to go back to their homes after Constantine's death.

Exiles

Yet Athanasius' return to Alexandria was not the end, but rather the beginning of a long period of struggle and repeated exiles²² For almost thirty years Athanasius would be considered a hero under one emperor and then have to flee to live with monks in the desert to survive the next emperor. It was at this

²¹ Gonzalez. p166.

²² Ibid. p176.

time that Jerome said, “*the entire world woke from a deep slumber and discovered that it had become Arian.*”

Athanasius continued to speak, teach and write against Arianism. Although Athanasius never saw the final victory of the cause to which he devoted his life, his writings clearly show that he was convinced that in the end Arianism would be defeated. As he approached his old age, he saw emerge around himself a new generation of theologians devoted to the same cause.²³ Death claimed him in 373AD at the age of 77.

Athanasius’s Thoughts

Shortly after the Council of Nicea, it is believed Athanasius wrote his first works – *Contra Gentes* (Against the Gentiles) and *De Incarnatione* (On the Incarnation). These works articulated what he considered the true faith in a climate of growing theological and political tension.²⁴

The presence of God in history was the central element in the faith and thoughts of Athanasius.²⁵ Athanasius fully believed God himself had visited our planet. The visit from God in Jesus Christ made it possible for us to be free beings capable of living in communion with the divine.

He beautifully writes, “*For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.*”²⁶ He then continues:

There were thus two things which the Savior did for us by becoming Man. He banished death from us and made us anew; and, invisible and imperceptible as in Himself He is, He became visible through His works and revealed Himself as the

23 Ibid. p180.

24 Weinandy. p3.

25 Gonzalez. p175.

26 Athanasius. On the Incarnation. Section 9.

*Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the whole creation.*²⁷

We see the depth, elegance and developed thoughts of Athanasius speaking of the power of Christ:

*The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things Himself...A man cannot transport things from one place to another, for instance, merely by thinking about them; nor can you or I move the sun and the stars just by sitting at home and looking at them. With the Word of God in His human nature, however, it was otherwise. His body was for Him not a limitation, but an instrument, so that He was both in it and in all things, and outside all things, resting in the Father alone. At one and the same time – this is the wonder – as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe.*²⁸

The Arian controversy, for Athanasius, is not a matter of theological subtleties with little or no relevance. In it, the very core of the Christian message and the very core of Jesus is at stake.

Athanasius's Influence

C.S. Lewis conveys some of the Influence of Athanasius by saying:

He stood for the Trinitarian doctrine, “whole and undefiled,” when it looked as if all the civilized world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius – into one of those “sensible” synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended to-day and which, then as now, included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen. It is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he

²⁷ Ibid. Section 16.

²⁸ Ibid. Section 17.

*now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away.*²⁹

The anti-Trinitarian world had grown very dark around Athanasius. He himself was a very small dark African. He was nicknamed in his day, “the black dwarf.” This black dwarf stood tall with a bright light and almost single-handedly kept defending Nicene orthodoxy until reinforcements eventually arrived. Men like the Great Cappadocians were soon to arrive on the scene and continue re-awakening the world to the full beauty and power of the God-Man.

Athanasius’s Foibles

Historically, Athanasius is known for his godly life. Gonzalez writes, “His monastic discipline, his roots among the people, his fiery spirit, and his profound and unshakable conviction made him invincible.”³⁰ Additionally, Weinandy writes, “He was extolled through the centuries as a holy and selfless man of steadfast and fearless faith, of long suffering patience, and of zealous passion for the truth of the Gospel.”³¹

In the early 20th century, however, many contemporary scholars portrayed Athanasius as very sinister³² T.D. Barnes states, “Like a modern gangster, he evoked widespread mistrust, proclaimed total innocence – and usually succeeded in evading conviction on specific charges.”³³ Barnes goes on to explain why most people haven’t heard of this side of him:

If the violence of Athanasius leaves fewer traces in the surviving sources...[the reason is] that he exercised power more efficiently and that he was successful in presenting himself to posterity as an innocent in power, as an honest, sincere and straightforward ‘man of God.’

29 Athanasius. On the Incarnation. C.S. Lewis Introduction. p9.

30 Gonzalez. p174.

31 Weinandy. p8. 31

32 Ibid. p8.

33 Barnes. Constantine and Eusebius. p230.

Barnes makes an argument from silence. In order to survive and even win the day Athanasius surely needed to be a wise, resourceful and clever man. The fact that he ultimately bested his opponents in no way implies that he was more evil than they.³⁴

Athanasius's Effect on Us

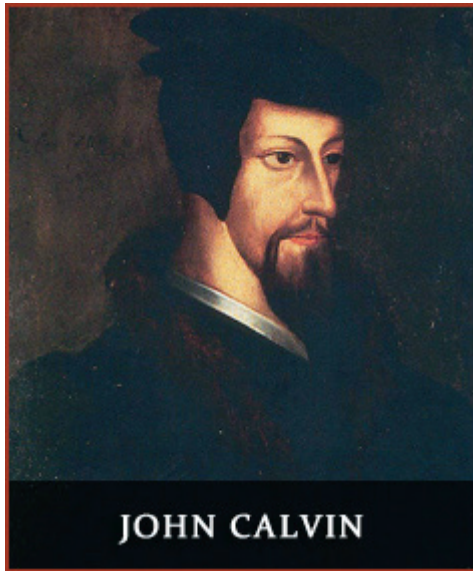
The most obvious effect Athanasius has on our life is with our view of the Trinity. Is a correct understanding of the Trinity (one in essence, three in persons) important for you? So many Christians look at the Trinity like a bad shallow dating relationship, "I want to date you, have the warm fuzzy romantic dinners, but I really don't want to know too much about you. Let's spend an hour together each week but don't require me to learn about you. I like what we've got going on, let's not ruin it with information."

As we spend our lives singing about God, listening to sermons about God, talking about God it seems like we should know who we're talking about. Athanasius teaches us how vitally important it is to have an orthodox understanding of the Trinity.

Athanasius, additionally, helps us to realize we do not live by public opinion polls. Athanasius was right, he was reading the Bible correctly, but the world around him had gone mad. He had the courage and conviction to proclaim the central truths of God when it was most unfashionable. We need thousands of people like Athanasius. People who love God and love people enough to tell them what they need to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear.

³⁴ Weinandy. p9.

**TURN TO PAGE
60 OF THE READER
TO EXPERIENCE
ATHANASIUS IN HIS
OWN WORDS**



#3: JOHN CALVIN

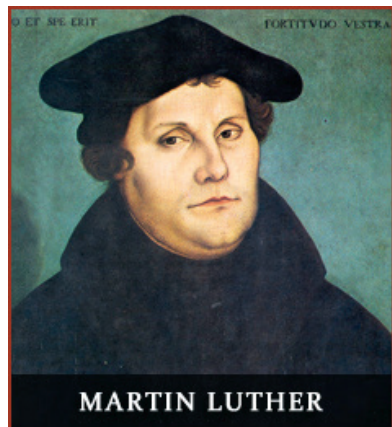
TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

Wow, we've now arrived to the top three in our Top Ten Theologians. Whether you consider yourself a 5-point Calvinist, 4-point Calvinist, Arminian or something else; John Calvin should be a hero in your life. In order to appreciate Calvin we need to have a working knowledge of his world.

Calvin's World

A Post-Reformation World

The world was forever changed on October 31st, 1517AD. While John Calvin was only 8 years old, a 33 year old German priest posted 95 grievances he had with his church. No human being could have anticipated the result stemming from one monk, Martin Luther, who wanted to reform his church.



All people will agree the 15th century church needed reformation. The church of the day started to contradict itself in many areas. A crack had been developing for quite some time.

Martin Luther was a brilliant troubled man. He excelled scholastically but found no relief for his soul. Much like Bunyan's character "Christian" in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Luther had a burden of sin he couldn't unload. Getting rid of his burden became the occupying passion of his life.

Luther tried over and over to attain righteousness. There were many religious ways in the 15th century to supposedly attain righteousness from sin. Luther tried them all to no avail. He eventually discovered how to be righteous. Only one way could remove his burden of sin. He realized righteousness was not earned. It could not be attained. It only came as a gift through faith in Christ. Luther was now a free man.

The institutionalized church made a drastic error one day when they sent a guy to raise money from Luther's congregation. They were told money given to the church in Rome would quicken the time their dead relatives would spend in the pain of Purgatory. Do you want your grandma in heaven? They would ask. Then give \$1,000. If you give me just \$100 it will help, but if you want your grandma in heaven faster give me \$1,000.



The sale of these indulgences absolutely infuriated Luther. His congregation couldn't afford what they gave. Their hearts were in the right place, but they were simply led astray. Luther knew their money made no difference. Luther's 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg castle were 95 reasons why the sale of indulgences was an idiotic scheme from a church in dire need of money and reform.

The twenty years following October 31st, 1517 were unexpected by all. It was as if Luther's 95 theses was a spark which set the world on fire.

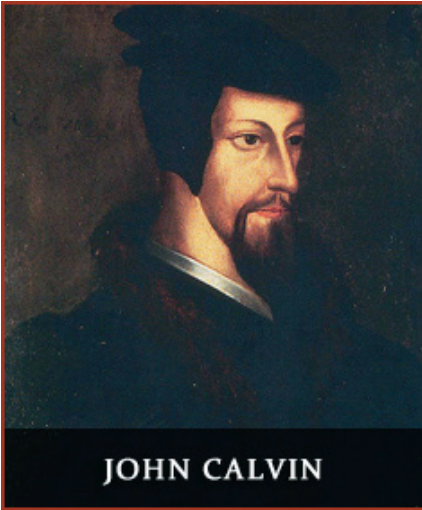
Luther's fear of God and of unwarranted innovation were such that he had hesitated to take the concrete steps that would follow from his doctrine.¹ With Luther hidden in a castle to prevent his death by the church, Luther's thoughts were quickly taken to an extreme by others. In 1524, a peasant rebellion broke out in Germany under the name of Luther and the Reformation. The peasants wanted religious reform, but they equally sought economic reform. The motives and actions of everyone involved cannot be known. The aftermath is known. More than 100,000 peasants were killed in Germany.

In 1527, right after these events, troops from Spain and Germany sacked the city of Rome. Since many of these troops were part of the reformation the sack of Rome took on a heavily religious tone. How would the church survive? All over Europe reforms were taking place. Some reforms took place inside of the church, many outside of the traditional church. The Protestant church was being born. What would the church look like?

Luther brought great reform but still held to beliefs which other reformers thought unbiblical. Erasmus wanted great reform but didn't want to leave the church. Zwingli wanted to wipe the slate clean and start over from scratch. Zwingli and Luther met to try to bring unity. They couldn't agree on a unified Reformed church. Other reformers from all over Europe were leading people into many differing directions. Had we lost true North? Could all the various Protestant teachings be brought into a cohesive whole? Would the Reformation die from a lack of unity?

John Calvin arrived to provide the much needed theological stability and unity for the Reformed church. While Luther was the trumpet call of the Reformation, Calvin provided the symphony.

¹ Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity: Volume 2, p39.



Calvin's Life

Early Years

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France on July 10, 1509. Calvin's mother, sadly, died a few years after his birth from a breast disease. His father held a prosperous administrative position working at the cathedral. His father, initially, desired for all his sons to join the priesthood. His connections allowed much of Calvin's schooling to

be paid by the Noyon church.

By age 12, Calvin was studying Latin about 70 miles north of his home town from one of its great teachers at the University of Paris.² Upon completing his studies in Latin he became a philosophy student.

Around 1526, at the age of 17, his dad pulled him away from a path of theological studies to study law. This was possibly due to a conflict between the priests at Noyon and Calvin's father.³ His father believed his academically gifted son would make more money through a career in law.⁴

Calvin entered the University of Bourges. Bourges is a French town 200 miles north of Noyon. Here he would learn from humanists who stressed classical studies. He would also become familiar with the thoughts of pre-reformers Wycliffe, Huss and also Luther.⁵ Of this time he later declared,

² Cottret. Calvin: A Biography. p17.

³ Ibid. p20.

⁴ Parker. John Calvin. P15.

⁵ Gonzalez. p62.

“I was stubbornly tied to the superstitions of the papacy.”⁶ Calvin would learn Greek at Bourges, equipping him to study the New Testament for himself in its original language.⁷

In 1533, at the age of 24, Calvin experienced a religious conversion. He writes about it in his Commentary on the Book of Psalms:

*God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, yet I pursued them with less ardour.*⁸

Calvin’s conversion experience corresponded with a distinct break from the Roman Catholic Church. On May 4th, 1534 he resigned from the clerical benefits that had been provided for him during his childhood, which officially broke off relations with the unreformed church and clergy.⁹ From this time forward, he would never cease from tireless work in support of the Reformed Church.¹⁰

On the Run

The atmosphere of France had changed by 1535. The country was not safe for leaders of the new Reformed movement. At the age of 26, Calvin decided to leave his country behind. He



6 Preface to the Commentary on the Book of Psalms

7 Cottret. p24.

8 Introduction to his Commentary on the Book of Psalms. ppxl-xli

9 Introduction to Institutes of the Christian Religion. Edited by McNeill pxxx.

10 Ibid.

traveled 360 miles southeast to Basel, Switzerland looking for a safe retreat where he could devote his life to study. Gonzalez explains, “What he sought was not to become one of the leaders of the Reformation, but rather to settle in a calm environment where he could study Scripture and write about his faith.”¹¹

Institutes of the Christian Religion

While in Basel, Calvin heard of horrific events transpiring back home in France. Reports reached him of the “many burnings” taking place in France and the perverse explanations given for these. What was being burned? People were being burned alive; people who led the Reformation. These people’s views were being terribly misrepresented. Calvin sensed more horror would come if he didn’t do something. McNeill explains:

Calvin decided that silence on his part would entail a just charge of cowardice and treachery. He could not be silent while those who had suffered death for their faith, and whom he regarded as faithful and “holy martyrs” were so grossly misrepresented, and while many still living were similarly imperiled. Some of the sufferers were his personal friends, notably the Paris merchant, Etienne de la Forge...who was burned alive February 15, 1535. He felt bound, as he says, to “vindicate from undeserved insult my brethren whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord.”¹²

John Calvin, as his friends literally burned at the stake in his home country sat down and wrote. He certainly wrote with a lump in his throat and a heart on fire to redeem those paying the ultimate price. To show everyone these people were living out the true Christian faith. The reformation was not a newly invented heresy; it was orthodox biblical Christianity rooted in the ancient church. Although he most likely had already been working on his book, he labored intensely from January until August of 1535. The work was published in Basel in March of 1536. Calvin was only 26 years old

11 Gonzalez. p63.

12 Introduction to Institutes of the Christian Religion. Edited by McNeill pxxxii.

when his masterpiece was completed.

The 16th century did not care about short pithy titles. The Latin title of his first edition can be translated:

*The Institute of the Christian Religion, Containing almost the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever It is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation. A Work Very Well Worth Reading by All Persons Zealous for Piety, and Lately Published. A Preface to the Most Christian King of France, in Which this Book is Presented to Him as a Confession of Faith. Author, John Calvin, of Noyon. Basel, MDXXXVI*¹³

His work was presented to the King of France to convince him to stop the burning of his reformed friends. Hopefully the Institutes would provide the badly needed systematic defense of the reformed faith.

Until the publication of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* most Protestant literature had dealt exclusively with specific points of discussion. Most literature said little regarding the Trinity, the Incarnation, and many other important doctrines. Calvin sought to fill this vacuum with his "short manual".¹⁴ The first edition consisted of only six chapters totaling 516 pages. Gonzalez explains the book's reception:

*The book enjoyed immediate and surprising success. The first edition, which was in Latin and therefore could be read in different countries, was sold out in nine months.*¹⁵

Calvin would continue updating his Institutes for the rest of his life. The 6 chapters would grow to 80. The entire work shows a profound knowledge, not only of Scripture, but also of Christian literature – particularly the

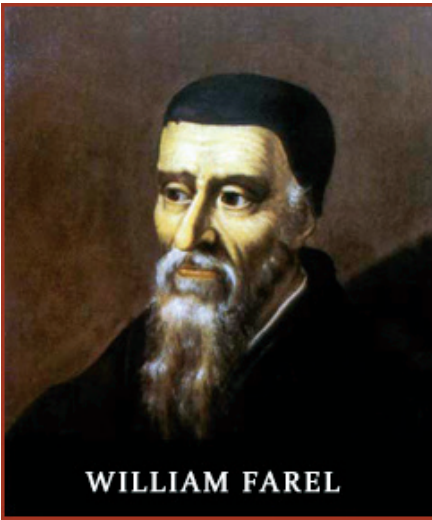
13 Introduction to Institutes of the Christian Religion. Edited by McNeill pxxxiii.

14 Gonzalez. p63.

15 Ibid.

works of Augustine – and of the theological controversies of the sixteenth century.¹⁶

While Calvin respected the leaders of the Reformation, he was convinced his gifts were not that of the pastor or the leader, but rather those of the



WILLIAM FAREL

scholar and author.¹⁷ Calvin made a decision in 1536, shortly after the publication of the *Institutes*, which would drastically change his plans. He decided a move to Strasbourg, Switzerland would help his study and writing. In order to get to Strasbourg, Calvin would pass through the city of Geneva.

Geneva

Calvin arrived at Geneva in 1536 planning simply to stop there for no more than a day, and then continue on his journey. A 47 year old man named William Farel happened to hear the author of the *Institutes* was in town. Here's what happened:

Farel, who “burned with a marvelous zeal for the advancement of the gospel,” presented Calvin with several reasons why his presence was needed in Geneva. Calvin listened respectfully to the other man, some fifteen years older. But he refused to heed Farel’s plea, telling him that he had planned certain studies, and that these would not be possible in the confused situation Farel was describing. When Farel had exhausted his arguments, and failed to convince the young theologian, he appealed to their common Lord, and challenged Calvin with a dire threat: “May God condemn your repose, and the calm you seek for study, if before such a great need you withdraw and

16 Ibid. p64.

17 Ibid.

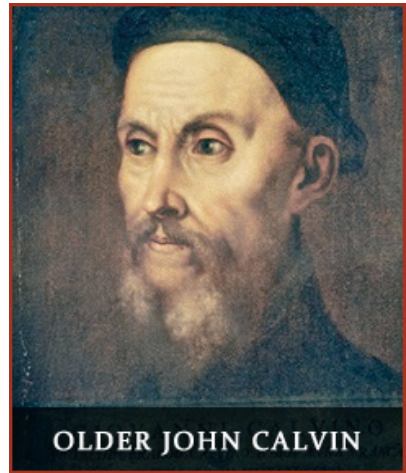
refuse to help.” Calvin responds: “these words shocked and broke me, and I desisted from the journey I had begun.”¹⁸

It’s not every day someone threatens God’s condemnation on your soul if you don’t do what they want. Farel probably wanted Calvin to become minister in the church of Geneva right way, but Calvin was unwilling to do that even though he had agreed to stay.¹⁹ Calvin’s biblical knowledge, theological insight, legal training, and his zeal for reform quickly made him the leader of the Reformation in Geneva. Farel gladly became the number two guy.

The City Council ran into an issue with Calvin. Calvin wanted the church to be able to discipline its members, if necessary. The city council, however, wanted to retain the ultimate right to excommunicate someone from the church. Calvin was not suggesting the church should be in control of the state. He was simply asking that the church be in charge of the church and not under the state when relating to the church’s own particular responsibilities.²⁰ Calvin’s issue with the City Council did not go how Farel and Calvin anticipated. After just twenty-one months Calvin was fired as pastor. He was twenty-eight years old and apparently a pastoral failure.²¹ Calvin went back to his initial plans and moved to Strasbourg.

Marriage

While in Strasbourg, Calvin preached or taught every day as well as two sermons on Sunday. He published his second edition of the Institutes in 1539 and published his Commentary on Romans in 1540. Around this time Calvin’s friends pressured him to get married. Calvin reluctantly



¹⁸ Gonzalez. p65.

¹⁹ Godfrey. John Calvin. p37

²⁰ Godfrey. John Calvin. p41

²¹ Ibid. p42.

agreed to marry a young noble lady on the one condition that she learned French. The wedding was planned for March. He later wrote that he would never think of marrying her, “unless the Lord had entirely bereft me of my wits.”²² Instead, in August, he married Idelette de Bure, a widow with two children from her first marriage.²³

Return to Geneva

In September of 1540, one month after getting married, the Geneva city council voted to invite Calvin back to pastor. Calvin’s first reaction, “**Rather would I submit to death a hundred times than to that cross on which I had to perish daily a thousand times over.**”²⁴ Farel came once again to the rescue for Geneva. Farel convinced Calvin to return. Calvin did not hurry. It took him a year to arrange his affairs, but in August 1541 he arrived back in Geneva.²⁵ Godfrey writes, “In 1541 Calvin was a more mature and patient man than he had been in 1538. Although he was still only thirty-two, he had learned the value of waiting and determined to try to work with those who had opposed him.”²⁶

Calvin would spend the rest of his life with his family in Geneva. He would reform Geneva to be what he considered an ideal Reformation city. He would preach sermons every day with three on Sunday.

Final Years

Calvin’s health began to fail after 1559. Farel paid his friend a last visit. Calvin died on May 27, 1564 at the age of 55.

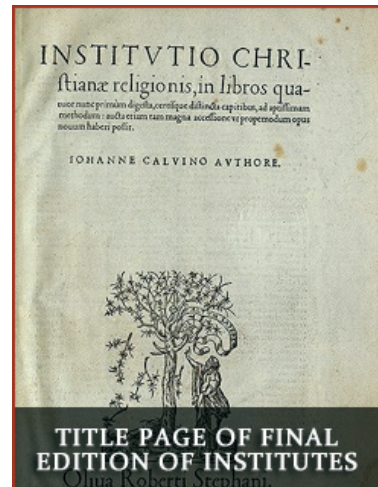
²² Parker. p87.

²³ Cottrett. p142.

²⁴ Parker. p105.

²⁵ Godfrey. p58.

²⁶ Ibid.



Calvin's Thoughts

A great asset to all Christians coming after Calvin is the depth, breadth, passion and clarity we find through his writing.

The Word of God is central to the vast thoughts of Calvin. The medieval church treasured the Bible as the very Word of God. It believed the Bible was true and invested much time and manpower in copying the Bible by hand. **But the medieval church had no confidence that the Bible could be understood by those who read it.** Calvin rejected the medieval church's approach to the Bible where it was honored, kissed, and carried in procession but was seldom opened or read by the people.²⁷

Calvin clearly saw the Word of God as the lifeblood for every believer. He writes:

*For, if we consider the mutability of the human mind, how easy its fall into forgetfulness of God; how great its propensity to errors of every kind; how violent its rage for the perpetual fashioning of new and false religions, it will be easy to perceive the necessity of heavenly doctrine being committed to writing, that it might not be lost in oblivion, or evaporate in error, or be corrupted by the presumption of men.*²⁸

Furthermore, he artfully states, "A soul, therefore, when deprived of the Word of God, is given up unarmed to the devil for destruction."²⁹

David Mathis explains the unique thoughts of Calvin:

Led by Scriptures, he rethought as much of reality as he was able, consciously appropriating God's revelation of himself in the Bible and in the person of his Son. In a

27 Ibid. p169-170.

28 Calvin. Institutes. I,6,3

29 Calvin. Reply to Sodelto.

day when many saw human reason and divine revelation as equals, the Reformation principle of sola Scriptura – not Scripture as the only authority, but Scripture as the only ultimate authority – changed everything for Calvin. It captured him as a reality so massive that it would take more than a few weeks and a quiet place of study to work out its implications. (Mathis, With Calvin in the Theater of God, p21-22)

Calvin lived and wrote as a man constantly aware of a big sovereign God.³⁰ He made sure the person interacting with his thoughts on God would only continue reading if the thoughts were leading to appropriate worship and obedience. The secret of his mental energy lies in his piety; its product is his theology, which is his piety described at length.³¹ The piety and mental energy of Calvin has had incredible influence.

Calvin's Influence

Karl Barth dramatically explains the influence of John Calvin by saying:

*Calvin is a cataract, a primeval forest, a demonic power, something directly down from the Himalayas, absolutely Chinese, strange, mythological; I lack completely the means, the suction cups, even to assimilate this phenomenon, not to speak of presenting it adequately...I could gladly and profitably set myself down and spend all the rest of my life just with Calvin.*³²

Biographer Steven J. Lawson writes:

Towering over the centuries of church history, there stands one figure of such monumental importance that he still commands attention and arouses intrigue, even five hundred years after his appearance on the world stage. Called "one of the truly great

³⁰ McNeill. Introduction to the Institutes. pli.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen. June 8, 1922. Quoted in front page of Piper, With Calvin in the Theater of God.

men of all time," he was a driving force so significant that his influence shaped the church and Western culture beyond that of any other theologian or pastor. His masterful expositions of Scripture laid down the doctrinal distinctive of the Protestant Reformation, making him arguably the leading architect of the Protestant cause.³³

He moved millions not through the power of his personality but through the power of his biblical ideas and words.³⁴

Calvin's Foibles

Michael Servetus

The greatest foible consistently brought up in the life of John Calvin is his involvement in the death of Michael Servetus. Servetus was a notable Spanish doctor. He was also interested in theology and wrote a number of works. He argued, among other provocative things, that the Council of Nicea had offended God.

Servetus had recently escaped from the prisons of the Catholic Inquisition in France, where he was being tried for heresy, and was passing through Geneva when he was recognized.³⁵ Calvin wrote up a list of 38 accusations against him. The city government asked the advice of leaders throughout Switzerland, all agreed that Servetus was a heretic, not only by Catholic standards, but also by Protestant ones. The laws at the time were for heretics to be burned at the stake. Calvin argued for a less cruel death, but without having any formal governmental power Calvin was overruled and Michael Servetus was burned to death in Geneva.

It is important to note Calvin was operating in a lenient way compared with the atmosphere of his day. All Christian leaders of 16th century Europe

33 Lawson. *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*. p1-2.

34 Godfrey. p9.

35 Gonzalez. p67.

(Roman Catholic and Protestant) would have burned Servetus at the stake.

Calvin's Effect on Us

Those who spend time with Calvin walk away with a big God. We are told to make sure we live a holy life while meditating on our holy God. We are kept from seeking our salvation in any form of works. We have our hearts stirred to receive the entirety of God's revelation.

As heirs to the Reformation, do our churches today have the same confidence in the truthfulness and authority of God's Word?³⁶ We have the Word of God on our shelves, computers, our phones, our iPads, but do we have it in our hearts and in our churches? Calvin scholar Robert Godfrey laments:

*The worship of the church has become a feel-good experience, rather than a meeting with the holy God of the universe. Exciting music has become the new sacrament mediating the presence of God and his grace. Sermons have become pop psychology, moralistic exercises in self-help.*³⁷

Mathis writes:

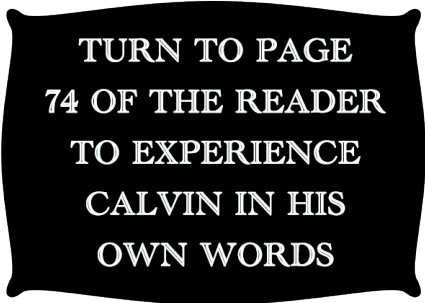
*Calvin's big, biblical vision of God changes everyday life. If you really want to be practical, don't reach for gimmicks, checklists, and self-helps, but come with Calvin to the Bible and get to know the most important realities in the universe: God, creation, sin, heaven, hell, Jesus, his cross and resurrection, the Holy Spirit. The biblical vision of the glory of God in Christ is the most practical reality in the universe. (Mathis, *With Calvin in the Theater of God*, p21-22)*

The 21st century church is in great need of depth; a stirring of the head and heart. The sheep have been fed a steady diet of junk food for too long.

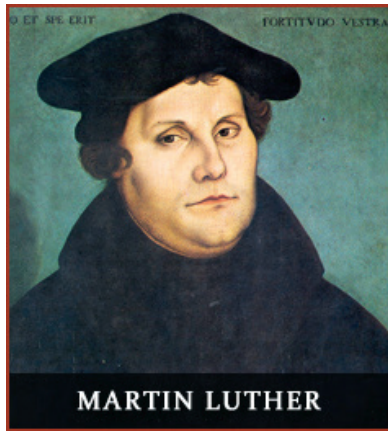
³⁶ Piper. p37.

³⁷ Piper. p37.

John Calvin must be allowed to play an important role mentoring new shepherds in leading the church back to greener pastures for the glory of God.



**TURN TO PAGE
74 OF THE READER
TO EXPERIENCE
CALVIN IN HIS
OWN WORDS**



#2: MARTIN LUTHER

TOP TEN THEOLOGIANS

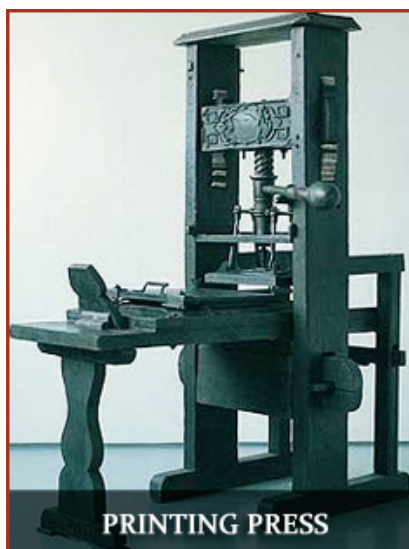
To have an understanding of Martin Luther it's important to have a working knowledge of his multi-faceted world.

Luther's World

Gutenberg Printing Press

It's hard for us to imagine life without mass produced books. Throughout most of humankind, however, every single book was hand copied. I'll say it again just in case it didn't stick: before 1440 AD, every book on the planet was hand produced.

In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. The invention was so earth shaking it led Time Magazine to rank it as the most important invention of the last 1,000 years. Four



hundred years before Gutenberg, a man from China named Bi Sheng came up with the concept of moveable type. Bi Sheng's clay letters were fragile and not able to handle widespread use.

Gutenberg came up with many improvements to make mass-produced books a reality. First, he came up with a process for making durable metallic moveable type. Second, he used an ink easy enough to come by and economical enough for widespread usage. Third, he used a wooden printing press similar to agricultural screw presses of the day. Gutenberg engineered these elements together into a practical system for the mass production of printed books that were economically viable for printers and readers alike.¹

The Gutenberg press allowed ideas to spread at a pace and a breadth previously unknown to humankind. Living through the development of the Internet can help us appreciate the invention of Gutenberg's Printing Press. What the Internet did to open up the spread of information in our day, the printing press did for the 15th century and beyond.

Without the printing press we may have never known Martin Luther.

St. Peters Basilica

In 1506 construction began on St. Peters Basilica. Construction of the immense church in Rome would end up costing the equivalent of more than \$2 billion dollars. The Basilica has the largest interior of any Christian church in the world. Construction would be tricky. Why?

It was believed to be a desecration for a church building to not continually stand in Rome. How can you build a new church on the exact same location without first tearing



¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Gutenberg

down the old building? The solution was creative.

St. Peters is so colossal it was built surrounding the previous church. The entire old church, still standing, fit inside the main sanctuary of the new St. Peters. Once St. Peters was finished the older church was dismantled and carried out the front door!

How does the church of the day afford such opulent spending? The creative solution came from the selling of indulgences. An indulgence was a certificate providing someone a speedy trip through Purgatory. The sale of Indulgences would result from a conversation like this:

“Do you want your grandma to suffer less and make it to heaven? The Pope can help you out if you pay up. Haven’t you heard it said, “When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs”? Giving us \$100 will help your grandmother a little bit: \$1,000 will more quickly ease her suffering. Do you love your church? Do you love your grandmother? Help us help you. You are one Indulgence away from the Pope easing the burden of your loved one.”

The Pope sent priests like Johann Tetzel throughout the western world selling indulgences. Was this a good way to finance the church of the day? Martin Luther had a few things to say (95 to be precise) about the sale of Indulgences.

A World Prepared for Change

In the hundred years before Martin Luther the world was preparing for massive change.

The office of Pope was in utter turmoil. For hundreds of years the Pope had been the most powerful person on the planet. In 1309, the new Pope refused to move to Rome. He stayed in France. For the next seven Popes, France was called home and immorality was rampant. The Papacy went to the highest bidder. A new Pope finally moved back to Rome and tried to

clean up the position.

The leader in France liked being Pope so he refused to acknowledge the new guy in Rome. In 1409, both Popes were declared illegitimate and a third Pope was elected. The previous two Popes refused to step down so there were now three Popes at the same time! People were quickly losing respect for the Papacy.



Surrounding the Papal degradation, the Black Death was devastating Europe. Between 1347-1351, more than one out of every three people died from the Bubonic Plague. Outbreaks continued for the next 120 years. Death surrounded every person. By 1450, Europe's population was down seventy-percent. It felt like the world outside the church had been turned upside down. In addition to such uncertainty outside the church, two men stood up inside the church calling for massive change.

Beloved Oxford professor **John Wycliffe** (1329-1384) believed the Bible to be the ultimate authority of the church, not the decisions of the Pope. The common people of his day did not have access to a Bible. Wycliffe broke the law when he translated the New Testament into English. The thoughts of Wycliffe laid a foundation for reform. He made it possible for people to start learning about God on their own. Church leaders, who thought it was too dangerous for a layman to read and interpret the Bible, were so upset with Wycliffe's influence that years after his death they dug up his body and burned his bones, throwing his ashes into the nearest river.

John Huss (1373-1415) also heavily criticized the practices of the institutional church. He stated Christ, not the Pope, was the head of the church.

He was disgusted by the lives of the clergy and thought it immoral for people to buy church positions. The name Huss in Czech means Goose. Have you ever heard the saying, “Your goose is cooked?” That saying comes from John Huss. For taking a stand against some of the church beliefs and practices of the day, Huss was burned at the stake. The queen was notified of his death by being told, “Your goose is cooked.”

Huss prophetically made this statement before his death, “They will roast a goose now, but after a hundred years they will hear a swan sing, whom you will be unable to silence.” Martin Luther stepped onto the scene almost exactly 100 years later. We now turn to the swan.

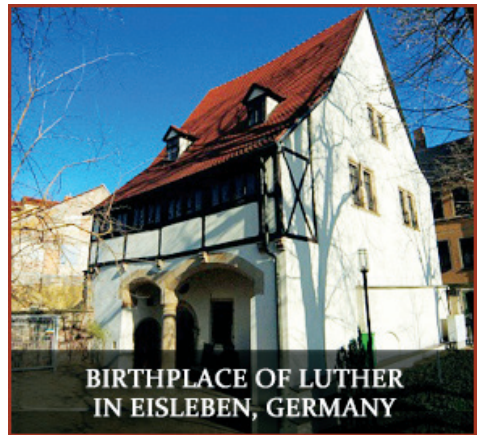
Luther’s Life

Early Years

Martin Luther was born around 1483 in Eisleben, Germany. Luther’s birth was a matter of such insignificance that he and his friends later debated the exact year.

His father, Hans, was a peasant farmer. Local inheritance laws specified that family lands would pass intact to the youngest son. Hans, as the older brother, was forced to leave the family farm shortly before Martin was

born.² Eager for a way to support his family, Hans eventually found work as a copper miner. Martin’s early life was a tough time for the Luther family. Remembering these years, Luther recalled that his mother had once beaten him until his hands bled merely for taking a nut from the kitchen table.³



² Kittelson. *Luther the Reformer*. p.31

³ *Ibid.* p.33.



Copper mining was a tough, dangerous job in the 15th century. While many people died in the mines, Hans thrived. Within seven years he would own his own copper business.⁴ Hans and Margareta were determined for their children to have better lives.

Martin was sent, at an early age, to some of the best German schools.

At **the age of four** he entered a school whose sole purpose was to teach Latin, which would prepare him for future studies. The school used barbaric practices to force the students to learn Latin. Kittelson explains Luther's early Latin education:

Any child caught speaking German was beaten with a rod. The one who had done least well in the morning was required to wear a dunce's cap and was addressed as an "ass" all afternoon.⁵

Luther recalled being beaten with a rod 15 times in just one morning. Fortunately for Luther, he eventually excelled in school. By the time he was 17 years old his teachers recommended continuing his studies at the university. It was rare for the son of a peasant to have a university education. Luther's arrival at the University of Erfurt opened the doors for him to obtain a career in the church, in law, or in medicine.⁶

Not long after New Year's Day 1505, Martin Luther became Master Martin.⁷ Getting his Masters degree was a huge deal. Kittelson writes:

Father Hans was enormously proud of his son and regarded the M.A. degree as

4 Kittelson. Luther the Reformer. p.33.

5 Ibid. p.37.

6 Ibid. p.39.

7 Ibid. p.49.

just the beginning. Master Martin (as even his father now referred to him) was to become a lawyer.⁸

Just one month into his law studies Luther took a strange leave of absence. He travelled home to discuss something with his family and friends. No one knows exactly what happened during the infamous trip back home. On July 2, 1505 Luther was traveling back to the university. He was caught outside in a violent thunderstorm. The lightning grew so close it actually knocked him on the ground. Fearing for his life he cried out, “Help me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk.” Luther saw the thunderstorm as a direct message from God to leave his career in law for the monastery.

Hans questioned whether the thunderstorm was truly from God. As a Lawyer, Luther would have been able to support his parents in their retirement years. Luther was their Social Security, Medicare and 401k all rolled into one. Luther turned his back on the guaranteed financial stability he could provide for his entire family for what he believed to be obedience to God.

Monk

Martin’s room in the monastery was just three feet wide by seven feet long.⁹ The monks attended seven worship services a day. The first service started at 2:00 A.M. Most of Luther’s time was spent in worship, prayer and meditation.¹⁰ Of this time Luther stated, “If anyone could have gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among them.”¹¹ After just one year Luther had passed the rigorous physical, mental and spiritual tests to become a priest.

Martin’s family was certainly proud of his religious achievements, but they were still upset with him for not becoming a lawyer. A great banquet was held to celebrate Luther’s first mass as a priest. He asked his father during

8 Kittelson. Luther the Reformer. p.49.

9 Ibid. p.52.

10 Ibid. p.53.

11 Ibid. p.53.

the feast if it wasn't better for him to be a priest than a lawyer. His father's response was a hurtful one that would stay with Luther his entire life. His father said, "Have you not heard the commandment to honor your father and mother?"¹²

Dark Night of the Soul

Although Luther had boldly chosen to follow the priesthood against the wishes of his family, he was not looking for an easy life. Oberman explains:

Luther did not seek the monastery as a place of meditation and study to exercise a faith he had once lacked. Nor was he looking for a sanctuary of strict morals to protect him from the immorality of the world outside. He was driven by his desire to find the merciful God... Searching for the merciful God was a crucial part of the monastic life and was by no means a unique expression of Luther's hunger for salvation, out of step with the Community of Brethren.¹³

In order to be saved from the wrath of God, people believed you must make use of all the means of grace offered by the church.¹⁴ Luther dove deep into trying to rid his body from sin. Long periods with neither food nor drink, nights without sleep, bone-chilling cold with neither coat nor blanket to warm him – and self-flagellation – were common and even expected in the lives of serious monks.¹⁵

Out of all the ways the church of the day recommended for Luther to be saved, it was confession that Martin came to despise. Confession was a crucial part of the monastic life. In this sacrament, the "religious," sought to purge themselves of their sins almost as quickly as they committed them.

Bainton explains:

12 Luther's Works. Volume 44. p.712.

13 Heiko A. Oberman. Luther: Man between God and the Devil. p.127.

14 Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: volume 2. p.16.

15 Kittelson. p.55.

Luther endeavored unremittingly to avail himself to [Confession]. Without confession, he testified, the Devil would have devoured him long ago. He confessed frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours on a single occasion. Every sin in order to be absolved was to be confessed... Luther would repeat a confession and, to be sure of including everything, would review his entire life...¹⁶

With Luther finding no rest for his troubled soul, his superior, Johann von Staupitz, took a bold step. This young man on the verge of collapse over religious problems and emotional instability was to be commissioned as a teacher, preacher, and counselor to sick souls! Staupitz was practically saying, “Physician, cure thyself by curing others.”¹⁷ Luther, therefore, was ordered much against his expectations to prepare to teach Scripture at the new University of Wittenberg.¹⁸



Salvation by Faith Alone

When Luther found himself forced to prepare lectures on the Bible, he began seeing new meanings in the Scripture, and the possibility that such meanings would provide an answer to his spiritual quest.¹⁹ In 1515, Luther taught through the book of Romans. Then throughout 1516-1517 he taught through the book of Galatians.

The great discovery that would change Martin Luther and rock the world came from a simple daily reading of Romans

¹⁶ Bainton. p.35.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.42.

¹⁸ Gonzalez. p.18.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.19.

1:16-17. He read that, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

Luther was greatly bothered by these verses. He thought, “How is this gospel really good news? Isn’t it actually bad news that God seeks justice and righteousness?” Luther found God’s justice to be unbearable. He wished God did not demand righteousness. He wished God was not just. He pondered how it was possible for “the righteous to live by faith.”

Luther had been taught that God’s justice, His righteousness, is a punishment to sinners. Since God is righteous, and we are not, God punishes us for our lack of righteousness.

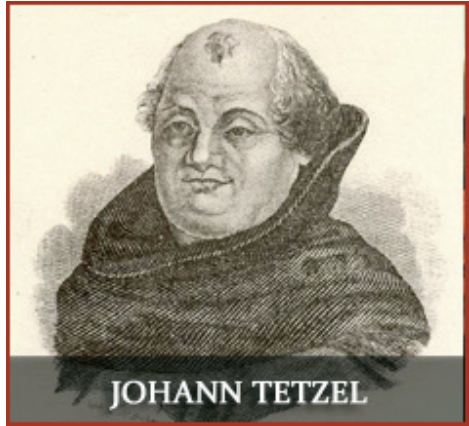
God, however, allowed the eyes of Luther to open. **Luther famously came to the conclusion that God’s righteousness is something which is possessed by God AND given to those who walk by faith.** Martin Luther had finally found freedom for his troubled soul. Faith in Jesus alone resulted in him *receiving* the righteousness of God. Indeed, God did not require him to produce his own righteousness, but to freely receive an alien righteousness by faith. Faith and justification are the work of God, given as a free gift to sinners. The mediator between God and man is not your works, the Pope, the church, nor the Priest, but only Jesus.

Luther tells us, *“I felt that I had been born anew and that the gates of heaven had been opened. The whole of Scripture gained a new meaning. And from that point on the phrase ‘the justice of God’ no longer filled me with hatred, but rather became unspeakably sweet by virtue of a great love.”*

While Luther is basking in his new found freedom, from the perspective of the institutional church of the day, the wrong man is about to show up to the wrong town at the wrong time.

Johann Tetzel

While Luther's eyes are being opened to freedom found only in Christ, Johann Tetzel arrived in Wittenberg. Tetzel was sent by the pope to raise money for the church. He sold indulgences to people in Luther's church. Tetzel's famous saying was, "When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs."



Luther watched poor people from his church give money they didn't have to try to pay freedom for their dead relatives. Luther saw the sale of indulgences as completely worthless. Luther reacted strongly against the sale of indulgences.

95 Theses

A huge collection of supposed relics accumulated in Wittenberg. There was supposedly a thorn from the crown of Jesus. They had a tooth from St. Jerome. You could see four hairs from the Virgin Mary. Those who viewed the thousands of relics in Wittenberg on All Saints Day (October 31st) and paid the necessary amount in indulgences might receive from the Pope 1,902,202 years and 270 days of reduction in Purgatory.

The arrival of Tetzel pushed Luther over the edge; he had enough. On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed 95 complaints against indulgences to the church doors in Wittenberg. Thesis 82 captures the essence of Luther's complaints:

Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love (a most holy thing) and because of the supreme necessity of their souls? This would be morally the best of all reasons. Meanwhile he redeems innumerable souls for money, a

most perishable thing, with which to build St. Peter's church, a very minor purpose.

Luther's reasoning is insightful. If the Pope is able to set everyone free



from purgatory, why does he need money? Shouldn't he just free everyone automatically out of his love for them? Why would such eternal matters be contingent on raising enough money to build a temporary building?

The printing press went into action. Without the permission of Luther, printers soon spread copies of the Ninety-Five Theses throughout

Germany. Copies were printed in the original Latin and also for the masses in a German translation.

Troubled Times

Luther's life forever changed after nailing those 95 theses. The pope initially requested the radical monk be dealt with locally. He was called to the next chapter meeting in Heidelberg. He went in fear for his life, for he expected to be condemned and burned as a heretic.²⁰ To his surprise most of the people there agreed with Luther. Afterwards his friend Martin Bucer wrote, "*Luther responds with magnificent grace and listens with insurmountable patience. He presents an argument with the insight of the apostle Paul.*"²¹

By the summer of 1518, 35-year old Luther had provoked powerful opponents. Luther's life was in danger. Luther writes of this time, "*I know that whoever wants to bring the Word of Christ into the world must, like the apostles, leave behind and renounce everything, and expect death at any moment. If any other situation*

²⁰ Gonzalez. p.23.

²¹ Kittelson. p.112.

prevailed, it would not be the Word of Christ."²²

Luther is summoned to meet in Augsburg with Cardinal Cajetan so he can retract his writings and recant. Luther remembered saying as he set out: "Now you must die... Oh, what a shame I have become to my parents!"²³ Cajetan was prepared and intellectually capable to debate with Luther but was charged by the Pope not to debate with Luther, but simply to get him to say one word *revoco* (I recant). They couldn't help themselves, the two men got into a heated debate. Cajetan urged Luther that he had to submit to the authority of the Pope, Luther replied that he couldn't submit to something contrary to Scripture. He insisted the sale of indulgences were no more than a scheme to raise money. Luther appealed to Rome. Due to the protection of Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Luther was able to leave Augsburg alive.

On June 15, 1520 Pope Leo X issued a statement against Luther called *Exsurge Domine* where he declared that a wild boar had entered the Lord's vineyard. He ordered all books by Martin Luther to be burned and he gave him sixty days to submit to his authority.

In October Luther wrote his book, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. The captivity of which Luther complained was the priest's hold on the sacraments and the insistence that Christians must perform good works in order to gain salvation.

Luther was summoned to stand before the Emperor in 1521 at the Diet of Worms. Luther was now famous. Two-thousand people met him outside the city to escort him inside. His many books were sprawled out before him. He was asked if he would like to re-



²² Kittelson. p.116.

²³ Ibid. p.121.

cant of his works. It was a hard time for Luther. To dare oppose the entire church and the emperor, whose authority had been ordained by God, was a dreadful act.²⁴ Given the chance to recant Luther eventually made his famous response. He spoke in German instead of using the more traditional theological debate language of Latin. Luther responded by saying:

Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning – and my conscience is captive to the Word of God – then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.

Luther was once again able to leave with his life intact. On his way back home, however, some armed horseman kidnapped Luther. Many believed Luther was killed. He was fortunately taken by his friends who staged his attack, secretly hiding him away in the tower of Wartburg castle.

Like a man possessed, Luther translated the entire New Testament into German within 11 weeks.²⁵ This was an astounding rate of more than 1500 words per day. Luther translated the New Testament, “to free the ordinary person from false, albeit familiar, ideas, to lead him onto the straight path, and to give him some instruction.”²⁶ He would go on to translate the Old Testament as well into German and write many more works instructing people to the central importance of the Gospel. Salvation is solely found by faith in Jesus Christ.

Marriage

On June 13th, 1525 Luther married Katherine von Bora. Katherine was 26 years old, Luther was 41 years old. Katherine had been a former nun. Luther helped her and 11 other nuns escape their convent. They amazingly escaped by hiding in herring barrels. Martin and Katherine ended up having

24 Gonzalez. p.28.

25 Kittelson. p.175.

26 Ibid.

six children and seemed to have a good marriage.

A great deal more can be written about Luther's fascinating life. We now turn to his revolutionary thoughts.

Luther's Thoughts

The man who previously called upon a saint to save him was later to repudiate the cult of saints. The man who vowed to become a monk was later to renounce monasticism. A loyal son of the Catholic Church, he was later to shatter the structure of medieval Catholicism. A devoted servant of the pope, he was later to identify the popes with Antichrist.²⁷ Luther's thoughts are a game changer. He sought to awaken a church that had been asleep for quite some time. He had personally been awakened; he sought to wake up everyone else.

Payton helps us understand the overarching thoughts of Luther:

He declared time and time again, "It was not I that did it, but the Word of God." With this he expressed genuine humility: Luther urged repeatedly that he himself was insignificant, but that the gospel was great, and that what he had accomplished was not his work but God's.

Even so, Luther was sure that God himself had entrusted him with this message. God had proclaimed the gospel anew through Luther; since that was the case, then all others should listen and heed.

He often upbraided people and called them to a careful defense of and alertness to justification by faith alone. If they did not heed his advice, he could quite readily, if they continued to disagree with him, denounce them as servants as Satan, as those in

²⁷ Bainton. p.1.

*league with the wicked one, seeking to divert people from the truth of the gospel.*²⁸

The absolute centrality of Luther's thought is focused on sola fide (salvation by faith alone). It is through faith in the risen Christ, not through any works we do, that we are justified and declared righteous. Jesus is the message and the messenger. Luther calls the church back to learning about the Word through the Word of God (*sola Scriptura*). We know of Jesus not from councils, Popes nor teachers, but through His Word.

Luther's Influence

In most big libraries, books by and about Martin Luther occupy more shelf room than those concerned with any other human being except Jesus of Nazareth.²⁹ Luther's influence in his day was immense. Kittelson explains:

*Luther was a "media personality," the first such in three thousand years of western history. "We have become a spectacle," he once remarked of himself and his colleagues. He and his followers have been termed "obedient rebels." Others called him a seven-headed devil. At least one of his closest colleagues insisted he was a prophet – perhaps even Elijah – sent by God himself. He was the subject of controversy then just as he is now.*³⁰

Among other monumental influences, Luther sparked a reawakening in his day around the purity of the Gospel and the authority of the Word of God. Many of his influences, however, were unintended. We now turn to the many foibles of Martin Luther.

28 James R. Payton Jr. *Getting the Reformation Wrong*, pp.107-109

29 Todd. *Luther: A Life*. xvi

30 Kittelson. p.9.

Luther's Foibles

Peasant Revolt

The most important thing on the planet for Luther, as we have seen, was justification by faith. He clearly sought major reform in the church to make justification by faith the renewed central focus of the church.

Many people who had been inspired by Luther did not share the same priorities. Some wanted serious political reform. Others sought major economic reform among the peasant class. All people saw Luther as their leader.

In 1524, a peasant rebellion broke out. Gonzalez explains:

For decades the conditions of the German peasantry had been worsening...One of the elements making this rebellion particularly virulent was that it took on religious overtones, for many among the peasantry believed that the teachings of the reformers supported their economic demands.

Luther refused to support the peasants. Luther wanted the focus to remain on Christ. Many others wanted to take the reformation much further. Luther saw the demands of the peasants as justifiable, but disagreed with their methods. When the peasant revolt turned violent Luther turned on them. He instructed the nobility to suppress the movement. It is believed more than 100,000 people were killed.

The peasants blamed Luther for turning on them. While I admire Luther for wanting to keep the Gospel the central focus of the reform, he could have done much more to prevent the deaths of so many people. Luther's harsh words would continue to result in many deaths.

Anti-Semitism

Adolf Hitler, a fellow German arriving 400 years later, thought he was simply following out the heart of Martin Luther by killing 6 million Jews. Luther argued that the Jews were no longer the chosen people of God, but rather “the Devil’s people.” Three years before his death Luther wrote a 60,000 word book called *On the Jews and their Lies*.

Luther spoke harshly against the Jews. This is without question. Luther should not have spoken so harsh against the Jews. As a leader of millions of people, he should have been more careful with his words. From another perspective, however, Luther saw the hand of Satan in anything that denied Christ. If any people kept others from the freedom found in Jesus, Luther would unashamedly attribute their actions to the kingdom of darkness.

If given the chance, Luther would remove Judaism from the planet. It kept people from seeing Christ. Luther did not, however, advocate the killing of all Jewish people. Destroying a religion and destroying an ethnic group are two vastly different perspectives. Most biographers will say Luther wanted to destroy the former while Hitler focused on the latter.

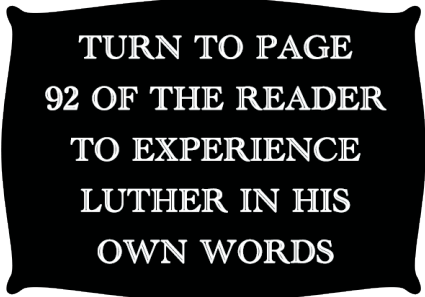
Luther’s Effect on Us

Moralistic therapeutic deism is a term introduced in the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005) by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. The term has been accepted by many as an accurate view of the 21st century church. The mindset is: Go to church to be moral, get free therapy, and wait for God to come back from vacation.

We need thousands upon thousands of people to wake up from their moralistic therapeutic deism slumber. We need Luther to be our mentor. Luther cries out for us to wake up our world as he woke up his. Our greatest need and our greatest hope are the same: Jesus. We need Jesus more than we need Dave Ramsey to get us out of debt. We need Jesus more than we need to have good marriages. We need Jesus more than we need to be nice

to each other. The temptation of the ages is to cloud Jesus over with good things. Luther reminds us of the utmost importance to never replace the eternal freedom found in Christ with lesser alternatives.

Similarly, we live in an age where the Bible is all around us. At no time in human history has the Bible been so accessible. The Bible, unfortunately, is everywhere except in the hearts of God's people. Luther leads us to not take such an immense treasure for granted.



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TO EXPERIENCE
LUTHER IN HIS
OWN WORDS**



#1: AUGUSTINE

TOP TEN THEOLOGIAN

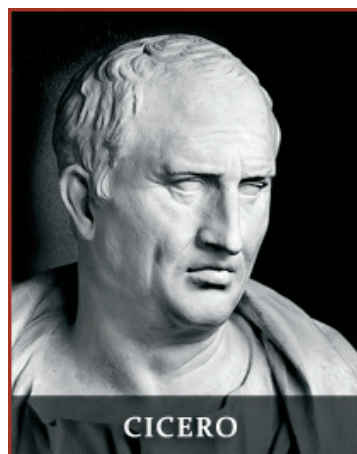
People living within the Roman Empire during the 4th and 5th centuries embraced some ideas which would largely seem foreign to us today. These ideas are relatively unknown to us in the 21st century, but they played a large role in the life of our Top Theologian: Augustine. In order to appreciate Augustine, we need to appreciate his world.

Augustine's World

Cicero

Cicero (106-43BC) was one of the greatest of the Roman orators. Many of his works are today lost to history. We know one of his books named Hortensius was popular during the time of Augustine. Cicero offered to the Romans a worldview.

Cicero wrote about happiness. He said every-



one seeks happiness. In the life-long quest for happiness he observed most people tried to find pleasure through food, drink and sex.

Cicero believed, however, that happiness is not found in a self-indulgent life of pleasure, which merely destroys both self-respect and true friendships.¹ He observed people seeking happiness through indulgent pleasures ended up with a miserable life. Most people in his world, he observed, ended up with a miserable life. Cicero thought this misery possibly came from some sort of divine judgment.

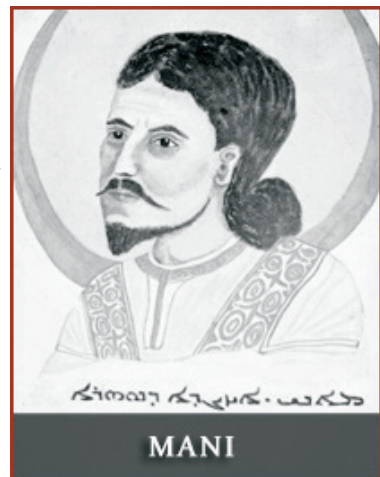
Cicero, through refreshingly plain language, advocated a different way to seek happiness. To find happiness one should live a highly principled and aesthetically pleasing life. Happiness will come through a rigorous program of self-discipline and self-improvement. The wise man was someone who trained his head to rule his heart and physical passions in order to live a humble and objective life.²

Humility, discipline and selflessness replaced the Roman dream of self indulgence. *The thoughts of Cicero would rock Augustine's world.*

Mani

Along with the thoughts of Cicero, a new flavor of Christianity spread through the Roman world during the time of Augustine. Its founder, Mani, also offered the Romans a worldview.

Mani was born around 216AD in the area of modern-day Iran. He called himself an "Apostle of Jesus Christ." He claimed to have unique secret information about the nature of God, humanity and the universe.



1 Chadwick. Augustine: A Very Short Introduction. p.11.

2 Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.48

In actuality, Manichaeism was a Persian adaptation of Christianity, which added in Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, speculative philosophy and superstition.³

According to Mani, the human predicament is the presence in each of us of two principles. One, which he calls “light,” is spiritual. The other, “darkness,” is matter.⁴ The kingdom of darkness has been fighting to defeat the light. In every human being these two principles have mixed together. Every human is so mixed with these principles that everything from the waist down is considered part of the kingdom of darkness. Everything from the waist up is the kingdom of light. Sex is not allowed for a Mani. It only contributes to the furthering of the kingdom of darkness.

Salvation consists in separating the two elements, and in preparing our spirit for its return to the realm of pure light, in which it will be absorbed.⁵ According to Mani, this doctrine had been revealed in various fashions to a long series of prophets, including Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and Mani himself.⁶

A great deal of Romans jumped on board with the ideas of Mani. Followers of Mani lived lives of extreme self-denial. Mani would have a large influence in the life and world of Augustine.

Plotinus

A third popular person of the day offering the Romans a worldview was a man named Plotinus. Plotinus (205-270AD) started a school of philosophy in Rome which became a hub of intellectual activity. Knowles talks about this fascinating man:

Plotinus lived an ascetic life with very little food or sleep. He ate only vegetables and

3 Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.51

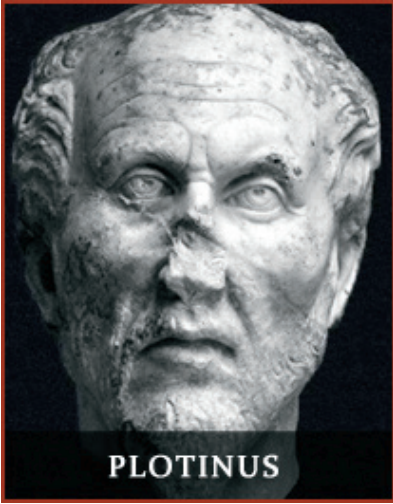
4 Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p.208.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

*never took a bath. His own body and person seem to have been of little interest to him, as though he were living as independently of them as possible.*⁷

Plotinus rediscovered the teachings of Plato. Many actually believed him to be a reincarnation of Plato. He is known as the father of a movement of ideas called Neo-Platonism. Neoplatonism was very popular at the time of Augustine.



Neoplatonism disagreed with the world-view of Mani. It taught there was only one principle in the universe. There is not a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness. There is, so to speak, only one kingdom. This kingdom is ruled by the One, the source of all things.

Reality is like the concentric circles that appear on the surface of the water when hit by a pebble. The realities of life that are closer to the One, the center, are superior. Evil then does not originate from a different source, but consists simply in moving away from the One.⁸ The miserable life described by Cicero is seen by the Neo-Platonists as people living in the outer circles away from the One.

Gonzalez explains the pursuit of the Neoplatonist:

*Through a combination of study, discipline, and mystical contemplation, it sought to reach the ineffable One, the source of all being. The goal of the Neoplatonist was the ecstasy that one experienced when lost in such contemplation.*⁹

Neoplatonists found great pleasure in their contemplation. Augustine

⁷ Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.68.

⁸ Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p.210.

⁹ Ibid.

would spend a great deal of time contemplating their contemplations. We now turn to #1 on our list of Top Ten Theologians.

Augustine's Life

Early Years with Monica

Augustine was born in 354AD in the little town of Thagaste, in North Africa. His father worked for the Roman government. His father followed traditional North African pagan religions. His mother Monica, however, was a passionate believer in Jesus.

Thagaste, now in modern-day Algeria, was in the middle of a North African boom during the early years of Augustine. Life was good. An inscription has been discovered explaining the indulgent life there, "The hunt, the baths, play and laughter: that's the life for me!"¹⁰

Augustine grew up around this indulgent life but his family had lesser means. It was clear to his parents, however, that Augustine had unusual intellectual abilities. His family would sacrifice greatly to allow Augustine the best of educations. To that end they sent him to the nearby town of Madaura, and later to Carthage.¹¹ Augustine was 17 years old when he arrived in Carthage. While he did not neglect his studies, he set out to indulge in the full offerings of the city. In fairly a short time he had a girl living with him. She would end up living with him for the next fifteen years. Shortly later, Augustine and his girlfriend had a son. They named him Adeodatus – meaning 'given by God.'

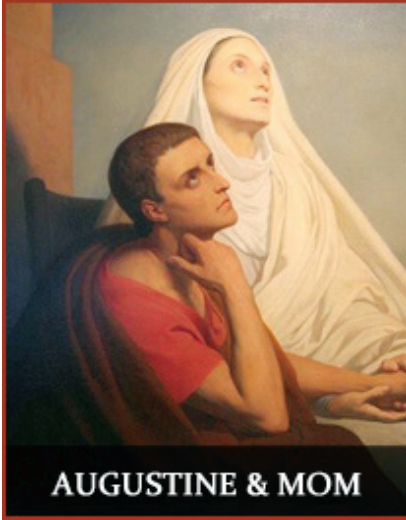
All the students of his day preparing for careers inside government or as lawyers became students of Rhetoric. It was a crucial skill during this age to be able to speak and write in an elegant and convincing way. Truth wasn't that important in his studies. It was more valuable to speak convincingly than to speak truthfully.

¹⁰ Brown. Augustine of Hippo. p.7.

¹¹ Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p.208.

Studying Cicero

During this time Augustine started to study one of the masters of Roman rhetoric: Cicero. Cicero began to shake Augustine's world. He saw the masterful communication of Cicero, but Augustine would not allow himself to stop merely at Cicero's style. He began to read the content of his works.



AUGUSTINE & MOM

Rhetoric, without truth, could lead someone like Augustine to become a rich man able to fulfill every indulgent desire.

Cicero's writings let Augustine know his life of indulgence would end in misery. Instead, he needed to search for truth above rhetoric.

Augustine's response to the writings of Cicero:

Suddenly, all empty hope for my career lost its appeal; and I was left with an unbelievable fire in my heart, desiring the deathless qualities of Wisdom, and I made a start to rise up and return to Thee...I was on fire, my God, on fire to fly away from earthly things to Thee.¹²

Augustine becomes a Manichee

One of the fascinating aspects of Augustine's life is his journey of faith. With the influence of Cicero propelling Augustine forward, he went looking for a new worldview. He threw himself completely into the teachings of Mani.

Manicheism claimed to be the belief system of the intelligent. Its teachings

¹² Brown. Augustine of Hippo. p.29.

were supported by astronomical observations. They ridiculed Christianity, and the Bible, as being too focused on the flesh and too barbaric in the writing of the Bible.

The issue of evil became a big focus for Augustine. His mother had always taught him that there was only one God. If there was only one God then why would he allow or create evil? In Manicheism he found a worldview where evil is an equal opposite to the kingdom of light. Since they have no relation to each other the kingdom of light cannot be blamed for the kingdom of darkness.

Augustine's mother, Monica, was not happy with him becoming a Manichee. Monica was so opposed to his Manichee views she would not allow him in the house!¹³ During this time Augustine led several of his friends to become Manichees. Although Mani taught a strict self-denial, Augustine continued to live an indulgent lifestyle. Throughout this time, however, he continued to have questions and doubts about Manichee beliefs.

During Manichee gatherings Augustine started to vent his doubts. Gonzalez explains Augustine's last days as a Manichee:

He was told his questions were very profound, and that there was a great Manichean teacher, a certain Faustus, who could answer them. When the much announced Faustus finally arrived, he turned out to be no better than the other Manichean teachers. Disappointed, Augustine decided to carry on his quest in different directions.¹⁴

On to Neoplatonism

Augustine at this time had become a professor in rhetoric. After unsuccessful attempts to teach in Thagaste and Carthage, he moved on in 384AD, at the age of 30, to a teaching position in Milan. In Milan he encountered

13 Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.54.

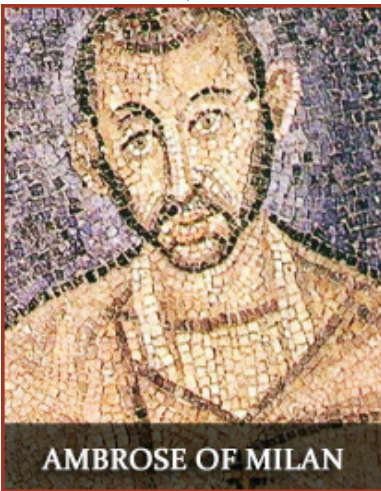
14 Gonzalez. The Story of Christianity: Volume 1. p.210.

the teachings of Plotinus and became a Neoplatonist. His nagging question about the origin of evil seemed to be answered.

In Neoplatonism you can have a single being, of infinite goodness, as the source of all things. Evil exists but it is not a “thing.” This is a huge realization for Augustine. Evil is real, but it is not a “thing.” It is rather a direction away from the goodness of the One. Neoplatonism helped to open the door for Augustine to become a Christian. He was still, however, disturbed by the Bible. He had come to see the Bible as sloppy rhetoric. Its language was crude and at times violent. How could this be the Word of God?

Ambrose

While in Milan, Monica convinced her son to go listen to the Bishop of Milan. Ambrose had been bishop for 11 years. Ambrose was the most famous speaker in all Milan. As a professor of rhetoric Augustine was interested to go hear the bishop. Initially, Augustine didn’t care about what Ambrose said, just how he said it. Eventually, however, Augustine stopped listening as a critic and listened to Ambrose as a seeker of truth.



Augustine had long looked at the Bible as a second-rate work. Through the teaching of Ambrose, however, he saw how the Bible could be the Word of God. His major intellectual objections had melted away, yet there was still a big hurdle in his path.

If Augustine were to accept the faith of his mother, he would be all-in: 100%. He was convinced that, were he to become a Christian, he must give up his career in rhetoric, as well as all his ambitions and every physical pleasure.¹⁵ It was this last aspect he struggled with the

¹⁵ Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity*. p.211.

most. By this time Augustine's initial girlfriend was out of the picture, but he was engaged to a second woman and sleeping with a third. During this time he famously would pray, "Give me chastity...but not too soon."

Early Tragedy

After reading a biography of Athanasius (our #4 theologian) and hearing of several other people becoming Christians, Augustine gave his life fully to God. He and his now teenage son were then baptized by Ambrose.

Augustine resigned from his teaching position and decided to return to North Africa. On the way, tragically, his mother became ill and died. After several months of grieving in Rome he finally reached his hometown of Thagaste when another tragedy rocked Augustine. His son, Adeodatus, also died.

Leader and Bishop

Augustine's plan was to sell most of his possessions, move to nearby Cassiacum, and devote himself to contemplation and writing. From these early writings, Augustine's fame began to grow as his sharp mind and newfound life in Christ found expression. He was eager to write against all the world-views he had been swept into that claimed truth but left the adherent empty.

Augustine's life was about to go in a totally different unexpected direction. He simply traveled to the city of Hippo to invite a friend to join him at Cassiacum. During a church service the bishop, Valerius, noticed Augustine sitting in the congregation. He spontaneously changed his message asking the congregation to seek God if someone in their midst might have been sent to be their minister! Augustine, much against his will, was ordained to serve with Valerius in Hippo.¹⁶ Within four years Augustine was the bishop of Hippo.

He would never return to a life of solitude and writing. All his most fa-

¹⁶ Gonzalez. p.211.

mous writings, including his monumental interactions with Pelagius, would be done under the stress of daily pastoral responsibilities. It's these writings, his thoughts which made Augustine the #1 Theologian of Church History and which we now examine.

Augustine's Thoughts

Freedom of the Will

Since Augustine led many friends to become Manichees, many of his first works were written to refute their teachings. These early works dealt mainly with the divine authority of Scripture, the origin of evil and the freedom of the will. At such an early time in the history of Christianity Augustine goes on to develop a robust view of the freedom of the will. This was important to solve the difficulties having to do with the origin of evil.¹⁷

Influenced by Neoplatonism, Augustine sees in Scripture the fact that evil is never a substance. God did not create a substance called evil. He instead creates humans and angels with a good will. Humans and angels are able to make decisions out of their own will. This will, however, is freely capable of making a bad decision. The origin of evil is found in the bad decisions made by both humans and angels – those of the demons, who are fallen angels.¹⁸ Augustine was able to show how an all-powerful good God can create and sustain the world and also explain the reality of evil.

The freedom of the will is absolutely crucial in understanding and appreciating the thoughts of Augustine. A new question rose up in Augustine's life. How free are humans to sin? Furthermore, how free are humans to avoid sin? These questions came from a man named Pelagius. To him Augustine turned his focus.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 213.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Pelagius

It was against the thoughts of the godly man Pelagius that Augustine wrote his most important theological works. Pelagius, a monk from Britain, had become famous by his piety. Pelagius claimed humans can attain a sinless life. He denied that human sin is inherited from Adam.¹⁹ He believed that humans are free to act righteously. He saw no need for an outside influence. He did not believe we needed the special enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Pelagius saw the Christian life as a constant effort through which one's sins could be overcome and salvation attained.²⁰

As Augustine considered the claims of Pelagius he remembered his personal experience of desiring to follow God but being unable to give up his sexual lifestyle. He both willed to obey and willed to not obey. Perhaps the will regarding sin was not as simple as Pelagius thought. Augustine's disagreement with Pelagius centered around conversion, the question arose:

How can we make the decision to accept God's grace? According to Augustine, only by the power of grace itself, for before that moment we are not free to not sin, and therefore we are not free to decide to accept grace. The initiative in conversion is not human, but divine. Furthermore, grace is irresistible, and God gives it to those who have been predestined to it.

Pelagius, for example, views salvation as a life preserver. If you find, while you are swimming, that you need help with your sin then you grab the life preserver. It's there if you need it, most people do in some way. Augustine, on the other hand, believed the Bible taught the concept of being dead in our sins. Dead people can't grab a life preserver. They're floating face-down. The only way Augustine can be saved is if God jumps in, drags him to shore and brings him back to life.

Augustine's famous statement from this debate was, "Grant what you com-

19 Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.120.

20 Gonzalez. p.214.

mand, and command what you will.” If God desires for someone to come and follow Him, he has to grant the ability to do what He commands. The only thing we bring to our salvation, according to Augustine, is our sin.

The views of Pelagius were eventually rejected by the church.

Confessions

Augustine’s book *Confessions* is without a doubt the most famous of all his writings. His autobiography, written between 397 and 401AD is unique in all ancient literature. No human being had ever written such an honest account of their own life. Augustine’s perception of himself in light of His God would shape western theology for a thousand years – not only in their conclusions, but in an observant, reflective and astonishingly honest quest for truth.²¹

City of God

The other book standing out among his many volumes is his work *The City of God*. The immediate occasion compelling Augustine to write this book was the fall of the Roman Empire. At the time many of the people who had clung to the ancient pagan beliefs of the Roman Empire thought Christianity was to blame for the fall of Rome. Augustine wrote this work to respond to those people. The book is a huge sweep of history centered on two cities. Each city is built on a foundation of love. The city of God is built on love for God. The earthly city is built on love for self. In the end, all earthly cities will crumble, only the city of God will remain.

The thoughts of Augustine have had unparalleled influence in church history. It is this influence we now look at more closely.

²¹ Knowles. Augustine and His World. p.142.

Augustine's Influence

The influence of Augustine is broad and deep. On a personal level his finger-prints are all over: Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Bellarmine, Pascal and Kierkegaard. For example, it's hard to read more than two pages in Calvin's masterpiece *Institutes of the Christian Religion* without coming across a quote from Augustine.

During the last year of his life Jerome sent a letter from Bethlehem to Augustine to tell him that by his books he had virtually, "refounded the old faith," and that the bitter attacks on him by heretics were sufficient testimony to his achievement.²²

It is easier, however, to mention his influence more on movements than on individuals. The theology and philosophy of medieval schoolmen and of the creators of the first universities were rooted in Augustinian ideas of the relation between faith and reason. When Peter Lombard compiled his foundational *Sentences* (1155) to provide a basic textbook of theology, a very high proportion was drawn from Augustine.²³

The Reformation found much of its foundation in Augustine. Both sides in the controversy, interestingly, appealed on a large scale to the writings of Augustine.

During the 18th century enlightenment people were debating the concept of Augustine's "Original Sin." Immanuel Kant surprised the men of the Enlightenment by affirming that human nature is distorted by a pervasive radical evil.²⁴

Augustine has and continues to influence those who follow Christ. Augustine, however, was not perfect. He had plenty of reasons why we should only worship Christ and view Augustine as a fellow sinner. His foibles help

22 Chadwick. p.125.

23 Chadwick. Augustine: A Very Short Introduction. p.3.

24 Ibid.

keep him in perspective compared to our Savior.

Augustine's Foibles

Augustine's life before coming to Christ was full of licentious living. His 15-year relationship with his live-in girlfriend seems to have not been handled properly. Right around the time Augustine is coming to Christ and should have married her is the time when he sends her on her way. This could have been a righteous decision, but it also could have been a great chance to make a wrong situation right. As he was sending her away, she vowed to never marry another man. She wanted to marry him but he told her to get lost. Later in his life he seems to have realized the injustice of the situation.

Many Christians would see Augustine's view of infant baptism as incorrect. Pelagius saw people free from original sin. Since there is no original sin, thought Pelagius, infants did not need baptism. Infants had not committed sin, so they did not need anything to get to heaven. Since Augustine disagreed with the premise of Pelagius, he viewed original sin to the degree that infants were unable to go to heaven unless they had been baptized. Outside of the debate with Pelagius it is possible Augustine did not hold this as strongly as some of his works suggest. He wrote in *City of God* some ideas which suggest some who die in infancy may be able to get to heaven without baptism. Augustine, however, wrote strongly on this topic which seems too harsh to many 21st century ears.

Additionally, some of Augustine's views on the end-times, predestination, Mary, martyrs, etc... have been criticized by certain groups of Christians throughout the centuries as not balanced or sufficiently biblical.

Augustine's Effect on Us

Dr. Bradley Green nicely summarizes Augustine's effect on us:

*At one level all of Western theology has been – in a sense – a long series of footnotes to Augustine. He bequeathed to the church deep reflection on how to talk and think about God, how language works when speaking about God, and on the nature of the triune God. His insights as to how one must affirm one God in three divine persons – where the three are understood in terms of relationship and love – is seminal. Augustine’s doctrine of man as sinner – and hence in need of radical grace – is central to understanding Scripture, and every evangelical must still come to terms with his view of original sin. Augustine is rightfully considered the Doctor of Grace, for it is in Augustine’s understanding of grace that he has perhaps made his greatest mark on the church. The grace of God, set upon us from all eternity, that moves us to trust in and believe God, that transforms our hearts, that effectively moves us to obey God for salvation and moves in us that we persevere to the end – that is a grace worth believing and promulgating in the world today. For these and many other reasons, Augustine is worthy of our attention, and can help evangelicals as we strive to understand and serve the God of Scripture.*²⁵

As this chapter comes to an end my hope is these mighty mentors of history will only begin to shape our lives. These ten theologians are potentially ten people God may use to mentor you to be all He has called you to be in your world. My prayer is your connection with these mentors will grow until He calls us all safely home.

I hope you have enjoyed this book as much as I have enjoyed learning from these men.

25 Green. Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy. p.288.

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