

when it consists of defiance of God's law, a rivalry of illimitable hatred and murder, a permanent intention of mortal sin, the very essence of hell! I just can't see how any believer in God can pin his faith in such a blasphemy.

PHILIP. What a pity poor old James had to go off to pray for peace. I'm sure he would have had a resounding answer for you. Now we shall have to wait another year or two until we meet again.

Augustinus Semper Vivus

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

In his recent novel *Island* Mr Aldous Huxley says some very silly things about St Augustine, or to be quite fair he makes one of his 'wiser' characters say them. From them it can be deduced that all he actually knows about Augustine is the *Confessions*, or a vague impression about that work, *massa damnata*, and unbaptized infants. This is probably representative of what the average educated man knows about Augustine, and so he will readily accept Mr Huxley's dismissal of the man as a neurotic rigorist predestinationist. But the average educated Englishman cannot be excused this absurd misconception much longer, for what is in fact a monumental biography of St Augustine, *Augustine the Bishop* by Professor F. Van der Meer, is now available in English.¹ Describing Augustine's death the author says this about him: 'To his Church he bequeathed two things; the memory of his *humble and indescribably lovable personality* [so much for the neurotic pessimist], and his great library, the archive of his spirit' (p. 274).

It is quite clear that Dr Van der Meer knows that library inside out, and that he has read every word of Augustine's letters and sermons, which are the most self-revealing of his works. And so in an immensely readable 589 pages (excluding notes) he substantiates over and over again the humble and indescribably lovable personality of his hero. I feel bound to say that it seems a pity that the publishers have presented his work in a volume that is handsome indeed, and well printed, but

¹Sheed and Ward, London, £4 10s.

whose weight (3 lb.) and price (£4 10s) can scarcely fail to deter many possible purchasers and readers. The book is really a classic. It has had to wait almost twenty years for translation into English - understandably, perhaps. But when it is at last vouchsafed us, every effort should be made to help it become a best seller; and for that a reasonable price is surely a necessary condition; and so is manageability. This is a book which every bishop and every parish priest ought to be obliged to read.

The author introduces us to Augustine the bishop and pastor of souls in three contexts; worship, preaching, and popular piety, to each of which themes one part of the work is devoted. But perhaps the most fascinating part, the one in which we really got to know the man, is the long introductory section entitled 'The Church of Hippo Regius'. This section could have formed a satisfactory first volume by itself. The book is however only loosely systematic, and the author has a ranging, wandering sort of style, as of a man going for a walk in a park rather than of one going on a definite journey, that admirably suits the subject. For there is no story to tell of Augustine after his conversion and ordination, which is why perhaps most people stop after the *Confessions*. But there is a picture, almost a landscape, of infinite variety and detail to display, and this is achieved with masterly effect.

St Augustine, as his first biographer Possidius ruefully discovered, is proof against the hagiographic treatment; 'to his visible embarrassment', Dr Van der Meer remarks, 'he could record no miracles, for Augustine had worked none'. Yet this latest biography is very consciously the portrait of a saint, and if we may saddle the author with a thesis it is this, that what made Augustine a saint was not his dramatic conversion, not his withdrawal from the world into a select monastery of his own foundation, but his becoming, very much against his will, a bishop. Had he been permitted to have his own way and to live the rest of his life as a monk, a scholar, and a gentleman, he would have cut a figure, perhaps, in ecclesiastical history of the same proportions as Cassiodorus, probably rather less significant for Christendom than Boethius. And he would not have been a saint, in all probability, but just a little of a prig. Such, it must be confessed, is the character revealed by his early works, *Soliloquies*, *De Libero Arbitrio*, *De Musica*, etc.

But when he was taken violently by the Catholics of Hippo and made a priest, and then inevitably a bishop, he accepted this rough destruction of his most cherished hopes for what the event so gloriously showed it to have been, his divine vocation. In that vocation, from that moment, he spent himself without any reserve, and thereby discovered

what inexhaustible treasures he had to spend. It was his generous response to his duties as a bishop of the Catholic Church that made him not only a saint but possibly the greatest Doctor of that Church after the Apostles. For it is not simply a matter for awed astonishment that his great theological works, *De Trinitate*, *In Genesim ad Litteram*, *De Civitate Dei*, the anti-Pelagian writings, were the product not of cloistered seclusion and undisturbed reflection, but of a busy and almost indecently public life; the fact is (one suspects) that had it not been for the pressures of that public life and its pastoral anxieties and duties, few of these books would have been written at all.

Not that we would decry – or that the author does – the value of Augustine’s monastic ideals and his actual monastic achievements. He continued, even as a bishop, to live in a monastic community composed of his clergy – it was one of the first ‘monastic cathedral chapters’, to use the sort of light anachronism with which Professor Van der Meer happily enlivens his pages. And this monastic establishment became a notable training camp for bishops, a sort of Venerable English College for the African hierarchy, from which bishops were chosen almost as a matter of habit. And so Augustine is the patron and model of all those clerical religious orders (among them the Order of Preachers), which were founded for pastoral work from a monastic, or at least a religious, base.

But above all he is a model bishop, a *speculum episcoporum*, a man of unflinching and universal solicitude for his flock. He had certain wearisome duties that a modern bishop is spared, and which time and again he besought his people to spare him, those of a kind of voluntary (but in his case most reluctant) arbitration tribunal and county court judge. People came to the bishop for Christian justice, and his decisions were recognized by imperial law. But in a most important respect it was much easier for Augustine to be a real and approachable father to his people than it is for a bishop today. ‘The great man’, our author remarks in his introduction, ‘lived in a small world. He was hardly more than a sort of episcopal dean, and a great deal of his work was that of an ordinary priest; he was the kind of bishop whom the more casual officials cheerfully kept waiting in their anterooms. There was in fact beneath the genius a very humdrum Augustine, who lived in what was really a large but very ordinary presbytery, and who could be approached by anybody about pretty well any business that his caller fancied . . . It is not altogether wrong to say that we owe Augustine the saint to the strange and surprising fact that Augustine the genius was

little more than a parish priest' (xvi-xvii). And he was not bogged down with matters of routine financial and canonical administration. So it might be fairer perhaps to say that Augustine is in our day a *speculum parochorum*.

On the eve of the second Vatican Council the temptation to indulge in a few comparisons between Church organization then and now, and to wonder if at least some features of the structure in which Augustine worked might not be profitably reintroduced, is irresistible. In the first place, then, bishops in his time were not the rulers and administrators of large territories, as they are today, but the leaders and pastors of local communities, local Churches. An echo of this more ancient situation perhaps survives in the canonical description of the bishop as *ordinarius loci*; but the word *locus*, 'place' scarcely fits the archdiocese, let us say, of Birmingham, which comprises four counties, containing places, *loca*, as disparate as Stoke-on-Trent and Henley-on-Thames. The archbishop of Birmingham governs a territory, the bishop of Hippo governed a place. Augustine would have been astonished and incredulous at the idea of a bishop ruling a *diocese*; for that was the name of the huge administrative units into which Diocletian had divided the Roman Empire. But the bishop's office was concerned with teaching and shepherding a particular Church, that is a congregation, a family gathering of the faithful; and in a urban society like that of the Roman Empire - still more our own - such familial communities are concentrated in places, not spread over territories or dioceses. The large territorial diocese is historically the result of the Church's spread into the tribal society of Germanic Europe; the archbishop of Birmingham might be said to be historically the heir of the bishop of the Mercians - indeed his cathedral is dedicated to St Chad.

There would seem to be good grounds for supposing that the ancient idea of the strictly local bishop that obtained in the Roman Empire is more appropriate to modern Europe than the idea that was born in the dark ages of a territorial ruler. Now in Augustine's native province of Numidia - equivalent roughly to England south of the Trent - there were well over seventy bishops; as Professor Van der Meer remarks, it was 'like a mosaic of autonomous communities, far too numerous and far too small' (p. 11). But perhaps not all that too numerous and small. Were the present archdiocese of Birmingham part of Augustine's Numidia it would comprise over twenty sees. Granted that that would at present be too many for comfort, let us imagine it none the less as a metropolitan province on its own with suffragan sees at Stoke,

Wolverhampton, Walsall, Worcester, Leamington, Coventry, and Oxford. Such sees could constitute real communities, genuine ecclesiastical *loca*. Their bishops could enjoy close personal contact with their flocks, and exercise an immediately visible pastoral care.

But administratively they would clearly not be self-sufficient. Curial offices, financial and educational administration, the training of clergy, and many contemporary forms of the apostolate would have to be pooled, and controlled by the metropolitan synod, meeting regularly as did Augustine and his African colleagues. Once it were accepted that an episcopal see need not form an independently viable administrative unit, the way would be clear for the erection of new sees in much the same manner as new parishes are formed at the moment. Such a re-organization of the ecclesiastical policy would maintain, and indeed enhance, the divinely ordained principle of episcopal government while changing the mode in which that government is exercised. It would mean what ought to be a healthy spread of full ecclesiastical responsibility, exercised much more than it is now by consultation, discussion, and debate, in conciliar or synodal forms.

But to return to *Augustine the Bishop*. In so vast and rambling a book there are bound to be points to criticize. The translation reads very well, but occasionally there are obscurities which may or may not be the fault of the translator. And surely he has slipped up in this sentence: 'On ordinary Sundays the *Preface* alone consisted of three excerpts from Holy Scripture, a reading from the Apostle . . . , a psalm . . . , and then the Gospel' (p. 174). In the matter of civil coercion of heretics, while Augustine's authority was undoubtedly invoked to justify medieval practice, it is not fair to say that he 'must be regarded as the true father of the Inquisition' (p. 95). The following does even the unregenerate Augustine an injustice: 'He had been the life and soul of that plan according to which ten people were to form a Platonic study circle on the country estate of the wealthy Romanianus. But when it was a question of turning one's back on the world, his mistresses would have nothing to do with it, and the whole plan burst like a soap bubble' (p. 207). Augustine never had more than one mistress at a time, and he only took a second because his mother had succeeded in sending the first one packing. Here is the passage from the *Confessions* (VI, 14) to which Professor Van der Meer refers: 'But as soon as we began to consider whether this would be pleasing to the *mulierculae* which some of us had already, and I too was resolved to have, all that scheme fell asunder in our hands'. So for 'his mistresses' read at least 'their mistresses'.

The author is a little prone to such free and easy expansion of the evidence, and it is a habit that does not always lend clarity to his presentation of Augustine's views. Thus on the Church and baptism (in the context of the Donatist controversy) we have these two contradictory statements of his position: 'For the Spirit only acts within the true Church' (p. 283); 'The Holy Ghost, however, also works outside the Church' (p. 307). Augustine's was certainly a comprehensive mind capable of embracing any number of opposites, but it is surely susceptible of a subtler and less harsh presentation than that. His dialectic was never so blunt and unresolved as Professor Van der Meer's.

Here is a passage in which a series of airy over-simplifications distort Augustine's views (on unbaptized infants), and introduce non-existent contradictions into his thought, in the service of another non-existent contradiction which the author persists in seeing between the concrete behaviour of 'this man who was so human' and his 'expressions of a terrifying rigorism':

This man who believed that a catechumen who died before baptism was a lost soul, who before the end of his life even advanced the opinion that the good thief must *undoubtedly* have been baptized (because he was determined not to diminish in any way the need for the first sacrament)²³, undoubtedly went too far; we know that now, the Church has said so. There were many people in Carthage who silently protested, anyway, against what he said about the fate of unbaptized children, centuries before the majority of the theologians rose up against him²⁴. He forgot he had earlier consigned these children to a painless limbo - 'halfway between reward and punishment' - for he never retracted this passage in the *Retractations*²⁵.

The first note⁽²³⁾, substantiating Augustine's advancing the opinion that the good thief must undoubtedly have been baptized, refers to two passages of the *Retractations* which read as follows: 'In the fourth book (of *De Baptismo*), when I had said that the suffering of martyrdom can take the place of baptism, I gave the not entirely suitable example of that thief, though whether he was not baptized is uncertain (*incertum*)'; 'About the thief to whom it was said "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise" I said (in *Questions on the Heptateuch*) that he had not been sacramentally baptized as though it were certain, when in fact it is uncertain, and indeed it is rather to be believed that he had been baptized, as I have argued elsewhere'. Scarcely an opinion that he must *undoubtedly* have been baptized.

The second note ⁽²⁴⁾ refers to a sermon preached at Carthage in which he does not in fact discuss the fate of unbaptized children as such, but is concerned to refute an entirely unwarranted distinction people were making between eternal life and the kingdom of heaven; they conceded that it was necessary to baptize children in order to obtain for them the kingdom of heaven, but maintained that even without baptism they would obtain eternal life. Augustine shows that the New Testament means the same thing by the two expressions, and that neither can be had except in Christ. Nothing he says in it contradicts the idea of 'a painless limbo'. The third note ⁽²⁵⁾ gives the reference for this painless limbo, and also refers to another famous expression of his, that the fate in store for unbaptized infants is a *mitissima poena*. So far from the majority of theologians having risen up against him on this point, or the Church having said that he went too far, it is the most common theological opinion that such infants suffer only the *poena damni*, the penalty of not enjoying the beatific vision, but no *poena sensus* or actual torment; which seems to be fairly, if not so precisely covered by *mitissima poena*.

In his epilogue on 'Augustine and our own day', which is the least satisfactory part of his book, Professor Van der Meer emphasizes quite rightly that Augustine was a child of his age, and that we must carefully distinguish between what is the real Augustine and what is merely the echo of late Roman thought-forms and assumptions. The same I think must be said for the Professor; he is hindered from achieving - at least in actual expression - a wholly sympathetic understanding of his subject by certain habits of thought current in this age; he has a tendency to think in labels and -isms. The quaintest example of this is the section headed by a somewhat infelicitous *jeu d'esprit*, 'Augustine the probabilist' (p. 153 ff). Anything more remote from the mind of Augustine than the tedious moral systems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it is hard to imagine. But the habit is most stultifying and obfuscating in the discussion of Augustine's doctrine of grace and original sin and predestination. Pessimism, optimism, rigorism - what enlightenment do we gain by discussing whether or no these labels should be pinned on his teaching? They are emotive words, and quite valueless as categories for the delicate assessment of the rightness or otherwise of this teaching. But we live in an age which can scarcely think in anything but slogans - fascism, colonialism, materialism, communism; excellent war-cries, worthless as terms of rational discussion. There is no profit in studying Augustine with war-cries.

The same scarcely conscious fault of method mars another otherwise excellent book on Augustine, *Charter of Christendom: The Significance of the City of God*; by J. J. O'Meara.² It is a slim volume, the 1961 St Augustine lecture at Villanova University, Pa. Indeed Professor O'Meara's expression of what in substance is a very just appreciation of Augustine's thought is seriously vitiated by his inadequate categories. This is how he sums up:

Augustine's *absolute* position was that only those who gave due worship to the Christian God were truly virtuous and could hope for salvation. Those therefore, such as the worthies of Rome, who gave worship to many Gods, were *absolutely* vicious, and the State they served, in not recognizing the true God, lacked true justice. Similarly Greek philosophy was *absolutely* to be rejected, because it refused to accept the possibility of an eternal body . . .

Speaking, however, non-theologically, in a *relative* and indeed normal way, Rome, polytheism apart, was not only good, but was chosen to prepare . . . for the coming of Christianity (pp. 111-112).

'Absolute' and 'relative' are of course Professor O'Meara's categories, not Augustine's, and they simply will not bear the weight put on them; so that this exegesis of Augustine's thought needs more ingeniously pious interpretation than its subject matter. Such a sentence as this is even more seriously misleading, unless it is elaborately explained: 'Augustine's attitude to Rome itself is, as one might expect, twofold: theological and historical: she was *absolutely* evil; but *relatively* had a limited goodness' (pp. 101-2). This meagre metaphysical equipment is incapable of doing justice to Augustine's doctrine of evil.

But to return to the matter of slogan or label thinking: it is combined in this as in our preceding author with the assumption that in the crucial matters of predestination, grace, original sin, Augustine has been at least partially repudiated by the Church. This is a widespread belief, and should be supported by chapter and verse. I would like to take the opportunity of quoting some chapter and verse to the contrary - from that masterpiece of chapter and verse, Denzinger's *Enchiridion*, 1957 edition. I will confine myself to the topic of predestination. Let it be established first of all that 'predestination' is a Catholic word and a New Testament word. That the destiny of men is in the hands of God is an inescapable conclusion from belief in divine omniscience, omnipotence, and providence. That only those are saved who have been

²Macmillan, New York, 18s. 6d.

predestined by God to salvation, is the Catholic and orthodox application of this conclusion.

The trouble comes with the further implications of this conclusion; and there are, briefly, three errors on the matter which the Church has condemned – errors that is of what we might call excessive predestinationism, not the contrary Pelagian errors, from which we hardly need to defend Augustine:

(1) Inferring from the truth of predestination that since the fall there is no longer any such thing as free will; what we now do, we do under the necessity of (fallen) nature. This is Calvin's error, condemned at Trent (Dz 815).

(2) Inferring from God's foreknowledge (*a*) that it imposes necessity on us, so that we cannot help doing what he knows we will do; (*b*) that this foreknowledge can in our present state be shared by us, so that we can have a certitude of our election, and observe signs of people's (usually other people's) non-election: also Protestant errors condemned at Trent (cf. Dz 822, 825).

(3) Inferring that the non-elect are predestined not only to their punishment but also to the committing of the sins that earn it in a way exactly parallel to the predestination of the elect both to their meritorious acts and to their heavenly reward.

I do not know that anyone has ever accused Augustine (since his Pelagian adversaries) of denying free will; he defended himself against that charge, and needs no other advocate. But it is the third of these three errors to which his words are most obnoxious. Thus in the *City of God* XV, 1, we have the following: '... two cities, that is two associations of men, one of which is predestined to reign with God for ever, the other to suffer punishment for ever with the devil'; And from XXII, 24, this, after a lyrical description of the wonders of this world: 'What then will he give those whom he has predestined to life, if he has given all this even to those whom he has predestined to death?'

This surely, is the sinister doctrine of *double* predestination; St Augustine, lover of antithesis that he was, does not share the prudence of St Thomas Aquinas in reserving the word 'predestination' for God's attitude to the elect, and using the word 'reprobation' for his attitude to the non-elect. But what's in a word – what is the difference in *substance* between the two? We are told in a conciliar text which uses the language of double predestination (Synod of Valence in France, 855 A.D.):

We faithfully profess the predestination of the elect to life, and

the predestination of the godless to death; but we assert that in the election of those who are to be saved God's mercy precedes their good deserts, while in the condemnation of those who are going to perish their evil deserts precede the just judgment of God. 'For by predestination God established those things only which he himself was going to do, either in gratuitous mercy or in just judgment' (from a sermon by Florus the Deacon). But in the wicked, he foreknew their wickedness indeed, as it comes from them, but he did not predestine it, as it does not come from him. The punishment however which follows their evil deserts . . . he both foreknew and predestined (Dz 322).

Another French Council at Quiersy two years earlier had said much the same thing in slightly different language, against the 'predestinationists':

But the good and just God has chosen out of the same lump of perdition (Augustine's *massa damnata*) according to his foreknowledge those whom he has predestined by grace to life, and he has predestined for them life everlasting: the rest, whom he has left by the judgment of justice in the lump of perdition, he has foreknown will perish, but he has not predestined them to perish; however because he is just, he has predestined for them everlasting punishment. And thus we say that there is only one divine predestination, which is concerned either with the gift of grace or the retribution of justice (Dz 316).

These conciliar statements are undoubtedly developments and clarifications of Augustine's words, but in no sense whatever rejections, let alone condemnations, of them. If we must talk about pessimism and rigorism, though there is little rhyme or reason in doing so, they seem to me to be as pessimistic and rigorist as anything in Augustine. And though they are only the utterances of provincial synods and general councils, yet they fairly represent the ordinary teaching of the Church. Through them St Thomas is the direct heir, and not the corrector or explainer-away, of St Augustine's teaching on predestination. If anyone thinks otherwise, the burden is on him to prove his case by precise evidence, and not to take it vaguely for granted that on so important a matter the Church has tacitly repudiated one of her greatest Doctors.

Apart from these regrettable inadequacies of expression, Professor O'Meara is in substance as fair and favourable to Augustine as Professor Van der Meer. He disposes of a number of modern caricatures (justly

so called) of the teachings of the *City of God*, for example that perpetrated by Ernest Barker in his introduction to the Everyman edition of the English translation; caricatures that are based on a crass lack of comprehension of Augustine's aims and point of view. He emphasizes the personal, experiential character of Augustine's thought, and makes a most illuminating comparison between its structure in the *Confessions*, the *City of God*, and the *De Trinitate*, a comparison I am proud to be able to say that I made independently in an article entitled 'St Augustine's Geography of Conversion', in the *Life of the Spirit*, August-September 1959. Both these books do full justice to St Augustine's huge, fascinating, humanity.

Heard and Seen

POST PILKINGTON

Now that the dust has settled a little, and the moral lessons so primly spelled out by the Pilkington Report have been assimilated, the future of British radio and television seems as obscure as ever. There is a passion in this country for enquiries and reports - one can think of a whole series of Royal Commissions whose recommendations still await acceptance or even serious debate - which can sometimes appear to be nothing but a concession to a guilty conscience. If a group of high-minded public figures can be persuaded to meet, hear evidence and prepare a report, then something has been accomplished. At least they have had their say and the pressures have been reduced. But when, as in the case of broadcasting, the issues involve acute questions of political manoeuvre, not to speak of the most substantial financial interests, it is unlikely that a Government will act with boldness. The report is there to be read and discussed: but, rather like Stalin's enquiry about the Pope, the Minister's concern is with what armed forces its authors command. In the case of the Pilkington report, the answer is very little. No one thinks that Miss Joyce Grenfell, or Sir Harry himself, can match the millions of the powerful lobbies of the programme companies.

The Report itself did not greatly commend its admirable intentions by a kind of University Extension class vocabulary and a humourless analysis of the monster as though it were a marketing-board. And, bad as though many