



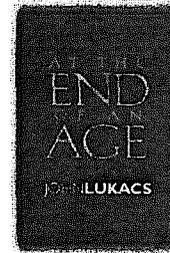
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BOOK REVIEWS



AT THE END OF AN AGE

John Lukacs

New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press (2002)

230 pages, cloth, \$22.95

John Lukacs is a widely-known popular historian and the author of more than twenty works, including *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age*, *The Hitler of History*, *Five Days in London, May 1940*, *The Passing of the Modern Age*, and *A History of the Cold War*. I was personally introduced to John Lukacs by a marvelous C-Span television interview with Brian Lamb on one of my favorite programs, *Booknotes*. (For those who do not know Brian Lamb and the weekly program *Booknotes*, I urge you to watch it. It airs on Sunday evenings at both 7 and 10 p.m. Central Time.)

In this lively new work Professor Lukacs has written a marvelous personal reflection on the nature of historical and scientific knowledge which flows out of a lifetime of thought about history and the human condition. His thesis runs counter to most of the academic ideas of our time and provides the reader with a compelling paradigm for understanding history, science, and human self-knowledge.

Simply stated, Lukacs argues that the Western world is now passing through the end of the Modern Age, a historical period that began five hundred years ago in Western Europe. The word "modern" appeared in English about 1580. Initially the use of the term was quite close to the Latin *modernus*, meaning "today's," or the "present time." Gradually the term shifted to mean "new" rather than something "old." Lukacs writes:

By the end of the seventeenth century, in English but also in some other Western European languages, another allied meaning became current among learned people, a concept which was one of the results of the emergence of historical consciousness. This was the recognition that there have been three historic ages, the Ancient, the Middle, and now the Modern—whence “medieval,” having been in the middle, between the Ancient and the Modern (5).

In time, the idea that the Modern Age might last forever, evolved in the West. This idea is now seriously doubted by most academics. Lukacs agrees, but not for the reasons you commonly hear articulated. He believes the Modern Age is breaking up on many fronts. Let me take just one for sake of illustration. The Modern Age, says Lukacs, discovered the virtues and pleasures of privacy. Before this age life was public in more ways than one. The idea of the bourgeois house or apartment evolved. Says Lukacs, “The very word ‘home’ acquired a new meaning. Among other things, the respect for privacy distinguished a civilized society from the barbarians or primitive people” (21). The result of this change was an “increasing emphasis on [the] political and legal rights of the ‘individual’ [which] seemed to affirm the rights to privacy, at least implicitly” (21).

Lukacs cogently writes:

The modern cult of privacy had, at first sight, a common ground with the cult of what is still called “individualism” (a questionable term); but at closer sight this connection is deceiving. Privacy had more to do with the developing bourgeois cult of the family . . . the tendency to protect and educate children (note the original meaning of “educate”: bring up, guide forth) was another new bourgeois habit, eventually spreading up and down, to the nobility as well as to the working classes. Children were no longer treated as little adults or caricatures of adults; there arose, instead, the bourgeois cult of the child—a cult of the home, of coziness, of interiority, of privacy (22).

In the nineteenth century these ideas were adopted by various governments, and by the end of that century women no longer had to work in the fields or factories because the wages their husbands earned allowed them to remain at home. By the twentieth century many more changes came, including the ease of divorce and abortion. Lukacs believes that women became involved in the marketplace in the later half of the twentieth century for a number of reasons, though initially it was not about money. He concludes: “In sum, the professional recognition as well as the legal protection of women had risen, while the respect for them had declined” (24).

Other features of the Modern Age include an increase in production, the rise of the town, institutional schooling (and ultimately the inflation of “education” and the decline of reading), and the devolution of art. Lukacs admits that his jeremiad has limitations, such as its almost exclusive emphasis upon the West, its preoccupation with the last fifty years of the twentieth century and its particularly American focus.

“History and life consist of the coexistence of continuity and change,” writes Lukacs (31). “Nothing vanishes entirely” thus the Modern Age will not simply go away. Its contributions to the future are numerous. He cites and analyses a number of them (34-37).

At some point in the last twenty-five years the word “post-modern” first appeared. Lukacs writes that:

[T]he prefix “post-” in itself is telling . . . [for] there is some sense of historical consciousness in it (as for example in “post-Communist” or “post-impressionist” or “post-liberal”) the prefix “post” being historical (and spatial), unlike “anti” which is fixed and mathematical: “post-modern” is not necessarily “anti-modern.” Yet the meaning (as different from the sense) of “post-modern” has been and remains inadequate, and worse than imprecise: it is vague, to the extent of being unhistorical (39).

Lukacs concludes his opening argument on present changes and the end of an age of five hundred years by saying that the best of post-modern thinkers and intellects “may

sense this but that is all" (42). He writes:

What Sheridan said in the House of Commons more than two hundred years ago about another Member's speech applied to them perfectly: "[He] said things that were both true and new; but unfortunately what was true was not new, and what was new was not true" (42).

We are at the end of an age. In my judgment it is imperative that more serious Christian leaders understood this reality. Lukacs observes that "The sense of this [change] has begun to appear in the hearts of many; but it has not yet swum up to the surface of their consciousness" (42). He sums up this present by writing:

As these lines are being written, something is happening in the United States that has no precedent. A great division among the American people has begun—gradually, slowly—to take shape: not between Republicans and Democrats, and not between "conservatives" and "liberals," but between people who are still unthinking believers in technology and in economic determinism and people who are not. The non-believers may or may not be conscious or convinced traditionalists; but they are men and women who have begun not only to question but, here and there, to oppose publicly the increasing—pouring of cement over the land, the increasing inflation of automobile traffic of every kind, the increasing acceptance of noisome machinery ruling their lives. Compared with this division the present "debates," about taxes and rates and political campaigns are nothing but ephemeral froth blowing here and there on little waves, atop the great oceanic tides of history (43).

The point Lukacs wants to drive home by his thesis is simple—he wants us to begin to think about thinking. This thinking is "as different from philosophy as it is from psychoanalysis" (44) and it includes thinking about "progress," "history," "science," "the limitations of our knowledge, and of our place in the universe" (44).

The remainder of the book takes up each of these four

respective areas of thinking and how we perceive them. In the chapter on historical thinking the author provides one of the best overviews I have read of how we can and should think about history. This is followed by a treatment of scientific knowledge that shows how determinism has collapsed and why materialism is reaching its end as well. The book concludes with a chapter titled: "At the End of the Universe." Here the author finally reveals that he comes to this whole process as a Christian thinker. We did not create the universe, but we are at the center of it. Our earth is, after all, the "visited planet" (to use the words of the late J. B. Phillips). Quoting Thomas Kepler, John Lukacs argues that, "The purpose of the world and of all creation is man. I believe that it is for this very reason that God chose the earth, designed as it is for bearing and nourishing the Creator's true image, for revolving among the planets" (206). Following Pascal he also believes, "Thought constitutes the greatness of man" (208). It is from Pascal that he further observes man to be "a thinking reed. It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the government of my thought. I shall have no more if I possess worlds. By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world" (208). There can be no meaningful separation of knower from that which is known. "It is our imaginative capacity which, together with memory, proves, among other things, that the laws of physics do not always and everywhere apply to the perceptions and functions of our minds" (211).

It is this assertion—that the earth is at the center of the universe—which makes Lukacs' work so important for Christian leaders. He believes that his argument will stand on its own regardless of one's theological system. You get a sense of his approach to logic and apologetics in the following statement, which occurs near the end of the book:

We cannot scientifically—or logically—"prove" that God exists. But we cannot prove the impossibility of God's existence either; because in the entire universe the meaning of God may be the only meaning that exists independent of our consciousness.

Earlier . . . I wrote about the limitations of the meaning of "fact." All I can say here is that, for once, factum is both a precise and a final term when and if it refers to God having made the universe—within which the miracle of our existence is yet another example of participation, and of our central situation (214).

One of the most important considerations that flows out of Lukacs' understanding of the Modern Age is his profound appreciation of residence and permanence. This appreciation contains a particular admonition for present-day Americans who want to divide "boomers" ("those who pillage and run") and "stickers" ("those who settle and love the life that they have made and the place they have made in it"). It is helpful for Christian thinkers to see this difference and to explain it to those they influence.

Lukacs concludes his sharp analysis of our time by drawing from several Christian writers. His sources are as diverse as Blaise Pascal, John Calvin, and C. S. Lewis. He maintains that in our time there is a "near manic wish to believe in extra-terrestrial beings and extra-terrestrial intelligence" (214). There is a "mass migratory restlessness probably without precedent" which might destroy places and things in ways that threaten entire civilizations.

There exists now, at the end of the Modern Age, a difference not only between what people think but how they think; and a, perhaps yet deeper, difference between what people think they believe and what they really believe. This book cannot and does not and wishes not to include psychoanalysis, and especially not an analysis of religious beliefs. But for this writer who, in the end, cannot exclude a contemplation of God from his contemplation of our history, including our history of the universe, a few concluding statements are perhaps inevitable (218).

One of the most helpful statements in these concluding observations is that,

There is—probably—an evolution, not only of our churches and of our religion, but of our God-belief: an inevitable evolution

not because the truth of God is relative but because our thinking, and our pursuit of Him, is fallible and historic. I sometimes think that this evolution, at least in the Western world, has gone through overlapping phases (always excluding many, many people, and not only saints) (218).

But why believe in God? Lukacs expresses his agreement with Calvin, who said, "Some sense of the Divinity is inscribed in every heart" (220). Following Unamuno, who wrote that, "Faith in God is born of love for God—we believe that God exists by force of wishing that He may exist." Lukacs then adds that this is a dangerous statement unless the rest of Unamuno's sentence is included, which says, "[Faith] is born also, perhaps, of God's love for us" (221).

We have, undoubtedly, entered a new age of human history. It is clearly different than any previous age. And Christians, Lukacs adds, "may become—in many countries they already are—a small minority" (222). The great Christian philosopher Augustine argued that we may learn of the presence and nature of God best in the human soul since there we see the image of God. Lukacs agrees: "All of us have known many non-Christians who have acted in Christian ways, thus being *animae naturaliter cristianne*; and we also know many sincerely believing Christians whose expressions may show alarmingly non-Christian thoughts in their minds" (223). Lukacs, as I noted above, finally argues that we really are at the center of the universe.

I must argue for the recognition of our central situation not only in space but also in time. In sum, that the coming of Christ to this earth may have been? no, that it *was*, the *central* event of the universe; that the greatest, the most consequential event in the entire universe has occurred here, on this earth. The Son of God has not visited this earth during a tour of stars or planets, making a Command Performance for us, arriving from some other place—perhaps—going off to some other place (223).

We must question the modern notion of progress, rooted as it is in Darwin and billions of years of time, precisely

because of the appearance of Christ on the earth two thousand years ago. We do not simply "have ideas" but we "choose" them (224). If we learn to think about thinking we will be far better equipped to speak to the unfolding new age that we are part of in the early twenty-first century.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief



**POWERS, WEAKNESS, AND THE
TABERNACLING OF GOD**

Marva J. Dawn
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)
176 pages, paper, \$14.00

Marva Dawn is one of the most impressive popular theological writers of our day. I commend every book she has written with great enthusiasm. By use of the word "popular" I want to sound an entirely positive note for Dawn's work. Let me briefly explain.

Marva Dawn has a unique ability to utilize serious, reflective, and exegetical theology in service of the church at large. She is widely appreciated, by both academicians and church leaders. She is academically qualified as a theologian (a Ph. D. in Christian ethics and the Scriptures from the University of Notre Dame) and personally engaged in active service for the life of the church. She travels widely, lecturing and serving schools and churches. She also retains an active commitment in the life of her own local church. Besides these credentials she bears in her own body the marks of serious long-term physical weakness.

Modern authors very often write an outstanding book that gains considerable acclaim, only to produce subsequent books that are quite disappointing. (This is a function of publishers as much as it is of writers!) With Marva Dawn the

sequence is almost the opposite. She has already written several excellent books (*Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* and *A Royal "Waste" of Time*, are only two examples) but *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* might well be her best book yet.

In this new book Marva Dawn utilizes a favorite source (the insights of the late French Reformed writer, Jacques Ellul) to ask if the "powers" (Ephesians 6:10-20) have overtaken a great deal of what we do in the church. She insightfully challenges both our practices and priorities and suggests that the church's strength is only perfected in weakness, not in following the techniques of our market-driven society. In a way that readers have come to expect from Marva Dawn she draws widely upon the written resources of the twentieth-century church. She utilizes insights from Oscar Cullman, James S. Stewart, Karl Barth, G. B. Caird, Soren Kierkegaard, and Walter Wink (with whom she critically interacts in a careful way), to name only a few of the better known writers on this subject.

Dawn's thesis is similar to that adopted in several of her earlier works—the church has embraced far too much of the world's view of success and power and the solution is found in a renewed theology of the cross. This begins at the place where it began in the church's origin, in the historical and personal victory of Christ crucified. (Her thesis is most assuredly not a "word and faith" charismatic emphasis but rather a nuanced *Christus Victor* theology. If you want to grapple with the meaning of "principalities and powers" I suggest this is a wonderful place to begin your struggle to learn.) She opens with the theology of the Book of Acts on this subject and then moves pastorally to the church of our time and then back again to the text of Scripture. Her thought is always carefully connected to the world we live in (with what Eugene Peterson calls its "slick contemporaneity"), and the church we must seek to reform by the Spirit and the Holy Scriptures.

Dawn argues that a defective understanding of the atonement has crippled the church at a very crucial point. We have limited the work of Christ on the cross to stressing "the revelatory dimension of Christ's death" without taking "seriously

the New Testament focus on the demonic nature of the evil from which humankind must be redeemed." As a result of this loss of focus "a basic component of the Christian gospel has been sidelined as extraneous" (8). Quoting from the late James S. Stewart of Edinburgh, she writes:

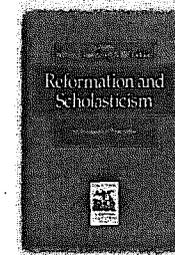
The really tragic force of the dilemma of history and of the human predicament is not answered by any theology which speaks of the Cross as a revelation of love and mercy—and goes no further. But the primitive proclamation went much further. It spoke of an objective transaction which had changed the human situation and indeed the universe, the kosmos itself. It spoke of the decisive irrevocable defeat of the powers of darkness. It spoke of the Cross . . . as the place where three factors had met and interlocked: the design of man, the will of Jesus, the predestination of God. . . . [T]his three-fold drama can be understood only when the New Testament teaching on the invisible cosmic powers . . . is taken seriously and given due weight (8-9).

Therefore, one of the central reasons why evangelical Christians miss the biblical emphasis on the cosmic powers, and then place too much attention on personal demons and the trials of individual believers, is to be found in a recovered biblical theology of the cross. Stewart was correct, Dawn argues, that "the only valid doctrine of the atonement . . . is linked to a full New Testament Christology recognizing that God reconciled the world in Christ" (9). This concept eliminates dualism, a prevalent heresy in many evangelical circles today, and recovers the central emphasis of Paul that "Christ has conquered the powers and displays his lordship over them" in this present age (9). The rest of Dawn's book is an answer to the question of the nature of these "powers" and how we can practically render them defeated in the everyday life of the congregation.

Both pastors and lay readers will profit from this book. I cannot recommend it too highly. If I had the authority to do it, and surely the only authority I have is to persuade you as a

reader in some way, I would require every church leader in America to read this book as soon as possible. It has the potential of reforming the theology of church leaders and thus impacting the church at the grass roots level like very few books I have read. Get this book, read it, mark it, and then read it again. I am not a prophet, at least in the sense that I have the ability to predict the future, but if you are teachable at all this book will impact your life deeply if you read it carefully.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief



**REFORMATION AND SCHOLASTICISM: AN
ECUMENICAL ENTERPRISE**

Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, editors
Grand Rapids: Baker (2001)
311 pages, paper, \$24.99

New studies of the Reformation abound in our day. But far too few who read volumes on Reformed doctrine understand that no theological development ever took place in a vacuum. The earliest sixteenth-century Protestant theologians, for example, were deeply influenced by the thought of their time. (No one arrives at conclusions *ex nihilo*.) Two of the dominant influences were humanism and scholasticism. Both are too often misunderstood.

As surely as Calvin and Luther were the first generation of a great theological development, so those who followed them developed their own ideas in several different directions. The question that often plagues the scholar of the sixteenth century theological recovery is not simply what did Calvin and Luther say, but what did orthodox writers say *after* their death, in the late sixteenth century, and in the early seventeenth century? When this question is properly posed you are compelled to consider the impact of the scholastic method upon the generations that followed the great Reformers.

Richard A. Muller, one of the foremost students of the Protestant scholastics, insists that the only way to approach this question is through the actual written works of important Protestant theologians. These include Casper Olevianus (*Firm Foundation*), Theodore Beza (*Table of Predestination*), and Jerome Zanchius (*Confession of Faith*). To meet this need, Muller, along with a growing number of serious scholars from both Europe and North America, have been translating and publishing such works, with new introductions for modern readers.

In addition to this current republication agenda, titled "Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought," this group of scholars has also prepared monographs of varying importance. This present volume, *Reformation & Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Perspective*, is one such volume. It consists of thirteen essays by highly respected European and American church historians which were presented during a colloquium at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. The purpose here is to engage in the present debate on continuity/discontinuity with regard to the relationship of medieval scholasticism, the first Protestant Reformers, and the rise of Protestant orthodoxy in the later creeds and writings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Is there sharp continuity between these three eras? Or, as some twentieth-century writers argued, sharp discontinuity?

The essays here range from "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism—A Review and Definition," by the aforementioned Richard Muller, to studies of scholasticism and its relationship to the Middle Ages. A very important essay is "Thomism in Zanchi's Doctrine of God." There is also an essay on the Puritan, John Owen, and his relationship to scholasticism. The final two chapters take a wide-angle look at scholasticism by showing its impact upon the disciplines of systematic theology and hermeneutics.

The central thesis of this collection is that nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of post-Reformational theology are inadequate at best, if not outright wrong. Along with this the editors tell us, in an excellent introduction, that "one is

struck by how often the term scholasticism is used in a pejorative sense, namely in the sense of 'speculative,' 'rigid,' 'dead and dry.' However, all these predicates are value judgments, and are therefore unacceptable" (21). In addition the evidence presented against Protestant orthodoxy is far too often monolithic in its presentation, which simply does not fit the evidence.

But what is the scholastic method? That question is not as easy to answer as one would hope. One twentieth-century writer has understood Reformed scholasticism in terms of six characteristics: (1) a theology characterized by basic assumptions and principles upon which a logical belief system is built, (2) a heavy dependence on the methodology and philosophy of Aristotle, (3) a strong emphasis on the role of reason and logic in religion, (4) a heavy emphasis upon the doctrine of God, especially relating to the question of the will of God (or decrees), (5) an approach to Holy Scripture which tends to view it as a body of propositions, and finally, (6) an a-historical and timeless element in Protestant scholasticism (23). The editors of this particular volume believe that some of the above characteristics are simply false while others should be seriously qualified to be of any use. I am *not* persuaded that they make their case.

Let me elaborate briefly. The editors adopt a current definition of scholasticism (25) early in the Introduction: "an approach [method] which is characterized by the use, in both study and teaching, of a constantly recurring system of concepts, distinctions, definitions, proposition analyses, argumentative techniques, and disputational methods." Muller weighed in on this debate some years ago and argued that there is a clear connection between Reformed orthodoxy and the whole Western tradition. Luther and Calvin did not so much break from the past as they developed it and, in this view, then their scholastic heirs carried it further.

I have some sympathy with this thesis, especially given the improper way modern writers have often referred to scholasticism in the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. At the same time I find myself recalling the words of a friend who

asked me, when he saw me reading this volume, "John, don't you really think a good bit of this is the story of the dog chasing his own tail?" I have to agree.

If scholasticism is "primarily . . . indicative of a method, which supplied the broad framework within which doctrines could be developed, and which was not bound, in terms of method and content, to any philosophy, such as that of Aristotelianism," then I fail to see that a good portion of the twentieth-century criticisms that J. S. Bray, Karl Barth, Brian Armstrong, and others have developed is all that far removed from the point—that the scholastic method was employed to create a theology that grew less out of the text of the Bible and more from external questions put to the Bible by the method itself.

It seems to me that a genuinely evangelical reformation must get its categories from the Bible first. If a theology begins with wrong methods the results will not be faithful to the trajectory of the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament. I fear this is exactly what a great deal of the neo-reforming movement of our time has done. What frustrates me is that so few wish to actually discuss the methods they use. The great assumption in all of this popularizing of scholastic Protestantism theology is that the method is a given which is most likely not admitted. I am persuaded the reality is otherwise.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief