

boasted the highest-quality station in the study—WEHT, an ABC affiliate—as well as the third best, WEVV, a CBS affiliate.

Most local TV newscasts “are far from

excellent,” providing coverage that is “superficial and reactive,” the authors note. But “there is a wider range of quality out there than many critics might think.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Henry VIII's 'Middle Way'

“The Making of Religious Policy, 1533–1546: Henry VIII and the Search for the Middle Way” by G. W. Bernard, in *The Historical Journal* (June 1998), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011–4211.

Who was the architect of King Henry VIII's religious policy after he broke with Rome in 1533? Thomas Cromwell, say many historians of the Tudor era. Henry was only “the plaything of factions,” dominated during that decade by Cromwell, his principal adviser.

Bernard, a historian at the University of Southampton, England, paints a different picture, one of a determined king who knew his own theological mind very well.

“A break with Rome was being threatened and ideas that could justify it were being

aired,” Bernard says, “as early as 1527,” when the king began his effort to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (who had not produced a son), and marry Anne Boleyn. This was well before Cromwell's rise to prominence. That the actual break with Rome did not take place until after Cromwell's rise was not due to kingly indecision. Henry had to lay the groundwork in his own realm first, Bernard points out.

After the break did occur, Henry “was deeply involved in efforts to define true religion,” Bernard notes. “Many prefaces, petitions, and letters reveal his participation in debates.” The king, he argues, skillfully and consistently sought “a middle way” between the papists and religious radicals such as the Sacramentarians (who regarded the sacraments as merely symbolic) and the Anabaptists (who opposed infant baptism). “He was anti-papal, against the monasteries, against superstitious and idolatrous abuses, but he was also opposed to novelties, to justification by faith alone, and upheld something like traditional teaching on the mass.”



King Henry VIII does not need much help from his advisers to tram-
ple Pope Clement VII, in this painting from the period.

By the mid-1530s, Henry's bishops in the Church of England were split over various theological issues. He chose "repeatedly to gather bishops and theologians together and to cajole and to persuade them to reach an agreement on the principles of true religion," Bernard says. Inevitably, this meant compromise, ambiguity, and even contradiction—which Henry "skillfully used . . . to advance" his own complicated religious convictions on such matters as freeing departed souls from purgatory.

Cromwell, whose own theological beliefs are hard to discern, says Bernard, was "immensely useful" to Henry. But by 1540, his reputation as a radical Protestant had made him a liability, especially since the king was considering an alliance with Catholic France or the Holy Roman Empire. So Cromwell was dismissed, and executed as a heretic and a traitor. But this, Bernard writes, did not usher in "any sustained conservative inquisition," or end Henry's determined quest for "a middle way."

Confronting the Void

It is not only unbelievers who confront the problem of meaninglessness, Michael Novak, author of *The Experience of Nothingness* (rev. ed., 1998), points out in *Society* (Jan.–Feb. 1999).

*It is an oddity that those who seek God become quite familiar with the experience of nothingness. It isn't new to them. They have, in a way, more to say about it than the innocent atheist, who seems surprised by the night and sometimes (like the poet Dylan Thomas) rages, rages against it, and sometimes (like Bertrand Russell in *Mysticism and Logic*) marches around it with empty boasts of defiance. Nothingness is familiar terrain traversed in great inner pain. . . .*

The prophets, saints, and mystics who have shaped our moral traditions—essentially Jewish and Christian or, as we say, "Western"—were quite well experienced in nothingness, meaninglessness, emptiness. They did not build up our moral sense upon illusions, but upon every experience of irrationality, terror, oppression, lack of faith, and emptiness of heart that any human is likely to face.

A Repenting Church

"Jews and Catholics: Beyond Apologies" by David Novak, in *First Things* (Jan. 1999), 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 400, New York, N.Y. 10010.

When the Vatican issued a statement on the Holocaust last year, many American Jewish leaders criticized it as a whitewash. Although the Vatican condemned the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, and even spoke of "the sinful behavior" of certain members of the church, it stopped short of an official apology. Novak, a professor of Jewish studies at the University of Toronto, argues that the Jewish response "reflects a misunderstanding not only of Catholic theology but of Jewish theology as well." The Catholic Church is undertaking something "more prolonged and more painful than any mere apology."

The most criticized part of the Vatican's

statement was a quotation from Pope John Paul II: "In the Christian world—I do not say on the part of the church as such—erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility toward this people." The critics objected to the pope's apparent exclusion of the church as an institution worthy of criticism.

When a Catholic says "the church," Novak argues, there are two possible meanings. In both cases, an "apology" would be inappropriate. At one level, the church is "a collection of fallible human beings." But