

append to his quotations “in reply to a question from representatives of the press.” The ABC television network was initially owned by Edward Noble, maker of Life Savers.

Alas, the book misspells the name of candyman Noble and, in places, those of Mathew Brady, Annie Leibovitz, Rupert Murdoch, Britney Spears, and even a couple of contributors, Jeffery Smith and Everette Dennis. Spelling isn't the only thing that's spotty. Editor Stephen L. Vaughn, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, includes entries for the left-leaning magazines *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, and *Mother Jones*, but not for the conservative publications *National Review*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *The American Spectator*. Granted, the choices at Madison newsstands may be limited.

They just shrank some more. In April, Madison's *Capital Times* stopped the presses forever. The paper now appears only online. “We are going a little farther, a little faster,” Clayton Frink, the publisher, told *The New York Times*, “but the general trend is happening everywhere.” With its understandable emphasis on print and broadcasting, the *Encyclopedia of American Journalism* may turn out to be a book of the dead.

STEPHEN BATES, a contributing editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, teaches in the Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

---

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

## Bad to the Bone

Reviewed by Jeffrey Burton Russell

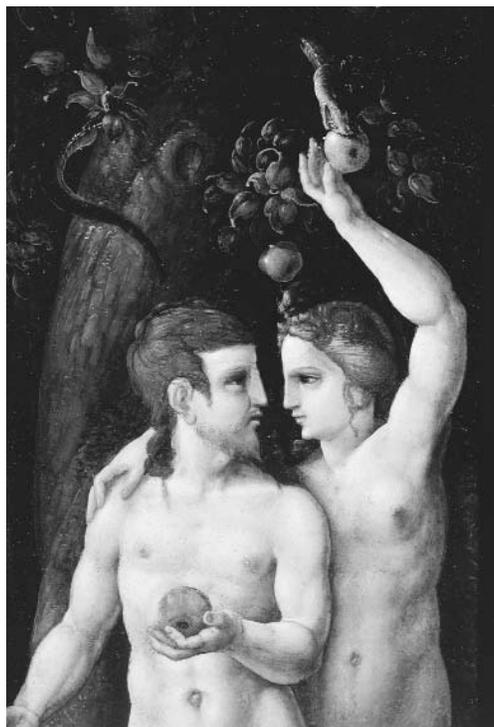
AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION through the ages has been whether human nature is basically good or basically evil. If it is good, general human progress may be assumed; if it is intrinsically flawed, then the American Founders were right in declaring that nature has to be constrained by justice. Though G. K. Chesterton and others have suggested that original sin is the only empirically demonstrable Christian doctrine, views on what original sin is vary. In this reflective,

**ORIGINAL SIN:**  
A Cultural History.

By Alan Jacobs.  
HarperOne.  
286 pp. \$24.95

original, and witty book, Wheaton College English professor Alan Jacobs displays wide learning worn lightly as he examines the views of writers as diverse as Benjamin Franklin and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jonathan Edwards and C. S. Lewis, and Sigmund Freud and J. R. R. Tolkien.

The concept of original sin predates Christianity, Jacobs points out, citing not only Genesis 3, in which Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and are expelled from Paradise, but also Psalm 51, which declares that humans are conceived in sin and born in iniquity. “The universality of sin,” Jacobs concludes, “is certainly a Jewish belief.” He explains that the traditions of both Eastern and Western Christianity, though varying in their details, have it that God created human nature intrinsically good, that goodness must entail freedom if it is not to be robotic, and that Adam and Eve freely chose their own will over that of God, thus committing original sin—an alienation from God common to all humanity. All humans participate in original sin, whether it is transmitted from generation to generation through



Detail from *The Original Sin* (16th-century triptych, German school)

time, or whether the entire human race chooses in one eternal moment to disobey God.

Jacobs efficiently defends Augustine (AD 354–430) against the many attacks against him as the author of original sin, demonstrating that doctrines of original sin similar to Augustine's preceded him by at least two centuries in both the East and the West. Jacobs quickly dismisses the still widely held belief that original sin was sexual—Adam and Eve practiced free sex in Eden before their eviction. Original sin is the initial assertion of human *pride* against God. Augustine did maintain that original sin, once it existed, was *transmitted* sexually through generations, in much the same way that today we understand genetic flaws are passed on. Contrary to another common misconception about Augustine, he was adamant that the source of sin does not lie in the body but rather in the corruption of the will. In fact, he spent a great deal of his career denouncing the Manichean belief that the human body is essentially evil.

Jacobs's most original and provocative argument is that original sin has strong democratic implications. Denial of original sin leads to elitism: Take, for instance, the duchess who simply refuses to believe that she shares a common nature with the unkempt commoners of field and street, or the self-righteous people who believe that they can make themselves good by stacking up a higher pile of good deeds than of bad ones. Their underlying assumption is that some people have exempt status, or higher virtues, or brighter minds, that others lack—plainly speaking, that some people (usually *us*) are better than other people (*them*). Original sin, on the other hand, is egalitarian because it means that *everyone* is alienated from God and has an innate tendency to sin. Equally egalitarian is the belief that Christ died in order to give *everyone* the liberty to escape sin. No one person can dare to consider himself or herself better than others, and no nation or race should dare to do so either. Jacobs offers this fascinating angle on the age-old debate in a splendid book.

JEFFREY BURTON RUSSELL is emeritus professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is the author of 17 books and numerous articles on history, religion, and philosophy. His most recent book is *Paradise Misland: How We Lost Heaven and How We Can Regain It* (2006).

## The Holy Web

Reviewed by Mary Swander

TWELVE YEARS AGO, SHARMAN Apt Russell sat down on her porch in Silver City, New Mexico, and decided to become a Quaker. For Russell, adopting the Quaker religion meant not only joining a group of like-minded people whose traditions include pacifism and a commitment to right the wrongs in the Peaceable Kingdom, but finding her own definition of “standing in the Light.” Her group consists of unprogrammed Quakers and Universalists. They have no minister, no creed, no scripture. Rather, they gather in silence, “waiting—waiting for the Light.”

On her porch steps, Russell had an epiphany. She found her Light in pantheism. In middle age, with her children growing up, instilled with a sense of her own mortality by her father's early death, Russell embarked on a spiritual quest to practice and more clearly define a belief system that falls under the umbrella of paganism—any nontheistic belief that is not Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. But isn't pantheism just a New Age belief in tree spirits? Russell's friends asked. Isn't it mysticism with an experience of the supernatural? Russell answers these questions and others in her investigation of this little-understood belief.

Pantheists include a wide spectrum of thinkers—from the Greek *physici* philosophers, to practitioners of Eastern religions, to dualists, to Romantic poets, to contemporary deep ecologists and cell biologists. But the basic belief is that “the universe is an interrelated whole that deserves human reverence.” In the words of the Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius, “Everything is interwoven, and the web is holy.” As part of that web, Russell says, we are “called upon to celebrate our existence in the universe, no matter what and who we are, blessed or not, whole or broken, deserving or undeserving.”

Throughout her exploration of spiritual thought, she interweaves a narrative of her work as a naturalist. Her observations of herds of jave-

**STANDING IN THE LIGHT:**  
My Life as a Pantheist.

By Sharman Apt Russell.  
Basic. 306 pp. \$25