

[1975. Review of To Prod the Slumbering Giant!, by Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship. ("Toronto Scholarship"), Blue Banner Faith and Life (Jul.-Sep.). Reproduced by Permission of Crown and Covenant Publications]

Toronto Scholarship

By Gordon H. Clark

The Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, by its very title, claims to advance scholarship. Various articles in several periodicals have questioned its commitment to Biblical Christianity; this short article aims to make just one point about its scholarship.

To Prod the Slumbering Giant (Wedge Publishing Foundation) contains essays by seven authors connected with the AACCS and its kindred organizations. On page 101 the following is found:

"This dualism has been aggravated by individualism. What is individualism? It is a view of man that goes way back to the ancient pagan Greeks. It is the idea that men are really only individual islands, and that each is on his own. They must cooperate of course, but only because of necessity. The ideal man is the individual, independent man, who stands on his own two feet. In North America individualism found fertile soil. Who doesn't know of the ideal of rugged American individualism?"

The point of this paragraph in its context is to connect American rugged individualism with pagan Greek philosophy and thus lower the American ideal in the eyes of Christians.

With the interests of Scholarship in mind, let us ask who were those pagan Greek advocates of American individualism? The remaining fragments of the Presocratics are so sparse that one cannot be sure what their views were on this subject. Heraclitus sometimes seems arrogant, but his theory of *hylozoism* and the universal divine fire is far from individualistic. One can only guess the views of the other Presocratics.

The Sophists might be thought of as individualists; but Protagoras – and he is the only one whose views on this subject are known – pictured man, not so much as an individual human being, but rather as a disconnected aggregate of sense organs inside a wooden horse of Troy.

Plato's doctrine that each individual soul is eternal may sound like individualism; but the school he founded, culminating in Plotinus, developed his views by arguing that all souls are one. Each of us is a part of the World-Soul. Then, so far as politics is concerned, Plato was as anti-individualist and totalitarian as one could wish or fear.

Aristotle held that the primary realities are individual things, like Mount Olympus and Socrates. But he also held that the individual being is born in a family, out of which grows civil government; and that State, the all inclusive community, controls every effort to achieve the all inclusive highest good. Aristotle was more of a totalitarian than a rugged individualist.

Maybe the Epicureans were individualists. Epicurus advocated celibacy and recommended taking no part in civil affairs. If this can be called individualism, at least it is not

very rugged. Surely it is doubtful that North American Puritans sought their doctrine of man in Epicureanism.

Stoicism, the most vigorous Greek school from 300 B.C. to A.D. 200, developing the views of Heraclitus, considered man as a spark of the universal divine fire. This is pantheism, not individualism. And as mentioned above, the culmination of all Greek philosophy in Plotinus taught that all souls are one.

A more scholarly search for the source of American individualism might better terminate on Martin Luther and the priesthood of all believers, in opposition to papal corporatism. Or a close origin might be found in the Puritans themselves. A.A. Hodge, though he lived too late to be the source of individualism, belies the Greek thesis by arguing from Scripture that every soul is an immediate individual creation. But whatever factors contributed to the Protestant American view, a sloppy reference to pagan Greek philosophy is no sign of scholarship.

Finally, if individualism is to be disparaged by association with Aristotle or the Epicureans, why can not anti-individualism be associated with the pantheism of Hegel and the communism of Marx?