

~~grace~~
~~holiness~~ grace
 gnosis
 prayer & ritual
~~pure ritual~~
 the theodicy
 penitential
 evolution
 exceptional & technology
~~man~~
 humanistic religion to God
 the divinity of the
 nature of the God
 the transcendence
 fundamentalism

God is not
a fundamentalist

unworthy of ourselves or too risky for our ~~spiritual~~ or adventurous

capacities, *or opposed too magnetically to our spiritual inclinations*

ML: Still, in Advertisements for Myself, you take sides, you say that humankind is roughly more good than evil.

NM: No, ~~that~~ *That* was my assumption about the faith some of us have in democracy, our belief that it will work because there's more good than bad in us as a human multitude. ~~It~~ *That* still remains to be proven.

Still, if we ~~still~~
ML: That's what I want to know. If we are roughly more good than evil, would that signal the ultimate victory of good?

There is no guarantee.
NM: Yes, but what I would argue is the absence of any guarantee.

This is an
That is the ~~existential~~ question—by existential in this case, I mean a not-yet-determined answer, no one can answer this question

To yet. When you say existential, it means you *are in the* do not have the

[~~am~~ God edits]

#2



ML: In our first interview, you said you believe in God's existence and in His limited nature. It's also true that many, if not most humans, have an inherent, or an imprinted, or intuitive belief in God as all-powerful. They can't think of God in any other way. We have lots of people who could say, "My intuitions are as good as Norman Mailer's, and I can't imagine a God who isn't all-powerful."

NM: Their intuition may be more powerful than mine. *Let me, however,* If I can just go through *my beliefs* sketchily—when I was a child, I believed in an all-powerful God. Of course. Most children do. Then there was a period when I was a fierce atheist. [!]For many years! By now, philosophically speaking, atheism is more incomprehensible to me than the notion that there's a Creator. And to this day, if I were arguing with an atheist, I would suggest: "The burden of proof is

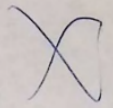
I remember in my play, The Deer Park, at the end, its hero, who is dying, says, "Where I go, I do not know. It may be ^{for} ~~far~~ worse."

And that is the terror supporting fundamentalism. Police systems are built on it. The phrase "keep your nose clean"—that is an aspect of fundamentalism. And the true believers' dependence on Revelation is also immense for just that reason. I would go so far as to argue that fundamentalism is one of the Devil's strongest tools:

the Devil adores fundamentalism because it keeps people from thinking. So long as people ^{don't} ~~can't~~ think, then they can't ^{begin to} ~~carry out~~ God's notions. The irony is that ^{(by subscribing (they think) to God's will)} ~~they are then~~ blind to God's will.

^{Squeeze themselves out.} They are frozen out. ^{with} ~~(They cannot collaborate with God's even if~~ they ^{long to} ~~wish to~~

they become



Nothing is one hundred percent. The point of writing novels is to show what the costs are in human activities. If I may quote myself again, at the end of The Deer Park, Eitel is told by a former wife, "Charlie, you have real dignity now," and he thinks it's a nice compliment. "Because what was ^{dignity} real dignity, but a knowledge of the cost, the frightful cost, of every human desire?" I've always ^{loved} ~~loved~~ that line because for me, it's the essence of the novel, the frightful cost of human desire.

So why not extend that to the frightful cost of divine desire, where the loss is greater? God might have had an earlier conception of human existence more beautiful, much more beautiful than the one He's left with now.

ML: Let me give you another model. A friend of mine has been sending me stuff on Simone Weil. I don't know if you. . .

NM: I know her work slightly. Dwight MacDonald used to write about her with adoration.

ML: Well, she's not afraid to think in bold terms—but I don't know if you'll agree.

Here's one of her ideas: she believes that God became limited in the course of creating the universe. She saw the act of creating the universe as a an act of renunciation, one of power-sharing with humans.

NM: I accept the power-sharing; that's implicit in everything I've said.

ML: Because God existed alone in His endless powers, so on.

Then suddenly He created something—He's giving something away. She believed that humans had a role to play because of this

ML: ~~Yes~~ ^{Bible} Thomas's Gospel is, of course, not in the ~~canon~~, but is a suppressed gospel, discussed most recently by Elaine Pagels. In her book, "The Gnostic Gospels" ? [TITLE TK] Thomas's Gospel states that as human beings, we all have the obligation to "bring forth what is within." And if we do, it will save us. If you keep in what is in, repress it, whatever it is—it will destroy you.

NM: I used to believe that entirely. I now think it is generally true, but risky. Because what does it mean to bring forth what is within ^{you?} ~~you~~ I work on the notion that there's godliness within us and diabolism as well. So to bring forth what is within you, it is necessary, very often, to expel the worst elements of yourself. Because if they stay within, they can poison you. That is much more complex than saying, "Get it out! Act it out. Be free, man! Liberate yourself." Because very often what comes out is so bad that it injures others, sometimes dreadfully. You could say that every crime of violence ^{is} ~~was~~ a way of getting the ugliness in oneself out, acting it out, doing it. You could even advance the



translates into ethics. But what you tell me over and over again is,

"We can't be sure." It would be very difficult to construct an

ethical system by which to live one's life based on your ^{scheme of beliefs,} cosmology.

Have you thought of that?"

NM: I think your point is excellent. I do search for an ethic I can

believe in. And that is where I go back to trusting the authority of

my senses. They can also be—what's the word I'm looking for?—

traduced. They too—it's a perfect place for the Devil to set in.

They too. To the degree that the Devil may affect our senses, it's a

perfect place for the devil to get to us. That would be the Devil's

aim exactly—to enter our senses, make us feel we're having a

godly emotion when in fact, we're having an emotion controlled by

the Devil—warped to a degree, distorted from the point.

Nonetheless, the toughest thing in my ~~theology~~ if I dare to ~~]~~

~~call it "my theology."~~ Let's say my ideas, my religious ideas ~~the]~~

~~toughest single thing in it~~ ^{that} is I don't have any bones to offer. The

worst that can be said about fundamentalism is that it reduces

moment seems to be feasible and responsible and decent, that
certainly gives me a better feeling than if I ^{I am} uneasy, dissatisfied
with myself and not liking myself.

Now, obviously, there is room for error. We all know about
vanity. There are people who, when they like themselves, are
dangerous. When they think they ^{are} extraordinary and fabulous,
they can be awful. So I keep coming back to this. One reason I
know this putative theology of mine will never take off, will never
be a religious movement, ^{that} is it's too difficult. It offers too little and
demands too much.

ML: So it isn't so much that you have no ethical system. It's just
an ethical system that cannot be abstracted, nor carved on tablets
for people to carry around and consult whenever they have to make
a decision. ^{Life is} It's always more complicated than any rule that can be
laid down.

NM: What I'm asking for—this is an odd analogy, but not
entirely—there are certain people who worship sex, good sex. I

doesn't have to feel every woman's ass he's tempted to latch his hand onto. He looks to be discriminating. The road back to balance is discrimination.

ML: A phrase comes to mind—I'm sure you ^{won't} ~~don't~~ like it—that [^] crudely speaking applies to a lot of what you've been saying, and that's "situation ethics."

NM: You mean: do the right thing in the circumstances. It's Black. First, what does "do the right thing" mean? Blacks are talking about situations ~~whites~~ have rarely considered in their full complexity. You're a drug dealer and you're cutting your stuff and there's a guy who, on the one hand is a fool—you can take him completely and give him plain talcum powder. On the other hand, you can see he really needs it, needs a drug at that moment. So "do the right thing"—don't cut his stuff to a ridiculous level. ^{Lose a little of the profit.}

^{What I'm getting at is} ~~at every level of human existence, no~~ ^{fix} matter how evil certain activities may seem to others ^{on the} ~~outside~~, there is a caution present along with the ^{ugly} impulse, ~~except~~

understand. He worked out an immensely elaborate and beautiful art but it's full of renunciation, ^{had} and we pay the price. If he ^{had} been greater as a writer, Americans would be that much better off.

James is not much of a guide to the modern world, ~~any more~~. A marvelous guide when you're younger to understanding some of

~~the crazy things — not crazy things~~ the subtly disproportionate things that go on in ~~society, particularly~~ high society. He's a great

guide to a very limited mountain pass that most people will not ~~approach~~ ^{traverse}.

~~approach~~. But renunciation is ~~what~~ did him in. If James had had a few passionate love affairs and had been able to write about them—

ML: He saw them as antithetical. It's the life/art division. James ^{that you} ~~said~~, "You can have a life OR you can have the art and I'm going to have the art." ^{be/rev 201}

NM: Look, I agree, and it surprises me to a degree, particularly now that I'm old. I've been on record as saying if you want to be a

good that the devil has to use extraordinary and exhausting efforts
~~to create a defeat~~
~~to defeat this him or her~~, and so the saint serves God's purpose ~~and~~ ^{by}
~~weaving the Devil out~~
~~thereby the saint is happy too.~~

JML: But all saints are not defeated.

NM: Give me an example of some triumphant saints.

JML: Saint Peter.

NM: Saint Peter ~~was a mess~~. He deserted Christ three times.

JML: But then he redeemed himself and started Christianity.

NM: Yes, and Christianity ~~it's~~ still be laboring under the fact that
 it was Peter who commenced it. You've got a three-time
 treacherous associate there. . .

JML: There are other saints. . .

NM: I won't say that people can't repent, that they can't restore
 their spirit back to something finer, but nonetheless renegades ~~are~~ ^{do have}
 to remain under suspicion.

JML: That, in a way, brings me to my next question. Your god
 and your devil are limited, I assume—
^{and}

NM: ~~I did~~. Yes, he's perfect in a beautiful way that took care of a great many animals, and thereby brought us a little more into sympathy with creatures who often feel more life than ourselves, but I don't know that he improved human nature particularly, not even by his fine example. I'm asking, rather, about the kind of saints who are trying to change human nature, and almost always end up as martyrs. Indeed, the way they become saints is that they were martyrs first.

JML: The one way we know a saint is a saint, at least in Christianity, is that they were martyred. St. ^{Stephen}~~Steven~~ was martyred, St. Sebastian was martyred. . .

But you mentioned animals. To shift for a moment: how far down does the chain of being—or, if you will—the war between god and the devil manifest itself?

NM: I have no idea.

JML: You said that dogs have souls.

NM: Yes.

perfectly possible, that some or all of us have to descend to the bacteriological level and return from there. My guess is it's not that elaborate a chain of reincarnation for that would propose a most complex universe in the after-life. I would rather assume there's a purpose ^{to} for everything, including the ^{biological} agents that ~~tend to~~ infect us and kill us. It may be there are agents of death with which God experiments as fully as God experiments with the development of human and animal life. In that sense, life and death are counterparts of the same ongoing existence.

JML: ~~Yang and yin. Interpenetrating.~~

NM: ~~OK.~~

JML: You've talked a lot about the moment of death and the state of mind one is in at the moment of death—this follows, I think from what you just said. Peace of mind, I think, is important to many religions—peace of mind at death, none more so than Catholicism. ^{The Church} Which actually has a sacrament called Extreme ^{"Anointing"} Unction [JML, CK w/ JM: now called "Sacrament of the Sick" or

Note:
Let's get this settled

~~some such] which~~ ^{It} was created by the Church to give ^{hope} to people ~~at~~ ^{who} ~~the moment of~~ ^{we're near} death.

NM: How did the Church arrive at ^{such} ~~this~~ confidence in its power?

JML: Well, over millennia, the Church created seven sacraments.

And the last one is Extreme Unction. I can't tell you which Father of the Church came up with the theology of it, but there is a sense of the Church reaching out to the individual at the moment of death and applying all of its powers to giving that person peace of mind as they passed over.

NM: Or, at least, giving them a belief in peace of mind. . .

JML: From the Church's point of view, Extreme Unction works—and I've seen people receive it—and you know, it does give them tremendous peace of mind.

NM: I can believe it's effective. Certainly for devout Catholics, it would be. Let me tell you a small story about a dear friend of mine, Eddie Bonetti, who was dying of cancer. ~~And~~ I spoke to him

They've been rotten to people, horrible to people, ^{but} and maybe they
feel a bit of contrition at the end. ^{Catholicism} Your religion is based on that.

JML: Absolutely.

NM: Between the stirrup and the ground. I've always found it
excessively sentimental and too easy: be evil all your life and as
you're falling from the horse, before your head is knocked off your
body—

JML: Say a perfect Act of Contrition!

NM: Yes! I've always found that extreme. And a little
convenient. The Catholic Church is not only a study in immense
human wisdom, but what applied skill it has at maneuvering our
thoughts around the tightest corners.

JML: It's thought of almost everything. It has an answer for
almost everything, every issue.

You spoke a little bit about limbo but I don't recall that you
said much about purgatory—as an idea, as a place, as a metaphor.

have, according to the Catholic Church, ~~would~~^S depend on what
your crimes were.

NM: I see purgatory in altogether different terms. The notion that if you suffer long enough you'll purge yourself—I don't see any reason to have that in the ~~hereafter~~. I would suggest instead that being reborn takes care of purgatory. For some people, life is, indeed, purgatory. For a few people, life is heaven—they're happy *so much* ~~99%~~ of the time. For some people, life is hell. I don't think we need these other structures. I think we pay our debts through our reincarnations. That makes much more sense to me than these immensely wasteful places called heaven and hell where nobody does anything, where nothing's brought back into the divine economy. *and* people are just marking time.

I see God ~~if you will~~ as being Faustian, aiming to go further. God is not satisfied with His or Her creation, God wants it ~~all~~ to become better. Therefore, wasteful procedure is anathema to God. So, I do see heaven, purgatory and hell, therefore, as wasteful

don't know what, and we're full of fear of taking the ^{next} step we now believe is demanded of us. Most men meet purgatory in terms of their personal courage. If they're afraid—if they're afraid of playing football, putting on the pads and going out to play can be purgatory. Boxing can be purgatory. Skiing, if the trail is steep and narrow, and the ^{moguls} ~~moguls~~ are formidable, can certainly reduce you. Bungee-jumping can be purgatory—brief but intense. Men—now women are beginning to search for that purgatory as well. It used to be that women's purgatory was related to the terrors of childbirth. After all, in the Middle Ages, there was one chance in ten a woman would die in childbirth. That was a true terror. One had to face ultimates to have a child.

JML: How limbo and purgatory came about, if I'm remembering correctly, in the thinking of Christianity was they began with notions of heaven and hell borrowed from other religions because there were previous religions that had both. Then the structure of the church became more complex and people asked questions.

What if you've been bad but not so bad you should be condemned to eternal hellfire—you've only been sort of bad—and the Church said, "you're right, we have a place for those people where they have modest suffering." Then people said, "what about people outside the Church? We've been told they're condemned but what if they haven't done anything evil? They died at ^{three} 3 years old—a wonderful little child but never baptized. . . ." The Church said, "we have a place for them too." So the Church was trying to create—I'm sure they would have created another place if they'd had to.

But ultimately, the Church began to see the folly of limbo—what a ridiculous idea for people to live in a big empty space forever and no positive pain but no positive joy ^{although the Baltimore} ~~for JML from JM: "perfect~~

~~Catechism decided to offer these innocent~~
~~natural happiness" said the Baltimore Catechism—no beatific~~
~~up perfect natural happiness. No beatific vision~~
~~vision but otherwise OK] would be available but~~
~~no unseemly suffering either. Just limbo.~~

We talked about saints but I never got to my question about demons. I remember you told me some time ago you had an encounter with a demon. Or a succubus or—whatever you want to

Priests had to pray for you, amulets were sewn onto your burial garments, you also needed prayers said by your relatives, you needed a tomb that would protect you from evil spirits when you needed rest—you would go out and explore the underworld, and then you'd come back to your tomb and your spirit entered again into your embalmed mummy which rested, of course, in your highly decorated casket. After some rest, you'd go out into the underworld again. Finally, you made it through the underworld. Sometimes you didn't. Rich Egyptians used to have a prayer: "Oh, Amon, do not let me die a second time in the Land of the Dead."

The Egyptians believed that the second death was final. The first was provisional ^{but} if you were able to ^{find a way} pass through the underworld

into the Elysian fields, you could live forever. So, for them, wealth was crucial. A poor man without the protection of priests, amulets, and a tomb had no chance at all. Which is why you have that long-lived

phenomenon of an early civilization, where most people live at a

subsistence level, but there is fabulous wealth at the top and they certainly know how to protect it.

Xoo
long
?

~~some~~ but I don't subscribe to the iron authenticity of the Old

Testament and the New Testament. Both were written by committee. The Old Testament was put together over a long period by a series of very talented committees, much more talented than the latter-day Bible-builders who composed the New

Testament. On the other hand, the people who wrote the New Testament were ^{good enough} ~~also fine~~ scholars and they were familiar with the best remarks that had been made up to that point in the Old

Testament and by many a sage, prophet, and mystic, ~~and they used that,~~ ~~them.~~ They were also attached to a concept that may or may not be

true. Which is that Jesus was the son of God. They were serious ^{men,} ~~about that,~~ but they were ^{also} ~~still~~ a committee. So, as literary works,

the Old Testament has some faults, and the New Testament a good many. To accept them, therefore, as the absolute map of our spiritual universe is comparable to using the kind of charts

Christopher Columbus had before him when he set out for the

Some thoughts on limbo

To get you caught up on limbo, we have to go all the way back to Adam, Eve and original sin. "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," says the old poem which summarizes the Church's teaching on original sin. Once they had been disobedient and were expelled from the Garden, every human being born thereafter not only had original sin but, far worse, no way to get rid of it.

The Old Testament stories of Noah guided by God to preserve humanity from the flood, the covenant of God with Abraham, Moses' receiving the commandments and the minutiae of Judaic law--all of this was simply preparatory to the birth of Jesus. The Catholic teaching is that prior to the crucifixion that redeemed humanity from original sin, nobody who died could go to heaven. Not Noah, not Moses, not Abraham, not a saint, prophet, or holy man.

Through the Middle Ages, the Church had a belief that as soon as Jesus died on the cross, he gathered up the righteous deceased and took them to heaven. (It coincidentally explained to a linear-thinking humanity why Jesus didn't resurrect for 3 days--he was busy, you see.) This was a popular artistic subject and was always called "The Harrowing of Hell."

Except, of course, hell was a place of eternal torment and the idea of the patriarchs and prophets, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary, roasting to a turn while waiting for Jesus to get crucified didn't quite compute. So enter the idea of limbo, a place of perfect natural happiness where the holy like Anne and John the Baptist are longing for the beatific vision but are not suffering beyond that.

Then as the world grew more cosmopolitan, the Church felt a need to account for the fate of righteous souls like Aristotle, Confucius, Lao Tse, Gautama Buddha and the uncounted numbers of virtuous pagans. OK, then, they were in limbo too. Since they weren't baptized and were without supernatural grace, they couldn't go to heaven. But either they had been born before Jesus and never encountered a Jew either, or had never come near a missionary so their lack of baptism could hardly be held against them. No, they had natural virtues and would therefore have perfect natural happiness--no illness, no sadness, no suffering.

This concept satisfies the Church's determination to be the sole "gatekeeper" of heaven and ultimate appointment's secretary for the Almighty. "Outside the Church there is no salvation." (Of course, some Christians who aren't Catholic have valid baptisms even though they belong to the "wrong" denominations since the clergy can trace their ordinations back to the Pope of Rome in an unbroken line. But that's another complicated topic.) It also maintains the important concept of God as just and not sending to hell those who never committed a serious sin and never had an opportunity to hear about the Church. There had to be someplace between salvation and damnation and it's limbo. But it's only for the virtuous. Hell is open to the seriously evil of all persuasions.

Naturally, unless you believe in original sin, none of this makes much sense so, ironically, many of those reported to be in limbo would probably chuckle politely at the concept. However, it keeps Catholics happy and probably is some real consolation to devout Catholic parents mourning a miscarriage or stillbirth. The child-who-wasn't may have missed heaven, but is eternally safe from damnation and happy.

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J. MICHAEL LENNON

INTERVIEW

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~~IV~~

ML: We have not spoken of ritual as part of religion. Recently my wife

and I went to the ordination of a priest. It was an extraordinary event.

Thirty or forty priests and bishops and deacons stood over the kneeling

aspirant, touching a shoulder or back or, if they could not reach the person,

they touched the shoulder of someone who could. All the while, a chorus in

the background was chanting "Veni, Spiritus Sancte! Veni Spiritus Sancte!"

~~Spiritus Sancte, Veni Spiritus Sancte~~

→ "Veni, Sancte Spiritu,
Veni, Sancte Spiritu."

weren't familiar with some philosophy, you were clearly interested in some philosophical questions—but finally, I guess, that any philosopher who won't propose any ultimates is a very unusual philosopher. As I read it, there is no ultimate nature of god, no ultimate answer to any of these questions. In so reading over everything that we have done so far I keep coming to the thing, we don't know, we can't be certain. And from a philosophical point of view, there's usually one rock somewhere.

NM: Well the rock, what if the rock is in transit? In other words when we say rock we mean something that is eternal. What if eternity is in ~~chassis?~~ ^{passage} ^{itself?}

~~(sounds like I am unfamiliar with this)~~ To use that famous phrase of Saroyan's "The whole foundation is in ~~chassis~~." In other words, eternity

I have
(no notion whether god is in command of black holes in space or is terrified

of them. My fundamental ^{idea} ~~action~~ is that the cosmos ~~as a whole~~ is at war ~~and~~
within itself and

(the god that takes over, that has created us, ~~the artist who created us~~ ^{is}, not the

emperor, but the artist. not Being is you will
This is my most basic notion of God) that god is not a

that Being is not a Being
(law-giver, but an artist, is doing the best that he or she or they can do to

^{Their}
introduce ~~God's~~ notion of existence into the cosmos. There are other notions

in existence out there as well / what turn / take
(other concepts of ~~how~~ the cosmos should be. We

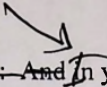
God's venture into the unknown
humans are ~~god's venture~~ / We humans are gods soldiers, God's premises

God's ability to change the given in the cosmos. To ask ~~that~~ And so ~~to~~ To look for

then that the end be positified
where we are going, to say "What is the end?" ~~is~~ philosophically

misleading, since we commence with the
notion that the end is not known,

When I say that I ^{I am} an existentialist, I mean it in the absolute sense of that

 ML: And In your novel, Ancient Evenings, some of the characters ^{de} actually

employ telepathic powers. And I ~~must add that, of course,~~ modern novelists can, in a sense, read minds. Because they're ~~always~~ exploring what people are thinking. One of the great advances I ~~suppose~~ is when the novel moved into the human mind.

In which
NM: What ~~century~~ would you say that was?

ML: Well, it really ^{came} started around a hundred years ago.

~~NM: No more?~~

#6

most obdurate

NM: Right there, you run smack into the ~~uglies~~ *uglies* aspect of Catholicism, the

insistence of Catholicism on God's perfection. What characterizes *my idea of*

Intelligent Design is that it is partial. We do well to grasp the notion that

these are partial attempts. I'm ~~so~~ glad I have the novel to fall back upon ~~as~~ *upon as*

a metaphor for this. When I write a novel, it's an attempt to come up with a

piece of intelligent design, but it's never perfect. Some parts are better than

others and ~~there~~ *that* you find out by publishing ~~the work~~ *the work*. It goes into existence, and then

the ~~returns~~ *critical* come back. Very often ~~the~~ *these* returns have ~~no~~ *little* relation to what you

had written. Occasionally, they do. Slowly, over the years, you learn more.

By the end of your life, you may be wiser as a novelist than when you

started. ~~So, the~~ *then* heart of one of my notions is ~~that~~ *that* God is always looking to

become wiser. ~~God the Father does not always necessarily understand the~~ *He's*

~~children all that well. That is also in the nature of existence. What you~~

~~create, you do not necessarily understand all too well.~~ *may in the beginning not be understood*

ML: Listen to this collision between Aquinas and David Hume: Hume criticized the argument from design. In particular, he emphasized there is no legitimate way to infer the properties of God from the qualities of the world, His creation. For instance, Hume questioned, how can we be sure

(#7)

the spark of
alive ~~the spark~~, to keep alive what is good in human beings *while opposing* ~~and oppose~~ what

is evil.

NM: Would this be a recognition by Sophia that the Demiurge may have
been a bit of a mistake?

JML: Yes.

NM: Most of the Gnostics believe that?

JML: Yes. In some versions, the Demiurge tries to undercut the messenger,

Zor(3)man?

Jesus or Mohammed Zoroaster—these new figures that come in with

wisdom—the Demiurge tries to attack them. Sometimes this gives rise to

NM: And one God. This had to be established, confirmed and ^{3 round} cemented into

the psyche. Which would of course explain the intensity of the early

Christian attacks on the Gnostics.

JML: Yes, they burned their books, they expelled them, they killed them.

^{Gnostic Gospels}
You know, when they found the ~~Dead Sea Scrolls~~ in 1945 in Egypt, those

were remarkable documents, ^{third or fourth} century copies of documents that

went back to the time of Christ. ^{Elsewhere} And they had been systematically burned

and destroyed. But because of the obscurity of this hiding place, these

scrolls had not been uncovered, and so it was a great revelation. Historical

and Biblical scholars had always known about the Gnostics but as ^{somebody} ~~somebody~~

^(SP)
~~whom~~ ^{and Irenaeus}
(Augustine had attacked, Irenaeus attacked). They never heard them speak

^{Gnostic Gospels}
for themselves. When they found the ~~Dead Sea Scrolls~~ they discovered a

completely different Christianity, one that did not embrace a monolithic God

X

NM: Yes, do not ~~try to~~ look into yourself. ^{Refer external} Look to the ~~outside~~ authority.

JML: And so you could say that the final expression of this was in ¹⁸⁷⁰ ~~the 10th~~

century when ^{The Church} Catholicism came up with the infallibility of the Pope.

NM: Yes.

JML: That was always implicit, but finally they had to state it. ^{It} That was a

final consolidation of Papal Power. In a lot of the reading I've done about

Gnosticism, when you think of the world that was in existence around the

time of the birth of Christ, you had two ^{prevailing religions,} ~~visions~~ in the Middle East at any

rate, the Greek and ^{the} Judaic ~~vision~~. They were opposed to each other in a

will enable you to ^{an} ~~the~~ ^{the mighty} affirmation of an oxymoron—God
that you can come out at the end with ~~the~~

~~is~~ All-Good and All-Powerful. Those words ~~All Good and All Powerful~~

violate our experience. ~~The statement is not knowable. Not knowable~~ All

^{can} we know or feel are ~~the~~ intimations ~~at times~~ that something did create us.

There is also our philosophical sense that it is far more difficult to explain

our existence in the absence of a first cause ^{than} ~~rather~~ as the consequence of ^{one} ~~a~~

~~first cause~~. So, ^{can} one believes in God in the way of a latter-day Gnostic. Yes.

It is not because of anything I read, nor anything ^{I have} ~~I've~~ been taught, not

because of what spiritual propagandists have been trying to put in my head

all these years, but simply because it makes sense to me. If there ^{is not} ~~isn't~~ a God,

^{then} I cannot conceive of how the universe around me came to be. So I go on

from there to say that if there is such a God, I have to assume ^{like or she} ~~that God is not~~

~~more~~ ^{no more} perfect than any of us. God is a creator, God is an artist, but God is

still ^{no more than} ~~only~~ doing His or Her best. Or ^{godly} ~~their~~ best—if it happens to be a

say, "Now that you've been through ^{this} ~~that~~, you're a better person for it." We

do that all the time to our children.

NM: On the other hand, there is also large vanity in the assumption that

God knows all about evil. Why not try to live with the notion that God is

trying to discover what evil is about? What if evil is, at present, more

bottomless than good? To say it once again, I work on the notion that God

is not all-powerful, and that opens all sorts of questions. The first is God's

relation to evil. Is He trying to discover more about it? May it be that God

doesn't comprehend evil all that well, any more than as parents we

understand it? If children are moving toward evil, are parents always the

first to know? Not often.

ML: It was Dostoyevsky who said suffering is the ^{sole} ~~sole~~ origin of

consciousness. That only through suffering could we improve our minds,

~~forgive me~~ ~~we~~ call it History. It is one of our fundamental activities. It

enables us to keep on living. I suppose I even offer the assumption that God

is not only like us in many ways but, indeed, He or She also has an ego to

protect.

ML: The next theodicy argues that evil is not the cause, but the

consequence of people failing to observe God's will. Universal,

reciprocated

~~reciprocal~~ love would solve most of the problems that lead to the evils in

the world.

NM: Well, let me go back to something I said earlier. God is searching for

a deeper set of meanings in evil. God does not pretend to understand evil

completely. Evil has aspects that God's understanding cannot penetrate.

The fundamental notion is that God, like us, seeks to learn. Maybe at the

commencement, whatever form it really took, ~~close to Genesis, or vastly~~

could be wiped out at a stroke. And this in the early stages of nuclear development. So if you eliminate all three of those, Hitler, gulags, atom bombs, then maybe I couldn't have come to these ideas. But historically speaking, you can't perform such an excision. ~~[That's what history is]~~ Those three horrors dominate the 20th century. Not to mention the trench warfare of the First World War.

ML: The whole problem of evil—Voltaire heard about the earthquakes in Lisbon in ¹⁷⁵⁵ ~~1711~~ and that's when he stopped ^{said the destruction proved} believing in God. ^{There was no} For exactly that reason. Throughout our history humans have questioned God whenever there was an earthquake, a disaster—of course, many of these were natural disasters. That was bad enough. But, of course why would God allow a natural disaster? You can't blame any of that on humans. That was Voltaire's point ^A at least we can blame the Holocaust on human evil or the Devil. In part, at least. We can't blame an earthquake in

100,000
Lisbon in which ~~50,000~~ people were killed—we can't blame that
on human beings.

NM: No.

ML: So that forced many philosophical thinkers of the
Enlightenment into their—they said, "That's it. God can't possibly
exist. This is ridiculous." But if you take a step back, you can say:
Maybe we're looking at too small a scale. Yes, six million people
were exterminated with untold suffering. The suffering is so great
it's impossible for us to conceive of it. It's horrifying to an extreme
degree to anyone who's ever looked at the photographs or read the
accounts. But maybe, in the larger scheme of things, God was
allowing this to happen to send a message to humanity on how far
it had slipped, and he was even willing to sacrifice his Chosen
People, or a great number of them, in order to send a message to
humanity that it was time to embrace Christianity, embrace love,
do whatever had to be done.

NM: Let me interrupt here--

clue I have is when there's great energy ^{available} ~~going~~ then I expect They are in a temporary collaboration. I would assert that we do have God and the Devil within us in varying degrees. Perhaps one can be—just guessing—as elevated as 70% good, 30% evil. On the reverse, ~~the most evil~~, 70% evil and 30% good. Maybe once in a great while there's a saint—90/10.

But generally speaking, we are mired in good and evil. Mired because we spend most of our time in trade-offs, in the exhaustion of efforts because one part of us wants to do something and the other part is opposed.

Very often our good fights an offensive battle against our evil—that does go on. We know that. The Christian ^{churches} are built on that: fight the evil in your soul.

ML: St. Michael the Archangel.

NM: Yes. But my argument is that it has become a three-way situation. It isn't that we're passive onlookers while God and the devil are at war within us and we ^{in our turn} have nothing to offer. We are the



OK, you as a Catholic may come back to me and say there are such places as purgatory and limbo, but they are temporary conditions before one goes to final judgment.

The argument I would advance is that heaven and hell make no sense if the majority of humans have such a mixture of good and evil within us. There's no reason to receive a reward if you're 57/43—why sit around forever in an elevated version of Club

Med? That's almost impossible to contemplate. You remember the *George Bernard* fun Shaw had with his expectation of heaven as a prodigiously

boring place where Don Juan nonetheless wished to reside because at least you could think there. That was the best Shaw could come up with as a concept for heaven—at least you can think well and carefully in heaven. But my notion is that your partial reward or partial punishment, which I do believe exists—is meted out in your reincarnation. How else account for the ongoing feeling of conscience that we all seem to have?. Conscience is there for good cause; conscience is vital—if, for nothing else, it's there because it

blood of Christ? I wouldn't believe it in a hurry but that wouldn't keep me from becoming a Catholic."

So we went through various ~~elements~~ ^{unwalled and obstacles} and finally he asked again,

"Why, then, can't you be a Catholic?"

"Because," I said, "I don't believe in the omnipotence of God."

And he said, "In that case, I can understand why you're not a Catholic."

ML: All right. Let's return one more time to reincarnation. I can feel that you have more to say on that.

NM: Yes. One ~~thing~~ ^{matter} we've not gotten ~~to~~ ^{into is my} ~~is any~~ ^{trust} supposition (the

atom bomb ~~and~~ the concentration camps and the gulags were

mighty efforts by the Devil to foul up reincarnation, ~~To mess up~~ ^{to choke off}

~~all subtlety of~~ the judgments within reincarnation. I hope I've suggested the

delicate dispositions of God, the care with which the question is

asked: "What shall I do with this soul?" That is at the core of

reincarnation—delicate, responsible, artful, deliberate judgment. If

the process is overloaded, it can break down. God, I repeat, is not all-powerful.

ML: So mass slaughter fouls up the ^{divine} bureaucracy?

NM: Contemplate the mess in eternity when so many human creatures were being slaughtered en masse.

ML: Not if you can go back to an omnipotent god. Most people believe God can handle anything and everything

NM: No, God's energies are also limited, ^{Everything I say is based on that} I would say. (We may live in a universe that is ^{is} expanding but there ~~is~~ not always endless energy available. No. No.

ML: Ae you saying that the Devil does have a purchase on the process of reincarnation?

NM: Through marring it, mainly. Or overloading it.

ML: It was Herman Melville who said—in a line I could never forget—when he was, if I recall, writing Moby-Dick—he said, "Lord, when shall we stop growing?" In your theological belief,

monkeys—no trouble at all, that's how the body was created. And at a certain point God put the soul in. Is that--?

NM: I happen to believe that dogs have souls.

ML: Well. . .

NM: Mind you, in reincarnation you may not come back as a human. You could come back as a dog, and, just as ²(parenthesis, that makes a great deal of sense to me because so many dogs, I find, are ^{closer to the} ~~more~~ human than humans.

ML: Stretch evolution back—people from monkeys or dogs is no trouble at all. That's just ^{three} ~~3~~ million years. But going back—50, 60, 100 million years—when the creatures were coming out of the slime, do you see that at a certain point God puts—

NM: I don't think it's answerable.

ML: Well, what doesn't have a soul?

NM: It makes more sense for me to believe that God was in the slime from the beginning and God was less in those days. God has grown with us. God has grown with evolution.