

CHRISTIANITY IN DYSTOPIA

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THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL is a genre with which most readers are familiar, though they may not know it by name: *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* are all best-selling and prize-winning examples of this type of literature. Largely a twentieth-century phenomenon, dystopian novels continue to enjoy widespread popularity today, both for their entertainment value and for the social commentary they provide.

All dystopian novels present societies that are imaginary. These societies, however, often bear an uncomfortable resemblance to the reader's own society. This resemblance allows the author to critique various trends in his society by extending them into the future world of the novel. Unfortunately, while critical dialogue on dystopian novels has explored their commentary on politics in great detail, the genre's treatment of religion has largely been overlooked. Such an oversight, particularly in light of blatant religious overtones in novels such as *Brave New World*, invites rectification, both to better understand the societies and narratives of dystopian novels and to better apply their social messages to present-day society.

Towards that end, this thesis analyzes several well-known dystopian novels in order to discover a recognizable and consistent pattern in their treatment of religion. The works studied herein include George Orwell's *1984* (published in 1949), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1946), Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Eugene Zamiatin's *We* (1924), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986).

Broadly speaking, my conclusions are as follows: many (though not all) dystopian novels present dystopian societies in a deeply and consciously religious paradigm. The societies presented in these novels are structured around a recognizably theistic or Mosaic template, complete with God-surrogates, attendant priest-figures, and new sins and heresies. In addition, the majority of these societies have made a clear departure from past religions, most notably historical Christianity itself. While institutional present-day Christianity is not usually presented as a danger which could lead to dystopia, pseudo-Christian

religions that worship sociopolitical idols are. Dystopian societies are intended to be a heaven on earth, but these “inversion[s] of the Eden myth” (Sicher 388) are ultimately failures.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF DYSTOPIA

Dystopian novels are a sub-genre of fictional literature, often classified as science fiction, and are defined by several common elements. Gordon Browning provides a good set of characteristics in his essay “Toward a Set of Standards for [Evaluating] Anti-Utopian Fiction”:

1. “The author is, in one way or another, commenting on the nature of his own society by taking what he considers the most significant aspects of the society and projecting them into an imaginary environment” (Browning 18).

Each of the novels I studied had a particular target, so to speak. In *Anthem*, Ayn Rand shows the dangers of a culture that demonizes the word “I.” Both *1984* and *We* address the hazards inherent to collectivism and socialism. *Brave New World* is a warning against happiness at the expense of conscience. *Player Piano* cautions against mechanization and consumerism. *The Handmaid’s Tale* decries misogyny and right-wing extremism. Finally, *Fahrenheit 451* imagines the consequences of a lowbrow, anti-cultural society that cares only about mindless pleasure. The message of a dystopian novel, however, is not so much to warn “that we must brace ourselves for a certain disaster” (18), but that if preventive measures are not taken in the present, today’s society is likely to turn into the novel’s future dystopia.

2. Dystopian novels are set at a remove; “in creating the imaginary society, the author uses for his setting either an isolated and therefore unexplored locality... [or] a time and place in the future” (18).

Some of the novels I studied were set in specific places, such as London or New York; others were less specific. The place-setting in dystopian novels is often functionally insignificant – George Orwell writes, for instance, that *1984* is set in England not because of some tendency inherent to Great Britain, but “in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone

else and that [indeed] totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere” (Roelofs 14).

In contrast, all seven novels are set in the future (from the author’s vantage point, that is – 1984 being a prime example). Moreover, through references to former times (the reader’s present), each novel repeatedly brings its future time-setting to the reader’s attention. This indicates that, while dystopian novelists often de-emphasize place-settings, they do want the reader to catch the time-setting and remember it.

This present-future divide, which separates the reader from the society about which he is reading, is in fact crucial to the function of a dystopian novel: the novel must communicate to the reader that his ‘now’ could become the ‘later’ of the novel’s dystopian world. Without the present-future divide, the social commentary of the novel loses its immediacy and becomes flimsy, a fantastical vision instead of a prophecy.

3. Dystopian novels are formulaic in that they visualize a society which “falls far short of the author’s definition of perfection” because of “characteristically human weaknesses” (Browning 18-19).

In fact, though the definition may be somewhat exaggerated, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists dystopia as “An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible.” This maximally bad situation is caused by humans themselves, not natural catastrophes or epidemics; it is caused, in fact, by the pursuit of fairly common values. *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World* address the human love of comfort; *We* and *Anthem* explore the drive towards communitarianism and self-obliteration; *Player Piano* examines the tendency towards ever-greater productivity and efficiency; and *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *1984* engage the lust for power. Dystopian societies are nightmares in which humanity recognizes the faces of its own passions and drives.

More exactly, dystopian novels serve as mirrors in which the reader is expected to see human passions and drives in the same way as the author does. The various thrusts of each novel show fairly obviously that, for example, Orwell and Zamiatin worried about communism, while Vonnegut worried about computerization and mechanization, and Atwood worried about American-style

right-wing Christianity. These concerns are not always shared by the reader. To create a sympathetic response in the reader, the author will often associate intrinsically repugnant practices with the society or institution he wants to vilify, such as threatening to allow rats to eat off a person's face (*1984*), forcibly performing partial lobotomies on fellow citizens (*We*), producing millions upon millions of babies in an assembly-line process and then selectively retarding their development (*Brave New World*), or sending groups of women off to colonies to clean up radioactive waste without any safety precautions (*The Handmaid's Tale*). It is debatable whether these practices are intrinsic to the ideologies that motivate them in each novel, though they are at least plausible in each situation. The author's primary aim is not, however, to present these practices as necessarily following from a particular ideology, but to depict a cultural atmosphere that the reader will agree is "as bad as possible." The novelist's purpose in writing a dystopian novel is not to present a purely logical ideological argument, but to "give abstract concepts emotional impact" (Weinkauff 271), to make the reader feel an ideology rather than simply think about it.

Browning's standards are useful in and of themselves, but they provide only a general overview of dystopia. In the course of my study, I noticed five additional characteristics which, although perhaps not defining characteristics, can also be broadly applied to dystopian novels.

1. Dystopian novels are realistic. A dystopian novel, as above stated, is set at a spatial or temporal remove from the author's society. However, while the author may ask his readers to accept the possibility of a magically mechanized future society, he will not present a world in which humans fly or rocks fall upwards. A reader will find it hard to identify with the world of a novel if its characters seem contrived, flat, or fantastical, or if its setting is non-realistic. Consequently, dystopian novelists always make their characters recognizably (and unremarkably) human, and always set those characters in a world which is recognizably the reader's world. These characteristics are necessary for the reader to identify with the world of the novel, and consequently for the novel's message to have maximum impact.

2. Dystopian novels portray societies which are ostensibly utopian. Dystopian societies are run by people who are convinced that their society is perfect, and who (more importantly) are invested in that perfection. Aldous Huxley writes in his Foreword to *Brave New World* that “the people who govern the Brave New World... are not madmen, and their aim is not anarchy but social stability” (x). Even *1984*’s O’Brien, a member of the same Inner Party that “seeks power entirely for its own sake” (Orwell 217) and without regard for the well-being of its subjects, can still envision “a world of victory after victory, triumph after triumph after triumph” (Orwell 221).

Dystopian societies are animated by human desire to actualize principles that are normally seen as good: comfort, productiveness, solidarity, power, happiness, and so on. In “The Grand Inquisitor in Schiller, Dostoevsky, and Huxley,” James D. Simons explains that the society of *Brave New World* is designed to be “an expedient one that will lead to material wealth and happiness for the multitude and to easy government for the rulers” (23). In *Brave New World* itself, Mustapha Mond tells John Savage that “people are happy [nowadays]; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get” (149). According to dystopian rulers, and in fact according to the vast majority of average dystopian citizens, life really is utopian (or as utopian as might be expected) – it’s only the protagonist who is dissatisfied. Part of the particular genius of dystopian novels is this insistence that the reader identify with a protagonist who is in essence a reject from a seemingly perfect society. Is the protagonist “the last man” (Orwell 222) in a subhuman society, or just crazy?

3. Dystopian novels pit an individual protagonist or protagonists against a societal or collective antagonist. Not all dystopian novels adhere to the same literary structure: for example, *1984* and *Brave New World* are third-person narratives, *Anthem* is a first-person narrative, and *The Handmaid’s Tale* alternates between first-person storytelling and second-person addresses to the reader. Most, however, do follow a single main character - *Anthem*’s Equality 7-2521, *Fahrenheit 451*’s Guy Montag, *We*’s D-503, *1984*’s Winston Smith, *Brave New World*’s John Savage, *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s Offred, or *Player Piano*’s Paul Proteus. (*Brave New World* differs here slightly; the storyline initially follows a

character named Bernard Marx, and only introduces the Savage on page 77. Once he appears, though, the narrative follows him fairly closely for the remainder of the novel.)

Dystopian protagonists are always the most realistic, three-dimensional, and human of the characters in each novel, and they are the characters that the reader can empathize with most strongly. For example, several critics have highlighted how much more of a developed character is *1984*'s Winston Smith, as opposed to his female counterpart Julia. Likewise, *Anthem*'s Equality 7-2521 is the only character in the entire book that has any real depth or substance at all. *Fahrenheit 451*'s Guy Montag, *We*'s D-503, and *The Handmaid's Tale*'s Offred also serve to prove this point. In effect, the dystopian novel tends to give the reader a highly subjective view of the dystopian society, from only one or a few citizens' perspective. In such a situation, it becomes crucial that the individual protagonist be a realistic, average person, because it is his realism which convinces the reader that the novel's society is indeed dystopian - not only dystopian for the protagonist, but for everyone, including the reader.

In some dystopian novels, such as *1984*, the protagonist is already disaffected with his society when he is introduced; in others, some episode jars the protagonist free from his acceptance of social orthodoxy. In both cases the narrative follows a protagonist's increasing alienation from his society. Almost all dystopian plots involve clashes between the protagonist and his fellow citizens, and ultimately some sort of showdown with the government. In a dystopian society, individualism is criminal, and this "unpardonable sin [of standing] forth from the mindless human herd" (Rand cover) is nearly always punished harshly.

4. Dystopian novels include direct sociopolitical commentary within the narrative. Heinous events in the narrative of a dystopian novel – for example, Winston Smith's capture and re-education at the hands of the Ministry of Love in *1984*, or D-503's "fantasiectomy" in *We* – convey the precautionary message of a dystopian novel admirably. In addition, however, a dystopian novelist will often dedicate appreciable space in his novel to presenting the reader with observations, or even reasoned arguments, regarding the dystopian society of the

novel. This “ideological” approach within the dystopian novel appears in each of the seven novels I studied.

The author’s placement of commentary can take several forms. One of the author’s most common methods is to place his commentary in the mind of the protagonist, as seemingly spontaneous thought; Rand, Atwood, Zamiatin, and Orwell all employ this method in their novels. Another common way of inserting direct commentary into a dystopian novel is through dialogue between characters, for example, between John Savage and Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World*, between Guy Montag and Faber in *Fahrenheit 451*, or between Winston Smith and O’Brien in *1984*. A third option is straight narratorial interjection; Huxley, who often addresses short ironic asides to the reader, provides a good example of this method. Obviously, what methods are used depends on the person in which each novel is set, as well as the particular style of each novelist. The end result, however, remains the same: sections of the novel, interspersed throughout the storyline, which are essentially mini-essays on sociopolitical theory. (In fact, two lengthy sections in *1984* are actually presented as excerpts from an essay entitled “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism.”)

As might be expected, this approach is sometimes detrimental to the dramatic quality of the novel. H. Mark Roelofs, in “George Orwell’s Obscured Utopia,” asserts that “as a literary effort, [*1984*] suffers because of Orwell’s overriding philosophical and political objectives. Its characters are paste-ups for ideological positions... moreover, the book’s emotional pace is frequently interrupted by the insertion of long sections of straight political theorizing” (12). Similarly, in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred’s account of her life often consists more in musings and observations than in recounting actual events. In Ayn Rand’s *Anthem*, the protagonist Equality 7-2521 is so relentlessly ideological, so baldly a manifestation of Rand’s sociopolitical theory, that (in my opinion) the quality of the entire novel suffers as a result. At the other end of the spectrum are novels like *Fahrenheit 451* and *Player Piano*, in which overt commentary is limited to certain key moments in the plot. The dystopian novelist is not content to trust the narrative of his story to convey his “dissatisfaction with the current

state of affairs” (Browning 18) – through one or another method, and even at the expense of the storyline, he presents his views directly to the reader.

5. Dystopian novels portray societies that dehumanize their members. Generally speaking, a dystopian society is bad because it requires its members to be less than human in some aspect. The society of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, for example, reduces womankind to “two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (Atwood 176); in the same way, 1984’s orthodoxy “means not thinking – not needing to think” (Orwell 47). According to James D. Simons, the price of the dystopian experiment is “the contortion of man into a preconceived mould... so that mankind will function as a predictable entity” (29). Some dystopian societies, like those of *Player Piano* or *Brave New World*, coddle their members by usurping human work; other societies withhold the basic rights of their members, *The Handmaid’s Tale* being a prime example. The dystopian society reduces its members from citizens to subjects, and from humans to automatons.

Here, then, is my composite definition of a dystopian novel:

- 1) It is intended by the author to be a critique of his era’s sociopolitical climate;
- 2) It is set in a world recognizably our own, though in the future;
- 3) It follows a single individual protagonist or small group of individual protagonists, each of whom is a realistic, normal human being;
- 4) It is set in an ostensibly utopian (but actually dehumanizing) society, which has serious deficiencies caused by human drives and characteristics;
- 5) And it contains direct sociopolitical commentary inserted into the plotline.

A WORD ON SELECTION AND EXPECTATIONS

Definitions exclude as well as include, and the definition of a dystopian novel is no different. The formal elements of a dystopian novel are essential to advance its function, which is to raise awareness in the reader of the danger of current social forces; therefore, both formal and functional elements are necessary components for a novel to be dystopian. Thus a novel like *Lord of the Flies*, which uses the scenario of a group of shipwrecked schoolchildren to explore the darkness of human nature, is not formally dystopian because it lacks the

present-future divide and does not contain direct authorial sociopolitical commentary, and is not functionally dystopian because it addresses no particular social or political trend. *Animal Farm*, another novel popularly called dystopian, does provide social commentary, in a general way, by portraying the dangers of a communist system of government. However, because the novel is not set in the future, follows no particular protagonist, contains no direct authorial sociopolitical commentary, and portrays a society which exists alongside of contemporary human society (instead of proceeding from it) – in fact, a society of talking animals – it is not formally dystopian.

The seven novels I chose to study each contain all five formal characteristics of a dystopian novel; more importantly, they all fulfill the primary goal of a dystopian novel, the function of the novel, which is to increase the reader's awareness of real-world social and political concerns. In addition, the novels I chose are all well-known, not only as political works but also as fiction novels, many having been reprinted dozens of times. The popularity of these novels is well-attested by the fact that, when I tried to explain this thesis to other people and encountered unfamiliarity with the term "dystopian," mentioning any one of these novels was always enough to get a nod of comprehension.

When I proposed this thesis, I expected to find that the treatment of religion in these works would follow two general guidelines: the majority of signs of organized religion would appear in collusion with the State, while individual religiosity (of the protagonist or other characters) would be opposed to the State. I also hypothesized that organized religion would be portrayed as powerful, while individual religiosity would be mostly powerless. Finally, I guessed that textual religious references would serve to give additional meaning to specific events in the narrative. The following presents what I actually found in each novel.

THE SEARCH FOR RELIGION IN DYSTOPIA

1. 1984

The first page of *1984* introduces the reader to its protagonist, Winston Smith. As Winston sits in his apartment writing in his journal, he mulls over an event that took place that morning at his office, the Two Minutes' Hate (a

meeting that is roughly analogous to a religious service). It begins with the participants being shown video footage of Emmanuel Goldstein, “the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party’s purity”; all “heresies [and] deviations sprung directly out of his teaching” (14). (Orwell specifically states that Goldstein has a “Jewish face”; critic Mary Weinkauff asserts that Orwell’s choice of name suggests “an intentional fostering of hatred for the defunct Judeo-Christian tradition” [267].) Apart from commanding “an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State,” Goldstein is also rumored to have written “a terrible book, a compendium of all the heresies” (15) – in essence, a negative or anti-catechism.

The participants of the Two Minutes’ Hate, whipped into a frenzy of fear and loathing by the sight of Goldstein, are suddenly confronted by the image of Big Brother, the ruler of Oceania. Their relief is immediate. One woman murmurs, “My Savior!”, and then utters a prayer to Big Brother (17). The entire group begins to chant “B-B!...B-B!...B-B!”, which is intended to be “a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother” (17-18). In contrast to the satanic Goldstein, Big Brother has distinct God/Jesus overtones. Later in the novel (page 24), Orwell specifically mentions that Big Brother is worshipped. Big Brother is also described as “the embodiment of the Party” (214), making the Party (Oceania’s ruling regime) divine as well.

In Oceania, Christianity is extinct. Mr. Charrington, the proprietor of an antiques shop, tells Winston that “there are a lot of [churches] left, really... [but] they’ve been put to other uses” (83). Among members of “the Party,” Oceania’s government, it is similarly criminal to be “a religious believer, an admirer of capitalism, and a sexual pervert” (200); as for Oceania’s social underclass, “religious worship would have been permitted if the proles had shown any sign of needing or wanting it” (62). Christianity is tied to the now-defunct dynasty of the capitalists, which was exemplified by such repugnancies as “the bishops in their lawn sleeves, the judges in their ermine robes, the pillory, the stocks, the treadmill, the cat-o’-nine-tails, the Lord Mayor’s Banquet, and the practice of kissing the Pope’s toe” (63). “These capitalists – they and a few lawyers and priests and so forth who lived on them – were the lords of the earth” (77),

Winston asserts; Goldstein concurs, stating “in the past the need for a hierarchical form of society... had been preached by kings and aristocrats and by the priests, lawyers, and the like who were parasitical upon them” (167). He also singles out the Catholic Church: while the Church was “tolerant by modern standards” (169), Goldstein argues that the Party maintains control because it shares essential organizational characteristics with institutions “such as the Catholic Church [that] have sometimes lasted for hundreds or thousands of years” (173). Christianity is presented as merely a sociopolitical institution that operated in much the same way as the Party, though not as successfully. Winston himself is an atheist, though he does believe in “the spirit of Man” (222).

Goldstein’s underground army, the Brotherhood, adheres to a “catechism” of its own. On page 142, O’Brien leads Winston and his lover Julia through this profession of faith in order to induct them into the Brotherhood:

“You are prepared to give your lives?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to commit murder?”

“Yes.”

“To commit acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people?”

“Yes.”

“To betray your country to foreign powers?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to cheat, to forge, to blackmail, to corrupt the minds of children, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases – to do anything which is likely to cause demoralization and weaken the power of the Party?”

“Yes.”

“If, for example, it would somehow serve our interests to throw sulphuric acid in a child’s face – are you prepared to do that?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to lose your identity and live out the rest of your life as a waiter or a dock worker?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to commit suicide, if and when we order you to do so?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared, the two of you, to separate and never see one another again?”

“No!” broke in Julia.

Ironically, this horrific list of crimes is completely fake, and is used by O’Brien (who pretends to be a member of the Brotherhood, but is really a member of the Inner Party) solely to obtain damning evidence against Winston and Julia. Much later in the novel, O’Brien admits to having collaborated in fabricating Goldstein’s book, and when Winston asks him if the Brotherhood is real, O’Brien tells him that he will never find out.

The Party is a religion unto itself. Goldstein writes that members of the Party believe that Oceania will defeat its enemies, Eurasia and Eastasia, “as an article of faith” (159). Although Winston imagines the Party as “a dedicated sect doing evil that good might come” (216), O’Brien reveals its true nature when he tells him, “we are the priests of power... God is power” (217). *1984*’s appendix, “The Principles of Newspeak,” describes most clearly the religious imperatives placed on the Party member:

What was required in a Party member was an outlook similar to that of the ancient Hebrew who knew, without knowing much else, that all nations other than his worshipped “false gods.” He did not need to know that these gods were called Baal, Osiris, Moloch, Ashtaroth, and the like; probably the less he knew about them the better for his orthodoxy. He knew Jehovah and the commandments of Jehovah; he knew, therefore, that all gods with other names or other attributes were false gods. (251)

The Party maintains strict vigilance against all kinds of heresy and unorthodoxy, and is so committed to its version of reality that it re-educates the heretic before it executes him – as O’Brien puts it, “there are no [more] martyrdoms” (209).

1984’s Oceania is a place where Christianity has been discarded, but where a new and even more totalitarian religion has taken its place. Buttressed by religious ceremonies, a priestly class, a god-figure, and a Satan-figure, this religion vilifies the Christianity that preceded it and relentlessly persecutes any heterodoxy among Oceania’s citizens.

2. Brave New World

The first sign of religion in *Brave New World* occurs in the opening scene, as the Director of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre tours its

workings to his newest group of assistants. While explaining the Centre's practice of "hypnopaedia," sleep-teaching, he mentions that the first experimental usage of hypnopaedia occurred "while our Ford was still on earth" (15). A page later, after reference to "Our Ford's first T-Model," the Director and his students make "the sign of the T" on their stomachs (16). This serves as the reader's introduction to the World State's version of Jesus Christ, whom critic Almeda King calls "the great god Ford" (821). Just as Christ brought the Good News of salvation, so Ford (Henry Ford, that is) brought the assembly-line process which, 600-some years later, has resulted in the Hatchery, a factory for producing human beings. The Hatchery has perfected human reproduction by the Bokanovsky process, which produces as many as ninety-six identical twins from a single fertilized egg. This process, coupled with Fordian assembly-line development and conditioning, are "major instruments of social stability" (4).

As far as the citizenry of the World State have a god, that god is Ford. "Ford!" is ejaculatory in the same way as "Lord!" is in contemporary culture; Bernard Marx, a principal character, is accused of heresy for failing to follow Ford's teachings; Ford even has a bible of sorts, "MY LIFE AND WORK, BY OUR FORD", which is "published in Detroit by the Society for the Propagation of Fordian Knowledge" (148). The use of such an obvious parody for Jesus is in some respects simply satirical – for example, when the Director murmurs, "Ford's in his flivver... all's well with the world" (29). In another sense, however, this Ford-worship is in earnest, because Ford's revelation of the assembly line did indeed give humanity a sort of salvation. Mustapha Mond tells John Savage that "Our Ford... did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't" (155). And, as Mond states earlier in the novel, there is "no civilization without social stability... the primal and the ultimate need" (28) – the Alpha and the Omega, as it were. In other words, stability is the salvation of civilization, and Ford brought that stability to earth.

Citizens of the World State also attend religious services, called Solidarity Services, which are celebrated fortnightly in the "gigantically beautiful," seven-

thousand room Fordson Community Singery (52). Each Solidarity Group of twelve (six men and six women) celebrate separately. They are first seated around a table, arranged “man, woman, man, in a ring of endless alternation” (53). The president of each group then dedicates tablets of *soma*, a euphoria-inducing drug, as well as a cup of liquid *soma*, which are passed around three times to the accompaniment of Solidarity Hymns. After this, the group listens to hear the coming of the “Greater Being” (54). Prompted by “a wonderful, mysterious, supernatural Voice” (55), their minds altered by the *soma*, the participants become convinced that they hear “the feet of the Greater Being” as they descend “invisible stairs” (56). They then form a sort of conga line, shouting and stamping to a feverish “delirium of cymbals and blown brass, a fever of tom-tomming,” and beating out the rhythm of the music on the buttocks of the person in front. At this climax, another voice intones “the words which announced the approaching atonement and final consummation of solidarity, the coming of the Twelve-in-One, the incarnation of the Greater Being:”

Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun,
Kiss the girls and make them One.
Boys at one with girls at peace;
Orgy-porgy gives release.

The service ends, of course, in an orgy. The tablets and cup of *soma* parody the Christian Lord’s Supper; the rest of it, however, seems simply to be a way to “give release,” emotionally, sexually, and spiritually

Some theology is evident in the hymns and responses – self-annihilation, the paramount virtue of solidarity, the future coming of the Greater Being (who remains anonymous throughout) to accomplish the twelve-in-one – but the main focus of the service seems to be on hyperemotional states of euphoria, delirium, and sexual arousal. Bernard Marx, after failing to achieve the *soma* high because he is distracted by the unibrow of the woman next to him, is miserably aware throughout the ceremony that he actually has no faith in the Greater Being at all: “he heard nothing and, for him, nobody was coming. Nobody – in spite of the music, in spite of the mounting excitement” (56).

Christianity is unknown to most citizens of the World State, in accord with “that beautiful and inspired saying of Our Ford’s: History is bunk” (23). In the opening scene of the book, it falls to the World Controller Mustapha Mond to explain that Christianity once espoused “the ethics and philosophy of under-consumption... so essential when there was under-production; but in an age of machines and the fixation of nitrogen – positively a crime against society” (35). Mond also ties Christianity to natural childbirth, which by the year 632 A.F. has become an obscene and unspeakable practice.

In *Brave New World*, Christianity is not seen as a political institution to be abolished, but as an unnecessary (and, by turns, a hilarious and disgusting) diversion from productivity and happiness. James D. Simons remarks that, for the citizens of the World State, “only unhappiness [would result] from Christianity’s insistence on the repression of natural impulses” (27). Rather than creating a competing religious system, however, the World State simply provides a substitute in *soma* – “all the advantages of Christianity... none of [its] defects” (36), or as Mond later calls it, “Christianity without tears” (162). In small doses, *soma* provides the virtuous patience and goodwill formerly demanded by Christianity; in large doses, it produces euphoria and hallucinogenic visions; and all without requiring any of the self-mastery and dedication of Christianity.

In addition to personal atheism like Bernard Marx’s, the world of Oceania also encompasses a rival religious system – that of the Indian Reservation in Malpais, New Mexico. The tour guide tells Bernard and his lady friend Lenina Crowne that the Indians have maintained “monstrous superstitions... Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship” (69). While in the Reservation, Bernard and Lenina have the chance to see these monstrous superstitions firsthand at an Indian religious ceremony that is performed in the central square of the pueblo. The ceremony begins with drums and chanting – “just the same rhythms,” Lenina thinks to herself, as “the synthetic noises made at Solidarity Services” (75). There, however, the similarity ends. Masked men perform a “strange limping dance,” pick up live snakes and dance “snakily,” and then throw the snakes into the center of the square. A boy dressed in a white loincloth then circles the snakes while being whipped by a man wearing a coyote mask. Once the

boy collapses, the coyote-man sprinkles his blood on the snakes, the other men grab the snakes and run off, and the ceremony is over. The entire proceedings are watched over by “a painted image of an eagle... [and an image] of a man, naked, and nailed to a cross” (76). John Savage, an adoptive Indian who is the accidental son of two normal citizens of the World State, tells Bernard and Lenina that the ceremony is done “for the sake of the pueblo – to make the rain come and the corn grow. And to please Pookong and Jesus” (78). The religion of the Reservation merges Indian spirituality with Christianity, equally venerating “Jesus on the Cross... [and] the eagle image of Pookong” (109), the Virgin Mary and “Etsanatilehi, the woman who makes herself young again” (86). For John, however, religion is primarily about the search for truth. John’s mother Linda, formerly a worker in the Hatchery’s Fertilizing Room, has never had the answers to John’s questions about “Time and Death and God” (92); “the old men of the pueblo,” on the other hand, “had much more definite answers” (89).

When John is brought into the society of the World State, he meets with Mustapha Mond and demands to know why, if Mond knows about God, he refrains from telling his citizens about Him. Their ensuing discussion shows the full scope of Christianity’s irrelevance to the brave new world. Though Mond thinks that “quite probably” there is a God (159), He is no longer needed. If, as he quotes from philosopher Maine de Biran, “you can only be independent of God while you’ve got youth and prosperity,” and, thanks to Ford and progress “we’ve now got youth and prosperity right up to the end,” it follows that

we can be independent of God. ‘The religious sentiment will compensate us for all our losses.’ But there aren’t any losses for us to compensate; religious sentiment is superfluous. And why should we go hunting for a substitute for youthful desires, when youthful desires never fail? A substitute for distractions, when we go on enjoying all the old fooleries to our very last? What need have we of repose when our minds and bodies continue to delight in activity? Of consolation, when we have *soma*? Of something immovable, when we have the social order?

Moreover, God is incompatible with “machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness” (159), because God demands self-denial, and “industrial civilization is only possible when there’s no self-denial” (161). The World State has not abolished Christianity; rather, through social reconstruction and

technological wizardry, it has eliminated Christianity's (as well as the pueblo religion's) points of contact with everyday life. Christianity is extinct, as the pueblo religion would be if exposed to the World State. It has not been outlawed, however; instead, it has been made irrelevant and replaced by the perfect surrogates, Ford-worship and *soma*.

3. Anthem

The society of *Anthem* has a highly overdeveloped sense of sin: it is a sin to act or think individually (11), to be alone (12), to be mentally or physically superior to others (13), to fight with others (15), to prefer the company of one person over that of others (18), to wish something for oneself (20), to speak to members of other professions without permission (40), to give distinct names to others (41), to have concern for one's own body (67), and to discover the Unspeakable Word (51). Equality 7-2521, however, has committed a crime worse than any of these, a "crime of crimes" (15): he has discovered electricity in the abandoned tunnels of the Unmentionable Times.

The motto of *Anthem*'s society is thus: "*We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, One, indivisible and forever*" (14). All work is accompanied by the refrain, "the will of our brothers be done" (21), and the nightly prayer is "we are nothing. Mankind is all. By the grace of our brothers are we allowed our lives. We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the State. Amen" (16). Indeed, in *Anthem* "men have no cause to exist, save in toiling for other men" (82). In this society, collectivism has been elevated to godlike status, all personal pronouns have been abolished, and only collective pronouns are allowed to be used. The Social Meeting, *Anthem*'s version of a religious ceremony, consists primarily of songs such as "the Hymn of Brotherhood, and the Hymn of Equality, and the Hymn of the Collective Spirit" (24). In this society, the one "unforgivable sin" is to "[stand] forth from the mindless human herd" (back cover).

Equality 7-2521 is unlike his fellow citizens, not only because he has grown to be stronger and smarter than they are, but also because though he knows that he is evil, "there is no will in us and no power to resist it. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist" (13). Moreover, Equality 7-2521

has the tendency to inspire the same sort of moral recklessness in others: International 4-8818, his friend (the very concept is a Transgression of Preference), tells him that “rather shall we be evil with you than good with all our brothers” (33). Likewise, after he escapes from the City to the Uncharted Forest, his love interest Liberty 5-3000 follows him into exile, professing that “we wish to be damned with you, rather than blessed with all our brothers” (93-4).

Initially, Equality 7-2521 attempts to atone for his transgressions (though, significantly, he makes no effort to stop sinning). He gladly accepts his vocation as Street Sweeper, though he had dreamed of being a Scholar (wanting a particular vocation is, of course, a sin): “we knew we had been guilty, but now we had a way to atone for it” (22). Likewise, when he discovers electricity in the course of clandestine underground experiments, he takes his find to the Council of Scholars, trusting that “our gift is greater than our transgression” (65).

Unfortunately for Equality 7-2521, the Council rejects his discovery, decreeing that “what is not done collectively cannot be good” (81). Calling the Council members “thrice-damned fools” (83), Equality 7-2521 escapes from the city into the Uncharted Forest. Thinking of the beautiful Liberty 5-3000, he mopes that “we are one of the Damned. It is best if the Golden One forget our name and the body which bore that name” (86). Within a day, however, revived by the beauty of the forest, Equality 7-2521 remembers that “we are the Damned. We remembered it, and we laughed” (90). And in a few more days, Liberty 5-3000 finds him in the forest and dedicates herself to him, as she “knelt, and bowed their golden head before us” (94).

Equality 7-2521, supposedly steeped in several grave sins but at the same time feeling greater fulfillment than at any other point in his life, begins to wonder if his former society’s moral compass is accurate. “We have broken the law, but we have never doubted it. Yet now, as we walk through the forest, we are learning to doubt” (97). If Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000’s joy is “the great evil of being alone,” then perhaps the terms “good” and “evil” have been misapplied.

Eventually, the couple comes upon an ancient house from the Unmentionable Times, and it is in the house’s library that Equality 7-2521

discovers the Unspeakable Word – “I.” He realizes that he has been searching for this word his whole life, and that it is “the face of god” (112). He states that “only three [words] are holy: ‘I will it!’” (109). The miracle of individuality (the “miracle of me,” as he puts it) is solely and exclusively his “to kneel before,” and he refuses to be “a sacrifice on [the] altars” of his fellow men. Now Equality 7-2521 realizes that the creed of “the great WE” is a “creed of corruption” (112), and he finally recognizes the “god whom men have sought since men came into being, [the] god who will grant them joy and peace and pride...this one word: ‘I.’”

With this new religion comes a re-definition of good and evil. Equality 7-2521 states that “the best in me had been my sins and my transgressions” (114), because man’s “sense of truth” recognizes true good and evil even through “centuries of chains and lashes.” He also comes to a new understanding of the concept of sainthood; while he had learned about “the Saints of Labor, and the Saints of the Councils, and the Saints of the Great Rebirth” (52), he now realizes that the real saints are “the martyrs... who died for the same cause, for the same word, no matter what name they gave to their cause and their truth” (117). With this statement Equality 7-2521 claims solidarity with all martyrs for any cause, asserting that in reality all of them died in the service of the god “I.”

He goes on to state that mankind was successively enslaved by “the gods,” by “kings,” “by his birth, by his kin, by his race. But he broke their chains” (119). A man’s right to “be free of his brothers” (118) is one “which neither god nor king nor other men can take away” (119), because “there is no right on earth above this right.” The “worship of the word ‘We’” has dimmed this reality, but Equality 7-2521 knows that it is ultimately unconquerable. The inhabitants of the true “City of the damned” (121) will be conquered, and a new dawn will rise for “the sacred word: EGO” (123).

Anthem is fundamentally about Equality 7-2521’s loss of faith in the socially sanctioned religion and his subsequent rediscovery of a previous one, which is stronger and (according to him) will eventually triumph. Liberty 5-3000’s obedient subservience gives hints that Equality 7-2521 is a sort of demigod himself. Religious terminology regarding sin, good and evil, sainthood, and holiness is frequent in the novel, mainly to add moral weight to competing

ideologies. Individualism is presented as the essence of all religions and causes, the one real god.

4. Player Piano

The god of *Player Piano*'s post-war America seems to be EPICAC, a supercomputer described as "the greatest individual in history" (119). Doctor Ewing Halyard, a government official, makes a "pilgrimage" (115) to Carlsbad Caverns to show EPICAC to a visiting dignitary, the Shah of Bratpuhr, who is himself the "spiritual leader of 6,000,000 members of the Kolhouri sect" (26). While there, he introduces the Shah to U.S. President Jonathan Lynn, and the Shah is incredulous when he discovers that Lynn is not "the spiritual leader of the American people," "has no religious duties, except very general ones, token ones," and effectively "governs without respect to the people's spiritual destinies" (118). In the America of *Player Piano*, EPICAC is clearly running the show.

EPICAC also proves to be a disappointment, however, after it fails to answer a riddle which, according to prophecies of the Shah's religion, can only be answered by "a great, all-wise god [who] will come among us one day...[after which] there will be no more suffering on earth" (121). (President Lynn, unsurprisingly, also fails to answer the riddle.) As he leaves the caverns, the Shah contemptuously dismisses EPICAC as a "*baku*," or "false god" (122).

EPICAC, the sole arbiter of America's industrial productivity, serves as a manifestation of the "national holy trinity, Efficiency, Economy, and Quality" (285). Reverend James Lasher tells Paul Proteus, the director of the Ilium factory in New York, that people have been "built up to worship competition and the market, productivity and economic usefulness" (92). However, with the infallible EPICAC (who is "dead right about everything" [116]) directing the economy ever-more-efficiently, more and more people are being streamlined out of the manufacturing and service industries and into dead-end road crew work or military service. Women are denied even these jobs, and seem to be exclusively housewives. Americans "can't participate, can't be useful any more. The whole culture's been shot to hell" (92), Lasher remarks. This "spiritual disaster" (128) is caused by EPICAC's sacrifice of his own faithful to achieve greater efficiency, economy, and quality. The American people are sold on the gospel of productivity

– in fact, according to Lasher, they are spiritually dependent on it – but they are unworthy disciples.

For a small group of engineers and managers, though, EPICAC is a good and generous god. Paul Proteus imagines that, even in the days of Thomas Edison, engineers were something of a “secret order, above and apart from society by virtue of participating in important and moving rites the laity could only guess about – and guess wrong” (15). In other words, in Proteus’ America, engineers form a kind of priesthood. Managers also serve a priestly function, for example Matheson, Ilium’s manager of testing and placement, “a powerful bureaucrat who went about his job with the air of a high priest” (36). Lasher argues that this quasi-priesthood is motivated by the “crusading spirit of the managers and engineers, the idea of designing and manufacturing and distributing being sort of a holy war” (93). The priest-figure is most fully realized in the character of Kroner, the manager of America’s eastern economic division. He personifies “the faith, the near-holiness, the spirit” (49) of the economic enterprise, and is described as “the archprophet of efficiency” (122).

In addition to EPICAC, the American corporate structure also seems to enjoy a quasi-divine status of its own. Proteus, unlike both his father (formerly the National Industrial, Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs, and Resources Director) and Kroner, lacks “the ability to be moved emotionally, almost like a lover, by the great omnipresent and omniscient spook, the corporate personality” (67). Paul’s competitor Fred Garth, on the other hand, has “an anthropomorphic image of the corporate personality,” and stands “in relation to that image as a lover” (127), in the same way that nuns are symbolically wedded to Christ (128). The pious ideal is described by Dr. Edmond L. Harrison, Proteus’ friend, as “[getting] a lump in your throat over the ups and downs of a bunch of factories” (268). EPICAC represents the face of god to the American public; the corporate personality represents divinity to America’s managers and engineers.

While Christianity is still present in the America of *Player Piano*, it offers no solution for the spiritual malady of most Americans. Though, as Lasher claims, the clergy taught them that “the life of their spirit in relation to God was the biggest thing in their lives, and that their part in the economy was nothing by

comparison” (92), Americans still bought into the worship of productivity, and now that they are losing “their place in the economy [and] the market place... they’re finding out – most of them – that what’s left is just about zero.” These spiritually hungry people “need something, and the clergy can’t give it to them – or it’s impossible to take what the clergy offers.”

Paul Proteus, though a privileged member of the priestly engineer caste and on the fast track to major promotion, cannot bring himself to feel the enthusiasm required of a true believer. Instead, he seeks an alternate deity in Nature, wanting to deal “not with society, but only with Earth as God had given it to man” (135). After he is fired from his job, he initially tries to become a farmer, “in the manner of a man dedicating his life to God” (246). In fact, the dedication page of the novel includes the quote from Matthew 6:28, “CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD, HOW THEY GROW; THEY TOIL NOT, NEITHER DO THEY SPIN; AND YET I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY WAS NOT ARRAYED LIKE ONE OF THESE” (5). Vonnegut uses this quote from Scripture to indicate that an ideal world would value nature over productivity, as Proteus also attempts to do. However, he soon finds out that Nature is “coarse and sluggish, hot and wet and smelly,” and the farmer’s life is now “as irrelevant as a statue of Venus at the gate of a sewage-disposal plant” (246). Following Nature ends up being unfulfilling.

The luddite-revolutionary Ghost Shirt organization has its own rival religion. Believing that the clergy “could no longer show that the old religious beliefs were the way to victory and plenty” (273), its members establish themselves as society’s messiahs and attempt to sabotage factories across America and blow up EPICAC. The Ghost Shirts believe that imperfection, frailty, inefficiency, and stupidity all have virtue, because they are characteristics of Man, “and Man is a creation of God” (285). Helped by collaborators inside the Ilium Works, and by Proteus himself, the Ghost Shirts manage to stage a successful rebellion in Ilium.

Uprisings in other cities are quashed, however, and the Ghost Shirts fail to destroy EPICAC. Government forces surround Ilium and demand capitulation. However, even though the leaders of the group, including Proteus and Lasher, are forced to surrender, the Reverend still seems “unshocked by the course of events,

undisturbed by them, even, inexplicably, at peace” (314). He soon reveals why: “it doesn’t matter if we win or lose... the important thing is that we tried. For the record, we tried!” (315). He then reveals the “record” to be God’s record when he states “first and last, I’m an enemy of the Devil, a man of God!”

Player Piano has many religious motifs. America worships a god who sickens them spiritually. Engineers and managers worship the corporate aspect of productivity. The Ghost Shirt movement attempts to enshrine values of inefficiency, fallibility, and imperfection in opposition to the trinity of “Efficiency, Economy, and Quality” (285). And Christianity, though useless as a medicine for social malaise, still retains individual significance for Reverend Lasher.

5. Fahrenheit 451

Christianity is present in the America of *Fahrenheit 451*, but only in disjointed pieces. For example, as Faber, a retired professor, remarks to the protagonist Guy Montag, a fireman,

how they’ve changed [the Bible] in our ‘parlors’ these days. Christ is one of the ‘family’ now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we’ve dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He’s a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn’t making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshiper *absolutely* needs. (81)

Jesus has not been irrelevantized, but He has been divorced from the moral demands Christianity used to make on its adherents. Similarly, as Montag tries to read on the subway, trying to absorb the passage in Matthew about the lilies of the field (a passage which Bradbury includes as an argument against consumerism, just as Vonnegut does), he is constantly interrupted by a radio commercial for “Denham’s Dentifrice” (79); the other people on the subway are “pounded into submission” by the noise, and Montag barely manages to escape the overpowering force of the advertisement. Clearly, Christianity is no match for the consumerism of Montag’s society.

Montag’s society has banned books, and firemen are in charge of burning them. Montag’s fire chief Beatty explains that this is because “people want to be happy” above all else (59). Books, which are too much of an incentive to think (and consequently be unhappy), are sacrificed for the sake of greater happiness.

Another casualty is institutional Christianity, typified by the Reverend Padover, a social outcast who “gave a few lectures thirty years ago and lost his flock between one Sunday and the next for his views” (150).

As Montag and his fellow firemen raid a house suspected of containing books, the owner says “play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out” (37); Beatty later explains that the quote is from a convicted heretic about to be executed. In Montag’s society, book owners are heretics because they refuse to submit to the socially-sanctioned worship of happiness above all else.

However, Montag also seems unable to connect with his society’s worship of happiness. Early in the novel, when his teenage neighbor Clarisse McClellan asks him if he is happy, Montag initially says yes, but then realizes that actually he is not happy at all. Later in the novel, as his wife and her friends “jabber about people and their own children and themselves” (98) as they sit in front of the television, Montag can do nothing but

[stand] looking at the women’s faces as he had once looked at the faces of saints in a strange church he had entered when he was a child. The faces of those enameled creatures meant nothing to him, though he talked to them and stood in that church for a long time, trying to be of that religion, trying to know what that religion was, trying to get enough of the raw incense and special dust of the place into his lungs and thus into his blood to feel touched and concerned by the meaning of the colorful men and women with the porcelain eyes and the blood-ruby lips. But there was nothing, nothing; it was a stroll through another store, and his currency strange and unusable there, and his passion cold, even when he touched the wood and plaster and clay. So it was now, in his own parlor. (95)

Montag cannot understand the ritual taking place before him; he cannot manage to become a member of that religion, the religion of his society.

Though books are outlawed, the Bible still features prominently in *Fahrenheit 451*. Montag has a copy hidden in his house, and over the course of the story he reads and memorizes part of the book of Ecclesiastes. Faber reads to Montag from the book of Job as Montag goes to confront Beatty, strengthening him in his newfound resolve to sabotage his fellow firemen by hiding forbidden books in their houses. When Montag eventually flees the city and meets a group

of exiles who memorize books, he is told that the New Testament is safely memorized along with other classic literature.

Fahrenheit 451 portrays a world in which Christianity, while still culturally recognizable, has lost its moral authority, and the Bible is either banned or treated no differently from other literature. The society's only goal is to obtain mindless happiness, and anything which interferes with that pursuit is deemed heretical and persecuted.

6. We

In Eugene Zamiatin's *We*, people are referred to as "numbers," and everyone lives in glass houses. All citizens of the United State live in one city, which is closed off by a green glass wall from the natural world. In this world of mathematical happiness, D-503 is building a spaceship called the *Integral* to bring the logical salvation of the United State to inhabitants of other worlds.

Numbers worship "our god, the United State" (43) through various hymns and ceremonies, which are celebrations of "the victory of *all* over *one*, of the *sum* over the *individual*" (42). Treasonous numbers are expected to sacrifice their friends, loved ones, and even themselves "on the altar of the United State" (38).

The embodiment of the United State, "the tool [and] the resultant of hundreds of thousands of wills" (46), is the Well-Doer, who is never clearly described. In one ceremony, a public execution, the Well-Doer is portrayed as "a supreme priest" (46); here, he is acting on behalf of the numbers of the United State. In another ceremony, the "Day of Unanimity" (128) on which the Well-Doer is always re-elected by a unanimous vote, he is portrayed as "the new Jehovah... as wise and as lovingly cruel as the Jehovah of the ancients" (131). The Well-Doer is a public figure and often makes a spectacle, arriving by airplane or being garlanded with flowers, and is well-loved by his subjects – except, of course, for those numbers who have "betrayed Reason" (218).

The religion of the United State is taught to students by robot "priests." D-503 recalls how his priest used to teach: the priest would state a "proscribed text" (40), and the students would recite it back to him. The texts are never specified, but one may assume that they reflect D-503's attitude toward Christianity, as well as the worship of the Well-Doer and the United State. This priest is very different

from the Well-Doer in terms of function and construction, but his end role is the same: acting on behalf of the divine United State.

D-503 has a great deal to say about the “old god” (7) of Christianity, most of it derogatory. The liturgies of the United State are similar to the church services of the ancients, but “they served their nonsensical unknown god; we serve our rational god, whom we know most thoroughly” (43). Modern numbers also know that “the greatest, bored skeptic – [the ancient] god” (57) is imaginary and does not inhabit the heavens, which are “only a blue nothing” (109). By creating “ancient man, i.e., the man capable of making mistakes... the ancient god himself made a mistake” (63). In contrast, the modern man is perfect. D-503 holds even multiplication tables in higher esteem than the Christian God, because “the multiplication table never (do you understand – *never*) makes mistakes!”

However, D-503 does see some good qualities in Christianity, namely that “the greatness of the ‘Church of the United Flock’ was known to them” (121). As ignorant and backward as they were, still “they knew that... ‘We’ is from God, ‘I,’ from the devil.” He sees dim approximations of the rational beauty of United Stateism in religious dancing (6) and the “purifying” aspect of Christian ritual (47). Both D-503 and his love interest I-330 mention that Christianity is a direct forerunner of the modern logical religion; according to the Well-Doer, this is because Christ’s Crucifixion reveals that even the ancient Christians knew the maxim of the United State: “real, algebraic love for humanity must inevitably be inhuman” (199).

R-13, D-503’s best friend, tells him that he is composing a poem in honor of the *Integral*, about the establishment of the United State. According to R-13,

There were two in paradise and the choice was offered to them: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness. No other choice. *Tertium non datur*. They, fools that they were, chose freedom. Naturally, for centuries afterward they longed for fetters... For centuries! And only we found a way to regain happiness... No, listen, follow me! The ancient god and we, side by side at the same table! Yes, we helped god to defeat the devil definitely and finally. It was he, the devil, who led people to transgression, to taste pernicious freedom – he, the cunning serpent. And we came along, planted a boot on his head, and... squash! Done with him! Paradise again! We returned to the simple-mindedness

and innocence of Adam and Eve. No more meddling with good and evil and all that; everything is simple again, heavenly, childishly simple! (59)

However, for D-503, everything is not simple. His happy relationship with O-90 is first disrupted and then ruined by his increasing infatuation with I-330, who is a veritable personification of lack of obedience to the United State. He falls madly in love with her, and soon begins to willingly disobey both logic and his own conscience. Eventually he finds out that I-330 is a member of “Mephi.” Abbreviated from Mephistopheles (a name for the Christian Satan), Mephi is both a revolutionary organization and a rival religion that embraces nature and worships energy (as opposed to the ancient Christians, who worshiped entropy, and the numbers of the United State, who worship social stability).

As members of Mephi cause unrest among the numbers of the United State, the government notifies its citizens:

you are ill. And the name of your illness is:

FANCY.

It is a worm that gnaws black wrinkles on one’s forehead. It is a fever that drives one to run further and further, even though “further” may begin where happiness ends. It is the last barricade on our road to happiness.

Rejoice! This Barricade Has Been Blasted at Last! The Road is Open!

The latest discovery of our State science is that there is a center for fancy – a miserable little nervous knot in the lower region of the frontal lobe of the brain. A triple treatment of this knot with X-rays will cure you of fancy.

Forever!

You are perfect; you are mechanized; the road to one-hundred-per-cent happiness is open! Hasten then all of you, young and old, hasten to undergo the Great Operation! Hasten to the auditoriums where the Great Operation is being performed! Long live the Great Operation! Long live the United State! Long live the Well-Doer! (166-67)

This operation is presented as a salvation, and D-503 initially feels relief and joy at the announcement, exclaiming “I was smiling, and I could not stop!” (168). However, when I-330 tells him that he must choose between the operation and her, D-503 realizes what his choice must be, deciding that “all were being saved, but... there was no salvation for me. For I *do not want* salvation” (172).

D-503 is eventually summoned before the Well-Doer after he treasonously attempts to sabotage the *Integral*. During his interrogation, the Well-Doer tells him that those who have undergone the Great Operation are now in “paradise”: “they are blessed, angels, servants of God” (200). D-503 is forced to undergo the operation and, freed from his fancy, watches calmly as I-330 is executed.

We portrays a world where a state religion has completely supplanted Christianity. The dead religion is now dismissed as having been flawed and full of mistakes, not the least of which was the ludicrous superstition that God actually exists. *We*'s religion is unabashedly atheistic; numbers worship the United State, fully aware that it is merely an artificial and limited entity. Still, individual impulses undermine the perfect rationality of United Statism, and rival movements can find traction among the myriads of numbers. The book closes with a new chapter opening on the United State religion, a chapter in which religion will be practiced by lobotomized automatons devoid of any “fancy” – any individual, independent thought – whatsoever .

7. The Handmaid's Tale

Uniquely among the novels I studied, the society of *The Handmaid's Tale* worships the Christian God. The Republic of Gilead, however, tends to use Christianity (and especially the Bible) for its own purposes. Offred, the protagonist, tells the reader that Wives can beat their Handmaids, because “there's Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands” (21).

In Offred's society, birth rates are dangerously low. In order to cope with this dire situation, the government of Gilead has re-structured society into a caste system. Young, fertile women are trained as Handmaids and assigned to high-level men within the regime, called “Commanders,” in order to be impregnated. Most of these men already have wives; in order to justify the practice, the Gileadan regime cites the Biblical story of Rachel and Bilhah (Genesis 30: 1-6). “*Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may have children by her*” (114). Handmaids are not allowed to beautify themselves, to travel unaccompanied, or to read. They are supposed to

be only “two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (176), meant to be filled “with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies” (251).

Wives have near-absolute power in the household, but virtually no influence outside it, and no authority over their husbands at all. Offred finds it amusing that Serena Joy, the Wife of Offred’s assigned Commander, was once a gospel singer on the “Growing Souls Gospel Hour” (22). Serena’s Christian faith now pains her twofold. The woman who once preached about “the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home,” while enjoying the celebrity life (60), is now herself confined to the domestic sphere; the woman who helped fight for the inviolability of marriage (21) must now allow her husband to have sex with another woman.

In Gilead, Scripture is primarily used to repress women. In addition to allowing beatings, Gileadans deny anesthetics to women in labor, citing Genesis 3:16, which states “*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children*” (146). The bedrock of the Gileadan repression of women is found in the passage from I Timothy 2: 9-15, which is read at Gileadan wedding ceremonies by the presiding Commander:

“I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel,” he says, “with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

“But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

“Let the woman learn in silence with *all* subjection.” Here he looks us over. “All,” he repeats.

“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

“For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

“Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” (286)

Scripture is also used as a basis for common law. The novel specifically mentions the death penalty for rape, which is based on the penalty prescribed in Deuteronomy 22: 23-29 (358).

Some Scriptural references are obviously false or corrupted. For example, the actual passage from I Timothy states that the woman “shall be saved *in* childbearing,” not *by* childbearing; Gilead’s obsession with recovering the low birthrate explains the passage corruption. In another example, Offred states that “not every Commander has a Handmaid; some of their Wives have children. *From each, says the slogan, according to her ability; to each according to his needs...* It was from the Bible, or so they said. St. Paul again, in Acts” (150). No such passage is found in the book of Acts. Finally, Offred’s education included readings from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 1-12), but adapted to Gilead’s purposes: “*Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed are the silent.* I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking” (115). No Beatitude reads “blessed are the silent.” Like old the old Christian hymn “Amazing Grace,” now outlawed because it contains the word “free” (71), the Commander’s Bible is “kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn’t steal it. It is an incendiary device” (112). The Gileadan government uses Scripture to support its practices, no matter how repugnant those practices might otherwise be, but when the Bible proves to be insufficient for their purposes, they have no qualms about falsifying or altering it. The appropriation and alteration of Scripture shows clearly that Gilead is ultimately concerned, not about authentic Christianity, but about maintaining the social order.

Gilead not only (selectively) uses Scripture as a basis for government, but also incorporates Scriptural language into everyday phrases. Thus the standard greeting between Handmaidens is “Blessed be the fruit”/“May the Lord open” (24). The police force is called “the Guardians of the Faith” (27). And all the stores in town have biblically-inspired names like “Lilies of the Field” (Matthew 6:28), “Milk and Honey” (Exodus 3:8), and “All Flesh” (Genesis 6:19) (33-36). Even in war, Gilead continues the use of Scriptural language, in military units named “the Angels of the Apocalypse, Fourth Division,” or “the Twenty-first Battalion of the Angels of Light” (106).

Gilead's motto is "*God Is a National Resource*" (276-7), and religious ceremonies such as Prayvaganzas (weddings), Salvagings (executions), and Particutions (events in which Handmaids are allowed to execute criminals themselves, with their bare hands, as a sort of psychological release) are social events rather than church services. Preachers seem to be only on television, and Offred remarks that "these days they look a lot like businessmen" (105).

The regime has subsidized personal prayer as well, in the form of a store called Soul Scrolls. This franchise operates machines that, upon ordering, recite pre-written prayers. "There are five different prayers: for health, wealth, a death, a birth, a sin... you can't hear the voices from outside; only a murmur, a hum, like a devout crowd, on its knees" (216). The Handmaids have prescribed prayers as well, prayers for emptiness and receptivity: "Oh God, King of the universe... obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh, that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled" (251).

The Republic of Gilead has also outlawed all other Christian denominations, and is in the middle of the "sect wars" (57). Members of other sects, once captured or discovered, are routinely hanged and displayed on "the Wall" at the periphery of the government compound, along with other undesirables such as abortion doctors and homosexuals. Some Christians still live clandestinely in Gilead, many helping women to escape via the "Underground Femaleroad" (320). Married Christians are still safe from persecution, but not for long: a retrospective section at the end of the book tells the reader that persecution is later "extended to cover all marriages not contracted within the state church" (385).

Offred, unlike some other dystopian protagonists, is not an atheist, but her god is not the same one the Gileadans proclaim to be a "national resource." Before Gilead was established, Offred tells the reader that "we believed in Love abstract and total. We were waiting, always, for the incarnation. That word, made flesh" (292); in other words, Offred and her fellow women divinized love. Now, in a world which refuses Offred love, she prays to "My God. Who Art in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is within. I wish you would tell me Your Name, the real one I mean. But *You* will do as well as anything" (251-2). Offred prays for

strength, for the safety of her vanished family, and for deliverance from the evil nightmare in which she is trapped. Eventually, she does manage to escape, and records her memories of Gilead on cassette tapes (later to be found and published as *The Handmaid's Tale*).

The Republic of Gilead shares many characteristics with modern fundamentalist Christianity, from which it is presumably descended, and is firmly and intolerantly theocratic. Religious services, Scripture passages, and biblical language are all used as tools to further the regime. Resistance does exist, however, both in other Christian sects and in Offred's individual faith, and the historical footnote shows that eventually the Republic of Gilead is overthrown.

These seven dystopian novels contain a great deal of religious themes and references, often following similar categories – priesthood, sin, a deified State, and so on. The following represents my attempt to discern general patterns among all seven novels.

THE OLD GOD: RESIDUAL CHRISTIANITY IN DYSTOPIAN SOCIETY

In order to make their novels' time-settings more credible, dystopian novelists usually attempt to establish continuity between the “present” of the novel and the “present” of the reader by including thematic elements the reader can recognize. Thus dystopian novels are still set on Earth, still involve human beings, and portray recognizable social structures. Moreover, present-day commonplace items are often still present in dystopian societies, for example cars, houses, and movie theatres. Since these novels were all written by authors living in societies with an institutional Christian presence, one might also expect that, in relating their stories to the present day, these authors would include mentions of present-day institutional Christianity.

Among current religious systems, institutional Christianity is by far the most prevalent in each of the seven novels I studied. Inasmuch as these novels address current religious practice and its possible future, they address Christianity almost exclusively. This extreme lopsidedness is evident even in the recurrent use of religious epithets and exclamations such as “Christ!” and “Good

God!” in several of the novels. When dystopian novelists focus on Christianity, they do so because Christianity is the single most significant religious force in their societies. It is both the most influential religious system and the one that is most recognizable to the reader.

In the societies of some dystopian novels, such as *Player Piano*, Christianity is still institutionally present, *i.e.*, it is still practiced by a body of faithful and retains today’s structure of clergy, churches, and so on. In others, however, Christianity as we know it today is only a fading memory.

Fahrenheit 451 is a good example of a dystopian novel in which Christianity is still present. In Guy Montag’s world, however, Jesus has been stripped of His divine authority and yoked to the consumerism of Montag’s society, hawking “products that every worshiper *absolutely* needs” (Bradbury 81). Likewise, the institutional Christianity of *Player Piano* has been assimilated into EPICAC’s social order. In *Player Piano*, set in an America in which mechanical wizardry has alphanumerically determined every individual’s occupation based on aptitude, the Reverend James J. Lasher (himself an R-127) tells Paul Proteus that “if the Pope set up shop in [America]... he’d be an R-001” (Vonnegut 91). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Christianity is a tool of the rulers of the Republic of Gilead, who (for example) pervert the Beatitudes to suit their own needs (Atwood 115). In these books, Christianity is no longer independent; it has been enslaved to serve whatever principle each society has as its goal.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the societies of a second group of novels, including *1984* and *Brave New World*, which have willingly abandoned historical Christianity. *We’s* D-503 constantly derides what he calls “the old god” (7), the “nonsensical, unknown god” (43). *1984’s* Winston Smith tells the reader that “religious worship would have been permitted if the proles had shown any sign of needing or wanting it” (62). Modern-day Christianity is a major social and cultural force worldwide; in the societies of this second group of novels, Christianity has been completely eradicated.

Both groups share one common theme, though: deliverance from dystopia will not come from Christianity. No author and no protagonist presents a return to institutional Christianity as any sort of solution to his society’s problems. Quite

the opposite, in fact – institutional Christianity is charged with creating social problems of its own. For the protagonists of the dystopian novels, a return to present-day Christianity would be regressive rather than progressive. *1984*'s Winston Smith describes Christianity as a pawn of capitalism: “these capitalists – they and a few lawyers and priests and so forth who lived on them – were the lords of the earth” (77). *Brave New World*'s World Controller Mustapha Mond charges Christianity with the obscenity of viviparous childbirth and “the ethics and philosophy of under-consumption” (35). *Player Piano*'s Reverend Lasher tells Paul Proteus that Ilium's spiritually sick victims of mass mechanization “need something, and the clergy can't give it to them – or it's impossible to take what the clergy offers. The clergy says it's enough, and so does the Bible. The people say it isn't enough, and I suspect they're right” (Vonnegut 92). And *We*'s D-503, an engineer in a perfectly logical society, sees the Christian God as emblematic of the inaccuracy of past civilizations: “the ancient god created ancient man, i.e., the man capable of making mistakes; *ergo*, the ancient god himself made a mistake” (63). Even *Brave New World*'s John Savage, easily the most religious of the seven-odd protagonists I encountered, finds that his Christianity (with its “insistence on the repression of natural impulses” [Simons 27]) is a hindrance to his dreams of romance with the beautiful Lenina Crowne – and ultimately drives him to commit suicide. According to these characters, the dystopian society may be bad, but Christianity is just as bad, if not worse. These protagonists do not view Christianity as a noble victim of dystopian oppression, but rather as a corrupt, outdated, or irrelevant system. Christianity is “the old god and the old life” (Zamiatin 7), and in its place the dystopian society has created a new god and a new life.

BETTER THAN GOD: DYSTOPIAN DEITY

To my consistent surprise, I found the dystopian god to be not only present, but positively pervasive throughout all seven novels. In her article “The God Figure in Dystopian Fiction,” Mary Weinkauff argues that the dystopian god “is, for practical purposes, a deliberate parody of the Judeo-Christian God” (266). This is true in terms of the novel – the author intends the reader to recognize and

appreciate the use of theistic imagery. In the world of the novel, however, a more accurate statement would be that the dystopian god is meant to be a *replacement* of the Judeo-Christian God, occupying the seat of authority He once tenanted.

The god of any given dystopian society is (by my analysis) an embodiment of that society's first principle, the goal or value which animates the society. Hence in *1984*, god is the Party (205), which embodies "power as an end." In *We*, god is the United State (43), which embodies solidarity and rationality. In *Brave New World*, god is the World State (35), which embodies "community, solidarity, stability." In *Anthem*, god is the collective "WE" (14), embodying communitarianism. In *Player Piano*, god is "the corporate personality" (67), which embodies "Efficiency, Economy, and Quality" (285). These dystopian god-surrogates represent the social forces which concern each dystopian novelist, the forces about which each novel is written; the dystopian god, therefore, is actually the central figure in each novel. Moreover, the dystopian god is not only a minor player in a dystopia, but is really the "corruption at the center" (Weinkauff 267) – in other words, the dystopian god makes the dystopian society.

Mary Weinkauff states that dystopian god-figures are "necessary for stability and sense of direction in an otherwise irrational society... so long as God or Big Brother controls the world men cling to the hope that meaning and coherence must exist" (270-1). However, in two of the novels I studied, no clear god-figure appears. Although the society of *Fahrenheit 451* has definite tendencies towards happiness-worship, and although in one passage Montag describes this principle in religious terms, no individual or institution is ever described as being godlike in the same way as is Big Brother or the United State. At the same time, though, Christianity is obviously on its way out. There seems to be only a vacuum where God, or a god-figure, should be. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, although the Republic of Gilead has perverted both Christian worship and the Christian concept of society, it still professes a general belief in the Christian God. Both Offred, in her private prayer life, and her friend Moira, who is helped to escape by Quakers, must confront the fact that the same God they worship is also the god Gileadans use to justify misogyny and repression. As in *Fahrenheit 451*, the distinction between God and god-figure is unclear.

Consequently (as Weinkauff might also argue), both societies are deeply unstable. It is telling to note that several characters in each novel either attempt or contemplate suicide. Montag's wife attempts to overdose on sleeping pills; Offred contemplates hanging herself on clothes-hooks in her armoire; and so on. Moreover, this phenomenon is also widespread in each society. *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Handmaid's Tale* differ from the other five novels I studied in that they do not have clear god-figures, but their societies and characters display the predictable result of this absence, and the consequent lack of a *raison d'etre*.

Not all societies have the same balance between Christianity and the worship of a god-figure. At one end of the spectrum is *Fahrenheit 451*, in which, while the Christian God is quickly losing ground, there is (as of yet) no corresponding enshrinement of another principle as god. At the other end of the spectrum is *Anthem*, in which the word "Christianity" is not used even once, but which contains no fewer than thirty-seven instances of "transgression," "sin," or "evil" – each and every one of them in relation to "the great WE" (14), the "Collective Spirit" (24) that serves as *Anthem's* dystopian god. Some dystopian novels, including *Player Piano*, *We, 1984*, and *Brave New World*, explicitly state that in their respective societies, Christianity is being directly replaced by worship of the dystopian god. Though not every society has gone about exterminating Christianity in the same way – *1984's* Oceania and *We's* United State may have actively eradicated Christianity, while in *Brave New World* and *Player Piano* Christianity seems to be dying by itself – it does appear that each novel is at some point on a religious continuum between institutional Christianity and the institutionalized worship of a dystopian god-figure. Thus, inasmuch as dystopian novels discuss religion, they address the progressive replacement of Christianity with a worship of the dystopian god.

The dystopian god, in contrast to the Christian God, is often openly totalitarian. H. Mark Roelofs explains that "the essence of totalitarianism is that the people should love the lord their god with all their heart, all their soul, and all their mind... in a totalitarian state only one love is permitted and it must be total love" (Roelofs 18, 20). In contrast, Roelofs argues, "In the Bible, god possesses total, implacable power. But he also cares... the biblical god is a god of hope, of

conditions, of promises – in short, a god of love” (23-4). *1984*'s god is evil because its image of power is “power without concern. Being total power, and being totally without love even as it requires total submission in love, it is totally evil” (24). Mary Weinkauf agrees, stating that “qualities such as mercy and compassion are unheard of... and unmerited favour and love in the theological sense are... non-existent. Interested only in the superficial well-being of society, the god-figure expects love, loyalty, and ritualized worship, and... sends men to their deaths arbitrarily” (Weinkauf 269). One good example is found in *Anthem*, where Equality 7-2521 is told that “if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies” (18); worship of “the great WE” (14) is the only justification for living.

Whereas the Christian God is remote and mysterious, the dystopian god is “here, below... in the Bureau, in the kitchen, in the shops, in the rest rooms” (Zamiatin 66). Moreover, the dystopian god is limited because it is a construct. Roelofs states that “Big Brother was no existential reality; he was a false god, a Baal, a pure artifice of Oceania's ruling class” (26). According to Weinkauf, the dystopian god suffers from a sort of inferiority complex because, though it has “been in control for as long as most people remember” (267), nevertheless it is not “a creator god” (266). Consequently, in contrast to the Christian God (who is all-encompassing and universal), the dystopian god, which represents merely a social force, condemns any activity not focused on itself. In *1984*, for example, there can be “no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy – everything... There will be no loyalty, except loyalty toward the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother” (220). This demand for “total love,” for the unceasing and exclusive homage of all citizens, makes the dystopian god very different from the Christian God.

Dystopian societies, it must be noted, do not all worship the same god. Several novels portray society itself as a god, including *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Anthem*. Such a god is worshipped by means of “the Hymn of Brotherhood” (Rand 24), “the Hymn of the United State” (Zamiatin 16), or the Solidarity Hymns (Huxley 54-55). Other novels portray social institutions as gods, such as the market in *Player Piano* or the Party in *1984*. The society of *Fahrenheit 451*

worships no particular dystopian god, though there are hints of an emergent god in Montag's comparison of his neighbors' conversation with a religious ritual (95). Finally, the Gileadans of *The Handmaid's Tale* still worship the Christian God, but have perverted His message to support a brutal, repressive, misogynist social order. These gods are projections of the authors' fears: what is only a trend in contemporary culture may assume (or be given) godlike status in the future, making the society dystopian. In other words, according to the authors, societies become dystopian by worshipping idols.

Apart from the general and disembodied gods of social forces, dystopian novels often, though not always, employ an individual who serves as a further embodiment of the deity – a concrete and at least quasi-human manifestation of divinity. Critic H. Mark Roelofs describes this manifestation as “the charismatic leader – distant, mysterious, omnipresent, all-knowing, larger than life and half-divine, yet apparently also simple, warm, and caring” (18). In *Player Piano* this is EPICAC, the super-computer which oversees the entirety of American life; in *Brave New World* it is “our Ford”; in *We* it is the Well-Doer, who is roughly analogous to the Egyptian pharaoh-god; and in *1984* it is Big Brother, who is called “Savior” (17). In *Anthem*, the idea of individuality has become such a blasphemy that there can be no individual personification of the collective; in *Fahrenheit 451*, as above stated, there is no explicit dystopian god, and therefore no human manifestation of that god; and in *The Handmaid's Tale* the Gileadans still worship the Christian God and His unique manifestation, Christ. In Christian terms, personal manifestations of the dystopian god are roughly analogous to Christ, the God-man, and like Christ these “god-people” are depicted as the saviors of their respective societies.

Each god-person is in fact portrayed as a person, not as a force or institution – even *Player Piano's* EPICAC is called an “individual” (119). However, these personal manifestations of dystopian gods follow no particular pattern as to whether they are present in the time-period of the novel – or, for that matter, a real person at all. *Player Piano's* EPICAC is a captive god who must be fed information by keypad. *We's* Well-Doer is reclusive, but still present on earth. *1984's* Big Brother may not even be an actual person. *Brave New World's*

Ford is none other than the famous carmaker Henry Ford, who in the 632nd year “A.F.” (2) has long since returned whence he came. All, however, are believed either to be currently in the world, or to have been on earth at some point in history. The importance of these individuals ultimately lies not in their reality, presence, or fitness to be god-figures, but in their ability to inspire confidence (EPICAC), affirmation (Ford), fear (Big Brother), or reverence (Well-Doer).

Dystopian gods also sometimes have attendant priests. In Christianity, priests are chosen from among the faithful and consecrated to serve as “intermediaries between man and the Divinity” (“Priest”). Unlike Christian priests, however, the priests of a dystopian society are first and foremost ideologues of dystopia. Their primary vocation is often to teach, for example the robot priests in *We* or *1984*’s O’Brien, described as “a priest, anxious to explain and persuade” (203). Priests also serve their god directly and devotionally, as with *Player Piano*’s engineer-priests, a “secret order” serving their god through “important and moving rites” (15), or *1984*’s members of the Inner Party, the “priests of power” (217), who serve power for its own sake.

Inasmuch as a dystopian society requires dehumanization, the dystopian priesthood entails even deeper self-obliteration, to the point that the priest is willing to sacrifice even his concept of reality for the sake of his god. In *We*, priests are robots, reciting pre-recorded lessons to schoolchildren; here, the dehumanization of dystopian society is completed in its priesthood. The Well-Doer, the “supreme priest” (46), is portrayed as only a “tool” as he sacrifices dissident individuals to the will of the collective United State. In *1984*, O’Brien’s abandonment of his own will to the authority of the Party, his god, is complete: “whatever the Party holds to be truth is truth” (205). As a member of the Inner Party, he has adopted the creed of self-annihilation: “the individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual” (218).

Dystopian priests are not, however, intercessory; that is, they are not expected to bring the prayers of the people to the dystopian god, or to change its mind or will. *We*’s Well-Doer acts as the tool of the people, but he does not intercede for them with the United State. The Inner Party of *1984* serves its god, Power, but does not attempt to change its nature. Even the bureaucrat-priests of

Player Piano have little intermediary power to change the will of EPICAC, “a wilderness of metal, glass, plastic, and inert gas” (301). Dystopian priests are dissimilar to Christian priests, because their primary vocation is not intercessory; instead, it is didactic and devotional.

The protagonists of dystopian novels are criminals before they ever act against their society. They become criminals when they fall out of love with their society’s god, whether that be *Player Piano*’s “holy trinity [of] Efficiency, Economy, and Quality” (285) or *1984*’s “Party, which is collective and immortal” (205). Regarding *We*, critic Efraim Sicher points out that even “the knowledge that [the United State] is not the final, perfect Eden and... there are alternative realities outside the walls of the One State is itself a punishable heresy” (385).

Many of the protagonists profess faith in an alternate god – though, as earlier stated, not the Christian God. Usually this alternate god is diametrically opposed to the totalitarian dystopian god: *Anthem*’s WE (14) is opposed by Equality 7-2521’s EGO (123); *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s “God Is a National Resource” (276-7) is opposed by Offred’s “God... Who Art in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is within” (251); *Player Piano*’s “Productivity and economic usefulness” (92) is opposed by Proteus’ Nature (246) and the Ghost Shirts’ humanism; *1984*’s Party is opposed by Smith’s “spirit of Man” (222); and *Brave New World*’s World State is opposed by the Savage’s “Pookong and Jesus” (78).

Whereas the dystopian god is the society’s existing first principle, the protagonist’s god is adopted over the course of the novel as a reaction to that principle. For example, in *Player Piano*, Proteus dreams of escaping the over-mechanized, over-consumerized society he inhabits and perpetuates as the manager of the Ilium production factory by a return to “Earth as God had given it to man” (135). The protagonist-god is usually also a principle, and similarly limited, but (because it is also the author’s principle) presented as a good and redeeming value, like Equality 7-2521’s sacred word “EGO” in *Anthem*.

In their newfound faith, some protagonists must confront challenges to their “heresy” from the dystopian priesthood; examples include Proteus’ uneasy relationship with Kroner in *Player Piano*, Smith’s showdown with O’Brien in *1984* (202-236), and D-503’s audience with the Well-Doer in *We* (198-200). Each

protagonist has faith in his own god, not only to help him survive the dystopian nightmare in which he finds himself, but also to eventually supplant the dystopian god itself. *1984*'s Smith hopes in the spirit of Man to eventually overthrow the rule of the Party; *Anthem*'s Equality 7-2521 believes in the power of "I" (113) to abolish "the worship of the word 'We'" (119); and so on. As far as their societies are concerned, however, dystopian protagonists' attempts to erect a rival god in opposition to the society's first principle constitute "the unforgivable sin" (Rand cover).

A SECOND FALL: SIN IN DYSTOPIAN SOCIETY

The concept of sin is a natural corollary to any creed that confesses a divine moral standard. In dystopian societies, however, humanity is believed to have returned to the "simple-mindedness and innocence of Adam and Eve" (Zamiatin 59). The dystopian society has "defeat[ed] the devil definitely and finally" (59). The result is a second Paradise, in which there is no sin.

Each dystopian society has its own beginning, and references to this origin in the dystopian novels I studied sometimes (as in *We*) use biblical imagery. The novels follow a similar rubric: each of the dystopian societies has its origins in some sort of destructive war which topples the old civilization. During this upheaval, an individual or group "comes to the rescue." Finally, a new, perfect society is instituted to last for all time. For example, the society of *Brave New World* was inaugurated following the Nine Years' War of A.F. 141. According to Mustapha Mond, "people were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life. We've gone on controlling ever since" (155). The same pattern recurs in *1984*. According to Emmanuel Goldstein's heretical book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchal Collectivism*, "it was only after a decade of national wars, civil wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions in all parts of the world that Ingsoc and its rivals emerged" (169). As Goldstein puts it, these new societies view themselves as the final stage of history: "the familiar pendulum swing was to happen once more, and then stop" (Orwell 167-168). Because the new society is the dystopian equivalent of paradise, there is no room for further perfection – the society is perfect, and therefore sin should also be a dead

concept. The fact that the novels' protagonists do sin (at least, according to society's definition) is proof that dystopian society is actually imperfect.

The concept of sin is most developed in *Anthem*, where "sin" (or "transgression," which is equivalent) is mentioned fifteen times. *Anthem's* society is also the most dystopian of any I studied: almost no memory is left of the previous era, the "Unmentionable Times" (14). Society has been totally rearranged on a communal basis, and communalism has been so enshrined that the word "I" is completely forgotten. Nevertheless, Equality 7-2521 finds himself to be different from his fellows. He is "born with a curse" (13) of being stronger and smarter than those around him, and this difference leads him to dream of choosing his own profession, search for artifacts of the Unmentionable Times, and commit the Transgression of Preference with International 4-8818 and Liberty 5-3000. All of this is evil, and is punishable by the state. However, even in the midst of his "sin," Equality 7-2521 muses, "in our heart – strange are the ways of evil! – in our heart there is the first peace we have known for twenty years" (36). His sin makes him feel truly himself.

Obviously, this is an odd concept of sin, which *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "a violation (especially willful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle" ("Sin"). In a dystopian society, however, the very notion of "good" is perverted, because the dystopian god is man-made and limited. What is "good" for the *Player Piano's* economy (shunting sub-par workers into degrading jobs), or the community in *Brave New World* (creating test-tube babies and enforcing total sexual promiscuity), or Gilead's patriarchy in *The Handmaid's Tale* (dehumanizing women and institutionalizing adultery), is not at all identical to what is "good" according to Christianity. However, for each dystopian society, the concept of good and evil is just as absolute as that of Christianity. Hence, in the foreword to *Brave New World*, Huxley writes that "in an age of advanced technology, inefficiency is a sin against the Holy Ghost" (xii), the unforgivable sin. In the dystopian society of *Player Piano*, ghettoizing the greater part of America's citizenry is morally good because it makes production more efficient, but 'saboteur' is "the ugliest word in the language" (224).

In “Christianity without Tears: Man without Humanity,” Almeda King states that “in the Christian ethic... the estrangement of man from God (sin) makes it possible for man to become man. The choice which the presence of sin forces man to make is what gives man the opportunity to exert himself as moral agent and thus achieve meaning as man” (824). Likewise, Efraim Sicher argues that “the Fall is inevitable and essential unless man is to lose completely his humanity” (387). Whether or not this is orthodox Christian doctrine (a question beyond the scope of this thesis), it does correspond well to the protagonists’ experience of sin. *Anthem’s* Equality 7-2521 feels liberated by his individuality; *Player Piano’s* Proteus feels exalted at the archaic idea of wilderness survival, “winning by sinew and guts a mountain of strong, red meat from an inhospitable world” (110-111); *1984’s* Smith enjoys his illicit affair with Julia and his reading of Goldstein’s heretical book, opining “it was bliss, it was eternity” (152). For dystopian protagonists, the world of the dystopia is drab and dull, and sins are the only pleasures available.

The protagonist of a dystopian novel does not merely sin, however. In *1984*, while Winston Smith is being detained in the Ministry of Love, Parsons, a former acquaintance, is also brought in. Parsons has been caught muttering “down with Big Brother!” in his sleep. In contrast to Smith, though, he is actually happy to have been caught: “between you and me, old man, I’m glad they got me before it went any further. Do you know what I’m going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal? ‘Thank you,’ I’m going to say, ‘thank you for saving me before it’s too late’” (193). This, according to Mary Weinkauf, is “dystopian grace” (269) – Parsons has sinned against Big Brother and the Party, but he is still faithful, so reconciliation is still possible. Smith, in contrast, has broken faith by attempting to join the Brotherhood of Emmanuel Goldstein, “the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party’s purity” (14). Smith is more than a sinner: he is a heretic.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a heretic as “one who maintains theological or religious opinions at variance with the ‘catholic’ or orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church, or, by extension, that of any church or religious system, considered as orthodox” (“Heretic”). Faith in an alternate god, which

each protagonist professes, definitely falls under this definition. In *We*, even “the knowledge that [*We*’s society] is not the final, perfect Eden... is itself a punishable heresy” (Sicher 385). Dystopian societies make truth claims about reality, such as “we make the laws of nature” (Orwell 218), “everyone belongs to everyone else” (Huxley 26), “people want to be happy” (Bradbury 59), and “if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies” (Rand 18); dystopian protagonists are heretics because they reject these claims. These protagonists are not simply sinners, but heretics who must be “broken on the altar” (Roelofs 26) of the dystopian god.

Dystopian societies have various institutions and procedures to bring dissidents back into full orthodoxy. In *Fahrenheit 451*, which portrays a society where books are banned, after Montag steals a book to read, his boss Beatty tells him that “we let the fireman keep the book twenty-four hours. If he hasn’t burned it by then, we simply come burn it for him” (62). If Montag repents, he may still be saved. In the end, however, he fails to return all the books he has hidden, and ends up having to flee the city. Another example occurs in the society of *We*. After “quantities of Numbers ... have betrayed Reason” (218), the United State orders all citizens to undergo the “Great Operation” which will remove “fancy,” or free will, and restore orthodoxy through X-ray bombardment (166-167). In much the same way, *1984*’s O’Brien tells Smith that “we do not destroy the heretic because he resists us... we convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him” (210). Each dystopian society gives the protagonist an opportunity to recant, but not all of them accept this dystopian salvation. Smith (*1984*) and D-503 (*We*) recant; Montag (*Fahrenheit 451*), Equality 7-2521 (*Anthem*), and Offred (*The Handmaid’s Tale*) escape from their societies, and Proteus (*Player Piano*) actually leads a rebellion against the U.S. government to overthrow the EPICAC-controlled economy. By and large, therefore, dystopian protagonists would rather be damned in a society of their own choosing than saved into a dystopian society.

CONCLUSIONS

A review of my original hypotheses shows that, while I found a great deal more data than I expected, my postulates still proved to be more true than not. I

expected the majority of signs of organized religion to appear in connection with the State; in most of the novels, organization (prayers, priests, services, and so on) is a characteristic only of the state religion, and has no part in the protagonists' religions. (In *Brave New World*, the single exception to this trend, John Savage's pueblo religion also incorporates ceremony – but, once John enters the world of the World State, he also lacks any religious organization.)

I also predicted that individual religion would be opposed to the State. While many of the protagonists and other “good” characters of the novels are atheist or areligious – *Brave New World's* Bernard Marx and *Fahrenheit 451's* Guy Montag, among others – other characters, such as *Player Piano's* Reverend Lasher, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Brave New World's* John Savage, rely heavily on their faith in their resistance to the dystopian society.

I also hypothesized that organized religion would be portrayed as powerful, while individual religiosity would be mostly powerless, and here I was surprised. The results of this hypothesis seem to be split. While gods such as Winston Smith's “spirit of man,” Paul Proteus' deified Nature, and John Savage's “Jesus and Pookong” all fall to the dominant dystopian religion, other characters like Equality 7-2521 and Offred manage to escape from their dystopias with the help of their faith.

Finally, I guessed that textual religious references would serve to give additional meaning to specific events in the narrative. While a minor point compared to the first three, this is also borne out in the texts. Some notable examples are R-13's comparison of the United State to Eden in *We*, Equality 7-2521's re-imagining of his society's heretics as saints, the use of “Ford” and the sign of the “T” in *Brave New World*, Messianic language in *Player Piano*, and so on.

Given the purpose of the dystopian novel, to raise the reader's awareness of current social trends and dangers, do the dystopian novels I studied really address Christianity as a subject? Overall, no. Although all seven novels were written in Western societies with a strong Christian institutional presence, only one (*The Handmaid's Tale*) has extended Christian institutional influence into the dystopia of the novel. In the societies of all the other novels, Christianity is either extinct or becoming extinct. Overall, dystopian novelists do not view

Christianity as a future danger, or a future salvation from danger; rather, it is social principles, idolatrously enshrined in a Christian religious template, which present the real hazard.

The dystopian novels I studied do show a recognizable and consistent pattern in their treatment of religion. Most of these novels are intensely religious works. Not only are their societies patterned on a Christian model, including god-figures, priests, and religious ceremonies, but their storylines also follow the Christian story: the protagonist lives in Paradise, but through sin falls from grace, and is ultimately confronted with a final choice between salvation and damnation. In their novels, dystopian authors use the structure, theology, mythology, and language of Christianity to show that humanity's greatest danger lies in sociopolitical idolatry, in creating a dystopian substitute for Christianity.

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