

PANELOUX'S TURN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SERMONS OF *THE PLAGUE*

By Eric Berg

I'd rather succeed in doing what we can than fail to do what we can't.¹

— RICHARD ADAMS, *Watership Down*

18. The acts of men are worthy of neither fire nor heaven.²

— JORGE LUIS BORGES, "Fragments from an Apocryphal Gospel"

In this essay I will argue that Camus presents two possible Christian answers for a classic theodicy. The first is an Augustinian answer and the second is from Tertullian (a second century Christian theologian from North Africa.) in the end both fail and theodicy yields absurdity.

In an essay titled "A Tribute to Albert Camus", Jean-Paul Sartre remarked that "One had to avoid him or fight him—he was indispensable to that tension which makes intellectual life what it is."³ This is the fate of Father Paneloux in *The Plague*. Camus sets forth a classic theodicy dilemma, and the Roman priest must face the horns of the bull; much like Sartre's observation of Camus, Paneloux was caught in that terrible intellectual tension and dies a "doubtful case."

Father Paneloux delivers two sermons to the inhabitants of Oran during their year of plague. *The Plague*, as a novel, is carefully constructed in five sections; positioned within parts one and four, like twin pillars, are the two sermons of Father Paneloux. Camus very obviously draws attention to elements in and around the sermons that set the two apart. What is most clear is that Father Paneloux has changed between the two sermons he delivers. The direct cause of the change is not in question, it is the death of a child, but several questions do remain unanswered. What does Camus say to the reader with the tension between the two sermons? What are the underlying theological changes in Paneloux's sermon, and how do they attempt to answer the dilemma raised by Camus? Are they successful?

The first question formulated above is answered by saying that Camus demonstrated to the reader that there is no successful Christian resolution to the theodicy dilemma presented in *The Plague*. Paneloux holds to a firm Augustinian line based upon the supreme will of God as an answer to the plague in the first sermon. In the second sermon, he shifts to a

¹ Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (New York: Scribner, 1972)

² Jorge Luis Borges, "Fragments from an Apocryphal Gospel", *Selected Poems*, edited by Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Tribute to Albert Camus", *Camus: a Collection of Essays*, edited by Germaine Bree. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962. P.174

position closer to Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum est*⁴ (I believe because it is absurd) or a move to the mystery of God. In the face of the death of the child, both attempts to avoid the horns fail, and what finally can be said is said by Rieux in the closing of the novel. Camus'/Rieux's answer is that "...we learn in times of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise."⁵

Who is Father Paneloux? We know from Camus that he is a Jesuit priest who serves the Roman church in Oran, Algeria. He is an expert on Augustine as Camus himself was.⁶ Paneloux is introduced to the reader in part one of the novel by attending to a parishioner (apparently), and Dr. Rieux is about to see the parishioner in question. The narrator describes the Father as a "...learned and militant Jesuit... who was very highly thought of in our town, even in circles quite indifferent to religion."⁷ This introduction of Paneloux serves to dismiss any charges of Camus creating a straw-man out of the Christian position. As a "learned and militant Jesuit" Paneloux would be extremely well equipped in any theological or philosophical debate. The Jesuit order of the Roman Church should immediately bring considerable academic credibility to Paneloux, and I would presume that "militant" could be read as "orthodox" as well as an attitudinal disposition. The effect is that the reader cannot impeach his credentials to deal with the theological issues that plague will bring. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that, in this scene, it is Paneloux who makes the first correct assessment of the situation in Oran. He tells the doctor that this business of the rats has to do with "...an epidemic they are having."⁸ This effectively demonstrates to the reader that Paneloux is aware of the concrete situation around him. Paneloux is used as a "stock" representative of the French Catholic church at the time of the German invasion or, as Camus dates the novel, "194-." Paneloux's views will accurately represent the views of French clergy at the time in France. Clearly Paneloux is a "cut above" the average French cleric in terms of education alone, not to mention other possible categories. What Paneloux represents is the intellectual leadership that will actually do the academic formulation of the theological responses to the German invasion. What men like Paneloux decide will work its way into the pulpits all around France through official channels. Paneloux is also employed to explore the question of evil, and his attempt is restrained by the size of the novel, and the fact that the Christian response is only one reaction that Camus intended to cover. Camus cannot represent every Christian position, so he must select one, and he does a fine job by selecting a Jesuit Augustine scholar.

Concerning the selection of Paneloux, Thomas Hanna makes an accurate observation about Christianity and Camus. Hanna wrote:

*It is a curious thing about the thought of Albert Camus that he has not estranged himself from Christian readers...when Christians pick up the works of Camus, it is with a mind to learn. It is encouraging and admirable that there continues to be a healthy dialogue between Camus and Christian thinkers.*⁹

This is reflected in his careful choice of, and categorical character development of Paneloux. It has been speculated that Paneloux could be modeled after a priest named Pain whom Camus knew in Oran, but Jean Grenier thinks that Camus borrowed his name from

⁴ *Early Latin Theology* edited by S.L. Greenshade, (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1986)

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, (New York: Vintage International, 1991) p. 308

⁶ Camus' level of expertise is that of Paneloux's because Paneloux is a fictional character and his level of knowledge is derivative from the author.

⁷ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 17

⁸ *ibid.* p.18

⁹ Thomas L. Hanna, "Albert Camus and the Christian Faith", from *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Germaine Bree (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962) p.56.

the town of Le Panelier.¹⁰ Prototypes aside, Paneloux is an extremely interesting character in the novel whom one cannot help but look to for answers.

James Woelfel, in his book *Camus: A Theological Perspective*, points to the direction of the questions I raise in this paper. Woelfel argues that Paneloux's second sermon is the "...only satisfactory rationale that can be constructed for the Christian resolution of the problem of evil given the divine omnipotence."¹¹ I agree with the claim in that it is an attempted resolution of the dilemma by Paneloux after the first attempt fails. However, it is my position that Camus demonstrates that both attempts by Paneloux end in failure; that there is no satisfactory answer for Paneloux given the dilemma and his theological commitments.

What this paper focuses upon is the classic theological dilemma set upon father Paneloux and the reader in *The Plague*. The dilemma is presented in the standard format.¹² The Christian God has the attributes of being both omnipotent and wholly good.¹³ Being omnipotent entails having unchecked power and being wholly good entails having the will to do good at all times. The final component of the dilemma is not a trait of God, but an ontological claim that evil exists. The dilemma quickly moves to contradiction. Either God's power is limited in contradiction to being omnipotent, or he has not done the good thing that is within his power, a failure of the divine will. The last move available to save the attributes of God is to deny the existence of evil. In the face of the plague, and particularly the death of the innocent child this is also a move to contradiction. This is Paneloux's situation.

Camus intentionally draws the reader's attention to the differences between the two sermons. There are differences of style, the weather, the congregation, and Paneloux's shift in pronoun use. These differences should be considered when separating the two sermons from one another.

The first clear difference is the style of delivery between the two sermons. The narrator describes Paneloux as "...a man of passionate and fiery temperament...who flung himself wholeheartedly into the task assigned him."¹⁴ He is described as being a "stocky man with a massive torso." The reader can picture an imposing figure with a bass voice perhaps. The first sermon is delivered with a "powerful and emotional delivery...with clear emphatic tones." As Paneloux delivers the sermon, he actually gains intensity as it matches the thunderstorm outside. Toward the end of the delivery, he is physically worn out, "his hair was straggling over his forehead...his body shaken with tremors."¹⁵ and he speaks in a

¹⁰ Jene Grenier, *Albert Camus: Sun and Shade: An Intellectual Biography* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) P.155

¹¹ James Woelfel, *Camus: A Theological Perspective*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975) P.86

¹² This dilemma has been set forth in innumerable ways. For several examples see the following: Dostovesky's *Rebellion* from *The Brothers Karamazov*; J.L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*; and Peter Van Inwagen, *The Magnitude, Duration and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy*.

¹³ When considering the attributes of God for this dilemma it is important to consider omniscience. Typically I have collapsed this into omnipotence. What is a God that is all powerful but has limited knowledge? By separating out God's knowledge it seems to also eliminate the power of God. Without knowledge God is limited and loses some of his power, any loss of power makes God less than omnipotent. However, it is important to note that there are already limitations placed upon God. First are logical limitations. Does omnipotence mean God can create a round square? Furthermore, time seems to have a limiting factor of God. Can He change what has been? It is helpful to look at this from the Augustinian perspective as Paneloux and Camus might. God sees every moment as one. He has a special vision, and this does make some modification upon the theodicy problem. However, this paper as I see it is concerned with the arguments as I find them in *The Plague*. The categories of God's power are set forth in the three fold format that I argue for. A modern response may incorporate temporal consideration to the question, but as I see Paneloux's position, he recognizes God as Omnipotent and completely good, and any considerations of God's knowledge will be included in His power. For example this could be the very best state of affairs possible for Oran in 194_. However, it does not make the dilemma dissipate or help with the death of the child.

¹⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

¹⁵ Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

lower voice that is described as “matter-of-fact.” At the very end, it is reported that he pauses enough to give the impression he is done, and then launches into a final assault. This is a widely used tactic employed in public speaking and preaching that draws attention to the conclusion. In terms of form, the sermon is passionate, dramatic and above all authoritative. The first sermon is delivered by a scholar who also demonstrates an ability to preach.

The second sermon is delivered in a much more personal way, less intentional. Paneloux shows the characteristics of a person who has been through a plague not of a professional orator, but Camus still describes it as a “performance.” Paneloux now delivers his sermon in a “...gentler, more thoughtful tone...and several times stumbled over his words.” His voice only grows firmer as he proceeds, and then he finally manages a dramatic gesture. As the sermon comes to an end, he recaptures the spirit from the first sermon, slams his fist on the pulpit and ends in a voice that is “ringing.” After the sermon, two priests describe the sermon as more “uneasy” than powerful. This uneasiness can be attributed to his shift in theological position. The first sermon is delivered in a powerful self-assured form. Paneloux has Augustine figuratively standing right behind him in the pulpit; he is sure of all his claims. The uneasiness of the second delivery demonstrates a lack of confidence, and it marks a shift in theology. It is a shift from the sure-footed and familiar terrain of Hippo (Augustine) to the treacherous and foreign terrain of Carthage (Tertullian).

Next, is the congregation that hears the sermon. The attendance is considered high for Oran, but Camus is quick to qualify this. It is because the beaches are closed, and the anxiety of plague setting in draws the curious. Camus also hints that many of the congregation have adopted the seductive Pascalian position of believing “it can’t do any harm.” In this time of great crisis, the inhabitants of Oran have turned toward religion as opposed to their lives during a more normal time when there is no immediate crisis. It has quickly been calculated by some parts of the general population that going to church can operate as an insurance policy.

For one reason or another people come to hear Paneloux and the cathedral is full for the first sermon; people are spilling out onto the street to hear him preach. It is haunting that Paneloux himself calls attention to St. Roch, a Roman Catholic Saint invoked during a time of plague, in the first sermon, and when the plague is raging in full force many of his congregation turn to St. Roch in almost idolatry. For the second sermon, Paneloux is delivering his message to a designated crowd. Paneloux preaches his second sermon at a “Mass for men”, which sets it apart curiously from the first sermon. The narrator reports that the congregation is “sparser...three quarters full” as St. Roch has attracted his following, and the women are missing.¹⁶ Dr Rieux is present at both sermons and provides the highly observant reporting of each.

Camus also uses extraordinary weather conditions to support the sermons and distinguish them. The first sermon is occasioned by a tremendous rainstorm. The rain sets the tone in the church by way of “heavy” fumes of incense and wet clothes. The narrator notes that “... these words, striking through a silence intensified by the drumming of raindrops on the chancel windows...”¹⁷ When the sermon is done, we are informed that the sun has broken out and the rain is gone. Paneloux has outlasted the thunderstorm. This will not be the case in the second sermon. During the second sermon, there is a great wind blowing, and it is described as “filling the church with sudden drafts.” The rain seems to work in favor of the first sermon, and the wind against the second. As Paneloux begins to finally gather some steam in his delivery the wind begins to “thump” the cathedral door,

¹⁶ This description of the congregation is similar to the reports in the rest of the novel by the fact that there is no mention of any Arabs.

¹⁷ Albert Camus, *The Plague* p.93

and it draws attention away from the sermon at the critical moment that Paneloux is gaining some momentum on his situation. The wind blown door leaves the reader feeling distracted when reading the sermon, and places the reader into the equally distracted mind of someone in the cathedral. When the congregation of men leave, the second sermon the wind is still raging and Paneloux is done, his words and those of his critics seem to be lost in the African wind. Camus is clear to point out that the wind is from inland, and not the sea. When the wind begins to blow in from the Mediterranean the plague will break.

The final and most telling difference is the shift in pronoun use. Paneloux shifts from "you" to the all inclusive "we." The narrator calls direct attention to this difference, so it should not be taken lightly. Camus remarks, "A yet more noteworthy change was that instead of saying 'you' he now said 'we'." Paneloux from the first sermon: "Calamity has come upon you, my brethren."¹⁸ Paneloux from the second sermon: "We must believe everything, or deny everything."¹⁹ The focus on God's judgment separated Paneloux from the other inhabitants of Oran; he does not see himself as part of the chain of cause and effect that has brought plague to the city. In the second sermon, he is one of the indicted, and the guilt becomes corporate, as does the struggle.

As the novel should be considered operating on three levels, the story of Oran itself, of Nazi occupation of France, and of the human condition, the analysis of Paneloux's sermons must be investigated from all three perspectives.²⁰ The three levels are: first as a particular city gripped by the plague, second as a metaphor for the German invasion of France, and, third as a commentary on the universal human condition.

I shall consider the second level first, or the German invasion of France. Considering the sermons as a metaphor for the German occupation of France, Germaine Brée made an interesting observation in her book titled *Camus*. In a foot-note (unfortunately unsupported by any citation), she reported that the first sermon of Paneloux recalls Catholic sermons delivered in France in 1940. These sermons called for the French to "...consider the defeat and occupation of France as the natural punishment for its sins and to accept it therefore as such, to repent and trust in God."²¹ Thomas Merton follows the lead of Brée, and also makes a direct connection to the sermons delivered in France in the 1940's. Merton reported: "The theme of plague as punishment for sin echoes the preaching of many French Catholic priests and bishops after the fall of France during the 'great penitence of Vichy.'"²² Unfortunately this represents, with a few exceptions, the reaction of the Church as a whole to the war and the holocaust in Europe. The move from Augustine to Tertullian that Paneloux makes is representative of the Church in Europe at the time. Both the Roman Church and the various Protestant denominations were in a fight for survival, being divided like the populations of Europe. Some served their homes in exile, and others served fascist governments. When we consider Paneloux as a character on this level, he begins as a passive force, giving no direction and extolling only judgment. His next sermon only adds

¹⁸ Albert Camus, *The Plague* p. 94

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 224

²⁰ An interesting fourth option has been put forth by Lulu M. Haroutunian. Haroutunian also sees Camus' *Plague* operating as a metaphor for those who suffer from tuberculosis during this time, as Camus did. In the article titled *Albert Camus and the White Plague* (MLN, Vol. 79, Issue 3, French Issue, May 1964) Haroutunian makes a compelling argument that Camus is also talking from experience and relating the novel to his time in the sanatorium. Haroutunian argues that the word "Plague" can be read as "Tuberculosis" and "Plague bacillus" for "tubercle bacillus". By contrast Theodore Ziolkowski in his article titled *Camus in Germany, or the Return of the Prodigal Son* (Theodore Ziolkowski, *Yale French Studies*, Volume 0, Issue 25, 1960) argues that Germans have only read *The Plague* on one or two levels. He stated that Germans have "...consistently ignored this interpretation (Oran as France)...And Germany, whose solicitous paternity he firmly declined, is left holding the calf – which has grown remarkable fat."

²¹ Germaine Bree, *Camus*, p.126

²² Thomas Merton, *Albert Camus' The Plague* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968) p.12

confusion to judgment with the move to absurdity. Finally, he seems to resist by joining the sanitation squads, bringing forth memories of people like Simone Weil and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It is also worth noting that both Augustine and Tertullian attack Marcion (first century Christian bishop eventually excommunicated by the Church) in their work, particularly the work that I attribute to Camus for the formulation of the sermons in *The Plague*. Marcion attempted to eliminate the Old Testament from the canon, and traces of Judaism from the New Testament. His canon became the Gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul. For these reasons he became an important theological instrument in the hands of the Third Reich. The selection of Augustine and Tertullian in light of their criticism of Marcion is an important connection to keep in mind when reading *The Plague* as a metaphor for Christian reactions to the Nazi invasion of France. The theologians that I propose Camus makes use of to advance his theological arguments in the text both attack Marcion, thus representing positive Christian elements in Europe during the time of Nazi dominance.

Paneloux's sermons work as a commentary on the first and third level reading²³ of *The Plague* at the same time. The sermons are employed to represent the Christian reaction to natural evil given their particular ontological belief. Each character in the novel has a different set of beliefs that are brought to bear on the question of natural evil. Dr. Rieux has no transcendent being to contend with, but he does have special knowledge of the evil, and with this knowledge comes an ability and responsibility to fight it. Cottard sees it as a reprieve from the normal human system that haunts him. He takes it as an opportunity. The other citizens of Oran have found themselves in his position. They are now all under indictment and arrest, awaiting judgment. In some ways he has a special theological vision, that of Barrabas, the one set free. Paneloux is placed in a unique position; he has a transcendent being that has taken an active hand in the plague, but one that he will not blame. This presents a very special set of circumstances to work out regarding the question of natural evil, and transforms itself into a theodicy dilemma.

Augustinian Elements of the First Sermon

It is clear that Paneloux functions as a theological voice for Camus. He wants to address the question of universal human suffering in the face of evil from several perspectives, and Paneloux's is the religious perspective. As I have argued in this paper, the selection of a Jesuit Augustine scholar is not by accident. Camus knew the theological position of Augustine very well. He did his graduate work in philosophy on Augustine, and this allows Camus to work competently from a theological position for the construction of the sermons. Furthermore, it also represents what Camus may see as the best Christian theologian to work with: an African from the Mediterranean region who knew Greek philosophy. This would suit Camus' taste and background much better than a theologian from northern Europe who called Aristotle "a whore and worse" for example.

In this section, I will reconstruct Paneloux's first sermon from the theological works of Augustine. In the following section, I will do the same with Paneloux's second sermon and Tertullian.

Augustine argues in his *Enchiridion*: "It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause of all created things, whether heavenly or earthly...is the goodness of God; and

²³ The first level being a story about a city gripped in plague, or a particular human condition. The second level as the German occupation of France during World War Two. The third level being about the universal human condition.

that nothing exists...that does not derive its existence from Him".²⁴ Paneloux reflected this belief when he preached: "Today the truth is a command. It is a red spear pointing to the narrow path, the one of salvation...the divine compassion which has ordained good and evil in everything; wrath and pity; the plague and your salvation. This same pestilence which is slaying you works for your good and points your path..."²⁵ All things work for the good for Augustine and Paneloux. The plague that has visited Oran is there to deliver them to a higher good, it comes to change their path and judge them. It is from God, it appears evil but ultimately it is good. This is a complicated theological position that Paneloux must work out, it traces the path of evil and sets it into the created order. This functions as a necessary condition to set in motion the contradiction. This formulation will attempt to shift the blame from God to the human agent, but it moves quickly to contradiction. The evil is derivative from God, and the dilemma of being omnipotent and willing the good quickly corners Paneloux.

The following passages set forth the classic theodicy dilemma for Augustine. Augustine commits himself (and Paneloux) to the classic threefold form of the dilemma. In it he claims the omnipotence of God, along with his entire goodness, and the existence of evil. The elements are presented clearly and completely when Augustine argues, "...If he were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil."²⁶ All the necessary conditions are present in this formulation from Augustine. He claims the omnipotence of God, his goodness, and that evil exists. Paneloux echoes this when he preaches, "It (plague) reveals the will of God in action, unfailingly transforming evil into good."²⁷ The two are theologically linked, and committed to arguing the theodicy dilemma from the classical Augustine position.

With the necessary conditions of the theodicy dilemma in place, Augustine's move is to God's judgment. Augustine argued, "Nor can we doubt that God does well even in the permission of what is evil. For He permits it only in the justice of His judgment."²⁸ Paneloux confidently follows his master: "And this is why, wearied of waiting for you to come to him, He loosed on you this visitation; as he has visited all the cities that offended against Him since the dawn of history."²⁹ The blame stands with the community, and the plague that has been sent by God is a necessary consequence of their actions. The problem with this is that it checks God's power. The actions of Oran logically (or metaphysically) entail that a plague be set loose, or at the least judgment be delivered. God had no other choice but to deliver the plague to Oran. When the emphasis is placed upon the judgment of God, God cannot overlook a city that calls for plague. It seems that God could have set loose some other form of judgment upon Oran. What is critical to realize is with the necessity of judgment in place God has to deliver. God has delivered judgment upon all the other cities in history that are like Oran.³⁰ Now, as time dictates, he judges Oran. The form has been set in holy history (*Heilsgeschichte*), judgment of the human from God. Similar to the famous sermon by Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, now the consequences of their actions have come forth like the rats, and act as the first link in a deadly and tragic chain of events.

²⁴ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith Hope and Love*, Translated by Thomas S. Hibbs, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1996.) P. 10

²⁵ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 96.

²⁶ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* p.11

²⁷ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 99.

²⁸ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, p. 110

²⁹ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 97

³⁰ It is not clear to anyone in the novel what exactly the city has done. It could be a general attitude, or a build up of past sins that has reached a breaking point in the 1940's. Whatever it is, God has now judged.

Augustine argues his point further in the *Enchiridion*: "The omnipotent God, then, whether in mercy He pitieth whom He will, or in judgment hardeneth whom He will, is never unjust in what he does..."³¹ Paneloux exegetes Exodus to make his point: "Pharaoh set himself up against the divine will, and the plague beat him to his knees...Now, at last, you know the hour has struck to bend your thoughts to first and last things."³² This part of the sermon functions to bring some Biblical clarity to the situation. Apparently, the citizens of Oran are guilty; as was the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh set himself up against God, and the result is plague. It is interesting to note that a close reading of the Exodus text shows that the Pharaoh had his heart hardened by God,³³ without any agency on his part. Exodus 4:21 reads, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.'"³⁴ He did not "set himself up against God," it seems that he was set up against, and by God. Is this a mistake by Camus or Paneloux? I blame the former. Regardless of the exegetical error, this demonstrates an act of necessity that is set into the holy history of the world, and has a precedent in Biblical narrative.

Paneloux is cornered by the horns of the bull. It is the will of God that has brought about this evil. To deny that is to check God's power or bind His will. The plague must originate somewhere, either from God or elsewhere. Take your pick, either move hangs Paneloux on a horn. If he denies that God sent plague then it came from somewhere else, and God did not have the power to stop it. If it came from God, then God is responsible for the evil. He does not deny that it is from God, in fact he asserts that it is an instrument of judgment wielded by God. If Paneloux denies that it is evil, he either denies that God is wholly good, or denies that plague is evil. All roads lead to contradiction for Father Paneloux. Upon reflection, and the death of the child, he delivers a second sermon.

The Second Sermon and Tertullian

Paneloux's theological position has significantly changed from the first sermon to the second. This change has come over time, and it is reasonable to assume that he has delivered only two sermons thus far during the plague. The narrator draws the reader's attention to the fact that it is a remarkable event for Paneloux to deliver these sermons. It is the death of the child that Paneloux observes that has the direct effect on his theological position. The narrator reports, "He had rubbed shoulders with death."³⁵ Paneloux cannot hold to the doctrine of plague as judgment after the death of the innocent child and the death of the child, Paneloux is under great pressure to abandon his master, Augustine. After deconstructing Paneloux's second sermon, and reading all the relevant secondary material on this sermon, I have concluded that Paneloux makes a move toward another early church father from Africa, Tertullian.³⁶ It is not as clear as his reliance on Augustine to formulate the first sermon, however the evidence points to Tertullian as the inspiration for the second sermon. At the very least if Camus is not familiar with Tertullian's work, the sermon is very close to Tertullian's theological formulation of "I believe because it is absurd." I do not believe that Camus intend to, nor did he, break any new theological ground with this sermon. If he did not intend it to be formulated from Tertullian, it ends up there.

³¹ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, p. 118

³² Albert Camus, *The Plague*, pp. 96-97

³³ See also Matthew 19:8.

³⁴ NRSV *The Harper Collins Study Bible*.

³⁵ *The Plague*, p. 222

³⁶ The word "absurd" appearing as a central theme of a theological position developed in North Africa was very attractive to Camus no doubt.

Like Augustine, it is not surprising that Camus would select Tertullian as the theological father of the second sermon. Tertullian, who is from the North African city of Carthage, was a convert to Christianity in his thirties, and is a prime candidate for Camus theologically, geographically, and historically. Tertullian concerned himself with the attributes of God, employing the first theological use of the terms *Trinitas*, *Persona*,³⁷ and *Substantia*. Tertullian's work on the Trinity comes through clearly in Paneloux's second sermon. Tertullian taught that God is one; nevertheless, God cannot be regarded as something or someone totally isolated from the created order as God is active in the created order. For Tertullian the three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided. What we experience is the complex action of such a being in human history, and thus the mystery. Paneloux seems to grab hold of this notion in the second sermon. In it he said, "...that there were some things we could grasp as touching God, and others we could not."³⁸

What may have attracted Camus to his work is that Tertullian concerns himself with "fever" in a very intriguing way. Tertullian employs "fever" as a metaphor for heresy in his text titled *The Prescription Against The Heretics*.³⁹ Tertullian wrote:

Fever, for example, we are not surprised to find in its appointed place among the fatal and excruciating issues which destroy human life, since it does in fact exist; and we are not surprised to find it destroying life, since that is why it exists. Similarly, if we are alarmed that heresies which have been produced in order to weaken and kill the faith can actually do so... 40

Plague and heresy are linked, and the same judgment follows from each naturally. After delivering his second sermon, Father Paneloux is considered by some of the priests to be in the early grip of heresy. As the two priests leave the second sermon, the comment that the sermon was "bold" in thought. This boldness made him uneasy and a priest Paneloux's age had no business being uneasy. This probable means a "uneasiness" with church doctrine and a "boldness" to venture beyond what is established, or what has come to be expected from Paneloux, the "militant" Jesuit. The Priests believe that his forthcoming essay (on the question of a priest seeking a doctor) will be bolder still, and will be refused imprimatur. The early signs of straying too far off the doctrinal path. As the readers of *The Plague* know at the time he delivers his second sermon, Paneloux is probably already infected with plague, or whatever strange fever he dies of in the end. Camus like Tertullian links fever and heresy.

The most common point of connection cited among Camus scholars is Tertullian's famous (albeit rather difficult to attribute) "I believe because it is absurd." Both Thomas Merton and Steven G. Kellman in their books titled respectively *Albert Camus' The Plague*,⁴¹ and *The Plague: Fiction and Resistance*⁴² attribute this passage from Tertullian as the inspiration for Paneloux's second sermon. After analysis of both Tertullian and the second sermon, I agree with this argument. The actual citation from Tertullian is as follows: "The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed just because men feel ashamed of it. And the

³⁷ *Persona* literally means "a mask" for the Romans. When considering the attributes of God it is the concept of *deus absconditus* that helps many Protestant theologians with theodicy dilemmas. The hiddenness of God and our inability to look behind the masks of God to reveal any clear meaning.

³⁸ Camus, *The Plague*, p.223

³⁹ *Early Latin Theology* edited by S.L. Greenshade, (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1986) There is little doubt in my mind that Camus was very familiar with this work. His Masters Thesis on Augustine was focused on Marcion's heresy as is Tertullian's work cited above. Camus, Augustine and Tertullian all engage Marcion on the origin and function of evil in the world.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *The Prescriptions Against Heretics*. P. 31

⁴¹ Tomas Merton, *Albert Camus' The Plague*, p. 37

⁴² Steven Kellman, *The Plague: Fiction and Resistance*, (New York, Twain Publishers, 1993) p.58

Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And he was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible".⁴³ This famous passage serves as the magnet that attracts both Paneloux and Camus. It is a logical move from the unforgiving position of Augustine to the mystery and absurdity of Tertullian.

The centerpiece of Paneloux's second sermon is the "hard " either/or that he presents the congregation of Oran. Paneloux preaches: "My Brothers, a time of testing has come for us all. We must believe in everything or deny everything."⁴⁴ This hard either/or can clearly be developed from Tertullian. Tertullian sets forth his position, "When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for when we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe."⁴⁵ Paneloux echoes Tertullian when he preaches, "Thus today God has vouchsafed to His creatures an ordeal such that they must acquire and practice the greatest of all virtues: that of the All or Nothing."⁴⁶ The development of the "virtue" of belief implies a correct content of belief with everything else standing outside this. For Paneloux, if we hold the virtue of belief then we have no desire to believe anything else. For example, this can be compared to the virtue of truth telling. If we have developed the virtue of truth telling, and we are faced with a situation in which we may lie, we are compelled to tell the truth. The use of virtue also shows Paneloux's Roman allegiance to Aristotle and to Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor" of the Church. There are boundaries on what can be held as a belief and what cannot in the Roman system. There is an established order of beliefs to be held to that Tertullian stands within. Tertullian made his position clear when he wrote:

My first principle is this. Christ laid down one definite system of truth which the world must believe without qualification, and which we must seek precisely in order to believe it when we find it...You must seek until you find, and when you find, you must believe. Then you have simply to keep what you have come to believe, since you also believe there is nothing else to believe...⁴⁷

The characteristic of "active fatalism" is employed with this either/or in the second sermon. In his second sermon the term "active fatalism" is raised for the first time. He says that the people of Oran must be the ones who stay on and fight the Plague, but to trust in the divine goodness, even with the death of the children. It means holding to the absolute of God and being active among your neighbors. Understanding that the plague is here, not committing suicide or ignoring it, but working to do what you can in Oran. Paneloux recognizes the position he has found himself in, and attempts to modify the position. This is the strong move to faith that Tertullian offers Paneloux. Paneloux now teaches that the Christian must either believe all or believe nothing. Camus sees this as a move to an absolute or a leap of faith that is the trademark of the Christian in this situation.

The Turn

The value of Augustine for the first sermon is the strength of his position. He has an uncompromising position, and it is often attractive to defend such a systematic position. Paneloux cannot hold this position in light of the death of the child. The value of Tertullian is the ability to avoid the harsh judgment and the strong move to faith. Tertullian softens the blow of the death of the child by not demanding that it is part of the judgment of God.

⁴³ E.Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1956) p. 197.

⁴⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 224

⁴⁵ Tertullian, "Prescriptions Against the Heretics", From *Early Latin Theology*, Edited by S.L. Greenshade.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 225

⁴⁷ Tertullian, "Prescriptions Against the Heretics", From *Early Latin Theology*, Edited by S.L. Greenshade.

With Augustine Paneloux must hold that somehow in the large scheme of things that the child is guilty. The child may have been indicted by virtue of being a citizen of Oran, or due to original sin. Either way, the child is under the judgment of God and has been sentenced to immediate death by plague. Upon a direct viewing of this Paneloux cannot hold that the child was guilty of anything. How can God do this? How can he make the innocent child suffer and die a horrible long death? Even if it is the corporate guilt of original sin, it is wrong. He can have no part of it. Much like Dostoyevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the death of one innocent child is too much. Even if justice will be served in a later life, the wait is too much. This traumatic event cannot be overlooked by Paneloux. Paneloux changes theologically. To move to the mystery of God takes away the judgment aspect or can at least delay its explanation. He still fights to maintain his belief in God, so he must find an accommodating position in light of the death of the child. Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum est* seems to accommodate Paneloux. There is absurdity and mystery in God, apparently enough to hold the death of a child. The mystery of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ is held by God, why not this? The weakness of Tertullian's position is the fatalistic component lurking in the background. Paneloux is quick to recognize this, and he does not hide from it. The narrator reports, "Well, he would not boggle at the word, fatalism, provided he were allowed to qualify it with the adjective 'active.'"⁴⁸ As Camus indicates, he calls direct attention to it and qualifies it with the modifier "active." As most people know who have at least a basic knowledge of the free will debate this qualifier does not help. The two philosophical terms, active and fatalism, are mutually exclusive; it comes down to either agency or fate. It is clear that Paneloux recognizes this situation, and he works with the term. Paneloux is trained to know the danger of a fatalistic position, and must modify the obvious meaning of the term. Not turning the entire content of his belief over to fate, but a certain level of understanding. Thus, the term active must be understood in light of the Mercy Monastery story. Paneloux will not resign himself or the human condition to fate after seeing the child die; as a believer, he is compelled to take an active role in saving others. We must be the one who stays. Paneloux, like Camus, knows the history of the plague from the Bible forward. He has studied the reactions of generations of people and clergy to the plague. From this study he has separated the reactions into those to admire, and those who either tempt God or reject him. What Paneloux finally means is "active" toward the neighbor and the community; not active in an outright attempt to beat judgment. However, I will demonstrate that it does function in this capacity for Paneloux despite his intentions. For Paneloux we still must hold to God, but reach out to the neighbor. Paneloux frames this choice as either "hate God or love God." This attempted theological solution is rejected by Camus. There are several problems with the Tertullian like theological position of the second sermon. What Paneloux inherits from Tertullian is a potentially fatal fallacy in his argument. The fallacy is commonly called the "death by a thousand qualifications," or the fallacy of "unfalsifiable dogma."

Anthony Flew introduces the fallacy of "death by a thousand qualifications" clearly in the book he co-edited titled *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*.⁴⁹ In it Flew shows that the conclusion of such a position is that anything can count as evidence. The fallacy of a "death by a thousand qualifications" goes something like the following. If a theologian takes the position that "God is love," for example, and is asked to defend the position. The protagonist points to the death of a person. The theologian responds that there is some good brought about by the death, thus God is still love. The protagonist continues to point out situations that seem to be counter to a loving act. The theologian continues to qualify the example or the position. So many amendments are added to the original position that it is

⁴⁸ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, P.226

⁴⁹ James Woelfel, *Camus: A Theological Perspective*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975) P.86

unrecognizable, even to the theologian. Any possible set of events can demonstrate God's love. What set of events could ever count against God's love if the death of a child qualifies? When the fallacy is named as "unfalsifiable dogma" it operates essentially the same way as the fallacy of "death by a thousand qualifications." When the theologian is asked, Where is the good in this situation? He or she responds that it is there-you just have not looked deeply enough yet. As the investigation proceeds, an infinite regress is set up, and the theologian keeps retreating behind this regress until the opponent gives up. Camus challenges theological thought in this way. How can the death of the innocent child possibly demonstrate the love of God? Paneloux is faced with another difficult challenge to the plague and is starting to recognize the difficulty of any theological position to explain this death in particular.

Neither the Augustinian nor the Tertullian position is a sufficient answer in light of the death of the innocent child. More dangerous for Camus, they are both a leap to an absolute. The answer that the suffering of the child can and will be answered in an afterlife is why Camus rejects both attempts by Paneloux to come to grips with the question of evil in *The Plague*. As Thody wrote about Camus, he is attacking the two great escapes of the French middle class of his time, Marxism and Catholicism. Paneloux is seen as the advocate and defender of French Catholicism.⁵⁰ Woelfel compares "Evil as a part of a larger good" in Christian terms to "Evil as irreconcilable" in Camus' terms. This distinction between the two represents the critical split between Paneloux and Camus (Rieux). By holding to the Christian belief that evil is part of a larger good, Paneloux is committed to a metaphysical principle that separates him and Camus infinitely. Paneloux is given two chances by Camus to work with the question of evil, and fails both times. This makes the move to Rieux's solution of "original goodness" in humans much more attractive than the Panelouxian position that contains a doctrine of original sin. Even with a form of "active" fatalism or "active" faith the jump to the absolute for an answer to the death of an innocent child is still the final outcome. Paneloux has put up a very hard fight, but lost.

What Camus clearly demonstrated in *The Plague* is that there is no solution for Paneloux to the theodicy dilemma. Paneloux has moved between two positions in an attempt to solve the dilemma and it has not worked. The move to the will of God turns out to be an impossible position for Paneloux after the first hand experience of the death of a child. The Augustinian position held in the first sermon fails on the third point of the theodicy dilemma, the existence of evil. This turns Paneloux to the mystery of God or absurdity with Tertullian. This fails because it contains an internal fallacy and it is a leap to religious abstraction which does not help in times of plague. The horns of the dilemma cannot be avoided by Paneloux, and his attempt fails. Furthermore, it has driven him to a death that is a "doubtful case." Taken as a metaphorical statement on Paneloux's death, it represents the complete failure of his theological attempt to understand the plague. Camus has a note in his notebook from April, 1942 that is insightful regarding Paneloux's fate. Camus wrote, "People live according to different systems. The Plague, abolishes all systems. But they die all the same."⁵¹ Some die of plague, others of heresy.

⁵⁰ Theodore Ziolkowski makes an interesting observation in his essay titled *Camus in Germany, or the Return of the Prodigal Son*. (*Yale French Studies*, Volume 0, Issue 25, Albert Camus 1960). In it he records that the French Catholic Church printed the following along with its obituary notice for Camus: "And even if the Christian reader misses in Camus the consoling prospects of which he, the Christian, may be assured, he would do well, for this very reason, to give Camus, the sincere ponderer (Grubler), the respect that he deserves."

⁵¹ Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*, (New York: Paragon House, 1991)