

MAN WITHOUT CHRIST: AN APPROACH TO HEREDITARY SIN

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THERE CAN be no doubt that the concept of original or hereditary sin constitutes one of the principal problems for Christian theology at the present time.

On the one hand, this notion has been laid at the base of Christianity's justification of its own existence. In the typical Catholic catechism, for example, the core of the Christian message is presented as the redemptive death of Christ. The question arises immediately then: Why did mankind need to be redeemed? The answer has been customarily formulated something like this: The first man, Adam, was created in a state of friendship with God, and not subject to death, suffering, or concupiscence. But he sinned against God, thereby losing all these privileges, not only for himself, but for all his descendants. As a direct result of his sin, all men are conceived and born in a state of sin, of separation from God, unable to enter heaven, and subject to death, suffering, and concupiscence. The essence of original sin is the separation from God, which is removed only by the merits of Christ, applied in baptism.

From the classic Lutheran point of view, human nature is so corrupted by the Fall that man has lost the power of free choice in matters concerning his relationship with God. He is "ridden either by God or by the devil." Totally unable of himself to achieve anything for his salvation, he is saved only by the mercy of God, offered to him in Christ and accepted in faith. Even after faith and baptism, however, the total corruption wrought by Adam's sin still endures. All his actions are sinful in some way or other; his sinful state remains, only it is no longer imputed to him, it is covered by the mercy of God in Christ, he is *simul justus et peccator*.¹

In either of these conceptions the idea of hereditary sin is not something incidental, but is the basis on which the whole subsequent structure of the Christian message is built.

¹ See Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (Weimarer Ausgabe 18, 638, 9); P. Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh, 1962) pp. 140 ff., 211 ff.

DIFFICULTIES WITH TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING

On the other hand, developments in man's knowledge of himself and his history and in his understanding of Scripture over the last hundred years have been such as to raise grave doubts about the doctrine in its common formulation.

The most obvious difficulty is raised by science. If the theory of evolution is to be taken seriously, it appears historically very improbable that the first man should have occupied the privileged position usually accorded him. Far from living in a paradise and being endowed, if only temporarily, with preternatural gifts such as freedom from death, suffering, and concupiscence, we must conceive of him, if we are to follow the indications of paleontology, as bordering on the brute, possessing reason only in its most primitive form, and certainly liable, like all other living things, to death and disorder. This quite apart from the question of the biological probability of a species emerging only in one individual or couple (monogenism) or, more or less simultaneously and in various places, in a number of representatives (polygenism). It would seem that if we are to heed the voice of science and view the first man in an evolutionary setting, we must conclude that his theological status is substantially simply the same as that of other men.²

A second difficulty, and perhaps in the long run an even weightier one, arises from our growing awareness of the dignity of the individual and his right to determine his own fate, rather than have this imposed on him by others. That one man should be made to suffer for the sin of another, and that not because of any intrinsic connection or necessity, but solely by an arbitrary decision of God's—such a conception offends against our sense of human dignity and carries with it an image of a God who must be considered morally primitive and grotesque, an image very hard to reconcile with St. John's description: God is Love.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, if it should be shown that the common understanding of hereditary sin were solidly based in Scripture and clearly and directly affirmed by the Church's teaching authority,

² For a further treatment of the problems raised here, see M. Schmaus, *Das Paradies* (Munich, 1965); L. B., "Paradies im Lichte der Entwicklung," *Orientierung* 28 (1964) 110; see also J. Haekel, P. Hoffmann, K. Rahner, "Paradies," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 8 (2nd ed.) 67-72; J. Scharbert, "Genesis," *ibid.* 4, 670 ff.

then a believing Catholic would be left no other recourse than to accept it as an inexplicable mystery. In point of fact, however, the great advances made over the last fifty years in our understanding of the Bible have made it very doubtful whether the notion of hereditary sin, in the form in which it is commonly presented, is to be found there.

The principal sources for the doctrine in Scripture have always been considered to be Gn 2-3 and Rom 5:12-21. With regard to the account of Paradise and the Fall given in Gn 2-3, it has been pointed out that this was never understood by the Jewish people as implying our idea of a hereditary sin; such a notion is unknown in the Old Testament.³ It seems clear that the Genesis narrative is a relatively late, sapiential⁴ essay in etiology (using the term as a theological category, rather than as a literary form⁵) to account for the sad condition in which man finds himself, within a monotheistic framework which rejected dualism, by affirming that the basic cause of it is man's separation from God. If there is no direct use of myths, certainly mythological figures are used (the talking snake, etc.), and there can be no question of taking the whole account as historical in the word's customary sense today. The question as to where to draw the line between truth-content and artificially constructed form has to be decided ultimately by theological criteria.⁶

With regard to the classical New Testament text, Rom 5:12-21, it is certain that Paul's thought is directed primarily not to the past but to the future; he is concerned to stress the certainty of our hope of salvation, the ultimate victory of God's grace and mercy in Christ over sin and evil. To support this, and probably basing himself on the then widespread idea that the end will correspond to the beginning, he

³ See H. Haag, *Biblische Schöpfungslehre und kirchliche Erbsündelehre* (Stuttgart, 1966) p. 11.

⁴ For the sapiential character of Gn 2-3, see A. M. Dubarle, *Les sages d'Israël* (Paris, 1946) pp. 7-24; J. L. McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Genesis 2-3," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 15 (1954) 541-72; L. Ligier, *Péché d'Adam et péché du monde* 1 (Paris, 1960) 173.

⁵ For the discussion regarding the use of this term, see K. Rahner, "Ätiologie," *LTK* 1, 1011-12; N. Lohfink, "Genesis 2 f. als geschichtliche Ätiologie," *Scholastik* 38 (1963) 321-34; Z. Alszeghy and M. Flick, "Il peccato originale in prospettiva evolucionistica," *Gregorianum* 47 (1966) 207.

⁶ For further treatment of this, see H. Haag, *op. cit.*; A. M. Dubarle, *The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin* (New York, 1964) chap. 2; H. Renckens, *Urgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte* (Mainz, 1959) esp. pp. 216-23; M. Schmaus, *op. cit.*

introduces the partly rabbinical form of argumentation regarding Adam.⁷ If, as a result of Adam's deed, sin entered the world as a dominating power, how much more (*pollō mallon*) will the grace of God be triumphant through Jesus Christ.⁸ Exactly how Adam opened the way for sin to enter the world as a dominating power Paul does not explain.⁹ The sin from which we are to be saved is primarily our own personal sin (*pantes hēmarton*). Nothing is stated directly about an inherited sin; the *ep̄h hō* can only be taken grammatically as meaning "because," not as a relative pronoun referring to Adam.¹⁰ In view of Abraham's salvific significance for those not descended from him, it seems doubtful that Paul would insist even on our biological unity with Adam as a condition for the validity of his argument.¹¹

In the light of these difficulties it has now become all too easy simply to dismiss the whole notion of original sin as being without foundation in Scripture, irreconcilable with scientific knowledge, and positively objectionable from a humanistic viewpoint. Thus we have the very learned work of J. Gross, who makes what must be judged a well-documented case for its being an invention of St. Augustine.¹²

RECENT ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

With the aim of avoiding these difficulties against the customary understanding of the idea of original sin, which have rendered it no longer entirely tenable, and also with a view to avoiding rejection of the doctrine itself in the conviction that this also is untenable for the Christian, a number of theologians in recent years have attempted to provide alternative theories, which would be in full accordance with the defined teaching of the Church, and yet take due account of the increased knowledge which mankind possesses today.

P. Schoonenberg attempts to master the problem through the use of

⁷ See O. Kuss, *Römerbrief 1* (Regensburg, 1957) 225 ff.

⁸ Karl Barth treats this impressively in his *Christ and Adam* (Edinburgh, 1956) esp. p. 45.

⁹ See Kuss, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ See Kuss, *loc. cit.*; also S. Lyonnet, "Le péché originel et l'exégèse de Rom 5, 12-14," *Recherches de science religieuse* 44 (1956) 63-84; *id.*, "Le sens de ἐφ' ᾧ en Rom 5, 12 et l'exégèse des Pères grecs," *Biblica* 36 (1955) 63-84; *id.*, "De peccato originali (Rom 5, 12-21)," in *Quaestiones in epistolam ad Romanos 1* (Rome, 1955) 182-243.

¹¹ See Haag, p. 62.

¹² *Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas* (2 vols.; Munich, 1960).

a concept drawn in some measure from the philosophy of existence: the concept of "situation." He defines original sin as the situation of man born into a world in which actual sin is a part of daily experience: "the situation of the lack of supernatural grace and of incapacity for any love and for any perfectly good moral action, in which [situation] man finds himself since and through the fact that as man he comes into being in a world in which the covenant with God has been broken in a sinful fashion."¹³ The world has a history of actual sin, which began with Adam and has been accumulating ever since. By baptism man is transferred out of this situation into the society of the Church; he acquires a new, sanctified "situation." The advantage of this view is its stress on the definitive significance of actual, personal sin for our understanding of the human situation. Its principal disadvantage, in my view, is its failure to do justice to the idea of original sin as a question of man's personal relationship to God. I find it very difficult to see how my inward, personal relationship with God can be determined by the fact that I am born into a world in which actual sin has been and is committed.

Gustav Siewerth has approached the problem through a re-examination of the concepts of nature and grace.¹⁴ His small work contains very valuable, basic insights, and the general view that he adopts is without doubt correct. But it remains largely static and outside of an evolutionary framework, and is therefore incomplete in what must be considered an essential element at the present time.

A. Alszeghy and M. Flick have proposed an interpretation in the personalist terms of a "dialogue with God."¹⁵ Original sin is described here as a "dynamic incapacity for dialogue with God, which can rightly be considered sinful and which is overcome only by grace." Again, there can be no doubt that this approach is substantially right, but it is also quite insufficient in itself, as the authors have shown they realize by undertaking a second approach more recently.

J. de Fraine has attempted to overcome the difficulty through a revival of the ancient notion of "corporate personality."¹⁶ "The indi-

¹³ "De erfzonde als situatie," *Bijdragen* 22 (1961) 30; see also his "Zonde der wereld en erfzonde," *ibid.* 24 (1963) 349-89; "Erbstünde und Sünde der Welt," *Orientierung* 26 (1962) 65-69; and his book *Man and Sin* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1965).

¹⁴ *Die christliche Erbsündelehre* (Einsiedeln, 1964).

¹⁵ "Il peccato originale in prospettiva personalistica," *Gregorianum* 46 (1965) 705-32.

¹⁶ *Adam and the Family of Man* (Staten Island, 1965).

vidual and group together form one single reality. Basically the individual does not fulfill his role by representing the group, or even by influencing it for the good or the bad; in the framework of 'corporate personality' we can say very objectively that he *is* the group and that the group *is* he."¹⁷ "Adam is not simply an isolated individual of primordial times (whose sin has mysterious effects on all his descendants, even the most distant), but he *is* also the entire human race, which he encompasses within himself in a very real and true sense."¹⁸ "Since we were all in Adam, we all sinned voluntarily in him, and rightly share his guilt."¹⁹ To my mind, this is the least satisfactory of all current attempts at a solution. No doubt, the solidarity of the individual with the community is a truth of vast significance for the whole of theology. There can be no question but that it is through the community of his fellow men that salvation comes to the individual. But the idea of community cannot be pushed without limit, to the destruction of the dignity and responsibility of the individual. To maintain that one man may incur *guilt* in the strict sense of the word because another sinned may well have been a natural form of thought in a tribal society; it cannot be seriously maintained any longer, and that in the name of Christianity itself. The concept of "corporate personality" is precisely what must be overcome; it is exactly what does not correspond, any more than, say, slavery, to a genuinely Christian understanding of man.

Another type of theory tends to begin with a Teilhardian conception of a universe evolving towards God, and it attempts to explain original sin as in some sense the negative aspect of this process; thus Hülsbosch, Smulders, Vanneste, and Alszeghy-Flick in their most recent article.²⁰ In the long run I believe this approach has the better chances, but its possibilities have not yet been developed very systematically.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272 ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145, quoting H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh, 1911).

²⁰ A. Hülsbosch, *God's Creation* (London, 1965) esp. chaps. 2 and 3; P. Smulders, *La vision de Teilhard de Chardin* (Bruges, 1964) Appendix 1, "Evolution et péché originel"; Z. Alszeghy and M. Flick, "Il peccato originale in prospettiva evoluzionistica," *Gregorianum* 47 (1966) 201-25. A. Vanneste gives his support in principle to Hülsbosch in "Le décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 87 (1965) 688 ff. L. Scheffczyk seems to give at least partial support to this view: "Die Erbschuld zwischen Naturalismus und Existentialismus," *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 15 (1964) 17-57, and "Adams Sündenfall: Die Erbschuld als Problem gläubigen Denkens heute," *Wort und Wahrheit* 20 (1965) 761-76.

The following approach is not intended to accomplish this either. It is offered simply as an indication of the line of thought which I believe we ought to follow, as a contribution to theological discussion, and in complete submission to the teaching authority of the Church.

SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS AN ACCEPTABLE INTERPRETATION

In the New Testament the ultimate destiny for which God has created man is termed "the kingdom of God." This is understood as a cosmic event, in which the created universe will be transformed into a condition in which it corresponds entirely to God's will and design: the world will be what it ought to be. For man, the kingdom of God will mean a total personal union with God, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit—a union in which the whole of man's personality will participate, and which will therefore bring with it the "resurrection of the dead." This condition is identified by St. Paul with freedom, the "liberty and splendor of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

That this condition of the absolute fulfilment of man should be the destiny of the universe was, according to the Letter to the Ephesians, not an afterthought of God's, but His intention from the beginning. It was with this goal in view, and no other, that He created the universe and man.

The purpose for which a thing is made, however, is not simply something extrinsic to it. It determines the structure of the thing—not necessarily its "essence," but the way in which the thing exists in the concrete. We must take it, therefore, that the existential structure of the being of the created universe and of man is ultimately determined by the destiny for which they exist, the kingdom of God. The universe is the way it is, and man is the way he is, because they are made for the liberty of God's kingdom. Not by any necessity, not essentially, but *de facto*, in the concrete and existentially, by the gratuitous mercy of God, creation has an inner directedness towards God's total communication of Himself; and this directedness is the basic determinant of the quality of its existence.

To lack the one and only destiny for which you have been made is a terrible condition; it is to be condemned to frustration. Creation has not yet reached its goal; we do not yet possess the kingdom of God. As a result, St. Paul tells us, "the whole created universe groans in all

its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth"; it is "the victim of frustration"; it "awaits with eager expectation . . . to be freed from the shackles of mortality and to enter upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God." Man shares this condition: "We are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us His sons and set our whole body free" (Rom 8:19-23).

The kingdom of God will be the fulfilment of our redemption. At present we have indeed "been saved, but only in hope" (Rom 8:24). When it comes, it will bring with it immortality. But it has not yet come, and so we must die. When it comes, it will bring us perfect freedom. But it has not yet come and so we are subject, "condemned," to suffering, to concupiscence, to bondage under the power of sin.

This last is of particular importance. It is only in the kingdom that man will be his true self. The characteristic determinant of the person is freedom. As long as man does not yet possess the fulness of the liberty of the children of God, he is defective, not only in body, in that he lacks the immortality of the resurrection, but *precisely as a person*. He is not truly free, in the sense in which Christ sets us free. There is a deficiency in his heart; he is closed in upon himself.

This is not in any way to deny that man possesses what is commonly called the faculty of "free will." As has been penetratingly pointed out, a man imprisoned in a dungeon is free to choose whether he will sit in this corner or that. But the *de facto* range of possibilities within which he can exercise his essential free will is limited. So with man made for the grace of God: to be lacking that grace does indeed leave one's faculty of essential free will intact. But existentially one is not capable of rising to the living God. And this failure to rise to God does not leave one in a state of indifference. There is no such thing as a state of "pure nature." For man made for the liberty of the kingdom, to lack the kingdom is to be existentially in bondage. For man made for grace, to lack grace is to be morally defective, defective precisely as a person; it is to be in a positively deficient relationship to God; it is to be in a state of sin. It is this condition of sinfulness, of defective relationship to God, in man made for the kingdom, grace, and liberty, yet lacking them and unable to be truly himself without them, that the Church has termed "original sin."

On the other hand, this state of sin is clearly distinct from the guilt

which an adult incurs by a personal act which is a conscious, deliberate mortal sin. In comparison with this, the condition described as "original sin" can only be considered sin in an analogous sense. Yet it remains true that in the absence of the kingdom, that is, of grace, man's relationship to God is positively defective and can truly be described in terms of sin.

The kingdom of God has not yet come. Yet, as we know, it is also true that it has come in Jesus Christ. It has not come in its fulness, but it has come in Him as in seed (Mt 13:31), as leaven. The resurrection of the flesh that will be ours will be the extension to us of Christ's resurrection. The liberty which will be accorded us will be the liberty of the Son of God. The total personal union with the Father which will constitute the kingdom for us will be a participation in the union of the Son with His Father.

In Christ, therefore, this grace of the kingdom, though not its full reality, is given to us. The kingdom is anticipated seminally in Him. The energy with which the kingdom comes will be the energy of Christ.

Christ Himself is the substantial grace and mercy of God. The full reality of the kingdom is present in Him, especially from the time of His resurrection. Therefore, just as man is made for the kingdom and cannot be his true self without it, so also he is made for Christ and cannot be truly himself without Him. (It is not intended here to enter into the question whether it is more accurate to say that man exists for Christ, or Christ for man. Certainly the universe must be seen as Christocentric, and teleologically so; yet it must not be said that Christ is the sole ultimate purpose of creation, or that the human race exists simply as a means in relation to Him. God's ultimate purpose is not so much the emergence of the historical person Jesus Christ, as rather the communication of Himself to man in grace, the divinization of His creation. This process reaches its historical and substantial peak in Christ, who is at once the culmination of the process and the principal means by which it is carried forward to completion in the kingdom. In other words, Christology must be "Patrocentric," as Christ was.) To possess Christ, or perhaps better, to be possessed by Him, is to possess the grace of the kingdom—and even its full reality, though only seminally as yet. It is, therefore, to be reconciled to God, to have

already received in principle the liberty of God's sons; it is to exist in a right relationship to God.

To lack Christ is to lack that total reality of the kingdom for which man is made, to be therefore deficient precisely as a person, to be not right at heart, to be closed in on oneself, to be existentially unfree and in bondage to sin, to exist in a relationship to God which is not merely neutral but positively defective. It is this condition of *Christlessness* in man made for Christ which the Church terms "original sin."

It becomes clear, then, why baptism can be said to remove original sin; for in baptism we are united to Christ, incorporated into Him, our condition of Christlessness is removed, henceforth Christ possesses us and we possess Him. We enter His death and resurrection (Rom 6: 3-4). Our existential unfreedom and bondage to sin is destroyed. The reality of that kingdom for which we are made has been given us, if only seminally, and therefore in principle we are no longer deficient precisely as persons; we can and do exist in a right relationship to God.

Because the kingdom has come in Christ, that is, in grace, original sin is removed. But insofar as the kingdom has nevertheless not yet come, that is, in the full reality of the resurrection, we must still "groan inwardly while we wait for God to make us His sons and set our whole body free" (Rom 8:23); we must still endure discord within our own being; we must still suffer and die.

It is not too difficult, I think, in this view to see how the Virgin Mary can be said by the Church to have been free from original sin from the beginning of her existence. From the beginning she was intended by God to be the mother of His Son incarnate. She stood, then, from the beginning in a very positive, personal relationship to Christ, which was determinative of her existence. She could not be said to be in a state of existential Christlessness. On the contrary, her being drew its whole meaning from her special relation to Him. She was not merely made for Him; in God's design, she possessed Him, or rather He possessed her. Of course, the continuance of such a state of affairs would depend upon her later ratification of it in her consent to become the mother of Christ and in her belief in Him.

A further question remains to be considered: the relationship of the first historical sin committed by man to this condition of Christlessness

in which we find ourselves before we enter into union with Christ through His Church in baptism. Beginning with St. Paul (Rom 5), Christian thought has usually considered that there is some sort of causal nexus between the first sin of the first man and our condition of Christlessness. This would appear to be confirmed by the statements of the Councils of Orange and especially Trent.²¹ (The appeal frequently made to canon 1 of the Council of Carthage in support of the view that man would not be subject now to death if Adam had not sinned cannot be considered convincing in view of the fact that the Council in question was simply a provincial one, and that particular canon was never confirmed by the Pope, Zosimus.²²) We must ask: In what sense is this to be understood?

In the first place, the close connection must be grasped between man's original condition of radical Christlessness and actual personal sin. Actual sin is the natural expression of a condition of Christlessness. It is, in fact, simply an affirmation of it, a personally deliberate form of it. Granted that man once lacks Christ for whom he is made and without whom he is deficient at heart and as a person, then he is morally deficient, morally weak, and it is not to be expected that he will live for any considerable length of time without actual sin.

Since we inherit our human nature from the first man, the generative cause of our Christlessness is his Christlessness—his radical Christlessness in the first instance, but this finds its natural expression in the deliberately willed Christlessness of his first actual sin. It is, therefore, not an impermissible use of language to speak of Adam's sin as the source of our condition.

What are we to say concerning the condition of the first man before his actual sin? The Council of Trent describes this in its Decree on Original Sin as a state of "sanctity and justice" (canon 1; *DS* 1511). Admittedly, the intention of the Decree was directed against the Lutheran identification of original sin with concupiscence (canon 5; *DS* 1515) and against the practice of the Anabaptists in refusing to baptize infants (canon 4; *DS* 1514); the first three canons, therefore, are meant simply to lay the groundwork for this, and even in canon 1 the description of Adam's prior state as being one of "sanctity and

²¹ Denzinger-Schönmetzer 371 f., 1511 ff.

²² See note by Schönmetzer to his edition of Denzinger, p. 82.

justice" is rather an obiter dictum; it might perhaps on these grounds be legitimately concluded that this description is not formally defined. Also, it may be asked whether, if the fathers at Trent had possessed the scientific evidence for the theory of evolution we possess today, which makes it very difficult for us to conceive of the first man's possessing special prerogatives, they would have spoken as they did.

However, there is not really any problem here. It is the common view of theologians that when a human being reaches such a degree of maturity that he is psychologically capable of serious moral choice, then God does not leave him without the offer of grace. The universal salvific will of God compels us to assume that a pagan who has reached the "age of reason" receives the gift of "sanctifying grace" until and unless he deliberately rejects God. We have every right to assume that this was the case also with the first man. Perhaps here the objection may be raised: If the first man had already received and accepted, in some way or other, the offer of grace, then his condition of radical Christlessness was removed—in which case how could his subsequent fall be considered the expression of that Christlessness? If, on the other hand, his condition of Christlessness was not removed by his acceptance of grace—in the absence of an explicit and conscious relationship to Christ as in baptism—then he was already in the condition described as "original sin" before his fall.

This demands a further clarification of the condition of man in general. First, it must be affirmed that the gift of justifying grace cannot be understood apart from Christ; grace is always Christological, because in the last analysis Christ is the substantial grace of God to man. Therefore, the pagan adult who has not deliberately rejected God but has received, in some way or other, and accepted the offer of grace can no longer be said to be in a condition of radical Christlessness (though he does lack a conscious and explicit personal relationship to Christ, and the significance of this for his salvation and the building up of the kingdom must by no means be underrated). That this is so, however, is not due to his human nature as such, understood essentially, but to the free gift of God, given him as an adult. Left to himself, to his human nature alone, he would be radically Christless. (As it is, he does lack the reality of the kingdom, and he also lacks a conscious and explicit personal relationship to Christ—which are the results of his

“natural” Christlessness.) In consequence of this his children, when they are born, and until they have either been baptized or reached maturity and accepted God’s extraordinary offer of grace, must be described as radically Christless, i.e., they are in the state termed “original sin.” The same, then, will be true of the first man and his children.

I have dealt at some length with the condition of the first man on a presupposition of monogenism, because it seems to me that a theory based exclusively on a presupposition of polygenism would be of little service at the present time. It may never be possible to prove scientifically either the one or the other, and any theory concerning the nature of original sin, in order to be most useful, ought to be so constructed as to be valid in either case. I believe there is no need of a demonstration that the theory outlined above is also reconcilable with acceptance of polygenism.

ROLE OF ORIGINAL SIN IN CHURCH’S PREACHING

In conclusion we may ask: What is the place of the concept of original sin in the kerygma, what is its role in the Church’s preaching? It is surely not without significance, and is a confirmation of our argument, that almost invariably in the history of the Church the question of original sin has been raised as the obverse side of the question of grace. St. Paul mentions the sin of the first man only in order to point out by contrast the abundance of the grace and justification offered to us in Christ. If as the result of one man’s sin we have become sinners too, how much truer it is that through one man we have been reconciled to God, how much more abundantly we have been graced by God in Christ. For Paul, we need salvation because we are sinners; but the sin of which Paul is principally thinking and from which we need to be saved is, as noted above, our own personal sin (Rom 1:18—3:20), which is however the consequence of our “natural” Christlessness. For the Council of Orange, concerned to overcome Pelagianism, the point at issue was man’s absolute need for Christ and grace if he is to attain salvation. The concept of original sin fulfils the function of demonstrating this need. For the Council of Trent, the primary point at issue was the assertion, against Luther, that man is truly justified

by baptism, that therefore his previous condition of "unjustness" is truly removed and not merely no longer imputed (canon 5).

Since Luther by no means denied original sin but rather exaggerated its importance to the point of asserting that man remains thoroughly corrupted by it despite "justification," and since he was therefore compelled to identify it with concupiscence, which clearly remains after justification, the purpose of the Council was to reduce the concept of original sin to proper proportions by asserting such a view of it as would make it possible for it to be removed by baptism. To this end it was originally proposed that the Council put forward a thorough systematic treatment of the subject of original sin as a prelude to its treatment of justification (a proposal which was, perhaps fortunately, dropped) and of which the principal remains constitute canons 1, 2, and especially 3.²³

In addition the Council was concerned to oppose the view of Pighius, that there was only one original sin, namely Adam's (canon 3 "omnibus inest, unicuique proprium"), and especially to counter the practice of the Anabaptists in refusing to baptize infants on the ground that they were not capable of contracting guilt.²⁴

The function of the concept of original sin for Trent, then, was (a) to lay the foundation for a concept of justification which would be real and not merely imputed, and (b) to show the justification for the traditional belief in the necessity of infant baptism. In addition to these functions of the doctrine of original sin several others have been added in the general preaching of the Church: (a) the doctrine points out that the source of all evil, suffering, and death in the world is a defective relationship with God; (b) it provides the foundation for the conviction that man is not perfectible this side of the kingdom of God.

If the notion of original sin is not to be considered an embarrassing superfluity in our time, or even positively objectionable to our sense of the dignity of the individual, as it already frequently is, then its significance for the essentials of the Christian message must be presented convincingly. This can best be done, I believe, and at the same time

²³ See A. Vanneste, "Le décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 87 (1965) 688-726; 88 (1966) 581-602.

²⁴ See Vanneste, *art. cit.*; Schönmetzer, in note prefacing Denzinger 1511.

the traditional kerygmatic function of the concept can best be preserved, if original sin is understood as the condition of man made for Christ and the kingdom of God, and unable to be truly himself without them, yet lacking them, existing therefore in a relationship to God which is positively deficient and which can legitimately be termed "sin" by analogy. In short, the function of the doctrine of original sin is to stress, to a world which does not necessarily experience it, man's absolute physical and personal need for the kingdom of God, and therefore for Christ, who is both its anticipation and the dynamism of its realization.