Theological Studies
49 (1988)

OUR HEARTS OF DARKNESS: ORIGINAL SIN REVISITED

STEPHEN J. DUFFY

Loyola University, New Orleans

THE "FOLLOWABILITY" of the world is always bounded by nescience. This is strikingly expressed in a powerful statement concerning original sin in the *Apologia* of Cardinal Newman:

To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprise, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes; the greatness and littleness of man, his far reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity; the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the dreary hopeless irreligion; that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet so exactly described in the Apostle's words, 'having no hope and without God in the world,' all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution. . . . And what shall be said of this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from his presence . . . if there be a God, since there is God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator.[1]

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CLASSICAL DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

Sin and evil are anomalies for Christian thought, as Newman indicates. There is no fully developed orthodox doctrine of sin comparable to the soteriological doctrines of Christology and Trinity. Agreeing with Augustine that some views of evil and sin are irreconcilable with Christian faith, the early Church anathematized the theological pessimism of the Manicheans and the anthropological optimism of the Pelagians. While the Church never officially endorsed the totality of Augustine's thinking about sin and grace, it would be difficult to overestimate its impact on all subsequent piety and thought. For Christian soteriology must presup-

[1] J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. M. Svalgic (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 217. I am indebted to Nicholas Lash, who shared with me an unpublished paper on original sin.

pose some understanding of the human predicament, including responsibility for evil. Salvation and sin are correlative; one cannot be formulated without the other. So it was that Augustine's always controversial teaching on sin, available and profound as it was, came to shape the Western Christian mind and heart until the modern era, when it fell under severe attack from historical-critical consciousness.

The classical doctrine of original sin as formulated by Augustine derived from his reflection on his own conversion experience and the Scriptures and was given final shape in the fires of controversy with Gnosticism and Pelagianism. Actually there is no doctrine of original sin in Scripture, a point well made by the Pelagians against the Augustinian view. Notwithstanding, the classical doctrine emerged from reflection on Genesis 2–3. The Adamic myth, however, is not primarily speculation about the first humans committing the first sin, the guilt and consequences of which mark all succeeding generations. As Paul Ricoeur insists, the story is penitential in motive, a reflection of Jewish penitential spirit as revealed in the Psalms and the prophetic literature. The real thrust of the Yahwist's Adam myth is to separate the origin of evil from the origin of being. The origin of human evil is not in some primordial chaos woven into the fabric of being and against which the gods struggle for life. Evil is not older than creation, nor contemporary with the origin of things. Creation is good, not evil. Evil is the corruption that occurs within a creation that is already complete and good. The Adamic myth thus takes an anthropological approach that traces evil not to the world or its good Creator but to human beings. The penitential motif is that God is good, but humans, freely opting for evil, have become corrupt. Genesis 3 portrays the passage from innocence to sinfulness as a free, contingent event. Evil ought not and need not be but nonetheless is. However, the story is not strictly a myth of falling. For Adam, no superman, is the archetypal representative of all humans and his condition is that of everyone. There never was a time of primal innocence. Paradise is God's own personal garden, where we have never been. It is not the occasionally flowering wilderness we inhabit.[2]

Although the Adamic myth is anthropological and concentrates evil primarily in the protagonist of the story, Adam, it does not do so entirely. Adam is not solitary. He enjoys a companion, Eve, and he has an adversary, the serpent. The serpent figure provides two significant modifiers to the anthropological view of evil. First, the man and woman do not absolutely give rise to evil. They find it already there, lying in wait, in the form of temptation. The serpent marvelously symbolizes mysteri-

[2] On the Adamic myth, cf. P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 232–78.

ous social and psychic dimensions of evil incapable of complete rationalization and absorption into conscious freedom. Secondly, Adam's adversary, the serpent, is a creature and incapable of compelling choice. At best it can tempt or occasion sin. Yielding is the unnecessitated act of the responsible agent.

The Christian Scriptures do not generally employ the Adam story. Evil is acknowledged and explained largely in terms of demonic powers that pervert creation and the human heart. But Paul does turn to the story in Romans 5:12–21, though his interest is primarily Christological. Paul sets up a type/antitype contrast between Christ and Adam, the new being and the old. Appropriating, even extending, the Adam story as an explanation of evil, Paul writes: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spreads to all men, because all sinned." Paul links human sinfulness to Adam, but not without ambiguity, and certainly not in the way Augustine would come to think. Redemption originates in and through Christ, the second Adam, sin in and through the first Adam. From Adam sin contaminates all, for all retrace his steps, as is manifested in the universality of death and the war between spirit and flesh. Indirectly Paul encourages the idea of an original sin that has universal human and even cosmic import, for creation itself, he asserts, is in bondage and decay (Rom 8:18–25).

Augustine's Construction of an Anti-Gnostic Myth

In articulating his own experience of sin, Augustine drew on this scriptural heritage. Human beings are created good and situated in a good creation. Restlessly desiring good, the human heart cannot be sated by any but the supreme good, God. Since being and good are primordial, evil can have no ontological status; it is not a being but the privation of being. Hence, lacking an ontological foundation, it cannot be explained but only described as a free defection of the defectible human from the order intended by the Creator. In this order humans are freest and happiest when subject to the highest good, God. Then the hierarchy of bodily and spiritual powers is harmoniously centered and unified. Evil is turning away from God, the noblest good, and inordinately turning to the world and its changeable, finite goods. It is a self-defeating denial of any authority but the absolutized self. Freedom and fulfilment are traded off for a liberation that sells the self into bondage to inferior goods. Thus humanity ceases to be oriented to its true good, so necessary to the life of the soul. The lower appetites thereby deprived of guidance emerge riotously, each clamoring to have its particular good acknowledged as the highest and truest. Desire, a natural tendency, becomes, after the Fall, inordinate and enslaving concupiscence. Sin is a self-imposed shackling

that follows upon our misplaced love for the finite instead of the infinite.

Given this anthropology, Augustine had to reject the pessimism of Manichean Gnosticism and the optimism of Pelagianism. Against the Manicheans he maintained that evil is not identifiable with human finitude. It erupts freely, contingently, and not by ontological necessity. Against the Pelagians, on the other hand, Augustine maintained that sin is not merely accidental or purely contingent. Universal in its range, though not synonymous with or a structure of essential humanity, it nevertheless is a kind of "second nature," a positive propensity to evil. The brilliance of Augustine's insight now enables us to see that two types of language have to be dialectically related in speaking of evil as both moral and tragic: that of freedom and that of inevitability, contingency and universality, responsibility and inescapability. This double negation of Manicheanism and Pelagianism would lead Augustine to the classical doctrine of original sin with its three pivotal points: original perfection, original sin, and original guilt.

The Manichean Gnosticism that Augustine embraced for nine years of his young life hinges upon a feeling of incommensurability between the self and its world and expresses this in antagonistic dualisms. Evil is being embodied in an alien, hostile world. This dualism of self and world leads to the dualisms of soul and body, God and cosmos. The soul, exiled from the divine realm by reason of a precosmic fall or error, is incarcerated in the body. Evil and finitude are one and the same. The sole shred of hope is escape from the material universe to the divine realm. And yet, though sharing in evil, humans are not responsible for it, for ultimately evil is a second ontological principle over against the transcendent alien God. Thus evil for Gnosticism is almost physical, a contagion infecting the person from without. The cosmos heard singing the glory of God by the Psalmist is counterdivinized, Satanized. And "far from proceeding *from* human freedom *toward* the vanity of the world, evil proceeds from the powers of the world toward humans."[3] Evil is less an act of doing than a state of being, the misfortune of existing in the world.

Philosophically and theologically such pessimism became unacceptable to Augustine. Philosophically he came to see that dualism is nonsense. If there can be but one supreme being, nothing can limit or oppose it. And since being is good, the supreme being cannot be hostile. As supreme good, it tends to diffuse and share itself; hence creation cannot be evil. Granted, any creature is a composite of being and nonbeing; still, insofar as it is, it can only be good. Augustine's Neoplatonism and his reading

[3] P. Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. D. Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1974) 272–73.

of Genesis canceled the Gnostic equation of evil with finitude. Evil can have no ontological status; rather it is the privation or corruption of being or goodness. Evil is not being but doing. We cannot ask "Quid malum?" We can only ask "Unde malum faciamus?"

Here, then, are the metaphysical principles in light of which Augustine interpreted Genesis 1–3, which he took as literal history. He found in Genesis 3 a radical disjunction between the origin of good and the origin of evil, for God is the font of being, not evil, and being is good. The man and woman are created good, indeed perfect, and located in a good creation, an idyllic garden, where they enjoy immediate knowledge of and fellowship with God. Evil can appear only in the second act, entering after the drama has already begun. Refusing to submit to their creaturely status, Adam and Eve freely defected from the Creator's established order. The root of evil, therefore, is the dark misuse of the created gift of freedom, the unraveling of what God had made. The first sin marks a clear separation between the theological genesis of being and the anthropological genesis of evil. With the state of original righteousness forfeited by a historical first sin, Augustine negated the Gnostic coincidence of evil with finitude. The human is the point where evil emerges in the world. Augustine's is an ethical vision of evil; humans are integrally responsible. His is not the tragic vision where humans are not actors but victims of a wicked god.[4]

At the other extreme from Augustine's anthropology lay Pelagianism, a moralizing and rationalistic explanation of evil. Augustine of the anti-Manichean writings recognized sin as contingent and voluntary. Pelagian voluntarism went further, maintaining that freedom is indeterminacy. We come from the womb, argued Pelagius, without virtue, but also without vice. Virtue and vice are freely acquired as one weaves a life story. Basically neutral, humans can opt for either. If sin is voluntary by definition, then humans must be capable of not sinning. Moral perfection must be a human possibility. A just God cannot demand the unreasonable. Each person prior to his first free choice is, relative to sin, in the same posture as Adam before the Fall. One can avoid sin altogether and some heroic persons have done just that. Though sin is widespread, it is not a universal condition of humankind. Adam corrupted only himself, not his posterity. He set a bad example which is widely followed; hence an evil influence is socially transmitted as habit or custom. Nonetheless, sin is neither inevitable nor universal. "In" Adam means "like" Adam. Finally, evil acts do not alter or destroy the ontological condition of human freedom; its indeterminacy or neutrality in the face of good and evil is

[4] On the tragic vision, cf. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* 211–31, 322 ff., 327.

intact. Impotency before the power of sin is a cowardly rationalization.

Augustine's vehement emotional reaction was grounded in his long-developing and by now deeply rooted anthropology, especially his conviction that freedom is genuine only if oriented to the eternal. For humans are by nature ordered to goodness and dependent on communion with the divine for fulfilment and happiness. To turn from God and toward creatures is not simply to opt for another mode of being human on a par with its opposite. Aversion from God is the counterpole of the innate dynamism of humanity and, far from being innocuous, is the disintegration of that nature. Righteousness is forsaken and disequilibrium reigns. Following the aboriginal calamity, humankind is no longer disposed to the supreme good; it is chaotic and enslaved by its own futile attempts at self-deification. Augustine, therefore, could not live with the simplistic Pelagian reduction of sin to a conscious, free choice of evil. Not so much by their fruits but by their roots you shall know them. Character, not choice, is the heart of the matter.[5] Humans do not ever enjoy a condition of pure indifference in the exercise of freedom. Rather, the corruption of human nature by sin entails a predisposition to evil, a bias toward it, which precedes and forms choice. In virtue of the Fall, this prevolitional bias is universal. In his anti-Pelagian brief Augustine, whose knowledge of Greek was not the best, made Romans 5:12, read in an erroneous Latin translation, a proof-text for his thesis: "Through one man sin entered the world and through sin death, and thus death passed to all men, in whom all sinned." All were affected and bore from birth, by propagation not imitation, the wound inflicted by Adam's sin.[6]

Pelagianism pushed Augustine to the bitter end in developing the notion of original sin. But if the hard crystallization of the doctrine can be attributed to the anti-Pelagian polemic, its basic motivation cannot. The torturous experience of his own conversion, and his awareness of the resistance of desire and habit to good, moved Augustine to vehemently reject the Pelagian position. Unlike Pelagius, Augustine saw that freedom has an acquired nature, for it is encumbered by habit and history.[7] In

[5] See, e.g., *Hom. in 1 Joan.* 7:7–8 and 10:7.

[6] *Contra Julianum* 6:24, 75; *Contra Faustum* 22:78; *De peccatorum meritis* 1:10–11; 1:8, 8; 3:7, 14; 3:11, 19; *De gratia Christi et peccato originali* 2:34. Cf. Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning" 277; J. P. Burns, "The Interpretation of Romans in the Pelagian Controversy," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979) 43–54. Rom 5:12 says nothing about an inheritance of sin; individuals sin on their own account and suffer death in consequence. Julian, Augustine's adversary, proposed the interpretation of Rom 5:12 recognized today as correct. But subsequently the Councils of Carthage in 518, Orange in 529, and Trent in 1546 also appealed to Rom 5:12. See DS 223–372, 1512.

[7] The decisive indication that the Pelagian polemic was not the origin of Augustine's

this he echoed Paul and anticipated Luther. And in effect Augustine constructed an anti-Gnostic myth as consistent as the Valentinian myth of a precosmic fall or the Manicheans' myth of the aggression of the Prince of Darkness. In it were all the elements for the classical doctrine of original sin that was to dominate Christian imagination until quite recently. Augustine distinguished two key components: the *vitium* and the *reatus*. The *vitium* is the corruption and crippling effect of original sin on human nature, which is mainly identified with concupiscence or the unquenchable flames of desire which precede all actions and become manifest in actual sins. The Fall as a historical event vitiated Adam and all his offspring as well. His disobedience was the doorway through which corruption entered the human family. Wherever human nature is propagated, sin is propagated with it. The *reatus* of sin denotes its juridical aspect, whereby it is a violation of divine law for which divine justice holds the lawbreaker guilty and punishable. All humans contract the *vitium* of sin by generation *and* the *reatus* as well. All are transgressors, all deserve punishment.[8]

Obviously such a position gives rise to problems. Augustine appears to undermine his own anthropological explanation of evil, for what becomes of personal responsibility if sin is in its deepest dimension a hereditary taint? Moreover, while the universal incurrence of punishment may be plausible in the case of adults who eat their own sinful fruit, how could it be so for *infantes*? But Augustine could brook no exceptions, especially when he reflected on his native North African pastoral practice of infant baptism. Baptism is for the remission of sins and the Church baptizes infants even though they are incapable of voluntary sin. The washing, he concluded, can only be for the removal of the defilement inherited

view is that in the *Ad Simplicianum* of 397, 15 years before the first anti-Pelagian broadside, his definitive formulation of grace and original sin is already in place.

[8] Augustine viewed concupiscence as original sin in the same sense that death and ignorance are, i.e. in virtue of a metonymy which identifies effects with their causes. He also maintained that concupiscence remains in its entirety after baptism, even though original sin is totally effaced. Strictly speaking, original sin is not constituted by concupiscence. See *Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum* 1:13, 24. At the end of his life Augustine asserted that God could create an innocent person with concupiscence (*Retractationes* 1:15, 2). Yet by our participation in the sin of Adam we are responsible for the presence of concupiscence. Moral voluntareity is of itself the essence of original sin; concupiscence and death are its consequences. Baptism pardons this moral voluntareity; concupiscence, however, remains, but no longer entails guilt. "It is ... forgiven so as to be no longer sin" (*Contra Julianum* 6:17, 51). On the complexities of Augustine's treatment of concupiscence, see W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 87–91.

from our primal ancestors' fall.[9] Without it even infants are liable to a *poena mitigata* in hell. Later theologians, more merciful if less logical, would rescue the unwashed infants from the flames and consign them to the incomplete happiness of limbo.

Thomas Aquinas

Catholic and Protestant thinkers who followed Augustine played only minor variations on his theme. Aquinas, like Augustine, gave a literal historical interpretation to Genesis 2–3, though unlike Augustine he did not see the garden of Eden as a paradise, but a situation much like our own.[10] The lion would not lie down with the lamb even had our first parents not fallen. Faced with temptation but endowed with the habitual supernatural grace of original righteousness and preternatural gifts as well, the first parents were able to resist sin, and had they done so would have emerged into a condition of immortality and beatific vision. But when they fell, grace was lost, nature was disordered and debilitated, and thenceforth they were not able not to sin. For Thomas original sin is formally the loss of habitual grace, or the deprivation of a right relationship with God and the incapacity to love Him above all things; materially it is concupiscence, or the rampage of unruly cravings which savages the freedom of the fallen and disrupts inner integrity and social harmony.[11] By natural generation the original sin with its *vitium* and *reatus* is transmitted to each and all at the inception of life. All are sinners even prior to any free, conscious choice of evil.

The Reformation Thinkers

Protestant thought continued and even intensified the Augustinian theme. Luther and Calvin maintained that sin is more than a negativity,

[9] If infant baptism was a rite in search of a theological rationale, Augustine supplied it; cf. *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1:22. But there is no answer to the objection of Pelagius in his commentary on Romans: How can a God who forgives sins committed by individuals themselves impute to them the sins of another? This criticism was voiced again by the Arminians and survived down into the modern age.

[10] *Summa theologiae* 1, qq. 95–102. See also 1–2, q. 85, a. 3. Compare Thomas' more sober account with, e.g., Augustine's *De civitate Dei* 14:10, 24, 26. We cite but one telling instance. For Thomas there would be carnal generation in paradise and sexual pleasure would have been all the keener since humans were more perfect (1, q. 98, a. 2, ad 3).

[11] *Summa theologiae* 1–2, q. 82, a. 3. Thomas views disordered concupiscence as a consequence of original sin (1–2, q. 91, a. 6, on the *lex fomitis*). "Disordered" would be tautologous for Augustine. But Thomas thinks of concupiscence as in a sense natural, as are the other miseries ensuing upon sin (1–2, q. 91, a. 6). The effect of original sin has been to return us to our nature. "Principaliter quidem poena originalis peccati est quod natura humana sibi relinquatur, destituta auxilio originalis iustitiae, sed ad hoc consequuntur omnes poenalitates quae ex defectu naturae hominibus contingunt" (1–2, q. 87, a. 7).

a mere privation of grace, as Duns Scotus held, who viewed concupiscence as a natural power and so not to be identified as sinful or as the material element in the essence of sin. To define sin merely as the absence of grace did not, thought the Reformers, do justice to the awesome dark power of the proclivity to evil that bedeviled human nature. Protestant thinkers intensified concupiscence in terms of a total depravity.[12] Far from being merely a deprivation, sin is a depravity that contaminates all dimensions of human existence, even, and indeed most of all, noble reason. Augustine was right to analyze the human face of evil not merely as a *privatio boni* but as a powerful *perversio* in need of conversion. To many Catholics this appeared Manichean. In fact it is not. The Reformers' notion of nature is more existential than substantialist; hence it is understood more in terms of the human relationship to God than in terms of alterations of structures of a prior and continuously existing identity or essence. The true self is "excentrically" rather than "inwardly" located.[13] Moreover, as we shall see, concupiscence, prescinding from the Fall, can be perceived as the natural power of desire and therefore as good, not sinful. But concupiscence can also be seen as the surge of undisciplined appetites running wild after the Fall, a rampant narcissism. This distinction between prelapsarian and postlapsarian concupiscence fends off both the Manichean identification of sin with an evil nature and the Pelagian oversimplification of sin as purely accidental and merely conscious bad choice. And yet the nuancing for the most part slipped into oblivion and under the powerful influence of Augustine concupiscence came to be portrayed in Catholic and Protestant rhetoric as a perverse inner tendency to sinful cravings, part of the tragic legacy from the fall of our first parents. Rather than serving as the causal explanation of how Adam could transgress, concupiscence was itself explained as an effect of that transgression. And this gave rise to a morbid moralizing that would motivate many to keep nagging religion at arm's length.

DECLINE AND RESURGENCE OF THE DOCTRINE IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Shifting Moods of Optimism and Pessimism

The doctrine of original sin had been debated from the time of Augustine, but with the Enlightenment it began to undergo total eclipse. Many ceased to view evil as a religious or theological problem. It was

[12] Cf. e.g., J. Calvin, *Institutes* 2, 1, and M. Luther's *Commentary on Rom. 5.* For an earlier comparable pessimistic anthropology, most graphically rendered, cf. Innocent III's *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, ed. D. Howard (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

[13] See W. Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 233–74.

simply a problem of personal psychology and/or human social arrangements. Its remedy would be intelligent human response, not the invocation of divine aid. With the transposition of evolutionary thought from the biological to the cultural sphere, parascientific myths of progress surfaced and with them an optimism which considered evil as in principle perfectly amenable to human manipulation. Evil could be eliminated if the natural sciences, technology, and the social sciences were properly set to the task. The mystery of iniquity was no mystery, merely another human problem that must sooner or later submit to the appropriate technological solution. Liberal theology gave its endorsement to the new optimism and helped lift the curtain hung over our futurity.

In the 20th century, however, in which human beings have already killed well over one hundred million of their kind, disenchantment set in. Two world wars, the Gulags, the Holocaust, Korea, Vietnam, the nuclear and ecological threats formed a somber litany that makes the optimism of the liberals ring hollow and naive. Despite technological progress, evil, far from vanishing, has only become more powerful and more fiendish. Freudian psychology and existentialist philosophy laid bare the tragic underside of the human condition. And artists like Conrad, Camus, Beckett, Golding, and Murdoch contended that because of our hearts of darkness there may be countless nice men and women but few if any genuinely good ones. In all these perspectives evil is held to be inherent, somehow structural, ingrained. And its terrible power defies explanation and solution. Paradoxically, the silver wings of science and technology, on which soared the hopes of the industrialized societies, carried the ultimate menace to the human prospect. In many cases the pessimistic alternative held out little hope that humankind could avoid self-destruction.[14] Stoic resignation to evil and the substitution of Atlas for Prometheus, there was wisdom. The 19th and 20th centuries, then, came to witness the displacement of the classical doctrine of original sin by a secular view of evil with optimistic and pessimistic replays of Pelagian and Manichean themes. Within this context revisionist theologians sought to reconstruct an anthropology adequate to our disconcerting experience of evil as a grim constant, appropriate to the Christian tradition, and sensitive to the problems that led to a loss of credibility for the classical doctrine, which appeared riddled with contradictions.

[14] Examples are S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), and R. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

Lingering Problems for Revisionist Theology

To begin with, the classical teaching found itself in conflict with the modern era's strong convictions that humans are basically good and that freedom and autonomy are supreme values. Further, original sin was said not to be an essential element of human nature, but freely and responsibly introduced. And yet original sin was also said to be a hereditary impairment, hence ingrained. It is natural insofar as it is universal, yet not natural in the sense of being necessary. Or again, the apparent contradiction between responsibility and inevitability appears largely due to Augustine's mixture of categories: a juridical category of debt, which concerns deliberate and therefore punishable acts, and a biological category of inheritance, which concerns species unity through generation. Augustine employed the juridical category against the Manicheans, as he insisted on the separation of the beginning of creation from the beginning of evil, and the biological category against the Pelagians, as he insisted on a prevolitional solidarity in evil grounded in procreation, which, of course, awakened the ancient associations, dormant in archaic layers of consciousness, between stain and sexuality. Thus the doctrine appeared incoherent, though its central insight, that the bondage of the heart to evil is self-imposed and that freedom and inevitability, individuality and solidarity are dialectically related rather than starkly contradictory, is profound. But how and why could the misdeed of a primordial couple estrange all their descendants so that they are born laden with sin and guilt and mentally and morally perverse? The stock explanation of inherited guilt and corruption as resulting from the inclusion of all of us in Adam's loins made the classical doctrine difficult to distinguish from its Gnostic rival, for sin came to appear as an intrinsic and inescapable dimension of the human condition for which no one is or can be liable. All this provokes the surfacing of a neo-Pelagianism which reduces sin, if it speaks of sin at all, to a conscious, deliberate act. In any case, a complete rationalization of human proneness to evil as essayed by either the classical doctrine or a resurgent Pelagian optimism washes out the central Augustinian perception.

A set of related problems for the classical position arises from its interpretation of Genesis 2–3 as literally historical. These chapters were thought to yield divinely inspired and infallible historical data about creation, the state of innocence, and the Fall. Critical and historical consciousness no longer shares these presuppositions and contends that when biblical symbols and narratives are construed literally as science and history, their genuine insights are lost. For example, the serpent symbolizes the seductive power of evil in the world prior to evil choice,

the already-thereness of an evil, which is not absolutely originated in choice alone and to which humans succumb.[15] Here is the tragic depth of evil and it is overlooked in the literal readings which simply attribute all evil to a literal first couple. Moreover, the classic reading of Genesis in its attempt to drive a wedge between finitude and sin lyrically depicts an idyllic state of righteousness or perfection before the Fall. Adam and Eve were blessed with heapings of moral and intellectual perfection and immunity to suffering and death, all of which was grounded in the supreme gift of an immediate companionship with their God. Such postulation of a perfect creation flies in the face of our evolutionary worldview and renders the Fall itself wholly unintelligible. How could pure potentiality or dreaming innocence be equated with perfection? How explain the transition from essence to existence?[16] Did the God withdraw His presence, thus making Himself responsible for the original sin? Or is the sin sheer human rebellion, thus making the gifted and protected original pair completely irrational? A dilemma faces us. Either sin is impossible because of the gift of original righteousness or it is inescapable because of a tragic flaw inherent in humankind which renders temptation and sin ineluctable. The first horn of the dilemma gores the traditional doctrine; the second confronts all modern attempts to reconstruct the doctrine, for it smacks of the Manichean fatalism that equates finitude with sin and indicts the Creator. Obviously the shaking of the scriptural foundations by critical consciousness brings the received doctrine of original sin crashing down.

Yet precisely the authentic insights into the human condition that made the Augustinian tradition so persuasive and powerful now motivate revisionists to reconstruct the doctrine of original sin and its anthropological account of evil so as to counter naturalistic optimism and pessimism. The phenomenology of sin as unbelief that entails a refusal of finitude and dependence on the Creator, as pride that attempts to absolutize the self, and as avarice and idolatry that draw finite goods into the orbit of the self's inordinate egoism, is one of the enduring insights of the classical tradition. The difficult task of any revisionist effort is the retrieval of the tradition's acute discernment of the captive human heart, but shorn of the discredited moralism, legalism, and biologism that have obscured it. How accomplish this? If creation and fall are not temporally separated as before and after, how distinguish the origin of creation from the origin of evil or sin from finitude? How sever the link between a historical fall and the corruption of human nature without surrendering to a Pelagian naiveté that sees humanity as always

[15] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* 255–58.

[16] P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957) 31–36.

the same and poised indifferently before good and evil? Conversely, how admit a constitutive ontological weakness in human nature without going over to Manicheanism? Refusal to read as literal chronology the before and after of the paradise story is to make fallenness or alienation and existence coincide. How hold together personal freedom and the tragic estrangement present in every existence that makes humans chronically ineffectual in meeting the demands of their moral ideals?

Obviously, then, the negative task of a revisionist theology will be to deconstruct the classical doctrine so as to retrieve its truly profound meaning and intention. This meaning is not rooted in juridical or biological interpretations of some terrible hereditary guilt. We shall see, rather, that the rational symbol of original sin is an articulation of what we declare in our confession of sins or sense in our experience of evil. The aim of this process of deconstruction and reconstruction is to open up a way between the naive historicism of fundamentalism and the bloodless moralism of rationalism, lest the treasure hidden in the Adamic myth and the Augustinian rationalization of it be squandered. The reconstruction proposed here revolves around personalist and situationist axes which derive from modern philosophical, psychological, sociological, and theological insights. With these insights we can fathom not the pseudo clarity of the classical doctrine but its dark symbolic richness, through which we may better articulate, though never with total lucidity, what is wrong with us and why.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SYMBOL OF ORIGINAL SIN

Angst

The Adamic myth tells a story of human rebellion. What does it signify and how is it keyed to our experience? The rebellious act it dramatizes springs from the pretensions of the human spirit. "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5). The man and woman fall not because they are primitive or animalistic or ignorant but because they are capable of reaching for the stars, seeking divine status and becoming the source of their own meaning. It is the self-transcending spirit in us that makes us human and that spirit is at once the source of our achievement and our capacity for evil. In our self-constituting power of transcendence we unite past, present, and future; we survey ourselves and our world; we understand, judge, decide, and act so as to make ourselves and our world. Herein resides the seat of creativity and destructiveness. For the human spirit, if transcendent, is also bounded, conditioned, mortal, threatened by nonbeing. Of the

two, therefore, transcendence and finitude, is born anxiety.[17] Spirit opens up infinite possibilities to the self. But finitude demands choice and with it the haunting awareness of roads not taken. Hence the anxiety of possibility, of a dizziness that chronically unsettles the self. In becoming itself, the self is tempted into alienation, either by proud forgetfulness of its finitude through frantic struggle to be all its possibilities or by slothful forgetfulness of its real possibilities through sluggish retreat and the surrender of selfhood through flight to the sanctuary of mediocrity for a false security. Straddling infinity and finitude, being and nonbeing, freedom and destiny, possibility and facticity, we are unbalanced, anxious, and we lurch toward hubris or toward its less attended to but very prevalent contrary, acedia. The tension between the poles is too much to maintain.

Because the wolf is always at the door, we are especially anxious about our future, about money, food, enemies, land, power, status, about not having enough or losing what we have. In this anxiety we are driven to seek apotheosis and security at the expense of others. And, because spirit envisions an infinity of future possibilities against the horizon of the one certain possibility, death, the angst is never-ending. From the depths of anxiety-ridden spirit rise endless aggression and a drive for power, wealth, and domination or a fearful flight from life and choice and a futile effort to clutch the eroding securities of the present. Angst, then, is the precondition of sin and estrangement insofar as it draws us to seek our own interests at the cost of destructiveness of the self, others, and nature. Anxiety is not itself sin but temptation to sin. Were it the former, the Manichean determinism to sin would revive. There is always, however, the ideal or essential possibility of centering one's life in God. To the extent that conversion occurs, anxiety wears its other face and becomes the goad to creative personal and social achievement.

The central point here is that humanity is saddled with a basic ontological insecurity and dread which derive from freedom itself as the capacity for self-transcendence.[18] Since the essence of the self is not

[17] For more extended developments of this crucial concept, see S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1941), and *The Concept of Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1980). See also L. Gilkey, *Message and Existence* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 138–42; E. Beckler, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973): Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* 80–153. Anxiety is not the whole picture. Ricoeur calls joy and anxiety ontological emotions. More precisely, "joy in and through anguish is the fundamental emotional register" (P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man* [Chicago: Regnery, 1965] 161).

[18] For a different viewpoint, which, following Heidegger, gives more play to care (*Sorge*) than to freedom, as Ricoeur does, see P. Bourgeois and F. Schalow, "The Integrity and Fallenness of Human Existence," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25 (1987) 123–32.

given in advance, it must choose and make itself in the face of its possibilities or seek refuge in the cloak of familiarities. The state of dreaming innocence drives beyond itself and by choosing forfeits its innocence rather than risk losing itself entirely. Human transcendence may forestall identification with any given, but the self comes to its identity through its choices. Freedom is always, because undetermined but hounded by its own finitude, permeated by an inescapable anxiety and hence a constitutive fallibility and vulnerability to sin. Human freedom is tragic as well as moral. Fallibility and anxiety are not the consequences of a primal fall; they are ontological constituents of freedom. Moreover, choice is rendered even more difficult by the additional fact that humans live at an epistemic distance from God.[19] The supreme good, never immediately experienced, is at best apprehended only in an anticipatory grasping and in the night of faith and hope. Such distancing readily begets misplaced love, which turns the possession of and power over inferior goods into demonic forces that dominate all choices. Sin knows, therefore, a tragic historical inevitability.

These remarks about anxiety as a precondition for sin indicate the path marked out by contemporary theologians. Clearly they are preoccupied, and rightly so, not with *peccatum originale originans*, the primordial calamity of Adam, but with *peccatum originale originatum*, the ongoing sinful, human predicament. It is a predicament in which one finds oneself religiously and morally impaired, a predicament in which ethical and spiritual aspirations outrun achievements and an anguishing distance separates "I want" and "I can." In Romans 7 Paul gives woeful voice to this common experience of the divided self trapped between two appetites, one irresistibly luring toward evil, the other ineffectually summoning toward good. The unruly appetites that defy reason and morality have traditionally been tagged as "concupiscence," the material aspect of original sin, according to scholastic theologians. Of late, theology has employed the insights of Freudian psychoanalytic theory of the structure and development of personality to better comprehend the phenomenon of the divided or alienated self.

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Emergence of Personality

In Freudian theory, which marks the dethronement of consciousness, the most primitive component of personality, the id, is a pool of unconscious, libidinal energies controlled by the "pleasure principle" and always clamoring for immediate satisfaction. The emergent ego, which is conscious and organized, is aligned with the "reality principle," hence pre-

[19] J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 281–82, 322–27, 372 f., 379 f.

pared to postpone or forgo instant gratification of instinctive drives to achieve more preferable goods over the long haul. The ego polices the id, though the former is not always master in its own house, for the reality principle is often vanquished in its conflict with the pleasure principle. The similarities between the id and its operation with concupiscence and its war with the spirit as described in the theological tradition are patent.[20] Further, there is no need to appeal to a fall from a superior state to explain the id-ego conflict. The conflict can be interpreted positively as a common developmental phenomenon rather than negatively as a consequence of a sinful degeneration.[21] Adoption of Freudian theory, therefore, negates the notion that concupiscence results from sin or is itself sin, though obviously it can be an enticement to evil. Self-alienation is natural to us and makes sin a virtually inescapable accompaniment of human development. We are born fallen. Thus concupiscence precedes all sin rather than succeeding original sin. The struggle for ascendency of the reality principle over the pleasure principle is the normal growth pattern of any maturing personality, not a penalty inherited for the crime of a primal ancestor. Lamentation over an imagined lost paradise is replaced by hope for an originally flawed but improvable human nature, hope that the divided self may become whole and well and appetites integrated.[22]

[20] Concupiscence designates the spontaneous tension in human beings between the polarities of spirit and matter, person and nature, freedom and destiny, possibility and facticity. The individual at any given moment is given to itself with all its spontaneous physical and spiritual drives and with all that previous choices, its own and others', have made it to be. But the individual is called not to eliminate a polarity, thereby becoming a half-person, but to unify and integrate this manifold by giving it a freely chosen direction. Tension resides in the natural concupiscence of a human being called to become a person in and through these many givens. See K. Rahner, "The Theological Concept of Concupiscence," *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 347–82, and S. Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger* (New York: Seabury, 1981) 43–46. On Rahner's person/nature distinction, see G. Vass, *Understanding Karl Rahner* 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985) chap. 2.

[21] Trent maintained that concupiscence may be called sin only in the sense that it comes from sin and inclines to sin (DS 1515–16). The second article of the Augsburg Confession (1530) seems to describe concupiscence as the essence of sin, the counterpart of the lack of fear of and trust in God marking humans from birth.

[22] The paradise of traditional theology witnesses to a malaise with the self-alienation that is natural to us and the consequence of a natural and not sinful dualism. Confusion between natural and sinful dualism assumes self-alienation is not human and evidences an ignorance of or reluctance to weigh the fact of the unconscious. Cf. S. MacIsaac, *Freud and Original Sin* (New York: Paulist, 1974). Luther's global and pervasive awareness of sin expressed, perhaps, a failure to distinguish the instinctual and personally culpable in one's life. Luther seems incapable of viewing çoncupiscence as the natural consequence of a properly human dualism or self-alienation. Hence in the face of concupiscence he was

A narcissistic-altruistic ambivalence appears at every stage of our growth, however, and personality integration travels a rocky road. The environment in which it occurs is crucial to the emergence of the ego and especially relevant in Freudian theory is the child's interaction with its parents. Parents unconsciously, for the most part, transmit by word and act to their offspring the values and meanings that are their own and their culture's, and these are absorbed unconsciously by children. Here is the child's second legacy; not only is it given genetic make-up, but psychic shape, a myriad of psychological assets and liabilities, and among the latter proclivities to sloth and pride, irrationality and evil. Again we see the relevance of psychoanalytic theory where the material aspect of original sin, concupiscence, is concerned. Interiorizing the parents' discipline with its rewards and punishments, the child develops the third component of personality, the superego, a pre-reflective conscience that now internally gives voice to parental and cultural mores, with all their strengths and weaknesses, which together shape a powerful, prevolitional, moral orientation that can never be wholly transcended as the ego strives for autonomy. The perduring psychic dualism at work in each person, the conscious and the unconscious, is the basis of concupiscence. In the process of nurturing and curbing aggressive antisocial behavior, parents and others do not their worst to corrupt the child, but their best to transmit value. Paradoxically, in the internalizing of values and principles the child's emerging superego stores up the energy of repressed aggression and now turns it against the ego. Thus does the child come to know guilt—in religious language, consciousness of sin. Freud seems to perceive civilization as Paul did the Mosaic Law, as an extraneous authority which promised life but delivered death in the form of guilt (Rom 7:9–10).[23]

One thing at this point must be clarified in any Freudian reinterpretation of original sin. The propensity to sin cannot be reduced to sexual lust. Certainly Freud does identify as sexual, broadly speaking, the instinctual energies of the id, calling them the libido. Certainly, too, theologians in the past liberally laced discussions of original sin with allusions to sex. For some the sin of Adam was sexual, for nearly all original sin was transmitted through sexual propagation, and for all the relentless and felt spontaneity of sexual arousal exemplified concupiscence so well that the two came virtually to be identified. But none of

incapable of moral neutrality. The human being is bedeviled by an ambivalence which is neither sin nor the consequence of sin but a result of its composite being as spirit/body and consciousness/unconsciousness.

[23] Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 81–95.

this finds warrant in a critical examination of the traditional texts or of human experience. Concupiscence, infinite desire, cannot be reduced to sexual libido and classed as sinful. In itself concupiscence, or Freud's id, is a morally neutral or ambivalent reservoir of appetites which as part of the human psyche may motivate wholesome and productive stirrings as well as evil ones. Its elimination would extinguish the fires of lust, but also the lights of civilization. Moreover, when concupiscence does lead to sin, the forms it assumes in the lust for power, wealth, glory, domination, even holiness, are infinitely more subtle and more destructive than sexual dalliance. On the other hand, Freud's mapping of the normal development of sexual libido as a transformation from hedonistic to more altruistic expressions should give pause to any theology that tends to color sex in the dark hues of sin. The concupiscence that leads to evil is the same erotic drive that leads to falling in love with the goodness that is God.

To pursue further the dawning consciousness of guilt, it might be well to follow up upon a suggestion made by Sebastian Moore.[24] In a sense, the fall of each of us is a consciousness explosion, an awakening, a tasting of infinity. The experience of evil is the price of self-awareness, which is marked by the loneliness and tension of being an I and, with a knowledge of good and evil, having to choose. Contrary to the traditional reading of the Adam story that prior to the Fall the man and woman were self-aware and God-conscious, perhaps we should see the Fall as the birth of consciousness and the dawning of God-awareness. In the moment of falling is lost the preconscious sense of union with the whole, to which the fallen are nostalgically drawn as conscious beings. Perhaps this self-awareness explodes in a childhood trauma when, before we can handle the experience, we are confronted with a shattering of parental order that up to then had woven for us a nest of security and meaning. We are jolted into a new world, "the world around the corner." We break out of the cosmic, psychic womb to discover ourselves in a world inhabited by spirits malevolent and benevolent and where the wholeness we crave is displaced and relegated to the dream. The dream character of the really real is the sad condition of original sin, or generic sin. It is a condition of discontentedness. "We are stumbling after union with a dreamed and unknown God; that is our greatness and our wretchedness."[25] The result of this trauma is not so much a bias toward evil as a tragic incapacity for loving the great good that appears to beckon. Here, to revert to the tradition, is the formal aspect of original sin. Coupled with this radical

[24] S. Moore, "Original Sin, Resurrection, and Trinity," *Lonergan Workshop* 4 (1983) 85–98.

[25] Ibid. 88.

ineptitude is a state of desire. The lost whole broods over us, judging our trivial pursuits and enticing us beyond. Self-awareness is the experience of being at once judged and drawn. We desire to be one and whole in consciousness as once we were in preconsciousness. And yet there can be no simple return to a preself-aware condition. Paradise lost cannot be regained. There can be no going back to a loss of self-awareness, only a going forward to what lies ahead, which for the Christian is the kingdom dreamt of and entered only through the grim passage of death. Meanwhile we are "in-between" people hobbled by a distance from the whole that causes us to move at best haltingly toward the good and inevitably toward evil.

The Sin of the World

While the incorporation of psychoanalytic insights into a revised understanding of original sin is less well known, the employment of insights from the social sciences has been perhaps more widely broadcast. Claiming fidelity to Trent, contemporary theology asserts that original sin is transmitted "propagatione, non imitatione."[26] Generation, however, is not Augustine's sin-tainted procreative act nor does it signify a biological link between a historical Adam and his progeny. The intent of the Tridentine formula was to reject the Pelagian idea that people are drawn into sin merely by following Adam's example and to assert the universality of sin and the appropriateness of infant baptism. But no positive meaning is given by Trent to the term "generatione." Modern theologians assign to it a wider meaning than mere physical procreation. Rather it is transbiological, transhistorical, communal, and refers to the whole process of socialization by which a human being enters the human world, including birth and interpersonal relationships. But the human world with which one attains solidarity is a sinful world. The reality called original sin is not a static given at birth but an intrinsically dynamic historical dimension of being human in a sinful world and as an existential of our freedom grows and varies as each one's participation in sinful humanity grows.[27] Moreover, being situated in and participating in the "sin of the world" is not in the first instance a conscious decision. It is "non imitatione." For sin works its shaping influence before one is

[26] DS 1513 and 1523. Trent said nothing positive about the nature of original sin except that it is the "death of the soul." Even less did it express itself on the way humans are jointly responsible for the sin of their first parents.

[27] Cf. K. Weger, *Theologie der Erbsunde, mit einem Exkurs 'Erbsünde und Monogenismus' von Karl Rahner* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 166. Though original sin has been considered the same in all, the sin of the world affects each person differently. The effect of the environment on each person varies as the somatic and psychic structure of each varies. See MacIsaac, *Freud and Original Sin* 117–23.

capable of moral decisions. Inserted into a race and an environment contaminated by corporate evil, each person is infected by the contagion before being able to offer the least resistance.[28]

Before consciously experiencing freedom, one is molded by the build-up of the greed, pride, inertia, and divisions that mark the long history of the human community. Before being able to choose, one is, merely by being historically situated, inextricably caught in an immense web of reciprocity in evil that one cannot escape and that has forming power. Evil is choice, but more than choice, for evil is transubjective and other. There is a serpent within, but also without, always already there waiting. We institute evil, but we also discover it; we are responsible agents but also tragic victims. Not only are we what we choose to be; we are also what others decide for us. Cumulative environmental influences are to be understood not in the superficial Pelagian sense of examples freely selected for imitation, but in the profound sense brought to light by Freud and the social sciences. Coming to freedom is always a social as well as a personal adventure. The tangle of evil persons with their evil deeds and diseased institutional structures and systems weaves a history which constitutes humanity in its network of interdependence as deaf to the appeal of the good. To be in the world is to be willy-nilly complicit in a sinful condition. Situated in a poisonous solidarity, the horizon of freedom constricts and the motives and insights presented to it are ruinous. Being situated in this way is something intrinsic, an inner determination of every human.[29] It is the powerlessness of the disordered heart, the incapacity to love the good, the distance between "I ought" and "I will" that the middle-aged Augustine came to understand so well. There is *liberum arbitrium* but not *libertas*; there is free choice, but burdened and warped by a sinful history. But far from being sheer negativity, a defective state, this involuntary dark underside is a positive power that holds captive, a lure to evil and moral entropy with which each one soon comes to connive so that the bondage of a predeliberate perversity becomes self-willed. Thus for Paul sin is "a demonic power, a mythical magnitude, like Law and Death. Sin 'inhabits' man more than man commits sin. Sin 'enters' into the world; it 'intervenes'; it abounds; sin 'reigns.'"[30] Here is the mystery of our transhistorical solidarity in

[28] Pannenberg traces the lineage of the notion of the "sin of the world" from Kant's "kingdom" of evil through Schleiermacher's "corporate life of sin" through Ritschl's "kingdom of sin" to Schoonenberg's "being situated" (Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* 125–28).

[29] Recall here the Marxist insight that consciousness is determined by social being. Cf. J. McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1978) 123–57.

[30] Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning" 283.

evil which constitutes a power unanalyzable merely in terms of the sum total of the multiple veerings of individual wills.

To make good sense of all this, we need to recover important nuances in the notion of sin as distance from and impotence for God's presence and purposes. All too prematurely we moralize the negative. But sin can be viewed as an ontological category before being an ethical one.[31] A theological anthropology must draw upon biology and genetics. But genetic fraternity is not enough, because we are strange animals that not only feed and breed but plan and build worlds. To share a common human nature, we have to share a culture, hopes, and language. There is, in other words, an ethical and sociopolitical as well as biological component to human nature. There is no sealed wall between the self and its culture. The flow of fallen history courses through us, not around us, and leaves the "death dance in our blood." What we do with our freedom depends on what we are. And what we are is only what we have become socially, and that is always largely determined by our social milieu.

Herein resides what Ricoeur calls the "realism of sin."[32] Consciousness can never take the measure of sin. Sin is one's true situation before God. "Before God," not consciousness, is the measure of sin. This is why prophets are needed to denounce sin, for conscious awareness of self never suffices. Indeed, consciousness itself, as Marx knew, is determined by an evil society and is in collusion with evil through its lies and bad faith. It follows that sin is more than sins, more than individual conscious acts or deviations of the will. It is a radical mode of being; it is Ezekiel's "heart of stone." Sin arises at a deeper level than that of conscious intention and explicit choice. It arises at the level, as Augustine said, of what we really love, in the character of our loves, in that center of our being that shapes all we are and do.

The Eschatological Dimension

Accompanying the tendency to reinterpret original sin as the sin of the world is a shift in emphasis from historical antecedence to eschatological dynamism.[33] This eschatological thrust incorporates a more processive, evolutionary perspective from which original sin is viewed not as the disastrous residue of some primal crime but as a present conflict

[31] Sin and freedom are antithetically related in the Augustinian tradition. Freedom, or exocentricity, is basically a matter of proximity to God and conformity to His purposes. Freedom, like sin, or egoism, is an ontological category. Self-possession and alienation are more fundamental than available choice.

[32] Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning" 282.

[33] C. Duquoc, "New Approaches to Original Sin," *Cross Currents* 28 (1978) 189–200.

between our history and the dynamics of the ultimate. It is the contradiction between what humans are and what they are called to become in Christ. To be born is to be born fallen and to know the estrangement from our essential being that marks our existence when through self-awakening we eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet sin is but one vector in human life, and original sin but one attempt of the tradition to define the status of humankind outside of Christ. As classically understood, the doctrine tended to be an abstraction in its focus on the sole vector of sin and gracelessness. Modern theology has as one of its chief assertions, however, the claim that a purely graceless world or individual has never existed.[34] Sin is never the total picture in anyone's biography. For human history is not only a history of perdition but a history of salvation. Hence life is drawn by a second vector, grace; and Christology rather than original sin is the fundamental axis for the doctrine of soteriology. Instead of deriving Christ's significance from sin, contemporary theology proceeds from Christ as the center and measure of the human to a doctrine of sin as derivative. Sin is located along a graced horizon that humans are struggling toward. It is less lost innocence than incompleteness. Surely not paradise lost but the kingdom ahead is the homeland.

The derivative nature of hamartiology is borne out by the realization that only through the revelation of the "new man" in Christ as fulfilment of human destiny do we come to grasp retrospectively the universality of sin symbolized in Adam. Further, the scholastic view of sin as a *carentia iustitiae debitae* derives from the conviction that human destiny finds its ground in God and has been revealed in Christ. While sin's universality may have its empirical verification and must be asserted as a presupposition for Christian soteriology, it is somehow obscured and concealed in our unmanageable anxiety and concupiscence and our unconscious situatedness. However, the hidden egoistic opposition of sin that distances from God is initially revealed in the law and radically in the cross. Obviously Christology eliminates the need for the supplementary hypothesis of monogenism to ground the assertion of sin's radical and

[34] The catholicity of a graced horizon in every person is, e.g., the major point in Rahnerian theology of grace. It is misleading to lament that humans are born deprived of a grace which ought to be transmitted by birth itself. To make physical and infrapersonal birth the medium of grace naturalizes and reifies a profoundly personal reality, God's self-communication in love. Moreover, because original sin has never been an independent theological magnitude in the concrete world, it is wrong to accord prepersonal deprivation of divine life independent status. It is always but one element within the study of grace and redemption, even though "the possibility of sin is an Existential which belongs to the whole of a person's life and cannot be eradicated" (K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* [New York: Seabury, 1978] 104).

universal sway. Biological descent of the race from Adam as its historical progenitor yields to the unity of human finality revealed in the second Adam and is reflected in the saga of the first Adam only as its antitype. Moreover, it is not the case that pursuant to Adam's fall a surrogate destiny was imposed on humanity. The original plan for creation is not scrapped only to be replaced by a divine contingency plan that entails a Christ as its agent. There is but a single creative design, which intends the divine self-communication.

Against this backdrop and all we have seen, there is reason to feel uneasy with the term "original sin," however venerable it may be. At best the term is derivative and stretches analogy to the breaking point. At worst, in its biological and juridical grounding it can be construed as a Manichean identification of finitude with sin and guilt, which is exactly what Augustine's opponent John of Eclanum did. "Original sin" is a code word for a *mise en situation*, an involuntary existential condition that is natural to humans as disordered and incomplete.[35] Human evil, therefore, must be grasped as underdevelopment by reference to a future goal and as statistical necessity in an evolving universe. It is difficult to imagine a world created for development and the becoming of freedom where evil is not a structural component.

A backing for this reinterpretation is found in the forward-straining Irenaean theodicy which came into favor (among liberal Protestants in the 19th century and Roman Catholics in the late 20th) against the backward-glancing Augustinian perspective. Irenaeus, writing in the late second century, provides a minority report by comparison with the familiar and dominant theodicy of Augustine. For Irenaeus, the unification of creation and redemption in a single order is pivotal. Perfection is at the end, not at the beginning; hope burns not for restored innocence but for healing and homecoming. According to Irenaeus, since ethical perfection cannot come ready-made, God made the world a testing ground and history a person-making process of growth. Adam was no superman tumbling down from perfection to imperfection. Rather he came from his maker's hand childlike. The starting point is the ontological imperfection of humans revealed in their instability and ethical-religious immaturity. Created imperfect, they are perfectible as they grope through a situation in which sin is virtually inescapable. Genesis does not contrast the way things are with the way they once were, but the way they are and ever have been with how they ought to be. The garden is the dream, not memory. Made to the image of God because endowed with intelligence, humans are meant, claims Irenaeus, to become the likeness of God

[35] Cf. Rahner's cautious remarks concerning the problematic nature of the term "original sin" and his willingness to drop it (*Foundations of Christian Faith* 111–14).

through the outpouring of the Spirit who conforms them to the pattern and norm, the Son incarnate. Our measure is not the first Adam but the second. The Fall, therefore, is not deterioration, according to Irenaeus; it is retardation of growth. Not the substitution of a divine back-up plan for the restoration of a lost order, redemption is rather the culmination of creation and the assurance that the divine intention is stronger than human folly. The new Adam reverses the sinful history set in motion by the first and manifests and enables that likeness to God that all are summoned to. Here is an alternative myth to the anti-Gnostic Augustinian myth.

With the new Adam as their center of gravity, the revisionists have relativized sin. It is the dark underside of a graced world. However, it is not as though humans are caught between coequal forces. Grace and sin are not equal valences, locked in a struggle whose outcome hangs in the balance. Grace is superior to any initial guiltlessness and to the reigning power of evil. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). Type and antitype are not just parallel. The universality of sin is more than matched by the universality of grace. The latter, of course, deabsolutizes the need for water baptism, for each one's prepersonal situation is already constituted by "being redeemed in Christ" as well as by being disposed to collusion with evil. It is no longer possible to give pride of place to baptism as a clean transference from a "before" that is totally graceless and sinful to an "after" that is graced and wholly renovated. Baptism cannot "remove" original sin understood as a mode of existence where we are driven by anxiety, at the mercy of the unconscious, and bound in historical solidarity with evil, all of which leave us primed for evil. The baptized remain part of human history. Even in the heart of the baptized lurks a kind of will not to grow to love the good. Choice is fettered. At least unconsciously aspiring to love as fulfilment, the human person senses a gnawing egotism in his inmost chambers, a *curvitas*, a bent toward the cult of limited goods and the self. In this sense original sin is an ineradicable bias or complicity, a dark involuntary at the heart of the will, eluding conceptual clarity and fast becoming voluntary in the conspiracy of impotence and cowardice against growth. Each one feels the undertow of an evil that is his and not his.[36] Each one is *simul iustus et peccator*.

At best, then, baptism is initiation into a community affording an environment for intelligent and reasonable growth and intensification of a graced relationship already active. This is so because of the claim that the good news of God's universal and superabundant love is that the

[36] B. McDermott, "The Theology of Original Sin: Recent Developments," *TS* 38 (1977) 511–12.

world is never *sine Christo*. All of history is *in Christo* and *ad Christum*. The deeper situation each one is born into is not that of sin but the effective offer, long before baptism perhaps, of liberating grace to counter the desire of the self for captivity. Obviously this new focus on the catholicity of grace counters anthropological pessimism and envisions a God who is saving rather than punitive. What we also seem to have in this revisionism is an idealist reading of history where falling is paradoxically an imperfect fulfilment of the ideal in the real. The idealist reading of history interprets it as a progressive approximation to what in principle is actual now. It is not without the risk of naive optimism if it fails to take the self-contradicting power of freedom and the demonic implications of history seriously.[37]

CONCLUSION

Ricoeur warns us that we never have the right to speculate about the concept of original sin, as if it had a proper consistency.[38] It is, after all, only a rationalized myth about the mystery of evil. This is wise counsel. Yet we always want to see farther than we can, to draw more sense than we may from our complex experience. We hanker to turn the darkness of hope into the clarity of explanation, and the tortuous search for truth into possession. Perhaps, too, the larger the story we try to tell, the stronger the tendency to imbue it with a greater "followability" than experience warrants. Stories have plots and assume a certain coherence. Fearful of the dark, we are always tempted to impose upon the universe and its processes an intelligibility that exceeds our paltry experience. But all our projections, even when we labor to make them coherent, are limited. And beyond coherence there is adequacy, which we always merely approach. Coherence is a necessary condition but an insufficient one when we spin stories that tell of our hopes concerning the whence and whither of us and all else. And so theology should be, in Rahner's words, "guardian of the *docta ignorantia futuri*" for the history of humankind.[39] We cannot lift the curtain hung over the mystery we are and the love that moves the moon, the sun, and other stars. So we are encumbered with ambiguity. We believe the world is followable; it has plot, point, purpose. But such "followability" is always rimmed by a larger nescience. If our prospects are as grim as the doctrine of original sin suggests, despite Mozart, Ely Cathedral, the marvels disclosed at the tip of our microscopes, and the wonder of a smile—and I believe this to be the

[37] Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 2, 29–30.

[38] Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning" 286.

[39] K. Rahner, "Possible Courses for the Theology of the Future," *Theological Investigations* 13 (New York: Seabury, 1975) 33.

case—it should come as no surprise. Still, the story of creation may yet be hoped to be the story of a garden in whose lasting making "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore" (Rev 21:4). But the way lies through another garden, Gethsemane, and up the hill of Golgotha, where the tree of life was planted.