

## I. ORIGINAL SIN

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### ORIGINAL SIN IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

What is the significance of being asked to address the theme of original sin *in ecumenical perspective*? It means speaking out of whatever strengths have come from one's particular tradition in readiness to be corrected by that larger past which informs the various ecclesial bodies.<sup>1</sup> It means proceeding in a way that neither ignores nor exaggerates the differences that may exist between us. Where we discover new depth and meaning in our own traditions as a by-product of honest confrontation by other Christians, we may rejoice. But when we remain "separated brethren" even in the midst of ecumenical dialog, this is clearly a matter of pain rather than pride!

In an age that is enamored by its modernity, how can one speak meaningfully about as ancient a theme as original sin? Is this doctrine simply a quaint echo from an earlier time? Or does it still constitute a valid insight into the fundamental condition of man and society? This paper undertakes an examination and reformulation of the theme. We proceed with great respect for the heritage of faith on this matter. But we also recognize the need for new ways of speaking that take account of our changing times and styles of thought.

#### I

We must approach our topic against the backdrop of a still broader question: how does our thinking and speaking about God make contact with the experience of being human? Whatever else has been meant by the church's teaching on original sin, it has some-

<sup>1</sup> It would be fair to say that this paper reflects the dominant influences of the Free Church wing of Protestantism. Rather than either parading or camouflaging that fact, we present our views openly and forthrightly as a contribution to ecumenical dialog.

thing to do with the distortion of life in relationship to God and to his purposes for man and society. We begin with an analysis of where the religious question and answer mesh with general culture. This in no way underestimates the defining particularities of Christianity, or the decisive normativeness of Jesus Christ as the living center of the church. We move in this way so that our specialized language about man's relation to God makes close contact with everyday considerations. To see how faith and life intersect is especially urgent when the church and its language seem aloof and unnecessarily alien to society at large.

To be a man is to be defined and limited (1) by other persons, (2) by goals and courses of action that direct our energies, and (3) by the future. This observation may seem so self-evident as to be theologically uninteresting. Quite the contrary! Its very commonness contributes to the importance of this primary insight into the nature of our humanity. It has far-reaching implications for understanding the particular function of the church's language about sin—or the distortion of life at its deepest levels.

Think of the way others contribute to our own personhood. As developing organisms—from the earliest years—we gain a sense of identity through relationship with influential persons.<sup>2</sup> From them we receive language, social values, notions of right and wrong, direction and purpose. To be sure, the larger cultural context also communicates its inhibitions, hatreds, fears, indifference, and crippling neuroses. Nevertheless, our capacities for growth and maturity are fundamentally conditioned by social relationships. Throughout the whole fabric of interpersonal connections we know what it is to be free and yet bounded. We become individuals precisely because we experience the boundary limits of other persons around us. We know who we are because we are known in these living encounters.

Similarly, we find life ordered and held together in relation to interiorized goals that claim our attention and energies. We are

<sup>2</sup> This insight has become axiomatic nowadays. The developing self, with its individuality and distinguishing idiosyncrasies, is at the same time social in its make-up. The writings of George H. Mead continue to be representative of this widely shared viewpoint. Consult especially *Mind, Self and Society*, University of Chicago, 1934.

integrated as responsible agents by the projects to which we give ourselves. To illustrate, mark how some compelling objective—i.e. completion of a graduate degree in theology or a manuscript for publication—serves to marshall one's total resources in its pursuit. To attain such a projected end, certain intrinsic disciplines must be adopted: concentration of effort—literally willing one thing, restriction of leisure, sacrifice of time for the enjoyment of family and friends, and giving up a broad range of interests that do not directly contribute to the sought-after value. Life is filled with the pursuit of projects, some quite enduring and elusive, others more transient and easily achieved or displaced. We experience both success and failure in this process. In more than accidental ways we are constituted as persons by what we strive for in life. We are motivated and yet bounded by the many goals and courses of action that occupy us from time to time.

Man is likewise defined and limited by the future. It is the capacity to anticipate one's tomorrows that essentially distinguishes man and human society from other creatures and their groupings on this earth. We not only live out of a personal history, with its fund of individual-social relations, remembering what has been in the *past*; we not only strive for desired objectives in the *present* moment; we also look ahead to what may be in the *future*. Indeed, our anticipations become an ingredient in our present pursuits, even as they have informed all our relationships and actions in the past.

Man is a future-oriented animal, and in ways that are scarcely paralleled by the more instinctive reactions we observe even in lower forms of life. In our relations with other persons, and in our pursuit of projects, we know what it is to be open and yet bounded. But it is the future that marks the most decisive boundary limit. We know that our tomorrows will be shaped by the potentialities and the restrictive factors that have accrued to our past and present. Even more profoundly, we sense that our expected tomorrows may in fact not be. In the midst of life—at the very center of our strength and achievement—we face the poignant and inescapable prospect of death!

This is where the religious question and the possibility of the religious answer mesh with our general experience of being a man.

We can phrase the religious question this way: who am I in my self-initiative and boundedness, as one who is defined and limited by other persons and sought-after goals, as one who is unqualifiedly bordered by a future which can be anticipated but is not mine to bestow? This question does not inevitably loom in the forefront of human consciousness. We live in a culture which is often able to function without explicit attention to this kind of primary awareness and introspectiveness. Although, even a society made up of "men come of age" deals at least implicitly with the uniquely human tendency to anticipate what lies ahead—with its enticement and element of mystery. Witness the exaggerated preoccupation with death and funerals that pervades American culture. In one way or another man in every era must deal with himself in his personal relationships, his volitional strivings, and his orientation toward the future which may be bulging with promise but which can finally only be received as a gift from beyond one's own powers.

In his personal encounters, his sought-after projects, and his anticipated tomorrows, man deals with that which "limits" and yet is highly influential in his life.<sup>3</sup> Here then the religious answer arises as a recurrent possibility. The notion of God is a high-level generalization. It gathers up the lesser intimations of otherness and boundedness—whether in persons, goals, or the expected future. Such instances are not exhaustive of those everyday occasions where we deal with what bears on our lives from beyond, or that which transcends and yet impinges upon us. But they are pivotal in providing the experiential base for thought and speech about God. We can now phrase the religious answer in this fashion: *God is the name for that Limit than which no greater can be conceived!* It is he who defines and constitutes man in the keenest sense of all. It is he who is the deepest and most inescapable boundary of man's life and death. Thus, the call and promise of the future, as the distinguishing ingredient

<sup>3</sup> For a phenomenological description of the way an awareness of "limitation" erupts in human experience see Gordon D. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'God': Transcendence Without Mythology," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 59, Number 2, April 1966. Where our discussion goes beyond Kaufman is in more explicit reference to the way not only personal relationships and volitional strivings, but especially future expectations provide an experiential base for the notion of God as ultimate Limit.

in man's past relationships and present strivings, takes on the personalized meanings that have become attached to the understanding of God, at least in those places that have been influenced by the Judeo-Christian heritage. We speak of God as the One whose purposeful presence and power is enduring and comprehensive enough to span future, no less than past and present.

But we must be clear that this kind of general analysis of what it means to be human does not in itself rule out the alternative that I am finally limited only by emptiness and silence, by Void, by the Abyss, by Nothingness. The future that I anticipate but cannot totally manipulate may be dark and inscrutable to the core. It perhaps has only that meaning which man projects upon it. Unaided reason cannot finally negate the conclusion that apart from other persons and the objects of my environment I am ultimately alone in the universe. Direct examination of experience does bring to consciousness an awareness of otherness and boundedness—especially in relation to persons, in pursuit of goals, and in our hoped-for tomorrows. But faith in God, as the ultimate Boundary Limit that conditions all of life, requires still other foundations.

## II

What supports the religious/Christian option? How is the more general awareness of otherness and boundedness filled out so that one actually becomes a believer? What leads one to acknowledge God as that ultimate Boundary Limit of life and death?

Undoubtedly many subtle factors contribute to the process whereby the daily experiences of limitation, of boundedness in the midst of openness, are generalized into a full-orbed understanding of God. Most directly, though, the response of faith in God as purposive Being is precipitated and nurtured by the *persuasive power* of the biblical histories. The illuminating and shaping events of Israel's history, and uniquely the event of Christ, add vividness and detail to those hunches we may already have about larger boundary limits. Those who are captivated by these paradigmatic events are given a sense of identity, motivational guidance and energy, as well as a larger perspective on the purpose and direction of life. They receive the growing assurance that their actions are surrounded by an over-

arching providence, whose power is at the same time marked by care and good will. This is to say, they are given faith.

Think of the history of Israel. The life-story of this covenant people continues to mediate a response of faith in God, where he is understood as loving, acting, and purposefully directing the affairs of men and nations. Hereby the general and sometimes merely implicit intuitions of otherness and boundedness are universalized and personalized. Human existence, indeed all of creation, is grounded and ultimately delimited by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Consider also the impact of Jesus, the man who lived, ministered, and was put to death on a cross. This formative history supports the insight that God may be characterized as suffering love, gaining victory for his intentions even through death. So responsive is the overarching providence to the condition of man that the One who impinges upon all of life allows himself to share the poignancy of finite limitation. Henceforth the ultimate Boundary Limit is known quite particularly as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Specifically the resurrection power that was released in the life and death of Jesus is the historical foundation of the Christian faith. The man who died on the cross—with his humble loving of God and neighbor, his obedience and faithfulness to God's will, his trust and hope in God's gift of the future even beyond the grave—is the enactment of God's present and coming kingdom. The style of existence which was realized in Jesus is the norm and goal of Christian life and community. The creative impact of the man from Nazareth, as caught up in a larger providential cunning, is the basis of Christian confidence and openness to that future which is made secure by God's mercy and care.<sup>4</sup>

Actually, what we have in mind here is a view of revelation as an historical *a priori*. The event of the man who lived and was subjected to death on a cross steadily impinges upon present experience. As a concrete item in the temporal process it has its own *a posteriori*

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to H. Richard Niebuhr who first disposed me to view revelation as an event that illuminates and shapes subsequent events. One finds this position articulated in *The Meaning of Revelation*, Macmillan, 1946. I have since come to think and speak of revelation as an historical *a priori*. (See section II above.)

character. But it lurks in communal and individual memory as an open-ended form, capable of gathering to itself the dispositions and aspirations of succeeding generations. It has the marks of universality and necessity in its status and functioning; it lives as a past datum that continues to shape personal-social existence in the direction of its own claims on the future. More than anything else, the revelatory dynamic of the Christ event as an historical *a priori* supports the religious/Christian option throughout changing times.

### III

How does the church relate to the acknowledgement of God as the ultimate Boundary Limit of our life and death? In what way is it already presupposed in such a faith response? We need to sketch an answer to these questions before turning more pointedly to the theme of original sin.

Man's capacity to anticipate and shape his tomorrows, at the same time knowing that he is challenged and yet strictly bounded by a future he does not fully control, has profound social ramifications. This distinctively human openness to the future stimulates the imagination and takes different forms. What distinguishes the various human and cultural styles is the concrete point of reference which anchors and guides thought and life. The future beckons in freedom. It is not accessible to man without a residuum of mystery. What one expects and desires is based on persuasive clues along the way: perpetuation of the American way of life, continued success and economic security, enhanced popularity and prestige, fuller gratification of the sensual drives, progressive betterment of the human environment through technological advance, and/or the kingdom style of life actualized in the man on the cross. In these ways the shape of the future is anticipated and striven for on the grounds of pointers from the past and present.

All this is potentially community-creating. Where a secular society develops, the implied assumption is that man is simply "thrown" into existence, with only emptiness and silence as the ultimate boundary limit of his life and death. Such a culture is perhaps marked by the kind of productive activism which pervades our technopolitan, urban civilization. In this type of setting man often acts responsibly, and

even with heroic discipline, in fashioning his future and that of his social order. The secular individual may reach great heights of imagination, courage, and regard for others. He may also succeed in bracketing the larger questions of purpose and ultimate destiny, contenting himself usually with provisional answers and highly restricted objectives. But quiet despair can still lurk underneath the surface calm. And man may occasionally fall to great depths of degradation through unchecked attachments to nation, wealth, power, or whatever seems—at least for the moment—to fill the throbbing void that is felt in the center of man's powers and attainments.<sup>5</sup>

We refer to church when a specifically religious answer emerges in an organized fashion around a defining focus: whether prophet, moment of illumination, authoritative teachings, or revealed documents. Where the persuasive and normative clues are from the biblical histories, and specifically from the man who lived for others and was put to death on a cross, we speak appropriately of the Christian church.<sup>6</sup> In these terms the church is a culture within cultures, a community within communities. It is marked by the conviction that man is not finally alone in the universe. Rather, it is the God of purposive intent and activity *who stands in the very midst of life* as the ultimate Boundary Limit of man and society. Consequently all that we are and do is prompted and judged in relation to the overarching providence of God.

The church has its life and reason for being as the provisional realization and agency of God's kingdom purpose. It is constituted by

<sup>5</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, Macmillan, 1965, has something of this doublesidedness in view when he distinguishes between an "open secularity" and a "closed secularism." Even though the heroism of the "secular city" does judge ecclesiastical narrowness in whatever form, the demonic potentialities of a secularist orientation should never be overlooked.

<sup>6</sup> We share with Schleiermacher a strong emphasis upon the communal context of faith. He viewed Christianity as a monotheistic, ethically-sensitive religion, whose consciousness of God is specifically anchored in the experience of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is developed in *The Christian Faith*, T. & T. Clark, 1948. The Christian Church takes shape around that particular point where the consciousness of God—as the One who relates to all of life—takes sensible form in the man from Nazareth. We are locating the church in human culture as those institutionalized patterns of thought and behavior which revolve around man's anticipations of the future, especially as concretized in the man on the cross.

its mission, i.e. to help shape the future under the sovereignty and grace of God, whose intention has been declared and given firm historical rootage in Jesus Christ. As understood within the biblical histories, God's election of Israel, and the church as the new Israel, is not on the basis of inherent worth. Nor is it a conferral of arbitrary privilege or exceptional powers. God's election is for task, for mission, for extending the ministry of the man who met his death on a cross. Therefore the church witnesses to, celebrates, interprets and disciplines itself in faithful pursuit of God's present and coming kingdom, or the style of life which is actualized in the shaping event of Christ.

In summary form, the church is defined essentially (1) by what it recalls, (2) by what it strives to do, and (3) by what it anticipates.

(1) The church is that part of the world whose remembered past, whose deepest self-awareness, is informed by the life histories of Israel and Jesus. The give and take of Israel's career, and especially the ministry and impact of the man who died on the cross, stimulate and sustain a consciousness of God's living *presence*. That which delimits man and society most profoundly is this identity-producing relationship. Where the church is truly the church—as the institutionalized memory and consciousness of God—pride and self-love are giving way to a humble loving of God and neighbor.

(2) The church is that part of the world whose strivings toward individual and social fulfillment take the form of the kingdom of God and its inherent disciplines—humility and love, obedience and faith, trust and hope. The covenant ideal of Israel, and particularly the radical willing of God's will by the man on the cross, communicate and nurture a consciousness of God's life-shaping *power*. That which truly deserves to marshall and direct human energies is the kingdom of God. Every effort to build a society on earth, in the form of the "secular city" or whatever, is hereby pointed beyond itself toward that "city whose builder and maker is God." Where the church is truly the church—in its consciousness and provisional enactment of God's kingdom—rebellion and self-will are being replaced by obedience and faithfulness to the way of righteousness and peace, of justice and love.

(3) The church is that part of the world whose anticipations of the future are unleashed and productively shaped by the stability of

God's promises. The victory of trust and hope in Israel, as realized most fully in the man on the cross, keeps alive a consciousness of God's *purposive* presence and directing power. That which is fully consistent with man's intended creativity, or his creation in the "image of God," is a posture of courageous openness to the gift of the future. Where the church is truly the church—as the consciousness and eschatological foreshadowing of what God has purposed for his world—the anticipation of what the tomorrows may bring does not issue in crippling dread and irrational withdrawals, but in the trust and confidence that God's providential care will prevail.

We obviously have been speaking about the church in normative rather than strictly descriptive terms. Congregations and larger ecclesiastical structures often fall far short of standing faithfully in Christ's own ministry of reconciliation, in obedience to the way of suffering love. The church in temporal development is itself human, all-too-human, and shares in the world's pride and self-love, disobedience and unbelief, distrust and hopelessness. And yet we are not minimizing the church's visibility or the importance of its concrete institutional character. In patterns that are open to sociological and political analysis the church lives in history in quite visible ways. It is identifiable through its preaching, sacramental life, instructional forms, inner disciplines, neighbor-concerns and social responsibility. But we are underscoring the point that the church as religious and cultic institution is itself subordinate to and judged by its own God-given mission. In short, the church is truly the church insofar as the purpose of God which was established in Jesus Christ is reenacted in its life and work. The church has its basic visibility as that group of believers who, through the grace of Christ and his continuing Spirit, are beginning to mirror the kingdom marks of humility and love, obedience and faith, trust and hope.

#### IV

We have found it necessary to approach the assigned topic within this broader frame. Original sin is scarcely the first subject to be taken up in a theological system. It intersects with so many other considerations. Actually sin is to be understood from the prior reality of grace, and some notion of the intended purpose for man and

society.<sup>7</sup> The positive kingdom style which was enacted in Jesus is the standard against which distortion is to be measured. In view of what has been said thus far, sin may now be defined as pride and alienation, disobedience and faithlessness, distrust and closedness of spirit. It is the failure to love God and neighbor. It is the refusal to take on the disciplines of the present and coming kingdom. It is the lack of resilience and confidence in facing one's tomorrows.

Original sin need not be contrasted with a state of original innocence. To follow that line is to get hung up on the traditional puzzle: how could perfection ever fall into imperfection without casting a slur on the Creator? When understood in the historical and process categories we have been featuring, it is possible to think of sin entering at a given point in the overall development of man and his social groupings. This point long antedates the present time. In that sense it is "original." It precedes the life we know as a primordial deviation from the intended and possible style of humility and love, of obedience and discipline in the ways of true community, of trust based on acceptance of a sustaining providence.

The ancient story of Adam's disobedience gives pictorial form to that specific juncture in the process when man became historical (with the capacities of speech, memory, personal relationship, intentional action, and imaginative projection in the face of his own limitation).<sup>8</sup> What the theme of original sin asserts is that whenever

<sup>7</sup> One of the abiding merits of Albrecht Ritschl's treatment of our theme is his forceful insistence that we "have to comprehend the fact of sin from the standpoint of the reconciled community, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is actually the ground of our knowledge of our sinfulness." (*The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay, Edinburgh, 1902, p. 327.) We clearly side with Ritschl in his explicit attention to relational and ethical ways of speaking about doctrinal matters. With him, we feature the cognate theme of the kingdom of God. But we do not share Ritschl's anti-metaphysical bias. This will become apparent as we proceed. Furthermore, we make much more central the issue of eschatology, or man's future-orientation, as a decisive clue to the realities of sin and grace. In the end we are basically more sympathetic to the traditional theme of original sin, albeit redefined in the ways we are here developing.

<sup>8</sup> Such capacities figure importantly in what may be meant by the phrase "image of God" in man. We are especially singling out man's openness to his tomorrows, with the poignant sensitivities this entails for all human relationships and strivings. Although somewhat less attentive to this particular emphasis,

man—undoubtedly in close interaction with creatures of a like kind—reached the threshhold of genuinely historical being, he emerged at this level of existence in restrictive and self-destructive ways. Rather than accepting the impinging future as the gift of a trustworthy providence he drew back in dread and suspicion.<sup>9</sup> We may conjecture that he quickly found himself at odds with himself and his total environment. Even the distinctively human capacity to project imaginatively into one's tomorrows, with all its creative potential, became a poignant threat and painful mark of separation from one's potentialities;<sup>10</sup> it was an occasion for both aggression and with-

a comparable point of view is found in Gordon D. Kaufman, "The *Imago Dei* as Man's Historicity," *Journal of Religion*, July, 1956.

<sup>9</sup> Soren Kierkegaard uses more exotic language to describe the emergence of spirit, as that stage where man becomes a "synthesis of the soulish and the bodily." "Thus dread is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom than gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs. . . . Dread is a womanish debility in which freedom swoons." (*The Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1946, p. 55.) Kierkegaard views the dread that emerges on the edge of dawning possibility as the precondition of sin.

We are putting this in the more straightforward terms of man's anticipations of the future. Man "falls" into sin when the future is greeted predominantly as a threat rather than a promise. In that instance man begins the self-perpetuating cycle of hedging himself against his own potential creativity, and basic distortion grips the human spirit.

Our approach also has some similarities to Reinhold Niebuhr's earlier reformulation of the theme of original sin through use of the concept of man's capacity for self-transcendence. See *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, Scribner's, 1941, especially Chapters VI-IX. In developing his argument Niebuhr draws heavily upon Kierkegaard's earlier analysis. Utilizing insights from contemporary psychology as well, Niebuhr shows how sin erupts in the midst of man's anxiety. The human situation is marked paradoxically by freedom and finiteness. Man is both creative and bounded, both open and limited. As a result he "falls" into a state of pride and self-love.

We prefer to speak of man's expectations of the future. This strikes us as somewhat more direct and less enigmatic than the notion of "self-transcendence." Also our concern is to keep the interrelated dimensions of human existence in clear focus. Thus we refer consistently not only to man's inter-personal relations and sought-after goals, but especially to his fundamental hopes and anticipations. In turn, sin includes a wide range of personal-social consequences and conditions: pride and alienation, disobedience and faithlessness, distrust and closedness of spirit.

<sup>10</sup> The fact of our separation from the future and its possibilities for free response is a mark of finitude itself. It is not intrinsically a sinful state of being.

drawal; in short, it served as the precondition of and fundamental ingredient in human sin. That was a fateful juncture in the movement toward what might have been man's maturing historicity—marked by openness in personal relationships, in pursuit of the disciplines of true community, and in accepting the gift of the future.

It is preferable not to speculate unnecessarily about what man's condition might have been had the movement at this juncture been in a positive rather than a negative direction. Would man have enjoyed immortality and freedom from concupiscence, as tradition has it? At the very least we may presume he would have been free to accept his finite limitation out of confidence in the steady good will of an overaching providence. His trustful acceptance of the gift of the future, with its promise of resurrection, would not then have been threatened even by the prospect of death. Also, his basic stability in the face of his projections and anticipations would have infused every relationship and striving with the qualities of love, faith and hope. But ever since the unfortunate turn in the story of human development, the perversions of sin have striven against the resources of grace that make for wholeness in the relations of man with man, and man with his beckoning tomorrows.

Sin has the universality and objectivity of a past condition which recurrently intrudes itself upon the present, with quite ominous consequences for the way ongoing generations are able to respond to the gift of the future. To make our point by way of contrast, let us look once again to the positive side. We may speak of the person-

It occasions both man's creativity and fallenness. To be free *for* is at the same time to stand out *from* the call and promise of our tomorrows. Something like this may be what Tillich has in mind when he says such things as: "Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creaturelessness. The creature has actualized its freedom in so far as it is outside the creative ground of the divine life. . . . To be outside the divine life means to stand in actualized freedom, in an existence which is no longer united with essence. Seen from one side, this is the end of creation. Seen from the other side, it is the beginning of the fall." (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, University of Chicago, 1951, p. 255.) We need not pause here for an extended commentary on this quotation. Nor are we claiming complete uniformity in point of view. But Tillich's reflections also posit a kind of distinction from one's essence which is intrinsic to creaturelessness; while closely tied in with man's sinfulness it is not in itself to be lamented. Our way of putting the matter features man's separation from his anticipated tomorrows and possibilities, as the precondition both of his openness and his "fall."

event of Christ as paradigmatic in its illuminating and guiding potential.<sup>11</sup> Here is an historical datum that steadily impinges upon life today, supporting new resolves and occasions for healthful relations, for the adoption of the kingdom disciplines, and for basic trust in the workings of a gracious providence. The man who lived and was put to death on the cross has the power and purposeful cunning of an historical *a priori* that continues to fashion individual-communal life in its direction.

The theme of original sin reminds us that a rival state of affairs works persistently against that style of life which was actualized in the man Jesus, the "second Adam."<sup>12</sup> The sin that has invaded history also functions paradigmatically, or as an *a priori*, but in a negative kind of way. The act of sinful disobedience which is pictorially symbolized in the "first Adam" has its own type of universality and objectivity. We cannot be as precise in locating the "fall" of man on the space-time continuum, as contrasted with the person-event of Christ. This is because man became historical before he became an historian! But what tradition calls the "fall" was just as surely a temporal occurrence—or series of interrelated happenings—in the larger development of man and civilization. And that historical juncture, when man in his pilgrimage toward historical being turned in upon himself rather than outward in sprightly openness, continues to inject its negativities into human affairs. It has the givenness and comprehensiveness of an alien style of life which persistently infects the present, and disorients the behavior of man in his anticipations of the future, in line with its own past distortions.

<sup>11</sup> To speak of the Christ event as paradigmatic in its shaping power is closely allied with what we mean by revelation as an historical *a priori*. (See section II above) Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, Macmillan, 1966, provides a helpful analysis of how paradigmatic events may function in a revelatory fashion.

<sup>12</sup> What we have in mind here was clearly anticipated by Walter Rauschenbusch's emphasis upon the Kingdom of Evil as a persistent rival to the Kingdom of God. He had a profound sense of our solidarity in sin no less than in the resources of grace. Note what he has to say about the way "the life of humanity is infinitely interwoven, always renewing itself, yet always perpetuating what has been. The evils of one generation are caused by the wrongs of the generations that preceded, and will in turn condition the sufferings and temptations of those who come after." (*A Theology For the Social Gospel*, Macmillan, 1917, p. 79).

We are here speaking of original sin as the cumulative and self-appropriated violation of man's historicity. This way of putting the matter avoids some of the ancient dilemmas and polarizations that often complicate the church's thought on the theme. Sometimes we have been required to choose between a view of guilt by "generation" versus the dissemination of sin through social "imitation." But neither position is totally adequate. Either sin is inadvertently viewed too strictly as a biological phenomenon, and easily becomes identified with the procreative process itself; or we are hard pressed to conserve the traditional insight of our solidarity with Adam in his fallenness. Certainly within Protestantism we have repeatedly struggled with a forced option between Augustinian and Pelagian tendencies: either original sin is viewed as some type of total corruption of the "will" and human "nature" in the aggregate, which appears to deny personal responsibility; or it is simply a matter of isolated acts and external contagion, which seems to abstract us from the total stream of historical existence.<sup>13</sup>

We are seeking to find our way around such doctrinal labyrinths and quite brittle options. Our analysis permits us to understand the matter of the transmission of sin in historicist terms. We have spoken of the state of sin as a kind of dehumanizing *a priori*, that counters the historical *a priori* of the Christ event in a negative sort of way. As an act or series of happenings, to which the Adam story gives imaginative form, original sin has the inclusiveness and necessity of a past state of affairs that "generates" itself repeatedly in the life of man and society. Here we avoid excessive biological connotations, and yet can speak of a type of generative process in the transmission of sin that certainly cuts beneath merely superficial imitation. Sin has the objectivity and massiveness of basic perversions in the personal-social process that continue to reproduce themselves in changing times and settings.

Another factor that points the way through some of the traditional puzzles is the awareness that sin and grace are not hard, impermeable substances. These enter at the points of: interpersonal

<sup>13</sup> An article that also seeks to break through some of the traditional dilemmas on this theme is Joseph Haroutunian, "Grace and Freedom Reconsidered," *Journal of Religion*, April, 1960.

relationships, sought-after goals, and the fundamental posture toward our anticipated tomorrows. Sin and grace operate in the very midst of the daily routine. They are not extraneous addenda, lacking vital connection with our memories, struggles and hopes. They stand for the disruptive and corrective resources that stem respectively from the "fall-event" of man and the "person-event" of Christ. Rather than sharply separating matters of loss and gain, of illness and health, sin and grace constantly intermingle in the life we know. Nor are we justified in speaking of the "fall" as totally obliterating the "image of God" in man. By this phrase we mean such things as the capacity for interpersonal wholeness, for pursuit of the disciplines of true community, and especially for anticipating and creatively shaping the future. To be sure, the consequences of sin's distortion are deathly serious. But it is more appropriate to speak of inauthentic versus authentic, or disoriented versus a properly oriented historicity. This is to put the matter in relational and developmental rather than static and quantified terms. Sin affects adversely but does not finally destroy the future-oriented character of human existence, with the profound implications of such anticipations for all our relationships and strivings. Sin enters as a fundamental deviation in the story of human development, in the movement from potentiality to actuality, from preparatory stages to the threshold of maturity as historical being.

We are also helped to by-pass some of the forced options that come to us from the tradition by using historicist categories that encompass relational-personal, volitional-substantial, and eschatological-metaphysical ways of thinking and speaking. Let us recall how this is so in the terms that have already emerged. We have said that man is delimited essentially by his interpersonal connections. Certainly one strong element in what we can mean by personality nowadays is the element of relationality. To be a person is to be in lively commerce with other intentional centers all around us. As we have seen, Christian faith inescapably reflects a personalistic bias in its dealings with the general intuitions of fundamental boundary limits. This is because of the central focus upon the person-event of Christ.

Also man is constituted as a substantial agent in his pursuit of projects. The connecting tissues that make of the self more than a

mere aggregate of loosely jointed parts are intrinsic to the changing phases of the volitional act. The personality as it endures and develops in its changing history is made up of numerous intentions and strivings. In this sense man is profoundly a goal-seeking creature, where the essential continuities serve as expanding boundaries and charters of purposeful behavior.<sup>14</sup> As shaped by the formative event of the man on the cross, the substantiality of man and the community of faith takes the specific form of the kingdom of God and its intrinsic disciplines.

Further we have said that man is distinctively a future-oriented organism. He is eschatological to the core. This then is what supports a metaphysical outlook and way of speaking. Man's anticipation of his tomorrows is a decisive ingredient in present no less than past relationships and pursuits; this projection toward the future penetrates metaphysically to the very depth of historical being. To speak distortion and/or remedial action at this level is to deal with far more than surface matters. It cuts beneath simply isolated acts and environmental contagion of a superficial sort. It reaches into the essential core of what it means to be a man.

We may now summarize and conclude. In speaking of original sin we refer to those developmental rigidities that thwart and contend with the kingdom purpose declared and enacted in Jesus Christ. Sin infects man and his groupings not only at psychological and volitional levels. It entails an ontological-metaphysical perversion in the very center of personal-social being. Man is created in the "image of God" as a radically historical agent, as one who is made for a kingdom of self-giving mutuality, righteousness and freedom. Sin not only weakens and disorients his interpersonal relationships and intentional strivings, but contaminates the deepest springs of his creativity. This

<sup>14</sup> Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, Dacre, 1959, presents a view of substance in process terms. For him essence is no longer a timeless form that somehow "rides the back" of change. Rather, it is conceived as bindingness upon activity as such. Farrer develops the notion of continuity in the midst of change by analyzing the structure of the volitional act as a fundamental clue to the nature of the self in its metaphysical depth. Also consult F. R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2 volumes, Cambridge, 1928-30, and John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, Harpers, 1957. These men help to redefine the substantiality of man in developmental and empirically-minded ways.

disruption permeates all the interconnections and structures of society. It lurks close at hand even in the midst of the highest human and cultural achievements. Instead of responding to the future as the gift of a gracious providence in a way that infuses man's past and present with love, faith and hope, the movement of sin is to turn in upon itself in thwarting and self-defeating closedness. And so the historical existence of man in community is marked by contrast and conflict between the kingdom of light established in Christ, and the kingdom of darkness which stems from the perversity of sin. Nevertheless, this contrast and conflict stands under the power of the resurrection which promises the coming of that day when every knee shall bow and confess that Christ is Lord.

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