

## ORIGINAL SIN AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

The most fundamental factor in the doctrine of original sin is not universal perdition but universal salvation. Original sin does not tell us man is evil but that God is Saviour. Obviously, universal salvation presupposes a universal loss. Obviously, a saving God presupposes someone who needs redemption. Catholic theology does not deny the negative statement about man which original sin declares. What it must emphasize, however, is the dialectical counterpoint of original sin, a counterpoint which is a valid antithesis to the thesis situation of sin. A concentration on a thesis when an antithesis has been established reveals a non-progressive, non-historical attitude. A theology preoccupied with original sin is a theology whose anthropology is perhaps Manichean, at least Jansenistic, but not truly Catholic in its orientation. A theology which gives too much attention to original sin draws more from Genesis than from the Gospel, more from Augustine than from church councils, more from the past than from the present and the future. A statement about original sin is really a statement about one's theological outlook and even his life orientation. This is not to say that Christianity does not have negative statements to declare. Christianity, however, has little abiding interest in the negative.

An anthropology which fears the negative statement is Pelagian, of course, but an anthropology which emphasizes the negative statement is pessimistic. Original sin was not so much something which was done but something which was overcome. It tells us perhaps less about man than it tells us about God, less about our origins than it tells us about our destiny. Original sin is more an incident in our history than it is an engagement or commitment in history. It is a story of our infancy, an infancy which is always with us since it is a factor in our identity but an infancy we hardly think about as we come of age. The doctrine of original sin tells us less of a misdeed than it tells us of the saving love which is the very heart of Christianity's message to the world. A mature man is more grateful for

what healed him than he is mindful of what injured him. What we are saying, in effect, is that there is no Gospel of original sin. The Gospel is a Gospel of redemption and salvation.

The doctrine of original sin is, in essence, an effort at a Christian anthropology highlighting the transcendental, moral, and freedom dimensions of man's structure. It speaks to us less of what went wrong than it does of how to proceed correctly.

In this paper, I would like to discuss three questions with you:

1. What is the substance and value of a doctrine of original sin?
2. What is critical and what is non-essential in this doctrine if one hopes to propose a Christian anthropology?
3. What would a provisional re-interpretation of the doctrine require?

#### I. WHAT IS THE SUBSTANCE AND VALUE OF A DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN?

We shall speak first about the substance of the doctrine. This will require a lengthy treatment. Then we shall speak briefly about the value of such a doctrine.

An understanding of the substance of the doctrine requires a statement about Scripture, the Fathers, and the Church's pronouncements on this subject.

##### *The Scriptural Statement*

The scriptural statement on original sin is brief. For all practical purposes, Genesis 2-3 and Romans 5, 12-19 sum up the entire biblical message. There are, of course, other references but they say little more than Genesis and Romans. What do each of these passages tell us of original sin and anthropology?

Genesis, first of all, deals with a number of things which appear to me doctrinally binding. In our effort to list these, we presuppose an aetiology in Genesis rather than an historical report of man's origins. It teaches us something about man but its instruction is not derivative from data alone. The story in Genesis derives from a subtle interaction of reasoning, imagination, faith, and inspiration.

We presuppose also a theology of Revelation which provides us

with an anthropology rather than a cosmology, with a perennially valid insight into human nature even though the form in which that insight is situated is transient.

We presuppose furthermore that Genesis relates a valid history even though its history is not a paleontology.

Granted these presuppositions, what does Genesis tell us about man? These are three pivotal observations which must be maintained in the construction of a future anthropology.

1. Genesis tells us that man is accountable for himself and his history. From the beginning, man determines the shape of his history. He is a creature in whom history is at issue. History is his creation and he suffers or he glories in the enterprise.

Scripture not only cites but describes man's accountability. It issues from his freedom and his moral behaviour. Man is not only subject to command (therefore, he is moral) but he is free to accept, to reject, and even to determine the posture and tonality of his acceptance or rejection. He is not able, however, to control the consequence of his action. When man sins, history can never again appear as a history in which there was no sin. Conversely, when man aspires to true humanity, history is altered by this aspiration and ameliorated by it. Man's historical action is so decisive and irreversible that he can only overcome his failure once he fails. He can never by-pass it. When man creates a history of alienation from God, he can never make his history a history in which only harmony was present. Once creation begins, there can never be another creation nor a creation in which history can begin again. Thus, at best, creation can become a redemptive creation if failure occurs in its history. God can never deal with us as though we had never sinned. To do this is to un-do our history. Therefore, God reveals himself as a redeeming God, as Someone who heals, not by any means as a God who dismisses our history.

2. Genesis tells us that man in the beginning altered his relationship to reality radically even if not insuperably. Genesis and subsequent biblical or conciliar development do not impose upon us inexorably either the thought that man had achieved a perfect relationship with reality or even with himself before the Fall. What I do think is imperative in Genesis is the fact of the Fall and man's responsibility in freedom for the Fall. There is no reason for the story

or myth in Genesis if a Fall had not happened or if the Fall is merely a description of man's finite nature. If being finite is sinful, then God is responsible for moral evil. If it is impossible, for all practical purposes, for man to avoid sin, then creation is not good in the beginning. If one sees an inevitability about man's first sin (which some do) and not an inevitability about man's redemption (which hardly anyone maintains), then one must say that God created man with a proclivity for destruction. Granted this, redemption, even if freely bestowed, is not quite so gratuitous as we have been led to believe in the past. A God who would not redeem a creature who had little chance of not sinning, is hardly a God of love.

The God of the Scriptures and the councils emerges differently. I would have a difficulty then with theologians who equate original sin with creatureliness and with those who see original sin as fundamentally the sin of the world. When Niebuhr, in a famous phrase, describes original sin as not necessary but inevitable, he gives us a formula which is viable only if it includes more than man's finiteness or subsequent sin. One can even, I would suggest, equate the "inevitability" of original sin with a statistical *probability*. It will not do, however, to see original sin as so necessitating that man's freedom has no real control over his future.

The uniqueness of original sin, furthermore, seems evident in Genesis. Apart from questions of transmission and the character of the offense, Genesis seems to tell us that man begins his history in a way which excuses no one from an inheritance of sinfulness. I would suggest, finally, that Genesis declares to us as revelation not only the cumulative sinfulness of the human family, read backwards into the myth of the Fall, but an historical moment of existential estrangement which was universal in its very beginnings. The universality of certain historical moments is no more difficult to imagine in the beginning of history than it is to imagine in the midst of history when Christ is rejected. To say that original sin attains a universality only in the rejection of Christ is to propose a thesis which is difficult to accept, perhaps more difficult to accept than the universality of sin in the very beginning. For, not all men live a history of conscious and contemporaneous rejection of Christ on Calvary whereas all men inherit the beginnings of a history which may have been more universal and

less diverse than some authors suggest. The cross reveals to us, I believe, not the universality of sin but the almost unspeakable depths of the alienation which began our history, an alienation which everyone of us ratifies in his own personal history with a consistency which makes us suspect something is radically wrong with man. The cross declares to us not the inescapable fact of our sin but its horror and, fortunately, its penultimate situation. The cross signifies for us what we have done to each other and what we are able to do to each other. It is the story of Cain and Abel, repeated now in an intensity which excludes even grace and the Son of God from our consideration. In Easter, we are given an insight into what we might have been and, mercifully, into what we shall one day become.

3. Genesis, finally, describes original sin as alienation or existential estrangement. It is a rejection of person in all the manifestations person assumes. It is a rejection of God, a rejection of human community in the refusal of solidarity between Adam and Eve, and a rejection of one's own person in confusion and artificial self-appropriation. An intimacy with God is lost and even a harmony with the cosmos. No longer does Adam see Eve as helpmate but as enemy. And man, for the first time, becomes anxious about the future and about himself. Now, the Other (God, Eve, the world) emerges as threat rather than opportunity, as fearful rather than desirable. Man sees himself ego-centrally in a prejudice of self-interest which he never fully overcomes.

Genesis indicts man as the creator of alienation. Whether man begins monogenistically or polygenistically, he introduces alienation into his history. Later, in the third section of this paper, we shall speak of the absence of brotherhood as the substance and unifying factor in original sin.

To sum up then, we might say that Genesis declares to us: (1) our accountability for our history; (2) the universality of a real Fall (howsoever imagined); and (3) the radical alienation which gives form and definition to original sin.

We have yet a word to say about the New Testament statement on original sin in Romans 5. There are a number of observations concerning this passage which seem in order:

1. It is difficult to imagine that Paul intends here either a com-

plete theology of original sin or a salvific situation which explicitly includes children. The kerygmatic preaching or the catechetical writing of the New Testament are addressed to the adult. This seems to be what Paul has in mind. Later theology will clarify for us the fact that the child is not an exception in this scheme of things. The child becomes a factor by which original sin is clarified, an indication of the truly universal dimensions of sin and redemption, and a sign of how un-exclusive the Church's action in history manages to be (e.g. infant baptism). Paul, however, seems concerned with the fact that sin was man's doing, that death (spiritual and/or corporal) issues from sin and not from God and that death pervades the human race both because Adam sinned and because we sin. It seems unlikely that Paul would envision a clear distinction between original sin and personal sin. For the unbaptized adult, there is a continuity between both (as even our theology of baptism accepts when it speaks of a simultaneous remission of original and personal sin). The only clear distinction occurs in the unbaptized child, which is not Paul's concern.

Rather, Paul gives us a description of man and his world—a description which is open to and will later require a theology of original sin. He teaches what we shall eventually call original sin though he teaches this without the distinctions and clarifications the Church's Tradition will later declare. Paul sees original sin in its active expression through personal sins rather than in its passive state as present in the child.

2. Paul does not teach monogenism in this passage. Monogenism is the frame-work in which he explains the origin of sin and its universality. Whether or not monogenism is doctrinally imperative cannot be deduced from Romans alone. Paul seems to accept the historicity of Adam but the point of the passage is not Adam but the type of community man created in contrast to the type of community Christ creates. Adam may be as real and as singular as Paul makes him but the substance of what Paul has to say remains whether monogenism is accepted or not. Paul intends here a description of man's religious situation, not a paleontology.

To conclude then, we might say that Scripture (both in Genesis and in Romans) require the following:

1. Man is accountable for what went wrong in the beginning. What does go wrong is inescapably part of his history.

2. What went wrong in the beginning is universal in its consequences.
3. All men are born alienated and breathe the air of alienation all life long.
4. Both original sin and personal sin conspire in the creation of the death we all inherit and ratify. The only way out of both is Christ.

#### *A Patristic Reflection*

At the beginning of this paper, we spoke of a statement concerning the Fathers as the second consideration in this first question. Since this is not an essay on patristics, our statement shall be as brief as was our survey on Scripture. What I have to say here amounts to an appeal for a wider reading of the Fathers than the current controversy evidences. In this connection, I wish to say a word about Augustine, Irenaeus and Aquinas.

At times, the presentation of Augustine's position on original sin amounts to a caricature. It is true that Augustine is occasionally preoccupied with sexuality in his presentation of original sin. It is also true that he is quite pessimistic about human nature. His pessimism grows even more brooding as he ages. Yet, it must also be said that his position is more nuanced and subtle than some popular presentations suggest. Original sin is not centered in the sexual, the biological, or the carnal. The root of the sin, especially in *The City of God*, is ego-centricity. This position is not seriously at odds with our previous assertions about original sin as alienation and as absence of fraternal collaboration.

Augustine's anthropology is, of course, static. His insistence on the deterioration of human nature is too excessive for our purposes even though it is understandable when one realizes the problems and intellectual climate of Augustine's day. Thus, he writes that because of original sin "nature was deteriorated"<sup>1</sup> or that "human nature was . . . vitiated and altered."<sup>2</sup> There are, however, dynamic undercurrents in Augustine's thought.

Original sin is not so much sexual lust but lust in a wider sense.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), Bk. 13, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

Though Augustine says that "divine grace forsook them"<sup>3</sup> in their sin and that our first parents "experienced a new motion of their flesh,"<sup>4</sup> he defines the conflict not sexually but as a contention between flesh and Spirit.<sup>5</sup> The origin of evil in our history is due to our misuse of freedom.<sup>6</sup> We are destroyed by an absence of humility, an excessive affirmation of self in pride, a refusal of obedience or of creatureliness.<sup>7</sup> There are moments when Augustine writes in a remarkably modern idiom: "The devil . . . would not have ensnared man in the open and manifest sin of doing what God had forbidden, had man not already begun to live for himself."<sup>8</sup>

I do not offer these observations to canonize Augustine nor to say that his doctrine of original sin is as impressive as we would like. I do suggest, however, that there may be more continuity with the past in our new reformulations of doctrine than we imagine.

Irenaeus is perhaps the most "modern" of the Fathers in his writing on original sin. A study of Irenaeus offers us possibilities not explored by the Augustinian synthesis. He avoids the overly-judicial approach of Augustine. His reflection on original sin is more serene, less contentious than that of Augustine since he is free of any Pelagian preoccupation. It is, most of all, the optimism and the evolutionary dynamism of Irenaeus' thinking which prove especially incisive. Irenaeus, furthermore, offers us new ecumenical opportunities since his synthesis is more congenial to Eastern Orthodoxy than that of Augustine.

For Irenaeus, the whole creative effort amounts to a divine pedagogy. Man is perfected in time. He is taught by God what it means to be a man, moment by moment, not all at once.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the beginning of history, man is not developed or complete. His origins

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. 14, p. 461.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Bk. 4, c. 38; PG 7, 284 Irenaeus writes: "Et propter hoc, Dominus noster in novissimis temporibus, recapitulans in semetipso omnia, venit ad nos non quomodo ipse poterat, sed quomodo illum nos videre poteramus."

are primitive even though he is destined for growth.<sup>10</sup> For Irenaeus, this progressive development is so much a part of being human that it explains why Christ must himself begin as an infant if he hopes to sum up in his life the history and the phenomenon of the human enterprise.<sup>11</sup> He begins in infancy not because *he* must but because there is a divine pedagogy in this, a lesson *we* must learn.

God uses history to teach man his creatureliness. He is given a command by God so that he will appreciate the fact that he is not sovereign, a being-unto-himself but rather a creature who is accountable to Another in freedom. The law of man's being is evolutive but the evolution is not as much organic as it is human. Evolution does not explain how man is physically constructed but how man perceives himself. In an evolutive process, he comes to an awareness of himself as a creature with multiple relationships, fundamentally a creature who has an altogether unique relationship with God. Because man is subjected to an evolutive process, sin becomes a possibility. Yet when man does sin, even this serves the divine plan. Original sin does not overturn the salvific order since it still teaches man that he is creature, beholden to Another.

Hence, there is an optimism in Irenaeus. We might add a word of our own here about the basic soundness of Irenaeus' insight into the nature of time. If God does create time, he must allow for evolution. If something serious and truly significant is not occurring in time, then time has little meaning. Time must serve a purpose not only with regard to the individual who comes to maturity in time but also with regard to the human family as a unit which must also come to maturity and come of age as a result of its being seriously situated in time.

Irenaeus sees the loss which occurs in original sin not so much as the loss of a possession but rather as the loss of a future opportunity. In the beginning, man is infantile. His perfection is a promised per-

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* ". . . sic et initio Deus quidem potens fuit dare perfectionem homini; ille autem nunc nuper factus non poterat illud accipere, vel accipiens capere, vel capiens continere."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* "Et propter hoc coinfantiatum est homini Verbum Dei, cum esset perfectus, non propter se, sed propter hominis infantiam sic capax effectus, quemadmodum homo illum capere potuit."

fection, one which comes about not so much from a development of his own resources but from an acceptance of God's Word in the Spirit. Human perfection is not achieved by man's self-development but in man's growing toward God. Thus, integrity and immortality do not come from within man but from the Word. Man's greatness will be expressed in the proper relationship to Otherness.<sup>12</sup>

The optimism of Irenaeus comes constantly to the fore. His description of original sin contains many emphases which the Augustinian approach did not stress so strongly. For Irenaeus, the image of the second Adam is evident throughout the Fall of the first. Eve constantly reminds him of Mary. The Christology of Irenaeus is more cosmic, less juridic than that of the Western tradition. There is not so much a waiting for redemption in the Incarnation but an active redemption operative in the very process by which man is compromised. The real evil of the Fall comes not so much from man but especially from Satan. Satan is pernicious since he beguiles man; man is more weak than he is malicious. The great sin of Satan occurs not before time or before original sin but in the very act by which Satan tempts man to disobedience and flaws creation. Thus, man is not apostate in his sin but victim. In his weakness, he fails to inherit those remarkable gifts God reserved for him had man been faithful and submissive to the lesson God sought to teach. Though God punishes man for his failure, the punishment is not so much punitive as it is ontological. Man made a mistake about his identity in the beginning and God could not let man live the lie of his failure. The proof that man sins from weakness and, therefore, is not totally

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 7, 284 and 285. Since I consider this passage quite important, I would like to quote it at some length (the italics are my own):

"Quaedam autem propter immensam eius benignitatem augmentum accipientia, et in multum temporis perseverantia, infecti gloriam referunt, Deo sine invidia donante quod bonum est. Secundum enim id quod facta sunt, non sunt infecta: *secundum id vero quod perseverant longis aeonibus*, virtutem infecti assument, Deo gratuito donante eis sempiternam perseverationem . . . *Subiectio autem Dei, incorruptelae perseverantia est . . . Per hanc igitur ordinationem, et huiusmodi convenientiam, et tali ductu, factus et plasmatus homo secundum imaginem et similitudinem constituitur infecti Dei . . . homine vero paulatim proficiente et perveniente ad perfectum, id est proximum infecto fieri . . . Deus enim est qui habet videri: visio autem Dei efficax est incorruptelae: "incorruptela vero proximum facit esse Deo."*

corrupt is evidenced by the immediate repentance of man after sin. God acknowledges the serpent as the villain of the piece and curses the serpent fully, without promise of redemption. Satan is cursed in the first instance so that man might receive a mitigated chastisement. Man has another chance at learning the lesson God wishes to teach. The Gospel shall one day summon man to the knowledge of his true identity in the scheme of things.<sup>13</sup>

The stress in Irenaeus is less on concupiscence and more on mortality in original sin. Death, in all its manifestations, rather than concupiscence, must be overcome. Thus, the central event of history is the Resurrection which is a victory over mortality. Baptism is not so much a remedy for concupiscence but an opportunity for new life. Original sin is less a question of guilt and forgiveness than it is the story of how man lost and recovered a freedom from death.<sup>14</sup>

I would like now to conclude this patristic section with a few insights from Thomas Aquinas.

For Thomas, original sin does not consist in the desire for some material advantage. As with Augustine and Irenaeus, the first sin is due to man's misinterpretation of his identity. Adam refuses to accept his status as limited being, with all the consequences which follow

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, c. 23; PG 7, 220-222. Rather than burden this text with endless footnotes, allow me to refer the reader to this entire chapter in Irenaeus. It is a remarkable statement of hope in the human family and its future Redeemer. We might also observe here the aptness of Irenaeus angelology. In stressing a certain simultaneity of Satan's Fall with man's, he reminds us that angels receive intelligibility in the salvific order insofar as they participate in human history and in the development of material creation. This is an insight which modern theology is presently re-discovering.

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, in the Eastern tradition, sees mortality as a total and not merely a corporeal death. He writes in the chapter we cite above, that Adam's chance at new life destroyed "the last enemy, death." Thus it is that death has been swallowed up in victory and has lost its sting. "For [Adam's] salvation is death's destruction. When, therefore, the Lord vivifies man, that is, Adam, death is at the same time destroyed."

Irenaeus continues this line of thought in Book 4, c. 39 of his *Adversus Haereses*. He states in the beginning of this chapter that "not to obey God is evil, and this is his death." Later, he asks a question: "How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker?" Finally, he comments that man fails, not God, in the Fall. "If, however, you do not have faith in him, if you flee from him, the cause of imperfection is in you and your disobedience but not in him who called you."

from limitation. In modern terms, he over-reaches his transcendental dynamism. He identifies himself with the unlimited horizon toward which he is directed but with which he is not equal. It is not then concupiscence but misplaced anthropology which disorients man in the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

The gravity of the first sin for Thomas, is not in the nature of the offense but in the unparalleled opportunities of not sinning which were still open to man. There is not yet a history of sin nor is there a radical alienation within man. Hence, the first sin is more free and more personal than subsequent sin.<sup>16</sup>

The consequences of this sin include a different *attitude* toward death. Death was quite natural to man, even before sin, since he is essentially structured from matter which, of course, is perishable. It is not death which man brings upon himself but the penal character of death. Thomas, we must note, presupposes there would be no death at all had there not been sin. Yet, it is not death as such but death as punishment which is the fruit of sin.<sup>17</sup>

This sin is transmitted to all men in the origins of each individual life. All born of Adam form one man, share one common nature, and become one body with him. Thomas reflecting the best of Christian tradition, stresses the one-ness of the human family which leads to a common burden and a common glory. We inherit true sin since the sin of one member of the family (i.e. Adam) becomes the sin of all those who form one reality with him. The freedom, which is essential to the notion of sin, is established in Adam.<sup>18</sup>

There are no other sins transmitted to us other than original sin since other sins do not affect the very nature of man. Actual sins relate more to the person of man. They affect the individual rather than the nature of the species. We transmit to others not human person but human nature.<sup>19</sup> This sin, therefore, is equal in all<sup>20</sup> and can only be contracted when a person is formed by the principle of

<sup>15</sup> II-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 163 a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> II-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 163 a. 3.

<sup>17</sup> II-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 164 a. 1, *ad primum*.

<sup>18</sup> I-II<sup>ae</sup> p. 81 a. 1.

<sup>19</sup> I-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 81 a. 2 and *ad tertium*.

<sup>20</sup> I-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 82 a. 4.

human generation. If one could receive his origins differently, he would not contract original sin.<sup>21</sup> Formally, this sin is a privation of original justice; materially, it is concupiscence.<sup>22</sup>

Before proceeding with a discussion of the councils, a few words of summary are in order. There are four factors which emerge from our survey of some of the Fathers. These are factors not directly developed in Scripture, which aids us in a study of Christian anthropology.

1. The alienation brought about by original sin has its roots in self-interest, in a rejection of the Other as threat. Augustine speaks of ego-centricity; Irenaeus speaks of an absence of submissiveness; Aquinas speaks of pride.
2. There is a divergent tradition on the so-called preternatural gifts. Augustine and Thomas presuppose a loss of attributes already possessed; Irenaeus sees these attributes as promised rather than attained. Correlatively, Augustine and Thomas envision a state of perfection as creation begins; Irenaeus situates his thought in an evolutionary or process frame-work.
3. Concupiscence and a privation of original justice have much to do with the Augustinian-Thomistic theory on original sin. Irenaeus is more intrigued with the question of mortality, more sensitive to man's failure in a divine pedagogy in which the Word had much to say to him in the Spirit.
4. A certain optimism is not out of order even with regard to original sin. Augustine tends toward pessimism; Thomas, toward a moderate middle ground; Irenaeus is optimistic. There is an impressive continuity in the thought of Irenaeus. The same things happen whether we sin or not, though they happen differently.

### *Conciliar Theology*

Before we speak of church councils, we must clarify a number of points. Too severe an emphasis on the Magisterium can be restrictive. A theology of original sin must never begin with the councils but rather with those primordial realities of Scripture and Tradition which

<sup>21</sup> I-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 81 a. 4.

<sup>22</sup> I-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 82 a. 3.

precede and supercede councils. A theology of original sin must consider also the liturgical life of the Church, a point we shall pursue in the closing paragraphs of this paper. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation* said it better than I can when it reminded us that "the teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on." Vatican II speaks of a priority of Revelation to the council though it reminds us of the subtle interaction of Scripture, Tradition, and authentic ecclesial instruction. No one element survives without the others.

There are three key councils which deal with original sin: Carthage, Orange, and Trent. For all practical purposes, Trent assimilates and furthers the doctrine of Carthage and Orange. For Catholic theology, Trent ranks close to Genesis and Romans in offering guidelines for a contemporary theology of original sin.

Before considering the councils specifically, I wish to offer three presuppositions for a study of conciliar theology. We must, first of all, remain sensitive to the complexity of conciliar exegesis. The council must be evaluated in the light of its age, in the light of the problem before it, in the light of the linguistics it employs. A conciliar statement must always be taken into account as one attempts theological synthesis. This does not mean that the statement must be actually utilized. It is possible to approach the problem from another perspective not envisioned by the council. It is possible to begin where the council ended or to begin where a council has not made even a beginning so that there is no immediate conciliar reference in a proposed synthesis. It is not possible, however, to act as if a council never happened or to proceed as if a council which happened makes no difference. If we take history as seriously as I suggested at the outset of this paper, then we must be consistent and speak also of the unavoidable qualification of history which a council achieves. The intensity and universal ramifications of conciliar experience alter the course of subsequent history in a way which cannot be ignored. No matter how minimally one wishes to consider the conciliar statement, he must admit that a council authentically teaches the faith. The council is not an explanation or a theory. It is an actual and binding historical moment of instruction, howsoever one interprets that moment. A council is the most vital doctrinal experience the Church

of Christ can achieve after the apostolic age. The rather universal reverence accorded by all Christians to the first seven councils, certainly the first four, are indications of the need of a conciliar theology in our ecclesiology.

The council is not a purely institutional action. There is always a charismatic and prophetic dimension to its assembly. The Church of Christ cannot undo or reverse its history. It must live that history even though it must live it creatively and in the present. A genuine conciliar theology allows the Church to adopt a radical position in history since it takes seriously the whole of its history and not only its apostolic origins. The Church declares a divine authority in the Spirit not only for its past but also for its present and future acts. The council has been the means by which the Church moved once from biblical images into a non-biblical statement of its faith, a way it can move even now into the statement of that faith in evolutionary or existentialistic categories (as it did, in part, at Vatican II).

A second presupposition I wish to consider concerns the epistemology with which one reads the council. If we view truth as a paradigm whose pieces we fit together or discover as we go our way in history, then our data must be juxtapositioned and we must say everything that was said in the past before we can make a statement about the present. Such an epistemology is quite Platonic. Truth is finished in the beginning; history is not a truth-making process but rather an effort at discovering what was always there. There is, however, another way of understanding truth. Truth can be viewed dynamically. Its identity can be established less in its repetition of its past, more in its progression into new forms. The new forms are not only different settings for the same thing but mark a definite advance or discovery of aspects of truth which did not exist before. A person does not mature by repeating his childhood or even by putting his childhood into a different setting. He matures by preserving the experience of his childhood and by creating situations for himself and responding to influences not even possible in childhood. What we need most of all in the establishment of a theology of truth is an eschatological epistemology, an epistemology which does not look to its past as a pattern or to the present as static. We need an epistemology which sees the fulfillment of truth in the future. Thus, a theology of

original sin is not a theology which maintains the entire past in its future statement. We are speaking of a theology which takes the past into a future situation where the past is overcome even if it is not denied. Childhood is not denied in maturity; it is simply overcome. The future statement seeks continuity with its past expression, not identity. The reason why we bother with continuity is because we believe there is a Revelation in the past expression. The Revelation is once-for-all, else its historical uniqueness is compromised and with it the radical newness of its moment of history. The once-for-all Revelation, however, is not given all-at-once. There is always something more to say even though one does not speak as though nothing were ever said on the question. Revelation is meant for future development. To return again to the example we are using in this section: one becomes a person in the once-for-all moment of his birth even though he does not become a person all-at-once. His birth begins something new but his being born looks to the future.

The third and final presupposition concerns the dynamic of the qualified proposition.<sup>23</sup> Many see the continual qualification of original theological statements as a gradual compromise, a constant loss of the sacred to the profane. Frequently, this fear comes from those who accept truth as completed in the past and who, therefore, envision the optimum situation as one in which truth is repeated with the least alteration possible. If, however, truth is realized in process, then qualifications are not diminishment but enrichment. Whitehead wisely observes: "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster—it is an opportunity."<sup>24</sup>

Many who fear qualification are unwilling to place theological formulations at the disposal of an earnest dialogue with science. Science and theology are partners in the same enterprise: the revelation of the real to the whole of mankind. Theology does not, therefore, declare truths different from those science discovers. Theology de-

<sup>23</sup> I refer the reader here to an important article on which I depend for the elaboration of this point. Anselm Atkins, O.C.S.O., "Religious Assertions and Doctrinal Development" *Theological Studies* (Dec., 1966, v. 27, n. 4) pp. 523-552.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1963), pp. 166-167.

clares deeper dimensions to the reality science also seeks, dimensions not accessible to man unless these are revealed to him. Both science and theology reject the unreal. Both science and theology articulate their positions in the context of some ignorance.

The task of theology, then, is the amalgamation of new data in the context of higher syntheses and more sophisticated qualifications. The inconsistencies are worked out in the process by which the truth is clarified or amended. Theology faces, furthermore, the burden of achieving a refinement without becoming hopelessly esoteric. For theology must be accessible to catechetical, pastoral, and homiletic possibilities. Theology must serve rather than complicate the essential simplicity of an explicit act of Christian faith.

In effect, then, modification is not a retreat but an advance. It seeks accuracy of expression, not accommodation. For the Church proclaims its doctrine in an inadequate situation, unaware at times of what the truly true point of its assertion may be. Thus, the Church has preserved for us the true doctrine of original sin without judging what precisely is essential to that doctrine and what is absolutely necessary for its proclamation. It is clear that there are many things which original sin is not and many things which it is. Yet, all the elements which make original sin a true statement are not decisively clear. If they were, then polygenism, for example, could not become a serious, theological consideration. Yet even *Humani Generis*, as we know, does not completely exclude this.

There are, then, many questions which must be asked of the doctrine of original sin. What is the precise assertion critical for the preservation of this doctrine? What process of development is open to us in the present state of the question? How must we qualify the assertion in the light of new evidence and an increment of truth?

The properly qualified proposition is religiously more engaging and epistemologically more substantive than its primitive expression.

At this point, a number of questions concerning theological truth can be asked.

Does not qualification imply a static conception of truth? We think not because the qualification emerges not from a rethinking of the past formula but from the assimilation of new data or from the adoption of another philosophical framework.

Does what we have said contradict the Church's assertion that she can adequately verbalize a doctrinal statement at any moment of history, an assertion recently fortified by *Mysterium Fidei*? We think not, because the Church does adequately verbalize so that an essential insight is not lost. It is difficult to say that Nicea or Chalcedon or Trent verbalized the faith inadequately. Adequate verbalization, however, implies neither definitive verbalization nor optimum verbalization.

I remember Father Yves Congar once making an observation about another problem but one which is not out of place here. He was speaking of the liturgy and he asked what would have happened to our theology of the Eucharist if the liturgy accepted uncritically the sentimentalism of the sixteenth century or the rationalism of the eighteenth century or the scientism of the nineteenth century or the subjectivism of the twentieth century. Certainly, our liturgy needed reformation but when we set about reform, it was a reform of elements not essentially lost rather than a creation of a liturgical theology *ex nihilo*.

We might say, in conclusion, that there is a community nature (one might almost say an ecclesial nature) to truth. This implies a community effort, past and present, for truth's discovery, a process situation which makes of no age short of the eschaton the golden age for truth.

Every theological statement we make, past and present, is inaccurate even though it may be fundamentally valid.

With these preliminary remarks, let us undertake a consideration of Carthage, Orange, and Trent.

#### *The Council of Carthage*

There are two definitions from Carthage which are binding upon us: (1) corporeal death enters the world as a punishment for sin, not as a necessity of nature;<sup>25</sup> baptism, even of infants, is for the remission of sins (therefore, even the newly-born are burdened with sin).<sup>26</sup>

Of these two definitions, the first seems more capable of future

<sup>25</sup> D-S 222.

<sup>26</sup> D-S 223.

qualifications than the second. There is something substantially true about this first judgment concerning corporeal death. Before we can precise its truth, however, we need a sharper idea of what corporeal death is. Irenaeus, for example, sees, the mortality following upon sin as a complete mortality, spiritual and corporeal. The latter requires the presence of the former before it can be affirmed. Therefore, corporeal death as such does not come from original sin. Aquinas, as we have seen, speaks of a natural necessity to experience death since we are material in our basic composition. The Council does not seem concerned with a complete anthropology or a definition of what corporeal death may be. Its intention is to cite death *as we know it* as a punishment; it does not consider the *nature* of human death nor the possibility of death even for sinless man where death would not be punishment but fulfillment. Carthage seems more concerned with death as a sign of sin (therefore, its religious significance) than with death as a biological phenomenon. I would suggest, therefore, that the full meaning of this first assertion is yet to be clarified. I would also concede that there is a prejudice in favor of corporeal death as such, in any form, as something which came into being as a result of original sin. I feel, finally, that Carthage does not settle the question of a biological necessity of dying *as such* but only the question of dying *as punishment*.

The second of these definitions seems less open to qualification. The Church is more aware, from the beginning, of the nature of her baptism and of the presence of original sin than it is of an involved anthropological consideration of human death. The early, universal, and serious administration of infant baptism emerges from a rather strong consensus regarding original sin in the newly-born. Even though the primary value in baptism is incorporation into Christ and not remission of sin, the theology of sin in the newly-born seems too firmly established for the contradictory to be plausible. We shall discuss the question of infant baptism further in the final section of this paper.

#### *The Council of Orange*

The Second Council of Orange was the second major council to deal with original sin. Once again, there seem to be two definitions which concern us: (1) original sin is responsible for a deleterious

change in man's entire anthropology, body and spirit;<sup>27</sup> (2) this change is truly sin for Adam and for his descendants.<sup>28</sup>

The first of these canons sees corporeal death as a consequence of sin. The intention, however, both here and in the next canon, is a statement on man's spiritual condition. There is an intimation in this canon worthy of comment, namely, that a change in man's body as punishment for sin presupposes a change in his spirit. If man is a unit, then body and spirit affect each other. Corporeal death *as punishment* is really the sign of a deeper death which has occurred.

The second of these canons speaks of sin in Adam and in his descendants. This is the clearest of the early magisterial statements on the guilt or sinfulness involved in original sin. In the words of the Council, we inherit "a death of the soul." Later, the Council of Sens, France, will censure Abelard for maintaining: "We do not inherit guilt from Adam, only punishment."<sup>29</sup>

Where Carthage spoke of corporeal death and baptism, Orange speaks of the spiritual and sinful dimensions of original sin. This was the conciliar state of the question before Trent.

#### *The Council of Trent*

Trent, as Carthage and Orange, speaks of original sin in the throes of doctrinal controversy. To consider doctrine in such a situation is always easier but also less complete than it ought to be. The Reformers presented Christian tradition with a number of insights and problems on original sin not hitherto encountered.

Theology has benefited, for example, from Luther's vision of original sin as a deeply religious experience, a division within man he must suffer from all life long. There is also considerable merit in the Reformation emphasis on the subjective dimensions of original sin and in the impairment of human freedom which the Reformers described in graphic detail. Catholic theology had difficulty, however, with two central reform principles: (1) justification was a salvation by imputation so that original sin remained; (2) original sin and concupiscence were identical. Before Trent, the beginnings of an

<sup>27</sup> D-S 371.

<sup>28</sup> D-S 372.

<sup>29</sup> D-S 728.

answer to these questions were already formulated. Carthage saw baptism as valid unto the remission of sin even in the infant; therefore, justification meant innocence and not non-imputation. Orange saw original sin as a spiritual and corporeal death rather than as an existential struggle with concupiscence. Earlier tradition offered, as I said, only the beginnings of an answer since the problems presented by the Reformation were new and different.

There are a number of things to consider from the Tridentine experience of the Church if we hope to propose an anthropology which is fully Christian, that is, both traditional and contemporary.<sup>30</sup>

1. Trent emphasizes the person and individuality of Adam more than any previous council. The intent, however, seems to be a statement on man rather than a statement on a particular man. Trent clearly presupposes the historicity of Adam. The object of these conciliar statements, however, is Adam's situation rather than Adam's identity. Adam is the framework, not the substance, of the definition.

2. There is an obvious effort in Trent to keep the question of original sin as open as possible. The first canon of Session Five is an early indication of this.<sup>31</sup> The proposed "*creatus fuit*" is changed in the definitive text to "*constitutus fuerat*." Thus the Council does not decide between those who identify Adam's reception of grace with his creation (e.g. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas) and those who see an interval of time between creation and reception of grace (e.g. Irenaeus, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Duns Scotus). Trent does not preclude, therefore, either an evolutionary statement on man's origins wherein the first man eventually comes to grace or an evolutionary statement on man's origins wherein man never receives but is only promised grace and the preternatural gifts.

What seems clear in all of this, is man's *situation* or *destiny* for

<sup>30</sup> I recommend at this point a careful reading of three splendid articles by A. Vanneste which appeared in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*:

- a) Le préhistoire du décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel (April, 1964, pp. 355-368).
- b) La préhistoire du décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel (suite) (May, 1964, pp. 490-510).
- c) La Décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel (July-August, 1965, pp. 688-726).

<sup>31</sup> D-S 1511.

glory. This "being situated for glory" is stronger, I would suggest, than the theory advanced by some, placing man in a situation where he can be either good or evil equally or a situation where evil is inevitable. I would argue for a more positive and a more persuasive situation for glory.

The description of the Fall, furthermore, which occurs in this first canon, is a description of man's changed religious situation rather than a description of man's biological construction. The canon speaks of "justice," "holiness," "disobedience," "indignation of God." The canon neither teaches nor attempts a paleontology. It is concerned with a loss we suffered, an alienation between God and man, the punishment of mortality. The death man must now die is not biological death but "the death with which God had previously threatened him," a death which is "bondage" in the power of one who rules the realm of death.

3. In its second canon, Trent continues its emphasis on the spiritual change in man. Mortality is basically a spiritual deprivation wherein the death of the body is a "punishment;" the Council is far more disturbed, however, by the "death of the spirit" which man has endured. In this canon, the Council speaks less of Adam, more of us.<sup>32</sup>

4. The third canon of Trent's fifth Session is one of the major conciliar statements on original sin.<sup>33</sup> The Council moves in three directions here, speaking of sin in its origins, sin in us, and Christ as Redeemer from sin.

Original sin is "one by origin." This phrase militates less against the possibility of polygenism than it does against Schoonenberg's quasi-identification of original sin with sin of the world. The latter theory seems too diverse and too gradual to assign unity of origin with any real meaning. The progressive, non-universal sinfulness of our history before Christ, which Schoonenberg depicts, seems to contradict "one by origin." Even if it is not clear that we have a definition here (some question has been raised about the defining intention of Session Five), we do have a formula which can be biblically justified and one which has considerable confirmation in Tradi-

<sup>32</sup> D-S 1512.

<sup>33</sup> D-S 1513.

tion. The question of how many begin the race or of how they collaborate in sin seems less important to me than the fact that history never knows a generation which is free of sin.

The second direction this canon adopts concerns *us*. When the Council speaks of transmission by propagation, it gives us a key element, perhaps *the* key element, in transmission. Granted this, there are still some observations which must be made. Even if the Council gives us *the* key element, it does not necessarily give us all the elements in transmission (we shall consider this in more detail in the third section of this paper). "Propagation" is the way the Council seeks to assign not so much transmission but reality to original sin in us. The intrinsic "realness" of the sin is at issue here, a "realness" which contrasts with theories of imitation or imputation (the former theory is explicitly excluded in this canon, the latter in Session Six<sup>34</sup>). "Propagation" has less to do with the biology of transmission than with its "human-ness" and its reality. The context of this canon suggests this interpretation not only in its exclusion of imitation by propagation but also in its description of original sin as real sin, proper to all, present in each. Even though the Fathers at Trent envisioned transmission more biologically than we do, they did not teach this as binding.

The final direction this canon moves toward is Christ. It is Christ alone, Trent reminds us, who takes away sin and reconciles us to God. In effect, this canon offers us a significant methodology in a doctrine of original sin: one considers Adam, becomes more interested in what happens to us, but focuses most intensely on Christ, our only hope in an otherwise hopeless history. The figure of Christ dominates this canon. Even baptism receives only oblique consideration. Baptism does not remit sin but merely applies a remission achieved already in Christ. Later, in its *Decree on Justification*, Trent speaks of all men as sinners and declares that neither nature nor Law can save man but Christ alone.<sup>35</sup> This Christo-centricity is an emphasis contemporary theology seeks to maintain in the doctrine of original sin.

5. In its fourth canon, Trent re-enforces an age-old tradition and

<sup>34</sup> D-S 1528-1531 as well as the corresponding eleventh canon (D-S 1561).

<sup>35</sup> D-S 1521-1522.

simultaneously answers the Anabaptists, Zwingli, and Calvin.<sup>36</sup> It declares that infant baptism is unto the remission of sins and, with Calvin clearly in mind, insists that the newly-born, even of baptized parents, are guilty of original sin. In its fifth canon, Trent, with Luther in mind, speaks of intrinsic regeneration and of the distinction between concupiscence and original sin.<sup>37</sup>

These are, of course, other things we might say. We could say a word about the proposed schema on the "Elevation and Fall of Man" at Vatican I<sup>38</sup> or we could consider *Humani Generis*, or even Paul VI's statements on original sin.<sup>39</sup> All these later documents, however, reflect Trent. If this is not to become a paper on the magisterial state of the question, we must consider our survey, for all practical purposes, complete.

In conclusion, we might summarize in this fashion:

- A. Scripture requires that a dogmatic synthesis include:
1. the role of man's freedom and responsibility in his own suffering;
  2. the existence of a real Fall or loss or change in man's situation;
  3. alienation as the fruit of original sin;
  4. the universality and historicity of the Fall;
  5. the relationship of original sin and personal sin, both of which conspire in mediating mortality to man.
- B. Some of the Fathers add insights worthy of serious consideration:
1. alienation begins with excessive self-interest, leading us to see the other as threat;
  2. although Tradition favors a more static explanation, an evolutionary or process frame-work for original sin and the preternatural gifts is a workable hypothesis;

<sup>36</sup> D-S 1514.

<sup>37</sup> D-S 1515.

<sup>38</sup> Piet Smulders gives an interesting evaluation of this schema in his book *The Design of Teilhard de Chardin* (Newman Press, 1967), pp. 299-300. The intention of the schema, he argues, was not monogenism but the one-ness of the human family, a one-ness embracing Indians and Negroes as equals.

<sup>39</sup> These three later documents consider the question of monogenism as such and all of them favor this frame-work for the doctrine of original sin.

3. although a pessimistic attitude is preferred, a certain optimism about man, even in sin, is not out of order.
- C. There are some conciliar decisions which must qualify any contemporary explanation of original sin:
1. the nature of original sin as such is sketched by Trent: it is one in origin and it is real so that a juridical (imputation) or environmental (imitation) position is not sufficient;
  2. the primary consequence of sin is a total mortality; the emphasis as the later councils clarify the question is more and more on the spiritual and religious dimensions of death, less and less on the biology of death; it is a death of the spirit, an estrangement from God and fuller human possibilities (e.g. the gifts) which destroys man; thus, corporeal death is a sign of a deeper death which has happened;
  3. this tragedy is transmitted in the very process by which one becomes a member of the human family; so total is this tragedy that even an infant comes to humanity with a fatal spiritual malady; this malady is not only weakness but sin or guilt;
  4. the only way out of this death by which we have all died is Christ; even Christ, however, cannot so remove original sin from us that we live again as if we had not created a sinful history; human history cannot be undone; it must be borne to its final moment; we can overcome bad history or improve good history but we can never start again.

*The Value of a Doctrine of Original Sin*

We have spoken thus far of the substance of the doctrine of original sin. As we began this first major question in our paper, we said we would consider the value of such a doctrine. With some brief references to this topic, we shall conclude this section of our survey.

The doctrine of original sin tells us something of man's responsibility for the course of history. Each of us is aware of his responsibility for his own history. Original sin tells us something about the wider, cosmic, almost transcendental consequences of our behaviour. Man's responsibility for the Fall summons us from a fatalism regard-

ing the direction of human history. A Fall which is almost a statistical inevitability puts more responsibility on God than on us for the way history is made. In a sense, the existence of original sin within us is an indication that a sacred history is re-enacted in every human life. The consequences of a real, historical Fall are present even in the infant where the consequences of a real, historical Redemption are also present. We fail and are saved even before maturity because the whole human family has undergone this experience. This experience is not a fatalism but a true history accomplished in the fragile freedom of first man and in the courageous freedom of Christ. In every man, the history of the whole race is embryonically and vestigially discoverable.

Original sin establishes, on the negative side, in the thesis situation, the presence of an absolute obligation and an absolute responsibility. It gives us an insight into the unity of the race, highlighting the key Christian concept that the formation of true human history is a moral and religious task. Original sin tells us little of profane history, less of paleontological development. It does remind us, however, that man's dominion of his environment involves a dominion of himself and a proper relationship to otherness. It is man's attitude toward himself and his behaviour toward the other which is the prime factor in the on-going historical process.

Original sin is Christianity's way of declaring a fixed point for the problem of evil, an explanation which is not comprehensive but religiously taxative. This doctrine gives us an insight into the history of man, an anthropology, rather than a cosmology. It makes man religiously aware of the radical division within his own personality rather than scientifically conscious of how he began to be.

The doctrine of original sin says more. It is a factor, I believe, in Christianity's harmony with man's distant religious history. We can speak without exaggeration of a consensus in world religion of an evil which pre-exists man's individual becoming. There is a "religious nostalgia" in man for "a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the Creator's hands."<sup>40</sup> There is a

<sup>40</sup> M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper and Row, Torchbook Edition, 1961), p. 65.

yearning for an innocence which man can no longer recover because of an irreversible disaster in the beginning:

. . . according to the myths of the earliest cultivators, man became what he is today—mortal, sexualized, and condemned to work—in consequence of a primordial murder . . .<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly enough, there does not seem to be a universal pessimism about the way things have gone. A belief in a golden age at the beginning of history and at its culmination sustains religious man in his primitive hopes. The "myth" of the Fall and the Christian aspiration for the eschatological kingdom reflect this same religious awareness. It would, of course, be naïve of us to be influenced unduly by the non-Christian, primitively religious state of the question on this point. On the other hand, a solution of the problem in purely scientific categories might prove rationally impressive but religiously myopic.

There is something which original sin tells us about the religious structure of man's personality. The *homo religiosus* has never been the man who desired to live only in the present or only in terms of his own sins and successes. There seems to be in him a sense of responsibility for the failure of the past as well as for the inadequacy of the present. There is even in us today, I believe, an awareness that there was a time when all was right and that a time is coming once again when all will be right again for man. Original sin may, in part, provide us with a sense of objectivity, of cosmic significance, of community responsibility in the formation and deformation of history. For, there is never anyone among us without freedom or without guilt.

Although man, in certain ages of the past, may have been too ready to believe in his depravity, modern man is skeptical about his status as sinner. Ironically enough, he is also skeptical about his capacity for nobility. He believes more easily in his ambiguity than in his identity. Original sin and Redemption are Christianity's affirmation of certain, universal, non-ambiguous statements in a religious anthropology. In a sense, the doctrine of original sin rescues man from that naïve optimism about his self-salvation which has always distorted man's need to accept himself as he is. The Redemption, con-

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

versely, saves us from the paralyzing pessimism which makes of man and his history a head-long flight into all-prevailing absurdity.

Eliade has wisely observed:

. . . non-religion is equivalent to a new "fall" of man . . . non-religious man has lost the capacity to live religion consciously and hence to understand and assume it . . . after the first "fall," his ancestor, primordial man, retained intelligence enough to enable him to rediscover the traces of God that are visible in the world. After the first "fall," the religious sense descended to the level of the "divided consciousness"; now, after the second, it has fallen even further, into the depths of the unconscious; it has been "forgotten."<sup>42</sup>

In speaking of the values or lessons of a doctrine of original sin in the formation of a Christian anthropology, we have, no doubt, given the impression that the doctrine says more than it actually does. This criticism is quite valid since, in this study, we consider only one doctrine and not the correlatively more important doctrine of the Redemption. It is not possible for us, however, to say all things relevant to this problem in one essay. With these observations in mind, let us proceed to our second major question in this paper.

## II. WHAT IS CRITICAL AND WHAT IS NON-ESSENTIAL IN THIS DOCTRINE IF ONE HOPES TO PROPOSE A CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY?

Before we undertake an effort at provisional re-interpretation, it is necessary for us to sort out elements which seem critical or non-essential for the doctrine.

The following elements seem indispensable for any future theory of original sin:

1. We must acknowledge the uniqueness of original sin. I would find it, therefore, difficult to equate original sin with "sin of the world." The latter may be a result of the former; the latter may have a much closer relationship to the former than we realized; the latter and the former are, however, distinct from each other.
2. The freedom involved in the Fall is an essential requirement of the dogma. There is an attractiveness about

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

theories which equate original sin with finite-ness or statistical inevitability. It seems to me, however, that they must be incorporated into a structure of freedom and real options.

3. There must be a universality about original sin from the beginning. This universality may mean, as we shall explain later, that no generation is free from sin and that no person is born of human parents without its presence. This radical universality presupposes a certain unity of origin, a unity which must be maintained whether one conceives of it statically or dynamically. It also requires a true redemption for all, even for the infant.
4. There is a reality about this sin which makes it really sin even if different from personal sin. This reality is more than a juridical or environmental involvement in the sin. This sin is proper to each of us, although the quality of its presence may not be equal.
5. The entire human family must bear the burden of mortality because of original sin. This mortality must be understood religiously even though it may include corporeal mortality.
6. The sin is transmitted in the process of humanization. The entire intelligibility of transmission may require a total humanization (i.e. more than conception and birth) but it remains real even if humanization has not yet attained maturity in consciousness and self-determining freedom.

The following elements seem non-essential to the doctrine:

1. Though monogenism is a magisterial preference, it seems dispensable in the over-all understanding of the dogma. Theology must create options whenever it can. Whether or not polygenism is preferable or even viable has not yet been demonstrated. I do not think, however, that the unity or transmission of original sin requires monogenism. We shall discuss this further in the next section of this paper.
2. A fully-developed humanity in the beginning of history does not seem necessary. There is little theological difficulty in positing a primitive anthropology in the origins of human history. There are, of course, some features of even a primitive anthropology which must be present from the outset. These include an innocence in the beginning, a real possibility of not failing, and a destiny to grace and preternatural possibilities. Consequently, biological death,

human suffering, and existential concupiscence may have been our experience whether we sinned or remained faithful. Our relationship to these realities would have been different had we not sinned. We would have had available to us the capacity to integrate these into a harmony beneficial to ourselves and to our history. Even now we realize how love can ease the tension of death, suffering, and concupiscence. When one's capacity to love is diminished, all of a sudden, the human condition becomes unmanageable.

3. Correlative to what we said before about transmission, "propagation" seems to be a wider term than conception, gestation, and birth. "Propagation" is a requirement and a beginning point for original sin. It cannot be excluded in any understanding of transmission though it does not stand alone, as we shall see later.
4. There is no scriptural, patristic, or conciliar requirement which excludes a dynamic, evolutionary, or process framework for original sin. A static ontology is one way of explaining original sin, perhaps even preferable, but by no means imperative.

### III. WHAT WOULD A PROVISIONAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE DOCTRINE REQUIRE?

Modern man, if I understand him correctly, does not want unilateral solutions from us as much as he wants a series of options which can function in a religious framework. His desire for genuine community need not be forced into a monolithic system. In ages that were more structured in their social and philosophical viewpoints, options were less satisfying. The modern age, however, is deeply interested in a multiplicity of options. It feels confined where these cannot be given. The options must, of course, be limited by a certain horizon. Options which have no limits lead to the affirmation of nothing or to the profession of an unacceptable indifferentism. Modern theology must provide us not only with insights into what we know but, more and more, with choices. Thus, these final pages are not a substitute for a more traditional presentation of original sin but merely a viable option. A substitution could only occur if evidence in favor of one or the other alternative were more conclusive than it actually is. It should be obvious from the procedure

we followed in the first section of this paper that an option cannot disregard the past even though it refuses to repeat it.

One might object at this point that modern man might find our effort with the doctrine of original sin, options or not, meaningless for his purposes. In a sense, this is true if the modern men of whom we speak are those who have found no meaning at all in life. A doctrine of original sin is addressed only to men who believe in God and who are already prepared to accept the Redemption. Such a doctrine is not a substitute for faith but rather a specification of God's action upon men who are able to see themselves as sinners.

We begin with the statement that evolution must be taken seriously.<sup>43</sup> In all that follows, our premises are more important than our conclusions. Frequently, theologians may arrive at unsatisfying solutions to problems and still make a contribution if the methodology they employ or the premises they presuppose are critical for the question before them. Such a procedure guided our reflections on the nature of conciliar theology in a previous section of this paper.

If one starts with the premise that evolution must be taken seriously, then he must be consistent. He cannot affirm evolution only until it becomes inconvenient for him. When one begins with a certain perspective, he must follow it through to its conclusions. In accepting evolution, we commit ourselves to a presupposition which is a law of life. Evolution, as modern man understands it, affects anthropology as well as cosmology, the spirit of man as well as his body.

If this be true, then Adam must be placed in this perspective. There is no compelling reason why Adam or first man cannot begin in a technologically and culturally primitive situation. There is no reason why Adam or first man must be anthropologically or even religiously sophisticated. It is imperative, however, that he begin his history in innocence and with an eschatological destiny for glory. No matter how primitive man is in his origins, he is meant for Christ. Whether we see him monogenistically or polygenistically, he is an evolutionary creature. Theology must not create paleontological certi-

<sup>43</sup> The process by which the Church came to accept evolution is briefly and incisively treated in a now-famous article (cf. Alszeghy-Flick "Il Peccato Originale in Prospettiva evuzionistica" *Gregorianum*, v. XLV 11. 2, 1966, pp. 201-225).

tudes when even biology "can as yet make no certain and definitive choice between monogenism and polygenism."<sup>44</sup> Although we are placing first man in a minimal situation, we are not placing him in a religiously insignificant situation. "Adam," I believe, is a cause and explanation for subsequent history. He is not everyman. His history is crucial for our history which is a true, objective history and not merely a cyclic, subjective history. Because of what happens in the beginning, everyone incurs sin as he becomes a member of the race. The "unity of origin" concerning original sin does not depend upon the one man (i.e. historical Adam) as much as it depends on first man. The first generation seems more important to me than the one man or the one moment of sin. The first generation cannot provide us with a unity for original sin unless it is reconcilable with the oneness of the sin and the oneness of the human family. Both of these unities can be preserved in the frame-work of the first generation. There is no reason why original sin cannot have been a failure in a collaborative effort at human fraternity. Even monogenism presupposes a collaborative failure at human fraternity in the failure of Eve to relate properly to Adam. If the group is larger, it must fail in such a way that one might be able to say there is a unity in this (whether only two sin for the group as such which is represented in them or whether the group fails *as a community*). Original sin as failure at community seems more probable when one realizes that the whole thrust of the Gospel and its only commandment is human reconciliation. Is it not possible to see in this redemptive action of Christ the vague outlines of what we are redeemed from?

Nor can one say that the first generation threatens the unity of the human family. Its unity issues from the common effort of a group humanizing itself over some years and then giving birth to a second generation influenced by what their predecessors made of each other. Its unity comes from the history the first generation makes together as well as, of course, from the deeper unity of the God it cannot escape and the destiny it cannot ignore. The unity of the human family is the unity of a common history, a common Source, and a

<sup>44</sup> P. Overhage, *Das Problem der Hominisation* (Freiberg: Herder, 1961), p. 185.

common goal. Human history makes its response to the one God in the creation of community. It fails to respond where community is shattered. The deep aspiration to unity which burns in our hearts takes the shape of human fellowship under God. In propagation, we transmit the capacity to destroy community to each other, a capacity intensified by our environment and ratified by our personal sins.

In all of this, I have presupposed that polygenism occurs in an area geographically and spatially accessible to the formation of the first human community. There is another possibility, one I choose not to develop in this paper, i.e. the emergence of polygenism in geographically inaccessible situations. One might, of course, apply all I have said to geographically diversified groupings. It does not, however, appear improbable that humanity came to be in only one place and then universalized itself from this.

The first sin of which I am speaking is of considerable importance for the future of the race. If it is a collaborative sin, it would slowly reach all in the group until human community would be gradually destroyed within a generation. This alters the very structure of first man who, like us, is not independent of his fellow-men but depends upon them to be what he is. Schoonenberg has not sufficiently emphasized the importance of this first sin in his theory. Scripture and Tradition take the first sin more seriously than Schoonenberg.

Original sin, then, involves a generic egoism, expressing itself as a failure in community sensitivity to one's fellow-men and God. Original sin creates in man a capacity for selfishness, a morbid tendency to live on his own terms, a resistance to the collaborative possibilities of human personality. Original sin is the way we first learned how to destroy community and to diminish each other. This inability to integrate oneself into the larger picture may well explain not only original sin but also the dogma of hell. Man's incapacity to live properly in the created process, when ratified in personal sin, may well lead to his incapacity for integration in the new heaven and the new earth, an eschatological schizophrenia, a living forever with a non-freedom God will not redeem once we affirm it as our own. Original sin begins as a choice of un-freedom in a created process meant for freedom; loss of salvation is a permanence of that un-freedom in an eschatological kingdom where only absolute freedom

reigns so that one who is not totally graced in freedom is estranged from reality.

Original sin, is, therefore, a true sin, the only real sin we know since all sin is a rejection of Otherness. Acceptance of the Other in freedom and love is the key to human survival and to human community. The key to survival and fellow-ship must spring from the very nature of man. Hence, man alters his "nature" when he refuses to begin his history in freedom and love. Thus, original sin alters the anthropological structure of man, even if this has no perceptible biological manifestations. Human nature becomes accessible to man's personality in an altogether different fashion. For man begins to personalize his nature in un-freedom, appropriating for himself those areas of his life he was meant to bestow generously upon others. Death begins to take on a new significance in this situation. Before sin, death may still have been an experience man would have to undergo as a sign of his finiteness. Death may well have been, as Irenaeus would phrase it, a divine pedagogy though certainly not a punishment, a way in which God would make known to man the limits of his existence and the essentially historical dimensions of his earthly activity. Scripture tells us that man was made of the corruptible substance of the earth, before sin, and, therefore, destined to share in the law of perishable nature in some way. Scripture does not speak of man as someone made in heaven, platonically as it were, but as someone made of earth even in the first innocence of his existence. One does not read in Scripture, as he reads in so much Hellenic and Hellenistic thought, that man is made material as punishment for sin.

Death becomes now for man, not an occasion for the glorification of the spirit in the flesh but a psychologically painful rupture in the very being of man. Every divisive situation in which man finds himself his own enemy is symbolized in the divisive way he dies. The punishment of death issues from the ego-centricity in man's heart. In sin, we affirmed ourselves too strongly, counted on ourselves for too much, shared ourselves too little. Death has a sting to it because we were not outgoing enough. How different death is, even now, when one dies for a loved one or a beloved cause!

The pain and punishment of death become even more difficult

because we are no longer familiar with God and pass into the keeping of One unknown. Even Christ in his sinlessness feels the pain of death because he shares with us a history in which death is difficult and in which God is not easily available even to his humanity.

One must concede in all of this that it is very possible corporeal death *as such* came into existence only after original sin. There are some magisterial indications which favor this interpretation. They are not, however, decisive judgments, at least in the sense that they have been fully exegeted.

We might say the same things of concupiscence and suffering which we have said of death. There is no reason why human biology must be altered after sin to admit concupiscence and suffering. If our relationship with God and each other is threatening, then our concupiscence and suffering take on another meaning and become unmanageable. Grace is relationship and Presence. If grace is lacking, then an integrating principle in our development is absent.

If man begins his existence without grace and the preternatural gifts, must we then conclude that there is such a state as pure nature? I think not, since two possibilities are still open to us which exclude pure nature. In the first place, man is *de facto* destined for grace. In the second place, it is possible to see man's adulthood as simultaneous with refusal of relationship. Thus, man would never have attained *adulthood* (that is, a situation where he is fully man) in a state of so-called "pure nature." Man *de facto* had only one way open to him in his future if his history was to be fully human. That way was the way of grace.

There is one final peripheral question we may ask before we proceed. At what point in the evolutive process do we have man? We have man at that point when a creature becomes self-reflectively conscious and freely in command of his future. We have man at that moment when a creature who understands relationship is born. For, relationship implies a creature who is religiously aware, conscious of himself, and freely capable of disposing of himself as he chooses.

We must say a word now about the transmission of original sin. The newer theories on original sin have given us a needed corrective in their insistence on environment as an element in transmission. Where they err, I feel, is in their neglect of the "given-ness" of

human nature. A child isolated completely from his fellow-men and from any meaningful contact with human history will still grow up in alienation.<sup>45</sup> It is exaggerated to say he absorbs the "sin of the world" in the period of his gestation or in the brief moments of birth when he is near another human being. It is true that our environment shapes us but we are something even before significant relationship with environment occurs. It is just as difficult to see how an unborn or newly-born child absorbs his environment *as sin* as it is to believe he inherits a graceless human nature.

Smulders gives us an insight into this problem when he writes:

John locates the center of gravity of the power of sin in the "world," thus evoking the image of an objective, external structure, outside of man though built by man; Paul, on the contrary, locates it in the "flesh," and thus within man himself, in the revolt of the carnal passions but, above all, in the deep-seated egotism lurking in the will itself.<sup>46</sup>

Though it is true that one might say Paul is speaking of an egotism assimilated from his environment, it is Paul's stress on the interiority of the sin, suggesting perhaps its origin in the "given-ness" of human nature which interests us. It is not too much to posit original sin as originating in the "given-ness" *and* in the environment if one is willing to see original sin, not in categories of heredity and environment but in the larger category of humanization. I see no reason why we must view original sin as a completed reality at every stage of human existence. Original sin, I suggest, is incipient in the first "given-ness" of human nature (therefore, one can rightly speak of "propagation" in transmission). It does not yet dominate man's personality but is present as a root alienation between God and man, between creature and creature. Though grace is lacking to the infant, it is also true that original sin has not seized the person in its full intensity. Grace or sin, after all, are not present in us as such but are present with a certain intensity. If one sees man statically, then the state of grace or sin has a certain completeness about it. If one sees him dynamically, they are present more embryonically, as it

<sup>45</sup> William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is an attempt to say this same thing.

<sup>46</sup> P. Smulders, *The Design of Teilhard de Chardin* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1967), p. 176.

were. Sin, even original sin, does not dominate a personality in one moment, even in the moment of birth. One is not simply graced or sinful; he is graced to a degree and sinful to a degree. This dynamic conception of sin allows us to distinguish venial from mortal sin, serious sin from sin-unto-death. Things need not be different with original sin since the same dynamic creature is the one who is sinner.

Original sin then joins with personal sins and becomes one with them in the unbaptized. Thus, baptism remits all sin in its every manifestation. The universality of this original sin does not depend upon the universality of personal sins since it clearly precedes such sins.

The transmission of original sin is justified, it seems to me, by the fact that we bear a common history together and by the fact that a fuller redemption is planned for every man who enters into the human family. Where sin is present, grace is present even more.

This question of transmission requires a word about the historical dimensions of man. It is this dimension of his existence which says much about his identity. Because of original sin and personal sin, man is born into a history which is no longer sacrament. History does not sanctify of itself any longer. It has become instead a theatre for the presence of sin. If man is to be sanctified, he must be sanctified now, not by his belonging to history as such but by his belonging to a sacred history. In a sacramental action, there is no sin. It is all-holy and thus reflects the holiness of Christ or the radical holiness of the Church. History is no longer a sacramental action for man. Man is born now without the sacrament of sanctifying history and needs other sacraments for salvation (the Church, for example, or baptism). History is now sacramental only if it is interrupted, encountered by God. It does not, of itself, any longer tend toward God. Thus God must intervene in our history if we are to be saved. His coming into each of our lives is an intervention rather than a "natural" association, as it was or, at least, might have been before original sin. Original sin deprived history of its sacramentality, of its all-holiness. Thus, man, who is created and humanized in history, comes into being with a "given-ness" and an environment which no longer mediate grace. In Adam or first man, when history was first concretized and personalized, it was concretized as non-sacramental.

When one is speaking of man, he is speaking of someone who is not merely creature but of one who is historical creature. Thus, he possesses the sinfulness of history within him as well as the possibility to share in that re-sacramentalization of history which we call the Redemption.

In the light of all we have said thus far, I would affirm the importance of infant baptism. I am not raising this question as a central consideration in the doctrine of original sin but as an aspect of the problem which occurs in its total formulation. We must not overlook incorporation into the community as the primary value of baptism but, since we are speaking of original sin in this paper and not baptism as such, we must limit ourselves to baptism as remission of sin. God becomes present to the infant in a new way in baptism, in a way which renders him disciple of Christ rather than sinner. To insist on adult baptism exclusively is to betray an exaggerated individualism or an understanding of original sin which equates it too often with personal sin. Many who reject infant baptism have an inadequate notion of sacrament and incorporation. They stress too much the actual hearing of the Word for salvation. Such a viewpoint evidences an unwarranted reliance on a certain nominalism. A child, however, can be supported by the grace of the community. Just as incipient sin is negated in baptism, so one might say that in baptism an "incipient" regeneration occurs. By this, we do not mean that the child is not fully redeemed but that baptism looks to the future. The grace of baptism, as the guilt of original sin, imply a future intensification of their presence. Baptism is future-oriented not only with regard to its definitive future in the eschatological kingdom but with regard to its conditioned future in the community of the Church which expects of the child a choice for the community as he comes of age and a reception of the Eucharist as the complement of his baptismal status.

It is unfortunate to speak of baptism only in this limited context of sin but we cannot say everything simultaneously. It is also unfortunate to explain original sin in terms of the infant though it is in this situation that the doctrine is especially dramatized.

One might ask, in conclusion, why we have become involved in so much re-thinking of the doctrine of original sin. Our purpose has

not been to intellectualize the dogma nor to engage in an empty speculative effort. The motivation for this presentation has been a pastoral concern, a concern that Pope John, Vatican II, and Pope Paul have called for time and again in the presentation of our theology. We have spoken here of an option, one which may be more appealing for science or psychiatry in its effort to understand the Christian doctrine of original sin. Our intention has not been, however, only to listen to the scientific world but also to address it in dialogue. For, the doctrine of original sin is the Church's way of explaining to all men the source of that vague dissatisfaction we all feel with ourselves. It seeks to tell us why our existence is not in order and why it is that even when we do everything right, something goes wrong. The doctrine of original sin, a doctrine the Church never declares in isolation from the more significant doctrine of Redemption, speaks to man religiously of why he is uneasy. But it also promises him fulfillment of his individual existence in a community of grace, haltingly begun now in the Church and decisively accomplished in the eschaton.

We believe also that the description we have given makes the doctrine of original sin religiously more challenging. It seems, furthermore, attuned to contemporary scriptural and conciliar exegesis as well as more congenial to contemporary philosophy and an evolutionary view of man. We have not sacrificed, we believe, any valid statement from the traditional past in this effort to meet the present.

The past described original sin in terms of Adam, causality, baptism, and human nature as given. The present tries to present the doctrine, respectively, in terms of anthropology and eschatology, grace and history as sacrament. The past viewed original sin as something handed down to us from our primordial beginnings. The present places original sin in an existential, dynamic, and future framework. The past perceived original sin, more, as an individual tragedy; the present sees the sin in its communal dimensions.

If these pages have not made us feel more keenly our mutual responsibility for history, our common guilt, and the greatness of the Redemptive action Christ has worked in our midst, then they have missed their point. If, at any stage in this presentation, we have given the impression we have a final answer, then we have

expressed ourselves badly. The doctrine of original sin is the Church's way of reminding us of those unheard-of possibilities which have opened for us sinners in the crucified Body of the historical Jesus and in the eucharistic Body of his Church.

These liturgical consequences of the doctrine of original sin must not be overlooked. Nor must the element of divine pedagogy by which God utilizes not only his teaching Church but his worshipping Church to give us an insight into what history is and who we are. The liturgy not only does something for man now but it also locates him in the over-all process of the past and the future so that he knows where he is.

In baptism, we begin to learn again that lesson we forgot in original sin. In baptism, we are pledged to a relationship to each other and to God in peace. The very first thing the Church does for us is baptism and it tells us in this first gesture on our behalf that we have not been made for ourselves. In this first and most fundamental of all the Church's actions, in this first visible emergence of the Church in our lives, she identifies herself as a healer and a community-maker.

This new lesson in reconciliation reaches its highest intensity in the Eucharist where we experience Someone who gave his flesh and blood that we might live again. It is in the Eucharist that original sin is decisively negated. For in the Eucharist, we are asked to remember Christ and to forget that moment in our distant past when we learned how to hate each other for the first time. If original sin looks to the cross for redemption, the baptized Christian looks to the Eucharist where he finally learns how sinful he was and how sinless he can be. Without Christ, we would have lost everything. For, without Christ we would have lost God and destroyed each other.

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