THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND ORIGINAL SIN

I can never begin a discussion on the problems concerned with original sin without thinking of the words of St. Augustine: "quo nihil est ad praedicandum notius, nihil ad intelligendum secretius." Fortunately, this paper does not have to try to present a complete theology of original sin. My goal is more modest—a discussion of the Council of Trent and original sin-but this presents its own difficulties in abundance. Certainly the general problem of our convention is amply illustrated by Trent's decree on original sin. All the problems of the meaning of the magisterium can be seen here. My goal is not to answer these questions, although my own inclinations will probably show through in places. My job is to precise the teaching of the Council of Trent on original sin. Just exactly what does Trent teach on this question of original sin? That is the question I want to answer. What this means in relation to the magisterium; whether the expression of the doctrine can be changed by the Church or not—are questions beyond my scope. These are questions with which the whole process of the convention is involved.

When we ask what does Trent teach on original sin, we can answer very easily that Trent teaches what is known as the traditional view of original sin as it is found in the classical theological textbooks of the last few hundred years. Basically this is what Trent teaches. Why should we look for anything more or less?

First of all, because not everything in a decree is of the same value. As is evident, the decrees are complex consisting of a variety of elements, for example the direct assertions, the indirect assertions, the theological reasons and quotations from sacred scripture. The magisterium is not necessarily engaged in the same way in each part of the decree. We have always distinguished the definition strictly speaking from what might be co-defined, simply stated, or presupposed. The whole of the decree is taught or presented as a teaching but not everything in it is taught in the same way. Only certain things are defined, for example. The question is complicated even further when we consider that the pre-suppositions include not only certain

theological principles but a whole culture and world view. And these are intrinsic to the decree as it is expressed. When one approaches this decree with a different theology, a different culture and a different world view, we have a complicated situation.

So our question concerning the teaching of the Council comes down to: what does the Council teach with the full weight of its authority? Discovering this is a very difficult task, as all know, and furthermore, we lack fully adequate tools to ascertain with clarity the various levels of teaching in a decree. Gregory Baum remarks that there are three questions we cannot answer at the present time:

(1) Where is the dividing line between infallible and non-infallible teaching of the Church? 2) What is the precise meaning of defined teaching in its historical context? 3) How far will greater fidelity to the Gospel qualify present teaching?¹

We might also note that as Karl Rahner remarks not everything that is in the mind of the framer of the decree is defined.² In the last analysis what is defined is what the magisterium wishes to define. But this is often very difficult to determine. The presence of an "anathema" or a "we define" is not always enough. These terms can have various shades of meaning at different times in history. Sometimes a decree must be looked at as a unit with only one central point or definition even when there are various canons or parts. We must also remember that we approach these decrees with a mentality and attitude affected by an overly developed theology of infallibility stemming from Vatican I that was simply not a part of the mental equipment of the framers of our decree.

In spite of our best efforts, it is often only in retrospect that we can see that something is or is not taught with full authority. Unless something is questioned there is not too much tendency to distinguish how it is taught or understood. So that it is often only in the light of subsequent disputes and questions that it becomes clearer how something is taught or to be accepted.

The problem of interpretation here is basically the same as that

² K. Rahner, Theological Investigations, Vol. I, p. 242.

^{1.} G. Baum, Man as Man and Believer, ed. by E. Schillebeeckx (Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 79-80.

in the interpretation of scripture or of any other document. While there are some agreed upon principles and methods of interpretation, it is still a very difficult and inexact business. The final authoritative interpretation is always the prerogative of the magisterium.

Rahner reminds us that it is possible for a council to teach or define something even when it has no knowledge of the problems which only arise later in connection with its teaching. Thus it would be wrong to assume in advance that because a council had no knowledge of a particular problem that it is a priori impossible that it should have said anything of importance on this matter.³ On the other hand, we must be very careful not to extend the Council's decrees to answer other problems than those it desired to answer. We know how cautiously many of the decrees were composed, what care was taken over even individual words to avoid prejudicing certain problems. In other words, had they been aware of the problems that trouble us, they might have spoken quite differently. A good answer for one question is not necessarily a good answer for another. Thus subsequent difficulties can be an indication that something is not defined.

I think, too, that there is a definite attitude we should have in approaching this matter. Too often in recent history the tendency has been to exaggerate what was defined, to look for too much definiteness. Too many definitions or a tendency to too strict an orthodoxy is bad. Our attitude should be that definitions should be restricted as much as possible, reduced to a minimum. A good manifestation of this attitude is Trent's own desire not to solve or prejudice disputes within the Catholic camp.

As we approach the decree, then, our task is to place it in its intellectual context. Why was original sin discussed at all? What questions were being answered? What ones avoided? What do the words mean? What precisions and nuances are knowingly introduced and why? What presuppositions are essential? What ones are not? What is being taught with full conciliar authority?

When a theologian is asked a question he often begins his reply with the annoying remark that we can not really answer that without going back and considering a few other things first. In fact, some

³ Ibid., p. 241.

theologians can not answer any questions without going back to Adam and Eve and creation. Dealing with the Council of Trent and original sin it is perhaps true to say that we really should begin with Adam and Eve and creation, for Trent can not be understood without a knowledge of all that went before. But fear not; we obviously can not consider everything. However, from time to time it may be necessary to consider certain aspects of sacred scripture or previous councils.

I would remind you, first of all, that the traditional teaching on original sin is a very complex matter and should not be considered as strictly scriptural in all respects. The practice and tradition of the Church were also influential, e.g., in the matter of infant baptism. From another point of view Tennant wrote:

the development of the highly complicated doctrine of original sin was less the outcome of strict exegesis than due to the exercise of speculation: speculation working, indeed, on the lines laid down in scripture, but applied to such material as current science and philosophy were able to afford,⁴

The teaching that came to be accepted was summed up in three councils: The Council of Carthage 418 dealing the Pelagian difficulty; II Council of Orange 529 treating the semi-Pelagian troubles; and the Council of Trent in 1546 considering the Reformation theology.

In our endeavor to understand the teaching of the Council of Trent on original sin, the first question to be explored is why the Council treated this question at all and in what context it was treated. It was discussed because of certain teachings of the Reformers that seemed to be at variance with the commonly understood teaching of the Church. Original sin is certainly a key Christian notion. Furthermore, even in the 16th century Hochstraten, anticipating the thought of Denifle, tried to show that Luther's teaching on original sin was the source of all his theological difficulties with Catholic doctrine. So original sin would seem to merit an important place in the discussions of the Council. Yet while this matter does have a logically important

⁵ Cf. H. Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent, Vol. I, p. 408, and Paquier, D. T. C. IX, col. 1190.

⁴ F. R. Tennant, The Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin in the Fathers before Augustine, p. 345.

place in the schema of the Council's work, the actual discussions on original sin give the impression of being rather easy and not too difficult or critical a matter. It was important, yes, but really not too big a problem. Things were fairly clear all told. That is the impression we get. The most excitement was stirred up over the question of the Blessed Virgin's immaculate conception, which was really a side issue. The whole affair occupied the Council for less than a month.

After the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian difficulties, original sin was not a particularly hot item theologically. There were, to be sure, plenty of scholastic disputes to keep one busy, but nobody was overly concerned. Two broad general views of original sin, one seeing it as the privation of original justice and one seeing it as identical with concupiscence, gradually were synthesized into a view that considered concupiscence as the material element in original sin and the privation of original justice as the formal element.

For Luther, however, original sin was not just an abstract doctrine that one might dispute about at leisure. He felt his own sinfulness very deeply. This was something very real in his own experience. His reading of St. Paul and St. Augustine told him that they too had experienced the same thing. He was unshakeable in his belief that his theology of original sin was the same as that of St. Paul and St. Augustine.

Precisely what Luther taught about original sin is not always easy to determine, since he was not given to full and systematic expositions of his thought, but by consulting a variety of places we can get a good notion of this teaching.

In his commentary on Romans Luther asks:

 doing evil God hates and imputes not merely this lack (inasmuch as many forget their sin and are not aware of it) but this whole sinful cupidity that causes us to disobey the commandment Accordingly the ancient fathers were correct when they taught that it is this original sin which is the "tinder" of sin, the law of the flesh, the law of our members, the feebleness of nature, a tyrant, our original disease, etc. It is as with a sick man whose mortal illness is due to the fact that not merely one part of his body lost its health, but that his whole body is sick and that all his senses and powers are debilitated, so that, to cap it all, he is nauseated by what would be wholesome for him and consumed by the desire for what harms him.⁶

Therefore, it is one and the same thing to say: to whom God reckons righteousness, and: to whom God does not impute sin, i.e., unrighteousness. But he will not forgive their unrighteousness to anyone, regardless of the many good works he may have done or do, unless his sin has first been covered (i.e., his root-sin, his original sin, the sin of his nature, which is covered by penitence, baptism, and a prayerful fear of God) and his iniquities, i.e., evil deeds or works have been forgiven.

The following texts are gathered from other places in Luther's works.

... so that no one can deny that sin is still present in all the baptized and holy men on earth, and that they must fight against it.8

Now it is also needful we testify in our works that we have received the forgiveness of sins, by each forgiving the faults of his brothers.⁹

Original sin, after regeneration, is like a wound that begins to heal; though it be a wound, yet it is in course of healing, though it still runs and is sore. So original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us.¹⁰

⁶ Luther, M., Lectures on Romans, translated by W. Pauck, from the Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XV (Westminster, 1961), pp. 167-168.
⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

⁸ H. Kerr, A Compendium of Luther's Theology, p. 86.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

What benefits does baptism confer? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.¹¹

Original sin is very much to be considered concupiscence, a concupiscence that debilitates the whole of human nature. Even though he has been baptized, a good Christian will always consider himself a sinner; he will always be conscious of his sin. The greatest saints have always been aware that they were sinners and they usually considered themselves great sinners. One who is not conscious of being a sinner, one who thinks he is justified (i.e., in his own eyes he is justified, intrinsic justification) is really a sinner. But one who is conscious of his sin is justified in the sight of God, extrinsically. This is true justification. Justification, then, becomes the non-imputation of sin by God. In a true sense, real sin never leaves us, because concupiscence is always with us. Therefore, we should be careful about saying that original sin is taken away by baptism. Luther thinks that it is better to say with Augustine that original sin is remitted in baptism, but that this does not mean that it is not but rather that it is not imputed. He is referring to a passage in Augustine's De nuptiis et concupiscentia (Lib. I, c. 25; P.L. 44, 430) where he says: respondetur, dimitti concupiscentiam carnis in baptismo non ut non sit, sed ut in peccatum non imputetur. Closely allied to all this is the matter of Luther's so-called denial of free will which follows not only from the corruption of human nature by original sin but perhaps even more importantly from predestination and divine knowledge.12

John Calvin's teaching on original sin is basically the same as Luther's. Even though Trent did not pay much explicit attention to Calvin on this matter, we can set down some of his statements to further clarify our understanding of Luther.

This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed "original sin," meaning by the word "sin" the depravation of a nature previously good and pure. 13

¹¹ Ibid., p. 164.

¹² Cf. Luther's De servo arbitrio.

¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J. T. McNeill and translated by F. L. Battles from the Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XX (Westminster, 1960), Book II, ch. I, #5, p. 246.

Therefore all of us, who have descended from impure seed, are born infected with the contagion of sin. In fact, before we saw the light of this life we were soiled and spotted in God's sight.¹⁴

Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19). 15

Now, it is clear how false is the teaching . . . that through baptism we are released and made exempt from original sin, and from the corruption that descended from Adam into all his posterity; and are restored into that same righteousness and purity of nature which Adam would have obtained if he had remained upright as he was first created. . . .

Through baptism, believers are assured that this condemnation has been removed and withdrawn from them, since (as we said) the Lord promises us by this sign that full and complete remission has been made, both of the guilt that should have been imputed to us, and of the punishment that we ought to have undergone because of the guilt. They also lay hold on righteousness, but such righteousness as the people of God can obtain in this life, that is, by imputation only, since the Lord of his own mercy considers them righteous and innocent.¹⁶

What strikes us most about these statements on man and original sin is their pessimism. Some might call it their realism, but at any rate it is not a very cheerful view of man. But before we take a look at the conflicts which grew up around these views let us stop for a moment with the teaching of Zwingli. He does not exactly deny the existence of original sin, but he does not want to consider it a true sin, because a true sin requires a transgression of the law.

... peccatum originale, ut est in filiis Adae, non proprie peccatum esse ... non enim est facinus contra legem. Morbus igitur proprie et conditio. Morbus, quia sicut ille ex amore sui lapsus est, ita et nos labimur: Conditio, quia, sicut ille servus est factus et morti obnoxius, sic et nos servi et filii irae nascimur, et morte obnoxii. 17

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁵ Ibid., #8, p. 251.

¹⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXI, Book IV, ch. XV, #10, p. 1311.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Vanneste, "La préhistoire du décret du Concile de Trente sur le

Rather than a true sin, Zwingli calls original sin a state, sickness, or condition of servitude coming from Adam's sin. We are born enemies of God and condemned to death like Adam—he through his own fault; we because of him. Zwingli also held that it was temerarious to teach that infants dying without baptism are damned (for eternity). This seemed to him clear from the power of Christ's redemption. After all, if Adam was responsible for the condemnation of all men, certainly Christ could save all men. Zwingli's statements would lead Catholics to suspect a denial of original sin lurking behind the descriptions of sickness and servitude. So if Luther and Calvin were too pessimistic, perhaps Zwingli was too optimistic in slighting the culpability involved in original sin.

The list of errors presented at the Council also cites Erasmus, Pighi and the Anabaptists. It is claimed that Erasmus adopted the Pelagian interpretation of Romans 5 which denies that this passage has anything at all to do with original sin. The Anabaptists, of course, denied infant baptism. Pighi had certain problems with the unity of original sin, and how it can be said to be in each one.

I would like to turn now to consider some of the discussions and controversies over original sin in the years before Trent. This will show us where the difficulties and problems in this matter were considered to lie. For the most part the question of original sin did not have a very important place in these discussions and attempts at reunion before Trent. Usually there was a good deal to say about original sin, but it was not a key matter. And sometimes it did not even make the scene. Only gradually did the topic increase in importance until it merited a separate decree at the Council.

Concern over teachings about the sinfulness of man and the effects of baptism are evident in the Papal Bull of 1520 against Luther. The following propositions were condemned:

To deny that in a child after baptism sin remains is to treat with contempt both Paul and Christ (Denz., 742, 1452). The inflammable sources (fomes) of sin, even if there be no

péché originel," Nouvelle Revue Théologique, 86, 1964, p. 366 for this and other citations from Zwingli. Throughout this paper I am very much in debt to Vanneste's work as found in this article and the others cited in the bibliography.

actual sin, delay a soul departing from the body from entrance into heaven (Denz., 743, 1453).

In every good work the just man sins (Denz., 771, 1481). Free will after sin is a matter of title only; and as long as one does what is in him, one sins mortally (Denz., 776, 1486).

After the publication of the Bull, the controversy centers around whether or not the concupiscence which remains in us after baptism should be considered true sin. Luther stoutly maintains that this concupiscence is sin. In his reply to the Bull Luther vigorously defends his position and calls this proposition "almost the best and most necessary of them all." Here is a series of quotations from this work:

How then can it be denied that sin remains in a saint after he is baptised? If it is not sin that wars against the good spirit and the law of God then I should like to be told what sin is. Whence comes this strife of the evil against the good within us, if not from the fleshly birth of Adam, which remains after the entrance of the good spirit in baptism and repentance, until, by resistance and the grace of God and the growth of the good spirit, it is overcome, and at last is slain by death and driven out.¹⁸

(Luther then gives many scripture quotations on the struggle and evil desires in the baptized person.)

Since, therefore, the lives and confessions of these and all the other saints prove the saying of St. Paul in Romans 7, "I delight in the law of God after my spirit, yet find in my members a contrary law of sin," so that no one can deny that sin is still present in all the baptised and holy men on earth, and that they must fight against it; then what does this miserable bull mean by condemning all that? Are the Scriptures and all the saints to be liars? 19

I know full well what they are wont to say to all this: They say that this evil which remains after baptism is not sin, and they invent a new name for it, saying that it is penalty, and

19 Ibid., pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ M. Luther, An Argument etc., in Vol. III of the Works of Martin Luther, translated by Jacobs from the German version (Muhlenberg Press, 1930), p. 27.

not guilt, that it is defect or a weakness, rather than sin. I answer, they say all that out of their own arbitrary will, without warrant of Scripture. Nay, it is contrary to Scripture, for St. Paul does not say, "I find in me a defect," but expressly, "I serve after the flesh the law of sin," and again, "The sin that dwelleth in me doeth the evil;" and St. John says not, "If we say that we have no defect," but "If we say that we have no sin." 20

They say it would be an insult to baptism if one were to say that sin remained, because we believe that in baptism all sins are forgiven, and man is born again, pure and new; but if all sins are forgiven, then that which remains is not sin. This is the way human reason works when without divine illumination it interferes with God's words and works and tries to estimate and measure them according to its own ability.

What answer should I make to this argument except the answer that St. Augustine gave to his Pelagians, who tried to spit him also on their spears of straw? "Certain sins," he says, "such as actual sins, pass quickly away as works, but remain as guilt, for a murder is quickly done and over with, but the guilt remains until the murderer repents. On the other hand, this original sin, which is born in the flesh, passes away in baptism as guilt, but remains as a work; for although it is forgiven, nevertheless it lives and works and raves and assails us until the body dies, and only then is it destroyed."²¹

For this is the rich grace of the New Testament and the surpassing mercy of the heavenly Father, that through baptism and repentance we begin to become righteous and pure, and whatever of sin is still to be driven out He does not hold against us, because of the beginning we have made in righteousness and because of our continual striving against and driving out of sin. He will not lay this sin to our account, though He might justly do so, until we become perfectly pure. We will, therefore, conclude the discussion of this article—almost the best and most necessary of them all—with the beautiful saying of St. Augustine, "Sin is forgiven in baptism; not that it is no longer present, but that it is not imputed."²²

20 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

22 Ibid., p. 35.

²¹ Ibid., p. 34. To be exact Augustine does not say sin here but rather "concupiscentiam carnis" But Luther always seems to strictly equate sin and concupiscence. The references to Augustine are: De nuptiis et concupiscentia, P.L. XLIV, 430; Contra Julianum, ibid., 852.

Luther's thought on this point can be seen in greater detail from the following quotations from his commentary on Romans.

The saints are intrinsically always sinners, therefore they are always extrinsically justified; but the hypocrites are intrinsically always righteous, therefore they are extrinsically always sinners. "Intrinsically" means as we are in ourselves, in our own eyes, in our own estimation, and "extrinsically," how we are before God and in his reckoning.²³

Therefore, actual sin (as the theologians call it) is, strictly speaking, the work and fruit of sin, and sin itself is that passion (tinder) and concupiscence, or that inclination toward evil and resistance against the good which is meant in the statement, "I had not known that concupiscence is sin (Romans 7:7).²⁴

If this is so, then I must say either that I have never understood the matter or that the Scholastic theologians did not deal adequately with sin and grace. For they imagine that original sin, just like actual sin, is entirely taken away, as if sins were something that could be moved in the flick of an eyelash, as darkness is by light. The ancient holy fathers Augustine and Ambrose, however, dealt with these issues quite differently, namely, according to the method of scripture. But the Scholastics follow the method of Aristotle in his *Ethics*, and he bases sinfulness and righteousness and likewise the extent of their actualization on what a person does. But Blessed Augustine said most plainly that in baptism sin (concupiscence) is forgiven, not in the sense that it is no longer there, but in the sense that it is not counted as sin. And Saint Ambrose says: "I am always in sin, therefore I always commune."

Blessed Augustine writes in Book 2 of Against Julian (Contra Jul. II, 9, 32): . . . "How, then, can we say that this sin is put to death in baptism, and how can we confess that it dwells in our members and works many desires except insofar as it is dead with respect to that state of guilt in which it held us and in which it rebels, even though dead, until it is definitely buried and thus healed? However, it is now called sin, not

24 Ibid., p. 126.

²³ M. Luther, *Lectures on Romans* as cited above, p. 124. The rest of this passage is very good too.

 $^{^{25}\} Ibid.,$ p. 128. Cf. also p. 212 for a relevant quote on sin remaining after baptism.

because it makes us guilty, but because it is the result of the condition of guilt of the first man and because by its rebellion it strives to draw us into this state of guilt." This sin, then, is that original blemish of the "tinder," concerning which we have stated before that it would be better to say that we die to it rather than that it dies to us and that while it continues in us, it is we who are turned away from it in this life by grace, according to the saying of Ps. 81:7: "He turned his back away from the burden."

... Blessed Augustine writes: (De nup. et conc. I, 23, 25) "Concupiscence is no longer a sin in the regenerate insofar as they do not consent to it, ... yet it is commonly called sin because, on the one hand, it came into being by a sin, and, on the other hand, it makes the sinner guilty when it has vanquished him," i.e., it is sin with respect to its cause and effect but not with respect to its essence (causaliter et effectualiter, non formaliter).²⁶

For a final clarification of Luther's thought we can cite P. Althaus writing in his book *The Theology of Martin Luther*:

... baptism conveys all of salvation. The assertion of the *Small Catechism* that it "effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe" (WA 30^I, 310; BC 348f.) is constantly repeated in similar form by Luther. Baptism does not give a particular grace, not only a part of salvation, but simply the entire grace of God, "the entire Christ and the Holy Spirit with his gifts" (WA 30^I, 217; BC, 442).²⁷

Luther, it is clear, is very strong in his identification of original sin and concupiscence. Therefore, since concupiscence remains after baptism so does original sin. But this does not mean that baptism has no effect. Baptism is effective, because of it sin is no longer imputed to man; man is not guilty before God. This way of looking at things is based on St. Augustine and St. Paul. Certainly much of Luther's language is traditional and bares marked similarities with expressions of Peter Lombard (Lib. II, d. 32) and Bonaventure (in II Lib. Sent., d. 32, n. 1, q. 1—et etc.) and St. Albert the Great.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 214 and 215.

²⁷ P. Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 353.

Luther may not be always too exact and he may be too convinced of his own position to give much to other views, but when the totality of his teaching is seen, it does not seem that it would be irreconcilable with the general teaching of the Church.

The Catholics, however, were not willing to call the concupiscence which remains after baptism a true sin. In general, the Catholics did not identify concupiscence and sin as closely as Luther. For the Catholics, the concupiscence remaining after baptism is a punishment (poena) of sin but not true sin. They do not want to speak of a true sin unless there is guilt. In this way they are following Augustine when he says: "Hoc est enim non habere peccatum, non esse reum peccati." 28

The discussions at this time do not always give the impression of being particularly profound. There is usually no deep analysis of sin or guilt, for example. Yet on the other hand, one does not seem to feel the need of great, profound discussions. One gets the general impression that the disagreements are not insurmountable. All the necessary distinctions for a meeting of minds seem to be present someplace or other in one form or another.

The next important document to be considered is the Confession of Augsburg (1530). Charles V called the Diet of Augsburg in the hope of attaining religious peace and the help of the Protestant princes against the Turks. For the Catholics John Eck had a list of theses which he considered Protestant and unacceptable. We might mention the following concerned with original sin: 183—on the alleged opinion of Zwingli that there is no original sin but only a natural defect; 184—on the alleged opinion of Melanchthon that there is no real distinction between original and actual sin; 185—against the alleged opinion of Luther that original sin always remains.

The Protestant confession of faith was drawn up by Melanchthon and gave a rather prominent place to original sin right after the consideration of God and the Trinity. The tone was very anti-Zwinglian containing a strong affirmation of the reality of original sin which will condemn one without baptism, and that no justification is possible by one's own powers.

²⁸ Augustine, De nup. et con., Lib. I, c. 26, 29; P.L. 44, 430.

The section of the confession on original sin appears to be very conciliatory in tone and easily reconciled with traditional Catholic teaching. Vanneste, however, feels that this is somewhat deceptive for the fundamental Protestant thesis of the identification of original sin with concupiscence is there, and all the conclusions are not drawn in order not to provoke a Catholic reaction.²⁹ Certainly there are a variety of motives and feelings involved in any affair as complicated as the Diet of Augsburg, but even so an attempt to minimize difficulties and still state one's position honestly is not a bad way to proceed. And the Augsburg Confession remains to this day a very authoritative statement of the Lutheran faith. Note the following comment by Max Lackmann in his book, *The Augsburg Confession and Catholic Unity*:

In the understanding of original sin (Art. II) there is unanimity on the point that vice of origin is truly a condemning sin (vitium originis vere esse peccatum damnans), and that it causes those who are tainted with it to be enemies of God and children of wrath. Original sin is imparted to all men at birth. This means that not only the children of heathen, but also the children of Christians, are sinners until they have been born anew through baptism and the Holy Ghost. Lust and evil inclination (concupiscentia) are still present in one who has been baptized. All real and essential sin is blotted out and washed away through baptism. The remaining concupiscentia is not essentially, but only materially, sin. The Augustinian Johann Hoffmeister, one of the opposition's most perceptive theologians, stated at the time of the Reformation, "nothing in this article can or should be rejected."

However, the Catholics did object to the definition of original sin anyway. They felt that as stated it really applied to adults and actual sin rather than to children. They also objected to calling original sin concupiscence if this meant that original sin remained after baptism.

Melanchthon replied³¹ that the definition was meant to include not only the act of concupiscence but also the perpetual inclination of nature. He then went on to show how he felt that the Protestant

²⁹ A. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 497.

³⁰ M. Lackmann, The Augsburg Confession and Catholic Unity, p. 47.

³¹ Melanchthon, Apologia Confessionis Augustanae, 1531.

statement was in conformity with the traditional doctrine. He noted that concupiscence had always been considered at least the material part of the essence of original sin, and that original sin included more than just the privation of original justice, since it extended to the inordinate dispositions of the parts of the soul. Melanchthon also felt that the Scholastics had tended to minimize the corruption of our nature, and so he considered himself to be more in the line of Sacred Scripture and the Fathers. Even the question of the sin remaining after baptism could be answered, for Luther always said that the guilt of original sin was remitted by baptism and so the material element, concupiscence, remains. While it is true that the Catholics call concupiscence a punishment and Luther calls it sin, remember, he says, that Augustine defines original sin as concupiscence and Paul speaks of the law of sin in his members.

Vanneste feels that Melanchthon made good use of the weakness of his opponents so bound to the scholastic traditions that they could not call into question the identification of concupiscence with original \sin^{32} Furthermore, says Vanneste, it was all too easy to consider the whole matter simply a question of terminology—can you call concupiscence in the baptized sin or not? After all, did not St. Paul use the same language as the Protestants? Contarini, for example, felt there was little difficulty on the question of original \sin^{33}

Actually I think I am on the side of people like Contarini. I find it difficult, so far, to find any essential disagreement here. Each seems to be struggling to bring out facets ignored or slighted by the other and both can easily be wrong if pressed too far.

Let us turn now to the assemblies at Worms and Ratisbonne in 1540-1541. These attempts at reconciliation between the Catholics and Protestants actually arrived at agreement on original sin. It is interesting to compare these agreements with the decree of Trent. The Confession of Augsburg was the basis of the discussions at Worms which began in earnest in January 1541. Eck and Melanchthon debated for several days on the subject of original sin, and the question of sin remaining after baptism quickly became the center

32 A. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 499f.

³³ Contarini, future cardinal and legate at Ratisbonne, in his Confutatio articulorum seu questionum Lutheri.

of the discussion. Everything was very gentile but it was not long before matters became deadlocked.³⁴ Desirous of breaking the impasse, Granville, who presided in the name of the Emperor, got two theologians from each side together and they hammered out a brief statement acceptable to both. In other words, Worms actually found an agreement on original sin acceptable to both the Catholics and Protestants.³⁵

In the agreement original sin is defined as the lack of original justice, which should be present, with concupiscence. Baptism remits the guilt of original sin, but concupiscence does remain. A distinction is made between the formal element of original sin, guilt, which is taken away, and the material element of original sin, concupiscence, which remains. This concupiscence can be called sin because it is from sin and inclines to sin. This material element or concupiscence is a depravation of human nature and repugnant to the law of God. The Protestants did not insist on calling concupiscence sin in the proper sense of the word and avoided using the term "non-imputation," which they liked so much.

Vanneste is somewhat critical of the agreement,³⁶ but even though we would probably have to expect a fair number of amibiguities in the circumstances, this agreement does show what good will can accomplish. However, the statement quickly lost all significance, for the Emperor transferred the whole business to the Diet of Ratisbonne which was going to begin in the spring.

At Ratisbonne the basic text for discussion was no longer the Confession of Augsburg but what is called the Book of Ratisbonne. It is principally the work of Bucer (Protestant) and Gropper (Catholic).³⁷ Gropper was a theologian who favored the double justice theory, and in fact, he got both sides to accept this at Ratisbonne. Seripando, however, as is well known, could not prevent Trent from rejecting this notion.

The article on original sin is quite long and considerably more

³⁴ Cf. Corpus Reformatorum, t. IV, 33ff.

³⁵ For the text of the agreement cf. Corpus Ref., t. IV, 32f.

³⁶ A. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 502f.

³⁷ Cf. H. Jedin, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 318ff.

involved than the Worms agreement.³⁸ It seems to have been arrived at without much difficulty. The description of original sin as the lack of original justice and the presence of concupiscence, and the view that the material element (concupiscence) remains after baptism and the formal element (guilt) is taken away are the same as at Worms. The distinction between original sin and actual sin is mentioned. This distinction is one that the Catholics felt the Reformers tended to blur. A somewhat surprising inclusion is the assertion that man retains a vestige of the image of God, called the light of nature. This would seem to run a bit counter to the main Protestant emphasis on the rather total corruption of man.

With Vanneste, we can note some interesting points, perhaps significant for the disputes on justification. The agreement states that concupiscence is lessened, repressed by baptism and furthermore, ad imaginem Filii Dei saltem inchoatam reformati (sumus). Expressions like these certainly seem to imply some change in the baptized and do not square with the notion of a purely extrinsic justification. This is a part of the Protestant teaching that does not seem to have received much emphasis in the disputes.

It is also noted that after baptism, concupiscence is not a sin, unless, of course, some actual sin follows. Ratisbonne does not say, as Worms did, that the concupiscence remaining after baptism is in itself something opposed to the law of God.

Among the terms used to indicate the forgiveness of original sin, the Protestants would have been pleased to find their favorite phrase, "non-imputation."

Ratisbonne is a remarkable undertaking. It was the last great attempt to heal the break. But it was too late; events had moved too far; the breach was too wide and too fundamental. It was to try the impossible. For our question, however, the article on original sin shows that it was possible to synthesize the two positions in some fashion.

When we come to the session of Trent dealing with original sin we detect a no-nonsense attitude. The Legates are fully in control

³⁸ A. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 504ff.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 507ff., esp. p. 509.

and determined to keep things moving along at a good pace. The session could not go on much longer and they wanted concrete results.

Some of the bishops could not see much difference between the Catholic and Protestant positions. They tended to feel that the differences were merely verbal and even that there was basic agreement. Some thought that the only difficulty was over the question of the sin remaining after baptism. In some of their letters the Legates expressed concern about some of the bishops. It is easy to criticize their ignorance and lack of theological acumen, but perhaps there is a good attitude here of fearing too much definiteness and a real feeling, even subconsciously, for the complexity of the matter. During the session more than one man was accused of expressing himself in a Lutheran way. Bonucci, the General of the Servites, was openly accused of Lutheran sympathies; and Seripando, the General of the Augustinians, was thought to write in a very Lutheran way.

On June 9, 1546, a list of thirteen errors was read in the Council. The list can be criticized as poorly worded, looking more to the past than to contemporary problems, and even evidencing some misunderstanding of the Protestant position. To some extent it corresponds to the not uncommon feeling that the Protestants were mainly repeating heresies long since condemned. The list follows:

Primus error est ille notissimus Pelagii, nos non nasci aut etiam concipi peccatores, sive nullam peccati labem ex nostra generatione contrahere. Quem errorem damnavit concilium Milevitanum.

Secundus est Valentini, Manichaei et Priscilliani, ex Christiano coniugio natos non contrahere originalis culpae contagionem. Quem errorem damnavit Innocentius I et profligavit Augustinus lib. [2.] de peccat. meritis et remissione cap. 25. et 26. Tertius est Pelagianorum, quem etiam secutus est Erasmus, Paulum ad Rom. 5 huius peccati originalis nullam prorsus facere mentionem.

Quartus, (quem Pighius sequi videtur), peccatum originale nihil esse in uno quoque nostrum, sed esse dumtaxat ipsam Adae praevaricationem, quae re vera nobis non insit, sed soli Adae.

Quintus est Martini Lutheri, concupiscentiam nobis innatam atque inspersam, quae remanet in baptizatis, esse peccatum

originale; quae sc. concupiscentia complete atque praecise sortita sit originalis peccati rationem.

Sextus eiusdem Martini Lutheri, originale peccatum esse concupiscentiam ultimo praecepto decalogi notatam.

Septimus est Pelagii, peccatum originale esse praevaricationis Adae imitationem.

Octavus eiusdem est Pelagii, quem Martinus Lutherus sequitur, ad peccatum huiusmodi expiandum in parvulis baptisma non esse necessarium.

Nonus eiusdem etiam Pelagii, ad quem errorem Martinus Lutherus accedere videtur, puellos non baptizatos morientes non damnari, sed salvari et vitae aeternae fieri possessores, licet ad regnum Christi non pertineant. Contra quem errorem late scripsit Augustinus.

Decimus est Psallianorum, Euchitarum, Messalianorum et Manichaeorum, baptismum infantibus nihil prodesse. Quem errorem etiam Anabaptistae sectantur.

Undecimus est eorundem Anabaptistarum, parvulos in infantia baptizatos rebaptizandos esse.

Duodecimus est eorum qui dicunt, quoslibet infantium actus, quamvis ratione careant, esse peccata, atque in eiusmodi consistere peccati originalis rationem, nullaque alia ratione eos esse baptizandos quam ut haec sola peccata expientur.

Tertius decimus est eorum qui tenent, non unum esse peccatum originale, sed plura. Quem errorem Magister sententiarum confutat 33. distinctione.

(Quorum errorum unusquisque hodie suos habet defensores.)40

This, then, is the situation as the Council of Trent opens. Both sides are working in the same general framework and theology. The chief dispute is over Luther's view of concupiscence, particularly as it is, in his mind, to be called sin even after baptism, and his feeling that the Catholics are really Pelagian. It seems there was a tendency among some Catholics to whittle down the nature of concupiscence to a purely physical phenomena or to make it innocuous by reducing it to the status of a morally indifferent natural power of the soul. Such views were, of course, anathema to Luther who fought them vigorously.⁴¹ Both sides looked at Scripture in the same way and

⁴⁰ Concilium Tridentinum, Vol. V, pp. 212-213.

⁴¹ Cf. H. Jedin, op. cit. pp. 145-146.

interpreted it in a far more literal and historical way than is done today.

It is important to realize these things when we try to interpret the teaching of the Council. The Fathers at Trent intended to give a summary of the church's teaching on original sin as they understood it and in doing this to refute certain ancient and contemporary errors. To do this they used a certain view of Sacred Scripture, a certain view of the traditional teaching, and a particular theology. Now with a different view of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, that is, a better exegesis, a better knowledge of tradition, and perhaps even different theologies, we may be able to see more clearly the basic truths about man and his relation to God and Christ that are contained in this decree on original sin.

The pertinent passages of Scripture can be classed as historical aetiology. Father Rahner describes very well what is involved here:

Aetiology in the widest sense is the assigning of the reason or cause of another reality. In a narrower sense it means indicating an earlier event as the reason for an observed state of affairs or occurrence in human affairs, the observed state of affairs being the means whereby the cause is known. The reference back to an earlier event may take the form of a figurative representation of a cause which, however, is only designed vividly to express and impress on the mind the state of affairs actually observed. That is mythological aetiology, and it may be quite conscious and deliberate or it may be accompanied by belief in the occurrence of the earlier event. Frequently in this matter without consciously realizing it the human mind hovers in an imaginative, meditative way in the attempt to represent to itself the present condition of mankind, or of a nation or an actual concrete situation, or something that imposes inescapable obligations, and at the same time to trace this back to its original cause, and the one endeavor supports the conditions of the other. The reference back to an earlier event may, however, be genuine, that is to say, the objectively possible, well-founded and successful inference of an historical cause from a present state of affairs. The state of affairs itself is more clearly grasped and the real cause and its present consequence are seen in one perspective. The degree to which the true historical cause is grasped in its own concrete reality may vary considerably. Correspondingly the manner in which the inferred cause of what actually exists is stated, because it is a case of something merely inferred, is almost inevitably expressed in a more or less figurative manner which does not belong to the earlier event itself but derives from the world of experience of the aetiologist. This is historical aetiology.⁴²

A recent writer sums up the scriptural teaching on original sin in this way:

Throughout the whole Bible one finds the constant doctrine that man, left to himself, is mere "flesh," weak, transient, mortal, and therefore prone to sin. The human condition is a sinful condition. Left to himself man is orientated towards death, death physical and spiritual. Only the vivifying Spirit of God can lift man out of his sinful condition and open to him the portals of eternal life. This is the essential dogmatic teaching of the Scriptures.⁴³

Rahner summarized the scriptural teaching in this way:

Consequently we know nothing except that man was created by God as God's personal partner in a sacred history of salvation and perdition; that concupiscence and death do not belong to man as God wills him to be, but to man as a sinner; that the first man was also the first to incur guilt before God and his guilt as a factor of man's existence historically brought about by man, belongs intrinsically to the situation in which the whole subsequent history of humanity unfolds.⁴⁴

Our knowledge of the development of the doctrine of original sin allows us to see better how it grew from the beginnings in Scripture. F. R. Tennant concludes his study of the early development in this way:

It has been seen that though Judaism, in the earliest Christian centuries, possessed definite theories of Original Sin, these were not taken over in their Jewish form by the Fathers of the Church. The doctrine of the Fall, as a whole, was deduced afresh. S. Paul was, of course, the connecting link between Jewish and Christian teaching on this point. His doctrine of Adam was derived from the Jewish schools; and it served to

42 K. Rahner, Hominisation, pp. 35-36.

44 K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴⁸ K. Condon, C.M., "The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin," Irish Theological Quarterly, 34, 1967, p. 36.

mould, to a considerable extent, the subsequent thought of the Fathers. But the ecclesiastical doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin were not deduced from S. Paul's brief statements on these subjects; in fact they were not contained therein. Irenaeus, in whom a Christian doctrine of the Fall first appears, seems to have been guided to his view of the connexion between the sinful race and its first parent by his doctrine of Recapitualation. The passage Rom. v. 12ff. was used to confirm the results thus obtained, but does not appear to have been the starting point whence Irenaeus set out.

Immediately later than Irenaeus, we have the practically simultaneous appearance of two definite theories, at once explaining the nature of hereditary taint and the mode of its propagation, and also accounting for the virtual participation of the race in Adam's sin. Tertullian, in the West, seems to have been enabled to furnish the very concrete and definite hypothesis contained in his writings by the traducianist psychology which he borrowed from heathen philosophers. In spite of his own protestations, we must consider Stoicism the main factor in his theory of the propagation of sin from Adam; without this external aid, his ideas as to original sin would probably have been more akin to the much less definite notions of Irenaeus. Origen, in the East, does not set out from S. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, not yet from the position attained by Irenaeus. Entirely new influences seem to have guided his mind towards the acceptance of a view essentially identical with that later elaborated by Augustine. And these influences again were quite different from those which enabled Tertullian to advance, to so marked an extent, upon Irenaeus. The traditional practice of infant baptism in the Church, and certain Old Testament passages relating to inherent sinfulness and to the impurity attributed by the Law to human birth, appear to have suggested to Origen's mind the idea of hereditary taint of sin attaching to all men; and in casting about for an explanation of this, he would seem to have come upon the truth of racial solidarity as expressed by S. Paul, and to have proceeded to formulate that solidarity in terms of the notion of mankind's potential (seminal) existence in their first father, just as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews regarded Levi as existing, and paying tithe, in Abraham.

Such, then, are the sources, insofar as they are avowed in the writings of the pre-Augustinian Fathers, or are to be inferred from them. After Tertullian and Origen but little development was needed, save in the elaboration of details and the thinking

out of consequences, to carry speculation with regard to the Fall and Original Sin onward to the point attained by S. Augustine. Such development proceeded uniformly in the West. Tertullian's results being generally accepted, though the means whereby, in the main, they were reached, i.e., his traducianist ideas, were rejected. In the East where, it should be noted, the essential ideas of the Augustinian theory had been formulated as early as in the West, development was more interrupted. Teachers in the age subsequent to that of Origen neglected the doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin contained in this Father's later writings, and relapsed into the indefiniteness of thought characteristic of Irenaeus and the Greek apologists. The Cappadocians, however, and Gregory of Nyssa in particular, supply a link between the fully-developed doctrine of Augustine and its germ which had long before appeared in Origen.

Finally, if the results thus summarised be essentially correct, an important conclusion may be drawn which the present writer has ventured to presuppose elsewhere, and has here sought to justify: "that the development of the highly complicated doctrine of Original Sin was less the outcome of strict exegesis than due to the exercise of speculation: speculation working, indeed, on the lines laid down in Scripture, but applied to such material as current science and philosophy were able to afford." (The author's *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 41.) 45

Before actually discussing the canons of Trent, I would like to list and briefly comment on the canons of the Council of Carthage and the Second Council of Orange.

Carthage (418)

- 1. Whoever says that Adam, the first man, was made mortal, so that, whether he sinned or whether he did not sin, he would die in body, that is he would go out of the body not because of the merit of sin but by reason of the necessity of nature, let him be anathema (Denz., 101, 222).
- 2. Likewise it has been decided that whoever says that infants fresh from their mothers' wombs ought not to be baptized, or says that they are indeed baptized unto the remis-

⁴⁵ F. R. Tennant, The Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin in the Fathers before Augustine, pp. 343-345. It should be noted that Tennant mentions the influence of the practice of the Church in the development of the doctrine, e.g., infant baptism.

sion of sins, but that they draw nothing of the original sin from Adam, which is expiated in the bath of regeneration, whence it follows that in regard to them the form of baptism "unto the remission of sins" is understood as not true, but as false, let him be anathema. Since what the Apostle says: "Through one man sin entered into the world (and through sin death), and so passed into all men, in whom all have sinned" (cf. Rom. 5:12), must not be understood otherwise than as the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized unto the remission of sins, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration (Denz., 102, 223).

The Council of Carthage was a provincial council, but it did receive some approval from Pope Zosimus. Whether he approved all the canons in general or all separately and expressly or only some expressly is not clear. Canons three to five seem to have received express approval, while it is not clear that canons 1 and 2 cited above were ever expressly approved. The strong affirmation of corporal death as the result of sin found in canon 1 has never been so strongly and unequivocally repeated in later documents, although it has been generally taught. The second canon affirms the existence of original sin from birth and the efficacy of baptism. Romans 5:12 is cited according to the incorrect "in quo" (in whom) translation. Regardless of what the Fathers of the Council may have thought about the exegesis of the passage no more can be said than that they are affirming that the passage refers to original sin.

Council of Orange (529)

1. If anyone says that by the offense of Adam's transgression not the whole man, that is according to body and soul, was changed for the worse, but believes that while the liberty of the soul endures without harm, the body only is exposed to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius and resists the Scripture which says: "The soul, that has sinned, shall die" (Ezech. 18:20); and: "Do you not know that to whom you show yourselves servants to obey, you are the servants of him whom you obey?" (Rom. 6:16); and: "Anyone is adjudged the slave of him by whom he is overcome" (II Pet. 2:19). (Denz., 174, 371.)

2. If anyone asserts that Adam's transgression injured him alone and not his descendants, or declares certainly that death of the body only, which is the punishment of sin, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul, passed through one man into the whole human race, he will do an injustice to God, contradicting the Apostle who says: "Through one man sin entered in the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed into all men, in whom all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). (Denz., 175, 372.)

The Council of Orange was a Provincial Council approved by Pope Boniface II. There is considerable dispute concerning the origin of the canons of Orange, but for our purposes it is not necessary to solve all the problems in this matter.⁴⁶ This Council is generally said to be against the semi-Pelagians and Faustus of Riez who had died about 30 years before this. Most of the canons are on grace and free will, although canons 1 and 2 (reproduced above) are on original sin.⁴⁷

46 The principal discussions of this can be found in: D. M. Cappuyns, "L'origine des 'capituala' de Orange 529," Rech. Theol. Anc. et Méd., 6, 1934, p. 121; and G. Fritz, "Orange (deuxiéme Concile d')," D. T. C., vol. XI, col. 1087-1103; and J. P. Redding, The Influence of St. Augustine on the Doctrine of the II Council of Orange Concerning Original Sin. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1939. Of the 25 canons of Orange the first eight present the most difficulty. Usually they are attributed to Caesarius of Arles but Cappuyns suggests they may be the work of John Maxentius, the leader and spokesman of the Scythian monks. However, this view does not seem to have met with too much acceptance. The origin of canon 10 is unknown. All the rest are taken from Prosper of Aquitaine's work Sententiae ex operibus S. Augustini delibatae, P.L. 51, 427-496.

⁴⁷ J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, Vol. III, p. 294 comments on Orange: "While sanctioning the doctrine of the inability of the unaided will to do good, and of the necessity of prevenient grace even for the beginning of faith and the work of salvation, these teachings make no reference to those Augustinian assertions that were the most vulnerable and the most fiercely contested on both sides. Nothing is said on the intrinsic malice of concupiscence; on its agency in the transmission of original sin; on the mass *damnata*, on the lot of unbaptized children; on the nature of grace and its irresistibility; on the twofold delectation and the way in which we are carried away by the one or the other; on the small number of the elect and God's will to save all men. Nothing is said of predestination, except to condemn those who assert that God predestines men to sin and evil. On the other hand, the Council affirms, that, by joining their efforts to God's grace, all those who are baptized, can and must fulfill their duties. This was equivalent to declaring that grace is never wanting to Christians, and that it does not accomplish everything in them."

The second canon condemns two Pelagian errors, that is, it is against saying that the sin of Adam hurt only himself, and against those who say that only death as a pain or punishment is transmitted and not sin itself. In other words, it is affirming the basic notion of an hereditary sin.

The first canon is more difficult to interpret and not all the scholars look on it in the same way. I am inclined to follow Vanneste's interpretation which I will present here.⁴⁸ The point of the canon concerns man's freedom. Original sin has harmed man's liberty. The same point comes up in canon 8 and in canon 13. Canon 8 says: "If anyone maintains that some by mercy, but others by free will, which it is evident has been vitiated in all who have been born of the transgression of the first man, are able to come to the grace of baptism . . ." (Denz., 181, 378). And canon 13 says: "Freedom of will weakened in the first man . . ." (Denz., 186, 383). The same point is made in the conclusion where we read:

... we ought to proclaim and to believe that through the sin of the first man free will was so changed and so weakened that afterwards no one could either love God as he ought, or believe in God, or perform what is good on account of God, unless the grace of divine mercy reached him first (Denz., 199, 396).

This notion that the will has been wounded, freedom weakened, which later became quite traditional, is here something of an innovation or at least not exactly according to what might be expected.

This can be shown, if one compares canon 13 of Orange with its source in Prosper of Aquitaine:

Prosper: Arbitrium voluntatis tunc est vere liberum, cum vitiis peccatisque non servit. Tale datum est a Deo, quod amissum, nisi a quo potuit dari, non potest reddi. Unde veritas dicit, Si vos Filius liberaverit, tunc vere liberi eritis. 49

Orange: Arbitirum voluntatis in primo homine infirmatum,

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Vanneste, "Le Décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel," Nouvelle Revue Théologique, 87, 1965, pp. 699-706.

⁴⁹ Prosper op. cit., sent. 152 (P.L. 51, 448). It is taken from St. Augustine, City of God, bk 14, c. XI, 1; (P.L. 41, 418-419).

nisi per gratiam baptismi non potest reparari; "quod amissum, nisi a quo potuit dari, non potest reddi. Unde Veritas ipsa dicit; Si vos Filius liberaverit, tunc vere liberi eritis" (Denz., 186, 383).

The difference is clear. Prosper is saying that liberty consists in not being the slave of sin, and that the sinner is a slave of sin and can only be free through the grace of Christ. As a sinner he has lost his liberty. On the other hand, for the Council of Orange freedom is only weakened by original sin.

Prosper's view seems to be quite in line with much of Augustine's anti-Pelagian thought. He is fond of saying that freedom remains after sin, but that we are incapable of doing good, and sometimes he even says we have lost freedom. The semi-Pelagian reaction consists precisely in the defense of human freedom. Faustus of Riez attacked both those who said full freedom and those who said no freedom after sin. (Ita ex parte alia cecidit, dum arbitrii libertatem integram praedicat et inlaesam, sicut illi qui eam ex toto asserunt fuisse evacuatam.) It is this view of Faustus that seems to be accepted by canon one of Orange.

Certainly it must be admitted that this is not altogether opposed to Saint Augustine, for his thought is very complex and difficult to systematize. When Augustine speaks in a wider context of human nature and not just of freedom, he often mentions that human nature is weakened and wounded by sin. However, he is not inclined to speak this way about human freedom. In this case he is more likely to be impressed by man's slavery to sin and the true freedom that is found only in Christ.⁵⁰

Thus the point of view of the first canon of Orange is that the human will is wounded by original sin, but not fully corrupt. To justify this semi-Pelagian teaching one can appeal to the more general Augustinian theme of the depravation or wounding of human nature by original sin.

As we come to the actual discussions of Trent the situation is clear. Original sin must be treated because of the Protestant teachings, especially the Lutheran view of the sin remaining after baptism.

⁵⁰ For a fuller presentation of this cf. Vanneste as cited above.

In general the Catholics felt that the errors in the air on original sin were not really new, but could be found also in the past. Within Catholic theology there were a number of scholastic disputes on various aspects of original sin. The Council did not want to get involved in these matters. Furthermore they were aware that the Protestants often called the Catholic position Pelagian. Thus it is easy to see why the Council drew up a list of authoritative statements from previous councils and popes.⁵¹ Naturally it would also be opportune to re-affirm the definitions of Carthage and Orange against Pelagian ideas.

On May 24, 1546, a series of questions on original sin was given to the minor theologians. From these questions and from some of the discussions of the following general congregations, it appears that the intention was to have a much more profound decree than the one we actually have. But various circumstances such as the state of the question itself, the relative scarcity of bishops, and the shortness of time made this impossible.⁵²

On June 7, 1546, a proposed decree, written chiefly by the legates and two Franciscans, was submitted to the Council.⁵³ This draft of the decree consisted of four canons.

1. The first canon concerns Adam's sin and what it does to him. Adam's sin entailed for him the loss of the holiness and righteousness with which he had been endowed, God's anger, the death of the body and slavery to Satan. The canon is very strong in stating that both the body and soul of Adam were wounded by sin and that no part of the soul remained unaffected.

2. These punishments and in fact, sin itself did not touch the

⁵¹ Cf. C. T., vol. V, p. 170; May 28, 1546.

⁵² Cf. ibid., pp. 163-164. H. Jedin, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 134 comments as follows: Those who framed these three sets of questions evidently had a three-fold purpose in mind. First of all they sought to induce the theologians to make the positive proofs of the Church's teaching on this subject accessible to the bishops. Secondly, they wished to prevent them from expounding scholastic controversies on the nature of original sin before the Council and to get them to limit themselves to the descriptive method. The purpose of the third question was that they should formulate the fundamental difference between the Catholic and Lutheran teaching about concupiscence which remains after baptism."

⁵³ For the text of this proposed decree cf. C. T., vol. V, p. 196ff. Here I will present only a summary according to Jedin, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 150-151.

person of Adam only, but in accordance with a general law (secundum communem legem) were transmitted to the whole human race.

- 3. This disease of original sin, which is transmitted through procreation, not by imitation, and is proper to each human person, is remitted through the merits of Jesus Christ applied through faith and baptism.
- 4. Because every child, even though born of baptised parents, is infected by original sin, it must be baptised in order that it may obtain eternal life by being bathed in the laver of baptism. Baptism takes away not only the guilt of original sin but likewise whatever is sin in the true and proper sense of the word, so that nothing remains in the baptised that is hateful in God's sight. However, there remain in the baptised "concupiscence," or a "tinder," "and a weakness or sickness of nature" (manere in baptizatis concupiscentiam vel fomitem, naturae infirmitatem ac morbum). These "relics of sin," St. Paul describes sometimes by the term "sin," but the Catholic Church has at no time regarded them as sin in the proper sense of the word, but only insofar as they stem from sin and incline to sin. For this view of concupiscence the decree appeals to St. Augustine and declares the Thomistic formula according to which the formal element of sin is removed by baptism while the material element remains, to be not unacceptable (non improbat).

From the records of the Council we have a good idea of the course of the discussion of this draft. Following Jedin⁵⁴ we can summarize the principal points in this way. There was a fair amount of disagreement over the description of Adam's state before sin as one of holiness or sanctity. A number of the fathers wanted to call it rectitude or innocence rather than holiness.

Secondly, the teaching of the decree on the ethical evaluation of concupiscence in the baptised was felt to be self-contradictory. On the one hand it stated that original sin was completely blotted out by baptism so that nothing remained in the baptised that could offend the eye of God while on the other hand it referred to relics of original sin. If you can speak of relics it seems that something remains which is still somehow sin.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 152ff.

Another point at issue was the phrase "in accordance with a general law" of the second canon. It was thought by some that this failed to take into account adequately the position of the Blessed Virgin. There were some other difficulties, e.g., the phrase "through faith and the sacrament of baptism" was thought to be too Protestant, but this gives the general idea of the discussion.

The proposed decree was then reworked with the discussions in mind. The revised decree with only a few minor changes became the final decree. We can now proceed to examine this final version of the decree. The first canon of Trent's decree on original sin is as follows: 55

1. If anyone does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he transgressed the commandment of God in paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice in which he had been constituted, and through the offense of that prevarication incurred the wrath and indignation of God, and thus death with which God had previously threatened him, and, together with death, captivity under his power who thenceforth had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil, and that the entire Adam through that offense of prevarication was changed in body and soul for the worse, let him be anathema.

Both similarities and differences are evident here in relation to the first canon of the Council of Orange. One difference is that Trent speaks only of Adam and not also of his descendants. Trent does not speak here of the wounding of human freedom.

In comparing this canon with the first draft of the decree we note that the strong emphasis of the phrase that no part of the soul remained unaffected by sin is left out. Adam is said to have been constituted in holiness and justice and not created in this state as the draft had it. The words "holiness and justice" were kept in spite of the objections of some. Even though many commentators equate "holiness" with sanctifying grace, I think this is a bit hasty. If they had wanted to say grace, they could have very easily, and in fact, it seems that the word grace may have been deliberately avoided, since it did come up.

⁵⁵ This decree is cited in the translation of H. J. Schroeder, O.P., Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941), pp. 21-23.

The phrase about incurring the wrath and indignation of God would probably have pleased the Reformers. Vanneste feels that both the scholastics and the Reformers could accept this description of the effects of original sin in Adam.⁵⁶

One gets the impression that the Council Fathers tried to avoid taking any controversial positions on questions and to keep things as open as possible. They avoided scholastic disputes and scholastic terminology. They sought for inoffensive formulas that everyone could agree upon, trying as far as possible to use scriptural and patristic phrases.

It would seem, then, that we do not have to take the references to Adam in the traditional monogenistic sense, even though the Fathers were thinking in these terms. It is not the point they were concerned about. Adam can have the same meaning here as in the Scriptures. Polygenism is not ruled out by this decree. Modern exegesis finds no dogmatic barrier in this definition.

Note also that there is no detailed description of the state of man before sin. None of the traditional gifts are in the canon. Man is merely said to have been constituted in holiness and justice. Precisely what this means is not spelled out.

What this canon seems to say is that soon after man begins to be he becomes a sinner. This sin disrupts and drastically changes his previous relation to God. The change is so profound that we can say that the entire human person is affected for the worse. (The decree expresses this by the words "in body and soul.") Death is prominent among these changes. Certainly the Fathers were thinking of ordinary physical death as a punishment for this sin, but it is not clear that this is actually being defined in the sense in which death and immortality are usually spoken of in this matter. This particular point was not under dispute at the time and it did not figure explicitly in the discussions. It is repeated here as part of the tradition. Even though much of the tradition has understood it in the usual sense, the tradition is ultimately dependent on revelation, and revelation does not seem to be all that clear on the matter, for death has a wide range of meaning in Scripture. Some have suggested that the

⁵⁶ Vanneste, op. cit., p. 711.

death involved as a punishment of sin may mean a change in the way death affects man or man experiences death. At any rate it does not seem that we can say for certain that Trent is here defining immortality as a gift to man before sin and simple physical death as a punishment for sin. It is certain that man's relationship to death has changed because of sin, but what this means exactly is not clear.

The second canon of Trent's decree reads as follows:

2. If anyone asserts that the transgression of Adam injured him alone and not his posterity, and that the holiness and justice which he received from God, which he lost, he lost for himself alone and not for us also; or that he, being defiled by the sin of disobedience, has transfused only death and the pains of the body into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul, let him be anathema, since he contradicts the Apostle who says: By one man sin entered into the world and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.

This canon is basically a reworked version of canon 2 of the Council of Orange. It is very close to the canon of the draft. The final version leaves out the phrase secundum communem legem, which provoked a dispute in relation to the Blessed Virgin, and also modified the phrases on death. I would like to comment briefly on this, paraphrasing Dubarle.⁵⁷ Earlier we noted the strong words on death in the Council of Carthage. Trent did not take this up. Furthermore the archives of Trent contain a much stronger canon that seems never to have come up for discussion. "Qui ergo dixerit Adam omnino moriturum etiam si non peccasset, anathema sit."58 Trent also modified the canon of Orange in a significant fashion. Orange declared that Adam had handed on to his posterity bodily death, which is the penalty of sin, and sin, which is the death of the soul. Trent states that Adam passed on to his descendants death and bodily sufferings and sin, which is the death of the soul. After this rearrangement it is no longer clear that the text is speaking of bodily death to the exclusion of 'death' in the very full biblical sense of the word, all the more so as the definitive text left out a clause of the draft, which

⁵⁷ Cf. A. M. Dubarle, O.P., The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin, p. 236.
⁵⁸ C. T., vol. XII, p. 567, line 49.

spoke of sin 'to which is due both the death of the body and of the soul as a penalty'.⁵⁹

The point of this canon is quite clear. It is at the very heart of the doctrine of original sin, that is, man's solidarity in sin. The first canon noted the beginning of sin and the effects of sin. The second canon teaches that these effects and, in fact, sin itself are passed into the whole human race. In effect, this is a repudiation of Zwingli, although there is no indication that the Council was thinking explicitly about him. From another point of view we are approaching the truth that all men need to be saved by Christ.

The third canon of Trent's decree on original sin is:

3. If anyone asserts that this sin of Adam, which in its origin is one, and by propagation, not by imitation, transfused into all, which is in each one as something that is his own, is taken away either by the forces of human nature or by a remedy other than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to God in his own blood, made unto us justice, sanctification and redemption; or if he denies that that merit of Jesus Christ is applied both to adults and to infants by the sacrament of baptism rightly administered in the form of the Church, let him be anathema; for there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved. Whence that declaration: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world; and that other: As many of you as have been baptized, have put on Christ.

The thought of the decree now moves to the remedy for original sin. This sin cannot be taken away by any natural remedy, only the merits of Jesus Christ will do. Christ is the universal Savior of all. This merit of Christ is applied to both adults and children through the sacrament of baptism. The final decree left out the phrase "through faith" because of the uses of the Protestants. The affirmation of infant baptism would be against the Anabaptists.

There are several important clauses in the first part of the canon to be considered. This sin is transmitted by propagation not by imitation. Obviously this is anti-Pelagian. Strictly speaking what it

⁵⁹ C. T., vol. V, p. 196f.

means is that as man enters this world he has this sin in him. The simple fact of being born into this world is all that is needed to have this sin. It is not necessary that it be acquired by one's own actions, nor that procreation be the active agent in the transmission of the sin.

The clauses "this sin of Adam, which in its origin is one, . . . which is in each one as something that is his own" are more complicated. The reference to the sin in each one is directed against the teaching of Pighi. This seems clear from error #4 and from the use of the Pighian terminology of "sin of Adam" for original sin. Without going into the complexities of Pighi's theory, let it suffice to say that he seemed to hold that there was only one sin of origin, Adam's, and that this was somehow imputed to all others, but it never really became the individual's own. The opposition of the Council is clear.

The phrase "which in its origin is one" is a carefully worded clause designed to preserve the unity of original sin without falling into the theory of Pighi. In other words, original sin is one in origin but multiple in each of the descendants. Vanneste suggests the possibility that the Fathers of the Council may have been concerned about the unity of original sin because of certain ideas or expressions among the Protestants that tended to confuse the distinction between original and actual sin. This would naturally endanger the unity of original sin. 60

Here is the fourth canon of Trent:

4. If anyone denies that infants, newly born from their mothers' wombs, are to be baptized, even though they be born of baptized parents, or says that they are indeed baptized for the remission of sins, but that they derive nothing of original sin from Adam which must be expiated by the laver of regeneration for the attainment of eternal life, whence it follows that in them the form of baptism for the remission of sins is to be understood not as true but as false, let him be anathema, for what the Apostle has said, by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned, is not to be understood otherwise than as the Catholic Church has everywhere and always understood it. For in virtue of this rule of faith handed down from the apostles, even infants who could not as yet commit

⁶⁰ Cf. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 724f.

any sin of themselves, are for this reason truly baptized for the remission of sins, in order that in them what they contracted by generation may be washed away by regeneration. For, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

So far Trent's decree has treated of original sin in Adam, in his descendants, and the remedy for this sin in Christ and Christian baptism. The fourth canon treats original sin in connection with the baptism of infants. The wording of this canon is taken almost exactly from the second canon of Carthage. A few more clarifications have been added, i.e., even the children of baptised parents have original sin, infant baptism is based on an apostolic tradition, baptism is necessary for eternal life, and John 3:5 is cited as well as Rom. 5:12. This canon is obviously against the Anabaptists.⁶¹

The thrust of this canon is clear. Original sin is a fact even in infants and they must be baptised for the remission of this sin and the attainment of eternal life.

In citing Romans 5:12 the Council is opposing itself to Erasmus who held this text has nothing to do with original sin. I do not intend to go into the history of the exegesis of this passage, which includes the difference between the Latin and Greek translations and exegesis. Suffice it to say that all the Council is saying for certain is that in this text St. Paul is treating of original sin.

I would like to note in passing here that this canon makes it quite clear that original sin and guilt are not the same as actual sin and guilt, for the Council speaks of "infants who could not as yet commit any sin of themselves." We have two quite distinct kinds of things.

The fifth and final canon reads as follows:

- 5. If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is
- 61 I suspect that the practice of infant baptism helped clarify the doctrine of original sin. In other words, the Church was baptising infants and the question would arise why baptise them? The answer would be because in some way they are sinners. I suspect that it would be this way and not the other way around, i.e., that the Church was conscious of the infants being sinners and therefore decided to baptise them. However, I did not verify this. In other words, the practice of the Church would here precede theological theory.

remitted, or says that the whole of that which belongs to the essence of sin is not taken away, but says that it is only canceled or not imputed, let him be anathema. For in those who are born again God hates nothing, because there is no condemnation to those who are truly buried together with Christ by baptism unto death, who walk not according to the flesh, but, putting off the old man and putting on the new one who is created according to God, are made innocent, immaculate, pure, guiltless and beloved of God, heirs indeed of God, joint heirs with Christ; so that there is nothing whatever to hinder their entrance into heaven. But this holy council perceives and confesses that in the one baptized there remains concupiscence or an inclination to sin, which, since it is left for us to wrestle with, cannot injure those who do not acquiesce but resist manfully by the grace of Jesus Christ; indeed, he who shall have striven lawfully shall be crowned. This concupiscence, which the Apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy council declares the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin in the sense that it is truly and properly sin in those born again, but in the sense that it is of sin and inclines to sin. But if anyone is of the contrary opinion, let him be anathema.

It is only in this last canon that the dispute with the Reformers comes to the fore. Even Calvin remarked that he had no difficulty with the first four canons. 62 This canon insists that the grace of Christ through baptism truly remits original sin. After baptism there remains a concupiscence or inclination to sin, but this is not harmful unless it is consented to. Even though Paul sometimes call this concupiscence sin, it is not truly and properly sin in the baptised, but it is of sin and inclines to sin. In other words, Trent is making a distinction between concupiscence before and after baptism. After baptism it is not sinful.

This canon is new and does not hark back to Carthage or Orange. It is, in a way, the heart of the decree, for it was the difficulties of the Reformers which made a decree on original sin necessary. All told it is probably a good statement, even the part about concupiscence being not a true sin but of sin and inclining to sin is very close to the language of Luther himself in his commentary on Romans 7:17, and to the agreements of Worms and Ratisbonne.

⁶² Cf. Vanneste, op. cit., p. 713.

Finally we should note that in the decree on justification the reality of freedom in man is affirmed, even though it is a weakened freedom (Denz., 793, 1521 and 815, 1555).

CONCLUSION

Now I would like to summarize what I think the Council of Trent affirmed with the fullness of its authority concerning original sin. This must be seen in the light not only of the history surrounding Trent but also of the affirmations of Carthage and Orange as well, and all of these in the light of revelation. We have tried to do this with a special focus on Trent, considering the way in which the decree was formed, the problems under discussion, the intentions of the Council Fathers, and the light of modern scripture studies and theological problems. This is not an attempt to minimize or to downgrade Trent.

These procedures are necessary not only to our understanding of Trent but to our appreciation of the reality of original sin itself. As John Macquarrie remarked:

Everything of this kind is historically conditioned in respect to its language and even its very concepts, and if it is passed on in a merely mechanical way, it becomes a mere lifeless tradition. Each generation must appropriate the tradition, and in order to do this it has to interpret the ancient formulas, or whatever it may be, into its own categories of thought. This means that one has to ask what the formula was trying to express in its own historical context, or what error it was trying to guard against, and then rethink this in our own situation. This needs more insight and patience than the simple rejection of the tradition, but such reinterpretation is needed if the tradition is to be carried on critically and responsible as a living and growing tradition. 63

Trent represents a development along a particular line and to a particular point, but not every part of that development is equally valuable. Man's basic sinfulness and need of God's grace can be perhaps expressed in other ways that are more meaningful to people today. The problem is to do this in such a way that the revelation,

⁶³ John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, p. 12.

the fundamental insights, the intentionality is preserved. Continuity must be maintained. In this continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation the decrees of ecumenical councils are privileged moments. Here the presence of the Spirit assures us that we do have a worthy statement of belief. It may have many imperfections, and it is, of course, not final, but in its own context it does give a firm place to stand.

From what we have said it seems to me that with the fullness of its authority Trent affirms:

- 1. From his earliest days man has been a sinner, and sin drastically changes the relationship between man and God so much so that man himself can be said to be changed particularly in relation to death.
- 2. There is a solidarity in sin so that the sin of man injures not only himself but those who come after him and this is so true that all men enter the world as sinners.
- 3. No one can be freed from this sin, which precedes all personal activity, by his own efforts. This sin is taken away only through Jesus Christ, the one Mediator.
- 4. Baptism is the way this mediation of Christ is applied to the individual person. Even the children of Christian parents are born sinners and are to be baptised for the remission of sin.
- 5. The grace of Christ, conferred through baptism, remits the guilt of this sin. However, there does remain in man concupiscence or an inclination to sin, which, while not properly sin in the baptised, is of sin and inclines to sin.
 - 6. Human freedom, even though weakened, remains a reality It is my hope that in this way we can begin to:

penetrate behind the possibly quaint and even alien language of the dogma to the existential issues that agitated the Church at the time of the dogma's formulation, and appropriate for our own time and in our own language the essential insight which the dogma sought to express. Every interpretation, in course of time, demands a new act of interpretation. When it is remembered further that dogmas were usually formulated to exclude particular errors, so that they are frequently more explicit in what they rule out than in what they affirm, it will be understood that the formulation of a dogma does not mean

that some final point has been reached and that future generations are excused from reflecting any more on the matter. The point has been well put by Karl Rahner, with special reference to the Christological dogma: "The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas, the classic condensations of the centuries-long work of the Church in prayer, reflection and struggle concerning God's mysteries; all these derive their life from the fact that they are not end but beginning, not goals but means, truths which open the way to the ever greater Truth." 64

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⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

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