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DOCTRINES ON THE

UNIVERSALITY OF SIN

By Rev. Lee van Rensburg, B.A.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

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LEE VAN RENSBURG

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CHAPTER 1

SCRIPTURAL ROOTS

The doctrines on the universality of sin are attempts to give theological explanations for the empirical and historical evidence of the universality of sin. They are attempts to explain why it is that each and every person that enters this world has a bias towards sin; why such a highly organized, intricate and majestically complex being like man, the crowning glory of the created realm in every case has this weakness we call sin; why it is that after 6,000 years of the history of mankind the present generation is as plagued with this malfunction as the first; why it is that sooner or later all of us commit sin in one form or another.

Indirectly these doctrines also seek to protect God's uniqueness and oneness against the dualism of evil and good and following from this second reason are attempts to explain the presence of sin within the good creation of God. However, these attempts are fraught with difficulties and invariably each explanation that is offered raises other pertinent issues that the Christian thinker does not wish to accept as side effects to his answer. This has resulted in scholars over the ages attempting to modify or reinterpret previous doctrines in order to allow for these issues to be taken into account. There has, therefore, as we shall discover, been much diversity and debate as to the form and contents of these doctrines.

It is, therefore, of importance that we should at the outset seek to bring together the main portions of scripture that speak about the universality of man's sin in order that we might be able to gain a workable background for our study.

In the Old Testament the first book of the Pentateuch seeks to explain how sin first entered into the world and does this with the aid of the Garden of Eden myth. The myth tells that our first ancestors, Adam and Eve were created by God, placed in a garden and in a state of innocence were in perfect harmony with God, the creation and each other. The prerequisite for this continued relation was their obedience to God. However, being created with free will there was always the possibility that they could act against the will of God for them. Initially this freedom is not used but after a while they are tempted by the snake to assert their freedom by going against God's will. Succumbing to the temptation this misuse of their freedom issues in the first sin which destroys the harmony between God and themselves. The result of their sin is expulsion from the presence of God and the deed becomes known as the Fall (a). The children born to Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are not born in the same innocence and fellowship with God as their parents originally were but instead are born into the sinful context that Adam and Eve had entered. They are not born in the Garden but are born outside the Garden away from the presence of God. Actual sin quickly follows in them for Cain slays his brother Abel (Gen. 4 vs. 8). John Wesley commenting on the Fall in his sermon on Original Sin says "fallen Adam then begat a son in his own likeness (now sinful) - nor was it possible that he should beget him in any other way, for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" 1.

As mankind increases from the one source so sin spreads to all men. God's perfection of man and the creation is spoiled because of the sin of Adam and Eve and sin appears in all their offspring, "and God saw that the wickedness was great in the

(a) See footnote at end of chapter.

1. John Wesley, Forty-four Sermons, Sermon XXXVIII, Original Sin.

earth and that every imagination of the thought of man's heart was only evil continually - and it repented the Lord that He had made man on earth, and it grieved Him at His heart" (Gen. 6 vs. 5,6).

The flood (Gen. 7) that comes upon the creation is seen as a judgement of God. Because sin is present in all men God decides as it were to 'start again'. The most righteous of all men, Noah, (and his family) is selected to be the new start for the human race. The entire living creation is then destroyed by the flood except Noah, his family and the animals in the ark. This symbolises a washing clean of the creation. Noah and his family begin again for mankind. However, even the most righteous one proves still to be contaminated, for when the floods subside and the creation has been "washed clean" and Noah and the animals return to living on earth Noah plants a vineyard and from the proceeds becomes drunk. In his stupor he discards his clothes and two of his sons attempt to cover his nakedness with some garments (Gen. 9 vs. 20-23). (Note the interesting parallel with the first sin - Adam and Eve attempt to cover their nakedness and hide their shame with leaves). God perceives that because of their heritage all men will always be sinners and that the "imagination of men's hearts is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8 vs. 21). Man is by nature a sinner.

In the Decalogue the hereditary aspect of sin is more clearly reflected as can be seen in the second commandment "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them (graven images) nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exodus 20 vs. 5). Here it can be seen that sin was being understood to influence more than just the one person who initiated it and that it had decided social implications as well. It was not possible for the children to go free from the effects of the wrong decisions made by their fathers. Here sin is not necessarily to be understood as physically hereditary but more as consequential. Involved in this concept is that the children learn the wrong ways of worship from their fathers and so perpetuate the sin of idolatry and share in the punishment that their ancestors initiated.

The important thing to note here is the idea that sin is transmitted even if the way in which it is transmitted is not yet explicit.

A similar idea appears in Ezekiel "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18 vs. 2) where the Israelite community finds itself in exile and interprets their predicament to be a direct result of their forefathers' sin. (b).

The interesting implication of the hereditary emphasis is that even if the children are not morally culpable they are nonetheless punished. Although the ancestors sinned and morally the children may not be held culpable for their actions yet there is no way in which they cannot be involved because they come from their line. What issues from the fountain head must be found along the course of the stream.

Worthy of note in the Old Testament is the concept that sin is detrimental to physical well being in the sense that sin brings sickness and suffering. This concept is not only reflected in the commandment that we have just looked at viz. if you obey God's will then your life will be long and good and by implication the corrolary, but also reflected in many of the Psalms 1. and more expecially in the reasonings of Job's Three Comforters. 2. This is important because if sin affects the physical realm then it is just one step away to be able to claim that in procreation sin is passed along the line physically. Scholars like Augustine will emphasise a seminal identity of the race with Adam.

Another most important concept to note is the "collective responsibility" that the Old Testament refers to in many places. Sin is often spoken of in terms of whole nations i.e. Sodom and

(b) For footnote see end of chapter,

1. For example Psalm 32 vs. 10 "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked". Sorrow in the Hebrew is a word which may also be translated as pain or suffering. Note the contrast in the second part of the verse "but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about".
2. See Job 15 vs. 20 ff.

Gomorrah; Ninevah, the Assyrians, Babylon, Israel, Judah, etc. where the individual as it were is absorbed into the community. The collective responsibility idea conveyed how it was that the individual shared in the goodness or badness, the blessing or condemnation of his society, benefiting and suffering with the community. The importance of solidarity with the community is unfortunately overlooked today in favour of individualism. This is important when arguing that a child is born into a community and not in isolation and might well share in the sin of that community even from birth.

It is Psalm 51, a psalm of David, that states most clearly that before man has even begun to live he is already contaminated by sin - "behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me". (Psalm 51 vs. 5). This Davidic psalm points out that it is not actual sin that makes us sinners but rather from the very moment of conception the bias towards sin is implanted. Matthew Henry commenting on this verse says "It is sadly lamented by everyone of us that we brought into the world with us a corrupt nature, wretchedly degenerate from its primeval purity and rectitude. This is what is called original sin because it is as ancient as our origin and because it is the original of all our actual transgression. It is a bent to backslide from God". 1. This text is often quoted as evidence or support of the hereditary explanation for the universality of sin.

Thus in Old Testament Scripture we come across many references to the fallen condition of man. However, there is no convincing and adequate explanation as to why sin is universal. Through myth and historical record it points out that man has fallen from innocence, that he has transgressed the will of God for him, that sin results in death, that there is collective responsibility and that sin affects the physical realm. The Old Testament is also a record of the promise, the covenant and the hope that God will redeem man from his plight.

In the New Testament no attempt is made to explain why each and every man is a sinner. It is accepted as "fait accompli".

1. Matthew Henry's Commentary of the Bible - Psalm 51 vs. 5.

reigned for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3 vs. 23). In

In the gospels Jesus does not offer any explanation as to the source of sin but concludes in many instances of its universality. His message at the outset of his ministry is "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4 vs. 17). It is interesting to note that the hereditary type of thinking in regard to sin is very much present at the time of Christ. His disciples on the occasion when they met the man born blind from his birth asked Jesus the question "Master who did sin this man or his parents, that he was born blind" (John 9 vs. 2). Jesus Himself presupposes a sinful historical link between the Pharisees and their forefathers "therefore be witnesses unto yourselves that you are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill you up then the measure of your fathers". (Mr. 23 vs. 31, 32).

In the discourse with Nicodemus Jesus says "unless a man be born again he can in no way see the Kingdom of God (John 3 vs. 5) and by inference concludes that all men are under the domination of sin. That sin has a hereditary nature is implied by His words in the same chapter "That which is of the flesh is flesh" (John 3 vs.6) implying that sin is present from the time of birth and that there is no way in which men may come from their birth as innocent (justified). It is only by an act of God that man can change from what he is to what he ought to be. In the teaching of Christ "the problem of the origin of evil is not emphasized, except insofar as each person, each family, each human grouping is responsible for its disobedience to God's law. It is this universality of sin that constitutes the sin of the world". 1.

The main reference to the universality of sin in the New Testament is given in the Epistles of St. Paul. In Romans 5 Paul writes that by one man sin entered the world, that by one man's offence many died, that because of the offence of one man death reigned in the world and that because of one man's disobedience many were made sinners. It is because of this one man that we all became sinners. Paul also connects original sin with physical death so that even before the law (between Adam and Moses) where men did not know they were sinning death nonetheless

1. H. Rondet - Original Sin, page 21.

reigned for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3 vs. 23). In his first letter to Corinthians the one man is shown to be Adam "in whom all die" (1. Cor. 15 vs. 22). Furthermore according to Paul there is nothing that man can do about his bias towards sin for it is a law within him "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. I see another law in my members working against my mind - the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7 vs. 20). The important contribution that Paul makes is emphasising the distinction between actual sins (fornication, falsehood, etc) and the state of being sinful i.e. not of a particular act or transgression but of sin as a power that is within man even when he is in fact not actually sinning, "as a state or condition of sinfulness, which is much more serious than any particular manifestation of it, leading men to realize that they must repent not only of what they have done but of what they are". 1.

H. Rondet argues that the Pauline reference to original sin is mostly the 'reverse side of a theology of redemption'. "We maintain then, that St. Paul speaks about sin only that he may better emphasize the work of redemption. Even though the sin of Adam, in its origin is remote from our transgression Christ has come not to expiate the one original fault but to redeem us from sin and the servitude to sin. The universality of sin is before all else a presumption of redemption". 2.

The two Testaments thus make many statements about sin in the world, and from the aforementioned scriptural passages the doctrines on the universality of sin have been formulated. The most generally accepted stating that "the sin of the first man was a radical and total delamination of his successors so that it came to them by propagation being passed to their own existence". 3.

However the moment one attempts to systematize and offer an explanation a host of other issues arise that demand to be taken

1. John Mackintosh Shaw - Christian Doctrine page 121.
2. H. Rondet - Original Sin - page 24.
3. Karl Berth - Church Dogmatics 4/1, page 500.

into account. The first question that springs to the fore is about the incarnation. If sin is passed on via the flesh then would not the body that Christ partially received from Mary be tainted by sin? Would it not be that, unless a docetic position is adopted, Christ's sinlessness cannot be possible?

Another question which is raised is whether man, as a result of his sin is totally corrupt or is his corruption only partial allowing for a potentiality towards goodness? If he has a partial goodness to what extent can he use this in returning to God? It is asked if there ever was a state of perfection from which man fell away or was it not rather intended by God that there should be a climb or an evolution towards perfection finally made possible by Christ? Does the Scripture in fact make a distinction between original sin and actual sin?

It is shown that the record in Genesis need not be taken as history but can be understood as myth. A reductio ad absurdum would result if the Garden of Eden story were taken literally i.e. snakes that talk, knowledge contained in an apple, and the trifling offence throwing an entire human race into disharmony, sin and death. If this is so could a seminal identity explanation which envisages the whole human race physiologically present in the first parent be reached without the Adam and Eve account being taken literally? If the account is accepted as "a pictorial or symbolic rather than a definite historical explanation of the entrance of sin into the world - a picture or parable of the entrance of sin into man's life in every age, rather than a definite ascertainable historical event in the life of one individual or individuals way back in the dim dawn of human history". 1. Another explanation for the fall into sin is required.

Questions are also raised as to the involvement of man with his own destiny for if a man's destiny is controlled by Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience to what extent is man a creature of free will? Together with this is the question of whether man can be morally responsible within the situation

1. John Mackintosh Shaw - Christian Doctrine, page 177.

suggested by hereditary sin for surely "No man may be judged guilty because of the misdeeds of his ancestor. Such a judgement would destroy the very meaning of morality". 1. All accounts of the universality of sin must take cognizance of man's ability to act morally.

It is these questions and others, that have influenced the doctrines on the universality of sin over the centuries and we must now begin to trace the attempts in Christian history to grapple with these issues.

1. J.S. Whale - Christian Doctrine, page 46.

FOOTNOTES :

- (a) There are in fact three different accounts of the Fall in the book of Genesis. The account in Genesis 3 is the best known and is the one which we have used. There is a short section in Genesis 6 vs. 1 - 4 that tells of the sons of God having intercourse with the daughters of men with the result that giants are born (Nephalim). Because of their sin God limits the life span of man to 120 years. Here the Fall is seen to be more cosmic than just a misuse of human free will. Sometimes this version is referred to as the fall of the "lustful watchers".

A third account appears in Genesis 11 which tells of the whole earth being of one language and one speech. Mankind then decides to build a tower that will reach up into heaven. God perceives that the imagination in their hearts is evil and descends to confound their language and scatters them over the face of the earth. This is an aetiological attempt to explain the diversity within the human race.

- (b) Ezekiel in fact contradicts this popular and fatalistic belief. In verse 20 - 21 of the same chapter "The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son, the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked shall turn from all his sins that he hath committed and keep all my statutes and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die".

CHAPTER 2

AS FAR AS EAST IS FROM WEST

In the period that followed after the epistles and gospels had been written there was little attempt made by the Christian fathers to formulate any sort of doctrine on the universality of sin. This was probably because their uppermost concern was the spreading of the good news of the redemption in Christ. Their zeal was for mission rather than for consolidating the faith. The early fathers thus tended to affirm passages of scripture that referred to the subject of sin than (really) offering any explanation or systematization.

When the early church thinkers began to say something about the universality of sin the schools of thought were wide and varied and many thinkers in the East and West were not only literally apart but figuratively apart as well. It was normally the case that they were seeking for the truth as individual thinkers rather than being spokesmen for the whole church. In discussing the early Christian thinkers contribution on the subject of the universality of sin we must remember that although some of these attempts might seem extremely far fetched, heretical and radical to us there was at that stage no accepted doctrine on which they could sound their thought. They were groping and feeling towards a foundation that we are privileged to have in our time but was not yet there in their own period. Their attempts however are most important for they begin asking the right questions

even if they did not manage to supply the correct answers.

Firstly we turn our minds to Tertullian in the West. Two things which greatly influenced his thinking on the universality of sin was firstly his literal acceptance of the Genesis record of Adam and Eve and secondly his acceptance of the traducianist theory of the procreation of the human soul. So far as Tertullian was concerned Adam and Eve were historical figures and a date, time and place could be ascribed to their fall. There were also two popular theories on the procreation of the soul in his day, the Creationist theory and the Traducianist theory. The Creationist theory stated that at the moment of conception God, as it were, 'sewed' the soul into the body. The Traducianist, on the other hand, taught that the complete person, i.e. soul and body derived from its parent. Tertullian sided with the Traducianists and emphasized that "the whole man, soul as well as body, is produced by one and the same generative act, and the paternal germ is not merely a portion of the father's body, but is charged with a definite quantity of his soulstuff". 1.

These two influences were conflated in his teaching and he concluded that there was a seminal identity of the human race with Adam. He taught that while Adam received from God a perfect, unblemished and unspoilt human nature after his sin all he could pass on was spoilt, blemished and stained. The consequence was passed along the line because we all come from the same 'soulstuff'. In some choice phrases Tertullian makes this quite clear "ita omnis anima eo usque in Adam censetur, donec in Christo recenseatur". 2. The first man has "infected the whole race by his seed, making it a channel of damnation". 3. However Tertullian in De Annima 4. distinguished between sin that was caused by the devil: and sin that was the consequence of original sin.

1. J.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, page 175
2. Tertullian - De Annima, page 448, Translation and Commentary by J.H. Waszink.
3. Tertullian De Testimonio Animae 3 - Translated by J.D. Kelly in Early Christian Doctrine, page 176
4. De Annima Section 39 - 41

Two other important insights are in his teaching. Firstly even though a traducianist, Tertullian taught quite clearly that each soul was still responsible for its own sin and that free will carried individual responsibility. Secondly he saw that corruption and death were not the only thing we inherited from our first parents but a weakened will and a bias towards sin were also an integral part of the legacy. It is important to note that Gnosticism had a strong influence and following at the time when Tertullian taught and claimed that there had always been a dualism between spirit (good) and matter (evil). It claimed that man was imprisoned within his body and was to seek salvation in knowledge. Tertullian reacting against this teaching emphasized that God had created the material world and that sin had entered via the devil and man's misuse of his free will thus defending the uniqueness of God against opponents such as Marcion. His writings are therefore to be regarded more as a case against Gnosticism than as an attempt to explain the universality of sin.

One of the most interesting contributions to come from this era was that of Irenaeus. Irenaeus spoke of man being born as a child and growing towards God until he reached paradise in his maturity. Paradise is thus a future event and not a past fact. He emphasized the goodness of God in creation and reproached all who would place the judgement of God in Eden before the kindness of God and reminded his readers that it was the serpent that was cursed and not man. Adam is to be understood as the lost sheep of the gospel that is searched for and found.

Expanding his developmental theory he says that just as one cannot give solid food to a small baby so God could not give perfection immediately to his new creation for Adam was not yet able to receive it. Paul himself in Corinthians implies that the Christian had to gradually experience the fullness of the life Christ made available to him. 1. God, says Irenaeus, created Adam at a distance so that he had to learn to walk even though it meant falling a few times before finding his feet.

1. 1. Corinthians 3 vs. 2 "I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it neither yet now are you able".

Irenaeus' thought is adequately described in his *Adversus Haereticos* "For man it was necessary first that he be made, then having been made that he should grow, that having grown he should become adult, he should multiply, that having multiplied he should be fortified; that having been fortified he should be glorified; that having been glorified he should see his Lord, because it is God who should one day be seen. The vision of God brings with it incorruptibility and incorruptibility makes one close to God". 1. Man then does not start with all God's good gifts but arrives at them.

However, although man was created as a babe Irenaeus still had a teaching on the seminal identity of the human race withsinful Adam. This may be inferred from his theory of recapitulation or the physical theory of the atonement. The theory is based on the Second Adam of the Pauline epistle to the Corinthians. Accepting that Adam's seed was stained and that all who followed from his seed would inherit the stain Irenaeus claims that in the virgin birth Jesus begins again for the human race. In not receiving the seed of Adam (i.e. being born of a virgin) and living the life of obedience he was able to win for all who proceeded from Him in faith the benefits that were initially meant for the human race. Irenaeus describes this in a rather involved but very interesting antithesis in which Jesus becomes the new Adam, Mary becomes the new Eve, the cross becomes the tree which brings life and stands in the centre and Christ dies on the sixth day which brings the new life as man received his first life and breath on the sixth day of creation. Christ by his obedience is able to pass on to those who follow Him the life that is acceptable to God which Adam because of his disobedience was not. This thought is most adequately expressed in two verses of a well known hymn :

O loving wisdom of our God
When all was sin and shame
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.

O wisest love that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,

1. *Adversus* 28, 3 translated by H. Rondet in his book "Original Sin", page 41

Should strive afresh against the foe
Should strive and should prevail. 1.

Thus when Jesus became man He "recapitulated in Himself the long sequence of mankind and passed through all the stages of human life, sanctifying each in turn". 2.

Ireneaus' explanation of the universality of sin linked with his explanation of our righteousness in Christ is perhaps the most interesting doctrine on the universality of sin. Interesting because he reveals the movement within Adam and Eve ending rather than beginning with their perfection.

In the East, Clement took a similar approach as Irenaeus teaching a basic inherent goodness in each person. Adam was created as a child who was suitable for achieving virtue and the progress towards this goal was made via the free will that was given to him by God. For Clement, Adam symbolises what in fact happens in all mankind, we are all Adams. He taught that sin was not passed along the line from parent to child but arrived at in each one's own experience by the failure to be obedient to God. However closely Clement reasoned he in fact did not have a doctrine of the universality of sin for in his teaching if an infant died before having committed any acts of sin, as indeed happened, they went into the presence of God as sinless. He appealed to the words of Job in the book of the same name "Naked I came from my mother's womb" (Job. 1. vs. 21) and interpreted the word naked in the sense of innocence. A new born infant did not inherit the sins or guilt of his ancestor Adam but merely the bad example of his forefathers who tended to lead him to sin for himself.

Another interesting attempt to systematise the reason for the universality of sin was made by Origen who attempted to move the fall from a terrestrial to a transcendental plane. Origen taught a pre-existence of souls before physical birth and as such were not generated by Adam but only by God who in the first instance created a fixed number of souls giving to each the opportunity or the free will of moving towards Him or falling

1. Methodist Hymn Book No. 74 vs. 2 and 3,
2. Haer, 3, 16, 6, translated by J.D. Kelly in his book, Early Christian Doctrines, page 172.

away from Him. All except the Logos fell away from God. As part of their punishment they were to be clothed in a physical body and that was in fact what happened at birth. He appeals to the text in Ezekiel 28 vs. 17 "iniquity was found in you so I cast you to the ground" as support for his theory of the pre-existence of souls. Thus the universality of sin on our plane is explained by a pre-cosmic universal fall (except for Christ). Origen was one of the first bold enough to move from the literalness and historicity of the Garden of Eden account of Adam and Eve, and interprets the narrative as an allegory for explaining the pre-cosmic Fall seeing in the clothes of skin that God prepares for Adam and Eve the physical bodies that we receive when we are no longer able to behold His presence.

Origen did not have any sympathy with the seminal identity explanation for the universality of sin. For him there was no transmission of original sin. Paradise was in heaven and the Fall was to earth and to be covered with a body. However this raised the question as to the incarnation of the Logos and Origen does not shrink from offering an explanation "Had Jesus, then, need of purification, and was He unclean or soiled by some defilement? It might seem that I am speaking audaciously, but I am led to it by the authority of Scripture. Consider the following which is written in Job "No one is free from defilement, even though his life lasts but a single day"(Job. 14 vs. 4). He did not say, No one is free from 'sin' (peccatum), but no one is free from 'defilement' (nemo mundus a sorde). For 'defilement' signifies one thing and 'sin' another. Isaiah teaches clearly that "The Lord will wash the defilement of the daughters of Sion" (Isaiah 4 vs. 4). Every soul clothed with a human body (corpore induta) has its blemishes. You should know that Jesus too was defiled, voluntarily, for our salvation he had taken a human body. Listen attentively then to what the prophet Zechariah says 'Jesus was clothed with filthy garments' (Zech. 3 vs. 3). This sentence is directed against those who state that our Lord's body was not a human body but one formed from the elements that serve heavenly and spiritual". 1. He attempts to show that Jesus was not cast down to earth but assumed the body of defile-

1. Homelies Sur S. Luc - Sources Chretiennes, page 220 - translated by H. Rondet in Original Sin, page 77.

ment in order to come and redeem us. In Contra Celsum he again emphasises man's body as the result of his sins. "'Our soul is humbled to dust' and then 'lust brought me down to the dust of death'. Just as it is said, 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?', so also 'who shall change the body of our humiliation' (Phil. 3 vs. 21). And it is a prophet who said, 'Thou didst humble us in a place of affliction', meaning by a place of affliction the earthly region into which Adam, which means man, came after being cast out of paradise for his sin". 1.

Thus for Origen there is no seminal identity with Adam and we do not inherit the error or the guilt of our ancestors - we are entirely responsible for our own status, we are not born neutral into this world but tainted by our pre-cosmic fall. On earth we receive the legacy of our previous misguided choice. Psalm 51 vs. 5 is indicative of our position "In sin did my mother conceive me" as in Psalm 58 vs. 3 "The wicked are estranged from the womb".

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen and Clement and many others in this era gave us many insights into the understanding of why it was that each one is tainted by sin but it was not until the fifth century that the church began to draw in all these ideas and proclaim an orthodox position. Strangely, as the persecutions had strengthened rather than weakened the Christian church many years before, now in a similar way heresy made her formulate and adopt a teaching on the universality of sin. The man who indirectly made the church consolidate her position because of his ultra liberal and popular teaching was the notorious Pelagius, advocator of neutral free will.

1. Origen in Contra Celsum VII - 50, Translated by H. Chadwick.

CHAPTER 3

FREE WILL VS. GRACE

The fifth century in the West is probably the era in which the doctrine of original sin was first systematically formulated, adopted by church councils and taught as orthodox doctrine from that time onwards. This was the outcome of a controversy that raged between Pelagius, a British monk, who taught for a while in Rome and later in North Africa, and Augustine of Hippo.

Pelagius considered himself the guardian of free or neutral will within man. He would never allow that another man's sin or guilt could ever affect the free will of another and from this further concluded that God's grace could never be irresistible or ever override man's rule of his own will. He saw the position that he adopted as protecting man's ability to act morally and responsibly. If sin was interpreted hereditarily then it would seem that man's responsibility in the sight of God would fall away for if morality was to have any meaning at all then the will of man must be free to discern between the good and the evil and have the power to choose anew each time. The generally accepted teaching of sin as being hereditary seemed to be a contradiction of man's moral nature. If a man were in a circumstance where he could not be responsible for his condition as hereditary sin suggested then in no meaningful sense could he be expected to act morally. It was like saying to a man who was born without legs that he

ought to walk. Thus Pelagius rejected the idea of an inherited sinfulness and taught rather that man was born with a neutral free will which was untainted and that he was morally responsible for his actions. "His position was based on the principle that moral obligation involves and implies moral ability, that what a man ought to do he can do. So he called in question any idea or suggestion of inherited sinfulness which might serve as an excuse for moral slackness". 1.

Pelagius was being quite logical and consistent as John Baillie shows us in another context "A totally corrupt being would be as incapable of sin as would a totally illogical being of fallacious argument". 2.

According to Pelagius an inherited sinful will would absolve men from all personal responsibility so far as the blame for sin was concerned for "There can be personal responsibility for sin only where two things are present, first knowledge of good and evil and some degree of ability to choose the good and reject the evil". 3. The tendency to sin came from custom and example rather than from hereditary. Pelagius rejected the concept that a man's will was effected by sin and also rejected the idea that man could not help sinning.

Thus Pelagius taught that the free will present in the created Adam is the same free will that is given to all men when they are born. Man's will is as such neutral and unaffected by the Fall or by a previous wrong choice of his ancestors. Adam's first unfortunate choice could in no way have affected his power to choose between good and evil the second time and certainly could not have affected his offspring's ability to choose between good and evil. Adam, his children and all men, according to Pelagius received the same 'neutral' free will as a gift from God. He held that Adam injured no one but himself and left the power of human nature in his descendants unaffected for either good or evil. He insisted that even after the Fall Adam's descendants were born as innocent and as capable of following good

1. John Mackintosh Shaw, Christian Doctrine, page 127,
2. John Baillie, Our Knowledge of God, page 33,
3. John Mackintosh Shaw, Christian Doctrine, page 128,

or evil as Adam himself.

The corollary of his emphasis was that man could expect no assistance from God so far as the choice of good was concerned. God could provide external helps but the natural choice came from man and God's grace could not intervene with man's will. Thus it was possible, on Pelagius' doctrine, for a man to choose the good and achieve it by the application of his own free will. It ought to be noted that Pelagius did not teach that man would always choose the good or live a sinless or perfect life but rather that by continuous discipline it was possible to reach a stage where one would fall no more. Pelagius was in effect saying that a man could stand justified before his maker as a result of his own actions.

The serious implication of his position was that in attempting to safeguard the morality of man's actions he was unwittingly rejecting the necessity for a Saviour.

Besides the above serious implication of his position of an unconditional free will the application of his teachings demanded that a number of contemporary doctrines be changed. For instance Pelagius denied that Adam was created immortal and claimed that he would have passed through the experience of physical death irrespective of whether he had in fact sinned or not. Adam for him was created mortal and was given a limited time in which to live out his physical life. Death was not the result of sin but a physical inevitability.

He also claimed that infants who died in their infancy were eligible for salvation even if they had not been baptised on the grounds that they in fact had not yet sinned and chosen evil - they were accepted by God as innocent and without sin. As a direct result of his position he claimed that unbaptised infants who had not yet sinned were not in need of the grace of God.

Furthermore he taught that God's grace in saving man and free will were incompatible. God's grace did not override man's need to be saved. God could as it were place all sorts of leads to influence man to accept this of his own free will but in no way

would God's grace override man's decision. Thus man of his own free will chose God's grace.

Brunner makes the interesting assertion that if Pelagius had shown that being a person in an act more so than a state instead of maintaining as he did that man was always able to decide for or against God then his position would have been impregnable. "Sin is never a state, but it is always an act. Even being a sinner is not a state but an act, because it is being a person". 1.

In summary form Pelagius taught that,

- (i) Adam was created mortal and would have died a physical death even if he had not sinned.
- (ii) Adam's sin affected only Adam and was not transmitted.
- (iii) Infants are born in the same state of innocence that Adam was born in.
- (iv) Irresistible grace and free will are incompatible.
- (v) Unbaptised infants may still enjoy eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately Pelagius maintained that man was always able to decide for or against God as if the matter of sin were always external - whereas Augustine clearly saw as Paul did, that it was man himself who was contaminated by sin. If sin was always an external matter then the whole Christian message of redemption would be annulled. Unfortunately he did not come to terms with Paul's "law of sin or death within me" (Romans 5) which prevents us "from doing the good that I would". While attempting to defend morality as threatened by the teaching of hereditary sin he erred by reducing Christ's work of redemption to the realm of moral example allowing for nothing objective (grace) to take place within the will of man. In arguing for the independence of human liberty Pelagius was confining God to eternity. Furthermore as the fathers of the synod of Diospolis (415 AD) pointed out that on the day of judgement there could be no mercy expected for Pelagian sinners for man would have to justify himself before

1. Emil Brunner - Man in Revolt, page 148.

God and could not claim any grace of God at work in his life.

Pelagius' doctrine was condemned as heresy by a number of church councils. 1.

The crux of Augustine's teaching was that if Christ saved all then he saved infants as well who therefore must also be sinners. For this reason he could not accept the Pelagian position of neutral free will since Christ is saviour of all. Infants cannot be withdrawn from redemption without being drawn apart from the world. Thus they are sinners from their birth in need of redemption.

The quarrel between Augustine and Pelagius was centred around grace - Augustine is sometimes referred to as the "Doctor of Grace" - rather than on original sin.

In arguing for the need for irresistible grace Augustine began to formulate his doctrine of original sin with an emphasis on the primitive state of perfection that existed in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Adam and Eve were more than primitive or innocent babes in the Garden, and were fully mature and responsible beings in a perfect relation with their Maker. The only weakness of man was his creaturehood (God could not have created another perfect being without duplicating Himself) and thus the possibility was that man in his creaturehood could misuse the free will that had been given to him. Augustine made the distinction between the ability to sin but not sinning and the inability to sin. The former was given to man in creation while the latter came at the end of the age. "From the bad use of free will there originated the whole train of evil". 2. As such originally there was the possibility of sin through the ability to misuse freedom, (we shall discuss later Augustine's use of the concept of freedom), while at the end of the age there would be an inability to sin. (a)

1. First Council held at Carthage in North Africa in AD 411
Also in 418 at the Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in AD 431.
2. Augustine in City of God, Translated by M. Dods,
Book XIII Chapter 14.

(a) For footnote see end of chapter.

Augustine taught that Adam's sin lay solely in the region of the will. "Sin is caused not by the flesh, but by the soul, and that the corruption contracted from sin is not sin but sin's punishment". 1. In the first sin it is the will that falls and in falling forfeits the ability to choose the right again. Thus for Augustine the original sin is a pride that seeks its own will before that of God's "and what is the origin of an evil will but pride? For pride is the beginning of sin" (Ecclus. 10. vs. 13). 2. The will after the Fall may still choose but only in the secondary sense of between lesser evils and no longer has the direction to be able to choose the highest good. Being fallen it is incapable of the highest choice (b). Thus, Adam the physical father of the race, in the sense that all mankind is physiologically present in him, passes on hereditarily what he is to his offspring i.e. a fallen will becomes hereditary. "For God the author of natures not vices, created man upright; but man being of his own will corrupted and justly condemned, begot corrupted and condemned children". 3.

Augustine was not quite sure as to whether the traducianist or the creationist account of procreation was the correct one. The traducianists taught that in procreation the soul was passed on from father to child and if this were the case then for Augustine the soul was contaminated from the father. The creationists however taught that the soul entered the body at the moment of conception and if this were the case then for Augustine the soul became contaminated at the moment it entered the flesh (but failing to explain how this happened). The result was that all that followed from Adam's seed were sinners - the entire race was damned (massa damnata) "We were all made from the same mass of clay which is the mass of sin". Augustine appeals for support to Psalm 51 vs. 5 "I was shapen in iniquity and in

1. Augustine in City of God, translated by M. Dods
Book IV, chapter 3.
 2. IBID, Book XIV, chapter 13.
 3. IBID, Book XIII, Chapter 14.
- (b) For footnote see end of chapter.

sin did my mother conceive me", and to John 3 "all men must be born again" also to Ephesians "we are children of wrath" and Romans 5 "death is passed to all men".

Augustine's insistence that all were in need of God's grace and that none were born beyond this need gave a new urgency to infant baptism so that a new born infant was to be baptised as soon as possible after birth in order that the taint might be eradicated - failure to do so and in the event of the infant dying, damnation would follow.

Against the Pelagian Doctrine of non-inherited sin and self chosen righteousness Augustine taught that the irresistible grace of God was needed for salvation. Augustine, however, was bound to give an explanation of the irresistibility of grace in relation to man's free will. He made three main points in this regard. Firstly because man's will was affected by the Fall he was no longer capable of choosing the highest good and so no longer open to the full scale of choices and so no longer totally free. Man's freedom was restricted so that he was only free within certain limits - in fact limited by what he had become. "Fallen man breathing the atmosphere of concupiscence though theoretically free, as a matter of fact is only free for sinful objects". 1.

Secondly Augustine distinguished between freedom and free will. Freedom means a freedom not to sin. Free will means a possibility of choosing wrong. Man initially was given a free will - not an inability to sin but an ability not to sin. Man cannot sustain his own freedom. This comes alone through the grace of God. This grace given again through redemption makes the ultimate state of the saints at the end of the age one of an inability to sin and as such bestows total freedom.

Thirdly because God alone can move man from free will to freedom there is no way in which man may come to exercise his free will in total freedom without the action of God. On this account of free will and freedom Augustine believed he had shown free will not to be at variance with the irresistible grace of God.

1. N.P. Williams - The Idea of the Fall and Original Sin.

Augustine's doctrine certainly required a Saviour - although man was not totally depraved he nonetheless was incapable of choosing the good. Unlike the Pelagian position man needed some action on God's part to restore his freedom of will and God's grace was required to enable man to achieve righteousness. God had to confer his grace upon man overruling man's will which was not capable of choosing God.

Following from his teaching on irresistible grace came the next logical step of predestination which Augustine unflinchingly pursued. He taught an absolute predestination that allowed some men to remain without God's grace while others received it and were allowed to enter the kingdom of God as redeemed souls. God was justified in choosing whom he would and those whom he did not choose were justly condemned. Augustine is forced into the predestination camp by his position on irresistible grace having to claim that in the inscrutable mind of God he chose to work in some and not others. As such some are bound for heaven while others are bound to damnation. God still remains just and holy in all his actions as those who are not elected receive their just reward. Brunner comments that unfortunately hereditary sin was the only tool available for Augustine to use against the Pelagian position in order to show the need of salvation for all through Christ alone so that "In the main all the right was upon his side, but he was not wholly right". 1. Starting from an inherited fallen will led him to affirm the irresistibility of God's grace which in turn drove him into a predestinarian position.

In summary form Augustine taught five things,

- (i) The immortality of Adam before the Fall,
- (ii) The transmission of a fallen will to his descendants,
- (iii) The irresistibility of grace for salvation,
- (iv) The impossibility of non baptised infants entering the kingdom,
- (v) Predestination.

1. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, page 149.

As a result of the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine the Council that met at Cathage in 418 proclaimed an orthodox teaching on original sin for the christian church. This was set out in a number of canons stating that

- (1) If anyone teaches that Adam would have died naturally and not as the result of the of his sin let him be anathema.
- (2) If anyone teaches that a new born infant does not require baptism for the remission of sins let him be anathema.
- (3) If anyone teaches that there is a place where unbaptised infants may live happily other than the kingdom of God let him be anethema.

The council insisted that Adam died as a direct result of his sin, that the first sin was hereditarily passed on resulting in Adam's descendants being born sinful and if not recipients of God's grace then condemned to damnation.

The Council thus anathematized the Pelagian teachings but at the same time did not emphasise Augustine's predestination conclusion.

However while defending the work of God in Christ and the irresistibility of grace the council did not arrive at a watertight doctrine regarding the universality of sin. The Augustine position still led to a frightening predestination position that the church for the time being did not wish to teach and did not include the doctrine of predestination in her general proclamation but reserved it for theologians.

As a result of the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine over the matter of grace and free will we can see how the church in the 5th century began to teach the doctrine of original sin. The doctrine was formulated as a side effect and it was for those who followed to try and consolidate it. We must, therefore, turn our attention to the great mind of St. Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor", to see how substance and body were given to this doctrine.

FOOTNOTES :

- (a) In passing it is worth noting Harnack's observation as referred to by J.D. Kelly that Augustine's primitive state of man is in fact Pelagian for man in his ability to sin chooses (for a while at any rate) not to sin and as such by an act of his will remains justified before God by his own actions.

- (b) We must bear in mind the returning threat of Gnosticism to the church. Gnosticism affirmed a basic dualism between spirit and matter and taught that matter was evil. It is against this sort of teaching that Augustine affirms (i) creation, (ii) that the creation is good and (iii) that sin enters through the realm of the will and is not inherent in matter.

CHAPTER 4

"THE ANGELIC DOCTOR"

By the time the scholastic period of the church had been reached the Augustinian teaching on the universality of sin, or as it was known by then as the doctrine of original sin, had by and large been adopted. Thus in this period they no longer saw the need to give an explanation for the universality of sin or to defend the doctrine and the great minds of the time turned rather to consolidating the doctrine and expounded on its nature and transmission.

St. Thomas Aquinas who in retrospect is generally recognised as the intellectual giant of the period probably because of the continuing influence of his thought on the church long after his death, and nicknamed "the Angelic Doctor" because of his saintly nature, as well as his dissertations on angelology divided the doctrine of original sin into three areas. Firstly the primeval state of mankind, secondly the fall from grace and thirdly the transmission of the sin. We shall discuss his teaching in each of these areas.

Aquinas believed in the literalness or historicity of the Eden story to the extent of accepting that Eden was a geographical place and that the trees were real trees etc. He, however, allowed that symbolical meanings could also be attached to the

characters in the Genesis record. He taught that in the primeval state there was a perfect balance of body and soul in Adam and that balance was the 'fruit of righteousness'. The children of Adam and Eve would have had to grow up and learn the secrets of life from their parents (i.e. they would not have been born mature) and Adam would have been in a position to teach them. The rest of the world then was much the same as it is today, the animals behaving as they would behave today, the wolf would devour the lamb etc. For Aquinas there was no Fall in the natural or animal world.

The Fall itself according to Aquinas could only come from one source and that was pride, there was no other way in which Adam could have sinned. His sin was simply that he tried to obtain in his own power a beatitude that he had received as a gift from God. In his *Summae Theologicae* he turns his attention to the cause of the first sin and asks the question whether the first sin was desire or not. 1. (His method is always of showing contrary schools of thought on the issue and then either siding with one or the other school or offering a third alternative). Discussing how the first sin arose he shows the various schools of thought relating to Adam's desire. One school claimed that sin must be contrary to human nature and because desire is very much part of the human make-up the first sin could therefore not be understood as desire. Thus desire was not the cause of the first sin.

An opposing view presented by Augustinian tradition taught that desire was the vehicle of the first sin because Adam desired what was beyond the will of God for him and so the first sin was committed. After presenting the opposing schools of thought the Angelic Doctor then describes Adam's righteousness and fellowship with God as his original justice. Because Adam's will stands initially in complete harmony with God's Adam is sinless. Adam's will governs and moves the whole of his being and thus the only possible place where any disorder could arise is in this region. The original sin is when Adam's will exceeds the bounds of God's will for him. This is exactly what happened

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summae Theologicae* Part 2 No. 7.

and materially the original sin is then desire that exceeds the bounds of reason and formally it is the loss of original justice. Thus Aquinas is basically Augustinian in teaching that Adam's will moving out of subjection from the will of God caused the fall from righteousness.

Having stated that the Fall was initiated by Adam's misuse of desire Aquinas then turns his mind as to how the original sin is transmitted to Adam's descendants. His concern is to show that the human race is bound up in Adam. The original justice that Adam receives is a gift from God and when he commits the first sin the gift is lost and therefore Adam can no longer pass it on to his line. All Adam can do is pass on what he himself has now become which entails malice in the region of the will, ignorance in the region of his intellect and weakness in the region of his appetites. However, it must be noted that Aquinas interprets the idea of 'seminal identity' as taught by Augustine with a different emphasis and sees Adam as a sort of Prime Mover who initiates the movement in others. N.P. Williams in a delightful phrase explains it as "a process which goes on in accordance with a kind of Newtonian moral law for ever until it brought to a standstill by an opposing force". 1. (The opposing force is grace communicated by baptism).

H. Rondet commenting on Aquinas' understanding of the solidarity of the human race in Adam says "Mankind is, as it were, one man. Adam, father of the race, virtually comprised us all in himself: his will controlled all our existences. In him the whole race has sinned - not that the sin is imputable to our individual wills but in the sense that our individual wills are with regard to the will of the head like a hand of a murderer is to the criminal will that moves it". 2.

Aquinas emphasises that sin is passed on solely by the act of generation and not by imitation and as Adam tainted the nature

1. N.P. Williams, The Idea of the Fall and the Original Sin, Page, 403.
2. H. Rondet, Original Sin, Page 165.

so the nature now taints the person. Transmission is via generation.

Aquinas also deals with a number of other issues that are related to the doctrine of original sin. Under one article he discusses whether original sin can be considered as a habit. He, after his style, refers us to the argument that original sin could never have been a habit on the grounds that a habit is always acquired and never infused. This argument states that there cannot be an act that precedes original sin to enable it to become a habit. If a habit was infused then man could never be responsible for original sin or bear the guilt of it. Contrary schools of thought, however, reasoned that original sin was a habit because men have a tendency or a desire towards sin from the moment of their birth. Taking the two positions into consideration Aquinas argues that original sin is initially not a habit although habit results from the privation of original justice. "We should not say that original sin is an infused habit. It is born by reason of our corrupt origin. It is a privation". 1. Initially it was not part of man's make-up but once introduced it became a habit from which men were unable to free themselves. They sinned habitually. For Aquinas sin as a habit must not be thought of as an instinct even though it has become so ingrained in our way of life to be confused as such.

In another article he deals with whether there are many original sins in one man or not. The idea that there are many original sins came from a translation of Psalm 51 vs. 5 "In sin (peccatis - which is the plural form) did my mother conceive me" and thus, it is argued that original sin is many in any one man. Furthermore with reference to the previous article, if original sin were a habit it would incline man to commit one thing for a habit repeats itself whereas in fact man is inclined to sin in many ways and so it would follow that original sin is not one habit but many. On the other side Aquinas records for us the counter argument from the New Testament text "Behold the Son of God that taketh away the sin (Pecca - which is the singular form) of the world" (John 1 vs. 29). This text implies that original sin is

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summae Theologiae*, Part II No. 9.

one which Christ removes from us by his death on the cross.

The position that St. Thomas argues for is that there is only one original sin in any one man. This he believes to be so because the cause of original sin is only one. It is only one thing that severed the first man from original justice and it is that one cause which separates all men from original justice although he allows that the expression of that separation may be manifold. The illustration he uses is that of a fever in a man's body. A fever is one although it manifests itself in many different ways. If a fever attacks the liver and the lungs and the stomach one does not say that the stricken man has three fevers in his body but one fever that is attacking three different parts. With the aid of this analogy Aquinas claims that original sin is only one in any one person although it manifests itself in many different ways. "Original sin is numerically different in different men although one in kind and proportion". 1.

Another article is directed towards whether original sin is in all men equally. It is said that all men do not desire in the same proportion and so it would follow that if original sin is desire it is not in the same proportion in all men. Aquinas in this instance takes the opposite view stating that there are relationships that admit to neither more than, nor less than what they are. For instance in the marriage relationship one cannot be more married or less married - one is simply married, the same is true of one's brother, he cannot be more or less one's brother. Although desire initiates the loss of original justice original sin cannot be greater or lesser in relation to the lack of original justice and thus it cannot be greater or lesser in any one man. "That one man should be more subject to desire than another man is not therefore the consequence of original sin since all men are equally deprived of original justice". 2.

Aquinas treats the subject of the state of infants who die not having been baptised in a more merciful way than his predecessor

1. IBID Part 2 No. 7

2. IBID Part 2 No. 7

Augustine did. Augustine was adamant that if baptism were not administered in order to deal with original sin and the infant died it would go straight to damnation. Aquinas however, taught that if the infant was not baptised and died without actually sinning it would still be tainted but would not go to damnation but to a place called Limbo. Limbo, he taught, was the eternal home of unbaptised infants who had not actually sinned and was not a painful state. Although they were eternally unable to see the Beautiful Vision nonetheless they were in a state of happiness, in the same sense that a horse has no remorse in not being a human and a dog in not being other than what he already is. The inhabitants of Limbo would be at peace although not allowed to behold the face of God.

Aquinas retains the idea of election and rejection that he inherits from Augustine but for a slightly different reason Aquinas insisted that God was the Prime Mover in the universe and as such nothing could be initiated without Him and as such nothing was able to happen that was contrary to His will. He uses the seemingly contradictory concept of a psychological freedom of man with God knowing how man will use his freedom of will before he has used it. Thus Aquinas like Augustine sides with predestination although modifying it with the introduction of Limbo.

In summing up the 'Angelic Doctor's' contribution to the nature and transmission of original sin we see that for him the primeval state was one in which Adam was created in perfection and in harmony with God. This harmony of wills was the gift of original justice. While Adam's will remained within God's will for him he lived in righteousness before God. By misuse of his desire he overreached God's will for him and lost the gift of justice before God for himself and was unable to pass it on to his descendants. In his fallen state he was like a prince who had lost his adornments but without losing his patrimony. In this state he was unable to pass the gift to his descendants but instead propagated the depravation like a Prime Mover until Christ provided the opposing force. The original sin became a habit was centred in the region of the will in all men it was like a fever that manifested itself in many ailments and all men were

equally deprived of their righteousness before God. Man had returned to his nature, had fallen from supra-natural to natural.

The fate of those who died in original sin without committing actual sin was to go to Limbo and as far as those who were elected or failed to be elected this was bound up in the unsearchable mind of God.

The doctrine of original sin in the consolidated form received from St. Thomas Aquinas became the teaching of the church of Rome on the universality of sin emphasising that the Fall caused the loss of original righteousness, that original sin is transmitted by generation and not imitation and that original sin is removed at baptism.

However not long after Aquinas the church was to face further division in the Reformation and we must now consider whether the accepted doctrine underwent any further transformation in that split and in what form it appeared in Protestantism.

C H A P T E R 5

REFORMATION AND REAFFIRMATION

In the reformation period there was a protest against the myriads of intricacies that the Medieval era had introduced into the Christian Church. Canon law had made the Christian life highly complex and intellectual and the reformers called for a return to the simplicity of the Gospel message. Involved in this reformation was a reaction against scholastic theology which the reformers believed by and large to be introducing subtleties into the Gospel message that were never intended and were more confusing and misleading than enlightening.

The Medieval teaching on the Fall of man portrayed man as losing his supernatural gifts while retaining his natural gifts relatively unaffected and thus falling from a supernatural existence to a natural one. This was considered by the reformers as mistaken and that in the Fall man was in fact totally depraved falling rather from human to sub-human. The picture painted by St. Thomas Aquinas of a prince that had lost his inheritance while retaining his nature was replaced by a picture that portrayed fallen man in the most gloomy of colours. The reformers emphasised that man had in fact marred the essential constituents of his nature as given by God and that depravity was in his inmost being. The Fall was understood not as a falling from supernatural to natural but rather from natural to

sub-natural - "Man is not a citizen, who after receiving a principedom from the generosity of the sovereign and forfeiting it by his own fault, has reverted to his former bourgeois condition, he is a citizen who has degraded himself by his own act to the station of an outlaw or felon". 1.

Luther believed in the literalness of the Genesis account of original righteousness, of the temptation and the Fall but rejected the scholastic interpretation of the nature of sin in us and held that sin did not just mar but entirely corrupted. In the Smaller Catechism he defines original sin as "the total corruption of our whole human nature, inherited from our first parents which makes us inclined only to evil and unable and unwilling to do that which is good". 2.

Lutheran doctrine was probably the most severe in proclaiming the total depravity of man. Fallen man was in no way capable of any sort of righteousness, (a) he was totally depraved and incapable of producing any good thing. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans he reiterates man's depravity "What then is original sin? According to the subtleties of the theologians, it is the privation of original justice. But according to the Apostle and the simple words of Jesus Christ, it is not merely the privation of a quality in the will, nor of light in the intelligence, nor of vigour in the memory but a privation of all integrity in all the powers both of body and soul, in the whole man interior and exterior. It is the readiness to do evil, the repugnance for good, the distaste for light and wisdom, the love of error and darkness, the avoidance of and supreme contempt for good works the unrestrained drive towards evil. The holy fathers have said that original sin is concupiscence, the law of the flesh, the law of the members, a weakness of nature, a tyrant, congenital illness. It is like a sickness whose weakness lies not in this or that member, but is the result of a lack of health in all the

1. N.P. Williams, The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin, page, 428.

2. Luther's Small Catechism Section 129.

(a) For Footnote see end of chapter.

members, of a weakness of all the senses and of all the powers". 1.

Melancthon though not as eloquent as Luther was more explicit and saw original sin as the initial departure of man's will from God's will. He would not allow the Thomistic position that everything was secondary to the prime movement of God and insisted that what God had made was good (Gen. 1 vs. 31) and that God did not delight in any form of wickedness (Psalm 5 vs. 4) and thus the original sin could not be attributed to part of the movement initiated by God. "By these clear definite testaments (Rom. 5 vs. 12, John 8 vs. 44, Zech. 8 vs. 6) we are to stand steadfast; we are confidently to repudiate the devilish lies of the stoics and the blasphemies of the manicheans and to realize that sin is not something caused by God, the disorder came first through the free will of the devil and afterwards through Adam and Eve who, themselves, freely turned away from God". 2.

Melancthon insisted that there was a great difference in God allowing man to sin and God causing man to sin. To claim that man had to sin because initially God is the first mover is to attribute David's adultery, Nero's fire, etc., to God. For Melancthon God's will is never achieved via sin and therefore God is never the prime cause of the possibility of the original sin.

His account of the original sin is an interesting parallel on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Man perfect before God on his journey falls amongst the robbers (the devil in the guise of the snake) who strip him of his possessions (righteousness) and inflict bodily harm (nature) and then leaves him to die. The Good Samaritan (Christ) brings him back to life and health. The analogy seems to be slightly inconsistent with his previous statement that sin came from man's misuse of his will (could man will to have been robbed) and could that event have earned the wrath of God? Nonetheless it still portrays his main

1. Translated from J. Ficker's edition of Luther's "Vorlesungen Uber Den Romerbrief" by H. Rondet.
2. C. Mansckreck Melancthon on Christian Doctrine, page 46.

teaching that sin is external to God's good creation and that more than possessions were lost in the Fall. Man himself is injured and will die without the intervention of Christ. The original sin for Melancthon enters via the temptation made by the snake and man moves from his obedience to God. Melancthon does not offer an explanation as to where the devil comes from in the good creation, but merely concludes that he was there.

The original sin is passed on hereditarily and at birth we are already by nature the "children of wrath" (Eph. 2 vs. 3). Psalm 51 vs. 5 "In sin did my mother conceive me" is not to be understood as the Psalmists's lament for the sins of his mother but rather as a lament for his own inherent sin.

Melancthon basically reaffirms the Augustinian position of the Fall and original sin, emphasising not so much the Fall but the fallness itself.

Although Calvin adhered to the teaching of the depravity of human nature he seems to have allowed that every good thing was not removed by the Fall. God seems to have allowed a few good things to remain for the sake of man (Institutes 2, 3, 3). However, like Melancthon he does not allow that man is capable of fulfilling any righteous deed in his fallen state. Apparent righteousness is explained away in one of two ways, i) Hypocrisy on the part of man i.e. keeping the good law for a bad reason thus giving an outward appearance of righteousness or ii) the sovereign will of God allows man to perform the right without in fact healing his corruption, 1. or in other words that man performs the right without realizing that in fact it was the right - he fulfils it by luck rather than by intention.

Calvin reaffirms the Augustinian position of our identity with Adam and the solidarity of the human race in their first ancestor, but with less emphasis on the seminal identity taught by Augustine and interprets it more in terms of the covenant relationship, the covenant being made with Adam and his prosperity. Adam is representative of the human race and the cov-

1. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 2.33

enant is made with him. Adam is our representative and in failing to keep it his prosperity loses out through the failure of its representative. (b) For Calvin in the last analysis the only sin is the original sin - all other sins that man commits are to be understood as the surface showing of the root cause. Calvin again picks up the predestination theme and claimed that all things were contingent on God and thus the Fall was in the will of God and we are not permitted to question why "but who art thou who replies against God ? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it why have you made me thus ?" (Rom. 9 vs. 20).

The original sin is conceived in terms of disobedience. Man is required to be obedient to the will of God and when he moved out of this sphere the original sin resulted. The Fall thus had its origin in disobedience - "By the disobedience of one man all were destroyed" (Rom. 5) - Linked with this, man's disobedience is his despising the word of God and giving heed to the words of the snake coupled with an ingratitude in desiring more than was allowed to him. Thus the result of original sin is the depravity of human nature formerly good and pure and the original sin itself is disobedience.

Calvin taught that the original sin was transmitted from Adam and then by all parents to their children. He affirms with Augustine "that we are not corrupted by an acquired wickedness but by an innate corruption from conception. Before children see the light of day they are in God's light darkened by sin. Adam was made the depository of the endowments which God was pleased to bestow upon human nature, and that, therefore, when he lost what he had received he lost it not only for himself but for all of us". 1. "Children come not from spiritual regeneration but from carnal descent". 2.

In his official definition on original sin he says "original sin may be defined as hereditary corruption and depravity of our

1. IBID 2.35

2. IBID 2.7

(b) For footnote see end of chapter

nature extending to all parts of the soul which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh." 1. We are innocent and blameless in bearing the guilt of Adam but he has brought us under this obligation. Even infants suffer for their own defect and not of another's. "For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own righteousness they have the seed implanted in them". 2. Calvin assumed the Augustinian position, reaffirms it, republishes it and relentlessly carries it to its logical conclusion of a double predestination.

Thus we see that in the reformation era the teaching regarding the Fall inherited from the Medieval and scholastic period was slightly changed rejecting the concept of man's natural abilities being untainted and insisting rather that man was depraved in himself and is incapable of performing any good thing. The Augustinian position was in fact basically reaffirmed with the Lutherans emphasising the fallenness of man in terms of total depravity and the Calvinists emphasising the loss of righteousness in terms of the covenant rather than in terms of seminal identity and with relentless logic reaching the predestination position.

In both Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches the accepted doctrine of original sin was that man was created by God in a state of righteousness and perfection and that by an act of man's own will and in disobedience to God's word he revolted and in so doing lost his state of righteousness involving all his descendants in the same plight. The original sin became innate and corrupted all human nature that followed from Adam.

Pelagius had for several reasons insisted that man's will must be neutral in order for him to achieve any responsibility for his actions and as a result had rejected the idea of an inherited sinful will. While not wishing to be Pelagian many thinkers were unsatisfied with the orthodox explanation and sought for alternate answers as an explanation for the universality of sin. Some schools of thought asked the question whether man could have

1. IBID 2.8

2. IBID

been created at a distance from God and required to grow towards Him (mature) and towards perfection or in other words whether man initially did not fall from perfection but was intended by God to climb towards it - that man's ancestor did not make a serious error but began the process of spiritual, moral and intellectual evolution. Other schools attempted to place the matter on a transedential plane. It is to these alternative attempts that we must now address ourselves.

FOOTNOTES :

- (a) Lutheran doctrine allowed that man was capable of fulfilling an ethical righteousness only in the sense that he could keep the required law from the wrong motives. Man was not able to perform the good that he ought to do - a bad tree could not produce good fruit.
- (b) Note the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 16 "Did all mankind fall in Adam's first iniquity ?" The Covenant being made with Adam not only for himself but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

CHAPTER 6

ALTERNATIVE ATTEMPTS

Pelagius was not the only thinker to oppose the idea of a first sin that led the race to destruction and chaos, but while not wishing to defend Pelagius in anyway, others have offered alternative ideas for the explanation of the universality of sin.

One of the most popular modern schools is that of an evolutionary explanation. 1. The school abandons the idea of an original perfection of the human race and claims that man was created many thousands of years ago as a moral, intellectual and spiritual babe. However, within him there was the potentiality for growth towards a full maturity in each sphere with an ultimate full fellowship with God.

The evolutionary growth is often conceived of in terms of a climb up the mountain to the lofty heights of perfection. As a babe man begins his climb - the climb need not necessarily include a fall but in fact none (except Christ who is The Way) matures without falling many times "Thus man is born at the bottom of the mountain and in setting out for the summit invar-

1. See for instance R.F. Tennants "The Origin and Propogation of Sin".

iably selects devious and tortuous paths that lead him into hardships and miseries". 1. Man does not reach the summit without the help of Christ who atones for man's failures and provides the necessary way to the top (righteousness before God).

The claimants of this theory of the universality of sin point out that scientific evidence strengthens their position in an age that no longer can accept the beginning of the race as set out in the Genesis record. Furthermore they reason that the term Fall and Original Sin do not appear in either of the Testaments. The term used for sin is transgression which if taken as it stands means a stepping out of the right path rather than a fall. This translation supports the theory propounded.

Furthermore they reason that an imputed righteousness in the very beginning would virtually make man a robot and such morality and righteousness would not be of any true value. Therefore they proclaim an evolutionary process in which the evil, ignorance and immorality are gradually left behind as a more adequate interpretation of the universality of sin.

Harvey Cox, the American theologian, in his book "On Leaving it to the Snake" describes the first sin as a failure to make a decision. The original sin which is in each one of us is therefore 'acedia' or sloth which allows someone else to make decisions for us when we ought to be making them ourselves. Man's first sin was allowing the snake to make decisions for him to carry out instead of thinking it through for himself. This is very similar to the position of a failure or laziness to climb by decision.

Although this theory at first seems to answer some of the issues that have been raised by the orthodox doctrine of original sin it has nonetheless justly been heavily criticised. On this theory sin becomes understandable, pardonable and to be expected and almost suggests that God uses sin to His own ends whereas the Scripture is quite clear that sin in any form must always be totally abhorrent to a holy God. Empirical evidence

1. N.P. Williams, The Idea of the Fall and Original Sin, page

does not suggest that intellectually, spiritually and morally man is evolving but rather the contrary if the last two world wars, perversion and crime are to be any guide. If anything man is deeper in sin than ever before.

Furthermore the evolutionary theory does not always make the necessary distinction between the moral realm and the physical realm. While one would want to acknowledge the closest possible integration of the spiritual with the physical so that the one affects the other and is affected by it at the same time the moral realm is independent of them both. The evolving man provides the channel for moral and immoral action but morality is independent of the physical realm. Failure to make this distinction results in a naturalistic determinism of man in which morality is relegated to physical growth and as such removes all praise or blame from man's actions in the same way that a seed evolving into a flower cannot be said to be a moral or immoral action. In attempting to argue that an imputed righteousness makes man a robot this school errs in exactly the same way but only by a different route.

The evolutionary school's emphasis is further inadequate on the grounds that it links sin to sensuality whereas much sin does not evolve from the appetites i.e. slander, deceit, theft, adultery. The root of sin seems to lie in the higher essence of man rather than in his lower or sensual nature. H.R. Mackintosh is right when he calls sin an "anti-evolutionary" fact and a disordering of man's true nature.

Karl Barth in his work "The Epistle to the Romans" insists that faith in the inherent goodness of man is a serious error - man is 'totaliter aliter' because of his sin and the gospel message is of a holy and transcendent God who deals with man's sin. There is no evidence in the Scripture of a deification of man through evolution. Salvation does not come from evolution but from the grace of God.

We must briefly consider two other attempts to avoid the "seminal identity" position. These attempts were made by the philosophers Immanuel Kant and George Hegel.

For Kant there is a basic dualism of good and evil and freedom and responsibility must rest within this dualism. Sin is not in the essence of human nature for we can only be accused for that which proceeds from our free will. However there is always the potential for sin in each soul (as there is the potential for good) and is in every case realized by free choice. In his book on Religion Within the Limits of Reason he says "To have a good or evil disposition as an inborn natural constitution does not here mean that it has not been acquired by the man who harbours it, that he is not the author of it, but rather that it has not been acquired in time (that he has always been good or evil from his youth up). The disposition itself applies universally to the whole use of freedom - the disposition must be adopted by free will". 1. Thus Kant does not accept the Fall in history that leaves a man weakened but that the weakness is realized in each man's soul when he chooses the potential in him for evil. The actual wrong choice does not come because man has been tainted by his forefathers but is very much his own choosing of that which was always a potential within him thus "Kant abandons the idea of a single, collective and representative Fall of humanity and finds in each man the Adam of his own soul".2. Thus for Kant man by nature is neither good nor bad and rather there is in him a twofold inclination for good and for evil. He does not accept the Genesis account that man was created good. To argue that because man does evil now that he once was totally good could also quite easily be construed that man was once totally evil and now does good. Neither position would be conclusive and so for Kant there is always both evil and good intention present in all men - a basic aptitude for good and morality but also a basic aptitude for evil. Sin in man's history is the expression or realization of the metaphysical potentiality but that potentiality is itself initially not historical.

Kant's attempt to remove the Fall from history turns out to be Pelagian for man is created neutral once again and has the ability to choose good of his own accord. This is in contra-

1. Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, page 20.
2. N.P. Williams, The Idea of the Fall and Original Sin, page 501.

diction to the Pauline emphasis that sin is internal and not only external - the law of sin and death within prevents man from choosing the good that he would. At no time is man ever born neutral with potentialities either way. Genesis claims that he was born good and his seed sinful. Kant leads us into a cosmic dualism that the Christian is not prepared to adopt because of his conviction of the eternal uniqueness and oneness of God.

George Hegel also makes an attempt to place the Fall beyond the pale of history in his well known system of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. For Hegel God can only be understood in the synthesis "God is thus recognized as spirit, only when known as the triune". 1. Thus he will also expound a basic dualism for man in which good and bad in him synthesise into an acceptable form. Hegel presents sin as a necessary stage in the development of man. In order to find its true self the soul must not remain in innocence but must lose itself in order that it may truly realize itself in the synthesis. Sin therefore becomes the essential middle stage through which man becomes himself "Sin is thus represented as the inevitable middle stage in man's development from the non-moral or pre-moral state of innocence to that of moral manhood or virtue proper". 2.

The innocence of Adam in itself is basically an incomplete state and the synthesis that results from losing this innocence through sin is a valuable end responsible life "The Fall is the eternal mythus of man - in fact the very transition by which he becomes man". 3. Hegel says that to choose wrong was better than not having chosen at all. Paradoxically the Fall for Hegel is the beginning of the ascent. Thus in each man there is the necessity for this movement to take place innocence - sin - morality. For Hegel God acknowledges the growth of man via sin "Behold Adam is become one of us knowing good and evil" God confirms

1. Philosophy of History, translated by J. Sibree, Third Part - Section 3 Christianity, page 304.
2. John Mackintosh, Christian Doctrine, page 135
3. Philosophy of History, translated by J. Sibree, Third Part - Section 3 Christianity, page 305.

the words of the serpent. 1.

However, Hegel's attempt also suffers heavy criticism on similar lines to that levelled at Kant. Sin, for Hegel, is understood as a necessary step towards true maturity whereas the scriptural position denies that sin has any part of God's purpose or plan but that rather on the contrary sin detracts from it and mars and spoils God's purposes. On Hegel's theory if man did not commit the necessary sin he would be forced to remain a non-moral creature and would never realise his true self. Man is compelled to sin in order to become himself. Man could never be justly condemned for his sin on Hegel's account which is totally contrary to the scriptural message regarding sin. I think that Mackintosh Shaw is quite correct when he says that the movement from innocence to morality is not via sin but via temptation "Innocence, temptation and virtue - these are the steps in man's developing moral consciousness as we know it in history and experience". 2.

Hegel also leads us once again into dualism and we must conclude that his attempt to take the Fall away from history or expound it as a necessary experience in every man's life in order that he might realize himself falls short of Christian acceptance.

Søren Kierkegaard bids us get away from the idea of Adam as responsible for the origin of sin. He argues that Adam is not the head of the race but part of it and as such he is neither more than nor less than the rest of the human race. Failure to give attention to this is to exclude Adam from the race - and ultimately from the atonement. Man is an individual as well as part of the race and failure to recognise this either leads us into the singularity of Pelagianism or to the exclusion of Adam from the race. Adam might be the first man but he is at once himself and part of the race and to attempt to explain him in terms of significance for the race confuses everything "He is not essentially different from the race, for in that case

1. Philosophy of History, translated by J. Sibree, Third Part - Section 3, Christianity, page 305.
2. John Mackintosh Shaw - Christian Doctrine, page 135.

there is no race, he is not the race, for in that case there is no race, he is himself and the race - therefore what explains Adam explains the race, and vice versa". 1.

His idea is rather similar to that of Paul's Church as a body illustration in I Corinthians where each member is individual but also linked. It makes no sense for the members to exist independently and the eye although different from the foot has its meaning only because of the foot and vice versa - all share the suffering and all share the honour of the one body. In a similar sense Kierkegaard is saying that Adam is part of the human race sharing in history as we all do but is no greater or lesser than any other part of it and does not bear the sole responsibility for the first sin. We are each one responsible for our perfection of the whole and as such individually responsible. The explanation for original sin is not to be found in Adam but in each part that makes us the whole. To consider members as mere individuals is to err although they are paradoxically individuals. Original sin is not the result of Adam but of us all for we cannot be separated from Adam nor he from us. For Kierkegaard there can never be any justification for making Adam's sin greater than anyone else's or the first sin of the race - sin is qualitative and not quantitative and as such is first in us all and not as second, third or fourth. For Kierkegaard failure to make this distinction between qualitative sin and quantitative sin is to err. Qualitative sin is original sin in each of us and not the quantitative result of anyone else's. "That sin came into the world is true but this statement as it stands does not condemn Adam". 2. Sin is universal but the responsibility for it is individual.

So far as original sin itself in each one of us is concerned Kierkegaard holds that there is no rational explanation for original sin. That there is a myth used in Genesis is indicative of this sin enters into us with a leap i.e. there is no connecting reason. Sin presupposes itself and it is here. The leap is qualitative in each man.

1. Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, page 27.
2. IBID, page 30

Furthermore in indicating to us the futility of explaining how sin entered the world he points out that God's directives to Adam in the Genesis record could not have been understood by Adam. When God said "only of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat" Adam could not have understood it in any meaningful way. "For how could he have understood the difference between good and evil, seeing that this distinction was in fact consequent upon eating the fruit". 1. The point is Adam could not have known his act was wrong until afterwards, and therefore he could not intentionally have done wrong else he would have had to have had knowledge of good and evil before he ate the fruit. Again Adam could not have known what God meant when He said "Thou shalt surely die" for Adam had no experience or concept of death.

Thus Kierkegaard, an existentialist, turns us away from trying to find a rational explanation for the origin of sin and makes us look to ourselves as individually responsible for our sin which enters us with a leap and which contributes to the universality of sin and to act by personal decision in the corresponding leap of faith.

After considering Tertullian, Origen, Irenaeus, Pelegius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and others we must acknowledge the difficulty there is in formulating an acceptable doctrine of the universality of sin.

Out of the many explanations we have studied in the past chapters there seems to emerge three lines of thought. The one which may be termed the error school which is also the official school, leads us to believe in a primeval fall in which man erred and in choosing wrong lost his original perfection.

The second which may be termed the evolutionary school leads us to believe in a evolving moral maturity that leaves the growing pains of wrong choice behind as it struggles upwards towards goodness.

1. IBID, page 40

A third line emerges showing the difficulty there is in trying to rationalize the universality of sin and perhaps this emerging thought has a contribution to make in understanding the universality of sin as an ultimate enigma.

C O N C L U S I O N

ERROR, EVOLUTION, OR ENIGMA ?

We have seen over the past chapters how scholars in many ages have attempted to give an explanation for the empirical and historical evidence of the universality of sin. The Scripture in both Testaments draws attention to the malady being in each and every man but without giving explicit explanation as to how it is that each man falls into sin. Inevitably the Scripture resorts to the use of myth to convey a truth that seems to elude other explanation.

We saw how the early Christian thinkers of the Church began to express individual theories of how it was that sin entered the world, how it was transmitted to all men and how it was that each man embraced a sinful nature. Their attempts were many and varied but seldom in agreement and their main contribution was not so much in the answers they provided but rather in the questions that they started asking.

We further saw that it was only when Pelagius levelled an attack on hereditary sin and the position that he adopted on neutral free will in each new born infant and the serious implications this had in regard to the saving work of Christ that the Church began to formulate and systematise a doctrine

that we will ever be able to say about the universality of man's

on original sin.

It was largely the teachings of St. Augustine on original sin that the Church first officially adopted and although this included predestination nonetheless continued into the scholastic period when under the "Angelic Doctor", Thomas Aquinas, the doctrine was given substance when more attention was paid to its nature and transmission.

At the time of the Reformation when Western Christianity divided into Roman Catholic and Protestantism the doctrine that Protestantism propagated was little changed from the one that she had inherited and if anything made it more severe and decidedly dismal emphasising the fallenness more than the Fall. We also considered a number of alternative attempts to provide adequate answers to the universality of sin. These evolutionary and philosophical attempts were however always at variance with Scriptural testimony and led into an unacceptable dualism allowing sin to be part of God's plan.

Søren Kierkegaard interpreted sin as a leap into our lives that could not be understood by the mind and encouraged us not to seek for an explanation of sin's entry into the world.

Thus all attempts to explain the phenomenon of the universality of man's sin whether in terms of error, evolution, of a pre-historic nature or on a transcendental level have proved to be inconclusive. Each has acknowledged that sin is in all men but how it came about or how, if at all, it is passed on there is no definite answer. Thus we have seen that over a great span of centuries a conclusive explanation has not been reached. The question is whether the problem of the universality of sin must be left unanswered or whether one must continue to search for a convincing answer. I think that there is a growing awareness that there can never be an adequate explanation for anything that pertains to the power of evil or the power of sin. Many thinkers today are concluding that sin is a quality which is in essence non-rational and therefore cannot be systematised. It remains an irrational occurrence in God's good creation. There is a paradoxical truth that says nothing positive can ever be said about a negative except just that i.e. that nothing can be said about it. Thus perhaps it is that the only positive thing



that we will ever be able to say about the universality of man's sin is that it is there and we can say nothing by way of explanation. To attempt to do so as many have done is perhaps to discover that it can't be done. There can never be any adequate reason for man to choose to sin and therefore the answer must surely remain as inexplicable as the choice itself. If this is true then the universality of man's sin must be understood as an enigma.

Karl Barth in his Church Dogmatics refused to give a systematic treatment on the subject of the Devil for he said that if the Devil is the "father of all lies" then what can one say about him that would be true. For Barth it is a mistake to give attention to such a subject for in the end only harm can come from it for to give attention to a subject which deserves no attention is only to make it prosper. Barth emphasises that the subject cannot be ignored but that it should be overcome by concentrating on the Redeeming power there is in Jesus Christ. If he is right about the devil then it would seem that the same would apply for sin for sin is equally far separated from the truth and would therefore mean that nothing positive could be said about it and the attention the subject deserves is little if any.

Emil Brunner reminds us of the scandal there is in the Christian faith and relegates original sin to this category - the scandal being not the literal acceptance of Genesis 3 but the presence of sin within God's good world that we must acknowledge in every age. The scandal is that God allows it to be there. The scandal is that if God is almighty and all loving as the Christian claims He is then why does He allow this evil to continue. Because there is no adequate explanation it remains a scandal. It is a stumbling block, an obstacle over which we do not know how to climb - it is an offence to us and must always remain so. 1. Kierkegaard arrives at a similar conclusion by way of his existentialist theology claiming that we can never find an objective explanation for the truth about ourselves - sin does not have a quantitative explanation

1. Emil Brunner - Man in Revolt

but must always be a qualitative experience within the mystery of one's own soul "to want to explain logically the entrance of sin into the world is a stupidity which could only occur to people who are comically anxious to get an explanation". 1. For Kierkegaard there is no outside reason for the presence of sin within us - it comes from within our own being and enters with a leap defying the rational and only to be grasped by the paradox.

Perhaps the insight that comes from all the attempts to systematise the universality of man's sin is that what should be emphasised is not why we are sinful or how sin entered into the world but rather how we might be redeemed from it through the gracious act of God in Jesus Christ. Ultimately to have the explanation for sin would be of no avail for it would have no use for those who are called of God. It would be far more useful to concentrate on the positive qualities and gifts that come from God's goodness. H. Rondet in his book on Original Sin while discussing Paul's contribution on the subject says that Paul only talks about original sin as the reverse side of the theology of redemption. In other words Paul is bidding us turn from sin to the positive work of redemption in Jesus Christ and only truly understands sin when he has left it behind and embraced the new life under God.

Paul's advice in Philippians 4 vs. 8 ff is also not to give any attention to the negative or evil "Finally, my bretheren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things". Let us turn our attention to the good and the positive rather than trying to understand or rationalise the evil.

A.M. Hunter in his book 'The Gospel according to St. Paul' interprets the Christian's duty as not so much to draw attention to the wrongness in people of which we are only too aware but rather to proclaim both God and his forgiveness "God in order that men may see all the nature of their sin as rebellion against His holy love, and forgiveness that they may continually

1. Søren Kierkegaard - Concept of Dread, page 45

accept responsibility for sin actually committed - to enable them to see the true nature of their duties we must show them the light of the gospel of the grace of God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ". 1.

The Genesis myth might well be right when it says that to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is forbidden for in so doing one seeks to understand evil when what is required is full attention to God's word. It may well be that those who insist that an explanation be given for the universality of man's sin are unwittingly perpetuating a fall that they wish to escape from. The advocates of the power of positive thinking have perhaps set up a significant guidepost to which we should look more closely.

All true knowledge is bound up in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Sin, whether original or actual, because of its parasitic nature of corrupting goodness can never exist in its own right and may therefore only be defined after first considering God's goodness. In other words the force of sin may not be defined in itself but only by negating the positive which can be grasped. If this is true then we should evidence what sin is not so much in what happened to Adam but rather in what happened to Christ on the cross. (a) Then having evidenced sin there as the crucifixion of love for which there is no justification, no good reason and no understanding let us accept the timely word of St. Paul and "lay aside every sin that so easily besets us and look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith". 2.

1. A.M. Hunter - 'Gospel According to St. Paul', page 92.
2. Hebrews 12 vs. 2
- (a) Note how Paul in Romans only talks about Adam when he talks about Christ.

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