CHAPTER VI

ORIGINAL SIN:

THE BASIC PRESUPPOSITION OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLUTIONS

A. AN EXPOSITION

In spite of the many problems regarding the interpretation of the Genesis account of Adam's Sin, it does provide a good basis for an attempt to present and consider the doctrine of the Fall of Man. That it is not a literal account of events is only too readily admitted now-a-days. And it is never forgotten that the ultimate truths of our being will have an aspect of mystery. Yet always there are attempts to pierce the realm of mystery. Any religious or philosophical doctrine if understood as an attempt of this kind, will not be taken for a foolproof explanation. At the same time the value of any such explanation is not limited in the way the doctrine or the theory is limited. It is this that allows us to grant the mystery-aspect of religious truths, and yet take the explanations of the mystery seriously.

Thus the doctrine of Original Sin is both a mystery and a theory that is attempting to solve the mystery. This way of looking at it enables us to understand K. Rahner's remark that the "mystery of Original Sin should not be rationalistically disintegrated." But, as he says, we may enquire into the real ground of this mystery without necessarily fixing a meaning to the details such as the nature of the first sin, or the exact significance of 'Adam'. According to Rahner, the genuine ground of this mystery lies in the fact that sanctifying grace is a mystery because it is the self communication of God. The state of Original Sin,
then, is a state of unholiness due to the lack of sanctifying grace and it is antecedent to the moral goodness of man's free decision.

Adam, when created, was in possession of grace which he lost by his sin. It is the gist of the doctrine of Original Sin that, since the sin of our first parents, men have been conceived in sin. What then was the state of man before the Fall? Scripture tells us that God made man upright and happy. The first sin of the first parents topsyturvyed the whole situation. This resulted in the loss of man's original uprightness. The relationship of man with God is radically altered. This fallen state has now become 'natural' to man, from which state he is redeemed by his acceptance of Christ, the incarnation of God Himself.

Thus, if by the doctrine of Original Sin is meant the first sin of the first parents, it also means the consequence of the first sin, the 'natural' fallen state of man, so much so that modern interpretations emphasize the latter sense even at the expense of the former. Thus by Original Sin is meant the possibility (or better, probability and natural inclination) of man to sin against God. This, of course, avoids the problems created by the acceptance of the Christian doctrine literally; but to what extent we are justified in this kind of 'demythologization' is a question to be considered. But we shall postpone the discussion of these and similar issues to a later occasion. Having underscored the mystery aspect of the doctrine, and having noted the two senses of the Fall of Man (Fall as "act" and Fall as "fact", in the words of Paul Tillich),\(^2\) we now proceed to consider in some detail the various accounts of the doctrine.
We begin by taking note of the main points of the scriptural accounts: the Genesis account, and St. Paul's version. Then we go on to the Augustinian formulation followed by the formulation of the Council of Trent. It is only in the next section that we consider the issues raised regarding this doctrine in the post-Tridentine period or the modern period, because while we go through the contemporary approaches a partial analysis of the important issues is attempted there, before we make a summary analysis of the doctrine in the final section.

a. The Genesis Account

The story of the garden poses many problems. The literary forms of the narration are obscure and complex. They do not correspond to usual kind of literature, and cannot be judged according to our classical categories. Their historicity as a whole can neither be denied nor affirmed without unduly applying to them the norms of a literary form under which they cannot be classified. Again in the context of the whole Bible the individual sin of the first parents seem to be only marginal. It is rarely mentioned explicitly. 3

Nevertheless, this story is the basis of various tenets of Christian theology in general and of many Roman Catholic dogmas in particular. As noted by R.V. Walle in his article on 'Original Sin', the theology of evil, the so-called preternatural gifts of the first parents, the guilt of Original Sin as transmitted to their descendents, the need for Christ's incarnation and redemptive death, the prerogative of the 'immaculate conception' and subsequently the 'assumption' of Mary, the objective atonement through the passion and resurrection of the God-man, the individual
reconciliation of each Christian through baptism, the life of grace as a struggle against concupiscence, the final perseverance and salvation itself, all these are linked up with the 'fall' of Adam.\(^4\)

The Genesis story of the fall of man is best presented in its original form. Given below is a continuous account of the drama of Eden reconstructed from the relevant verses selected from the Bible:

"Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live. Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East, and there he put the man he had formed. He made all kind of beautiful trees grow there and produce good fruit. In the middle of the garden stood the tree that gives life and the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad ... Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. He said to him, "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day." Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him... Then man and the woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed."\(^5\)

"Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the Lord God had made. The snake asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat fruit
from any tree in the garden?" "We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden," the woman answered, "except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die." The snake replied, "That's not true; you will not die. God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad." The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruits and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband and he also ate it. As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding and realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves."

"That evening they heard the Lord God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the Lord God called out to the man, "Where are you?" ... And he said to the woman, "I will increase your trouble in pregnancy and your pain in giving birth. In spite of this, you will still have the desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him." And he said to the man, "You listened to your wife and ate the fruit which I told you not to eat. Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you. It will produce weeds and thorn, and you will have to eat wild plants. You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything, until you go back to the soil
from which you were formed. You were made from soil and you will become soil again."

Man was created in a world of harmony. As a result of sin he is driven out of Eden. He loses his uprightness and harmony, concupiscence and death enter the world, and the struggles in human lives follow. Behind the facade of archaic simplicity and without expressing any abstract speculation, the story of the garden is deep theology. Before taking up the issues involved here for our consideration, we now pass on to another scriptural reference to the fall of man.

b. Paul's account

St. Paul presents the parallel between our solidarity in Adam in his sin and our solidarity in Christ in his redemptive act. His main purpose is to show that the gift of justification in Christ amply makes up for what we lost through Adam.

"Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned ..." (Rom. 5:12) states clearly the relationship between Adam's sin and the sin of the world. But Paul does not stop here. He makes the parallel between Christ and Adam explicit.

"It is true that many people died because of the sin of that one man. But God's grace is much greater and so is his free gift to so many people through the grace of one man, Jesus Christ. It is true that through the sin of man death began to rule because of that one man. But how much greater is the result of what was done by the one man,
Jesus Christ! All who receive God's abundant grace and are freely put right with him will rule in life through Christ. So then, as the one sin condemned all mankind, in the same way the one righteous act sets all mankind free and gives them life." (Rom. 5: 15, 17, 18.) According to Paul, the future of the whole of mankind was linked up with the one man, Adam and his behaviour affected all. But this is only part of his presentation of the scheme of reality. If we are made sinners by being born as a member of Adam's progeny, so also, by being united with Christ, we are saved from our sinfulness.

c. St. Augustine

It is St. Augustine who used the term Peccatum Originale about the doctrine. The theology of the transmission of Original Sin was elaborated by him against the Pelagians who denied the doctrine as such. In this background, Augustine stressed the Original Sin as the dogma of faith and also its universality. He saw its operation in the concupiscence which turns man from God, to the extent that, and as long as, this inherent stain of guilt is not destroyed by baptism. He regarded it as transmitted by the libido in the parents' love by which a human being comes into existence. Through one man's fall human being comes into existence. Through one man's fall human nature has become not only sinful, but the breeder of sinners so that even Christian parents, who are no longer infected by Original Sin, still pass it to their children, because they beget them in concupiscence. This view of Augustine is closely related with his idea of salvation as limited in range. He believed that most men are left by God's just judgement in the 'massa damnata' constituted by Original Sin.
Augustine has not worked out the intrinsic difference between Original and personal sin, because the consequence in the next world are the same.

d. **Council of Trent**

In the Middle Ages from Anslem of Canterbury onwards, supernatural and habitual grace was clarified as sanctifying grace and by a more precise doctrine of *justitia originalis*. The essence of Original Sin was increasingly situated in the lack of sanctifying grace for which Adam's actual sin was responsible. Concupiscence now appeared simply as a consequence of Original Sin is really blotted out in baptism, although concupiscence remains. It was the Council of Trent which defined a real inward Original Sin in all (except B.V. Mary) which is caused by Adam's Sin and is really effaced by justification. Against the reformers it also clarified that Original Sin does not consist in concupiscence (since it persists in the justified), but in the lack of original justice and holiness, which the Council regarded as constituted by the grace of justification as interior and habitual.

The Post-Tridentine theology developed various theories as to why the factual lack of sanctifying grace is in us, as descendants of Adam, is not simply a consequence of sin, merely negative absence, but is something in us which ought not to be or theories why it would be possible to impute the sin of Adam to us. We shall now make a brief survey of the various theories developed in modern times.
B. CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

Before presenting the individual hypothesis we shall make a brief review of the variety of influences which have drawn the authors to a reconsideration of the traditional interpretation of the doctrine of Original Sin.

1. Difficulties inherent in the classical position

No theologian is unaware of the fundamental problems involved in the traditional presentation of the doctrine of Original Sin. How are we to explain the fact that the single sin of one man is the sole explanation for a condition of deprivation in all? How can we account for this sinful condition? Can we seriously hold that the non-transmission of grace is the positive transmission of guilt? In what sense can the deprivation of grace be called 'sinful' in the individual when not personally willed by him? These and other problems have vexed the theologians for centuries.

2. Influence of Modern Philosophy

Modern Philosophy, whether explicitly existential and personalistic or not, has introduced a much richer appreciation of the specifically human than was the case in the scholastic tradition. Our notion of freedom, consciousness, temporality, historicity, and the interpersonal as constitutive of human existence have been greatly enriched. Since Original Sin has primary reference to the human condition, these philosophical enquiries cannot but influence and aid our thinking on the doctrine.
Theological Developments

Theological reflections on any given facet of revelation is necessarily influenced by the developments in other areas. Hence the doctrine of Original Sin, now as in the past, must look to current thinking in the Theology of Revelation, of Christ, Church, and grace for its own self understanding. Perhaps a newly-awakened Christocentric view of reality is the most influential factor in a rethinking of the doctrine of Original Sin. Mankind's solidarity in Adam is attempted to be understood with reference to the solidarity in Christ.

The Natural Sciences

In the area of the Natural Sciences it is evolution which has had the strongest influence on the doctrine of Original Sin. Despite the variety of the conflicting explanations on the precise 'how' of the evolutionary process, stubborn resistance on the part of the theologian to the fact of evolution is no more. Evolution in our day is not simply a scientific theory alongside others, but has become a particular perspective upon reality as a whole. This presents the doctrine of Original Sin with a number of interesting questions. Is the traditional Adam endowed with the preternatural gifts a marvellous parenthesis in the progressively more perfect evolution of the world? Does not his sin and spread of sinfulness in the world militate against the evolutionary idea of more and more perfection? Does the prevalence of the theories of polygensism or polyphyletism undermine the doctrine of Original Sin? In a polygenistic context how would a theologian explain the transmission of Original Sin, related as it has been to direct physical generation from the first father of all?
5. Modern Biblical Scholarship

Modern Biblical Scholarship compels the systematic theologian to take a new look at his biblical foundation for the doctrine of Original Sin. The relatively recent realisation that Genesis chapters 1 to 11 cannot be history in the modern scientific sense of the word, demands a reconsideration of the classical presentation of the doctrine. The sacred author's didactic intention in Genesis Ch. 2 and 3, scholars commonly agree, is to explain contemporary Israel's universal and hereditary condition of sinfulness. To explain the hereditary character of sin he traces it back to his forefather; to explain its universal character he traces it back to the father of all, Adam, the Man. Although the author is interested in depicting a truly historical cause for a truly historical situation (and hence Adam is not an atemporal and mythical every man), he has neither the resources for, nor the interest in, writing modern scientific history. Rather, he in this account represents the universally hereditary, cumulative character of sin. From the Genesis account, therefore, it is obviously quite impossible to establish any scientific or historical detail as part of the doctrine of the Original Sin.

Regarding St. Paul's account in Rom. 5, modern scholars agree that his intention in employing Adam-Christ parallelism is the more effectively to proclaim universal redemption in Christ Jesus. In this context it is disputed whether Paul's intention was to affirm the historical existence of Adam, though some scholars argue that Adam's historicity is to be assumed necessarily to make real his parallelism to the historical Saviour. Again, most scholars agree that we cannot look to Rom. 5 for revealed teaching on the mode of transmission or the nature of Original Sin in mankind as a whole.
6. The Modern Interpretation of the Magisterium

The teaching authority of the Church as exercised through Council documents, Encyclicals, etc., is also subjected to new interpretations. The Council of Orange is understood to have taught the necessity of Christ's grace for salvation as against the optimistic naturalism of the Pelagians. And in Augustinian style it stressed the debility of human freedom tracing it to the sin of Adam in us. According to recent interpretations of the Orange documents, its primary didactic intent is man's need for grace and not all the details regarding the fall of man.

As regards the teaching of the Council of Trent it is now argued that its intention was not to define Adam as a single, concrete, historical person who is the physical father of all men, thereby excluding any kind of polygenism. It is also emphasised that a council document does not give direct answer to the questions which were not asked at the moment of its origin. It is even argued that conciliar statements should be understood to mean that its position is clearly seen to be conducive to salvation, not that it is the only position on the question, or even the best. Thus it is now supposed that the Council of Trent leaves open the question of Adam's historicity as well as that of monogenism and polygenism.

The foregoing summary of the various factors which have been influential in a reconsideration of the doctrine of Original Sin was preparatory to an exposition of some of the more recent hypotheses which have been proposed. Although they differ in particulars, all are concerned to render the doctrine more intelligible to the modern mind in scholarly fidelity to the data of revelation.
Z. Alszeghy and M. Flick

Alszeghy and Flick analyse Original Sin in terms of personalistic philosophical themes and try to establish the compatibility of the traditional understanding of the doctrine with an evolutionary world-view.

The authors undertake their personalist analysis with the conviction that since sin is a personal state, it cannot be described in static terms. Human existence is constituted by, and fulfils itself in, interpersonal dialogical relationships. Original Sin, then, is defined as one's innate and absolute incapability, prior to his personal choice of freely entering into dialogue. Thus Original Sin is both 'personal', because it is an incapability of interpersonal dialogue, and 'natural' in the sense that this inability is prior to one's personal choice. This inability to orientate oneself towards God and towards other beings is a consequence of the fall of all men in Adam.

How one man's sin induces dialogical impotence in mankind, is tackled by putting the 'Fall' in an evolutionary perspective. Adam was the first man who evolved to a degree of self-consciousness sufficient to recognise and freely respond to God's invitation to supernatural life. When, for the first time in Adam, man was called to cooperate freely in the on-going evolutionary plan of God, he disobediently refused to grace. Thus he thwarted the original evolutionary plan. As a consequence, the instinctive and supernatural orientation toward further conscious supernatural evolution (the grace which Adam possessed 'virtually') was simply blocked, not only in Adam, but in all men. Adam's sin affected all mankind, for all men are one, forming a corporate person.
We will recognise that in their hypothesis Alszeghy and Flick are clearly in the classical tradition though they admit biological polygenism, though Adam did not actually possess grace prior to the fall, and though transmission of Original Sin is not related to procreation as its cause. And they consider the paradise story as historical, because its religious value demands the preservation of a nucleus of historical truth. But their personalistic approach, with the idea of commitment and dialogue as essential to the theology of sin, is certainly appealing to modern mind. They also take account of the fact of evolution while preserving the traditional tenets.\footnote{11}

**Pierre Grelot**

Grelot's intention is to update the doctrine of Original Sin in view of modern thought in the fields of Biblical Hermeneutics, Paleontology and depth-Psychology. According to him, Adam is, unlike that of Alszeghy and Flick, not the first man to cross the threshold of self-conscious freedom, but the first couple, since the sexual bipolarity is a constitutive ingredient in human self-consciousness. Awaking to self-consciousness and freedom is precisely an act of self-conscious freedom, and it is this first act of freedom — attempting to be like God in the knowledge of good and evil (proud mastery over one's destiny) — that constitutes the Fall. Unlike Alszeghy and Flick, Grelot does not explain the subsequent universality of sin on the basis of corporate personality. The co-Adamites were awakened to the threshold of self-consciousness in the cultural ambience provided by their contact with Adam and Eve. Moral contagion thus spread through the entire race by psychological rather than physical generation.\footnote{12}
Despite rich reflections on the specifically human or interpersonal factor in the 'hominization' process, Grelot's theory leaves certain questions unanswered. Why only one couple emerge to consciousness independently? And does psychological generation adequately explain the interiority of Original Sin?

Piet Schoonenberg

According to P. Schoonenberg the Fall is constituted not by a catastrophic sin of a first man or the first couple, but rather by the innumerable personal sins of all mankind throughout history taken as a collectivity. The solidarity of mankind is not presented as a mysterious bond between each individual child and the first father of the race. Rather, 'the sin of the world' — the sins of one's parents, all the predecessors, and the whole of environment — is taken into consideration as a constitutive element of man's being. Man is essentially 'being-situated-in-a-sinful-world'.

Adam is the first sinner, though not necessarily the first man, and in view of the total history of sin, his sin, though first, is relatively insignificant. The fall is not the sin of Adam alone, but rather the whole history of sinful deeds from Adam to the present time. These innumerable sins in their collectivity constitute the 'sin of the world', and to be in the world is to be in the condition of Original Sin. Original Sin is transmitted through procreation in the sense that it is through generation alone that man enters and is situated in the world. Thus neither monogenism nor physical descent from Adam is required for the doctrine.13

Regarding the universality of Original Sin, Schoonenberg has rejected his earlier position that Original Sin became
universal because of, and only after the world's rejection of Christ by crucifixion. He now holds that it is absolutely universal — before and after Christ's death — because every sin is a part of the existential situation of those who are born after it. But it is unclear how this 'being-situated-in-a-sinful-world' if understood as relating only to the environment and as disconnected from physical and psychological inheritance, can by itself explain the interior sinful condition of anyone born into the human family. And if inheritance is crucial to the doctrine, then the question of the first sin also becomes important. Schoonenberg shifts the emphasis from the question of first sin to the consequent accumulation of sins which constitute the situation in which we are born. But the latter is not more easily explained than the former.

A. Hulsbosch

Like Schoonenberg, Hulsbosch identifies Original Sin as the 'sin of the world', which becomes the sin of each man inasmuch as his very existence is constituted by the relations with others. Just as the world as a whole, since sinful, is under the power of the evil one, so also is each individual man who is born into the world.

What is most provocative in Hulsbosch's treatment, however, is his new focus on the question. Adam and his paradise of the past in a static, essentially unchanging world are replaced by Christ, toward full union with whom in future glory, the world and man are evolving. If in the older interpretation the emphasis was on the givenness of the perfect state from which man has fallen, in the Christian evolutionary perspective which rejects the static view of the world, the focus is on the fully glorified Christ of the
future to whom world is growing. Hulsbosch defines Original Sin as "the powerlessness of man — in his incompleteness as creature — to reach freedom and realize the desire to see God, in as far as this impotence arises from nature and is put into the context of a sinful world." When seen in the evolutionary perspective the incompleteness of man is seen in a new light — as something that should be and can be overcome by man's free decision to cooperate with God's plan.

In this dynamic presentation, sin is revealed as the refusal of man to subject himself to God's creative will. And the fulfilment of man is to be brought about by man's creative self-achievement in personal freedom before God; this, in turn, is made possible by reconciliation through Christ with God, because mankind has already fallen. God reveals himself and meets man in grace, and this grace is revealed in Christ Jesus. It is in this context that Hulsbosch speaks of Christ's salvific work as the completion of the work of creation.

The two important points of Hulsbosch's interpretation are: (i) The man born into this sinful world is the man born in Original Sin, because his relationship to the rest of the world is not merely external to him, but is in fact constitutive of his very being; and, (ii) this situation of 'fallenness' can be overcome only with the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. Thus in his theory Hulsbosch combines the best of Schoonenberg and a truly Christological foundation for the doctrine. There is much here that is appealing, specially his consideration of 'man-as-situated-in-a-sinful-world' and as striving for personal fulfilment in Christ.15

However, it seems that not only the historicity of
paradise story has been abandoned, but even the historicity of the fall is reduced to a minimum; even if there has to be chronologically a first sinner his influence is not emphasised as much as the sins of the world taken together. Secondly, though man's eschatological fulfilment is envisaged in a Christocentric evolutionary perspective, the problem remains that if man's imperfection is not according to God's original plan, then Christ's intervention as a redemption and a reconciliation also will not be according to the original plan of God. Which means that sin and its origin will have to be granted as much historicity as is granted to Christ and his redemptive act if the former is to be understood in terms of the latter.

Henri Rondet

Like Hulsbosch, Rondet takes a Christic view of Original Sin. According to him, "in order the better to understand the sin of Adam, it is necessary to recognise the unity of human family in Christ, the new Adam, in whom have been created or, preferably, are created all men who in the course of time have been, are, or will be." 16

Rondet explains this thesis in the three dialectical steps or "moments" in which God's eternal plan is realised in history. (i) From all eternity God sees all men in His beloved Son. God's decision to create a universe is His decision to become man, the God-man who will be the centre of all created reality and the prototype of all men. God sees the universe gathered around His Son. (ii) From all eternity (in the second dialectical step) God sees humanity in sin and thus separated by sin from Christ, who was meant to make men one. Endowed with the liberty to 'yes' or 'no' to God and surrounded by the grace of God which is offered to him, man
necessarily sins. (iii) From all eternity God sees man as
saved in Christ the Redeemer. The third moment of this
dialectical view of creation and human history is finalized
toward Christ.

Who or what is Adam in this scheme of things? Rondet
admits that there obviously was a chronologically first
sinner, but he transcends the whole question of monogenism
or polygenism in maintaining that Adam is man, humanity taken
as a totality which, in the second dialectic moment appears
in the view of God as separated by sin from Christ. The sin
of Adam, therefore, is "an innumerable multitude of personal
sins constituting a collective sin, the sin of the world, the
sin of Adam." But at the same time mankind's solidarity in
redemption through Christ is logically prior to its solidarity
in sin.

It is clear that Rondet is thinking of "moments" here
in the strict philosophical sense, certainly not of
chronological steps in the created order, for sinful
humanity (second moment) is simultaneously created (first
moment) and redeemed (third moment) in and through Christ.
Thus according to him creation, sin, and redemption are not
merely chronological events, but logical elements of the
history of mankind. This history is understood as salvation
history when mankind's solidarity is, as Rondet does,
considered to be logically prior to all the natural
solidarities. 17

Alfred Vanneste

Alfred Vanneste is convinced, with the authors we have
seen previously, that the whole thrust of the doctrine of
Original Sin is Christological and soteriological. He
describes Original Sin as "the need of every man for redemption by Christ". If we trace the historical development of the doctrine from Romans through Trent, we see that this need for Christ has been the basic motivation and the essential message. "What is the significance of Christ in the living of each Christian?" was the central issue in the Pelagian controversy, which understandably narrowed down to the limit-case of infants and their need for baptism. Here the necessity of infant baptism was an application of the principle that all men, infants included, need salvation in Christ, and therefore the statement that infants are in sin, not personal but "original". 18

Vanneste's interpretation of the doctrine of Original Sin may be summed up in the following points: (i) Since the doctrine of Original Sin is essentially a theological expression of man's common need of salvation through Christ, we can and must transcend the scientific questions of monogenism, polygenism, evolution etc., which encumber the traditional framework. Actually they have no bearing or interest as such for theology. (ii) Since Original Sin is a specifically Christian doctrine expressing the significance of Christ for all mankind, it is totally different from the view of Original Sin as a mythical expression of man's general sinfulness. (iii) Original Sin should not be used to explain, even in a general way the origin of suffering and death in the world. Biological suffering and death are "results" of sin in the same way the decalogue promises long life to those who honour their parents. 19

Engelbert Gutwenger

Engelbert Gutwenger quite frankly denies the appropriateness of speaking of a condition of "Original Sin" or of an "inherited guilt". He finds no justification for such statements in
St. Paul and feels that Trent's restatement of the Augustinian synthesis is a formulation which is conducive to salvation, but certainly not the only or the best one.

With Hulsbosch, Rondet, and Vanneste, Gutwenger views the doctrine from a Christological perspective. All men have been created unto Christ, and this dynamics rules the entire history of humanity. As philosophy has discovered certain existentials of human existence so revelation has made known to us the basic existential of man: 'being-for-Christ', which pertains as much to man's constitution as 'being-in-the-world' or being-with others. According to Gutwenger to be in Original Sin is simply to be outside Christ, prior to the possibility of free personal decision for or against Christ. Prior to the possibility of free choice, man is in a state of innate indifference. Though it obviously implies a lack or want, it is not a sinful condition, but positively willed by God, just as he wills man's decision for Christ, because this indifference is a necessary presupposition for such a decision!

But the question is: Have we, in order to give a Christocentric and anthropocentric doctrine, to explain 'Original Sin' without reference to the origin of humanity?

CONCLUSION

In moving, rapidly as we have, through this series of presentations it is quite obvious that there has been a progressive change of focus on the doctrine of Original Sin from man's solidarity, in sin with Adam to the human condition as 'not-yet-in-Christ'. To be in 'Original Sin' is simply to be outside of Christ prior to the possibility of free personal decision for or against Christ.
The question then arises whether this not-yet-in-Christ prior to personal decision can appropriately be called a 'sinful' state — even when qualified as 'Original Sin'. Gutwenger would deny the appropriateness of this terminology, while Vanneste accepts it provisionally, in the sense that, since it is meaningless to speak either of personal sin or of innocence in an infant 'Original Sin' describes the condition as well as anything else.23

Hulsbosch and Rondet also maintain that the very core of Christian faith is man's need for salvation in Christ. But in their interpretation there is a second aspect or moment of Christ's redemptive work, namely, reconciliation of truly sinful man to God. Thus they strike a balance between the traditional teaching on Original Sin and the more creative Christocentric positions of Gutwenger and Vanneste. Granted the doctrine of Original Sin grew historically out of a stress on man's need for the grace of Christ, it would seem that Hulsbosch and Rondet have better preserved the Christian sense of the 'sin of the world'.24

This is not to say, however, that there are no difficulties with this position. The Christocentric view is popular these days. To explain it in theological depth is quite another matter. From the controversies raging in the field one thing is clear: that Christology must be much more thoroughly investigated before Christocentric theories of Original Sin can be more than a rough sketch along broad lines.

A second difficulty which the authors themselves admit as unresolved is the way in which Original Sin becomes one's own through being situated. It would be difficult to deny that this is an important aspect of the mystery. Perhaps, we should combine 'being-situated-in-the-world' with the
radical existential, being-for-Christ. But does this combination suffice to explain the 'mysterium iniquitatis'?

Nevertheless, the new approaches to the study of Original Sin have shown the shortcomings of the traditional explanation of the doctrine and brought out several aspects which were either ignored or not sufficiently taken into consideration:

- the concept of sin as a breach of 'covenantal trust' and a deadlock in the dialogue between God and man.

- the Hebrew notion of collective guilt and especially that of corporate personality, according to which Adam might be an ideal prototype as well as an individual 'man'.

- the 'sin of the world' as an 'existential' of man, so that he is 'situated' in a sinful community from his very birth.

- the dynamic, evolutionary process of creation, truncated as it were, by man's sinful refusal to co-operate with the divine plan.25

At the same time, a more thorough knowledge of the literary genre of the narration, of its affinities with similar themes and traditions of the ancient 'Near East' as well as of its unique vision of faith, helps us to extract more clearly the real message of the Bible and sift out the genuine elements of its teaching on Original Sin:

- There is evil and sin in the world: we are all in need of a salvation that comes exclusively from Christ.
- Even while taking full account of the personal sins of each, we must accept a certain sinfulness which precedes the personal decision of the individual.

- This 'sinfulness' affects us all as a body, collectively and in successive generations.

- This corporate unity in sin can be compared to our unity based on the fact that we are all created in God's image and all called to become one in Christ.26

C. A SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The foregoing survey has made it clear that the Christian theologians make every attempt to circumvent the problems raised by modern understandings of man and his world because they prefer to keep the doctrine of Original Sin in its purest form and as undiluted as possible. Some do this by denying outright the new ideas such as that of evolution or its apparent concomitant polygenism. Some others want to go by the new trends and they try to establish that these are really implied by the traditional dogma of Christianity and even by the scriptural accounts pertaining to the doctrine of Original Sin. A third group would prefer to avoid the problem altogether by taking the stand that these are not really relevant to the doctrine; that Original Sin is a purely theological issue and it should not be treated as a matter of science or history. Though this sounds to be a very considered position, it needs to be asked in what way the doctrine is meaningful if its spatio-temporal connections are served. At least it needs to be 'shown' that the doctrine is independent of such questions as those pertaining to history, science, etc.
We shall first see what are the main issues raised regarding the basic accounts of the doctrine.

1. Problems regarding interpretation of the Scriptural accounts

i. Regarding Gen. 2-3 the tendency among the exegetes is to consider the passage as an 'etiology'. Etiology is the giving of an earlier event as a reason for an experienced situation or event in human affairs, in which this situation is the reason for our knowledge of the cause. It is only common experience that there is something in man which prevented him from fulfilling himself. The paradise story of the fall is then, the result of assigning a cause to the misery and wickedness of mankind.

But the dangers are many in viewing the scriptural account in this manner. For one thing, the revelatory value of the truth of the doctrine is lowered considerably in the attempt to explain it with reference to ordinary processes of knowledge. An etiological account need not necessarily be revealed; but, if the revealed truth is only the result of an etiological reasoning as is held by Manickam and also by P.D.Letter then it must be pointed out that, on account of our incapability of showing the exact nature of the truth of the doctrine, these authors are tempted to deny any truth that is not comprehended by our ordinary process of reasoning. Karl Rahner too calls the Genesis account to be etiological, but he does not consider this in detail. If the idea is to say that the details of the Genesis account need not be taken literally, but only the gist of it need to be taken seriously, it is not clear whether the gist/religious truth of the account can be so separated as to say that the gist is revealed, and that the
literal form and details are the results of etiological reasoning. And, it is not clear what is meant by saying that literal form of the event, or the event itself, is etiological, but the truth is revealed. The evident confusion is the result of taking refuge too quickly and readily under obscure phraseology.

ii. Connected with this is the idea that there is a historical "development" not only in the theoretical form of the doctrine but also in the grasp of its truth. For instance P.D.Letter holds such a development is there from Genesis to St. Paul (Romans 5). He thinks that "Romans" adds a 'new feature' to the etiology of Genesis by bringing in the factor of God's mercy as a solution to the problems of man's sinfulness. And, according to this author, the Pauline account is understood by most as implying physical solidarity with Adam whereas, he suggests, that the present trend is to understand the doctrine without implying this.

In talking of this kind of a development, the idea is to say that Paul knew better than the author of Genesis, and we, of course, know better than Paul. But what do we know? And how do we know what they know? Is historical analysis only to show our assumed superiority, or a genuine attempt to know the truth? In what sense can we say that the Old Testament author did not mean the salvation aspect? In what sense is then the Old Testament called a preparation for Christ? What is the meaning of the promise to Adam? — the promise of a Saviour? Or, should we take it only as an interpolation? Of course, yes, if we want to say that the Old Testament represents a time of history when men thought only about their ruin but never about their better possibilities!
iii. A third problem regarding the interpretation of the scriptural accounts springs from the readiness of some theologians to deny all historical and biological significance to these accounts, because such historical and biological aspects are found inconvenient. For instance there is the attempt to establish that the doctrine of Original Sin presupposes the unity of all men, but the biological implications of this unity are irrelevant. The explanation given is that the physical descent of all men from the first sinner is not a certain element of revelation. But, if one eliminates elements in this manner, it is unclear what can be held as an unquestionable element of revelation. True, there are problems in fixing the meaning of a revealed truth. But it is one thing to hold that a theological doctrine should not be treated as a matter of history or science, but quite another to say categorically that the doctrine has no biological implications. It would seem to be a better thing to leave the question open. At least it needs to be said that biological aspect is not ruled out even if it is only a mode of establishing human solidarity.

Associated with this is the problem of the historical connotation of the scriptural accounts. Because if we surrender the historicity of the paradise story we cannot maintain at the same time the physical integrity of man with Adam. It is certainly out of question that the sacred author was drawing on human recollections of paradise, in some way handed down by the first generation of men. At the same time, the religious value of the story of the 'Fall of Man' demands the preservation of a nucleus of historical truth. On the other hand, temptation of some theologians of Original Sin to explain evil only from a historical point of view has played havoc. Its historicity does not deny evil 'coming into force' each time man commits a sin. It is as a reaction
to this overemphasis on historicity, that others have denied any historicity to Adam's Fall.

Regarding Romans 5th Chapter too there is the same dispute. Alszechy and Flick, for instance feel that St. Paul must have the intention of affirming the historical existence of a unique sinner in the beginning. Because, otherwise the parallelism between Christ and Adam would be between the real and the notional. Others would agree that Paul personally presumes the historical existence of Adam, but that the affirmation of the same is not his didactic intention and hence does not pertain to his teaching. This approach is all right in so far as it does not deny or affirm the historicity of the first man; but, for one thing, the connected problems such as that of 'transmission' and 'actual sin' are to be explained; and, for another, it is not healthy to assume that Paul had taken historicity of Adam to be a necessary ingredient of the matter but that we need not. For this, we will have to show that our theory is better than Paul's. Still another group is of opinion that historicity is not Paul's intention didactic or otherwise. Lengfeld, for instance, holds thus:

"In the typology of Adam-Christ, really nothing, can be affirmed regarding the historical individuality of the figure of Adam. Paul neither wanted to, nor could he make any historical affirmations." 32

From the scriptural accounts, therefore, it is obviously quite impossible to establish any details regarding the historicity of, or physical transmission of sin from Adam. And, yet, it is impossible to deny these to them. In spite of the fact that the Christian doctrine is intrinsically connected with the Old Testament account, the author of Genesis, would have been completely bewildered by 'our'
contemporary questions about Original Sin. Was Adam the physical father of all men? Did his sin alone cause the deprivation of grace in all? Was this deprivation transmitted by physical generation? Is "Adam's sin" inherent in each of his successors? Such questions move far beyond the data of the sacred scriptures and the intention of the sacred author.

2. The Problem of Historicity

Let us consider the question of historicity apart from the problem of the interpretation of the scriptural accounts. Of course, it might be said that the Fall of man is to be understood also as a preface to the sacred history. But in what sense is this a preface to history? We know that, corresponding to the solidarity of mankind with the historical Christ, there is granted in Christianity a certain amount of historicity to the Fall of Adam; and that whatever the advantages of overlooking the historical aspect of the Fall, reducing it to a figment of imagination is too naive a solution.

In the Semitic tradition, history of mankind is not a cycle but a road, and the universality of sin can be accounted for only by a sin committed at the start of the road. In this context whatever be the ambiguities and mysteriousness in granting a historical value to the ideas of a first sin and of the first sinner, it becomes necessary to do so. It is a 'fact' of historical value without which the explanation proposed could not be considered really significant in the Christian tradition. It only remains to 'interpret' this historical sense in a suitable manner; but there is no question of avoiding the historical aspect. Karl Rahner is of the opinion that not only Original Sin has a history, but it is the 'beginning' of the sins of the world, though
it is not merely the first temporal moment; and it is a sin that is unique in the world.

This is especially so because of the emphasis on the historical aspect attached to the redemptive act of Christ. The creation of man and world-history itself gets its true meaning from salvation history. History is salvation-history and salvation through the acceptance of Christ who is also a historical person. In fact, time and eternity meet in Christ, but the historical aspect of Christ is not allowed to suffer by this. In this context Adam's sin is also to be understood as an 'event' in this history.

This leads us to a consideration of the Christocentric nature of the interpretations of the doctrine of Original Sin.

3. Christocentric interpretations

An important feature of the formulations by present-day theologians of the doctrine of Original Sin is their angle of approach that is clearly Christocentric. Their approaches range from one end to another — from the idea that 'grace' is 'man's situation-in-Christ' and Original Sin is nothing other than an attempt to describe theologically the situation of mankind outside Christ, to the idea that mankind in sin through Adam's sin and Christ's redemptive act is to be understood as a means of providing an escape from this situation, a situation man could have avoided by doing right act. The one extreme is that man's sinfulness is natural to him, that this natural sinfulness is figuratively expressed by the doctrine of Original Sin. The other extreme is that man's sinfulness is really and actually caused by his free action in time, that he was, and could be, actually in grace without sin, that similarly redemption through
Christ is not a necessary existential of man but a contingent result of the fall of man. There is the middle position that both sin and salvation are 'equally' and 'always' the existentials of man.

In spite of the fact that the Christocentric approach to the doctrine helps to see it in relation to its total context, the dangers of this approach are many. For instance, Hulsbosch, Rondet and Vanneste interpret the doctrine in a purely negative manner as a deficiency in mankind that can be and should be met by man's acceptance of Christ. The modern interest in Christology has enabled theologians to avoid some of the problems that beset them for years, (for instance in biblical exegesis the meaning of the problematic Genesis account as pointing to salvation through Christ). But this tendency to avoid problems by excluding all positive content and giving only a negative meaning to the doctrine, will benefit neither the understanding of Original Sin nor Christology. Throwing away the baby with the bath cannot be a healthy way of doing anything.

Another danger of taking away the whole attention from the doctrine is to give radically wrong meanings to 'Original Sin'. For instance there is the attempt to interpret Original Sin as a 'natural situation' of man. This is not thought to be a problematic interpretation because it is supposed that Christology is enriched by saying that man's fallenness is natural to him and Christ is there to redeem him from his natural situation. In spite of everything that could be said for this, this is a wrong way of understanding the sin-aspect of Original Sin. Gutwenger goes to the extent of saying that Original Sin is not a sin at all. It is clear that he means more than that it is different from personal sin. Also Vanneste's stand is very close to this.
The other extreme is that of overemphasising the historical, biological and other details of the doctrine here too with the expectation that an emphasis on these would serve better to underscore the need for salvation through the acceptance of Christ. While doing this, grace, for instance, is explained as an actual state of man that existed before man sinned first. And Original Sin as a specific act that led to the loss of that pre-existing grace. This way of doing theology is not likely to help us to get nearer to the truth of the doctrine. Nor would it enrich Christology in any significant manner. The Christocentric view is popular, of late. But to explain it in theological depth is quite another matter. As noted earlier, Christology must be much more thoroughly investigated before Christocentric theories of Original Sin can be more than a rough sketch along broad lines.

4. **Theory of Evolution and Connected Problems**

The chief impetus for developing a method of approach in theology that came to be called Christocentric was the need to answer, or at least avoid, the problem raised by the general acceptance of the theory of evolution. There is, of course, stern resistance to this theory from some people; for instance, Peter Geach, in his book "Providence and Evil", restates the orthodox interpretation of the Christian dogmas and defend them against what he calls a destructive outlook — the theory of Evolution. He contends that "what the doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin in their uncompromising traditional form the Christian message is so radically altered from the old concept as to lose all credibility."  

But many Christian theologians today accept evolution as a plausible way of looking at the reality of the world,
including that of man.

"Despite the variety of conflicting explanations on the precise how of the evolutionary process, stubborn resistence on the part of the theologian to the fact of evolution now seems meaningless" contends a modern commentator of Christian doctrines. He also points out that evolution in our day is not simply a scientific theory alongside others, but has become a particular perspective upon reality as a whole. Moreover it is no longer a question simply of the evolution of man's body, but rather of man in his totality.

Evolution presents the doctrine of Original Sin with a number of interesting questions. Is the traditional Adam, particularly as endowed with the classical preternatural gifts, a 'marvellous parenthesis' in the otherwise progressively more perfect evolution of the world? Is the scientifically more favourable theory of polygenism (the original emergence of a number of human beings), if not polyphyletism (the original emergence of several disparate groups of human beings), to be rejected out of hand on theological grounds? How does the theologian explain the unity of the human family, a presupposition for the universality of Original Sin, in view of those hypotheses? In a polygenistic context, how would a theologian explain the transmission of Original Sin, related as it has been to direct physical generation from the first father of all?

The Council of Trent is supposed to have favoured a monogenistic understanding of the beginning of mankind. But it is also argued that the Council leaves the question of monogenism and polygenism perfectly open. Pope Paul VI in an address to theologians convened to discuss the doctrine
of Original Sin stated thus:

"As to the theory of evolutionism, you will not consider it acceptable if it is not clearly in agreement with the immediate creation of human souls by God and does not regard the disobedience of Adam, the first universal parent, as a decisive importance for the destiny of mankind."^37

But, with regard to this too, there is the attempt to understand it not as a declaration about evolution or polygenism, but about the need to protect the doctrine with its religious (not scientific) truth unaffected.

In the Christian evolutionary perspective, the focus reversed from Adam in the past to the fully glorified Christ of the future. Evolution is attempted to be interpreted as a Christocentric process. Such concepts as collective responsibility, corporate personality, etc. are employed to overcome the problem regarding the 'first man' and the 'first sin'. 'Corporate personality' refers to the summing up of a whole group in one individual. The idea of the whole human race being virtually present in Adam, is but a very general way of putting the thing; and it does not sufficiently explain the nature of the unity of mankind, not the 'how' of the transmission of the sin. But it enriches our understanding of the doctrine with an additional factor as its constituent.

As regards the mode of transmission, there are a variety of opinions. They range from the adherence to the strictly biological inheritance on the one side to the idea that the sole meaning of Original Sin is the 'natural' incompleteness of man which merely by his belonging to the human race. The understanding here is this: being a man is
being incomplete and it is, then, this solidarity that is represented by Original Sin and not the 'transmission' of a sin from one generation to another. If the former type of attempts run into problems by sticking on to the strictly biological nature of 'transmission' the latter type tends to avoid 'the problems of one kind' and enter into new ones. Such as: If 'solidarity' of mankind, and not the 'how' of the solidarity is the truth of the doctrine, then, how would one understand the solidarity? If biological solidarity is not the only way of understanding solidarity, it must be said that the solidarity, understood without the biological as at least one factor, is not solidarity of man, but perhaps of angels.

In conclusion it must be said that science and religion are not commensurable and therefore there is no place for any fear that they conflict because they do not quite "fit" together. Karl Rahner is of the opinion that in the present state of theology and science, it cannot be proved that polygenism conflicts with orthodox teaching of Original Sin. According to him the biological and historical significance, which is a must for the doctrine, is engendered by the acceptance of an evolutionary and polygenetic view. This would be a safe stand, provided it does not lead to a blind and overhasty acceptance of all the hypotheses regarding evolution. Such a caution as this is in fact called for. Because there are many dangers; for instance the danger of identifying Original Sin with a purely natural evolutionary incompleteness. This is clearly misconception. For, the 'sinfulness' of mankind will not be sinfulness if it is only natural.

We shall now go on to a consideration of the sinfulness of Original Sin.
5. **Sin and Grace; Original Sin and Personal Sin**

Sin is understood in relation to law in Christianity. But it is not law that makes something a sin. Before ethical conscience is awake, there is but a mixture of right and wrong. When a prohibition is introduced it dissolved this mixture: it manifests at once what is wrong by appealing to moral rectitude. The law makes sin 'manifest'. According to the extraordinary text of Rom. 7:7-13 this is even the essential function of law.

Man, of course, has always been conscious of his sinful state. Several passages of Scripture express this consciousness. But the understanding of sin as lack of grace is more clearly brought out in recent times. Man lacks God's sanctifying grace, precisely because he is a man and member of the human race. However, the will of God is that man should have the divinizing pneuma. And that will is antecedent even to God's moral demand on the freedom of the individual. Consequently if this divinizing pneuma is not there, this is only conceivable because of guilt freely incurred. And this lack which in this sense ought not to exist, of a divinizing holy grace antecedent to personal decision, has therefore, in an analogous sense, the character of sin. It is a state which ought not to be.

The preternatural gift of immortality and all that is implied by the original justice is to be understood then, as a state that God 'would have been' happy to see as prevalent. It is a lost opportunity; nonetheless it was an opportunity. An opportunity lost by sin. Since God owes grace to no one, he could link it to any 'meaningful condition', and therefore to the steadfastness of the first man.
Since this lack of the pneuma is in each instance an inner condition proper to man, we can rightly speak of an interior Original Sin proper to each — precisely because each belongs to the fellowship of the human race. This is to be distinguished from personal sin. Original Sin is not somebody else's (not even Adam's) personal sin, but a 'sin' that is in each one of us. This is 'natural' when measured by our nature. But it is a sin when seen from the standpoint of the ultimate. Thus it is wrong to say, as Schoonenberg does that Original Sin is the sum total of the innumerable personal sins of all mankind throughout history. Despite its character as a real interior sin (but, sin in an analogous sense), Original Sin (with its results: concupiscence and death) may be termed man's 'situation' if we wish to distinguish it from personal sin. Original Sin is thus the sin of the world only if we take it in its relation to the 'beginning' of the history of personal sins.

5. Aspects of Original Sin

It is clear from the foregoing that there is an admixture of two elements in Original Sin. They are:
(i) the 'actual sin' of a first man and (ii) the 'result' of that sin in the world, in general and in human beings in particular.

We may say here with some confidence that most of the problems solved in the theology of Original Sin are solved a bit too quickly and, by sacrificing one of the two above mentioned elements depending on which of these is emphasised. For instance, Hulsbosch defines Original Sin as follows: it is "the powerlessness of man — in his incompletedness as creature — to reach freedom and realise the desire to see God, in so far as this impotence arises from nature and
is put into the context of a sinful world. Here the emphasis is on the naturalness of the fallen human situation. This, of course, avoids the questions of historicity, biological transmission, etc., etc. But it does not thereby solve the questions raised regarding the explanation of this state, whereas the doctrine is supposed to consider such questions also. Again there is the extreme position that Original Sin is not a sin at all, held by Gutwenger for instance. According to him it is even 'willed' by God!

On the other hand, if the aspect of Original Sin that relates to the first actual sin is over emphasised, the dangers are: that of regarding it as a sin in the same sense as personal sin; of pressing the historical aspect beyond the limits; of interpreting the transmission of it 'only' in the biological sense. In other words, the danger is that of pressing the theory beyond its natural limits.

The two aspects of the doctrine have been clearly brought out by Paul Tillich by distinguishing them as 'Fall as act' and 'Fall as fact'. And the observation may be made here that there has been a sort of shift from an emphasis on the fall as 'act' in the classical tradition to an emphasis on the fall as 'fact' in the contemporary times. But we may hazard the remark that it is pointless to separate the sin in the garden from the sinfulness of the world. Both are linked together as one topic of truth.
REFERENCES


5. Gen. 2, 7-25.


* In this survey of the contemporary approaches to the doctrine of Original Sin, for exposition I have depended heavily on the following works:


9. P. Schoonenberg, as referred by J.L. Connor and R.V. Walle in their works (op.cit).

10. E. Gutwenger, as quoted by J.L. Connor (op.cit).


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

15. J.L. Connor (op.cit.)
16. H. Rondet, (as explained by J.L. Connor), op.cit.
17. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p.238.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p.239.
24. Ibid., p.240.
26. Ibid.
27. T.M. Manickam, Dharma according to Manu and Moses, Bangalore, (Dharmaram Publications), 1977, p.257.
30. R.V. Walle (op.cit.), p.137.
32. Lengfeld, as quoted by J.L. Connor, op.cit.
34. J.L. Connor & R.V. Walle, (op.cit.).
39. Ps. 143:2; Job 15:14; Ps. 51:5.
41. R.V. Walle, *(op.cit.)*, p. 155.