CONCLUSION TO PART II

Corresponding to the idea that evil in the world is a mere privation, we have come across the explanation of 'sin' as mere lack of grace and Original Sin as the general and even natural situation of mankind. But we have also strived to point out the errors of such a view on the matter. We have argued that such a negative interpretation does not take the reality of evil into account. And the understanding of 'sin' as lack of grace does not sufficiently explain what is sinful about sin. True that in a Christocentric theology sin and evil should be viewed in relation to the possibility of redemption. But it does not mean that we can explain grace or Christ's redemption any more clearly than we can theoretically explain evil.

The emphasis on the need for grace may have led to a blurred understanding of the nature of sin. But, if this lack of grace is qualified, as K. Rahner does, as a 'situation that ought not to be', then it refers also to its positive aspect. We have tried to show, during the analysis of the doctrine of Original Sin, that both sin and grace are to be understood in mutual relationship and in their relationship to actual life. Thus, our attempt at analysis was based on a mutual relationship between doctrines, and not on a one-way relationship between them. Also, we have through-out kept in mind the relationship each doctrine, as well as the whole theoretical or religious system, has with actual life. Before explicitating further this vital relationship between a system and the reality of the actual life, let us consider the very doctrine of Original Sin in its relationship with other important doctrines in the Christian context.
As we have already pointed out during the analysis of the doctrine of Original Sin, the recent interest in interpreting it from the standpoint of a Christic theology has many dangers. For instance, it takes away some positive elements from the doctrine and avoids most of the problems rather than confronting them. But, such a Christocentric approach has one important advantage: that it keeps the doctrine in its theoretical context without allowing it to be considered in isolation from that context.

The fundamental conviction of Christianity is that all men are called to a life of divine grace, but in such a way that this grace is given to all only through Christ, and not simply because they are human beings or members of mankind. This is implied by Christ's expiatory death 'for all'. As a result, Original Sin is understood as a result of man's non-cooperation with God's plan. A situation that each man shares by his very birth into the human family, but not a part of his essence, nor given with his creaturehood. In fact it is the weight of evil that burdens every man by his birth and his solidarity with mankind, prior to all his sins, but ratified and freely accepted by each personal sin, just as he is sanctified and saved by ratifying Christ's redemption in his personal life by faith. Thus, the real essence of Original Sin is found in man's deviation from his God-appointed destiny.

The pre-sinned state of 'original purity' and bliss points not only to the eschatological future but also to the real nature of man. In this sense, the pre-sinned state is real, and virtual. Man, though weak and wicked as more than evidenced, is, according to God's original plan, intended to be like God Himself. The 'fall' is the result of man's own making, and God by his grace has given him the opportunity
Redemption particularly means that man regains his true status, the status that is originally willed by God, though he has fallen from that status. And heaven is not just a reward for man's good deeds, but his natural destiny. The Christian idea that some are eternally to be saved and some to be eternally condemned in hell is to be taken not so much as depicting the real nature and destiny of man, but as an attempt to underscore the need for accepting Christ.

This emphasis on the acceptance of Christ and gaining salvation through his grace does not in any sense minimise the role of morality in man's attaining his ultimate goal. In fact, the very message of Christ is so closely interlinked with moral teachings that the role of morality is amply emphasised. And this presupposes freedom. Man, therefore, is understood as a free agent who, by his own action, has deviated from the path that leads to salvation; but he is called to return to the right track exercising the freedom of his nature which, though vitiated, can receive strength from God's grace. One reason for the emphasis in classical theology on the first sin of the first man as cause of every man's sinfulness is this: to underline the need for moral rectitude and to point out the colossal ruin sin can bring about.

Another important reason for the emphasis on the first sin of the first man is the characteristic historical attitude that colours the very Christian perspective. In the Christian tradition, unlike in the Indian tradition, the 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." Hence the story of the first sin, though a narrative of very mysterious and
obscure facts, has the value of historical facts. Moreover, the whole history of mankind is viewed as being fulfilled in Christ. For this reason it is 'salvation-history'. In this context, Christ, a historical person, invites mankind to a higher level of being. In spite of the many problems that Christianity has to face on account of the emphasis on Christ's historical role, it is not going to get rid of this important feature. In fact, it is one of the characteristic features of Christianity. As a result, the sin of the first man too has to be viewed from this angle. The positive advantage of this view is that it underscores the fact that sin, from the start, is not natural to man, not an essential part of a man's nature, rather something man should endeavour to keep away from. The problem of the historicity of the first man or the first sin will not be so much a problem if it is understood in this manner. The doctrine of Original Sin is one that relates man's historicity with his timelessness in eternity.

The frantic efforts by some to save the doctrine in the face of the attacks that come up in the wake of new ideas such as that of evolution attracts our attention. But some of these efforts have been counterproductive in that they lead to a denial of the very truth of the doctrine in some aspects. Some would even go to the extreme of saying that this sin is 'natural' to man, nay, even 'willed by God'. And some would reduce the doctrine to a 'mere' myth with 'some' symbolic value. But others have given it the worth of "a symbolic expression of a deep psychological insight into human moral behaviour, giving a very real value to genuine myths." According to Paul Ricoeur, "One should not say, it is ONLY a myth — meaning it is less than historical — but the story of the fall has the grandeur of a myth, i.e. is more meaningful than a true story!"
We have seen that in spite of the mythical nature or mystery-aspect of the doctrine of Original Sin, it makes significant sense when related to the system of doctrine where redemption by Christ, though itself another mystery, is a cardinal doctrine. If the attempts to interpret the doctrine of Original Sin in the context of such modern ideas as evolution and its corollaries, have not been carried too far, it is chiefly on account of the placing of this doctrine in its natural context along with other ideas connected to it. As we have observed, there have been some attempts to explain away the doctrine on account of its inconveniences; and also there are efforts on the other side to stick firmly to all the details of some old interpretation. But, on the whole, the theological interest in placing Christ and his mission at the centre of the stage has served to lessen the danger of isolating the doctrine from its theoretical context.

But it does not mean that the doctrine is only a Christian doctrine, that it is meaningful only if we 'accept Christianity' in the sense of becoming a Christian. This is certainly not the case. In the ultimate analysis this ceases to be a merely Christian theory; and it becomes capable of universal application. Of course, its limitations with regard to the conceptual framework remain. But the vital relationship between a theoretical system and actual life is one that transcends the limitations of the theory. According to Karl Rahner, the duty of the Christian is to produce 'a concrete historical manifestation of the divine power of grace which overcomes the evil in man. Clearly, this applies to all men once the truth of this is seen independent of the words and concepts employed. This is possible because the actual situation of man is the same everywhere; and the attempt to overcome this situation,
as well as the striving for higher goals, is a universal phenomenon. The fact that the situation is understood differently in different theoretical formulations does not affect the universal applicability of a particular understanding. But, at the same time, the real significance of any particular understanding is best grasped with reference to its own context.

The 'context' of a doctrine does not mean only the theoretical context, but also the actual context of living, from which theories should not be separated. Seen in this light, it will be clear how the doctrine of Original Sin becomes a plausible theory that explains the problem of evil.

It is in the actual situations of life that a theory makes sense and performs its functions. Therefore, the role played by the doctrine of Original Sin is to be assessed not by asking 'what happens if I do not think it a sensible doctrine?' but by asking 'what does the whole system of Christianity do for one who takes help from this doctrine?' Because, no doctrine functions in isolation, but it is the whole system that provides an answer to the problems of life. Such a religious system as Christianity cannot fail to provide a feasible answer to man's problems, cannot fail to give him the necessary explanations and a certain direction to his life. In doing this, the system employs many a doctrine that is theoretical, but having actual implications for life. The doctrine of Original Sin is such an element in Christianity.

The doctrine of Original Sin, provides an answer to the 'problem of evil' in particular. Because, it attempted to explain such problems as: How did it all start? What are the effects of sin? How momentous are these effects?
How to tackle man's almost natural tendency towards evil? What are the precautions he can take? And what are the remedies to the effects of sin? It is here that the whole system plays the role of illuminating and guiding the individual and the society that shares the concepts and theories of the system.

This does not mean that the Original Sin is a fool-proof doctrine. It is a theory with all the limitations natural to a theory. At the same time its efficaciousness is not reduced on this account. Because the truth that is guarded in words and concepts is not necessarily limited by the words of the language or by the ideas that a limited intellect has grasped. This is especially true with regard to ultimate religious and philosophical truths. If this were not so, man would have been confined by his own limitations. This is where revelation, intuition, etc. come in. The theoretical problems might remain as they are. But man forges ahead, because he is in possession of a truth bigger than himself, and which he perceives, dimly but surely.