

CHAPTER TEN: ORIGINAL SIN: THE HUMAN CONDITION TO BE REDEEMED

A. The most important truth about original sin

5 Toward the end of the first part of the Liturgy of the Easter Vigil the Church exultantly proclaims Easter. The new Roman Missal provides two forms of the Easter Proclamation; I refer to the briefer of the two. After an opening hymn and the dialogue which precedes a preface, the Proclamation praises God the Father and our Lord Jesus, and then explains why:

10 For Christ has ransomed us with his blood,
 and paid for us the price of Adam's sin to our eternal Father!
 This is our passover feast, when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain,
 whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.
 This is the night when you first saved our fathers:
 15 you freed the people of Israel from their slavery
 and led them dry-shod through the sea.
 This is the night when Christians everywhere,
 washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement,
 are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.
 20 This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death
 and rose triumphant from the grave.
 Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love!
 To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.
 O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam,
 25 which gained for us so great a Redeemer!
 The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
 restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy.
 Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth
 and man is reconciled to God!

30 The Church then offers to the Father the liturgy to follow, together with the Easter candle, which represents Christ.

 The most important truth about original sin: We are redeemed from it by the blood of the Lord Jesus and by His resurrection. Jesus redeems us from all defilement, from the chains of death, from slavery, from alienation from God; He restores us to grace,
 35 gives us the power to grow in holiness, restores our innocence, brings us joy, weds heaven to earth, and reconciles humankind to God. Somehow all of the evils which our Lord Jesus overcomes sprang from original sin; all redemption from these evils comes from the Father through our Lord Jesus. And so Man's (Adam's) sin is called a "happy fault" and a "necessary sin," not as if in itself a fault were a good or a sin inevitable, but because in Man humankind misspoke itself in the dialogue between its freedom
 40 and God's freedom, and in doing so evoked from Him the splendid response of so great a redeemer.

 The redemptive work of the Father through our Lord Jesus is the beginning of the end, the starting-point of the fulfillment in Christ Jesus, which we studied in part two.
 45 Original sin is the privation, the nothing created freedom produced by itself; it is humankind's original contribution to God's marvelous plan. To understand the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus, one must understand what faith teaches concerning original sin. Otherwise, the mystery of the redemption will seem absurd, because the suffering and death of Jesus will seem pointless--as if it were an arbitrary price exacted by a cruel
 50 Father, rather than a necessary ransom paid by a Father whose merciful love is boundless.

 The seeming brutality of the sacrifice of Jesus, I am convinced, is an extremely important obstacle to the acceptance of Christian faith. From a pastoral point of view, any significant lessening of this obstacle will greatly facilitate the communication of the Gospel. An understanding of original sin will help make clear that the suffering
 55 and death of Jesus is humanly meaningful, and thus will lessen the obstacle.

 As I explained at the beginning of chapter nine, moral theology is directed primarily toward helping us live Christian life as our conscious and purposeful cooperation in the work of Christ redeeming. If our lives in Christ must be like His sacrificial life, then our lives, precisely insofar as they are Christian, also will seem pointless
 60 if we do not understand why Jesus suffered and died.

 In recent years there has been a great deal of theological discussion about whether Christian ethics is specifically different, not only by giving life a different meaning and moral action a different motivation (differences everyone admits), but also by requiring something more definite than the humanly good thing required generally of anyone
 65 simply insofar as he or she is human. I think that the New Testament and the actual practice of the Church through the centuries show that Christian morality does include more definite norms than does even the soundest morality which can be articulated in abstraction from the light of faith. In other words, I hold that the Gospel demands more of us than natural law (right reason) as such demands.

 At the same time, in part two I argued that fulfillment in Christ is not an alternative to human fulfillment, but is perfect human fulfillment crowned with a full share in divine life. I also argued that Christian life in this world is made of human acts by which one shares in human goods, and that these very acts and goods are destined to last forever. The question is: If Christian life really is directed to human fulfillment,
 75 why should Christian morality require anything more than what human fulfillment requires, which is articulated by sound practical reason and which we call "natural law?"

 My answer is: Because of humankind's resistance to God's love, human fulfillment actually is impossible except through fulfillment in Christ. Fulfillment in Christ is accomplished through redemptive work--primarily His work, secondarily our cooperation in it.
 80 This work involves undergoing evil to overcome it. This overcoming would be unnecessary had evil not been introduced into the human situation. Evil was introduced into the human situation by original sin. And so Christian morality makes demands for the sake of human fulfillment which human fulfillment would not make had there been no original sin. Moreover, the fact and character of original sin depend upon human free

choice; free choice is not a necessary reality knowable as such by reason; therefore, original sin, together with the redeeming life required of Christians to overcome evil, can be known adequately only by faith, not by reason alone.

5 In part five I will show at length what is required generally of everyone insofar as he or she is human, and what more specifically is required of us insofar as we are Christian.

B. The teaching of the Church on original sin

10 The most rounded and definitive expression of Catholic faith concerning original sin is a decree of the Council of Trent on the subject. The document consists of a prologue and six articles, the sixth of which makes clear that this Council does not intend to deal one way or another with the special case of Mary, the mother of God. I summarize the first five articles (cf. DS 1511-1515/788-792).

15 The first article asserts that the first man, Man, was constituted in justice and holiness, that he disobeyed a command of God, that he thereby lost justice and holiness, that he incurred as divine punishment the death with which God had threatened him, that with death he became a slave of the devil, and that he was as a whole, both body and soul, changed for the worse by the offense of this sin. The proposition that Man was
20 changed as a whole for the worse is partially quoted from a definition of the sixteenth-century, Second Council of Orange, which explicitly holds a point Trent does not explicitly mention: that the freedom of Man's soul did not remain untouched by this sin (cf. DS 371/174).

25 The second article of Trent's decree asserts that Man's sin was injurious for his descendants as well as for himself, that he lost holiness and justice for us as well as for himself, and that he transmitted to the whole human race sin itself which is the death of the soul and not merely death and punishment of the body. In support of this assertion, Trent states that its contradictory is incompatible with the teaching of St. Paul (cf. Rom 5.12). In the next section I will discuss the teaching of Paul.

30 The third article of Trent's decree asserts that the sin of Man is one by origin, that it is communicated to all men not by imitation but by propagation, that it is in all human persons and also is each one's own sin, that it is not taken away by the powers of nature, that its only remedy is the unique mediator and Lord Jesus Christ who reconciled us to God in His blood, and that the merit of our Lord is applied to adults and
35 infants alike through the sacrament of baptism.

The fourth article asserts that it is right to baptize infants to cleanse them of original sin, for they really do contract it; it is sin in a true sense, and it must be expiated. This article also asserts that the Church always has understood St. Paul (cf. Rom 5.12) to have taught the universality of original sin, and so the consequent universal
40 necessity of redemption; the Council also refers to the teaching of Christ that rebirth is required to enter the kingdom (cf. Jn 3.5).

The fifth article asserts that through the grace of the Lord Jesus original sin really is taken away, not merely covered over, that concupiscence (a tendency to sin) remains in the baptized, and that concupiscence is not sin in the true and proper sense of
45 the word, but only a consequence of sin which inclines to sin. The Council also inserts in this article an argument based on various passages of Scripture in support of its teaching that baptism really takes away sin. This argument is aimed against the reformers, who did not recognize the full effect of the redemption worked by God through our Lord Jesus.

50 The Council of Orange, which Trent intends to follow, makes explicit one further, important point. Orange gives a reason, not mentioned by Trent, why it would be inappropriate to say that the punishment for original sin but not the sin itself was transmitted to Man's descendants. The reason is: To say this is to attribute an injustice to God (cf. DS 372/175). In other words, if we share in the punishment for a past sin, we
55 also must share somehow in the sin itself, since otherwise God would be punishing us for someone else's sin, which would be unfair.

Trent stresses the exclusivity of the mediatorship of Christ, it leaves no question that no one is saved except in Him. (This teaching is the basis of a point I made
60 at the beginning of chapter nine: Everyone who is in grace is a Christian, conscious of it or not.) Our Lord Jesus saves us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. By His redemptive work, which is made effective in us through baptism, we truly are freed from sin, although unruly desire, which is an effect of sin, remains in us. Even if we had no personal sins--as infants have not--we need to be redeemed from a real sin, which weakens our wills and incurs death as its penalty. This real sin is something we inherit, simply as part of being human, for it is inherited by every human person (Mary apart) from Man. Man had been constituted in grace, but he sinned, lost his
65 status as an adopted child of God, and handed on to all humankind his own state of sin and its consequences.

70 Although Vatican II has no extensive treatment of original sin, the recent Council in many places takes for granted the traditional teaching, which Trent defined, and alludes to its various aspects (cf. LG 2, DV 3, AA 7, and GS 13, 18, 22).

C. The testimony of Scripture concerning original sin

75 Trent obviously refers to Genesis, chapters 2 and 3, when it speaks of the sin of the first man, Man. Taken as it stands, the story in Genesis pictures the first humans as part of God's good creation. They disobey a divine command and are worsened in every aspect of human goodness. (I made use of this feature of the story in chapter five, section F.) One interesting aspect of the story of Man's sin is that in the temptation of
80 Woman, the serpent proposes as an argument against the divine threat of death: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (Gn 3.4-5).

It seems to me that Scripture suggests here a basic temptation: Sin has the appeal of freedom to do as one pleases, regardless of moral norms.[1] Before one

encounters the consequences, it seems that sin, rather than a block to one's fulfillment, is a requirement if one is not to be limited arbitrarily. The appeal of sin is to one's desire to do and to experience everything, to know--that is, to experience and enjoy-- both what is recommended as good and what is forbidden as evil. The self-limitation inherent in choice is restrictive enough. Why must one also submit to moral norms, which appear to be additional and arbitrary limits?

The teaching of Trent on original sin clearly and explicitly relies far more upon St. Paul than it does upon Genesis. Luther and others had relied heavily upon Paul's epistle to the Romans for their heretical account of justification. Trent appeals to the same text, together with other New Testament books, to buttress Catholic teaching.

Romans begins by making clear how disastrous the human condition without Christ would be. Paul points out that the pagans worshipped idols, and in consequence fell into all sorts of sins, although the true God is knowable even by the light of reason (cf. Rom 1.18-31). Moreover, the pagans are not excused by their lack of guidance from a revealed law, for conscience and natural knowledge of the law written in one's heart is sufficient to make clear that wrong acts are sins and deserve punishment (cf. Rom 1.32; 2.12-16).

Paul also points out that although the Jews enjoy the gift of God's word, which protects them from idolatry and gives them sound moral guidance, they are hardly better than the pagans. They do not fulfill the requirements of God's law, which serves only to make clear their sinfulness (cf. Rom 2.1-11, 17-29; 3.1-20).

The only escape from sin is faith, and this way out is available both to pagans and to Jews (cf. Rom 3.21-31). Even Abraham, the proto-Jew, is saved not by observing a law, but rather by faith in God, a faith which implicitly stretched forward to redemption through Christ (cf. Rom 4). Christians likewise are saved by living faith in God, faith received through the sacrificial and redemptive work of Christ (cf. Rom 5.1-11). Saved by faith, Christians have a solid hope of heavenly glory, because the love of God has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5.5).

In this context--after reviewing the universal disaster of sin and asserting the universal redemptive power of faith in God--Paul brings up original sin in order to show that like Man, Jesus is a unique and universally significant principle in humankind's relationship to God, and, in fact, that Jesus is a far more powerful principle than Man. Paul begins: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned--" (Rom 5.12). This is the verse on whose significance Trent was to insist. One Man introduces sin and death, and in doing so he truly is a principle of sin and death for all. At this point Paul breaks off to comment upon the situation of humankind between Man and Moses, when there was no law but there was sin and death (cf. Rom 5.13-14).

It seems clear enough that Paul is arguing here from the causality of sin and death by Man to the causality of grace and life by Jesus. Paul takes it that the story of Man's sin is well known and accepted. The argument would not work unless Man is as truly a principle of sin and death as the Lord Jesus is of grace and life. If, for instance, one assumed that Man initiated sin as a bad example which others follow, the conclusion could not be stronger than that Jesus provided a unique example of obedience for others to imitate.

Paul goes on to point out the limits of the parallel. The gift is far more powerful than the offense; Man's sin only spoiled things, whereas our Lord's redemptive work is constructive (cf. Rom 5.15-17). In indicating the limits of the parallel, Paul would be omitting a very powerful point which he hardly would have ignored had he thought but not said that Man's sin is inefficacious for us without our willing consent. Instead of saying any such thing, Paul goes on to reaffirm the parallel within the limits he has indicated:

To sum up, then: just as a single offense brought condemnation to all men, a single righteous act brought all men acquittal and life. Just as through one man's disobedience all became sinners, so through one man's obedience all shall become just (Rom 5.18-19).

If the universal human disaster of evil has a unitary principle, the act which introduced sin and death for all humankind, so much more does the universal grace of redemption have a unitary principle: the redemptive work of God in our Lord Jesus, which Paul proposes for acceptance in faith.

Trent's definition says a good deal more than Paul, but does not say anything different. Paul's expression of faith makes clear that the whole of humankind became sinners, and so subject to death, because of the sin of one man (cf. JBC 53:52-60). The context makes clear that this basic condition of every human person as sinner is only the beginning of universal human sinfulness, which the basic sin helps to explain.

Another important passage in Paul on original sin is in his treatment of the resurrection in First Corinthians. Insisting that Jesus really lives, Paul says:

But as it is, Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Death came through a man; hence the resurrection of the dead comes through a man also. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will come to life again, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits and then, at his coming, all those who belong to him (1 Cor 15.20-23).

The parallelism here makes clear Paul's belief that the death which came through Man is-- that is, includes--precisely that biological process which Jesus underwent and from which He rose.

D. Difficulties felt in respect to this doctrine

On the one hand (as I shall explain more fully in section H), the teaching of faith with respect to original sin corresponds to certain common data of human experience. Evil, including the evil of guilt, seems inescapable, not only in the sense that one must confront it in others, but even in the sense that one must acknowledge it in oneself. Behind this anguishing state of affairs, one senses something which is wrong prior to oneself. Monistic religions and philosophies account for evil as an illusion,

and dualistic philosophies and religions as an ultimate power. Neither of these ways out is available to Jews and Christians. Original sin accounts for the human experience of the inescapability of guilt in a way consistent with the conception of evil as privation, a conception essential to the Christian understanding of creation and redemption, as I explained in chapter five, section A.

On the other hand, the doctrine on original sin seems to raise a great many difficulties. During the past quarter century Catholic Scripture scholars and contemplative systematic theologians have produced a vast literature articulating and attempting to find ways around these difficulties. With some reluctance, I am about to make my own attempt to explain the traditional teaching in a way which avoids many of the difficulties and dissolves (sufficiently for one who has faith) those difficulties one cannot avoid.

The first point to notice is that many seeming difficulties about original sin arise from popular conceptions or theological theories which are no part of the Church's teaching. For example, all the picturesque details of the story in Genesis, such as the talking serpent and the eating of fruit, are at times mistaken to be part of the doctrine, and then these details either solemnly defended as revealed truth or used to dismiss the whole teaching on original sin as fantasy. Again, the theory of St. Augustine that there is a connection between the transmission of original sin and the vehemence of sexual passion is presented as if it were essential to the Church's belief that original sin is inherited; the doctrine is dismissed together with the questionable theology. Some serious critics of the traditional teaching even have focused their attack upon secondary theological and catechetical materials and have neglected to use care in stating the Church's actual belief.[2] What the Church really does believe involves sufficient difficulty without buying trouble in such ways.

A difficulty in the doctrine concerning original sin which always has been felt is in the relationship between death and sin. If death truly is a result of sin, then it seems to follow that there would have been no death had Man (or human persons generally) not sinned. Yet human organisms are not very different from other organisms in respect to organic life and death, and it is hard to imagine a natural world without death. Indeed, such a world might well be absurd. Therefore, it seems that human death is natural and inevitable. If it is inevitable, then there would have been death regardless of sin, and so death hardly can be a punishment for sin.

Another perennial difficulty in the doctrine on original sin concerns how it is transmitted by propagation as part of every person's human heritage, if it has the character of true sin and somehow affects the will. These two aspects clearly are essential if the doctrine is to account for human involvement in guilt prior to each individual's personal self-involvement, without reducing this guilt to the status of illusion, to a power operating apart from God, or to God Himself.

If the antecedent involvement is not inherited, then individuals by their own intact nature could avoid it. If the antecedent involvement is not truly sin which affects the will, then it must be accounted for by a theory of evil other than the Christian one (and so reduced to the status of nonevil) or it must be attributed to God's work and treated as a relative evil (in the sense clarified in chapter five, section B). But how can true sin be inherited? Of all things, sin seems the most personal, while all that is inherited seems to belong to humankind as a species. Trent clearly teaches that infants have original sin, yet they obviously are innocent.

A more modern difficulty in the doctrine on original sin arises from the theory of evolution. In general, it seems that the earliest humans must have been much closer to the condition of other primates than to the condition of modern persons--indeed, it seems that in the evolutionary emergence of humans no clear-cut dividing line can be drawn anywhere. Moreover, the evolution of higher animals which reproduce sexually involves a population of a certain size, because there must be an adequate gene-pool.[3] It seems to follow that if "first" can be said of humans at all, it cannot be said of one human ("monogenism") but rather must be said of a fairly sizable group of humans ("polygenism"). But the Church talks of the first Man in the singular. Both Pius XII and Paul VI warned that polygenism, which evolution-theory seems to demand, appears incompatible with the Church's teaching.[4]

A fourth difficulty, also a more modern one, is that study of Scripture makes clear that less is being asserted about original sin--for example, in the first few chapters of Genesis--than might appear to be the case. One must not confuse accidental features of the story by which some revealed truth is articulated in ancient Israel with that very truth itself. Yet awareness of the distinction between the propositions expressed and the linguistic-literary vehicle of their expression was not very clear prior to the nineteenth century, and surely was not clear to those who participated in Trent. Therefore, it seems appropriate to many contemporary theologians to limit the faith-requirement concerning original sin to what can be established from Scripture, and then to reinterpret the definitions of Trent accordingly. This strategy also offers promise for resolving the preceding difficulties, while still maintaining a sufficiently meaningful doctrine of original sin to do the subordinate job this doctrine has--namely, to make clear what is wrong with humankind prior to personal sins.

I now proceed to consider these difficulties, beginning with that difficulty which arises from modern theories of evolution.

E. Evolution compatible with traditional doctrine

The theory of evolution which is clearly defined and well established is that which pertains to the unity and diversity of organic life. Organisms reproduce; reproduction is not replication, but continuity with difference; differences which enhance reproductive potential tend to predominate; but what enhances reproductive potential differs under diverse conditions; therefore, organisms with common ancestors differ greatly under diverse conditions.

One can speak of "evolution" in reference to the natural world generally--for example, in talking of the evolution of galaxies. "Evolution" in this context merely means an orderly process. This process really has almost nothing in common with organic

evolution. "Evolution" has come to be applied to development in culture and in every sphere of human life. Here the processes called "evolution" have even less than cosmic development in common with biological evolution, since human culture unfolds dialectically, by way of human reflection, argument, and conflicts of power directed by human plans and choices.

Once these distinctions are understood, one can see that evolution as a biological theory can account only for the existence and conditions of humankind as an organic reality. There is no incompatibility between the traditional doctrine on original sin and the well-established scientific theory that insofar as they are organisms human persons had subpersonal antecedents.

However, the capacities of intelligence and free choice are not merely organic. In our experience and exercise of them, these capacities involve self-reference and self-causation, which presuppose the personal self possessed in the world of nature only by human individuals. These capacities can hardly be accounted for as modifications of any organically based functions. Therefore, human persons as such cannot be accounted for by evolution.[5]

The capacity for free choice either is present or it is not. One cannot have a little ability to make a slightly free choice. Thus, if one admits the spiritual reality of human persons, one also must recognize that their emergence in the world had to be a sudden event. Those who argue against original sin on the basis of assumptions about the semi-bestial condition of our primitive ancestors really implicitly deny the truth of the whole Christian account of human persons--an account which not only is taught by faith but also can be defended philosophically as I explained in chapter eight, section E.

A great deal of Christian theology until recent times embroidered extensively upon the essential teaching of the Church concerning the conditions of the first human persons. For example, it was thought that these humans, fresh from the hand of God, were as like God in knowledge and virtue as human persons in this world can be. It probably would be impossible, but it also is unnecessary, to reconcile these theological views with an evolutionary account of human origins; the Church's essential teaching is more limited than the theological speculations which formerly were proposed to explain it.

Nevertheless, since anyone who accepts a Christian account of human persons must assume that they emerged by a sudden event inexplicable through natural causes alone, there can be no reason to suppose that the intelligence of the first persons was in any important way different or less than our own. In any case, one who can make a free choice can commit a sin; the Church's teaching on original sin requires no more than this of the first persons. If they did not have this ability, then they simply were not persons.

This last point is important to bear in mind when various data about human origins are considered. Fossil remains, even the remains of primitive tools, do not necessarily show that the creatures which left these remains were human persons. Subhuman primates today evidence some tool-making ability; extinct species might well have had more of this ability. Some species too advanced for human comfort may well have been extinguished by human competition.

However large the group needed for an adequate gene-pool, since the transformation of subhuman creatures into human persons could not have occurred by natural causes, there can be no ground in the conditions required for primate reproduction to conclude that initially God did not create (by substantial transformation) one man or one human couple. Moreover, inasmuch as the original situation necessarily is a miraculous emergence, there can be no reason to exclude some mode of "reproduction" in that situation which transcends the power of natural causation. For example, the first persons might well have had a role in transforming other members of the group from which they organically originated, perhaps by continuing to relate to them and making some sort of personal gesture toward them.

Furthermore, the account of original sin I will give can accommodate a group of any size whatever, provided only that the group has some kind of human social cohesion. Thus polygenism, if it must be granted, does not seem to me inconsistent with the Church's teaching on original sin.

I have described a possible original situation close (in literal detail) to the Genesis story not to insist upon the nonessential features of this story, but rather to emphasize the fact that no purely naturalistic account of human origins can be given. One must choose: Either you and I and human persons generally are not unique entities in the world, endowed with self-referential intelligence and self-causing free choice, or our first human personal ancestors emerged in the world miraculously, having been transformed by divine creative power from some subpersonal primates--or from something else, such as dust or slime. Really, the antecedents make no difference. Not only faith, but the reality of human free choice, which is evidenced by experience and which can be defended by reason, requires one to opt for miraculous emergence.

Much recent Catholic theology has been influenced in respect to original sin and evolution by the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. He sought to include all reality in a single evolutionistic scheme. Teilhard's vision is not a scientific hypothesis; rather, it is speculative metaphysics and theology. In Teilhard's system, neither free choice nor sin is fully recognized, and original sin is dismissed as an obstacle to the evolutionist optimism with which Teilhard replaces the traditional doctrine of the redemption. For Teilhard, the only really essential Christian truth is that Christ is the measure of and is at the head of creation. In other words, Teilhard maintained the Christian hope for fulfillment in Christ; he simply dismissed the remainder of Christian faith, together with its often difficult moral implications, and replaced it with a more appealing projection of his own imagination.[6]

F. Death -- both natural and a consequence of sin

As things now stand, it is clear enough that human persons, insofar as they are bodily realities, belong to the organic world, and that in this world reproduction and

death are natural, physically necessary processes. But it also is clear that human persons are not exclusively bodily realities, since free choices--such as the act of faith, a decision to die for another person or for the truth, and so on--cannot be accounted for fully by naturalistic principles.

5 Of all the organisms in the world, only human persons know they are going to die. The natural inevitability is recognized universally; experience teaches human mortality as decisively as it teaches the succession of times and seasons. Yet human persons universally show their refusal to accept death as appropriate. Most peoples yearn for and project some sort of survival; even some secular humanists speculate about the possibility of eventually finding a "cure" for death--something which would prevent the degenerative processes associated with aging. More or less clearly, human persons know that they are not exclusively bodily realities, and that insofar as they are more, bodily death, although naturally inevitable, is an absurd affront to personal dignity. As Vatican II teaches:

15 It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute. Not only is man tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of his body, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction. He rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the absolute ruin and total disappearance of his own person.

20 Man rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter. All the endeavors of technology, although useful in the extreme, cannot calm his anxiety. For a prolongation of biological life is unable to satisfy that desire for a higher life which is inescapably lodged in his breast.

25 Although the mystery of death utterly beggars the imagination, the Church has been taught by divine revelation, and herself firmly teaches, that man has been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery. In addition, that bodily death from which man would have been immune had he not sinned [note 14: Wis 1.13; 2.23-24; Rom 5.21; 6.23; Jas 1.15] will be vanquished, according to the Christian faith, when man who was ruined by his own doing is restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Savior (GS 18).

The Council then proceeds to spell out the Christian hope, which answers human anxiety about death and which even now maintains a communion between us and our dead loved ones.

35 If one considers the human condition and the reality of death within an exclusively naturalistic, rational worldview, then the physical necessity of death makes our belief that death is a consequence of sin seem absurd. But this necessity makes our hope in resurrection seem no less absurd. Therefore, if we are to hope for resurrection, there is no rational ground for disbelieving that human persons would have been immune from death were it not for sin.

40 A purely naturalistic, rational worldview presents itself as scientific. In fact, although such a worldview can be compatible with science, it generalizes far beyond empirical evidence in constructing its general account of reality.[7] Again, speculative metaphysics, not science, confronts the teaching of faith that human persons would not have died were it not for sin. No empirical data can directly confirm or disconfirm the contrary-to-fact proposition which faith teaches. Science, within its proper domain, tells only about what is the case in the present state of the universe. The physical necessity of death is real in the world as it is; faith does not deny this fact, but does assert that the world could have been quite different.

45 If one considers the creation of bodily persons from within the perspective of faith, one can see that it is eminently fitting that they should have been created with a power to avoid death. For the appeal of bodily persons to God's creative imagination surely must have been ways in which we can manifest His goodness. Bodily persons can be like God in certain respects--for example, in being parents and children--which are impossible for angels. But bodiliness also carries with it a potentiality to corruption. 55 This aspect of human creatures hardly seems in any way to manifest God's perfect life. Why not create these bodily persons, with both a vocation to share in divine life and their unique ways of expressing divine goodness in their creaturely life, but provide them with the power to avoid death? In this way, human persons would have been preserved from the implications--now physically necessary--of their organic nature. The affront we sense to our personal dignity, which is doubly an affront to the dignity of 60 children of God, would have been avoided. As St. Athanasius teaches:

65 God not only made us out of nothing, but He also gave us freely, by the grace of the Word, a life divinely oriented. But men rejected the things of eternity and, on the prompting of the devil, turned to the things of corruption. They became the cause of their own corruption in death; for, as I said before, they were by nature corruptible, but were destined, by the grace of the communion of the Word, to have escaped the consequences of nature, had they remained good. Because of the Word and His dwelling among them, even the corruption natural to them would not have affected them (FEF 750).

70 Similarly, St. Theophilus of Antioch argues that God made human persons neither mortal nor immortal, but open to either destiny, according to the use they would make of their freedom. God is not the cause of death; rather, death follows from sin as immortality would have followed from human self-determination to obey God (cf. FEF 184).

75 One can speculate as to how human life in this world would terminate if it did not end in death. One also can speculate as to what would have happened had the first human persons obeyed and remained in friendship with God, but some of their descendants fallen into sin. I see no point in such speculations. Our theology must proceed from God's revelation and from what we experience; God's wisdom is boundless. Even speculation about the manner and mode of the resurrection which we await in hope is useless. A fortiori, speculation about contrary-to-fact possibilities is theological idle chatter. 80

G. Revision of the Church's teaching unwarranted

While sound studies of Scripture make clear that the witness of the sacred texts says less about original sin than might have been thought in times past, these same

studies do not show that anything in the Bible is incompatible with Catholic faith concerning original sin as defined by Trent.[8] Moreover, while Catholic faith teaches more about original sin than could be established by cautious modern exegesis of Scripture, the definitive teaching of the Church on original sin is far more modest than popular impressions and past theological speculations which derived from a naive reading of the sacred texts, a reading which now would be considered "fundamentalist."

As I explained in chapter one, section I, Scripture must be interpreted in the light of living faith. The sense of Scripture which the Church has held and still holds is its true sense. In the matter of original sin, as I pointed out in section B, Trent explicitly specifies the meaning of Romans 5.12. No faithful Catholic will ignore this norm of interpretation. Moreover, any Catholic is assisted very significantly by the Church's teaching in sorting out what is revealed truth from what is literary vehicle in passages of Scripture such as the account in Genesis of the origin of human sinfulness.

Many current theological efforts to articulate a more acceptable account of original sin seem to me to run afoul of one or more other fundamental truths of faith. As I have pointed out already, for instance, an interpretation which grants too much to naturalistic evolutionism implicitly contradicts the Christian account of the human person, by accepting a continuity between subpersonal organisms and human persons which takes no account of free choice and the irreducibility of the power of choice to the principles and conditions of physical nature. Again, any account which identifies original sin with the inevitable imperfections of creatures in an evolving creation either entails that the evil of original sin is illusory or that God is its cause.

Similarly, many accounts attempt to avoid the difficulty posed by the concept of something at once truly voluntary and inherited by somehow reducing original sin to personal sins and to the moral defects of the social-cultural environment.[9] Such attempts seem to me valuable in two important respects. First, they show an awareness of the social aspects of human action and responsibility which were so neglected in the individualistic theology of 1650-1950. Second, they call attention to the dynamic unity between original sin and all subsequent human immorality.[10]

However, many of these attempted theological reconstructions fail to make clear why humankind cannot in principle be redeemed by the combined natural powers of human persons, as all secular humanists propose. In this way, such theories rejoin the Pelagian heresy which evoked the most significant development of the traditional doctrine of original sin and of grace (cf. DS 222-230/101-108).

Not a few contributions to recent discussion concerning original sin go beyond careful exegesis and theological reflection. Setting aside the presupposition of faith, which is essential to true theology, they undertake an arbitrary revision of doctrine, of the sort I discussed in chapter two, sections H and I. As is to be expected, no principle is proposed by anyone according to which one might limit or grade such revisionist efforts, because once the Catholic doctrine defined by Trent is set aside, in whole or in part, any personal opinion on this matter is worth the same as any other. This is so because original sin is not a question upon which reason and experience, apart from faith, can throw any positive light whatsoever.

The teaching of Trent makes clear that the first humans were constituted in grace, but lost it by their disobedience. This proposition is central, as will become clearer in what follows, since it defines what is primary in the privation which original sin is: the lack of that grace in human persons which could and should have been in them merely by their coming into being as members of the family of humankind. God wished the whole human family to be His adopted family, and due to sin this is not so.

But it is a mistake to proceed from this point in isolation to try to account for original sin by assuming in human persons simply as created and as human a true resistance to participation in divine life. This assumption would mean that there is some inherent incompatibility between fulfillment in human and divine goods--an inevitable clash between the natural and the supernatural--so that a perfectly natural thrust toward human fulfillment would entail a choice against supernatural life. As I explained in chapter seven, sections A-C, there is no such incompatibility. It is by no means necessary that the human decrease that the divine might increase. Therefore, an adequate account of original sin must make clear how this condition affects the will, to make every human person until fully healed by grace prone to immoral acts by which human goods are violated.

In general, it seems to me that reinterpretations and revisions of the traditional teaching on original sin carry the very serious danger of undermining a far more important Christian teaching: the doctrine of redemption. If it is difficult to understand how sin was introduced into the world by the sin of one person at the beginning and passed from him to us; it is no easier--indeed, it is more difficult--to understand how grace is restored to humankind by the redemptive work of Christ and communicated by Him to us. Again, if a hypothetical gift of nonmortality from the beginning to a faithful humanity is incredible, the real gift of everlasting life to a faithless but redeemed humanity at the end is more incredible. And if one cannot accept a break in the continuum of nature to allow for the special creation of human persons, one will find it far more difficult to accept a total transformation of nature into a new heavens and new earth.

In chapter two, section E, I described a procedure which seems to me essential in theology when one encounters difficulties. The procedure demands patience, absolute faithfulness to the Church's teaching, and, if possible, a creative advance which will resolve the difficulty without compromising in any way what the Church believes. While the following sketch of a resolution is tentative, I hope it might point toward a clearing away at least of those difficulties which trouble persons whose faith is genuine and whose understanding of the traditional doctrine is unencumbered by the excess baggage of popular presentations and alternative theological explanations.

H. The human condition for which original sin accounts

As I explained already, the human condition puzzles everyone. Death does not seem appropriate, despite the fact that it is natural and inevitable. But worse even than

death is the general situation of conflict and alienation. One experiences turmoil within oneself; one falls short of any standards or ideals one respects; one finds oneself at odds even with those who are nearest and dearest.

At the social level, disruption is even more obvious, for the very principles which should serve order and justice promote turmoil and oppression. There are powers which are more than human, but their attitude toward humankind, tested by the various religions of humankind, seems ambiguous and ambivalent. Apart from Jews and Christians, who accept God's revelation with faith, people generally try to resolve the mystery of evil either by some form of radical dualism or by some form of absolute monism, as I explained in chapter five, section A. Either the human condition is explained by opposing principles of good and evil which make our world into their battleground, or it is explained away as the restlessness of reality dispersed from its own self-identity into the surrounding darkness of nonbeing.

Persons of Jewish and Christian faith cannot consistently accept such an account of the human condition. God created everything good. Evil is privation. It arises primarily from freedom, when this magnificent gift of God-likeness is abused. Thus we reject all the secular humanist accounts of evil, for they ignore the reality of sin and try instead to represent evil as something inevitable.

Optimistic secular humanists, such as Western liberals and Marxists, write evil off as the stage of development in which humankind now is; they expect that unfolding dialectic or increasing knowledge eventually will overcome evil. Pessimistic existentialists, like the Manichaeans of old, think that the human situation is absurd, that it is constituted with built-in conflicts which never can be transcended. Those like Freud who posit in human nature ultimate, conflicting drives toward life and death also articulate a neodualistic account of evil. Christian faith rejects all these accounts of evil.

Nevertheless, the mere rejection of accounts of evil incompatible with creation by a good God and with human responsibility for the abuse of free choice does not eliminate the mystery of evil. Indeed, in one respect the mystery is only intensified.

If God truly is good, whence death, which seems natural? A Jewish writer close to the time of Jesus meditates: "God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being" (Wis 1.13-14). Somehow, sin leads to death. One draws destruction upon oneself; one submits to the devil and deserves death (cf. Wis 1.12; 2.24). At the same time, inevitable death becomes an excuse for sin; the wicked seek enjoyment and look forward to death as oblivion (cf. Wis 1.16-2.9). It follows that death is essentially related to sin. But death is an absolutely universal feature of the human condition; it is natural and inevitable. So must sin in some sense be universal. To understand a characteristic of the whole of humankind, one must look to humankind in its beginning. How and why did people commit sin in the first place? It could only have been by their abuse of freedom.

The data of experience make clear the universality of sin. As St. Paul points out, those who do not believe in God are sunk in evil; this evil follows from all sorts of sins, which in turn issue from their idolatry and nonbelief (cf. Rom 1.18-32). The situation cannot be blamed upon God; He gave even the pagans sufficient knowledge to be aware of Him whom alone they should worship, and He gave them an adequate grasp on right and wrong (cf. Rom 1.20 and 2.14-16). How, then, does sin originate among the pagans, who do not break the law of God, yet fall into wickedness by an abuse of their freedom?

The Jewish sage suggests explanations for the origin of idolatry. For example, "a father, afflicted with untimely mourning, made an image of the child so quickly taken from him, and now honored as a god what was formerly a dead man, and handed down to his subjects mysteries and sacrifices" (Wis 14.15). The ambition and greed of artisans and artists makes idolatry flourish (cf. Wis 14.18-19; 15.12). And from idolatry flood all sorts of sins (cf. Wis 14.22-31). God is kind and gentle even with such sinners, for He provides them with the motive and opportunity for repentance (cf. Wis 12.2-10). Yet the pagans fail to make the most of the opportunity, because their malice is ingrained; "they were a race accursed from the beginning" (Wis 12.11).

But is Israel free of sin? Not at all, despite its being chosen by God and favored with His word of guidance and His faithful help. Jesus, after excoriating the scribes and Pharisees, says: "Thus you show that you are the sons of the prophets' murderers. Now it is your turn: fill up the vessel measured out by your forefathers" (Mt 23.31-32). Stephen, about to be martyred, reviews the history of Israel's response to God's love:

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are always opposing the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did before you. Was there ever any prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? In their day, they put to death those who foretold the coming of the Just One; now you in your turn have become his betrayers and murderers. You who have received the law through the ministry of angels have not observed it" (Acts 7.51-53).

No more than the pagans do the Jews avoid sin. "There is no just man, not even one" (Rom 3.10). Solomon prays, with wise consciousness of human sinfulness: "When they sin against you (for there is no man who does not sin). . ." (1 Kgs 8.46), taking for granted the inevitability of sin.

One sins freely; one sins inevitably. This paradox holds true with apparent universality. For us, sin is inevitable, because we find ourselves preconditioned in a sinful situation, distracted by anxiety about death, driven by temptations which we seem too weak to resist for long. But if this situation confronts all humankind so far as we know, still it cannot have been so at the beginning. For God is good, and sin cannot have originated with Him. The only possible solution is that the present condition of humankind is not what it was at the beginning. Thus, the problem demands that we look to the condition of Man--of humankind--in the innocence in which our race emerged from the hand of God.

I. The condition of humankind at the beginning

God created Man good, without sin, and with the power of free choice (cf. DS 239/130). He was constituted in holiness and justice--that is, in supernatural life and in

moral integrity (cf. DS 1511, 1901-1926/788, 1001-1026). Moreover, by God's special gift, not by nature, Man enjoyed nonmortality (cf. DS 222, 1978/101, 1078). The teaching of the Church leaves open whether Man was created in grace or received grace by a subsequent gift. It also leaves open whether nonmortality actually was given and lost, or promised if Man remained in God's friendship.[11]

The initial situation of friendship with God cannot be envisaged as one of which Man was unconscious. God not only makes Himself known in the things He has made, but; "Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents" (DV 3). The bond of friendship between God and humankind was a real relationship in the experience of the first human persons; this bond has been fully restored only through Christ (cf. Rom 5.10-21; Col 1.20).

Implicit in the teaching of the Council of Trent, which says that concupiscence is a result of sin, is the point that Man was free of unruly desire which might positively tend toward sin. Instead of the inner conflicts we experience, Man at first was well disposed toward orderly fulfillment. (Obviously, this disposition does not exclude natural human desires, nor does it rule out the possibility of a normal inclination toward a good which it would be wrong to choose, for if these were excluded, sin would be impossible.)[12]

Many older theological treatises add more to this account of the goodness in which Man was constituted. For example, it often is suggested that Man was immune from bodily pain. The argument for this is that Trent teaches that the sin we inherit is more than death and bodily pain (cf. DS 1512/789). But this argument is weak, since Trent does not assert here that we inherit susceptibility to death and pain from Man, but only that the sin we inherit cannot be reduced to this. (Trent does assert in the previous article that sin leads to death; therefore nonmortality must be posited, although immunity from pain need not be.) Again, many theological treatises used to enlarge upon the extraordinary knowledge, virtue, and power with which Man was endowed.

None of this is proposed as essential by the Church's teaching, and none of it is necessary for original sin to do the job for which faith posits it.

Man at the point of sin was in grace and knew it. He was capable of choice and capable of making the wrong choice. But he had no unruly inclination or positive tendency to make the wrong choice. He at least had the power to avoid death, and he knew this. Thus he was in a position to choose uprightly or sinfully, and he had some awareness that the latter choice would be disastrous.

So much from the Church's teaching. What does theological speculation appropriately add to this picture?

First, I think it quite appropriate from a strictly theological point of view, in light of modern knowledge, to add that Man not only emerged from the hand of God but also organically emerged from subpersonal antecedents. A subpersonal creation which is like God not only in existing but also in causing other things to exist is a more perfect manifestation of God's goodness than a subpersonal creation which simply exists as a setting for these other things. In particular, a subpersonal creation which has a share in causing the very image of God to come to be in the world is more noble than one which has no such share. Just as Mary and the whole of Israel are ennobled by the role which they play in the Incarnation of the Word, so the natural world including our primate antecedents are ennobled by doing their part, albeit unconsciously, in the coming to be of persons within nature.

Second, inasmuch as the emerging of persons in the beginning has in any case the character of miracle, and inasmuch as a group of a certain size would be required, I think it is appropriate both to assume that a group of the required size was hominized, and to assume that the hominization of the rest somehow involved the cooperation of the first Man to be hominized. Genesis suggests the hominization of a group of two, since it is obvious that a couple is needed to get things going. If we now assume that a much larger number is needed, I do not see that this makes the slightest difference.

There are three reasons why it seems fitting that the first Man should have a role of cooperating with God in the hominization of others. First, Genesis pictures Woman being drawn from Man's side at least partly to make clear the unity of humankind, despite the fact that the first humans could not be related to each other by any of the usual natural relationships (father, sister, and so on). Similarly, the supposition that Man had some role in bringing about the hominization of other members of the primal group establishes it as a human community, not merely as a multitude of individuals transformed from a common, subpersonal stock. By human cooperation with the creative transformation, fellow subpersonal primates become fellow men and women. Second, the cooperation of the first Man in the hominization of others is fitting for the same reason that a role for nature in human becoming is fitting: God's goodness is better manifested in a Man who helps bring others into being, than in one who simply finds himself as part of a group brought into being willy-nilly. Third, the orderliness among persons which begins in the Trinity itself also is continued if created persons come to be through a natural order.

Third, I think it appropriate to assume that the condition of primal humans was no more different from our condition than must be assumed. The basis is Ockham's razor. On this assumption, we ought to suppose that the primal Man's awareness of God was much like our own: faith in revelation. He had ground enough to believe in God and His promises, but had no knowledge of what immortality and everlasting life might be like. He knew the difference between right and wrong, but he no more clearly saw the implications of doing what is wrong for his friendship with God than we do. (Remember that for most believers, the connection seems to be made by God's fiat.) Moreover, the first humans functioned as a social group with some sort of structure. (It is worth noticing that primates generally do so.) The first Man naturally would be the leader of the primal community.

Fourth, I think it appropriate to assume that in their primal condition humans would be tempted to choose to act contrary to one human good for the sake of attaining another. As I explained in chapter seven, sections A-C, there is no possible direct conflict between human goods and divine goodness. Therefore, one cannot assume the first

sin to be a choice of finite goods against divine goodness.[13] Nor can one assume that persons in the primal situation would be tempted by unruly desire or by prior wrong choices of their own or of others. Thus, humans in the initial situation would have been susceptible only to the quite rational temptation to act contrary to one human good for the sake of achieving some other--for example, to attack someone to protect another, or something of this sort.

Fifth, I think it appropriate to assume that prior to sin the whole primal group, however large it might have been, existed as a human community in friendship with God. I am assuming a group of some size, and a natural order in it, which disposes to a social structure. We must believe that the first Man was in friendship with God. Traditional theology pictures the first couple in friendship together with God. I simply extrapolate that the first group, however large, also was a supernatural community, a sort of primitive Church: God's earthly family. As Vatican II teaches, both the nature of human persons and of religion demand religious community (cf. DH 4).

Sixth, I think it appropriate to assume that among the truths God revealed to persons in the primal condition was that they ought not to do the moral evil which they might be tempted to do. This assumption is reasonable, because such guidance would be very helpful, considering the implications for human persons and their relationship with God of doing moral evil (a matter already briefly discussed in chapter seven, section E). This assumption also fits the traditional view that the primal sin was disobedience, since if the first Man was warned to avoid moral evil, then whatever moral evil actually was committed also had the character of disobedience, violation of divine friendship, implicit unfaithfulness to God, and so of sin. (The concepts involved here will be clarified further in part six.)

J. Man's sin and its immediate consequences

All sorts of possible temptation situations which will meet the requirements of the original conditions can be imagined. For example, leaders of groups and their more distinguished followers often have honest disagreements in judgment about what is best for the group. Perhaps such a disagreement arose between Man and his first subordinate--for instance, about whether the time was ripe for Man to turn over leadership (changes in leadership do occur in all groups). Not out of any unruly passion or selfish inclination established by previous sin (for these are excluded by hypothesis) but out of a cool judgment that the problem threatened the whole group's well-being, Man may well have decided to attack and cripple his brother.

The wrongness of such an act would have been obvious to Man, and he would have been aware that it was contrary to God's revealed norm that one ought not to do moral wrong. But all the consequences of doing wrong need not have been clear.

Moreover, human freedom in this case would first have encountered its own paradoxical character. If the wrong is done, human good--the well-being of the group--seems to be promoted. The choice to do wrong does have a negative aspect with respect to human good, but so does the choice not to do wrong! Moreover, while Man realized that in choosing to do wrong he would be determining himself arbitrarily, he also realized that every choice involves self-limitation. What difference to the condition of a finite person can the self-limitation of a wrong choice make when every choice whatsoever inevitably involves self-limitation?

True, God had warned not to do it. But the warning was not an evident truth. Perhaps--in this "perhaps" is a role for Satan--the submission to moral limits is something God demands for His own good, not for ours? In that case, one can assert one's human dignity by rejecting God's warning to do only what is morally right. The moral requirement does seem arbitrary in the present case.

And so, Man chose to do evil that good might follow therefrom. No doubt he said to himself: "It is the lesser evil; it would be irrational to choose the greater evil."

By his choice, Man separated himself from God. In doing so, he became subject to death, not as if this subjection were a punishment arbitrarily imposed, but simply because death is natural to organisms, and the gift of immortality had hinged upon the calling of humankind to be the earthly family of God.

On the assumptions articulated in section I, it is reasonable to suppose that the primary sinner was the first Man, since that person would have been primary in natural order and in social leadership. What of the remainder of the group? In the example I have given, it is plausible to assume that the decision to attack was a mutual one, made both by Man and by his first subordinate, and that everyone else took one side or the other, as seemed to them better for the group as a whole and for themselves. One also might assume that the initial sin was committed before more than two persons were hominized (as Genesis suggests). If biology requires a much larger group for normal human reproduction, then the hominization of others could have occurred after sin as well as before. All who came to be, since dependent upon the first sinners for their humanity, would have been in the same situation of sin as all children normally begotten.

What exactly was the initial situation of sin considered from a social point of view?

First, the group as a whole no longer was in friendship with God. It no longer was God's earthly family. And all members of the group, being united in sin, were confronted with the inevitability of death. Moreover, sin against one another no longer was inconceivable; in my example, such sin had been done; in any example the potential difference between one's own interests and the interests of others (and of the group as a whole) would now be clear.

Second, fear of death makes a difference to human emotion. Without this fundamental anxiety, emotional reactions would have the natural adjustment one observes in a healthy animal. With this fundamental anxiety, the entire human emotional makeup is distorted, with a bias toward more intense pleasures which help to offset fear. The distortion of human emotional makeup is a matter of fact, extensively documented by modern psychiatry with its descriptions of the subconscious and of neurotic behavior.

Third, the distortion of human emotion by anxiety concerning death affects the

very forming of experience. Memory and learning are heavily conditioned processes, as psychology makes clear. Emotions with a bias due to anxiety concerning death necessarily generate a very different human experiential world than would have been generated by emotions without this basic anxiety.

5 Fourth, intellectual judgments, especially of a practical sort, are distorted. These judgments are based to some extent on experience. They also are influenced by the will. Rationalization together with the impact of distorted experience generates moral opinion which in many ways is false.

10 Fifth, human expressions in language and in other cultural products are deprived of the rationality and pure usefulness they should have. This follows directly from distortions in knowledge, especially practical judgment. Tools must be made not only to serve good purposes but also to serve sinful purposes. Language must be built to deceive as well as to communicate. Everything human will be affected by selfishness and injustice, as Marx has helped to make clear.

15 This entire situation, once begun, will continue as a vicious circle. Every sin of person against person intensifies anxiety. Every deviation flows through the whole human system. Nothing of the human person's makeup will be what it would have been. The whole person, body and soul, is changed for the worse. This change, which results from sin, also is a source of temptations which in the condition of innocence would not
20 have been possible--for example, temptations to kill simply for revenge or out of envy: Cain and Abel. Thus, the change for the worse is called "concupiscence."

What about the weakening of the will? The will is a spiritual power. How can it be weakened? Either one can make choices or not. If one can make them, what sense does it make to say that Man's will is not what it would have been had there been no sin?

25 So far as I can see, the will in itself, as a capacity for free self-determination, cannot be more or less able. But it can be exercised in respect to different options. And in respect to some alternatives, the choice to do what is morally wrong can be far more attractive to the person as a whole than in respect to others. This is a fact of our own experience: Some temptations are easier to resist than others. Original sin
30 has the result of putting persons in a situation such that in many cases the choice to do what is morally right is not easy. In this sense, the will is weakened.

In chapter eight, sections H and N, I pointed out that choice has a certain negative aspect, inasmuch as every choice means the acceptance of self-limitation. Genuine human community can compensate for this inevitable self-limitation, since community
35 allows persons who love one another to find more adequate fulfillment in one another's lives than they can in their individual lives. Right choices build up genuine community; wrong choices tend to damage community. Hence, when genuine community is considered a real possibility, concern for it is a powerful motive for making good choices and seeking for completion in community.

40 The primal human group lost something--perhaps virtually all--of its character as genuine community when the members of the community sinned. Anyone considering making a choice after sin had been committed would have faced worse alternatives than those initially confronted by Man. For now the self-limitation involved in all choice would not be offset by participation in community, and so moral goodness would not have on its
45 side one of its most appealing fruits. Indeed, once sin is at large in the world, the morally upright person is more likely to suffer from others than to find mutual fulfillment in others. Virtue becomes its own punishment, as Scripture in many places teaches (cf. Wis 2.10-20, aptly applied to Jesus in Mt 27.41-44).

50 K. Man's sin transmitted by propagation, not by imitation

Had Man and the rest of the first community not sinned, the family of Man would ipso facto have been the earthly family of God--I should say, "would have continued to be," since on my account thus it was until sin. Every person newly born (or newly homin-
55 ized) would have come to be in God's friendship simply by coming to be in the human community which, as such, would have been in God's friendship.

Once sin entered the world and the primal family of God was destroyed, a different situation obtained. God did not leave men and women to their fate: ". . .after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (cf. Gen 3.15),
60 and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, in order to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (cf. Rom 2.6-7)" (DV 3). However, friendship with God no longer was given together with human nature; it now depended upon the acceptance--or something credited as acceptance--in faith of a redeemer to come. The main character at the beginning of salvation history is displaced;
65 "Man" is erased from the list of actors in this drama and "Jesus Christ" written in its place. "Man" becomes the name of a minor character.

It follows that precisely insofar as one receives one's humanity from Man--from our first human personal ancestors--one receives something which is not what it could
70 and ought to have been, for one receives a humanity without the gifts which God meant humanity to carry with it. Human nature itself is the positive reality which is transmitted.[14] The central privation which constitutes the evil of original sin simply is the absence of grace.

However, new humans do not inherit humanity without grace, but with everything else just as it would have been had sin not been committed. On the contrary, we inherit
75 our humanity in the midst of a humankind which as such is not the family of God. Even if we are conceived of Christian parents, born into the Church of Christ, and baptized in it at once, we are also born into a world which is hostile to Christ, for the Church exists amidst a humankind which still more or less extensively and more or less maliciously resists God's love (cf. Jn 15.18-20).

80 John XXIII states that in looking at the world, the spectacle he sees has two aspects:

. . .joyful, on the one hand, where the grace of Christ continues to multiply the fruits and prodigies of spiritual nobility, of salvation, and of holiness throughout the world, and sorrowful, on the other hand, where man's liberty is abused and

compromised, where man does not see the heavens opened, and refuses to believe in Christ the Son of God, Redeemer of the world and founder of Holy Church, and turns wholly to the search of the so-called goods of this earth under the inspiration of him whom the Gospel calls the Prince of Darkness, the Prince of this world--as Jesus Himself calls him in his discourse at the Last Supper--to organize the contradiction and struggle against truth and goodness, a nefarious position which accentuates the division between what the genius of St. Augustine calls the two cities, keeping ever active the forces of confusion so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect, and drag them headlong to ruin.

5
10 Material advantages tempt even Christians, and progress weakens them by turning them from the quest for holiness, and . . .

leads to the relaxation of the ensemble of discipline and good order of the past, with grave prejudice to what constitutes the strength of the resistance of the Church and of her children to the errors, which, in reality, in the course of the history of Christendom, have always led to pernicious and fatal divisions, to spiritual and moral decadence, to the ruin of nations.

15
Having uttered this prophetic vision, John completed the allocution by announcing the convoking of the Roman Synod, the plan for Vatican II, and the revision of the Code of Canon law.[15]

20 I have quoted Pope John at length because his description of the world--affected by original sin although also redeemed by Christ--is accurate. New humans come into existence not only without grace, but also without membership in the earthly family of God. Thus from the beginning each person's life is shaped by opposed and competing social acts, the vast commitments and conspiracies which form society as it really exists. The spontaneous willing of all little children is affected by this social environment, an environment inevitable since original sin. I explained in chapter nine, section F, how spontaneous willing has moral significance.

25
Moreover, every new human comes to be in a world like that which the first humans made by their sin: one in which virtuous action as such does not promise the fruit of fulfillment in community, but rather promises the bitter fruit of suffering at the hands of wicked persons. Everyone's will is weakened by this fact, so much so that no one can long avoid sin without the help of God's grace--a point of Catholic teaching mentioned in chapter four, section D, and now rendered more intelligible.

30
Finally, every new human comes to be with awareness of death. The implications which this awareness had in the beginning, it still has. But the consequences of this awareness have grown through time. For the distortions introduced at the beginning altered even the course of human biological development, as the more brutal survived and reproduced, while the more virtuous often proved biologically less fit. The effects of original sin are in our genes.

35
40 The alienation from God in which human persons insofar as they are children of Man come to be, the affect of this alienation upon the conditions of all choosing, and the other consequences of original sin which we inherit do entail that our moral situation and our relationship to God--considered apart from our relationship to God through Christ--are not at all what they could and should have been. This privation is true sin, the original sin in which the Catholic Church firmly believes. No one makes a choice to be in this condition of sin; there is no choice about it. It comes to us not by choosing as the first sinners did but simply by being born as children of sinful Man. In other words, it comes to us by propagation, not by imitation.

50 L. Replies to some likely objections

Someone might object that the preceding account of original sin still leaves standing a difficulty present in any account of it: A universally inherited sin is hard to reconcile with God's universal salvific will. My response is that the two data of faith are not hard to reconcile. God creates the human race, endows human persons with freedom, permits sin, and allows sin to have its natural and inevitable consequences. But at the same time He provides remedies. If all who become human are in sin insofar as they are children of Man, all also can be redeemed insofar as they are brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus. As St. Paul teaches, the gift is greater than the offense (cf. Rom 5.15-17).

55
60
65 What about unbaptized children? As I have said before, revelation and faith bears primarily upon the situation of those who can hear the word and believe it. In insisting upon the reality of original sin, the Church teaches the necessity of baptism (cf. DS 1514/791). But the Church does not say when and how baptism begins. It seems to me that one can hold that absolutely everyone has an opportunity for salvation, inasmuch as any real relationship to Christ is a bridge over which life in Him can come, and everyone at all times and places has some real relationship to Christ. This view does not render the completion of baptism in its full, sacramental rite less necessary whenever it becomes possible, nor does it at all suggest that anyone who freely refuses God's grace and persists in this refusal is saved despite this personal sin.

70
75 If this is so, how is Mary, conceived immaculate, different from anyone else? My answer is that for every other human person, the beginning of existence is without grace, for the sin of Man obtains. The next instant grace is given overcoming an existing state of sin. In Mary's case, redemption is preventive rather than curative. She is God's child even in the first instant of her being.

80 However, someone might object that this fine distinction apart, the very social character of original sin, as it has been described, would entail that Mary too--and for that matter even Jesus Himself--is caught up in it. My answer is that they truly were caught up in the condition and consequences of original sin, but original sin was excluded for them personally. In other words, they never exist as humans without divine life. Moreover, insofar as possible, the effects of original sin in their very humanities were prevented. Thus it is false to suppose that either Jesus or Mary was subject to concupiscence, and it seems to me inappropriate to suppose that Jesus could have died had He not permitted Himself to be killed or to suppose that Mary did die (a point the Church, has left open).[16]

Someone might object that St. Paul's teaching that the gift of redemption is greater than the offense seems to be inconsistent with his teaching about universal sinfulness, both among pagans and among Jews, apart from faith in Christ. For even if grace is available to all, the remedies Christianity provides against the consequences of original sin are not available to all. Hence pagans did in fact fall into idolatry, and Jews were in fact unfaithful. In the actual conditions, without the full benefit of Christian faith and life, the works of human persons hardly can be what they ought to be, yet God renders to each person according to his or her works (cf. Jer 17.10; Mt 16.27; 1 Cor 3.8; Rev 2.23; and so on).

My reply is that God also assesses works according to the talents each one is given (cf. Mt 25.20-33)--that is, with full consideration for all of the circumstances in which one lives one's life. [17] Sin by anyone, Jew or Greek, deserves punishment, "But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who has done good, the Jew first, then the Greek. With God there is no favoritism" (Rom 2.10-11). No favoritism: The time one is called to God's vineyard makes no difference whatsoever; what matters is one's willingness to do as best one can what one is called to do when one is called to do it (cf. Mt 20.1-16). Moreover, not those who are found in sin, but those who yield to the promptings of God's merciful love are saved (cf. Mt 21.28-32).

Someone might object to my account that it involves more theological assumptions, or somewhat different assumptions, than are necessary. I concede that this is true. I have tried to construct an account which is detailed enough to make a likely story. In many respects, the story (like that in Genesis) is more detailed than necessary. I am not concerned about any of the details of this account, provided that the Church's teaching is safeguarded. Thus, if it is compatible with the belief of the Church, I should not mind saying simply that at the beginning suitably endowed human persons, however exactly they came to be and however many there were, all committed some sort of sin and in doing so surrendered their original blessings. Putting matters in this way, all of the descriptive details about the original situation could be dispensed with. Of course, in any human community, someone's "Aye" or "No" is decisive; that one, in the original community, is the principle and epitome of sinful humankind, is Man.

Some careless reader might object that the account I have given is implausible in assuming that God constituted the original persons as unelected representatives of the whole human race and that they formed by social contract a community in friendship with God. Such an objection would show incomprehension of the theory of action set out in chapters eight and nine and of the account of original sin proposed above. For no such juridical assumptions are required. The entire theory moves on a different plane altogether, one which takes full account of both the social character of human acts and the conditioned character of personal moral responsibility. The persons in the primal situation no more represented us than parents represent their children when, in living foolishly, they make their children's lives more difficult. Moreover, the community I envisage would have been formed not by contract but by the natural priority of a born leader to his submissive followers.

Finally, someone might object that the realistic assumption about nonmortality in the original situation is unnecessary. All that is necessary, it will be argued, is that people would have had a different attitude toward death than we in fact do. My reply is that there is no ground in Scripture, in the Church's solemn teaching, or in the whole Catholic tradition for this revision of Christian doctrine.

To suppose that what changed is only the human attitude toward death is to suppose that our attitudes float free of profound human realities, such as death, in some sort of metaphysical stratosphere. Man in innocence could have been no more sanguine about death than our Lord Jesus was. He faced death with faithful obedience, with confidence, and with utter horror.

Moreover, if human persons would in any case have been subject to death, on what ground are we to suppose that God did not create us in exactly that mortality in which we find ourselves, and will not also leave us in it? The truth of faith hangs together: If the share in divine life won for us by the redemptive death of Christ entails bodily resurrection and eternal life, then the share in divine life lost for us by the sinful lives of our first parents would have entailed a like immortality.

But if this is so, why did God not redeem us simply by restoring--if need be, over and over--the original situation? Why does He redeem us by sending His Son to share the lot of sinners? To this question I now turn.

Notes to chapter ten

1. See W. Malcolm Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2-3," Journal of Biblical Literature, 88 (September 1969), pp. 266-278. Clark makes clear that "good" and "evil" here refer to that which is either; they are real alternatives; the "knowledge" of both is the acceptance of both indiscriminately, rather than acceptance of the seemingly limiting divine order of things.

2. E.g., Herbert Haag, Is Original Sin in Scripture? trans. Dorothy Thompson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), pp. 23-63 and 101-106; a less horrible and fairly typical example is Peter de Rosa, Christ and Original Sin (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 80-86.

3. See Theodosius Dobzhansky, Mankind Evolving (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Claude Heddebaut, "Biologie et péché originel," in Paul Guilluy, La culpabilité fondamentale: péché originel et anthropologie moderne (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1975), pp. 153-164.

4. On monogenism, see Pius XII, DS 3897/2328; Paul VI "Original Sin and Modern Science: Address of Pope Paul VI to Participants in a Symposium on Original Sin," The Pope Speaks, 11 (1966), p. 234 (AAS, 58 [1966], 649-655). For a theological commentary which has some plausibility, see Karl Rahner, S.J., "Evolution and Original Sin," in Johannes Metz, ed., Concilium, vol. 26, The Evolving World and Theology (New York/Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 61-73.

5. Various naturalistic reductions--that is, explainings away--of the

nonnaturalistic aspects of human personhood are so prevalent in contemporary thought that even faithful Christians (including a great many theologians) continually fall into these lines of thought, which are absolutely incompatible with Christian faith. Any student who has not done so ought to devote some time and effort to the study of philosophical anthropology. As a start, I suggest James E. Royce, S.J., Man and His Nature (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961); Mortimer J. Adler, The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967); Germain Grisez, Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 230-240 and 343-356. Those who read only scientific works and naturalistic philosophy, on the one hand, and, on the other, theology and its sources, without carrying out Christian philosophical reflection, are likely to overlook the dogmatic and ideological character of all but the most technical writing about evolution; except in a strictly scientific context, where it is harmless to faith, evolutionist views of the universe are expressions of a thrust toward speculative metaphysics of the least rationally defensible sort.

6. See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Christianity and Evolution, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), especially pp. 36-55, 79-86, 133-137, 162-163, 189-198, and 212-220. For indications of some of the links between Teilhard and the revisionistic accounts of original sin, see Robert T. Francoeur, Perspectives in Evolution (Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon, 1965), pp. 145-229. One cannot revise the Church's belief on original sin in the direction Teilhard desired without in the end embracing a monistic theory (a form of pantheism) in which evil is merely an illusion which development and gnostic insight will remove. Freedom and its dialectic drops out of Teilhard's rewriting of the story of salvation.

7. An illustration of this point in detail with respect to the one important issue of human free choice is in Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 57-97. I did not begin to realize how weak the naturalistic worldview is until I looked closely at its classic and most powerful formulations.

8. See A. M. Dubarle, The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin, trans. E. M. Stewart (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), pp. 45-200. Except for the final chapter, where the author seems to me to surrender the Church's belief through lack of theological ingenuity to articulate and defend it, Dubarle's book is well-argued, clear, and helpful.

9. For a summary of some of these accounts, see Michael J. Taylor, S.J., ed., The Mystery of Sin and Forgiveness (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1970), pp. 215-252 (articles by James P. Mackey, Pierre Smulders, S.J., and Piet Schoonenberg, S.J.). Also see B. O. McDermott, "Original Sin," New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 17, pp. 471-472; and "The Theology of Original Sin: Recent Developments," Theological Studies, 38 (1977), pp. 478-512, for additional bibliography.

10. One of the more helpful recent theological attempts unfortunately is not available in English: Maurizio Flick and Zoltán Alszeghy, Il peccato originale, 2nd ed. (Brescia: Queriniana, 1974). The authors summarize other current views (pp. 179-226) and present their own view (pp. 273-374) which, if not altogether satisfactory, does include most of what is helpful in all other recent works I have read.

11. A useful treatment of the Church's teaching on original sin is that written by T. C. O'Brien, O.P., Appendices 2 and 3, in St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 26 (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co. and Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), pp. 110-120. The remaining appendices also are very sound, concise treatises on other aspects of the matter; O'Brien is most helpful in his clear explanation of the most plausible traditional theology of original sin--that of St. Thomas.

12. For a theological reflection on concupiscence which is worth study, see Karl Rahner, S.J., Theological Investigations, vol. 1, trans. Corneilius Ernst, O.P. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), pp. 347-382. Although useful, Rahner's view, it seems to me, is distorted by his assumption (common in the whole Augustinian tradition) that one can choose directly contrary to divine goodness. I argued in chapter seven, sections A-C, that this assumption is false.

13. If divine life is eligible, it must be an intelligible good; if it is an intelligible good, we understand infinite goodness; if we understand infinite goodness, we necessarily will it; if we necessarily will it, there is no eligible alternative to it; if there is no eligible alternative to it, then divine life is not eligible; therefore, if divine life is eligible, it is not eligible.

14. See St. Thomas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, q. 82, art. 1-2; also O'Brien, op. cit., pp. 133-143.

15. John XXIII, Allocution to the Cardinals (January 25, 1959), AAS 51 (1959), 65.

16. See Bonaventura Kloppenburg, O.F.M., De relatione inter peccatum et mortem (Roma: Liberia "Orbis catholicus," 1951), pp. 155-200, for a survey of theological opinions. The definition of the dogma of the Assumption (cf. DS 3903/2333) carefully uses a formula which leaves open the question whether Mary ever died.

17. Dubarle, op. cit., pp. 201-217, has a good chapter on this point.

70 Questions for study and review

1. Why is the doctrine concerning original sin important for moral theology?

2. Summarize the teaching of Trent, of Scripture, and of the Easter Liturgy on this matter.

3. What are the main difficulties with respect to this doctrine?

4. What can be said by way of dealing with these difficulties?

5. Explain the ways in which the doctrine concerning original sin is related to other, more important Catholic beliefs.

6. Summarize the efforts of reinterpretation and/or revision which are mentioned, and indicate what reasons are given for rejecting each of them.

7. Summarize the "likely story" I provide.

8. How would one go about distinguishing in one's experience between the consequences of original sin and the consequences of other, subsequent sins?