



ORIGINAL SIN  
AND  
HUMAN MISERY

By

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## PREFACE

Not long ago, an article appeared in a prominent Catholic weekly entitled, "Original Sin: That Is Our Trouble." According to its author, World War II, and all the sins, crimes, injustice, uncharity, suffering, and stupidity therein involved, were caused by original sin. If our First Parents had not disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, all their descendants would have come into, and passed through, this world equipped with all the supernatural and preternatural endowments which Adam and Eve possessed before the Fall. The men, women, and children of this generation would have escaped World War II and all the mental, moral, and physical misery that have flowed therefrom.

The Catholic Church teaches that all this is true historically. If Adam and Eve had not fallen, the condition of the human race would be infinitely, or at least indefinitely, better than it is actually.

From this historical fact, inferences are sometimes drawn which are very discreditable to existing human nature. According to these, the human nature that men now possess has become vitiated or weakened, either intrinsically or extrinsically. Whether this view is shared by the author of the article mentioned above, I do not know. At any rate, it is accepted by others, both Catholics and non-Catholics. They attribute the sins and miseries noted above to hereditary defects in human nature itself, to divergence from the normal type of human nature, as it exists in the mind of God. Ever since the Fall, mankind — to paraphrase the words

which Richard III applies to himself—has been “sent into this breathing world, scarce half made up.”

Undoubtedly this assumption of a radical decadence in human nature provides a plausible explanation of the world's moral, intellectual, and physical miseries, not only for this age but for all the ages of recorded time. Is the assumption supported by philosophy or psychology? Is it in accord with Catholic teaching? How can the infliction of defective human nature upon rational creatures, because of a sin they have not committed but only inherited, be reconciled with the justice and goodness of God? If the assumption of radical deterioration in human nature is not tenable, how shall we explain the existence in the world of manifold evil?

In the following pages the attempt is made to discuss these questions briefly and to answer them, so far as I am able.

John A. Ryan.

Washington,  
August 15, 1942.

# Original Sin and Human Misery

*by*

Right Reverend Msgr. John A. Ryan, D.D.

THE official, authoritative, and *de fide* pronouncements of the Church on original sin are presented, for the most part, in the decrees of the Council of Trent. The sessions of this Ecumenical Council were held at Trent, near Salzburg, Austria, and Bologna, Italy, at various periods between 1545 and 1563. The principal occasion of the Council was the revolt of Luther, which had occurred in 1517, and the rapid and devastating diffusion of his doctrines. "Its main object was the definite determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants; a further object was the execution of a thorough reform of the inner life of the Church, by removing the numerous abuses developed in it." 1

The decree on original sin was formulated mainly in five canons against the corresponding erroneous doctrines. It was promulgated within six months from the opening of the Council. Previous to this action, the only dogmatic decrees proclaimed by the Council (in Sessions III and IV) were those dealing with the symbol of faith, the canon of Scripture, and the editions and use of the Sacred Books.

Obviously this was the appropriate order to follow. The Reformers had denied the traditional teaching of the Church on the rule of faith and the interpretation

1 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XV, p. 30, col. 1.



of the Bible. These were the primary and most fundamental doctrines. Next in importance came the question of justification, whether it is achieved by faith and good works or by faith alone. That topic could be logically and effectively dealt with only after the discussion of original sin, inasmuch as Luther's doctrine on justification arose directly from his errors concerning the Fall. In his opinion, original sin consists in the hereditary corruption of man's nature and particularly in concupiscence. As a consequence of this baneful inheritance from Adam, the soul of man, said Luther, is so impaired and depraved that it has lost the power of free will.

Against these propositions, and variations thereof in the teachings of the other Reformers, were directed the five canons of condemnation noted above.<sup>2</sup> The following four paragraphs describe and summarize the positive doctrine:

<sup>2</sup> Sessio V., *De Peccato Originali*.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CANONS OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

*Canon 1.* By this sin, Adam lost the sanctity and justice in which he had been established, and incurred God's anger and indignation and therefore death; and with death, captivity under the power of him who holds dominion over death, that is, the devil; and the whole Adam, both as to body and soul, changed for the worse.

*Canon 2.* Because of Adam's sin, not only he but all his descendants lost the sanctity and justice received from God; and became subject to death and bodily pain, and also to sin which is the death of the soul.

*Canon 3* deals with the manner in which original sin is transmitted from Adam to his posterity, and removed through the redeeming and sanctifying work of Christ. *Canon 4* declares that Baptism is necessary for the removal of original sin and entrance into the Kingdom of God, even in the case of infants.

*Canon 5.* The grace conferred in Baptism remits the guilt of original sin and takes away the true and peculiar essence of sin. Those who are baptized put on the new man and become innocent, pure, beloved of God, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ, and deserving of heaven. They retain, however, concupiscence, or incitement to sin, which torments, indeed, those who do not consent, but is not effective against those who oppose it through the grace of Christ Jesus. This concupiscence has never been understood by the Catholic Church as a true and proper sin in the baptized, but only as derived from sin and inclining to sin.

In the Sixth Session, on Justification, the Council made two pronouncements which have a direct bearing upon original sin. Both deal with free will. According to the first, all men have, indeed, lost their innocence through the sin of Adam, but their free will was by no means destroyed, even though it became attenuated and bent in its powers.<sup>3</sup> The second declaration condemns those who declare that after the sin of Adam, free will was either lost or became extinct; or that it is merely a fiction, brought into the Church by Satan.<sup>4</sup>

In the foregoing paragraphs will be found, abbreviated but not mutilated or diminished, the substance of all the doctrine laid down by the Council of Trent on original sin. None of these declarations provides a formal definition. None of them tells us precisely what original sin is in its essence. For the most part, they describe the *effects* of Adam's sin, with important implications concerning its nature. The main concern of the Council was to refute the erroneous notions of the Reformers and in that process to make clear the main elements of the traditional doctrine.

Let us now examine and elucidate some of the more critical and difficult phrases in the Council's pronouncements.

<sup>3</sup> Caput L

<sup>4</sup> Canon V.

## THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER AND ITS FORFEITURE BY OUR FIRST PARENTS

*Canon 1.* "Adam lost the sanctity and justice in which he had been established." "Sanctity" means "sanctifying grace." "Justice" denotes the supernatural order to which our First Parents had been elevated. By the supernatural order is meant that condition of existence which places the human being above the status belonging to him by reason of the intrinsic forces of nature. In the supernatural order, man obtains a dignity and a destiny which are beyond the powers of a rational animal. God created a great variety of beings: minerals, plants, animals, men, angels. Each was formed according to its own type, its own pattern, in the mind of God. The type, the pattern, the constitution of man was that of a rational animal; that is, a being composed of an animal body and a rational soul. The angels were created as pure spirits; the animals, as creatures having not only life but also the faculty of sensation. Man is midway between these two types, a living entity possessing not merely the power to feel, but also the ability to think.

This is his nature. This is all that he is, according to the creative pattern which he exemplifies. When he was elevated to the supernatural order, his condition and destiny became immeasurably higher than what was due him according to his natural constitution. He became a friend of God, a member of God's household, an adopted child of God, a partaker of the Divine

Nature, an heir of God, a co-heir with Christ, and qualified for the Beatific Vision; that is, destined to "see God face to face." His nature as a human being did not enable him to aspire to this supernatural end; he could only hope to possess God through his natural faculties; that is, to know Him and love Him discursively, not intuitively. By nature, man's knowledge and love of God in eternity would not differ in essence, however much they might differ in degree, from that knowledge and love which are within the reach of us all here on earth.

In comparison with the natural order, the supernatural may helpfully be likened to an elevated railroad. The passengers on a surface railway may be moved in the same direction as the occupants of a vehicle on the elevated, but so long as the car which carries them remains on rails laid upon the ground, it will not bring them to the elevated station. Nor can the passengers on the elevated train arrive at a station located on the ground. They may, indeed, be shunted to a sidetrack, but they do not descend to the rails of the surface line. When persons in the supernatural order and the state of grace commit mortal sin, they are diverted to the sidetrack and turned away from God. They cannot continue toward their eternal destiny, the Beatific Vision, until through forgiveness of their sins they become once more friends of God. In the course of this transformation, they are carried back from the sidetrack to the main line and enabled to resume their journey forward.

All the gifts and prerogatives of the supernatural order were forfeited by Adam and Eve when they sinned; with the exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

all their descendants are born under the same disability. Nevertheless, they are not returned to the natural order. They are still destined for a supernatural end, to see God face to face in eternity, as soon as they are emancipated from original sin by the sacrament of Baptism. Later on, we shall examine the Catholic doctrine concerning the fate of infants who die unbaptized.<sup>5</sup>

Through the Incarnation and Redemption by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, all the descendants of Adam are eligible for membership in the supernatural order, for a place in the elevated train. If they are baptized and live to the age of reason, they will reach their proper destination at the elevation station, *i. e.*, the Beatific

<sup>5</sup> Is there a place of natural happiness, or natural unhappiness, reserved for *adults* who die without formal instruction in the truths of Christian Revelation? For example, Chinese and Japanese pagans? In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, several theological writers, mostly French, answered these questions in the affirmative. They were impressed by the difficulty of conceiving how the multitude of pagans, including the hordes of recently discovered American Indians, could make a profession of supernatural faith, never having heard of Christianity or the supernatural. Hence, these authors concluded that the natural order still exists and that natural rewards and punishments in a future life are still available to uninstructed pagan adults. However, this view seems to have won the adherence of few, if any, theological writers after the end of the eighteenth century. The overwhelming weight of theological opinion has always accepted the doctrine that the natural order and natural union with God in eternity have never existed for adults since Adam and Eve were placed in the supernatural order. Since the Fall and the promise of a Redeemer, all men are called to supernatural salvation and will receive it if their lives are meritorious, even though the knowledge of Christian Revelation, required for a profession of Christian faith, can come to them only through extraordinary illumination.

An excellent and comprehensive treatment of all the aspects of this question is presented in *Le Problème du Salut des Infidèles*, by Louis Caperan; 2 Vols.; Paris, 1912.

Vision, provided that their souls are in the state of grace when they are overtaken by death. If they are shunted to a sidetrack through mortal sin and do not get back to the main line through contrition, they will never see God face to face.

### What Our First Parents Lost

Adam lost the sanctity and justice in which he had been "established." The Latin word is "*constitutus*," and it seems to have been deliberately chosen by the Council in order to avoid endorsing either of two conflicting views prevalent among contemporary theologians. According to one opinion, Adam was created in the supernatural order; according to the other, he was elevated to that condition subsequently. The verb used by the Council is consistent with either opinion. However, the weight of theological opinion, both past and present, affirms that Adam was established in the supernatural order at the moment of creation.<sup>6</sup> This accords with the general theological opinion that God destined all mankind for existence in the supernatural order: that the natural order was a type in the mind of God, but never to be actualized.<sup>7</sup>

The Council's statement that by his sin, Adam incurred "God's anger and indignation and, therefore, death." is based upon the account of the prohibition imposed by God upon Adam and the latter's disobedience, presented in Genesis ii. and iii. "Death" means

<sup>6</sup> Since the fifteenth century, this opinion "has obtained all but universal currency." Pohle-Preuss. *God: the Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, St. Louis, 1940. p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> "Man's whole natural endowment was intended merely as the basis and groundwork of a higher and specifically different one; viz., that of supernatural grace." *Idem*, p. 179.

physical death, the dissolution of the body and its separation from the soul; it implies that before the Fall, our First Parents possessed the preternatural gift of immortality. Their other preternatural gifts were freedom from ignorance, from concupiscence, and from suffering. Taken together, they constituted the state of "original justice," "original integrity," "the integrity of nature." They are called preternatural, because they were higher than the purely natural properties of man and lower than his supernatural endowments.<sup>8</sup> The gifts of immunity from concupiscence and from death are either explicitly or implicitly asserted in the decree of the Council of Trent on original sin. Freedom from ignorance and from suffering have not been expressly affirmed by the Church; but they are regarded as "theologically certain," upon the authority of Genesis ii. and iii.

Concerning the precise scope of the latter two preternatural powers, there has been not a little speculation by theologians. Some have held that freedom from ignorance enabled Adam and Eve to know God in His essence, to have a perfect knowledge of all created nature, and to perceive without reasoning all the con-

<sup>8</sup> "The Supernatural involves divine perfections, *i. e.*, such as by nature belong solely to God. The Preternatural communicates only such perfections as, though belonging to a higher order, do not transcend the creatural domain. Thus freedom from concupiscence is natural to an angel, because his nature demands it; but it is not natural to man. If, therefore, God grants freedom from concupiscence to a man, He gives him a real grace, *i. e.*, something which is not due to his nature, and which is consequently Supernatural. However, since such a Supernatural perfecting of man does not in principle transcend the creatural order, a grace of the kind just mentioned is merely *praeternaturale*." *Idem*, pp. 187-188.



elusions derivable from first principles. Had our First Parents not sinned, their descendants would have maintained systems of political government, whose regulations they would have obeyed spontaneously. All persons would have married, and there would have been as many males as females. Men and women would have needed food, but they would not have used meat nor milk nor eggs nor cooked victuals, nor intoxicating liquor. These are merely samples of the fanciful speculations of individual theologians. There never was unanimity nor even a dominant opinion among them concerning the entire content and implications of the preternatural endowments which constituted the state of original justice, or integrity.<sup>9</sup>

®C/. Pohle-Preuss, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-216.

## CHAPTER III

### CAPTIVITY UNDER THE DEVIL

“Captivity under the power of him, who holds dominion over death, that is, the devil,”—repeats the words found in ii. 14-15, of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Inasmuch as all Adam's descendants inherited original sin and became subject to all its disabilities, they too are born under the power of the devil. The words quoted above may be compared with the following expressions in the Ritual of the sacrament of Baptism. “Go out from him, unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.” These words are used by the priest almost at the beginning of the ceremony. A little later, he prays God to “break all the bonds of Satan” by which the person about to receive Baptism “had been bound.” Presently the priest again addresses Satan in these words: “I exorcise thee, every unclean spirit, in the name of God, the Almighty Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Judge, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that thou go out from this creature of God, whom our Lord has brought to the Holy Temple in order that he may become the temple of the living God and that the Holy Spirit may dwell in him.” And the person to be baptized is required, through his sponsors if he is an infant, to “renounce Satan and all his works and pomps.”

What does all this mean? That the unbaptized person is actually possessed of the devil? That his soul is the devil's chattel? Not at all. “Under the

power of the devil/" does not mean subjection to the devil's will and disposal, or certain punishment with him or under him. In the usage of the Church, this phrase has a relative, precise, restricted signification. It denotes exclusion from the supernatural order, in which our First Parents were established and to which all their descendants were and are called. Entrance to this order is through the sacrament of Baptism, which removes the guilt and stain of original sin. Until this has taken place, the soul is without sanctifying grace, averted from God, and deprived of the benefits of the supernatural order, including its own final destiny, the Beatific Vision.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> At least six passages in the New Testament mention the power or empire of the devil, and set it in opposition to the Divine dominion. Here are the texts, in the order of their appearance: ". . . now will the prince of the world be cast out" (John xii. 31, 32); ". . . for the prince of the world is coming, and in me he has nothing" (John xiv. 30); ". . . the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds" (2 Cor. iv. 4); ". . . And they recover themselves from the snare of the devil, at whose pleasure they are held captive" (2 Tim. ii. 26); ". . . that through death he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is, the devil. . . ." (Hebrews ii. 14); "For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter v. 8, 9).

This diabolical empire over the children of Adam was described by some of the Fathers in terms which tended greatly to expand its boundaries. As Rev. Dr. J. Rivière remarks in his able work, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (translated from the French, St. Louis, 1909, vol. II, pp. 248, 249): "Another result of sin was to put us in the bondage of the devil; hence Salvation must consist in a redemption. This idea, which has been suggested by the Gospel and by St. Paul, was to prove of extraordinary fertility and to undergo some surprising deviations. Here fancy reigns, either in the place of, or side by side with, the old mystical speculations. If we consider the devil as God's rival, who keeps in bondage sinful souls, then the Saviour, to redeem us, will have to pay him a price, and this ransom can be nothing else save His own self. This childish and brutal idea was adopted by several of the Fathers. But soon the absurdity and bias-

Perhaps the best practical indication of the restricted and limited scope of the phrase discussed in the immediately preceding paragraph and of the kindred phrases employed in the Ritual of Baptism, is provided in the predominant opinion of the theologians concerning the condition of infants who have died without baptism. Although they are technically "under the power of the devil," they do not suffer pain of sense; nor even pain of loss of the Beatific Vision, of which they know nothing; moreover, they enjoy some degree of natural happiness, which implies the power of knowing and loving God. Such infants remain practically, if not technically, in the natural order. Although they are called to the supernatural state, they never reach it effectively. While alive, they are in it only potentially; when they die, this potentiality vanishes. To recur to the simile of the railroad lines: at birth they enter the cars on the elevated, but they never move forward because, without the sacrament of Baptism, the cars lack the motive power of sanctifying grace.<sup>11</sup>

phemy involved in the opinion came to be felt, and then it was remembered that Satan, far from being God's partner, was but a delegate, whose whole power was held on sufferance."

Comparable with the phrases above quoted is that employed by St. Paul in Ephesians ii. 3: "We . . . were by nature children of wrath." Cf. Colossians iii. 6. These expressions denote simply aversion from God, as man's *supernatural* end.

11 While the condition of natural happiness possessed by deceased unbaptized infants is greatly and fundamentally inferior to that of persons enjoying the Beatific Vision, it is not in itself deplorable. It does not call for bewailing or lamentation. It does *not* justify the friends of these infants in bemoaning them as virtually "lost." God could have left all mankind in the natural order, the final end of which, even for adults, would be to know and love Him eternally through exercise of the natural faculties of intellect and will. This would be natural happiness. Surely it would have been good and worthwhile. It is also good and worthwhile for infants.

## CHAPTER IV

### CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL DETERIORATION

“Through his sin of disobedience, Adam was, in body and soul, changed into something worse.” This is the closing sentence of Canon 1 of Session V of the Council of Trent. To which should be added, as supplementary, the excerpts cited some pages back from Session VI: “Through the sin of Adam, free will was by no means destroyed, although it became attenuated and bent down in its powers;” and “free will has neither been lost nor extinguished.”

These declarations of the Council form the basis of all the important differences among theologians concerning the effects of original sin upon Adam's descendants. The effects are succinctly rendered by the axiom first employed by Peter Lombard, “Master of the Sentences,” (1555-1625): “*vulneratus quidem est in naturalibus bonis, spoliatus vero gratuitis;*” that is, “wounded in natural goods, but despoiled of the gratuitous.” On the meaning of the latter phrase, there has been substantial unanimity among theological writers: man has been deprived of those goods that did not belong to human nature, namely, the endowments described in the foregoing pages as supernatural and preternatural. “Wounded in his natural goods,” however, has never been accepted in a uniform sense by all the theologians. Their mutual disagreement turns upon the question, whether these words should be taken in the philosophical or in the historical sense: absolutely or relatively. According to the former interpretation, man's

natural powers have been wounded or weakened in themselves, either intrinsically or extrinsically; in the latter view, the wound has been merely relative to man's supernatural and preternatural endowments. In other words, man's natural powers are weaker than they were before the Fall, but not weaker than they would have been in a state of pure nature. The wound is comparative and historical, not independent and inherent.

In passing, it should be noted that, according to its historian, Pallavicini, the Council of Trent refused to employ language which would expressly support either of these theological opinions. Describing the effects of the Fall upon the will, the Council substituted for "*vulneratum*" ("wounded") the words, "*attenuatum et inclinatum*" ("attenuated and bent down")—terms, says Pallavicini, which "can be fairly adapted to all the opinions of the Scholastics." 12 Undoubtedly so; otherwise, Catholic authorities could not continue to defend the mutually opposing views.

The main argument offered by the Augustinians for their opinion that the wound to nature is intrinsic, may be thus summarized: since the preternatural goods of Adam were no less gratuitous than those that were supernatural, they are included under the second part of the axiom, "*gratuitis spoliatus*"; therefore, "*vulneratus in naturalibus*" must denote definite injury to those powers that are purely natural. This wounding is not, indeed, absolute, but relative to that kind or grade of pure nature which God would have created if He had not intended to raise man to the supernatural order. In this hypothetical grade of pure nature, the animal part of man would have been constantly and com-

12 Quoted in *Theologia Dogmatica* by H. del Val. O5-A., I, p. 621.

pletely subject to the dictates of reason. As it now exists, however, human nature is of an inferior kind; it represents "the lowest condition of pure nature." Hence, the wounding in man's natural properties describes the descent from the higher hypothetical grade (which never existed but which would have existed if God had established only the purely natural order for mankind) to this lowest possible level, on which we now find ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

This argument is not convincing. It seems to imply that no grade of pure nature would be worthy of God's creative act which included possible rebellion of the lower nature. Nevertheless, the constant subjection of man's animal nature to his spiritual nature seems to be equivalent to immunity from concupiscence, a condition which the Church holds to be *preternatural*; therefore, it is not within the reach of any grade of pure nature. Again, let us not forget that, even when man was on the supernatural plane, he was capable of sin: the sins of pride and disobedience committed in the Garden of Eden. Why then should his animal nature have to be made incapable of disobeying his reason? Finally, the assumption that the present condition of human nature is the lowest grade of "pure nature creatable by God," is a pretty large assumption. Can we not conceive of men provided with an average Intelligence Quotient some fifteen or twenty per cent lower than the average which they have exhibited throughout history, and yet having sufficient intelligence to comply with the requirements of "*animal rationale*"? How is it possible to prove that such a grade of human nature would be unworthy of God?

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 622, 623.

The question of the injury to man's natural powers is treated under another aspect by the theologians, when they consider whether God could have created man in a state of pure nature, in any condition or degree of pure nature. What is called, "the opinion of the Augustinians," denies this possibility, because such a creation would not be in harmony with God's wisdom and goodness. The arguments for this position are feeble and unpersuasive. Least unpersuasive of them is the following: men were created to enjoy God and rest in Him as their final happiness; until they reach that end, their hearts are restless; on the other hand, the end of all creation is the glorification of God, but this end would be less perfectly attained through the life and activities of men in the natural order than in the supernatural order. Hence, the supernatural order is the only one that is congruous with the goodness and wisdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

Against this opinion, the argument from the papal condemnation of the fifty-fifth proposition of Michael Baius seems to be conclusive. This proposition reads: "God could not from the beginning have created man such as he is now born." The authoritative and true doctrine is expressed in the contradictory of this proposition, namely, God *could* have created man from the beginning in his present condition. Therefore, He could have created man in a state of pure nature. This is not only the overwhelmingly common opinion among the theologians but is regarded by some of them as "theologically certain."

"Let us further bear in mind that God, without injury to His justice or His goodness, could have created

<sup>14</sup> *Op. di.*, p. 558.



man as he is today, for his state meets all the needs of his nature, his condition and character, as a reasonable being." 15

Returning to the question of "*vulneratus in bonis naturalibus*," we note that all the theological writers who hold the "wounding" to be merely relative and historical agree that man's natural powers have not been injured intrinsically. Some prominent authors do, indeed, believe that our natural faculties have been weakened *extrinsically*, through external obstacles which would not have existed in the state of pure nature. On the other hand, many theological authorities of first rank maintain that the natural powers in the descendants of Adam have not been harmed, even extrinsically, and that the wound to his nature consisted merely in the deprivation of his preternatural gifts. In the words of Cardinal Bellarmine, fallen man differs from man as he would have been in a state of pure nature only as "*spoliatus differt a nudo*" as a denuded man differs from a nude man, as one deprived of his clothes from one who never wore clothes. To Reverend Doctor A. Tanqueray, S.S., this opinion seems "by far more probable" than the other?6

In a very well-known and able work. Reverend Doctor J. A. Moehler contends that the opinion of Bellar-

15 Devivier-Messmer, *Christian Apologetics*, New York. 1903, p. 250.

"When God created man in the beginning. He could also have formed another man from the slime of the earth whom He would have left in the condition of his own nature, namely, so that he would be mortal and passible and feeling the conflict of concupiscence with reason; in this man there would be derogation from reason; because his condition would be a consequence of the principles of nature" (St. Thomas, in *Sent*, ii, 30, Q. I. A. I.).

18 *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, Baltimore, 1896, I, p. 397.

mine is "unable to account for the wound of the spirit, especially for the perversity of the will. Would the spirit of man . . . , as void of supernatural grace, and as a bare finite being, be found in that attitude of opposition to God and all things holy, wherein man is now born?"<sup>17</sup> Doctor Moehler's position is that in a state of pure nature, God could not, or would not, have made the soul of man such a poor thing as it is now; that the soul at present is affected by a "perversity of the will" which is not due to concupiscence, but to something defective in the soul itself, as compared with its powers in a state of pure nature.

"Perversity of will" is neither precise nor scientific. It is general, popular, and rhetorical. To be sure, the will does rebel against the reason in many situations which include no concupiscence; for example, in sins of pride, hatred, and disobedience. According to Doctor Moehler, these offenses can be explained only as effects of original sin and the "wound" that it inflicted upon the spirit. To which one might reply that the rebellious angels committed a sin of the spirit, which implied "perversity of the will" but which was not due to the Fall. Moreover, our First Parents perpetrated a sin of disobedience and, probably, of pride; these sins of the spirit were not the effect of the Fall but its cause. Hence, Adam and Eve exhibited a certain "perversity of the will" before they had suffered that "wound of the spirit," which Doctor Moehler attributes exclusively to original sin. Is "man now born in an attitude of opposition to God and all things holy?" This language is even more inexact and exaggerated than "perversity of the will." Doctor Moehler's argument really

<sup>17</sup>*Symbolism*, London, 1906, pp. 53, 54.

assumes that sins of the spirit, such as those noted above, would be impossible in a state of pure nature. What proof have we of this? It seems clear that no effective attack on the opinion adopted by Doctor Tanquerey can be based upon anything so indefinite as "perversity of the will" in Adam's descendants.

The conclusion of the matter is that the phrases which we have been considering in the decrees of the Council of Trent are entirely consonant with the opinion that original sin has not caused the powers of man to be injured or weakened, either intrinsically or extrinsically. Being changed into "something worse as to body and soul," and having a will that is "attenuated and bent down," do not necessarily endorse the contrary opinion nor impose it upon the conscience of any Catholic.

The following extracts, freely translated from *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, present the essence of the two theological views concerning the relation between human nature since the Fall and the state of pure nature. A good Catholic may lawfully hold either.

Given the immutable character of the constituent energies of human nature, it is necessary to conclude logically to the identity, ontologically, of the state of human nature and the actual state of fallen nature. In the one case, as in the other, there is the same essential constitution of body and soul; in the intelligence, the same capacities to reach the truth; in the will, the ability to do good and in a certain measure avoid evil. The same limits and the same infirmities exist in the other faculties; the intelligence turns from ignorance to lift itself gently toward the truth; the will is fragile in the face of the assaults of concupiscence and needs divine concurrence and help

in difficult situations, in order to be victorious morally and to attain its real end, union with God; there is even a vague desire to attain the Vision of God, even though this is beyond the power of the forces of nature. In this minimum which is common to both conditions there is no indication of fallen nature; man remains man with the principles and qualities demanded by his nature.

Morally speaking and in fact, however, the fallen state cannot be identified at every point with the state of pure nature. In the latter there is not a descent from a higher condition in which man had been constituted; there is merely absence of Grace, the conflict between concupiscent and spirit which is natural to man; there is no disequilibrium, but a natural order, with an end which can be attained and the means suitable to that end; there is the spiritual infirmity of poor human nature with the essential needs of a spirit united to matter, but there is not a nature which is in default and culpable.

That state of pure nature is not like fallen nature, a real state, but a pure abstraction which does not exist and never has existed in a separate condition; the man who faces history, psychology or revelation, is not a man who from the beginning was in a state of pure nature; in the beginning Adam was in the state of elevated nature; since the Fall, in a state of fallen nature. He has not been returned to the natural order in which pure nature would have been constituted. He remains destined for the sole end to which God destined him, the supernatural: without the Redemption he would not have the supernatural means and forces which fit him for that end: hence he remains in a state of disequilibrium and disorder. (Vol. 12, 1, Cols. 598, 599.)

One of the mildest expressions of the opinion that some deterioration (extrinsic) affects human nature in

its present condition may be found in Pohle-Preuss, *op. cit.*, p. 229:

There is reason to doubt, however, whether the state of pure nature, thus conceived, would in every detail be essentially like the present state of original sin. Original sin, with the consequences which it entails, impairs the purity of nature to a considerable extent. It is not likely that in the state of pure nature idolatry' and bestiality would have wrought such havoc as they actually did and do in consequence of the Fall, especially if we consider that original sin has immensely increased the ravages of these two arch-enemies of humankind. Abstracting from the guilt of sin and the punishment due to it, the state of pure nature may consequently be conceived as somewhat more perfect than the state of original sin.

When they think of the poorer condition of mankind resulting from original sin, the majority of Catholics probably do not compare it with the hypothetical state of pure nature; they think of it only historically in relation to the happy state of our First Parents before the Fall and in relation to the condition that would be ours if they had not sinned. Of those Catholics who do compare the present state of mankind with a condition of pure nature, a considerable proportion probably believe that both the intellects and the wills of Adam's posterity have been either intrinsically or extrinsically weakened. This conclusion they derive from one or more of several sources: contemplation of the miseries, sins, and follies of men throughout history; pessimistic and rhetorical expressions sometimes found in popular books of devotion; <sup>18</sup> similar language employed in ser-

<sup>18</sup> For example, in book IV, ch. 55 of *The Following of Christ*.

mons and instructions; finally, the descriptions of original sin and its effects presented in certain catechetical texts.

One widely used catechism declares that "we all come into the world infected with sin." To some readers, this expression suggests substantial corruption of the soul, which is heretical doctrine. Among the effects of original sin, the same text includes "concupiscence and inclination to evil." The addition of "inclination to evil" as a separate effect is easily conducive to exaggerated notions. Another catechism speaks of human nature as "tainted." While this term is susceptible of a correct interpretation, it can readily lead to misconceptions. This text also declares that original sin has "darkened the understanding and weakened the will." While this statement is correct relatively, the words themselves, unless explained by the instructor, convey on their face the idea that the powers of the soul have been weakened as compared with what they would have been in a normal state of nature. Still another text declares that we are "all born enemies of God, because we are deprived of the gifts of God granted to mankind." "Enemies of God" is, of course, Scriptural, but it requires interpretation by a competent instructor to protect the pupil against misleading inferences. As a matter of fact, the authoritative explanation is that the phrase merely means that we are "excluded from that special friendship of God to which no creature has a natural right."<sup>19</sup> Before Baptism, the soul is in a state

<sup>19</sup> Rev. Augustine F. Hewit, C.S.P., *Problems of the Age*, New York, 1868, p. 247. Almost half a century has gone by since the writer came upon this volume as a student in the St. Paul Seminary, but his feeling of indebtedness to its discussion of original sin still endures.

of "enmity" with God, because it is without sanctifying grace; when this grace is received in Baptism, the soul is in the condition of friendship with God. But the average pupil in a catechism class which uses this particular text will not derive this meaning from these words without specific interpretation by the instructor.

Fortunately, two of the most important recent texts are free from these ambiguities. In Cardinal Gasparri's *Catechismus Catholicus*, the injuries descending from Adam to his posterity are enumerated as "concupiscence, death, and the other pains of sin, and the sin itself, that is, the privation of justice and sanctity."<sup>20</sup> Nothing is said about "infected nature" or "tainted nature," or "darkened understanding" or "weakened will" or "enemies of God."

A *Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, revised edition of the Baltimore Catechism, contains this question: "What are the chief punishments of Adam which we inherit through original sin?" Here is the answer: "The chief punishments of Adam which we inherit through original sin are: death, suffering, ignorance, and a strong inclination to sin."<sup>21</sup> Of course, "inclination to sin" includes concupiscence; but "inclination to sin" is not put down as an indefinite and additional disability, a separate category which might cover a great number and variety of other evil propensities. As in Gasparri's Catechism, so here, there is no mention of the potentially misleading terms occurring in the texts noted above.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican Press, 1930. p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> Paterson. N. J., 1941, No. 2, p. 11.

## CHAPTER V

### NATURE OF ORIGINAL SIN

Canon 2 teaches that not only Adam but all his descendants lost the sanctity and justice which he had received from God, and they inherited not only death and bodily pain but also sin, which is the death of the soul. In support of this position, this Canon quotes the words of St. Paul: "... by one man sin entered in the world and through sin death, and thus death passed into all men because all have sinned ... " (Rom. v. 12).

The central dogma of this Canon is that all mankind are born in original sin. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX, in an infallible pronouncement, confirmed the traditional doctrine of the Church that this baneful inheritance did not fall upon the Blessed Virgin Mary.

What is the nature or essence of original sin? While the Church has not answered this question in terms of a formal definition, all the elements of a satisfactory concept are provided in the five Canons that we are considering. On this basis, Doctor Tanquerey offers the following formula, whose terms are substantially the same as those employed by all the other theologians: "Original sin is the privation of sanctifying grace, by which we are averted from God as our supernatural end, and which is in some sense voluntary in us on account of our connection with Adam." 22

Canon 5 declares that original sin is "the death of the soul." This is another way of saying that through

22 *Op. at.*, p. 389.



this sin the soul is deprived of sanctifying grace. As the latter is the life of the soul, so lack of it is the soul's death. Mortal sin is so called, because it is the death of the soul; that is, the expulsion of sanctifying grace, which is the principle of supernatural life. A person who does not possess sanctifying grace is said to be "averted" from God. When the aversion is brought about by himself, his sin is called actual; when the aversion is inherited, the sin is called original. In contradistinction to actual sin, original sin is sometimes denominated "habitual" sin, that is, a sinful state in which the unbaptized person is habitually averted from God as his supernatural end. Since this habitual aversion is not produced by the person who is averted, it does not deserve or receive personal punishment. This is clear from the theological teaching concerning the fate of infants who die unbaptized.<sup>23</sup> A person habitually averted from God lacks sanctifying grace and, therefore, cannot reach the supernatural end; but by nature, no person has a moral claim to either of these benefits. Indeed, a distinguishing characteristic of the supernatural is gratuity or nonindebtedness. When Adam's descendants are said to be "punished for his sin," it is always implied that the punishment is restricted to the loss of supernatural and undue benefits. The punishment deprives the individual of nothing which belongs to him.

Nevertheless, original sin is sin, and therefore implies some participation, or contribution, by the *will* of the sinner. One of the propositions of Michael Baius (No. 46) condemned by the Church reads in part: "Voluntariness does not belong to the essence and the definition of sin." Hence, the words in the last clause

M Cf. Pohle-Preuss, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-307.

of Tanquerey's definition, "in some sense voluntary in us." How voluntary? Not by any act of ours. Not by any participation of our wills. The final words of Tanquerey's definition give the explanation: "on account of our connection with Adam." As the moral head of the human race, Adam involved his descendants as well as himself in his transgression and in its principal consequence, namely, the privation of sanctifying grace. The unbaptized infant has willed this condition, not by a personal act, but through the sinful act of the head of the human race. As St. Paul expresses it, "by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners" (Rom. v. 19). Their voluntariness is corporate, not individual; nor does it imply personal responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

Original sin is not "voluntary in the strict sense of the word. Considered precisely as voluntary, original sin is only the shadow of sin properly so called. According to St. Thomas, it is not called 'sin' in the same sense, but only in an analogous sense."<sup>28</sup>

"Original sin is, therefore, voluntary in a wide but true sense, because it includes a relation to some will that made a free and sinful choice; and that is what the Church desires above all to signify when it insists upon the word 'sin.'"<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 271-276.

<sup>25</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. II, p. 315, col. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Toner, Rev. Dr. P. J., *Dissertatio Historico-Theologica de Lapsu et Peccato Originali*, Dublin, 1904, p. 25. Dr. Toner wrote this excellent production while he was a colleague of mine in the St. Paul Seminary, forty years ago.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE QUESTION OF CONCUPISCENCE

Canon 5 declares:

The grace conferred in baptism remits the guilt of original sin and takes away the true and proper essence of sin. Those who are baptized put on the new man, becoming innocent, pure, beloved of God, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ and deserving of heaven. They retain, however, concupiscence or the sinful impulse. Although the Apostle sometimes calls this concupiscence sin, the Church has never understood it to be called truly and properly a sin in those who are baptized, but only insofar as it arises out of sin and inclines to sin.

The terms used by the Council to describe the efficacy of baptism in the soul, are all taken from the New Testament. They denote the principal effects of sanctifying grace and the essential endowments of the soul in the supernatural order.

From the viewpoint of theological discussion and popular conception, the most important word in this canon is "concupiscence." St. Augustine (d. 430) seems to have held that concupiscence was at least the principal constituent of original sin.<sup>27</sup>

In more than one passage of his writings, however, he expressed the view that concupiscence was the sin's cause rather than its essence. For example: "The very embrace which is honorable and permitted cannot be effected without the ardor of concupiscence. . . . Now from this concupiscence whatever comes into being

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

by natural birth is tied and bound by original sin." 28 In technical language, concupiscence is related to original sin as instrumental cause. Similarly Peter Lombard, the "Master of the Sentences" (d. 1164) said that intercourse and conception involve the "ardor of concupiscence" in the parents; "therefore, the body itself which is conceived is polluted and corrupted by vicious concupiscence; when the soul is infused into this body, it contracts a stain by which it is polluted and becomes guilty; this is the vice of concupiscence which is original sin. . . . After baptism, concupiscence is no longer imputed as a sin, but remains as the penalty of sin; before baptism, it is both a penalty and a moral fault." This was the prevailing opinion among the theologians of the Middle Ages. Besides Peter Lombard, the most prominent names are: St. Bernard (d. 1153), Petrus Pictaviensis (d. 1205), Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1141), with qualifications, Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) and St. Bonaventure (d. 1274).

The sum of the matter is that during the eight centuries immediately following the death of St. Augustine, almost all the important theological writers defended the theory that concupiscence was either the essence or the instrumental cause of original sin, the only conspicuous exceptions being St. Anselm (d. 1109) and Peter Abelard.<sup>29</sup> Passing by the latter, who reduced original sin to a mere penalty rather than a real sin, we note that Anselm took a diametrically opposite view to that of Augustine. According to him, concupiscence is not a sin in itself, nor can it constitute original sin. The movements of the sense appetite which are called

28 Quoted by Pohle-Preuss, *op. di.*, p. 285.

29 Toner, *op. dt.*, pp. 85-90.

concupiscence are in themselves neither good nor bad; they become one or the other only through consent of the will. The essence of original sin he placed in privation of original justice, although he did not identify the latter with sanctifying grace.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding Anselm's great ability and authority, his views on the relation between concupiscence and original sin remained almost unknown, certainly unrecognized, until the middle of the thirteenth century. The reaction from the Augustinian doctrine to that of Anselm was begun by Alexander of Hales (d. 1245) and carried well toward a victorious outcome by St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).<sup>31</sup> The latter located the essence of original sin "formally" in the privation of original justice, but "materially" in concupiscence. In Aristotelian language, the first was the "substantial form," the second, the "primary matter." Sometimes he described concupiscence in such terms as to make it an effect of original sin in Adam rather than a constituent element of it in his descendants. In the course of time, his followers (the Dominicans) interpreted him as using the word "matter" in a wide and improper sense, as meaning "effect." Duns Scotus and all the Franciscans rejected entirely the theory of concupiscence as the essence of original sin. The Jesuits have always taken the same position. Suarez, for example, declared: "Properly speaking, this concupiscence in no way constitutes original sin, nor is it a part of it, but an effect."

Protestantism and Jansenism asserted that concupiscence is the formal, or essential, element in original

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-82; 102, 103.

*Ibid.*, pp. 88-9U

sin. It was against the Protestant doctrine that the five condemnatory canons of the Council of Trent were directed.<sup>32</sup> The opinions of the various protagonists of Jansenism (Baïus, Jansenius, Quesnel) were stigmatized as heretical by Popes Pius V, Innocent X, Clement XI, and Pius VI (1567-1794).<sup>33</sup> Since these condemnations, no Catholic theologian has held that original sin consists of, or is caused by, concupiscence.

Reference has been made above to *popular conceptions* of the relation between concupiscence and original sin. For the most part, these notions are not consciously based upon any conception of identity. In the main, they assume that concupiscence is an *effect of* original sin, but such an abnormal and evil effect, that original sin must have inflicted a grave wound upon the normal forces and elements of nature itself. In other words, this notion holds that original sin "changed man into something worse," not merely historically, not merely as compared with his original endowment of supernatural and preternatural gifts, but in his natural properties and powers as a human being.

As we have seen on earlier pages, this is not the predominant teaching of Catholic theological authorities. What has been already said concerning the pos-

32 "As compared with the older pronouncements, those of the Council of Trent, for the first time, denounced and disavowed as erroneous that profound pessimism which was henceforth to impregnate the theology and piety of orthodox Protestantism, and which under another form would endeavor to thrust manifold infiltrations into the intelligence and life of Catholic circles" (*Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 12, 1, p. 527, col. 1). This article, by A. Gaudel, is equivalent in compass to two large volumes. It is the most fundamental and satisfactory treatise on original sin that has come to the writer's attention.

33 Pohle-Preuss, *op. di.*, pp. 221-225.

sibility of a state of pure nature is sufficient proof that if a purely natural man had been created, his state would have been "substantially identical with the state in which man actually exists." 34

So much for the question of man's deterioration *in general*. The popular notion that we are considering here does not take in the whole subject. For example, it does not pay much attention to man's alleged "perversity of will" or his proneness to the sins of pride, hatred, and disobedience, as compared with his attitude and conduct in a hypothetical state of pure nature. This popular notion places emphasis almost entirely upon the fact of concupiscence, contending that this force, or passion, or propensity, is so abnormally powerful and troublesome that it could not have been among man's qualities as a normal and "unwounded" human being. To be sure, this opinion seems to fall under the condemnation which Pope Pius V visited upon the 79 Propositions of Michael Baius, in 1567. Proposition 26 reads: "The integrity of original creation was not an undue exaltation of human nature, but its natural condition." The term, "integrity," in the proposition means specifically absence of concupiscence. Therefore, the positive doctrine implied in this Papal condemnation is that concupiscence is a normal constituent of human nature.

To be sure, very few of the Catholics who accept the exaggerated notion of concupiscence, noted above, are aware that they may be adhering to heretical doctrine. Many, possibly most, of them do not intend to deny utterly that concupiscence is a normal constitu-

\*\* Schell, *Dogmatik*, II, p. 293, quoted by Pohle-Preuss, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

ent of human nature; they merely assume that the force of concupiscence evident in the average person today, and throughout recorded history, is considerably more powerful (and more troublesome) than it could have been, than God could have permitted it to be, in a normal human being, in a state of pure nature.

This milder form of the popular notion deserves objective examination. Let us start with some definitions. "Desire of the lower appetite contrary to reason." "Inordinate desire." "The inordinate movements of the sense appetite toward satisfaction." "Inclination of the senses toward sense goods, even against the order of reason." "Any excessive desire, the object of which appeals to the senses."

All these definitions come to essentially the same thing. "Inordinate" and "excessive" are equivalent to "against the order of reason." Hence, concupiscence indicates not merely a stretching or inclination of the lower appetites toward sense goods, but denotes a degree of such tendency which is contrary to reason, the capacity of these appetites to go beyond the limit set by reason. In passing, it should be noted that concupiscence inheres in all the sense appetites, not only in that of sex: it impels to gluttony and inebriety, as well as to violations of chastity.

In themselves, the sense appetites, *e. g.*, sex and eating and drinking, are unrestrained and unregulated. They seek their appropriate gratifications indefinitely. Animals will sometimes gorge themselves with food; men will sometimes drink intoxicating liquor to excess and indulge their sex appetites to the limit of satiety.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> According to St. Thomas, concupiscence is in a sense infinite. *Summa Theologica* 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>ae</sup> q. 30, a. 4.



In a physical sense, these excesses are not abnormal or unnatural, since they arise out of the intrinsic constitution of animal nature. In man, the sense faculties naturally tend toward indefinite enjoyment of sense goods, while the intellectual faculties naturally tend toward indefinite possession of the goods of the mind and spirit. Having no internal principle of restraint, the sense appetites are sometimes impelled to embrace goods which, in quantity or quality, are harmful to health, incompatible with the pursuit of higher things, and injurious to social order. Hence arises the constitutional conflict between the two orders of goods which is called concupiscence. It is no more abnormal than the faculties themselves.

One of the best descriptions of this natural and inevitable conflict between the two parts of the *animal rationale* is found in the excerpts herewith subjoined from "A Manual of Catholic Theology" by Wilhelm and Scannell.<sup>30</sup>

It is thus evident that, by the very constitution of his nature, man is liable to spontaneous motions in his sensitive tendencies, over which the will has, at best, but little control. In other words, concupiscence is an attribute of human nature. In animals which have no reason, concupiscence is the mainspring of activity; it is in harmony with their nature, whereas in man it is a disturbing element in the higher life of the soul. The subjection to concupiscence in man belongs to the same order as the possibility and necessity of death and of physical pain, *viz.*, to passibility and corruptibility in animal life. . . .

<sup>30</sup> London, 1890, I, pp. 420-423.

The union with a passible and corruptible body entails upon the spiritual soul a certain imperfection and weakness, in consequence of which the soul's own life is subject to gradual increase, and is dependent on external influences; and, unlike the life of pure spirits, is in many ways hindered in its free and full development. . . . The imperfection of man's spiritual life, arising from its dependence on animal life, may fitly be styled an "animal quality" of the spiritual life. . . .

Intellectual knowledge, the noblest function of the soul, is derived from and supported by the knowledge acquired through the senses. . . . In case of conflict, the lower knowledge and the motions of concupiscence accompanying it are apt to obscure and disturb the intellect. . . .

. . . Again, the lower reason, preceding the action of the higher intellect and supported by the imagination, directly excites in the will affections and desires for sensible goods, regardless of their moral value. . . . Thus the passibility of the will, which results from the very fact of its union with a corruptible body, establishes between the higher and lower regions of mental life the same antagonism which exists between the rational and the sensitive appetitive faculties. . . .

Thus all the imperfections and defects to be found in the animal part of man are not the result of the destruction and perversion of man's original state, but the necessary, natural result of the constitution of human nature.

Anyone who feels inclined to question the foregoing statements and argument should be prepared to present a contrary conception of the normal condition and consequences of a union of two such dissimilar entities as an animal body and a spiritual soul. It

cannot be assumed that the latter would automatically and necessarily keep the former under the constant and continuous control of right reason, so that, for example, men would be unable to commit fornication or gluttony or theft. Possibly a *normal* degree of control would imply reduction of the sins just mentioned and all the other excesses of the senses to a general average of one-tenth of the number that men now commit or have committed in the centuries since the Fall. Possibly so; but the assumption is incapable of proof. Given the union in one nature, one person, of the two dissimilar and contrary elements, spirit and flesh, it seems inevitable that the latter should tend to exceed the bounds set by the former, and that this tendency should pass into actuality, unless restrained by the rational will. In other words, there is nothing in the concept of a spiritual soul nor in the concept of an animal body which indicates that, in a union of the two, the former will necessarily and automatically exercise complete domination over the latter. If this point be conceded, there is no ground left upon which to build an argument for the assumption that the *degree* of control exercised by the spiritual element should normally be greater than it has been throughout history.

## CHAPTER VU

### GOD'S JUSTICE AND GOODNESS

One who accepts the conclusions arrived at in the foregoing pages cannot find even a shadow of an argument for the proposition that the effects of original sin raise doubts about either the justice or the goodness of God. If we come into the world with all the powers and qualities that belong to man in a state of pure nature, if we differ from what we should have been in that state, only as a man deprived of his clothes (the supernatural and preternatural gifts) differs from a man who has always been naked, then we cannot say that God has deprived fallen man anything that He has promised (divine justice) or withheld any degree of His "gratuitous love which promotes the happiness of others of sheer kindness" (divine goodness or benevolence). Even if we hold, with Father Pohle that, "the state of pure nature may consequently be conceived as somewhat more perfect than the state of original sin," we must still reject any censure drawn therefrom upon either of these divine attributes; for a human being on this slightly lower level would still be worthy of God's creative action. Had there been no original sin, such a creature would still exemplify a good creation and could attain a good end. Nay, more, if men were born now with the lowest possible degree of rationality, if, indeed, they were merely high grade morons, it is difficult to see how one could prove that life for them would not be worthwhile. At any rate, their lives would be judged according to their powers

and capacities, and this is the test, the only test, of God's justice toward men. He would not punish them for acts or omissions which were beyond the control of their free wills. The logic of the doctrine that infants who die without Baptism are punished neither by the "pain of sense" nor the "pain of loss," may be effectively applied to any degree of the rational animal which God sees fit to create. Every man will be judged according to his powers, capacities, and responsible actions. Hence, original sin and its effects do not compromise the wisdom, or goodness, or justice of God.

The goodness of God is minimized through another notion, entertained more or less definitely by many persons. It is that all the descendants of Adam would have remained in an utterly deplorable and hopeless condition if the Son of God had not died on the cross for their Redemption. They would have languished in a state of gravely impaired and deteriorated nature. Implicit in this notion is another assumption—for the most part unexpressed—that if God wished to make anything worthwhile out of this miserable mass of fallen men and women, he would have to immolate Himself. Obviously, this notion fosters an exaggerated conception of original sin and its effects.

A few of the Greek Fathers of the Church did, indeed, "so emphasize the fitness of Redemption as a remedy for original sin as almost to make it appear the sole and necessary means of rehabilitation. . . . That view is now commonly rejected, as God was by no means bound to rehabilitate fallen mankind. Even in the event of God decreeing, out of his own free volition, the rehabilitation of man, theologians point out other means besides Redemption, *e. g.*, divine condonation

pure and simple on the sole condition of man's repentance, or, if some measure of satisfaction was required, the mediation of an exalted yet created interagent. 37

No theory about the impaired condition of fallen human nature can be based upon the assumption that the Redemption was necessary, for the simple reason that this assumption is unproved and unprovable. The notion that fallen man is much lower than he would have been in a state of pure nature cannot be supported by assumptions about the Redemption.

Indeed, there is a whole school of theologians, the followers of Duns Scotus, the Franciscan, to whom must be added the eminent Jesuit, Francisco Suarez, who maintain that even if Adam had not sinned, God would have become man in order to make His creation complete and perfect. This view has the merit not only of discouraging exaggerated notions of the effects of original sin, but of enhancing men's conceptions of the goodness of God.

According to the common opinion of the theologians, Adam possessed sanctifying grace and was in the supernatural order from the first moment of his existence. This implies that in the design of the Creator, man's supernatural and gratuitous endowments were to be a "normal" (not a necessary) complement of his human nature. This is an obvious and powerful manifestation of God's goodness. Finally, we have the certain and palpable proof of divine benevolence which is exhibited in the Redemption of men and their re-establishment in the supernatural order.

3\* *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XII, p. 678, col. 1.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SAD CONDITION OF MANKIND—SUMMARY AND. CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, the problem of evil and suffering in the world remains. If they are not due to impairment of man's natural powers through original sin, how can they be rationally explained? Is the problem a mystery that is insoluble on this side of the grave? In a well known and eloquent section of his *Apologia*, Cardinal Newman maintains that original sin provides the only rational explanation:

Starting then with the being of a God (which, as I have said, is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction), I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full: and the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator. This is, to me, one of those great difficulties of this absolute primary truth, to which I referred just now. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world. I am speaking for myself only; and I am far from denying the real force

of the arguments in proof of a God, drawn from the general facts of human society and the course of history, but these do not warm me or enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice. The sight of the world is nothing else than the prophet's scroll, full of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary, hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope and without God in the world," — all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution.

What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer, that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence. Did I see a boy of good make and mind, with the tokens on him of a refined nature, cast upon the world without provision, unable to say



whence he came, his birth-place or his family connections, I should conclude that there was some mystery connected with his history, and that he was one, of whom, from one cause or other, his parents were ashamed. Thus only should I be able to account for the contrast between the promise and the condition of his being. And so I argue about the world—if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God (pp. 241-243).

If the great English Cardinal were alive today, with the awful conditions and events of the recent and present day world before his memory and vision, he would probably use even stronger and more eloquent descriptive language, and would be even more firmly convinced that the only solution of the distressing mystery is to be found in “the doctrine of what is theologically call’d original sin.”

Nevertheless, he would be out of harmony with the dominant opinion of the theologians. In the article, *Péché Originel*, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, referred to above, we find these summary sentences:

The theologians are almost unanimous today in recognizing that the doctrine of original sin cannot be conclusively deduced from the facts of experience. . . . The Church, in declaring that God could have created man such as he is born today, St. Thomas, in maintaining that man’s physical infirmities are not necessarily penal, but

are explained by his constitution, that his moral feebleness and his interior conflicts derive from the structure of his nature, flesh and spirit,—prevent contemporary' theology from seeing an apodictive proof of the Fall in the data of human experience (Cols. 581, 587).

On the other hand, the condition of the world that Newman regarded as "a vision to dizzy and appal," still confronts us and still affects countless thousands of men and women substantially as it affected the author of the *Apologia*. The following paragraphs were intended as at least a partial explanation of the overwhelming prevalence of sin and suffering. They are taken from the work cited in the immediately preceding paragraph (Cols. 583, 584):

God in his liberality has called man to a higher perfection than that which he could attain by his intellectual nature. Through sanctifying grace he can develop his nature according to a plan which surpasses human requirements; he can lift himself to a participation in the divine nature; he can become fitted to contemplate the divine nature, not only in the mirror of creation, but face to face.

To that first fundamental gift God has added another: to complete the perfection of the state of innocence and to facilitate the rise of man toward beatific vision, he has corrected the defects which result necessarily from the natural composition of man. By means of sanctifying grace, or original sanctity, man submitted his soul and will to God; by means of integrity or original justice he was establishing himself in a marvelous interior unity. Such is the supernatural perfection in which God established primitive humanity by constituting it in the condition of sanctity and original justice.

Since that perfection exceeded the requirements of nature, it could be lost; it was not automatically incorporated in human nature but required, according to the divine plan, a probation in order to be permanently assimilated.

But how could a nature, endowed with such prerogatives, established in such a state of goodness and rectitude, fail and thus lose the privileges which it could have and ought to have conserved? The reason is because it remained a creative nature, a free nature. The possibility of defect in created intellectual nature is imbedded in the very bosom of the most magnificent, but most dreadful, gift of his nature: the free human will.

That liberty in primitive man had implied not only the possibility, but the facility of attaining eternal beatitude; it implied also the possibility of turning away from God, of failing to realize his destiny. It left him with the power to go forward or to default.

The solution offered in the two immediately preceding paragraphs is somewhat less than satisfactory. To say that Adam had the power to sin because his nature "remained a creative nature, a free nature," and that "the possibility of defeat in created intellectual nature is imbedded in the very bosom . . . of the free human will,—" is to make statements that are technically correct; but they suggest a misleading implication. The power to sin is, indeed, involved in the human will as actually created by God; but it is not an essential element of free will. God could have created man free, without giving him the power to abuse his freedom. Man's free will might have been limited to choices between the good and the better.

Consider the doctrine of the Counsels. The man who keeps the commandments but fails to pursue the way of perfection does not commit sin. "Good master, which good work shall I do to have eternal life?" a certain man inquired of Jesus. The reply was: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." "All these I have kept; what is yet wanting to me?" asked the young man. Jesus answered: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. xix. 16-22). Had the young man accepted this recommendation, he would have acquired greater merit, would have laid up for himself "treasure in heaven." In choosing "the more perfect way," he would have exercised his free will quite as definitely as he had exercised it when he chose merely to keep the commandments and avoid sin. In other words, so long as the will is able to choose between things commanded and things counseled, between the good and the better, it is free. The power to choose between the good and the sinful is not essential to psychological freedom.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Is it essential to man, as a rational animal? Would inability of the human free will to commit sin imply a preternatural endowment? There is no question that God could have made man with free will but without the power to abuse it, just as He placed the angels in this position after the revolt of Lucifer. The question is whether this "perfection of freedom" would be in accord with the constitution of human nature, or whether free will in a being composed of body and spirit necessarily includes the power to make evil choices. As stated above (pp. 21, 22), the Augustinian view maintains that in a state of pure nature, "the animal part of man would have been constantly and completely subject to the dictates of reason." To be sure, this opinion does not imply absolute inability to sin, but it points in that direction. At any rate, the statement in the text above remains true: "God could have created man free without giving him the power to abuse his freedom."

The problem of moral evil in the world is not solved by reference to free will, as such. It is, indeed, elucidated by reference to the *kind* of free will with which man is endowed. But God could have so constituted human nature as to withhold from free will the ability to sin. As St. Thomas declares, this power is a defect rather than a perfection of freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Why did God create the human will with this defect? This power to abuse its freedom? Only He Himself has the answer. To human intelligence the problem of evil in the world remains an impenetrable mystery.

### Summary and Conclusion

As compared with the condition of our First Parents in Paradise, our human nature has been "in body and soul changed for the worse." While the Council of Trent affirms this doctrine clearly and decisively, it does not assert that man's natural powers have been weakened, either intrinsically or extrinsically. According to the dominant and more authoritative theological view today, men are born with substantially the same powers and capacities as they would have had in a state of pure nature. Consequently, the manifold miseries of the world cannot be attributed to an impairment of man's natural powers. According to the opposing, and less "probable," theological opinion, some degree of deterioration has occurred in the qualities of

<sup>39</sup> "The power of the free will to make various choices, while observing the right order, pertains to the perfection of its freedom; but its power to choose something which is contrary to the right order, that is, to sin, implies a defect of freedom. Hence free will is greater in the angels who cannot sin than in us who can sin" (*Summa Theologica*, 1<sup>o</sup>\*, q. 62, a. 8, ad 3).

fallen nature, possibly through the wrench which it suffered when it was deprived of its supernatural and preternatural endowments, possibly through external obstacles which have arisen in the course of history; but this view seems to make the impairment relatively slight. Therefore, it has been far too mild to account for the enormous amount of sin and suffering which has existed, and still exists, in the world of men. Only the Lutheran doctrine of the complete corruption, or total depravity, of human nature through the Fall, would be adequate to explain this vast volume of evil in terms of deterioration.

When we consider the essential constitution of man as a rational animal and the kind of world that he has inhabited, we realize that pain and suffering were inevitable. When we reflect that his free will includes the power to do wrong, we realize that the conversion of this potency into actuality should not have been entirely unexpected. Those who fall back upon the theory of a decadent human nature to explain moral and physical evil seem to picture as the normal condition of mankind, either that of our First Parents in Paradise, or that of a perfect man in a perfect world. The former condition was not natural at all, but supernatural and preternatural; the latter does not describe the kind of man or the kind of world that God actually made. In either case, those persons take an improper standard by which to measure deterioration.

The assertive title of the article cited at the beginning of the Preface is true historically, but false in its possible implications. Original sin explains the fact of human misery, but it does not justify inferences about the deterioration of human nature.

Even if the sin of Adam had compelled all his descendants to come into the world maimed, feeble, and incompetent, no unfavorable reflection could logically be deduced therefrom upon either the justice or the goodness of God. Man is a good creative work; life on earth is worthwhile for all men; life beyond the grave will be determined for each man on the basis of his capacities, efforts, and achievements.

When I began this little production, I was hoping to find answers to three questions: First, has original sin caused an impairment in the natural powers of Adam's descendants?; second, has the impairment, if any, been sufficiently grave to account for the physical and moral evils of the world?; third, if these two questions are answered in the negative, how can the existence of these evils be explained?

No specific answer to the first of these three questions can be found in the defined doctrine of the Church. A good Catholic may hold that the Fall has impaired men's powers, as compared with what they would have been in a state of pure nature; or he may assert that there has been no deterioration whatsoever; or he may concede that there has occurred a slight extrinsic impairment. However, the majority of the unofficial teachers of the Church, that is, the theologians, now maintain either that there has been no injury done to nature or that it has been relatively slight. According to the dominant theological opinion therefore, the physical and moral evil in the world cannot be adequately explained by an assumed deterioration of man's natural powers. These propositions have, I think, been placed upon a sound basis in the preceding pages.

With regard to the third of the questions stated

above, all that I have done is to suggest that the *physical* evil and suffering of the world are explained by the constitution of human nature and the conditions of its physical environment, and that the *moral* evils derive from man's power to abuse his free will, even to the commission of sin.<sup>40</sup> Why did God make human nature subject to these physical and moral limitations? I do not know. Why did not God create a richer and more pleasant earth? I do not know. Why did God give men the power to sin? I do not know. What I do know is that God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful, that He gives to everyone sufficient grace, that He is fully aware of our limitations, weaknesses, and temptations, and that He never demands from us anything that is unreasonable. Let no one be misled, then, into the attempt to find excuses for his wrong actions in false assumptions about the deterioration of human nature.

*Mcf.* Article, "Evil," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*; also article, "Evil and Necessity," by Rev. Joseph Rickaby, S.J., in *The Month*, November, 1898, and pamphlet by Rev. A. B. Sharpe, M.A., entitled "Evil: Its Nature and Cause." London: Sands & Co., 1906.



## **DISCUSSION CLUB OUTLINE**

### **Chapter I**

#### **The Canons of the Council of Trent**

1. What is an Ecumenical Council?
2. What is the difference between “justification” and “salvation”?
3. How did Luther’s doctrine of justification follow from his notion of original sin?
4. Describe the losses suffered by Adam and his descendants on account of Adam’s sin.
5. Describe the effects of the grace conferred in Baptism.
6. Show the importance of the Council’s pronouncement on free will.
7. Does the Council give a formal definition of Original Sin?

### **Chapter II**

#### **The Supernatural Order and Its Forfeiture by Our First Parents**

1. Describe the differences between the natural and the supernatural order.
2. What is the constitution of man as a rational animal?
3. In what ways is man elevated by membership in the supernatural order?
4. What do you think of the “railroad” illustration of the difference between the two orders?

5. Explain the Immaculate Conception.
6. Have the descendants of Adam become members of the natural order?
7. Is there a natural end for persons who die without formal instruction in the truths of Christian Revelation?
8. Was Adam at any time in the natural order?
9. Enumerate and explain the preternatural gifts possessed by our First Parents before the Fall.
10. Why are they so called?
11. Do we know much about "freedom from ignorance and from suffering"?

### **Chapter III**

#### **Captivity Under the Devil**

1. How is this expressed in the Ritual of Baptism? And in certain texts of Scripture?
2. Discuss each of these texts in its context.
3. What does it really mean?
4. Cite some exaggerations of the captivity doctrine in the writings of some of the Fathers.
5. What becomes of infants who die without Baptism?

### **Chapter IV**

#### **Corporal and Spiritual Deterioration**

1. How does the Council describe this deterioration?

2. Cite the theological axiom which summarizes this doctrine.
3. How do the theologians differ in their interpretation of the axiom?
4. Does the language of the Council support either of these views to the exclusion of the other?
5. Discuss the main argument for the Augustinian opinion.
6. Discuss the question, whether God could have created man in a state of "pure nature."
7. Do you think that, since the Fall, man's natural powers have been weakened?
8. State the view of Bellarmine and of Tanquerey.
9. Discuss the opinion of Moehler.
10. Summarize the statements quoted from *Dictionnaire* and from Pohle-Preuss.
11. Enumerate the various reasons why many Catholics believe that our intellects and wills have been greatly weakened through original sin.
12. Quote the ambiguous expressions used in some catechisms; and the more acceptable expressions in others.

## Chapter V

### Nature of Original Sin

1. Give and discuss Dr. Tanquerey's definition.
2. What is meant by the "death of the soul"?
3. Is original sin voluntary in the descendants of Adam?

## Chapter VI

### The Question of Concupiscence

1. Does the Council identify Original Sin with concupiscence?
2. What is the relation between them, according to the following authorities: St. Augustine? Peter Lombard? St. Anselm? St. Thomas Aquinas? The Dominicans? The Franciscans? The Jesuits?
3. What is, or was, the Protestant view?
4. Compare some popular conceptions on this subject with the predominant teaching of Catholic theologians.
5. Is concupiscence a normal constituent of human nature?
6. What is the meaning of concupiscence?
7. Is it an abnormal thing in human nature?
7. Summarize the explanation quoted from "A Manual of Catholic Theology."
9. Is it possible to prove that the potential concupiscence existing in human beings is excessive for a rational animal?

## Chapter VII

### God's Justice and Goodness

1. Do the effects of Original Sin raise a rational doubt concerning the justice or goodness of God?
2. What is the supreme test of God's justice toward men?

3. Was the Redemption necessary to restore man to friendship with God?
4. In what sense is the supernatural order "normal" to human nature?

## Chapter VIII

### The Sad Condition of Mankind—Summary and Conclusion

1. How was the presence of evil in the world explained by Cardinal Newman?
2. Is his explanation supported by dominant theological opinion?
3. Summarize the solution offered in *Dictionnaire*.
4. Is the power to sin essential to free will?
5. What is the doctrine of the Counsels?
6. Is it essential to man as a rational animal?
7. Summarize the doctrine on the deterioration caused by Original Sin.
8. Can this deterioration account for the vast amount of sin and suffering in the world?
9. Did God make a perfect world?
10. Describe the freedom of opinion allowed to Catholics concerning the effects of Original Sin.
11. Have we any adequate solution to the problem of physical and moral evil?
12. Can we excuse our wrong actions on the assumption of a grave impairment of human nature?

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## POSTSCRIPT

Since the foregoing was put into type, some comments have been received from Rev. Dr. James W. O'Brien, Rector of Mount St. Mary Seminary, Norwood, Ohio. Following are his important paragraphs:

I have gone over your manuscript carefully and while I do not agree with your main conclusion, I must confess that both positions are fairly and accurately stated and so far as I know there is nothing against Catholic doctrine.

It strikes me that the other view is more in conformity with the decrees of the Councils, and there are many theologians who hold it, at least with regard to exterior vitiation. It seems that you make too much of the condemnation of Baius. God might indeed have created man in the state of integral nature, *i. e.*, neither in the state of grace nor in the state of pure nature, but with the sensitive appetite completely under the control of reason and not so independent as it is today. In this case, the integrity of human nature would be natural, at least *quoad substantiam*. Of course, this may be beside the point since the whole question is with regard to the *natura pura*. In any case, it seems to me that prop. 26 has to do with a fact and not with conceivable conditions.

None of these states would exclude necessarily the capacity to commit sin entirely, but I should think that in the status *naturae integrae* they would all be sins of malice; in pure nature there would be some sins of passion and ignorance, and in fallen nature a great many more.

The amount of evil in the world today seems to me to confirm the view that human nature has undergone some early eruption that makes man a good deal worse than we might expect him to be.

The opinion which Dr. O'Brien defends in the second of these paragraphs is substantially identical with the position of the Augustinians which is stated and discussed on pages 21, 22. When Dr. O'Brien says that "the other view is more in conformity with the decrees of the Councils . . ." he means obviously those decrees according to a certain interpretation. As pointed out on page 52 of the text, this interpretation is contrary "to the dominant and more authoritative theological view today."

Dr. O'Brien's "integral nature" is entirely hypothetical and, as he himself admits, it is not identical with "pure nature." It does not seem to be a very serviceable concept, since it is merely a theory about what God would have or might have done. Even those who hold that fallen nature has been impaired or wounded more or less, as compared with pure nature, are thinking of man as a rational animal, including the power of the flesh to rebel against the spirit. They are not drawing the contrast between nature as it now is and the "integral nature" as described by Dr. O'Brien. The latter concept and its implications are characterized by a baffling amount of unreality.

In the last paragraph quoted above, Dr. O'Brien says that the amount of evil in the world seems to him "to confirm" the opinion that our fallen nature represents a very great deterioration from what we should expect to be the normal type. It will be observed that he uses the word "confirm," not "prove." Theologians today are practically unanimous in rejecting the view that the doctrine of original sin can be proved on the basis of experience. To be sure, Dr. O'Brien's general view would go a long way toward explaining the amount



of evil in the world, but we must keep in mind that his “integral nature” is only hypothetical; it is not normal human nature. So far as I know, the theologians (except those of the Augustinian School) who hold that there has been some impairment in man’s intellect and will do not think of it as great enough “to account for the enormous amount of sin and suffering which has existed, and still exists, in the world of men” (*supra*, p. 53).

