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# The Evangelical Quarterly

JULY 15th, 1942

## ADAM AND HIS POSTERITY

### I

NOWADAYS the Biblical doctrine of "Original Sin" is out of fashion. The pride of the human heart finds it humiliating; the wisdom of man proscribes it as manifestly foolish; science glibly pronounces it untenable and retrograde; and modern theology straggles serf-like and equivocally in their train. But the Bible continues to speak forth with the unchanging terms and indiscriminate challenge of God's authoritative pronouncement.

The universality of sin is not likely to be denied or questioned to-day, except by religious perversions, such as Christian Science. Contemporary evidence, alas, is too overmastering. The annals of mankind contribute further corroborative proof. And the Bible states it without any suspicion of ambiguity: "There is none righteous, no, not one! . . . They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one! . . . For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 10, 12, 22, 23). The emphasis is trenchant and inescapable. The human conscience recognises this as truth, simple and direct.

How is one to account for the catholicity of sin? To what cause may it be attributed? Sin is said by some to be one of the regrettable, but inevitable, limitations of the finite—a disability, however, which is not without its useful and salutary purposes. It is regarded as essential to the expression of human freedom: man as a free agent must be at liberty to sin or not, as he chooses; it is only experimentally, as it were by the system of trial and error, that the thing which is good may be distinguished from that which is not good and that the progress of mankind may be maintained. Thus, according to this view, sin is of value to

the individual and to the race in an educative capacity, albeit its lessons are frequently learnt at the price of much pain and discomfort. It is held by others that a man's environment is most to be blamed for his sinfulness: theoretically, good surroundings will produce virtuous living, but bad surroundings will produce vicious living. Therefore, ameliorate the world's circumstances, moral, social, and civil, and the sin problem will in a proportionate measure be eliminated. But one is then perplexed at the exhibition by young children, brought up in the midst of the most desirable influences, of sinful and vicious tendencies which are, to say the least, deplorable. On this ecological basis, too, it is vain to seek an explanation for the lapse into the grossest iniquity of men who, professedly with the purest and holiest aspirations, have shut themselves away from the sin of the outside world behind monastic walls. The evolutionist points to sin as a relic of man's more primitive and imperfect ancestry, which as the race evolves is becoming increasingly vestigial, until ultimately it will disappear altogether.

*These and similar aetiologies all assume one fundamental postulate, namely, that man is perfectible to an indefinite degree.* The observation of one's fellow-men and the testimony of history, both ancient and recent, should be sufficient to demonstrate to any man of even common intelligence the fallaciousness of such an idea. Moreover, the teaching of the Bible expressly contradicts it. But man is quick to clutch at any straw which with pretentious and plausible appearances bids fair to keep his arrogance and self-importance above the swirling waters. It is our object to arrive at an acceptable statement of this radical problem which, at the same time, will be compatible with the teaching of God's Word.

This is not the place for discussing the credibility of the early chapters of Genesis. It is sufficient to state that we are satisfied that there are solid logical grounds for accepting them as trustworthy and preferable to any evolutionary view of man's origin. In any case, both the Old and the New Testaments, with whose teaching we are concerned, speak in the most unmistakable terms of Adam as a real historical individual. Starting from this point, then, no proof is needed to demonstrate our relationship to Adam as the first parent of mankind from whom all subsequent individuals have sprung. This is self-evident. We are all by descent his physical offspring, inheriting

mediately from him every distinctive human characteristic. In view of the admittedly universal prevalence of sin, the question in point is, what is the connection, if any at all, between our protogenitor's sin and ours?

At the conclusion of the sixth day, when creation was completed, God pronounced everything to be "very good", Adam included. It is clear that Adam was created positively holy, for in what God had made there was neither sin nor death nor imperfection of any kind. But it also appears that Adam, while created positively holy, was endowed with the faculty of self-determination, either to the good or to the evil. Now, this does not mean that he was created in a state of neutrality or equilibrium, that is to say, without any previous inclination either to the good or to the evil. That would not be *self-determination*, but *indetermination*, a very different thing. It is a prevalent misconception that for a man to be constituted a free agent he must be centrally poised between the good and the evil, and by a volition of the mind exercise a choice. But this is only impotence and indecision, and is very far removed from freedom as it really is. Moreover, it is foreign to human experience: no person has ever been in such a case, nor ever will be. Each man is inclined either to the good or to the evil *by nature*—the unregenerate man to evil by the old nature, and the regenerate man to good by the new nature; and no man is capable of altering the direction of his inclination. True and essential freedom lies in one direction only, not in being perched on the centre-bar of indefinite neutrality, nor in jumping down upon the one side or the other according to fancy, but in being self-determined to the good. To be self-determined to the evil means bondage, defeat, and death; to be self-determined to the good (which is achieved solely by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which turns a man right about face) is to taste of life and liberty as the all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving will of God holds sway over the heart. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!"

## II

Now Adam enjoyed a unique privilege in that he was created positively holy; God set the creature's footsteps in the right direction on the pathway of life and liberty. But involved in the Divine prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil were two momentous possibilities: by obedience, the self-determination to good, resulting in absolute holiness and a glorified state free from merely human limitations; or, by disobedience, the self-determination to evil, resulting in the dire penalties of the curse and death. Had Adam been created immortal, there would have been no possibility of his dying; his destiny was to be decided by himself, according as he obeyed or disobeyed God's probationary injunction. But this does not imply that he was created in a state of indeterminate neutrality; for God gave him every advantage, as already remarked, by making him positively holy and setting him off along the road of holiness and blessing; so that the overwhelming probability was that this man, so favoured as to know by experience goodness and liberty and life, would not only in his own interests, but also for love of so benevolent a Creator, have chosen the good and eschewed the evil. There was for Adam a possibility of sinning (*posse peccare*), but also at the same time a possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*); and every circumstance favoured his realisation of the latter. Had he remained faithful and holy, his meritorious probation would have gained him the reward of the impossibility of sinning (*non posse peccare*) in the place of the possibility of not sinning. But he transgressed the Divine statute, and by this act sin was originated in the human heart.

When we come to inquire what are the implications of Adam's sin for the posterity that sprang from him as its progenitor we are brought face to face with a profound and perplexing problem, in connection with which many formidable and saintly swords have been crossed in the arena of dogmatic theology. But, though it is a mystery which human comprehension cannot hope fully to fathom this side of eternity, the Scriptures are not silent on this subject, and some of the greatest purely Christian philosophical literature has dwelt upon it as its theme. How considerable a debt is owed in this sphere to the devoted intellects of Augustine, Anselm, and Calvin! The classical passage of Scripture is found in the fifth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and our investigations might almost be termed nugatory were we to pass over these difficult verses without notice.

St. Paul is here drawing a comparison between the only two unique men in history: unique in that the one was created

but not born, and the Other born in a supernatural manner but not created; unique in that the respective work of each has vitally affected mankind as a whole. Through the first man, Adam, sin passed into the world, and death by sin; and thus death passed through into all men, inasmuch as all sinned. Through the one man's lapse many died; more than that, through the one man's lapse death has been reigning as king through that one man; and through the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners. So, by contrast, through the second Man the grace of God and the free gift unto justification by grace have abounded to many, who shall reign as kings in life through that one Man, Jesus Christ; and through the obedience of the one Man the many shall be constituted righteous.

### III

In connection with the topic with which St. Paul is here dealing, it is important to observe the essential contrariness of these two men, Adam and Christ. It is plain from this passage that the only point of similarity between the two lies in the fact that in both cases "the many" stand in relationship to "the one", and "the one" to "the many". Otherwise the contrast is fundamental. The judgment unto condemnation passes deservedly upon all on the ground that all sinned, and hence all are guilty. Apart from the Second Adam, who was without sin, there is no single exception to this rule: "For there is no difference: for all sinned" (Rom. iii. 22, 23). But, on the other hand, justification is not assigned to any man meritoriously, on the ground that he is righteous: it is a free, undeserved gift by the grace of God, and its bestowal is dependent not on any works committed but on faith. Furthermore, all men without discrimination are not thus justified, but only such as believe. Clearly the imputation of Adam's sin or of Christ's righteousness rests upon some very real and definite basis of identification. The New Testament leaves us in no doubt that the union with Christ is founded upon faith in the individual. Scripture, however, is less explicit concerning the nature of the union with Adam, but its reality and its gravity are not lightly to be esteemed on this account. For each individual the especial truths, so unequivocally and insistently proclaimed in Holy Writ, are, on the one hand, that all sinned and consequently all stand con-

demned, and, on the other, that he that believeth on Christ is not condemned.

Much depends upon the manner in which we interpret Rom. v. 12, which is a crucial verse. Here is a careful, parallel translation:

Διὰ τοῦτο ὡςπερ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

Therefore, just as through (διὰ) one man sin passed into (εἰς) the world, and through sin death, so also death passed through (διὰ) into (εἰς) all men on the ground that (ἐφ' ᾧ) all sinned.

The interesting repetition of the prepositions *διὰ* and *εἰς* is noted because they provide the first clue in connection with our inquiry. They inform us that sin, and by a natural consequence death, first passed *into* the world (hitherto "very good") *through* Adam as a channel; and, moreover, that death passed *into* all men *through* Adam as a channel. All men, then, are in some way associated with this first sin of the first man, for they all labour under its evil penalty, death. The Christian conception of God rightly and rigidly precludes the blasphemous idea that He should ever be capable of an unjust act; the very thought is an offence to His holy Nature, and is totally incompatible with those attributes which are most essentially and indispensably linked to His Deity. Now, it is obviously unjust to punish a man who is not guilty and to condemn him for what he has not done. Is mankind, then, merely the unhappy and ill-fated sufferer under the bitter fruits of this *one* sin of Adam, just as a pure and innocent child may be afflicted with a disease inherited from a father who has sinned? If so, then there is no guilt attaching to this innate taint; it is only an unfortunate accident, a lamentable inconvenience, passive in character, and certainly undeserving of Divine judgment or displeasure in any form whatever. Suffering and disability are indeed the bitter fruits of this one sin, but death is something more: it sums up in one word the Divine judgment passed upon sin. And this judgment has passed through to all men inasmuch as all sinned; that is, all are guilty, and in consequence all are justly punished with the judgment of death. The guilt of this one sin is laid at

the door of every individual in the human race, else death would not have passed upon all men through this one sin.

Origen and Augustine mistranslated ἐφ' ᾧ as "in whom" a meaning which the phrase cannot bear; but in doing so they appear to have approached to the correct interpretation of the verse. The fundamental sense which St. Paul wishes to convey seems to be, that death passed through into all men on the ground that, *when Adam sinned, all men sinned with him.* (Cf. Bengel: "*quia omnes, Adamo peccante, peccaverunt.*") Chrysostom understood πάντες ἡμαρτον as indicating that all men were "reckoned as having sinned", and Calvin as meaning that all "were sinful". But neither interpretation is satisfactory in view of the fact that ἁμαρτάνω is always and invariably *active* in its signification, and, as indicated above, upon the active participation of the whole human race in the one sin of Adam depends their culpability and just condemnation. Nor can it successfully be maintained that the verb is active in the sense that all men commit sins after birth, for the tenor of the whole passage makes it plain that the reference is to the *one* sin committed by Adam, and not to the individual sins of his posterity. This conclusion is strengthened by the statement of verse 14 to the effect that death reigned even over them that, in the interval between Adam and Moses when there was no law, did not sin after the similitude of Adam's transgression; that is, they did not disobey, as Adam did, a received command of God and do that which was expressly prohibited. Doubtless this holds good, too, for infants while they are still too young to be termed moral agents. Yet they are all subject to death, inasmuch as all sinned in Adam when he sinned. If anything is clear and obvious from St. Paul's statement that "*all sinned*" (Rom. iii. 23; v. 12), it is that newborn infants are included in the term "*all*": it necessarily includes every single individual, whether they live one day or one hundred years—or else the Apostle does not mean what he says and we must accuse the Holy Spirit of inaccuracy! The suckling sinned when Adam sinned and is *ipso facto* constituted guilty. But the New Testament provides us with solid grounds for trusting that all such children are covered by the atonement of Christ, and we cannot agree with Augustine when he avers that all babes who die unbaptised are eternally lost and condemned, even though it be, as he presumed, to the very lightest of punishments. No penalty that



separates one from the presence and glory of God and our Saviour can be called mild!

Before the theologians at the Council of Trent Catharinus propounded his theory that Adam is to be regarded as our *federal representative*: when he transgressed the Divine law he involved not only himself in guilt and punishment, but also his subsequent posterity, whom he represented before the Creator. This federal theory has achieved considerable sanction amongst Protestant doctors and is staunchly upheld by both the elder and the younger Hodge. But it must immediately be objected that if he represented us by a pact, we must obviously have commissioned him to act on our behalf at some date prior to his unfortunate lapse; nor can we logically be held to have done the deed which our representative perpetrated: we cannot simultaneously have committed the identical sin as our representative, for a representative only acts *in the absence of* those who have commissioned him.

#### IV

On the basis, then, of what mysterious relationship to Adam are we reckoned as actively having sinned in him? Following in the main the lines of interpretation so brilliantly propounded by Augustine and Anselm, and in more recent times defended by Shedd, it seems that the correct answer is that the connection between Adam and his posterity in this matter rests upon a generic or specific foundation. If we *all* sinned in Adam when he sinned, it follows that we must in some way have been present when he committed the first sin. It cannot be said of those who do not exist that they sin, or are guilty of sinning, or come under condemnation because of sin. The very idea is absurd; for nonentity is as incapable of acting as it is of being acted upon. We must, therefore, have had a real existence in Adam. It should be remarked that when Adam sinned he was at the time the complete human race and species; he was all humanity concentrated and unindividualised in the one person. Thus, in this respect, when he sinned all humanity sinned. Adam's initial act of apostasy vitiated the whole of human nature which was resident in him. Hence the first individual act of sin gave rise to the corruption of human nature, or what we call "original sin"; but in all who have sprung from Adam it is the corruption of human nature, or the "original sin",

which gives rise to all individual acts of sin. With the formation of Adam the work of Divine creation ceased, and thereafter creation gave way to natural and specific propagation. All the substance was there; the germinal seed for the procreation of posterity had been implanted in this one man; all mankind was actually and potently present in the one person of Adam. Who will presume to state at what stage a person becomes a responsible individual? Is the line of transition from irresponsibility to responsibility to be drawn at any particular age, or height, or weight? The old man of eighty is very different from the boy of eight: he is different in appearance; he is different in size; he is different in ways and habits of life; his thoughts, actions, circumstances are all different. Even his body is a different one: the very tissues and fluids have been used up, burnt out, and replaced many times over since the days of childhood. Is then the octogenarian to be held responsible for something which he did when he was a mere youngster—some folly, shall we say, which he would not dream of committing now he is a man of mature character and experience? Assuredly, we reply, for he is none the less one and the same person, although visibly, materially, and intellectually so radical a change has taken place in him since his boyhood. Let us go a step farther. The man is dead: can his dead body be imprisoned or flogged for embezzlement or be punished for adultery because when alive the man committed these crimes? Assuredly not; for a dead body is not a man, and cannot under any circumstance be held responsible for any deed which was committed through the instrumentality of this body when the man was alive. The body is merely a substantial, dimensional vehicle of the man's self; but human nature, whether individual or entire, is immaterial and dimensionless. At what stage (asked Aristotle) are we to say that an acorn becomes an oak? When shoot and root appear? when it is a sapling? or when it has grown to a full-sized tree? The truth of the matter is that none of these is the correct answer: they are all only periods in the existence of the tree, and cannot be dissociated from each other if the idea of the tree is to be maintained in its integrity. The explanation of the oak tree is that of a progressive history or process. Indeed, the oak tree may very really be conceived as already existent and present in the acorn; but for a just and sufficient understanding of what is meant by the idea of an oak tree one's perspective

must take in every stage of its development, from the insignificant acorn to full maturity, and thence on to decay and death. And so we see that a true conception of human nature cannot result from the contemplation of any single point in the existence and experience of a man, nor is it to be confounded with that which is sensible, such as the visible, tangible, and actual properties of the human body. Adam is the acorn; and the development of the oak tree unfolds before us in the history of the human race, individualistically and collectively. Our purview must commence with Adam, continue systematically up to the present time along the whole range of past history, and end in accordance with the light which the prophetic Scriptures throw upon the consummation of all things.

Adam's probation, then, was essentially the probation of the whole human race; his apostasy was actively and voluntarily the apostasy of the whole human race; his condemnation was justly and logically the condemnation of the whole human race. Consequently, it is seen how the Divine decree promulgated through Moses is vindicated and put into effect: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: *every man shall be put to death for his own sin*" (Deut. xxiv. 16—a verse actually urged against Augustine by Julian!). And the Apostle clinches the matter when he says: "For there is no difference: for all sinned (Aorist, *ἡμαρτον*;—i.e. in Adam, the "original sin") and come short of the glory of God" (Present, *ὑστεροῦνται*;—i.e. short-coming due both to "original sin" and to individual post-natal sin). And again: "Death passed through into all men on the ground that all sinned."

## V

It is legitimate to conclude from the Scriptures already noticed that, had Adam not disobeyed the Divine command, the benefits now resulting to all believers through the obedience of Christ would immediately have passed upon all men through the obedience of Adam—namely, holiness and life; for all men would then automatically have been constituted partakers of human nature as it was in Adam before the fall, uncorrupt and holy. Thus ultimately would have been won absolute holiness, the impossibility of sinning, and absolute immortality, the impossibility of dying, both of them the prerogatives of God alone,

who only is all-sufficient and self-efficient, and who alone can bestow these ultimate gifts of sinlessness and deathlessness, which are the believer's lot on earth in a finite experience, and will be his lot for ever in Heaven in an infinite experience. But they are not achieved by man consequent upon any all-sufficiency or self-efficiency of his own, but only inasmuch as he is kept by the power of God from falling. An analogy may be taken from the angels (created beings with whom there is no such thing as sexual propagation and transmission of sin). It seems that they, like Adam, were created positively holy, with the possibility of not sinning and hence of not dying, but also with the alternative possibility of sinning and of passing under sentence of death. So it happened that those that apostatised came under just condemnation of death and were cast down from heaven, whereas those that were obedient and faithful have been exalted by their Creator to a plane of indefectibility and immortality, where they are eternally kept, not by their own power, but by the power of God.

We have seen how the whole of human nature was in Adam, and originated and actively participated in the first sin, the whole nature in consequence becoming polluted and vitiated. It is not difficult to follow the manner in which, as that nature became distributed by procreation, its corruptness was passed on to each individual of the species. (It should be remembered that the human nature is not something material and sensible, and thus, as it is transmitted to individuals, that it is not dissected as it were into ever diminishing portions; but just as each believer at the new birth receives the Divine nature in its fullness, so each man at his physical birth receives the human nature in its fullness.) Two arguments are commonly brought against the Biblical doctrine of original sin: firstly, that the individual has no recollection of having committed this sin, and, secondly, that he has no sense of guilt in connection with it. But there are many sins, both small and great, committed in earlier years of which we retain no recollection, but in connection with which we are sensible of an indisputable knowledge of guilt. And furthermore, it is incorrect to state that no individual is conscious of any guilt in connection with what is termed original sin: this may be so with the unregenerate man, but it certainly is not the experience of the regenerate man. The believer has a very distressing consciousness of the guilt attaching

to original sin. All of us who are not strangers to the grace of God in Christ Jesus are only too painfully aware of our innate sinfulness and utter inability and unworthiness, quite apart from any individual deed of disobedience which may stain our past. It is this, and this alone, which causes St. Paul to lay bare his struggling heart in the poignant confession of Romans vii. Indeed, our actual sins that we commit as individuals only serve all the more to throw into relief before our wretched gaze the inherent perversity of our nature. This is pre-eminently a matter of Christian experience. Yea, even in the elect, who are redeemed and sanctified, the "old man" will never be eradicated until at the return of our Lord we are provided with glorified bodies. Meanwhile, by an experimental faith in the power of His resurrection, it is possible and God's purpose that the vitiating influence of the "old man" should be put out of action; it is to be reckoned by faith as crucified with Christ: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin might be rendered inoperative (*καταργηθῆ*; not "destroyed", as A.V., nor "done away", as R.V.), to the end that we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Rom. vi. 6). Thus Paul says also that our Saviour Christ Jesus rendered death inoperative (not "abolished", as A.V. and R.V.), and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. i. 10). So too David, the prototype of the Messianic King, overwhelmed with penitence for his adultery and murder, cries out by the Holy Ghost: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me!" (Ps. li. 5). Again Paul, the greatest of our Lord's disciples, proclaims: "We all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature* children of wrath, even as the rest" (Eph. ii. 3). "Therefore, just as through one man sin passed into the world, and through sin death, so also death passed through into all men, on the ground that all sinned."

The position of each individual before Almighty God is either in Adam or in Christ: there is no other alternative. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22). All are included as a race or genus in the sin of Adam and its consequences; but only "they that are Christ's at His coming" are included in the salvation of God. All men were created in Adam and descend along the natural

line of human propagation; but only such as are re-created by the Holy Spirit become joint-heirs with Christ in the family of the Heavenly Father—"being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. i. 23). "There are but two men", says Thomas Goodwin, "who are seen standing before God, Adam and Jesus Christ; and these two men have all other men hanging at their girdles."

How solemn and mysterious is our relationship in Adam, or, by the grace of God, in Christ! How past all comprehension that I who sinned in Adam, was shapen in iniquity, and born of corruptible seed, should be chosen in Christ! "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it!" "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known!"

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