No-one would deny that the word 'sin' is used in the Bible to cover many different aspects of the idea of wickedness or opposition to the will of God. This is obvious to anyone who examines the different Hebrew words, all translated in the Septuagint by the same word *hamartia*, and in the English versions by the one word 'sin.' It is true that we also find such variants as injustice, lawlessness, evil, guilt, but there is no consistency in the way such words are used.[1] There is a place within the concept of sin as found in the Bible, for many different aspects, aspects which we no longer take cognisance of in our narrower definition of sin as any deliberate act, by thought, word, or deed of a responsible individual, against the law of God. If we limit sin to an act, if we limit it to the act of the individual, and if especially we insist upon the moral responsibility of the individual, then it is vital to realise that the Biblical term 'sin' has a much wider connotation than when we use the term. The fundamental meaning of *hata'*, the commonest word for 'to sin,' is to miss the mark, to lose or to fail, and through all the terms used for sin there is the underlying idea of a falling short of a norm given to man by God. There is no doubt, therefore, about sin having its origin in the deliberate and conscious failure to conform to God's law ; in other words, sin is fundamentally a responsible act of rebellion. The moral aspect of sin can never be lost sight of ; the wider use of the term does not deny this fundamental morality. But it is precisely on the wider use of the term that we must insist, because it is here that we are most likely to fail in appreciating the teaching of Holy Scripture on sin. Thus the consequences of man's failure to observe the Divine law loom large within the general notion of sin,[2] and those consequences are indicated by this same word. In fact, the failure to follow the norm laid down by God is often only recognised when the consequences are felt, as is shown in many of the lament psalms where the psalmist's sufferings lead him to a full realisation of his sinfulness, and of the necessity of confessing it to God : ' As long as I kept silent my bones rotted, and I moaned unceasingly ; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me ; my strength ebbed as in the summer heat. I have confessed my sin to Thee, and I have not concealed my wretchedness ;

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[1] The Greek word *hamartia* is employed to translate fifteen different Hebrew words (and this does not include different variations of the same verbal stem) ; *adikia* stands for thirty-six different Hebrew words ; *anomia* for twenty-four. cf. Quell, *Theol. Wört.*, I, pp. 267ff.   [2] cf. *Theol. Wört.*, I, p. 280, ll. 29ff.

I said : I will confess my rebellion to the Lord ; and Thou hast removed my wretchedness, my sin thou hast pardoned ' (Ps. 32:3–5). We would perhaps use the word ' guilt ' as a term of general reference to the consequences of sin, and the various Hebrew words which are translated by ' sin ' have this meaning in those contexts where the author is not concerned with a sinful deed, but with the resulting condition and the inner state produced by this deed. The causal connection between the two is not clearly shown, since it was a most difficult question in view of the overriding sovereignty of God over all things, good and evil.[1]

Guilt is spoken of as a positive reality, in terms of a burden or of a disease. Thus guilt can be a burden too heavy for man to carry (Ps. 38:5). It is in substance identical with sufferings which may afflict a man, and guilt reveals itself through these sufferings. Cain's banishment to the wilderness, to a land which he will not be able to cultivate, is a suffering which constitutes his ' guilt ' which, he complains, is too heavy for him to bear (Gen. 4:13). Grief and regret and sorrow for sin are called forth by grief over pain and misery and misfortunes ; in practice the grief is identical. It is particularly important for those who wish to understand the significance of penitential practices, to realise the close connection in the Biblical theology, between guilt and bodily sickness. Thus the law (Lev. 13–14) laid down strict regulations for various skin diseases,[2] because they were external signs of guilt, and the result of sins (the latter word not necessarily indicating any responsible action against God's law on the part of the individual sufferer). These laws are not to be adequately explained in terms of hygienic precautions, made more effective by a religious setting ; it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that such hygienic reasons as the prevention of contagion were not ignored, but their primary purpose was to emphasise the guilt involved. Thus not only must the sufferer keep away from others, but his clothes must be torn and his hair unbound (Lev. 13:45). The priest must destroy contaminated clothes and houses, as well as diagnose the ailment. But he was not simply doctor and sanitary inspector : he must offer cultic sacrifices. For the ' leprous house ' there must be a sacrifice—for the *sin* of the house. For the sick man's cleansing there must be a ' sacrifice for sin ' which constitutes the rite of expiation for his impurity ; the Septuagint does

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[1] Only one Hebrew word, '*asam*, is used to express clearly this state of guilt, and this word is found almost exclusively in ritual contexts. A man could be considered guilty, without any deliberate refusal to observe God's law ; he could become guilty or impure through ignorance.

[2] cf. L. Koehler in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1955 (Heft 3/4), p. 290

not hesitate to speak of the sin-offering which the priest offers as a propitiation 'concerning the one who is being cleansed *from his sin*' (Lev. 14:19). In similar fashion later Judaism taught that sickness was a punishment for sin, and that the sick man did not get rid of his sickness until all his sins were forgiven. Death, the evil most feared by men, was the most striking consequence of sin : 'It is by woman (namely sinful Eve) that sin began, and it is because of her that we all die' (Sir. 25:24). 'It is by the envy of the devil that death entered the world. Those who belong to him will experience it' (Wisd. 2:24). A similar saying among the Rabbis was 'No death without sin, and no chastisement without guilt.'

That Our Lord's disciples held the same belief is clear from their question on seeing a man blind from his birth : 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, so that he should be born blind ?' But Our Lord's reply seems to deny the truth of their belief : 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be shown forth in him' (John 9:3). If the first part of this reply were taken from its context, and made to stand as an independent statement, then of course it would be a clear denial of any connection, in this case at least, between blindness and sin. But it must not be torn from its context. In examining its context, we see that something must be supplied in order to make Our Lord's answer a complete sentence ; there are two possibilities : 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, *so that he should be born blind*, but in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him,' or : 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, *but he was born blind* in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him.' The first suggestion is preferable, since it only involves repeating the words which end the disciples' question, and which therefore could reasonably be omitted as understood. In this case the sense is that in God's designs, the final purpose of sin, of which the consequence [1] had been this blindness, would be the showing forth of God's works, the manifestation of His glory. Our Lord is not categorically denying the connection between blindness and sin, but is insisting rather on the Divine purpose to be found in all human action,[2] a purpose which is about to be made manifest here in the restoration of sight. Our Lord is almost rebuking the disciples for asking a question which is of lesser moment here. Had they not read in Ben Sirach : 'You must not say : What is this ? Why that ? For all has been created for a purpose' (39:21) ? If we were to adopt the second paraphrase, the meaning would not differ : the final purpose of the man's blindness is the manifestation of God's

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[1] 'A final *hina* corresponds here to the consecutive *hina* of the question.' Stauffer, in *Theol. Wört.*, III, p. 328, l. 4   [2] ibid., pp. 327–30

glory. Here, the statement : ' Neither this man sinned nor his parents ' seems more categorical ; but it is so only in appearance, for in what sense can we say that he was born blind in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him, except as an expression of the final purpose of God, whereby evil is changed into good ? Our Lord is here concerned with the final end of all things : ' It is for judgment that I came into this world, in order that[1] (as God's final purpose, which we can only know from the results) those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind ' (John 9:39 ; cf. Mark 4:11f.). There is a close parallel to this text, which confirms our interpretation : when told of Lazarus's sickness, Our Lord says : ' This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it ' (John 11:4). Without any essential change, this can be made exactly parallel to Our Lord's reply concerning the blind man : thus ' He is not sick, so that he should die, but in order that the Son of God may be glorified in him.' It is impossible to take the first clause as an absolute statement, for we are told both that Lazarus was sick and that he died (John 11:4, 39). To understand the clause ' Neither this man sinned nor his parents that he should be born blind ' as an absolute statement, is perhaps less obviously, but nevertheless equally, impossible.

So it would be a mistake to think that this wider use of the term ' sin ' is confined to the Old Testament. It is clear that the one word is used in the New Testament, for three ideas which, whilst having a common factor ultimately based, as in the Old Testament, upon the moral act against God's law, make the word more extensive than the modern definition of sin. The word is used to describe an action contrary to the norm laid down by God ; it is used of the condition in which man finds himself as a result of such sinful actions—a condition which though not necessarily, yet generally, reveals itself in various miseries he has to suffer ; and it is used to signify the personified power of evil which is in the world. Somewhat to our surprise, it is in the first sense that it is used least frequently.[2] On the other hand the word is often used in the sense of sinful state, i.e. the condition of a man who is separated from and at enmity with God. Thus the Christian is dead to his sins (1 Pet. 2:24) in so far as he has ceased to be in a sinful state ; and yet there are those who do not abandon (the state of) sin (2 Pet. 2:14—note the singular : *hamartias,*

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[1] ibid., p. 328, l. 11

[2] Out of 50 examples quoted in *Theol. Wört.*, 1, p. 297, ll. 20ff. as examples of the word ' sin ' in the sense of wicked *actions* only 11 are clearly so : Matt. 12:32 ; Acts 7:60 ; James 2:9 ; 4:17 ; 5:15 ; 1 Pet. 2:22 ; 1 John 3:3, 9 ; 5:16 ; 2 Cor. 11:7 ; cf. John 8:34.

regards the injuries inflicted by sin as positive realities which remain after the sinful deeds are done? The verbs used of the action of Christ on sin : to take away, to carry, to loose, to purge, would all suggest the same thing. And it is a consequence of looking on sin as a positive and lasting reality that it is also spoken of as a personified power, which came into the world (Rom. 5:12) and came alive (7:9), seducing and killing (7:11) and laying siege (Heb. 12:1). It lives in us, bringing sufferings and desire (Rom. 7:17 ; 20:5, 8). In fact it is a demoniacal power, under whose tyranny man is a slave (Rom. 3:9 ; cf. 11:32). Sin lords it over us (Rom. 6:14) as a king (Rom. 5:21 ; 6:12), with no other reward for services rendered than death (Rom. 6:23). This concept of sin as a personified power is almost exclusively found in the Epistle to the Romans, but we have echoes of the same idea in John 8:34, where everyone who does sin becomes the slave of sin, and in James 1:5 where sin is born of concupiscence, and fully formed gives birth to death.

It might well be objected that all these expressions which we have examined are simply metaphorical expressions, and that they are not to be taken literally. Sin, the objection might run, is spoken of as a positive reality *metaphorically*, it causes us physical harm metaphorically, it brings death metaphorically. When the word is used in the Bible in the sense which tallies with our definition of sin, then it is to be taken literally ; in the other cases, where it goes beyond our definition, it is used metaphorically. But this is too facile altogether. When is human language *not* metaphorical as used of the truths of Faith? To define sin as an offence against God : is this any less metaphorical? To say that sin is not being but the privation of being : is this any more direct and positive than these so-called metaphors of sin which we find in the Bible? If the expressions we have considered were few and far between, and were used for ideas which were elsewhere expressed in 'literal' terms, then we would agree with the objection. When, for instance, Our Lord says, 'I am the vine,' we know clearly enough already, who 'I' is, not to take 'vine,' literally ; when we are told that the lilies of the field do not spin, we have no reason to think that lilies were thought to be capable of spinning. But sin is not spoken of in any other way than those we have examined ; when we say that sin, according to its context, is regarded chiefly from the standpoint of an *act* in contravention of the divine law, or, in another case, chiefly as a positive consequence of such an act producing a real state or condition, or, finally, that it is a powerful force which causes certain effects, we are speaking inadequately, in human terms, about something we do not fully understand ; but we are not speaking merely metaphorically,

in the accepted sense of this word ; if we were, then we ought to be able to go on and give the literal explanation also. These uses of the word ' sin ' show us what the Biblical writers believed concerning sin ; they were no more capable of expressing their belief adequately than we are, but it is rather gratuitous to dismiss their concepts as primitive and inadequate. Their ideas, in the terms with which they conveyed them, are the ideas and terms which God saw fit to use in revealing the notion of sin to us. They are necessarily limited, as is the whole of God's action in human affairs ; but it is important to remember that the idea of sin which we are seeking is a *revealed* idea of a truth beyond the limits of our understanding. We are quite capable of elaborating a notion of natural sin ; we can develop a *philosophy* of sin ; we can, moreover, offer a rational, philosophical explanation of the theological teaching on sin, in order to assist some people to grasp the truth of Faith in a way suited to their particular mode of thinking. But it is nevertheless important to keep before our mind the revelation of sin which we are attempting to explain : it would be unfortunate if the truth were dominated by the explanation ; no one philosophical explanation has exclusive rights over any truth of Faith. The definition of sin in terms of offence against God is useful for all, since all are accustomed to human relationships in which a man so frequently offends his neighbour ; to explain sin as the infringement of God's law, and consequently as deserving of punishment, is almost as generally useful, since practically all men are accustomed to having their lives governed by laws, enforced by the enacting of penalties against law breakers. When, however, we speak of sin as a privation of being, we are giving an explanation which is useful to a select few : to those who have been trained to think along certain philosophical lines it is a good explanation : amongst other things, it ' exonerates ' God from any positive causality with regard to sin. Even for the philosophically minded it does not, of course, satisfy all difficulties ; for many it explains nothing : to speak of toothache or cancer as ' privations of being ' is easier for the healthy man than for the sick ; a hole in the road is positive enough for the man who falls into it.

The examination of the term sin, therefore, is not merely a contribution to a Biblical glossary, which we have to bear in mind if we are to understand the Biblical texts. It gives us the revealed teaching on sin, whether we in turn present this teaching in different terminology or not. In actual fact translation into other terms is now necessary, for we fail to realise other Biblical concepts which are essential to the proper use of the Biblical terminology of sin. If, for instance, we spoke of the sickness of an innocent child, or the sufferings of a

saintly man, as sin, our hearers would be horrified, for there is no responsibility for sin in the case of these individuals. Yet according to the Bible there is such a thing as a corporate responsibility, whereby a certain group, whether a family, or a clan, or the whole of the chosen people, or even the whole of the human race, shares responsibility in certain circumstances, for good or ill. The examples of corporate punishment for sin are among the most difficult texts in the Bible for the modern reader. But they are most pertinent to our subject, and they cannot be dismissed as primitive and outmoded. It is true that there has been some development in the course of revelation, whereby the individual's rights and responsibilities were increasingly clarified ; but, as J. de Fraine says, ' It is incontestable that the mention of the individual as object of the divine attention, or as subject of the religious relationship, is surpassed by far by the mention of the nation as religious object or subject.'[1] With some reason Ezechiel has been called the father of individualism (cf. Ezech. 18), but it is a mistake to think that in saying that the children's teeth will no longer be set on edge by the sour grapes their fathers ate, he removed the principle of corporate responsibility from God's scheme completely. De Fraine points out that even in Jeremias and Ezechiel this is by no means ignored. And anyone who tries to realise the fundamental importance of St Paul's teaching on the body of Christ will refrain from dismissing the idea of a corporate responsibility as just an Old Testament idea. It is so important to emphasise this truth, though we cannot examine it here ; our tendency towards an exaggerated individualism causes great difficulties in theology, and perhaps especially in the theology of sin and penance. Our division of man into body and soul is another reason for the difficulty we find in accepting the Biblical doctrine of sin in all its fulness. We insist so much on sin being an affair of the soul : mortal sin, for instance, causing the ' death of the soul,' that bodily sickness and physical death become no more than images of sin and its effects. But this dichotomy is foreign to Biblical theology, as P. Benoit has recently shown.[2] Yet another difficulty makes this total view of sin seem completely unreal : the forgiveness of sin fails to remove such evils. But this difficulty is only one aspect among many, of the great Christian paradox : we are redeemed and yet we must still work out our salvation in fear and trembling ; Christ has conquered the devil, and yet the latter goes about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). ' We are dead to sin ' (Rom. 6:2). But are we ? Such mysterious truths as these are fully explained neither by the Biblical nor the philosophical

[1] ' Individu et Société dans la Religion de l'Ancien Testament,' *Biblica*, xxxiii (1952), p. 445 [2] ' The Holy Eucharist—II,' *Scripture*, ix (1957), pp. 6–8

explanation of sin, and in face of the difficulties, we may prefer to retain our modern use of the term ' sin.' But we have no choice with regard to the substance of the Biblical teaching which lies behind the Bible's use of this word, and in point of fact we actually retain the term in its Biblical sense in the expression ' original sin.' It is here where our definition of sin proves so inadequate that we have difficulty in showing how ' original sin ' is sin. We would not refer to the sickness of the child as sin, but we must regard it as a manifestation or an effect of original sin. Every evil in Biblical thought comes within that all-embracing term sin, not excluding the evils to be found in material creation, since it too awaits its redemption (Rom. 8:19ff.). The taking away of sin, therefore (or, as we would say, the forgiveness, or remission of sin) means, finally at least, the taking away of all evil. A sharp division between spiritual good and material good is as alien to the thought of the Bible as is a sharp division between spiritual evil and physical evil. To make such a division is to obscure the full import of the messianic hope,[1] and Our Lord's fulfilment of it.

Upholland College   T. WORDEN

' IN THE WORLD AND NOT OF THE WORLD '[2]

(Translated from the French by B. Dickinson)

We find little in St Paul about the sanctification of a Christian who has interests in the world. St Paul more readily thinks of him, it would seem, as disinterested in the world. Is this because of a kind of indifference—without hostility, however—towards the world ' whose form is passing away ' (I Cor. 7:31), an indifference to its culture, to its present fate ? It seems that St Paul, just like Our Lord in the Gospel, without feeling hostile towards this life, was really interested only in the next. . . .

Yet we find in St Paul a few pronouncements which apply to our problem. These are the texts :

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short : from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world

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[1] The language in which the prophets expressed the blessings to come has too readily been taken as mere metaphor, and the messianic hope of Israel rather too glibly labelled as materialistic. There are signs that this kind of judgment is now being modified to some extent, cf. J. van der Ploeg, *Revue Biblique* (1954), pp. 497ff. Pinckaers : ' L'Espérance de l'A.T. est-elle la même que la nôtre ? ' *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, LXXVII, pp. 785-99.   [2] cf. John 17:9-19