

## THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING. THE ORIGINAL SIN

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According to Catholic Doctrine, it is said that earthly life has the function of a text and that immediately afterwards there is an individual judgement with reward or punishment. From all of this one could conclude that suffering ought to be found only in the life beyond this earth, as definitive punishment (Hell) or temporary punishment (Purgatory). Nevertheless there is suffering already in this earthly life. Here is the problem: what is the reason for suffering in this earthly life?

Revelation gives an answer to this problem: it can be found in the dogma of the original sin.

The central nucleus of the dogma of original sin is well expressed by St. Paul's phrase *per peccatum mors*, «death (entered into the world) by reason of sin» (*Rm* 5.12).

By the term «death» St. Paul does not only mean physical death, but also and above all, a state of spiritual «death», the death of the soul. Furthermore, St. Paul also includes suffering in the physical death (and therefore the diseases and all the sufferings and miseries that afflict man during his earthly life).

Speaking of original sin, in order not to create any confusion, it is necessary to distinguish clearly the «originating original sin» from the «originated original sin»: the first is the cause of the second. The originating original sin is, according to the narration of *Gn* 3, Adam's sin: it is a personal sin, that is, one consciously committed. The originated original sin, instead, is the sin with which all of us are born<sup>1</sup> and it is a sin only by analogy, that is, it only has a certain similarity to the personal sin, since it is clear that a baby newly born could not have committed personal sins<sup>2</sup>. In the phrase «*per peccatum mors*» the originating original sin is indicated by the word «*peccatum*», instead the originated

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<sup>1</sup> Except the Blessed Virgin Mary.

<sup>2</sup> I repeat that for a «personal sin», one intends a consciously committed sin, with full cognition and deliberate will.

sin is indicated by the word «mors».

Now let us go on to examine the whole question more accurately. Let us begin by taking into direct consideration the data of Revelation which are contained in the Holy Scriptures and in the Magisterium of the Church.

### *The Sacred Scriptures*

With respect to original sin, the principal Scriptural text are: *Gn* 2-3; *Rm* 5.12-21; *1 Cor* 15.21-22.

— *Genesis* narrates that God put Adam in a very beautiful garden where he had dominion over all the plants and animals, and he enjoyed a special familiarity with God. But God also gave Adam a precept: «You may eat from any tree in the garden; but you may not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because you would certainly die on the day you ate from it» (*Gn* 2.16-17).

Then God created woman, and the text of *Genesis* adds: «Adam and his woman were both nude: and they did not even feel ashamed» (*Gn* 2.25).

Successively, under the instigation of the serpent, first Eve and then Adam ate the prohibited fruit, committing a grave sin because of pride: «Immediately, Scripture says, they opened their eyes and saw that they were nude; whereupon they intertwined fig leaves and made girdles for themselves».

When God came, he cursed the serpent and then also cursed Adam and Eve. God said to the woman: «I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you». And he said to Adam: «Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the fields. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return» (*Gn* 3.16-19). And God threw them out of the splendid garden.

— Another text of very prime importance is the *Letter to the Romans* 5.12-21. In this passage St. Paul makes a parallel between Adam, from whom sin came, and therefore death too, and Jesus, from whom grace came, and therefore life.

«Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and

death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned». Two other very obscure verses follow, but are not essential. Then St. Paul continues: «But the free gift is not like the trespass: in fact, for it many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of God of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many». Therefore St. Paul repeats many times, with slight modifications, the same parallelism. Particularly significant is the phrase: «but where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more».

The same parallelism between Christ and Adam is again found in *1 Cor* 15.21-22.

### *The Magisterium of the Church*

The principal documents of the ecclesiastical Magisterium are the Council of Carthage (418), the Second Council of Orange (529), the Council of Trent (*Decree of original sin*, 1546), the encyclical *Humani generis* of Pius XII (1950), the Second Vatican Council (Const. *Lumen gentium*, 1964; Const. *Gaudium et spes*, 1965), and the discourse of Pope Paul on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1966 (A.A.S., 58, pp. 649-655).

From those documents, connected with Holy Scripture, the intimate sense of the dogma of original sin results, which is this:

Man is, from birth, in a condition of physical and spiritual dying. The cause of this state of death is sin. Christ liberates us from the state of death.

More in detail, it seems to me that the elements contained in the Catholic teaching (with various degrees of theological value) can be expressed thus:

1) All men<sup>3</sup> are born into a state of physical and spiritual «dying»<sup>4</sup>. From common experience it already follows that men are born into a state in which they are subjected to suffering, to death, to ignorance, to the impetus of rebellious passions; furthermore, it follows from Revelation that men are also born into a state of enmity with God. This inclusive state of physical and

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the Most Holy Mary.

<sup>4</sup> The expressions «dying» and other similar ones, are hyperbolic understood under a certain aspect: it is evident that there is not only misery and pain in the earthly life, but also beauty and joy, which are gifts of God and participations in His beauty and happiness. Nothing is more contrasting to the spirit of Christianity than a pessimism denying every value in the earthly life.

spiritual death can be indicated by the term «originated original sin», *in a broad sense*; *in a strict sense* the term «originated original sin» only indicated the state of spiritual death or enmity with God, that is, that state which is cancelled by baptism.

The originated original sin, in a strict sense, is not a personal sin, it is a «sin» only by analogy, however, it must have in itself a true aspect of sin, by which it constitutes a «death» of the soul.

It is not an extrinsic reality for man, but rather intrinsic: *inest unicuique proprium* (it is in everyone as its own) (Council of Trent).

2) The cause of this human condition of «death» is (personal) sin: *Per peccatum mors* (Rm 5.12).

3) Christ is he who, by means of his vicarious expiation, liberates us from the condition of death.

These are the fundamental elements which are contained in the Catholic doctrine concerning original sin. But other elements are also commonly taught. And they are:

4) The personal sin which has caused human misery has been the disobedience of one, single man, Adam, at the beginning of History (the originating original sin).

Nevertheless, both on the basis of Holy Scripture and on the basis of the Church documents, one must admit, at least in some way, that the sins of all the other men have also had a causal influence on the miserable human condition.

5) Adam has been the physical ancestor of all of humanity, and the originated original sin has been transmitted through natural generation, and not through an imitation.

The elements indicated by numbers four and five, are less important than the first three; but this, *per se*, does not mean that they are not also revealed. Nevertheless some theologians, today, deny or at least doubt that they are a part of the true contents of Revelation.

With respect to point number four, the more forceful texts in favor of the uniqueness of original sin are not those of Holy Scripture, but those of the Council of Trent which affirms that the sin of Adam *origine unum est* (it is unique in origin), DS. 1513.

Nevertheless, from the recent studies it follows that it is always more difficult to establish exactly what the Council of Trent defined or not, in the documents. Furthermore, the phrase «*quod origine unum est*» presents itself as an «*obiter dictum*», or that is, as «something said in passing», and at the time of the Council of Trent there was a diffused theological conception that

the «obiter dicta»<sup>5</sup> did not fall under a definition. One can add that the Council of Trent proposed to defend the revealed truth against the errors of the Protestants, but the Protestants, generally speaking, did not deny the uniqueness of Adam's sin, at all.

The Holy Father Paul VI on July the 11th of 1966, received a group of theologians and scientists who had convened in Rome for a symposium on the dogma of original sin and delivered a speech. In this speech Paul VI reaffirmed, first of all, the elements exposed in number 1, 2, and 3, but made reference to the elements of numbers 4 and 5, too.

Nevertheless, from the same speech and from other facts it follows that the Supreme Pontiff did not intend to totally condemn any theological attempt to deepen the contents of the dogma of original sin; but intended to confirm that Catholic theologians must work in the spirit of obedience towards the supreme Magisterium of the Church, which is the unique one concerned with judging about matters of faith, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it seems to me that the uniqueness of originating original sin and the physical descendance of the entire human race from Adam was affirmed by the Supreme Pontiff, above all, inasmuch as it seems that those two points are necessary for the complete affirmation of the first three essential points.

### *The originated original sin*

As I have already said the originated original sin is constituted, in a broad sense, by all the effects of the originating original sin, but in a strict sense, it is constituted by those effects of the originating original sin which are cancelled by baptism. Such an originated original sin, in a strict sense is constituted by the lack of sanctifying grace and by the rebellious concupiscence (that is by the rebellious passions, which, even if they are expelled out of the mind, return in an insistent way, almost, obsessively); baptism cancels them inasmuch as it gives the sanctifying grace and gives the divine promise of abundant actual, graces capable of counter-balancing the rebellious concupiscence.

That the rebellious concupiscence has an aspect, even if indirect, of «sin», appears to be clear enough, since it induces one to formal sin, with force and insistence. It is more difficult to understand why the lack of sanctifying grace has a true aspect of

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<sup>5</sup> Even if one did not exactly use this term.

«sin», of the «death» of the soul. The reason for this aspect of sin is two-fold:

1) The sanctifying grace is a perfecting of the soul which directs it towards the beatific vision, that is to a supernatural knowledge and love of God. Therefore, the lack of sanctifying grace is an *aversio a Deo*, a *deviation from God*, because in such a state the soul is incapable of knowing and loving God at the supernatural level: it can only tend towards God at an inferior level, at the natural level.

2) Such a lack of sanctifying grace, although not being in itself a personal sin, however it is the *effect* of personal sin; therefore, it is in opposition to the will of God.

### *The most common reconstruction of the History of the originating original sin*

The most common reconstruction of the History of the originating sin, done by theologians seeking to interpret and complete the revealed data, has been, at least up to the sixties, the following.

Adam and Eve were two individuals, from whom the entire generation of humanity derived. They *by nature* were subjected to suffering and to death, independently from any personal sin, just as we also *by nature* are subjected to suffering and to death.

But God gave Adam and Eve three praeter-natural gifts, and precisely the following: immortality, integrity, wisdom (that is, the exemption from death, from concupiscence, from ignorance) and an absolutely supernatural gift: sanctifying grace.

God submitted Adam and Eve to a test and they sinned. With this they lost the praeter-natural gifts and sanctifying grace for themselves and for all of their descendants. Thus, we are born into a state of pure *nature*<sup>6</sup>, moreover, according to many theologians, in a state of *worsened* nature («wounded»).

### *A biological objection*

Against the above-expounded reconstruction of the originating original sin, the objection has been made that the theologi-

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<sup>6</sup> That is, with suffering and dying, with concupiscence, with ignorance, and without sanctifying grace.

cal monogenism<sup>7</sup>, that is, the origin of the entire human race from a single, initial couple is discordant with the way in which the origin of all the other species comes.

It is undeniable that the derivation of the entire human species from a single couple presents serious difficulties from a genetic point of view. There are two types of difficulties:

1) To suppose that a new species, clearly distinct from the originating species, begins with two single individuals, means to assume that two individuals are born from a species A, that is B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, which are fertile among themselves but are infertile with the originating species. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the individuals of a different species differ not only because of a single gene, but for many genes. Therefore, it is extremely improbable that in the germinal elements of an individual belonging to species A occur, simultaneously, all those genetic mutations (harmonious among themselves) which determine the birth of an individual belonging to species B. And it is, furthermore, improbable that two individuals are contemporaneously born of species B, and precisely, one as male, and the other, female.

2) Ordinarily at least, a new species is born through the evolution of a sufficiently numerous, entire population.

Therefore, the origin of a human species from a single couple requires a true miracle, actually many miracles. Now, a miracle is certainly possible, but it seems strange that in order to arrive at a human species it was necessary to make a departure from the evolutionary procedure, whose programming was precisely the realization of the human species as its principal scope.

### *Theological objections*

The preceding objection, of biological nature, in my opinion, has only a secondary importance. The principal objections against the common reconstruction of originating original sin are, rather, of theological nature; that is that reconstruction it not in

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<sup>7</sup> In order to avoid confusion, it is opportune to immediately state precisely that theologians use the term «monogenism» in a sense which does not correspond to that which is used by the biologists: When theologians speak of monogenism, they mean: «a derivation of the actual human species from a single couple», instead, when biologists speak of monogenism, they mean: «a derivation of the human species from a single, pre-homind population» (and when they speak of polygenism, they mean: «a derivation of the human species from more separate populations»).

full accord with the revealed data, but on the contrary, very much empties them of their theological contents.

It seems to me that among the theological objections, the principal one is this: that reconstruction *empties the principle* «per peccatum mors», because it admits that suffering, death and all the other miseries that afflict human persons in this life, are *natural*, in the sense that they would exist *even independently from every sin; that is, it is admitted that God, even independently from every sin, could create an intelligent person who is subjected to suffering and to dying. Note that this affirmation is not explicitly contained in any text of Holy Scripture, and neither is it contained in any document of the Church's Magisterium.*

A second remarkable difficulty with the ordinary reconstruction lies in the fact that it does not succeed in giving any explanation with respect to the scope of our solidarity with Adam<sup>8</sup>.

A third difficulty lies in the fact that according to Holy Scripture the cause of the state of dying, into which we are born, is also constituted by the sins of all men («because everyone sinned» *Rm* 5.12). This does not re-enter into the ordinary reconstruction, at all.

However, before clarifying these theological objections and indicating the others, I think it is convenient for me to expound some hypotheses, which have been proposed by various theologians and by myself, in order to interpret the originating original sin more profoundly.

### *Various hypotheses*

I will give a very brief exposition of these hypotheses, by following the order of sequence in which they were published.

a) One of the first hypotheses, often indicated by the term, «the hypothesis of the evolutionary sin», maintains that the original sin consists in the fact that the beings in progressive evolution still have not reached the end of the evolution, that is, they have not reached that perfection towards which evolution tends.

Evolution tends to produce human beings with a psychic and somatic level which is always higher, until they reach their *Ome-*

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<sup>8</sup> The common reconstruction really gives the impression that Adam and Eve: «were two unlucky beings who at the beginning of History committed an enormous disaster in which we are caught in the middle and of which we did not have any fault». I read this phrase in an old sermon.



ga point. According to the supporters of this hypothesis the *Omega* point would not only be constituted by a certain level of «natural» perfection, but by a «supernatural» perfection, with the full glorification of humanity in union with God, in Christ.

Our «original sin» would be the «evolutionary incompleteness» with which we are born.

This hypothesis is evidently connected with the conception of the world proposed by Teilhard de Chardin.

b) Another hypothesis maintains that the original sin which burdens every man who is born, is the fact of being born immersed in an environment of sin.

The human psyche, by its very nature, has need of certain external conditions in order to be able to develop itself, oriented towards God. But since the beginning of History, sin has spread into the world, so that every man who is born does not find around himself those conditions which are necessary for a psychological development, which may be oriented towards charity and towards God; every man who is born is born into the impossibility of harmoniously developing oneself in an orientation towards God.

According to this hypothesis originating original sin is not the sin of a single man, but the sin of «man» in general <sup>9</sup>, the «sin of the world», which St John speaks about.

An hypothesis of this type was expounded first by R. Troisfontaines <sup>10</sup> and then by P. Schoonenberg <sup>11</sup>.

The second of these authors has developed a detailed analysis of the influx that the surrounding sinful situation exercises on every man by means of his bad examples, pressures and instigations of evil, the obscuring of value and norms. The influx, then, of this situation reached its culmination with the sin of killing Christ. By this sin Christ was rejected by the world and excluded from our existence; and, the font of grace being rejected, the acquisition of grace was thus rendered impossible for every man who is born <sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> «Adam» means: man.

<sup>10</sup> R. TROISFONTAINES, *Je ne meurs pas*, Paris 1960.

<sup>11</sup> P. SCHOONENBERG, *Man and Sin*, London 1965; the same author had already mentioned the same hypothesis in: *Gottes werdende Welt*, Limburg 1963.

<sup>12</sup> Then Schoonenberg says that the exclusion of Christ from the world is the reason why grace can be acquired only by means of a sacrament, and not by generation.

In such a way the sin of the world has reached the point of having an influence from which no man can escape and which determines an absolute, true inability for the good.

According to Schoonenberg the originating original sin is the sin of the world and the originated sin is, for each man, the fact of «being situated» in the sin of the world.

In what sense, according to this hypothesis, has sin caused death? Not in the sense that, if man had not sinned, physical death would not have occurred; but in the sense that, for a man who had not fallen into sin, physical death would only have been a serene passage into a better life. Instead, for a man who is a sinner, physical death has assumed its typical, tormenting and tragic character: the sinner is compelled to abandon that world which he only believed and hoped for.

A. Hulsbosch<sup>13</sup> has expounded an hypothesis on original sin that combines the hypothesis of the evolutionary sin and the hypothesis of the sin of the world. Several theologians and noteworthy biblicists, among whom P. Grelot<sup>14</sup>, have placed themselves in the same line of thinking as Schoonenberg.

c) Z. Alszeghy and M. Flick, professors at the Gregorian University, have published an hypothesis in which the uniqueness of the originating original sin is admitted, but the physical derivation of the entire human race from he who sinned first is denied<sup>15</sup>.

According to this hypothesis humanity emerged from inferior organisms, perhaps through various lines, and had a gradual psychic and somatic development. The primitive plan of God was that evolution developed itself in a rectilinear way, until reaching, by way of its free gift, the fullness of the life of supernatural grace and a condition without suffering. This plan, however, had one condition; it would have been realized only if man had freely accepted this linear evolution towards the supernatural.

But the first man who, by way of the gradual psychic development, had arrived at the possibility of freely accepting the rectilinear evolution towards the supernatural, refused, by sinning,

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<sup>13</sup> A. HULSBOSCH, *De Scepting God*, Roermond and Maaseik, Romer and Zonene, 1964.

<sup>14</sup> P. GRELOT, *Réflexions sur le problème du péché originel*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 89 (1967), pp. 337-375 and pp. 449-484.

<sup>15</sup> Z. ALSZEGHY - M. FLICK, *Il peccato originale in prospettiva evoluzionistica* in *Gregorianum* 47 (1966), pp. 201-225; *Id.*, *Il peccato originale*, Queriniana, Brescia, 1972.

to accept such an evolution desired by God.

Evolution was thwarted by such sinning<sup>16</sup>, both for the first sinner and all the other men and for all their descendents<sup>17</sup>. Thus began a different evolution from that initially projected by God, an evolution which was always in a state of suffering and in a state of incapacity of reaching (independently from redemption) supernatural life.

In this hypothesis the originating original sin is the sin of the first man who reached a sufficient level of reasoning; the originated original sin is the deviation of evolution, that is, our impossibility to follow the rectilinear evolution towards God<sup>18</sup>.

### *A Further Hypothesis*

In the following pages I attempt to interpret and deepen the nature of original sin<sup>19</sup>. Such an attempt has as a basis the supposition that the uniqueness of the originating original sin does not take part in the revealed data; if it took part in it, the attempt constructed on a mistaken basis, would also be evidently mistaken.

Establishing if the uniqueness of the originating original sin takes part in the revealed patrimony concerns positive theology

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<sup>16</sup> The authors explicitly suppose that this derivation was not phenomenologically perceivable, so that an observer of external events would not have been able to note a any break or catastrophe.

<sup>17</sup> The solidarity of all men with the first sinner is motivated, by the authors of this hypothesis, above all in this way: «According to recent studies, Holy Scripture describes cases, in which a singular act of a physical person is, at the same time, a communitarian position by which a community determines its own situation in front of God. This does not happen by means of a juridical imputation against the individuals for an act which is extraneous to them, but because the entire community is almost «incarnated» in that person». (M. FLICK, *Peccato originale ed evoluzionismo* in «Civiltà Cattolica» (1966) III p. 25-26).

<sup>18</sup> Some other hypotheses on original sin have been formulated and published. In my opinion, they do not give valid contributions.

<sup>19</sup> G. BLANDINO, *Peccato originale e poligenismo. Le recenti ipotesi teologiche*, Ed. Ethica, Forlì, 1967 (July) (This essay and two other essays on the same topic were, then, published again in *Questioni dibattute di Teologia*, vol. 1, PUL - Città Nuova, Roma, 1977, pp. 47-105); H. RONDET, *Le péché original dans la tradition patristique et théologique*, Fayard, Paris, 1967 (August); H. RONDET, E. BOUDES, G. MARTELET, *Péché originel et péché d'Adam*, Cerf, Paris, 1969.

and, in the final instance, the supreme Magisterium of the Church. Nevertheless, I am allowing myself to present such an hypothesis, before knowing if its basis is admissible, because the speculative work is of help to the positive investigation, above all inasmuch as the former can prove the dependence or non-dependence of the various doctrinal elements among themselves. In the present case, it seems to me that my hypothesis proves the non-dependence of the central element of the dogma of original sin (indicated by the numbers 1, 2, 3) on those indicated by number 4 and 5; and this, if it were exact, would be important because, as I have already said, points 4 and 5 are affirmed, above all, inasmuch as one thinks that the complete affirmation of the first three points depends upon them.

My present hypothesis is this:

God created men to make them happy.

However, he willed that happiness was not only a gift for them, but also a conquest.

For this he wanted that men be subjected to a test, in the earthly life.

Given the seriousness of the test, it was already probable in itself, actually, practically certain, that men would have frequently sinned<sup>20</sup>.

*God foresaw that humanity would have frequently been sinful<sup>21</sup>, and for this reason, he made human nature so that it is suffering, mortal, subjected to the impetus of disordinate passions<sup>22</sup>, in order that this condition of dying had the function*

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<sup>20</sup> With this I do not want to deny that men often also overcome temptation, perhaps more often than they sin. Neither do I intend to deny that God could impede all sins, by means of an overabundance of grace; but the overabundance of grace ought to be still much more than there is in the actual economy.

<sup>21</sup> The cognition of the human nature and of the proof to which it is subject is sufficient for this prevision; the cognition of singular, free, future acts of men, is not necessary. The prevision on the basis of which God made a suffering humanity is not the exact prevision of the sins of individuals, but the generic prevision of a sinful humanity.

<sup>22</sup> The affective tendencies or passions are not a defect and cannot be considered, per se, as an effect of sin. That which can be an effect of sin is their «disorder», that is, the fact that they are often repeated in us, rebellious, excessive (in various gradation in different men, up to the typically pathological cases).

of expiation (and also of the integration of the test). For the same reason God arranged that men did not receive grace by virtue of generation<sup>23</sup>, but by means of a sacrament.

In this hypothesis the originating original sin is constituted by all the sins of humanity (the «sin of the world»); the originated sin, in a broad sense, is the inclusive situation of «dying» into which man is born; the originated original sin in a strict sense (that is that which is cancelled or counter-balanced by baptism) is the deprivation of sanctifying grace and the rebellious concupiscence.

Therefore in this hypothesis:

a) the originated original sin<sup>24</sup> coincides exactly with that described by the more traditional hypothesis;

b) the originating original sin would be constituted, *in the first place and in an emblematic way*, by the first grave sin (that with which sin entered into the world), but it would *also* be constituted, *and not any less*, by the sins of all the other men.

#### *Various clarifications*

— The condition of suffering and of mortality is an accidental condition, and not essential for the human person: the human being can be non-suffering and non-mortal. Actually, the condition of suffering and dying is transitory and exists only during the earthly life as a test.

When, therefore, I say that «the human *nature* is suffering and mortal» or that «man is *naturally* suffering and mortal», I always intend to refer myself to the human person *in the state of being tested, with a body of this type and in a world of this type*.

Actually I do not see how the human person could be exempted from suffering and from death if a body of this type and a physical environment of this type are maintained. The praeter-natural stable<sup>25</sup> gift of exemption from pain and death, which one speaks about in the more common reconstruction of original sin, does not seem possible to me with a body like ours and in a world like ours; in this situation, in fact, a clash is always possi-

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<sup>23</sup> That is, that they might not receive grace for the very fact of being generated from parents in a state of grace.

<sup>24</sup> Which is the real central point of the dogma.

<sup>25</sup> That is, not due to new and repeated, divine interventions.

ble (with wounds, fractures, hemorrhages, alterations and destructions of organs), an infection, etc. The steady exemption from pain supposes a body and a world which are radically different from ours.

— The central point of the expounded hypothesis is that God has constituted human nature subjected to suffering and dying, *on the basis of the prevision of the fact that humanity would have frequently been sinful.*

It does not seem strange to me that God, in realizing (in «constructing») human nature, kept the future behaviour of men in mind.

At the purely biological level, God constructed human nature (and in general, that of all the living beings) keeping in mind that there would have been (in the future) frequent alterations of the biological order. Forseeing these alterations, God realized a very rich and fine system of such mechanisms for restoring, within certain limits, the altered order. If in a living being a wound, a fracture, or a modification of the ionic concentration of blood, etc., occurs, mechanisms intervene which restore the altered order.

Thus, it seems to me entirely logical that God, in realizing human nature, kept the future violations of the moral order in mind, and arranged something (that is suffering) which could, at least in part, re-establish the violated order <sup>26</sup>.

On the other hand, the plan of redemption by means of Christ, also has the same structure: in fact, Christ also died for the sins which would have been committed after his death. Therefore, in the plan of redemption there is a prevision that humanity will also sin in the future (a prevision which is anything but difficult) <sup>27</sup>.

If my hypothesis is correct, the profound significance of the narration in Genesis of Adam's sin is to show the behaviour of man in general. The sacred author searched for the meaning of suffering, and guided by God, understood that at the origin of na-

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<sup>26</sup> Every intelligent being, in realizing a work keeps the probable, future alterations of the same work, in mind. For example, when a human legislator establishes a law, he already knows that violations of that law will occur, and therefore, he also establishes such dispositions to diminish and punish the violations.

<sup>27</sup> I also am capable of foreseeing with practical certainty that there will be sins on earth even next year, just as there were sins in the past.

tural suffering (provoked by physical, biological and psychical factors) there is sin. Therefore, he expressed this truth not in an abstract way, but through a scene which means precisely: «This is man! This is the origin of suffering!»<sup>28</sup>.

This interpretation is in perfect accord with what the bibli-cists think in general, with respect to the third chapter of Gene-sis which narrates the story of Adam's sin. They think that the li-terary genre of that chapter is not historical, but sapiential; that is, they think that that narration does not make reference to the behaviour of an historically determined man, but rather to the behaviour of man in general.

The scene expresses the connection between cause (sin) and effect (suffering), according to the simple mentality of the author and his people; for this reason, in the scene, *the cause chronologi-cally precedes the effect*. In reality, if the hypothesis proposed here is true, the connection is more complex and, in the order of ti-me, the effect preceded the cause (that is, suffering existed befo-re sin).

— The central idea of the dogma of original sin is: *per pecca-tum mors*, «the cause of suffering and dying is sin».

It seems to me that this idea is fully emphasized in the hypo-thesis expounded above, more than in the traditional interpreta-tion.

And that is for two reasons:

1) In the above-expounded hypothesis, sin is the *primary and essential* cause of suffering and dying.

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28 With this, I do not intend to deny that Adam is also attributed with an individual character beyond that of an universal character (both in Genesis and in other passages of Holy Scripture). He is presented as an individual from whom the entire human race descended. But the pro-blem is whether the individuality of Adam is part of divine teaching or only part of the simple way in which the Hebrew people reconstructed the origin of humanity. The most simple way in which the popular mind can reconstruct the origin of humanity is really that of making it derive from an unique founder. Actually in primitive peoples (and this also ap-pears in the Bible), there is the tendency to make every people (and every tribe or group) derive from a unique (principal) founder and to attribute the foundation of every city to a single, principal founder. And often the same name is attributed to the founder (of the family) and to the people, to the founder and to the city. Now it is clear that the derivation of a people from a unique, principal founder (of a family), sometimes can be historically true, but much more often it is fictitious.

Instead, for the traditional interpretation, it is not completely true that dying is caused by sin, since it is admitted in that interpretation that suffering and dying are properties of human nature even independently from any sin. According to the traditional interpretation sin has an accessory causality<sup>29</sup>.

Note that the affirmation that suffering would have been proper to human nature even independently from any sin, is an affirmation which is necessarily implied by the other elements which constitute the traditional reconstruction of original sin. However, such an affirmation is only the fruit of an elaboration of theologians, and has never been expressed by Holy Scripture, nor by the infallible Magisterium.

2) In the above-expounded hypothesis the sin which caused the ruin of man was not the sin of a single man, but *the sins of all men in general* (and, more generally, also the sins which really are not committed, but which should have been committed if there had not been the graces obtained by the Passion of Christ).

In such a way, a general validity is attributed to the connection «sin-suffering». And the causal influence of the sins of all men upon the situation of the death of humanity, an influx which seems to be a revealed datum, is truly inserted into the interpretation of original sin; this datum, instead, does not find a real insertion in the traditional interpretation<sup>30</sup>. According to that in-

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<sup>29</sup> In the sense that sin has removed the praeter-natural gifts that prohibit the verificating of human suffering while the primary cause is *human nature which would suffer even independently from the sins of men*.

<sup>30</sup> If my hypothesis is right the final tract of *Rm* 5.12 («because everyone sinned») would probably be referring to personal sins. In the common interpretation the tract is referring not to personal sins, but to the originated original sin; but some fathers (especially the Greek Antiochene Fathers) and some modern scholars (for example, S. Lyonnet, O. Kuss) refer it, even if with some differences, to personal sins, and this is, certainly, the most obvious interpretation.

Coherently, vv. 13-14, ought to be interpreted, in the most natural way, thus: «Everyone is dead even before the revealed Law, because everyone has sinned by transgressing the natural law». This interpretation is also in harmony with what St. Paul had already said in *Rm* 2.12-14. However, the subsequent verses, in which in various ways, it is repeated, «for the disobedience of a single man, many have been made sinners», constitutes a difficulty for my hypothesis, since Adam is obviously considered an individual in these verses. One can note that St. Paul, when he wants to present the parallelism, Jesus-Adam, then he attributes the cau-



terpretation, at the most one can sustain that the sins of men *worsen* the situation of a suffering and mortal nature.

Furthermore, the great problem with the traditional hypothesis, of how to justify our solidarity with Adam, disappears.

The problem of explaining the suffering of those people who have not committed any sins, remains. However, the solidarity of these few people with the mass of other men is the solidarity of the exception with the norm. And their solidarity has a profound scope of love: their suffering is the expiating suffering for the sins of others, whose summit is constituted by the suffering of Christ<sup>31</sup>.

For the two reasons now indicated, it seems to me that in the above-expounded interpretation, a full and general value is given to the idea *per peccatum mors*, which it does not have in the common interpretation. And it appears more clearly that that idea, is anything but a fable, rather, it constitutes the supreme «intelligence» of the problem of suffering.

— In the traditional interpretation, there is, as an implicit presupposition, the thought that the state of humanity which always fulfilled the divine will and never sinned, was a state which had a remarkable probability of persisting. The plan of paradisiac economy (that is of terrestrial paradise) would have been considered by God as a plan which, *per se*, could and had to be stable and perennial. Therefore the state of actual humanity is considered, at least implicitly, as a state which could have been

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se of our state of dying to Adam; instead when he turns his attention directly to our state of dying, then he indicated the cause of it in the fact that «everyone sinned». However, it is entirely probable that St. Paul, similar to other hagiographers, may have considered Adam as an individual (cfr. note 28). All these verses always present difficulties in order to give them a unique and coherent interpretation, and not an artificial one. Probably, St. Paul himself, in his own mind, has never reached an organic arrangement of the various aspects of the question, and has only hinted at the real problematic and at the real, partial attempts for a solution, attempts whose incompleteness he himself was aware of.

<sup>31</sup> Evidently, in the traditional hypothesis, the solidarity of all men with Adam cannot be explained in this way. That is, one cannot say that the solidarity of all men with Adam may have the scope of an amorous expiation of the sins of Adam. If instead, one said that, that solidarity has the scope of expiating the sins of all men, then *one admits my hypothesis (with only a verbal difference)*.

avoided with remarkable probability. According to such an interpretation, things have gone badly, much worse than could have been expected.

It seems to me that this implicit thought is not true and that, still further, it falsifies the true significance of our state of original sin, since it makes us consider our state as something very extrinsic to us, as a misfortune which was practically avoidable, but which, instead, fell upon us.

When Revelation speaks of Adam and Eve, it does not want to speak only about «two unlucky beings who at the beginning of History committed an enormous disaster in which we are caught in the middle and of which we did not have any fault».

Our state of being is not the break-up of a divine plan which has unforeseeably gone badly, but is the foreseeable situation of a humanity subjected to a serious test in order to conquer divine love for itself. *Things went badly just as it was foreseeable that they would go.*

Even accepting the traditional interpretation according to which God realized a prime, paradisiac economy, it would also be necessary to say that God himself disposed that that economy was unstable and transitory; in fact, he established that, if a man had sinned, not only would he be removed from the paradisiac state, but also all of his descendents. By its nature, this clause of the divine decree rendered the paradisiac economy unstable and transitory.

Often one supposes that the paradisiac economy had a remarkable possibility of stability, for the fact that men had within it, by way of the gift of integrity, a greater facility in overcoming the temptations, than that which is given to us by the actual graces (in the measure in which now God, in fact, distributes them). Even this, however, seems to me very little in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition which insist on saying that the order of grace established by Christ is much more rich than the primitive order of grace: «but where sin abounded, grace abounded even more» *Rm* 5.20; «Oh God, who in a wonderful way have created us... and in a more wonderful way have renewed us...» (From the liturgy: a collect of the Christmas day Mass)<sup>32</sup>. It is not true that Adam with the gift of integrity was in an easier con-

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<sup>32</sup> One could perhaps say that the actual order of grace is richer than the primitive order only for that which concerns the reward (that is, the quantity of sanctifying grace and the corresponding intensity of the beatific vision), but not for that which concerns the help towards *loving*

dition than that which we are in with the grace of Christ.

An indication in favor of the instability of the paradisiac economy is the very fact that it, even if it was realized, it certainly did not last (actually the common interpretation is harsh, because it admits that the paradisiac economy already collapsed in the first woman and in the first man).

According to the my hypothesis, the paradisiac economy never was realized; such an economy and the praeter-natural gifts have only had an hypothetical or virtual reality, in the sense that it is true that God would not have constituted men in the actual situation of dying if he had not foreseen that they would not have frequently sinned. However, it was entirely probable that they would have frequently sinned.

Because of the very nature of men put to the test, the unique plan of grace, which could be stable and efficient, was inevitably a *plan of redemption*.

— The natural suffering then comes to constitute a part of the test, because in the face of suffering man can accept or rebel against it.

It is, however, obvious that natural suffering neither constitutes the unique nor principal occasion of sin. The more serious sins (homicides, wars, adulteries, etc.) are in general, committed when one is in an excellent state of health.

Nor do I think that suffering determines a global increase in sins. It is well known that man, when he is in a good condition of health, easily believes himself to be the creator of his own destiny and not to be in any need of anyone; but, when he is struck with suffering, then he realizes that he is a «poor man» and he remembers to ask God for help. For a great deal of men the hour of pain is the hour of repentance and return to God. This fact, at first, may seem strange and paradoxical, but it is undeniable.

— The redemption accomplished by Christ gives us grace, but it does not take away the suffering, dying, ignorance, and concupiscence. And that is so, because suffering, dying, etc., maintain their function (of expiation and test) even for the redeemed. That is clear not only for suffering and for dying<sup>33</sup>.

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God and *doing* his will in this life. But such a dichotomy is not founded on any text and, rather, it seems to me that it is clearly contrary to the thought of St. Paul, and, more generally speaking, to Holy Scripture.

<sup>33</sup> Death has an expiating function, above all, for physical and moral suffering which accompanies it. Death would be entirely different if it

Also the necessary effort for winning over the insistent and rebellious concupiscence constitutes a suffering and, thus, a punishment and a means of expiation and merits. The fact, then, that God gives us abundant help only in a transitory form and not in an habitual form compels us to repeated prayer and, therefore, to a greater perception of our dependence upon him.

With respect to the actual economy of sanctifying grace, the fact that it is not transmitted by way of generation, has an aspect of punishment. The transmission by way of generation would certainly have been a particularly «gracious» plan for a non-sinful humanity. One can note, however, that a similar plan for a sinful humanity would have had more inconveniences than the actual plan, since in that way few babies would have received grace, and always with great uncertainty. (This latter point is also the reason why God established the efficacy of the sacraments to be independent from the state of grace in the minister).

— The hypothesis, per se, proposed by me, prescind from evolution. However, in all probability, evolution is a real fact. And there is already suffering and dying in the living forms which precede man. Given that human suffering has sin as a cause, we must say that, because of sin, God put man at the summit of an evolution in which there is suffering and dying.

But now arises a further problem: What is the significance of suffering in animals?

In *Rm* 8.19-22, there is a mysterious text which certainly has connection with the problem of original sin.

«For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility — not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it — in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now...»

If this text has a real significance, and not purely a figurative one, what is said in this text, is to be attributed, above all, to those infrahuman creatures which are capable of suffering and of rejoicing.

In this text one hints, very mysteriously, not only to a subjection of corruption, but also to a liberation and to a participation in the glory of the children of God.

Perhaps the suffering of the animals is a form of solidarity in

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were without suffering and without mystery.

the expiation of human sin<sup>34</sup>. In such a case, the affirmation *per peccatum mors* would acquire a total value. Certainly, it is difficult to explain, independently from every sin, the suffering of any creature with sensation. Perhaps we, as westerners, liquidate too easily the suffering of animals and we are too willingly inclined to think that it is not a true suffering and that, in a certain sense, it does not exist.

Therefore, in my opinion, the entire biological life and its evolution (and the natural laws which determine it) have been constructed, keeping man and his entire behaviour in mind, and thus, even sin.

It is necessary to add suffering and dying have not been inserted into the plan of the life in a purely extrinsic way, but they have received a biological function. Suffering has been utilized, at least in part, as a warning element for the protection of organisms from harmful agents. Evolution has been set up in such a way that dying is necessary for it. In fact, evolution needs the birth of new individuals (with new genetic mutations present in all the cells); and the continual appearance of new individuals would be impossible if the old organisms did not die and disintegrate.

— The hypothesis proposed by me requires neither monogenism nor polygenism, but follows as equally valid in any form of natural evolution. But in this hypothesis, the reason of the monogenistic miracle ceases to exist.

If the original sin is constituted by the sins of all men, the truth of faith that every man is born with the originated original sin does not require the derivation of all men from a single couple. Therefore, the principal reason why one thinks that God might have performed the miracle (or the miracles) of monogenism, disappears.

Are there other reasons which could have led God to make an exception from the general plan of evolution?

One can think perhaps, that such a reason may have been that of founding the unity of the human race, making it entirely similar to a large family.

But, in the first place, one must object that even in the polygenistic hypothesis, the human race is a large family, with an intricate and close network of family relationships. Each one of us is consanguineous with each other (that is, has a founder in common), much closer than one thinks; in order to find a common

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<sup>34</sup> It would have, that is, an analogous function, with due proportions, to the suffering of those men who did not sin.

founder again, it is not necessary to go back to the beginning of humanity, it is enough to go back much less than that<sup>35</sup>.

Furthermore, it is very strange that to really make a family out of the human race, one must make it different from all the other families; since in every family the descendency from a certain founder does not exclude that its members also descend from other couples, but actually, imply it<sup>36</sup>.

I have said that one does not see the reason why God might have had to perform the monogenistic miracle; instead, one can very well see why the biblical hagiographer may have reconstructed the origin of the human race by making it derive from a single couple. This type of reconstruction of the origin of man is that which appears as the most simple one, if one does not suspect the existence of evolution.

— Various authors have supposed that, along evolution, the first men may not have received from God the elevation to the supernatural state, with the sanctifying grace (but that they were left behind in a purely natural state) and that this was only given when men arrived at a psychic development of a sufficient degree.

Now it also seems to me that this supposition may have some probability of being true; in fact, it is in concordance with the plan of gradual evolution<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, this concordance is not a demonstration, since sanctifying grace, being a supernatural, free gift, is beyond, per se, the plan and the laws of natural evolution<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> See *Questioni dibattute di Teologia*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 224-226.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the grandchildren of any couple also have two other grandparents.

<sup>37</sup> And it also seems probable to me that the first men did not have a psychic development capable of committing grave faults and that, therefore, the first faults, which actually were committed, were not grave (in the modern sense of the word). In other terms, I think that the development of moral responsibility in the successive generations of primitive men may have been analogous to that which occurs in an individual baby of today. Probably only after various thousands of years did some individuals appear in the human species, who were capable of assuming a grave moral responsibility. And perhaps even today the number of men who reach such a responsibility is minor compared to what is commonly believed.

<sup>38</sup> Even independently from the problem of original sin, I believe it would be very useful for theology to keep in mind the facts of evolution and the long periods of time in which it developed. Human nature is

*Observations on the preceding attempts*

— The hypothesis of the «evolutionary sin», according to which original sin consists in the fact that beings in evolution have not reached that state of perfection towards which evolution tends, has a fundamental deficiency: according to it, «original sin» is not, in any way, connected to a fault or a personal sin. In such an hypothesis the profound idea, *per peccatum mors*, is totally left out. This is a critical observation which has already been made by several authors.

Another observation concerns the evolutionary conception which lies at the basis of that hypothesis, that is, the conception according to which evolution tends towards a humanity without suffering and without dying.

It does not seem to me that the data at our disposition justifies a similar evolutionary conception, even by admitting that evolution might have many developments which are unforeseeable for us. One can discuss if science might succeed in impeding the natural death of an organism<sup>39</sup>, but it seems to me that there is not any evidence which can justify the hope in the elimination of physical and, furthermore, of moral suffering (and, note, the central point of the question is suffering, not dying)<sup>40</sup>.

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not static, but in a state of development; and if humanity has already been in existence for more than a million years, it is justified to assume that it will continue to exist for various other *millions* of years. Therefore, one realizes that perhaps humanity is still in an immature phase, at the beginning of its History; one realizes that we are the «first Christians». And various problems regarding the diffusion of Christianity or the development of dogma and morality take on another aspect. Still another observation. Often theologians and preachers have posed the question: «Why did the Savior delay so long in coming?» One could almost respond: «He came just as soon as it was possible». In fact, if he had come even only 2,000 years before, humanity would not have had a sufficiently cultural development for historically documenting (and transmitting) His coming and His doctrine. A Revelation concerned with all men would have been, therefore, impossible.

<sup>39</sup> That is, in the strict sense of the terms, it does not appear to be absurd (at least for what we know today), but it certainly presents enormous difficulties. However, it is very probable that the elimination of biological death would determine the stopping point of evolution.

<sup>40</sup> With regard to certain affirmation, then, according to which evolution would tend, by nature of its very own laws, towards the realization of a glorious humanity, I would not say that they are in syntonny with the modern, scientific thinking; they might be pleasing to some, but

— The hypothesis proposed by Troisfontaines and by Schoonenberg has, in my opinion, the value of sustaining that the originating original sin is the «sin of the world». But it seems to me that the influx of the sin of the world on each man is not only that of creating an external situation in which an harmonious psychic development, oriented towards God, is impossible: the sin of the world has influenced the very structure of human nature. And the sin of the world which has influenced a given man is not constituted by the sins *of the others* (of the surrounding environment), but is constituted by all the sins of humanity and *also and above all* by the sins of that same man.

That hypothesis, then, does not explain the reason of suffering and of biological death, since it admits that they would exist even independently from any fault <sup>41</sup>.

— The hypothesis proposed by Z. Alszeghy e M. Flick is, above all, an attempt to deepen the theological significance of original sin. This hypothesis is constructed on the supposition that the uniqueness of the originating original sin is a truth contained in the patrimony of revelation. It seems to me that the assertion of the uniqueness of the originating original sin profoundly reduces the significance of the dogma of original sin, that is, of the idea «*per peccatum mors*».

The hypothesis of Alszeghy and Flick has the value of sustaining that the originated original sin is fundamentally an internal defect of man. With respect to the hypothesis of the «evolutionary sin» it has the advantage of being more close to the biological data by sustaining that actual humanity does not tend towards a

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for the majority of the scientists, they would constitute, rather, a «difficulty». I think that the traditional conception is much more adherent to the reality on this point, since it admits that the glorification of humanity is beyond natural laws and requires, among other things, a profound modification of the laws of matter; that is, it requires a new intervention of divine omnipotence, which produces «new heavens and a new earth». On the other hand, one must not forget the fact, which is of primary importance, that single man reach the glorious Christ and at the eternal sanction, already at the end of his individual life, and not at the end of evolution.

<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it seems to me that Schoonenberg attributes too great an influence to the environment. Also, his whole argument on the exclusion of Christ from the world seems more apparent than real to me. For example, one can object that Christ cannot be excluded from the world (and in fact, he never has been, since he continuously gives us His grace).



state without suffering. However, it sustains that the «rectilinear» evolution of infra-human, living beings might have lead to a humanity without suffering, after more or less long period of time. It does not seem to me that there are arguments to affirm this; rather, it seems to me that, considering the pre-human living beings, there are all the motives for thinking that evolution did not have the possibility of eliminating suffering and that the state of our humanity does not represent a state of deviated evolution.

Furthermore, this hypothesis always admits a direct and extraordinary intervention on the part of God, in order to thwart the course of evolution (even by affirming that this intervention was not perceivable by an external observer). And all of this has as its basis, in the final analysis, always the supposition that the first plan realized by God, that paradisiac one, had remarkable probabilities of persisting, without much difficulty.