

# ***Inscape* November 2016**

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**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!**

## **PARADISE LOST**

We know from Sacred Scripture that God created the first man and woman “according to his own image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27). The human person, in having a body and a soul and a spirit, existing in relationships, possesses a nature that is a potential to be completed from “imageness” **into** “likeness.” This is accomplished by bringing our human nature into a steady growth as we make free will choices to live according to the Indwelling Trinity. Thus we live more fully “according to God’s own likeness” by cooperating as a whole person in loving submission to God’s Holy Spirit.

Vladimir Lossky, a modern Russian Orthodox theologian, well describes God’s eternal plan of salvation whereby human beings would cooperate by making free choices out of love freely given back to God: “Adam was to emerge from an infantile awareness by agreeing, through love, to obey God....” “Do not eat....” “Do not touch....” It is the very possibility of a really conscious love, of an ever-growing love that would take man away from an autonomous enjoyment not of one tree, but of all trees, not of one fruit, but of all that is sensible, to consume him, and all the universe with him, in enjoyment of God alone.”

## **THE FALL**

Saint Basil the Great knows what happens when we disobey God. Possessing a mind that can know good and a will to do it freely, we also possess in that same intellectual freedom “the faculty of turning away from good.” We cannot accuse God of having acted either unjustly or unwisely in making us free to do good and also evil. To anyone asking: “Why then have we not been created impeccable?” Basil answers: “Who reproaches the Creator for not having made man impeccable by nature does nothing other than to indicate a preference to be irrational rather than a rational creature, an immobile, inert being, deprived of the ability to be free and active.”

Basil, seeing well that human wisdom, a participation of God’s own willing, can also be corrupted by error and sin, insists that our ability to be at least capable of constant change does not come from our human intellect and will, but rather “from being always in movement.” Thus it is not our liberty or intellect which occasions our sinful fall, but it is our mutability, our fleeting character whereby the danger of a fall arises: “But there are in it [the human mind] two faculties; in accordance with the view of us who believe in God, the one evil, that of the demons which draws us on to their own apostasy; and the divine and the good which brings us to the likeness of God.”

Basil clearly saw that “we freely choose evil rather than good. If we would remain fixed in contemplating the beauty and would persevere in the joy of the intelligible, we would have the ability and the power to lead a life conformed to its proper nature.” Unfortunately, however, we do not continue to live intelligently in keeping with our nature, made in God’s image, and sin results. “Through a lack of vigilance it [our soul] grows heavy and falls from the superior

regions. It mixes then with the flesh, goaded on by the desires of shameful joys of earthly pleasures.”

God alone is incorruptible and uncreated. We, through the gift of divine life, possess the childhood that can mature into an unending, eternal adulthood of participated divinity. Maturity for Saint Irenaeus is to be gifted by the attributes of God as incorruptible and uncreated. But Adam lost this gift for life, and, though he possessed his human physical life, he became *corruptible* and *dead* as far as God’s life within him was concerned. God cannot be at fault for Adam’s disobedience and his fall from God’s grace. Thus Irenaeus writes: “Those persons, therefore, who have apostatized from the light given by the Father and transgressed the law of liberty have done so through their own fault since they have been created free agents and possessed of power over themselves.”

Saint Athanasius follows Irenaeus in insisting on human nature still remaining basically unchanged in its orientation to become “according to God’s image.” What is absolutely needed to return to divine life, Athanasius strongly preaches, is for God’s Only-Begotten Son to become enfleshed among us and thus restore us to true filiation by the divinization of the Holy Spirit. “The nature of man did not change. The difference is that man has clouded the light, hindered the plan of God and now the Son must come to replace man in the correct, logical path to beatitude and immortality.”

## SIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As we have just seen from the representative writings of Irenaeus and Athanasius that typify the universal teachings of the patristic writers, the Eastern Fathers did not seek any philosophical definition of sin. They were solidly rooted in Holy Scripture. If King David could confess: “I was born in guilt, a sinner from the moment of conception” (Psalm 51:5), so Saint Paul could summarize the New Testament sense of sin in all human beings when he wrote, “As through one man, sin entered the world, and through sin death....Thus death has spread to all men because all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Because we are tied to Adam’s sin, all of us, according to Paul’s teaching, find sin in our members (Romans 7:24). There is that “unspiritual” self within all of us that Paul found dictating to him what he should do against God’s law. He finds himself doing what he knows he should not do and not doing what he knows he should do (Romans 7:14ff). The sense of sin found in New Testament writings presupposes what is found in the Old Testament; both formed the double source of patristic teachings on the origin of human sin in the world.

In the Old Testament there is no single word to denote sin. Johannes Pedersen (theologian; 1883-1977) in his work *Israel* 1-11, presents sin generally as a breach in God’s loving and merciful covenant which he has made with his chosen people. The Hebrew words *het’* and *hatta’t*, which are translated in the New Testament by the Greek word *harmatia*, mean “to miss the mark.” This notion removes the merely legalistic view of sin based on deliberation to commit sin and broadens it to embrace the cause of sin as anything that prevents a human being, or the people of God, from living with God as the Center. It is failure to attain one’s goal, one’s end. Thus sin is unreality, insofar as it is considered “nonaction” in regard to the “real” action that brings fulfillment to the individual person or community.

An important Hebrew word for sin in the Old Testament is *’awon*. It provides a context for understanding the richness of the concept of sin in the New Testament and therefore in the Eastern Father’s teaching on sin. This word connotes a deviation, an element of failure and distortion of something that should never have come into existence.

Sin in the New Testament can refer to sin as a single act, sin as a state or condition, or sin as a power. These latter two ideas are found often in the Pauline and Johannine writings. But

the radical newness presented by the New Testament writers, and not found in the Old Testament, is that God has sent his own Son to conquer and destroy sin in the lives of those who believe in him as the Son of God. The magnitude of sin and the slavery that keeps the human race in absolute bondage through sin are highlighted only that we might accept the power of Jesus Christ as God's righteousness for us. God, through his Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus' resurrection, redeems us and makes us righteous.

In the Old Testament we see that only God can deliver us from sin. In the New Testament the Good News is that God has done this through his Son, Jesus Christ. God, in his merciful love for all mankind, can do no more than he has already done for his people, his children, in giving them his Son as Deliverer and God's Righteousness.

### **SIN BRINGS CORRUPTION**

Saint Athanasius has captured both the Old and New Testament concept of sin in showing the cosmic effects of Adam's refusal to live "according to God's image and likeness." We human beings without Christ's grace live in a cosmic condition that Athanasius calls *phthora*, which in Greek means "corruption." A process of disintegration takes place as a result of sin, which is described by Athanasius as a state wherein human beings lose the divine life of eschatological incorruptibility within themselves and become mortal, corruptible (i.e., deprived of divine life, or grace) and are "liable to the affections proper to nature."

Adam's sin brought about this state of corruption (*phthora*). Into this state every human being is born, excluding Jesus Christ. Yet each human person is guilty for his or her own sins. Each person, yielding to self-idolatry (*philautia*, self-love), brings additional "corruption" into the world. Life according to the image and likeness of God is diminished, not only in the individual, but through him, in the subhuman cosmos, which now is no longer harmoniously moving back to God.

This seems to be the universal consensus of all the Eastern Fathers, who follow Saint Athanasius in their commentaries on the well-known text Romans 5:12, as cited earlier.

Saint Theodoret of Cyrus, the leader of the Antiochene school and one of the architects of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), interprets Romans 5:12 as Adam's sin bringing to all human beings "death." Today most New Testament scholars also follow his interpretation of the Greek phrase *eph'ho* as meaning the symbol of death as not only physical death, but also spiritual death to God's divine life in us: "Death, through which all have sinned, has passed to all men for it is not by the sin of the forefather that each man suffers the law of death, but from himself, from his own sins."

Adam and Eve, having lost true incorruptibility, the divine life of God within them, could only beget children of "corruption" or mortality, death on all levels of existence, especially on the spiritual plane of total deprivation of God's life. Such mortal human beings are in such "mortality" committed to passions and fears and pleasures and sorrow.

### **ORIGINAL (ANCESTRAL) SIN AND BAPTISM**

These insights from the early Fathers of the Eastern Churches could have great importance for Western Christians. In most theological manuals among Catholics and Protestants of the West, baptism is interpreted as a cleansing from original sin. If we study the ancient ritual of baptism, which today in the Eastern Churches is still received by infants along with Chrismation and the Eucharist, we find no stress placed on the removal of Adam's original sin. Rather we find through these ancient rituals the granting of divine life to the newly baptized. The new Christian is exhorted through the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit to die with

Christ to the “old creation” and put on the new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). The New Christian is liberated from this corruption of death in which he or she was born and now a new life is freely bestowed for the Christian to live hidden in Christ Jesus.

As we become “immortal” in Christ by sharing in his divine life, we cease to be afraid of death, including our physical death. It is God’s perfect and eternal love, which does not fail and does not end, that casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). The sign of the new Christian is to be set free from the victory and sting of death (1 Corinthians 15:55). It is precisely inasmuch as we become immortal in Christ that we cease to be afraid of death and can live in loving service to others, the true Christian test of already living, in the Kingdom of God, in the immortal divine life of the Trinity through the risen Lord Jesus.

We can summarize, therefore, the Eastern Christian tradition of sin, especially the root of all our other personalized sins, Ancestral sin, as above all an inherited mortality. This leads the individual human being toward personal sins, but does not imply any guilt for the actual sin of Adam. This mortality, the consequence of Adam’s sin and linked, more as cause than as effect, to the individual sins of his descendants, was transmitted to every being except Jesus Christ. If Christ had come from a human sperm, he would not have been a new person. He was born into the human race, but not totally under the bondage of the effects of inherited “corruption” or mortality.

He could overcome death and restore human beings to true life and incorruptibility, which is divine life. For the Orthodox theologians the teaching of the Western Roman church on the Immaculate Conception removes Mary the Mother of God, from that which is inherited by every human being at birth. A greater understanding of the key issue of original sin perhaps can be of help to a better understanding of the relationship of human nature to grace.

### **FAR EAST OF EDEN: PARADISE LOST**

*(From Pilgrimage of the Heart; A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality: [1983] Rev. Fr. George A. Maloney)*

“Yahweh, do not punish me in your rage, or reprove me in the heat of anger. Your arrows have pierced deep, your hand has pressed down on me; no soundness in my flesh now you are angry, no health in my bones, because of my sin. My guilt is overwhelming me, it is too heavy a burden; my wounds stink and are festering, the result of my folly; bowed down, bent double overcome, I go mourning all the day...And now my fall is upon me, there is no relief from my pains; yes, I admit my guilt, I am sorry for having sinned (Psalms 38:1-6; 17-18).

### **SIN: MISSING THE MARK**

God gave the command to do good and to avoid sin, but opposing powers make us tend toward evil, and it becomes difficult to do this good. These sinful powers are not innate to man’s nature, but they are brought in from outside. (Nilus)

For after man in disobedience died the grievous death of the soul and he received curse upon curse: “Thistles and thorns shall the ground bring forth for you (Genesis 3:18), and again: “You will cultivate the earth and it shall not yield henceforth unto you its fruits” (Genesis 4:12), thorns and thistles sprouted and grew up in the earth of his heart.

His enemies took away his glory through deceit and clothed him with shame. His light was taken away and he was clothed in darkness. They killed his soul and they scattered and divided his thoughts. And they dragged down from on high his mind and Israel became the man who is slave to the true Pharaoh. And he set over him his supervisors and taskmasters, to do his evil works and to complete the construction of mortar and brick.

And these spirits led him away from his heavenly wisdom and led him down to the material and earthly and muddy evil works and to words and desires and thoughts that are vain. Having fallen from his proper height, man found himself in a kingdom of hatred toward mankind and there bitter rulers forced him to construct for them the wicked cities of sins.

But if man groans, then does he receive the beginning of deliverance. And he is delivered in the month of new flowers (Exodus 13:4) in the springtime when the ground of the soul is able to shoot forth the beautiful and flowering branches of justification. The bitter winter storms of the ignorance of darkness have passed as also the great blindness that was worn of sordid deeds and sins. (Pseudo-Macarius)

Just as the whole body suffers and not merely one part alone so also the entire soul [intellect, reason, imagination, memory, will, understanding, perception, desire, motive, emotion, choice, conscience, unconscious, want, feeling, decision, thought, discernment, faith, etc.] was subjected to the passions of evil and sin. And so the entire body [person] fell victim to passion and corruption. (Pseudo-Macarius)

There are many things of all kinds which receive the name of evil. Some of these are troublesome to all men in general, while some of them are troublesome to some only; but there is nothing like wickedness of the soul and disease of the will.

Some things are bad in themselves, such as the destructive influences of stars and disorders of seasons, barrenness of countries, rendings of the earth, earthquakes and pestilences, as well as poverty and disease, ill-treatment, imprisonment, and scourgings. But for man they are not at all evil. Such things harm him but outwardly and affect no more than his body and his possessions. The body is not the man to the extent that when it is sick he himself should be diseased....

If, however, true humanity consists of having will and reason, which no other beings here have in common with man, it is this which gives rise to virtue and wickedness alike. As for misfortune or prosperity, disease or health, living in distress or in enjoyment, the former would apply to those who have turned aside from the right way, while the other would belong to those who persist in the path of duty...

If, therefore, we need to learn what things cause pain to the true man by being a perversion of nature, we must take the opposite of God's laws. That which is truly evil opposes God's will. By being evil it is an object of hatred for him who cares for the good, and those who hate it wish that good may not come about when it is absent and suffer pain when it is present. By its presence evil causes the good pain, whether it is with them (as long as they have not taken leave of reason!) or with others for whom they pray. It is the good for which they pray for all men, by hastening to the divine loving-kindness and by desiring to see God's glory shining everywhere.

Thus sin alone is grievous to those who live in Christ, because it is evil while their character is virtuous, because it is contrary to God's laws, to whose will they strive to be united, and also, because for those who live in accordance with right reason it is most unsuitable to be vainly afflicted by anything else since they can derive the most useful fruits of pain.... In the case of evil of soul, suffering is the remedy. It averts future evil, causes present evil to cease, and is able to release us from punishment for past misdeeds. It was for this reason, I think, that the ability to suffer pain was given to our nature at the beginning, since it is not capable of helping us for anything else.

Now we do not venture to commit sin for no reason, but for the sake of gaining some reward of pleasure we barter away enjoyment of the good health of the soul. It is not for their own sake that we choose the ruin of the soul and the burning up of the mind! Once we know these things and repent of our sinful deeds we are distressed over them and despise the pleasure derived from them. We cast out the passion by means of its opposite, and show this by rejecting what we have accepted and by accepting what we have rejected. At the same time our suffering becomes the penalty which we pay for the sins which we have committed, and having been cleansed by it we need no further chastisement. (Nicholas Cabasilas)

In Christ's compassionate love and merciful forgiveness of our sins toward us,

*Father John Michael Zboyovski*