

SIN AND HOLINESS

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Sin seems to be quite a serious topic, particularly for Christians. But no one who reflects on sin is indifferent to it.⁽¹⁾ Even advertisements indicate this. Perhaps you might have seen an ad which goes something like: 'Drink Maxwell Coffee – It Tastes So Good It's Sinful'. Today when belief is undergoing an enormous amount of critical inspection, the notion of sin, like most doctrines of faith, has come under severe re-examination. Hence a thorough re-thinking of the concept of sin has become one of the most urgent concerns of moral theology and such related human sciences as psychology and sociology. But sin is a negation, and a negation has meaning only in relation to the positive it negates. Thus any discussion of sin would be lacking and perhaps even depressing unless it is considered in the context of grace which redeems and saves. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of sin without remembering man's call to holiness. The concern to discern the ferments of good and evil within modern man has long caused many people to direct at him and his environment a questioning gaze.⁽²⁾ It is the gaze of historians and sociologists, theologians and psychologists but above all of pastors. However, as a psychologist vitally interested in spirituality, I would like, in this article, to consider the theme of sin and holiness from a psycho-theological perspective. Discernment of the particular sins requires a full study of the corresponding virtues themselves. Therefore while looking at the question of sin in general, we shall also explore as Christians, what we are called by God to be and to become.

The Sense of Sin Today

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on reconciliation and penance *Reconciliatio Et Paenitentia* makes us aware⁽³⁾ that a glance at certain aspects of contemporary culture can help us to understand the progressive weakening of the *sense of sin*, precisely because of the crisis of conscience and crisis of the *sense of God*. This sense of sin is

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1. X. Thevenot, *Sin: A Christian View For Today*, Missouri, Liguori Press, 1984, p. 7
2. See Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, John Paul II, n. 1
3. *ibid.* n. 18

rooted in man's moral conscience and, as the *Exhortation* asserts, is linked to the sense of God, since it derives from man's conscious relationship with God as his Creator, Lord and Father. Hence, just as it is impossible to eradicate completely the sense of God or to silence the conscience completely, so the sense of sin is never completely eliminated. In our society today however, it seems that the idea of sin has changed because man's understanding of himself and the world has changed.

In former times man's destiny was largely in the hands of others. Not that oftentimes this is not yet true today, but certainly far less so, because the world has not only in a sense become somewhat smaller, but also because man appears to be in a better position to discover self and to relate to others. Today we have almost unlimited access to great varieties of past experience, and to many diversities of cultures. In today's environment the whole population of the world has become astronomical, since the earth is surrounded with satellites and other information means. The earth itself is now the content of this new man-made environment of information.⁽⁴⁾ It is no surprise that this total environmental change of the electronic age should inspire some radical new outlook on life. Meanwhile, even if the outer quest for the conquest of space looks promising and exciting, the journey into the interior of ourselves promises to be much more arduous and demanding than anything undertaken by the astronauts today. All cultural skills and technologies generate environments and habits of perception that are natural to them. And since most sinful behaviour is social behaviour in the sense that it does not begin and end in a single individual but produces effects on others,⁽⁵⁾ we should study the operation of these environments on human perception and milieu. Undoubtedly, the world-view of our age, the new mode of experience of life, the greater disposition for dialogue in an era of mass media, the critical spirit of our age, as well as several other factors, challenge us today to reflect more boldly on the concept, meaning and sense of sin in the light of the universal call to holiness.

In modern theological, philosophical and psychological literature sin emerges as more than the doing of evil or the breaking of laws. Sin is seen as compromising one's personal integrity.⁽⁶⁾ Sin is understood in more human and personal terms. It is being untrue to oneself or dishonest and closed to God and others. Sin is further viewed as refusing to bring a loving outlook and commitment to bear on the key situations of life. It is treating oneself and the neighbour as a thing not as a person. Presumably, the process of secularization and technological progress, has enabled man to be freer to

4. Marshall McLuhan, *The Future of Morality: The Inner versus the Outer Quest*, in *The New Morality*, W. Dunphy (editor), London, Burns and Oates, 1968, pp. 175 – 189

5. J. Gaffney, *Sin Reconsidered*, New York, Paulist Press, 1983, p. 68

6. B. Haring, *Faith and Morality in a Secular Age*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1973, pp. 28 – 29. J.L. Carmody and D.L. Carmody, *Contemporary Catholic Theology*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, pp. 98 – 102. M.J. Taylor, *The Mystery of Sin and Forgiveness*, New York, St. Paul Publications, 1971, p. XI

reflect on who he is and what his responsibilities to self and others are. Most of all, psychological reflection has made him aware of his inner self and how he essentially needs the other not only for personal fulfillment but also for self-transcendence. Modern mass communications in the meantime, are showing us that the other is not just family and friends but the whole of society, namely, every man. This is certainly a very welcome change for Christian moralists, because a morality motivated by love, respect, and service appears to be the only morality that can cope with our present-day situation; a morality capable of repairing the hateful polarization that exists between men today. It is being suggested here that the selfless serving person is the true man.

The Call To Holiness

In the above sense man becomes what he is called to be and become in his humanity, not by concentrating on his own needs alone and centering life in himself, or by exploiting others for his own gratification, but by losing himself to serve others. In this search the Christian is called in his actions to live consistently in line with his vocation to love and serve and be with Christ a “man for others”.

In view of this it behoves us to underline the fact that the biblical call to holiness is a universal call. God’s call to his creation cannot be understood as ‘more’ for some and ‘less’ for others.⁽⁷⁾ In Genesis 1:26–28, we find: “God created man in his own image – male and female he created them, and God blessed them.” God’s blessing upon both man and woman points to the vocation of *all men* to reproduce in themselves that image in which they were created. Modern biblical scholarship hints that the history of salvation indicates God’s continual intervention among men to call them back to his original purpose of union with Him. And this has been made an achievable reality by Jesus Christ, because men and women who have God’s image ‘restored’ in their lives through Jesus, acquire in their lives what St. Paul calls ‘the liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:19–23).

It is God’s plan for mankind and his world to return to what God had originally planned for them. Men and women ‘lost their way’ in sin; and so did the animals, the plants and the earth itself, which had all become rebellious. Yet the redeeming activity of Christ does not only restore man but also the whole of creation. Meanwhile the central message of Jesus is the call to his disciples to re-enact, in other words, to represent to the world the life that he had received from his Father. It is for this reason that as committed Christians we hearken to bless the God and Father of Our Lord

7. F.J. Moloney, *Disciples and Prophets*, London, DLT, 1980, pp. 3–15. B. Haring, *Called to Holiness*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1982, pp. 7–9. *Concilium* 129(9/1979): Spirituality, Models of Holiness, *passim*

Jesus Christ, who destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

Jesus historically invited his followers to re-enact the life enacted by himself: 'Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36). 'Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). Thus the basic message of Jesus is that while the heavenly Father is always merciful and perfect the Christian *becomes* merciful and perfect. This of course, is reminiscent of Leviticus 19:2: 'You shall be holy, because I, Yahweh your God, am holy'. Holiness is the way of being which is proper to the Father of Jesus Christ. Jesus's teaching makes it obvious that he was enacting the spirit of God his Father. In like manner the followers of Jesus must re-enact the same holiness of God in their own lives and represent it to the world. More specifically this is a 'conversion' to and a 'reconciliation' with God the Father.

This reminds us that the story of the Prodigal Son (whose father had certainly not forgotten his son, indeed he had kept unchanged his affection and esteem for him) is man – every human being as is vividly depicted by John Paul II in his *Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance*: "bewitched by the temptation to separate himself from his Father in order to lead his own independent existence; disappointed by the emptiness of the mirage which had fascinated him; alone, dishonoured, exploited, when he tries to build a world all for himself; sorely tried, even in depths of his own misery by the desire to return to communion with his Father."⁽⁸⁾ Christian revelation teaches us that finitude, suffering, sin are part of the human condition, but it also tells us of a God who plumbed the depths of that finitude in his Son's distress and death on a cross. Christ of course, did not die so that human beings would no longer suffer, but once freed from sin and enlightened by the cross-resurrection event we can now address ourselves to bettering the realities that constitute human life.⁽⁹⁾ Thus Christianity is aware of a "Love" that is greater than sin.

We find in 1 John 1:8–9: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins." These words, insists the *Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance*, present the question of sin in its human dimension: sin as an integral part of the truth about man.⁽¹⁰⁾ But they immediately relate the human dimension to its divine dimension, where sin is countered by the truth of divine love, which is just, generous and faithful, and which reveals itself above all in forgiveness and redemption. Hence St. John writes a little further on that: "whatever accusations (our conscience) may raise against us, God is greater than our conscience." (1 John 3:20).

8. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, op. cit. n. 5

9. H. Wattiaux, Eugenics and Catholic Morality, in *Theology Digest* 30, n. 3 (Fall 1982), p. 244

10. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, op. cit. n. 13

It is to be hoped that by treating the theme of sin and holiness from more than one point of view, a degree of clarification will result, rather than an increase in confusion. In particular we shall be looking for lines of convergence between psychology and moral theology in this area.⁽¹¹⁾ In our society to-day we are contending with the alleged demise of the supernatural, brought about by the secularization process. In our case we would like to use the term 'secularization' not in the sense of what has happened with social institutions as it has been the case of the separation of Church and State, for instance, but applying the word 'secularization' to the process taking place inside the human mind. This is what sociologist Peter Berger, in his enlightening book, *A Rumour of Angels*, calls a 'secularization of consciousness'.⁽¹²⁾ Today the supernatural as a meaningful reality is absent or remote from the horizons of everyday life of large numbers, very probably of the majority, of people in modern societies, who seem to manage to get along without it quite well. Thus, those to whom the supernatural is still, or again, a meaningful reality find themselves in the status of a minority, more precisely a 'cognitive minority' – a very important consequence with very far-reaching implications. More specifically, a cognitive minority is a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. In this sense the whole message of Christianity is based on the conviction that God exists. He has revealed himself in Christ. His nature is love. He has created us in his image and invited us to love ourselves and others as he loved himself and us. Faith sustains the Christian in this pursuit as a whole new dimension of sensitivity allows him to realise a little more the image of God in him as he strives to imitate the life of Jesus.

Biblical Perspective of Sin

With this new emphasis we are not minimizing the biblical and traditional teaching on sin. I firmly believe that this will actually enhance and even bolster it. What we are doing is simply putting the traditional doctrine on sin in what we hope to be more personal terms which are relevant to our day and age.

Number 13 of the *Pastoral Constitution on 'The Church in The Modern World'* (*Gaudium et Spes*) gives a summary on the notion of sin which sets the mood for the biblical consideration of sin. It says in part: "Although set by God in a state of holiness, man, enticed by the evil one, abused his freedom at the very start of history. He lifted himself up against God, and sought to attain his goal apart from him. Although they had known God, they did not glorify him as God, but their senseless hearts were darkened, and

11. See B. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, Rome, Gregoriana, 1980, passim

12. P.L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, A Pelican Book, 1971, pp. 16–19

they served the creature rather than the creator.”⁽¹³⁾ The Vatican II document reflects St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 1:20 – 25 suggesting that although they knew God, certain people still refused to honour him as God or to thank him; instead, they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened. That is why God left them.

The traditional phrase ‘God left them’ or ‘God abandoned them’ means that religious error, if blameworthy, results in moral and social ills. Sin produces its own consequences and its own punishment. To know there is one, personal God means to know that one must pray to him and adore him. Yet often, man either sets himself up as the absolute measure of all things, or debases himself to the point of despair.

Ezekiel refers in an allegorical form to the history of the sinfulness of Jerusalem and Samaria: “For the Lord Jahweh says this: I now hand you over to those you hate, to those in whom you have lost interest. They will treat you with hatred, they will rob you of the fruit of your labours and leave you completely naked. And thus your shameful whoring will be exposed. Your debauchery and your whorings are the cause of these afflictions, since by playing the whore with the nations you have defiled yourself with their idols.” (Ez. 23:28 – 29). Speaking of God’s forbearance with Egypt the Book of Wisdom refers to the Egyptians’ wayward attitudes: “As their foolish and wicked notions led them astray into worshipping mindless reptiles and contemptible beasts you sent hordes of mindless creatures, to punish them and teach them that the instruments of sin are instruments of punishment.” On his part, St. Paul, although he judges and condemns pagan society, does not condemn individuals (whose intentions God alone must judge): “God, through Jesus Christ, judges the secrets of mankind.” (Rm. 2:16). St. Paul reaffirms this in 1 Cor 4:5 “There must be no passing of premature judgement. Leave that until the Lord comes: he will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of men’s hearts. Then will be the time for each one to have whatever praise he deserves, from God.” St. Paul concludes in the following manner in Rm. 1:24 – 25: “That is why God left them to their filthy enjoyments, and the practices with which they dishonour their own bodies, since they have given up divine truth for a lie and have worshipped and served creatures instead of the creator.”

Thus in this light sin is a refusal to know and to adore God. Hence the person who is striving for holiness is primarily concerned with seeking to know God and adore him in so far as worship is an essential part of what human life means. So much so in fact that everyone prays, perhaps all the time, without realizing it.⁽¹⁴⁾ The ability to pray is uniquely human. Man is the only being who prays. He is an eminently prayerful being. Whatever we

13. Pastoral Constitution on ‘The Church in The Modern World’ (Gaudium et Spes), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, (W.M. Abbott, ed.), New York, Angelus, 1966, p. 211, p. 13.

14. Thomas Hora, *Existential Metaphyschiatry*, New York, The Seabury Press, 1977, p. 18

cherish therefore, trust in or cling to is really our God. Hence in this existential and meaningful sense we ought to constantly inquire what we are praying to or worshipping and how? Prayer and transcendence appear to be the two most significant aspects of being human. Transcendence is the ability of man to be aware of what he is thinking. Reverence for God, the cherishing of God, is the beginning of wisdom. And the beginning of wisdom for the one who is striving to acknowledge his sinfulness as he seeks holiness is to worship the right God.

Sin as "Alienation"

In this context the deepest need and desire of the human heart is the need to love and be loved by God.⁽¹⁵⁾ Man's deepest longing, in the context of Divine Reality, would be to co-operate with God the Creator whereby alone he would be complete.⁽¹⁶⁾ In conscious awareness of absolute attachment to God lies our real freedom of mind, heart and soul. But "what Revelation makes known to us is confirmed", says the Vatican II document on 'The Church in the Modern World', "by our own experience. For when man looks into his own heart he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his source, man has also upset the relationship which should link him to his last end; and at the same time he has broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and other men and all creatures." The document continues to assert that: "Man therefore is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness. Man finds that he is unable of himself to overcome the assault of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though bound by chains. But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out the 'prince of this world'"⁽¹⁷⁾

This divisiveness highlights modern man's "alienation". In fact, the alienation of contemporary man from other persons (including God), and from himself is one of the dominant themes not only of modern existentialist philosophy but also of contemporary literature and theological writing.⁽¹⁸⁾ The notion of alienation involves the feeling of apartness and strangeness. St. Paul in fact, speaks of sin in Col. 1:21-22, as an estrangement from God: "When you were estranged from God, your minds alienated from him by a life of sin, he used Christ's natural body to win you

15. B.J. Tyrrell, *Christotherapy (Healing Through Enlightenment)*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975, p. 37

16. Th. Hora, op. cit. pp. 77-78

17. Gaudium et Spes, in op. cit. p. 211, n. 13

18. Cf. B. Haring, *Sin in the Secular Age*, England, St. Paul Publications, 1974, p. 59

back through his death, so that he would bring you into his presence holy, pure and blameless.”

Furthermore alienation means the absence of warm or friendly relationship with people. In the light of existentialist philosophy it entails a separation of the individual from the real self because of a preoccupation with abstractions and the necessity for conformity to the wishes of others and the dictates of social institutions. As a term in social psychology and in clinical psychotherapy, alienation indicates states of mind that cause conflict, such as self-alienation or estrangement from one's self, loss of a sense of identity, a feeling of depersonalization. The cause of alienation in clinical psychoanalysis is traced back to some environmental pressure as are for example excessive demands of social or performance standards.⁽¹⁹⁾ Hegel originated the notion of *Entfremdung*, used to denote the distance between mind and reality.

By a psychological process, a person's attitudes towards others (and may I add towards God) become his attitudes towards himself. Alienation from others leads sooner or later to self-alienation. As a result of manipulation of others for purposes of increasing wealth and personal power, for instance, a person's sense of security and confidence are poisoned. One's own self becomes as much an object of manipulation to him as other persons may become. In the meantime some find positive substitutes for alienation, for example, in social service or political activities. Some may respond to alienation by withdrawing from society as a whole. This sometimes may involve deep despair, apathy, or defeat without any meaningful alternative commitment to relieve their feelings of alienation. Others may find only a blind, angry, disorganized, self-defeating striking back. Not infrequently, alienation becomes a state of fragmented identity.

However, when we have the humility and willingness to part with our cherished opinions and possessions we are open to learning, progress and growth. We have to be willing at any given time to ask: Is what I am attached to mentally really valid? Oftentimes our essential tendency to cling to something causes us to suffer; whether or not you call this tendency a dependency or attachment, possessiveness, fear, anxiety or wilfulness for that matter. All of us would like to find a footing in life. But reality and existence is based on what really is.⁽²⁰⁾ People discontented with their lives often seek solutions. All of us would like to be happy and fulfil our lives. The pearl of great price is for us to realize that what is really real is the perfect life, namely the perfect good of God which already is. We only have to discern it, without having to change or cure anyone. A person's decisive moral and religious choice lies in whether or not he wants to know God

19. H.J. Eysenck, W. Arnold, R. Meili (eds), *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Volume One, London, Search Press, 1972, p. 44

20. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 154

more and more, and honour him who is the origin, centre and goal of our life. A man who does not consider God worthy of being recognized or adored, inevitably chooses chaos of values. His whole life and personal relationships are disturbed by this fundamental alienation.

Hence we need to see sin in God's context. As such, the first thing we know of man is not that of man as a sinner but that he is a man of God, namely a man called to be with God. By God's gift and by God's word man is called to be freely in faithful love and in Christ, one with God, one with others and one with himself. These are basically the three dimensions of man's recovery of his own unity and wholeness. In this sense God becomes the centre of our life.

The Sin of Pride and Idolatry

On the other hand however, the sin of pride is to make oneself and one's dignity the all-important value of life.⁽²¹⁾ Ultimately it is a refusal to acknowledge one's dependence on God or to obey Him. It is vanity and pride when a person relies on the praise and admiration of others to maintain the feeling of his significance. This means adhering to the idea of one's own importance, regardless of protest from within oneself or from outside. This is a defensive quality in man and an unwillingness to trust and to be open. This is an attitude which engenders false or inadequate ideas of God. It is false worship and a substitute for worshipping the unseen God.

This is the idolatry of an idea of oneself, as it is so well depicted in psalm 35: "Sin speaks to the sinner in the depths of his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. He so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt. In his mouth are mischief and deceit. All wisdom is gone." As a person relies on the idea of his own importance to maintain his self-esteem, he will invariably suffer from feelings of insecurity because any threat of his importance (which is inescapable) is extremely disturbing. The vain man depends on the praise or the liking of other people to maintain his self-esteem, instead of relying on God working within the forces of self-esteem and inner security.

The idol is a method of coping with the fears alternative to trusting in God. One worships created things instead of the Creator. Basically this is the idol of power, whereby one views others only as helps or hindrances to his power, instead of treating others as human beings equally created in the image and likeness of God. This leads to isolation and consequently to alienation from self, others and God, which becomes to a certain extent hell on earth. This is the self-inflicted punishment of pride of a pompous and self-conscious existence, unaware of the barrier it creates to natural and friendly relations with others. The ego's struggle to control repression and

21. Christopher Bryant, *Depth Psychology and Religious Belief*, England, Mirfield Publications, 1977, p. 32

idolatry as one directs his drives and desires to specifically human ends is man's refusal to worship God.

Psalm 8 helps us ask the right questions about man's real identity in verses 5–8: "... what is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and splendour, made him lord over the work of your hands, set all things under his feet." Thus man, frail yet made in the likeness of God, on the border between the spiritual and material worlds, rules the natural creation. In the meantime one must not play down man's fall, in the sense that he is not only created, but he is also not now as he ought to be. And insofar that he does not fulfil the image of God, man falls short of the glory of God.

However, the world we live in is a sea of mental garbage. And it is very easy to pick up all sorts of rubbish thoughts about ourselves and others.⁽²²⁾ We pick and choose things in order to express ourselves or to confirm ourselves. We are always trying to say "I am" whether it is with perfume or a necktie, fine clothes, through bragging or inferiority complexes. But while the world offers us rubbish thoughts with which to make self-confirmatory statements, the most precise self-confirmatory statement that we can ever make is the following: 'God is the only I am; I am because God is.' It is in this same sense that Jesus asserts: "I and my Father are one."

Sin In The Light Of The Freedom of the Children of God

Perceiving ourselves in this light, we realise that each and every one of us is a child of God; a perfect manifestation of God's self-revealing presence; unique individuality endowed with all the good, the intelligence, the love which God is. Once we understand about ourselves, this existentially valid self-confirmatory idea, we can behold others in the same perspective. Through the mercy of the Father, as believers we are enabled in a mysterious but real fashion to put on the mind of Christ and to have as our own the self-image which was also in Christ Jesus. But above all Christ gives us the "power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12) and to be transformed into his glorious image. Each one of us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is called to be a son or daughter through the Son in an inchoate fashion in this life and perfectly in the life to come.

It is of the utmost importance for the Christian who longs to enjoy the freedom of a child in his/her relationship with God, to acknowledge Christ as he who is anointed and filled by the Holy Spirit and the One in whom we are children of God by his Spirit. Our faith seeks to understand Christ as our Way to Truth and Life. Our Christian faith becomes a grateful acceptance of Christ Jesus as our Father's free gift to us.⁽²³⁾ As free gift of

22. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 182

23. Cf. Josef Fuchs, S.J., *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1983, pp. 20–21

the Father, Christ's own freedom is directed towards our freedom. Christ ultimately frees us from the bondage of sin in its different forms and aspects. Sin – personal sin and the sin of the world and in the world (original sin) – means in this context, a situation where a person or mankind refuses in freedom, to be free for God, for true love and for fullness of truth.

St. Paul states in his letter to the Galatians: "When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free" (Gal. 5:1). He writes this in view of Christian liberty. Human beings must choose either Christ or the Law as author of liberation from the bondage of their sinful condition. Choosing Christ means having faith in him and accepting his message in the sense of Galatians 3:23 – 29: "Before faith came, we were allowed no freedom by the Law; we were being looked after till we could be justified by faith. Now that that time has come we are no longer under that guardian, and you are, all of you, *sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. All baptized in Christ, you have clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Merely by *belonging to Christ* you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised." Faith and baptism are not being contrasted here, but they are shown as one involving the other. Furthermore it is indicated that all those who believe in him are all of Christ Jesus. St. Paul also stresses this liberation of Christ in so far as it redeems man from the bondage of selfishness and for a self-giving love.

St. John as well, makes this liberation in Christ the focus of profound reflection in his theology. John, however, stresses more the bondage of falsehood and liberation in and for truth. To all those who freely receive him and open themselves to his transforming power and healing light, Christ gives "power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12) and to be transformed into his glorious image. By the Spirit we can be born anew to a Christlike life; a life as sons and daughters of God, as it is affirmed in John 3:3 – 7: "Jesus answered" (in his conversation with Nicodemus), "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said, "How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above."

Hence the true and perfect freedom is that of the Son of God. Everything is given by the Father. The freedom of the Son is the expression of his being one with the Father: "The Father and I are one." Jesus shares everything with the Father who is infinite freedom for love. The richest form of healing to the Christian in fact, is when he "dares" to call the Father "Abba" and who makes the Father the vital centre of his consciousness, just as the Father was and forever is the centre of the

consciousness of Jesus the Christ.⁽²⁴⁾ But it is at this point perhaps that we need to gather our thoughts and take a look at biblical anthropology.

Biblical Anthropology

There are two great starting points for the development of biblical anthropology. The first goes back to the beginning and develops the doctrine of man along the line of progression from creation. The second starting point begins with the revelation of man at his best, which begins with the person of Christ, the perfect man.⁽²⁵⁾

The creation-centred model is summed up in the word *image*. Genesis, in 1:26–27, presents the most positive and uplifting anthropological insight of Scripture in the assertion that God has created man in his own image and likeness. In this manner man is both a representation and a representative of God. In this approach man is not truly self-referent and to understand man's nature fully we should refer to the original, namely, to that which is represented in man. Thus man is made from the dust of the earth in the image of God. However, he has the likeness of God but is not God himself. Meanwhile man has a purpose and a task to fulfil that are set in the context of a community, no matter how basic.⁽²⁶⁾ God did not create man a solitary being. "Male and female he created them." The partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons. This already points to the fact that in his innermost nature man is a social being; and that "if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts", in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*.⁽²⁷⁾ It is also very affirming for man to recall what Genesis says, namely, that God saw "all the things that he had made, and they were very good" (Gen. 1:31).

The second approach centres on the Incarnation, the revelation of Christ. Thus, a truly biblical anthropology shows man not only as he is, but also as he may be. In other words man, in Christ, is truly man. In the model of Christ we have the revelation of the glory of God and at the same time the revelation of the glory of man. Hence we are what we are created to be, not what we make ourselves to be. It is initially very much the quality of his self-perception that determines a person's state of health and well-being. And if we accept in faith that 'God is love' as He is defined by St. John in his First Letter (verse 4:8), then, love becomes the fundamental and inborn vocation of every human being, created in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, our self-image will improve tremendously if we reflect on the words of St. Paul addressed to the Ephesians (2:8–10): "We are God's

24. B.J. Tyrrell, *op. cit.* p. 60

25. E. David Cook, *Man in Society*, in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, (D.F. Wright ed.) Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1978, pp. 134–141

26. See Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them*, Great Britain, DLT, 1985, p. 49

27. *Gaudium et Spes*, in *op. cit.* p. 211, n. 12

work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live.”

A New Kind of Existence

At any rate, sin brought man to a lower state, forcing him away from the completeness that is his to attain. Both the high calling to holiness and the deep misery which men experience find their final explanation in the light of revelation. We are called under the dynamic force of the Gospel to an ongoing conversion and watchfulness for the presence of God in the ever-new opportunities to serve others.

Sin is all that opposes the joy and message of the paschal mystery. In contrast the authentic Christian aims for wholehearted holiness. A Christian in fact, is a person for whom Christ is the ultimate decisive authority in such questions as use of force, terror, peace, justice, love as well as meaning of life, dying and death, personal guilt, suffering and personal destiny.⁽²⁸⁾ Our salvation consists mainly in our freedom from sin and our participation in a new life, namely, Christ’s divine life communicated to us. This means a new and true moral goodness in Christ. Furthermore, if Jesus Christ is both truly God-in-man and the only proper Man, then in him, God opened to men the possibility of a new kind of personal existence. Particularly Jesus’ humanity is important to us because it is potentially what all men have in their nature to become. The life of Jesus opens up for us a completely new mode of human life. His utter self-offering love to man and obedience to God are a unique example that he sets before us. Hence to become like Jesus is to hope that the expression of God in Jesus becomes manifest also in us who follow him in trust. This is a process whereby our humanity is re-formed into a way of existence which originates in God’s non-temporal mode of existence. Our basis of hope in Christ is therefore our confidence that God will continue this process and bring his purpose to fruition, not only beyond the limits of our finite lives, but beyond even the disappearance of the part of the material cosmos, the Earth, in which He has been at work to achieve His ends.

Obviously the Christian life is something much more noble than just avoiding mortal sin at all costs. Nor is Christian life led in the fear of punishment; but rather one flowing from the love of and the enthusiasm for the ideal of conformity to Christ in life and action. According to St. Thomas (See *Summa Theologica* I, II, 6, prol.), sin is that which impedes or even stifles completely growth in Godlikeness and Christlikeness. Sin, attests Aquinas, brings with it its own punishment, which consists precisely in a real diminution of the human being — a real deformation of God’s image in

28. Hans Kung in his book *On Being a Christian*, London, Collins, 1977, suggests on page 125 that: “all those can be called Christians for whom in life and death Jesus Christ is ultimately decisive.”

us.⁽²⁹⁾ Sin becomes something barring our entry into the Kingdom of God, and rendering impossible that sharing in God's own life which has its culmination in the vision of heaven to which all men are called, and to which all men, leading their daily lives according to the will of God and the teaching and example of Christ, are invited to grow.

Moral and Emotional Growth

Constant transformation of our self-image is as natural and essential to the believer as is the growth of the self. This transformation in self-image involves a change on both the conceptual and the feeling level. Thus growth in the awareness of one's sinfulness and the need for one's personal sanctification demands morally mature reasons, as well as emotional maturity. And if we want to understand more fully the notion of sin as a negation of the all-embracing virtue of holiness, we need to realise that an essential facet of moral development is emotional growth.

Hence the first task of the authentic Christian is to educate his feelings. To the individual who feels, what is felt is a reflection of how he is appraising the world and himself, how he is assessing particular situations, and what kinds of behaviour are from time to time being activated within him.⁽³⁰⁾ A person who has insight into his feelings can report for instance, that he feels angry with his wife, or that he is still grieving for his mother, or that he is jealous of another person. If he has no insight we may be able, by noticing how he behaves and what he says, to infer what behavioural systems are currently activated within him to communicate to him our inferences. In summary, the language of feeling is an indispensable means for talking about ways in which a situation is appraised. A judgement that something is good may be deemed correct, but is only mature if such a judgement is formed by a mature reasoning process that gradually leads to emotional maturity in the individual. The aim of moral education is moral maturity, but since moral maturity requires development, one should know about the ways that are able to facilitate this developmental process.

The status of a 'cognitive minority' (such as that of committed Christians) is invariably an uncomfortable one – not necessarily because the majority is repressive or intolerant, but simply because it refuses to accept the minority's definitions of reality as 'knowledge'.⁽³¹⁾ The plausibility of a cognitive structure that is not socially shared, that is challenged by our fellow men, is endangered, not just in our dealings with others, but much

29. C. Bianco deals with various aspects of sin in the theology of Aquinas, in his doctoral dissertation for the Gregorian University, entitled *Sin and Providence in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. See especially pp. 48 – 55 of his Extract published in 1968, where he deals specifically with sin and its own punishment.

30. B. Lonergan S.J., *Method in Theology*, London, DLT, 1972, pp. 30 – 34

31. P.L. Berger, *op. cit.* p. 19

more importantly in our own minds. And unless one can insulate himself against the massive challenge to his previously taken-for-granted reality, he will soon begin to doubt his challenged 'knowledge'. Meanwhile there are different ways of coping with doubt and individuals vary in their ability to resist social pressure. For instance one could either try to keep his truths to himself, or he could seek to gain converts in order to feel more secure in his convictions. He could also perhaps seek for some sort of compromise and accommodation. This does not exclude that he could choose a destructive way of dealing with this type of stress and denigrate those who may hold different opinions than his. What could easily happen, at any rate, is the progressive disintegration of the acceptability of the challenged 'knowledge' in the consciousness of the one holding it, unless due moral development takes place.

There are good reasons for stating that on a certain level the Christian, like everyone else, has to learn the content of morality almost as he has to learn to read and write, in the sense that he is subject to certain laws of psychological development in the area of moral reasoning.⁽³²⁾ In fact the work of prominent developmental psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget on moral development showed that moral reasoning has qualitatively different stages of development, and that not many people reach the higher stages. Ideally all moral development must end up in personal integration. These two scientists have sketched a very comprehensive picture of individual moral development. They have developed theories which indicate what stages an individual goes through in achieving moral maturity. Even though we may be convinced that some actions are right and wrong in general, when we get down to particular circumstances, we often find that we are no longer so certain about the path to be followed. Anyone who experienced a real moral dilemma, real moral anguish, is aware that situations are not neatly cut and dried. It is also possible that someone can do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Hence the reason for the moral judgement should always be taken into consideration.

Thus the meaning and value of life consists in one's moral attitudes. When I say I am a moral being I am understanding myself as a responsible and accountable being and therefore obligated or bound morally and to some extent also psychologically. First of all to be human is to be responsible for oneself. This in some sense means to be obligated. It is a question of attachment; while we understand ourselves as beings who are capable of being free from trivial attachments we consider ourselves as obligated to God in the sense of a conscious awareness of a total attachment to Him as a way to our real freedom of heart, mind and soul.

Christian morality is ultimately a conversion to God. In this context

32. R. Duska and M. Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, New York, Gill and Macmillan, 1978, pp. 80–99. See also B. Kiely, op. cit. pp. 46–62

conversion is a change in the whole person.³³ It means to change the whole thrust of one's life. Conversion in relation to sin means recapitulating and transforming the basic orientation of a person who has been so against God that he cannot come back to God by himself. It is the total person changing himself. Once a sinner, the person is now committing himself totally to the love of God, giving himself as a person to the Father. This ultimately means falling in with God's will in one's life as one starts to respond to the call of personal sanctification. However, real conversion cannot take place in the person without the help of the grace of Jesus Christ. The grace of Christ makes the sinner once more able and free to change himself, to overcome his resistance against the Father. As he converts the sinner, Christ enables him to change the orientation of his whole person and his whole will in relation to God and to Christ. A convert in this sense is, by the grace of Christ, a spiritual man in the Pauline sense, whereby every person is either a spiritual man or a carnal man. There is no middle ground. It is in the human act in which our person as a whole is engaged that we actualize ourselves fully as spiritual men or sinful men.

Christ is the supreme example of what it means to live humanly. He first established his identity as a separate Divine person and asserted the total affirmation of his goodness before he let his human availability be known. He announced his relationship of absolute oneness with God: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). He indicated his singlemindedness and absorption with God's kingdom: "I must be busy with my Father's affairs." And then Jesus spoke of his possession of fulness and loving availability: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." It was only later that his death became the stage of diminishment, of letting go, of renunciation and self-sacrifice out of love. Jesus Christ is above all the greatest manifestation of God's presence and saving activity among us.

Psycho-Theological Reflection

When Scripture speaks of sin, the main context is always the call to conversion, whether from a total or partial alienation. There is not the slightest indication in the Bible that there is a quantitative measurement to define the borderline between mortal and venial sin.³⁴ Thomas Aquinas states in his *Summa Theologiae* (I – II, 88, 1) that it is only mortal sin that which truly deserves the name "sin". Other events or realities we may call sin deserve that name only in an analogous sense.

Today we know more about human imperfection and about developmental psychology. Even if God's will must be accepted in its totality, not every human act and action expresses the person in his totality.

33. Karl Rahner, Conversion, in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, edited by Walter E. Conn, New York, Alba House, 1978, pp. 204 – 206

34. B. Haring, *Sin In The Secular Age*, op. cit. p. 159

There is no possibility whatsoever of giving a general quantitative and exact determination of where mortal sin begins and venial sin ends, because of the great diversity of psychological endowment and moral and religious giftedness of persons, and the great diversity of environment. Thus we must look not only to the objective dimension but also to the subjective dimensions and needs, fears and pressures. The task is for everyone to make a responsible human assessment of what things are seriously wrong in this particular context and situation; what things are trivially wrong and disordered. There is no one open and shut answer.

In the hierarchy of what is important for us, what comes first is our fundamental stance or outlook on life. Then come fundamental options. And thirdly come those actions, those human acts, by which we express or fail to express our inner personhood.

The Fundamental Option

The fundamental option, for the most part is not a sudden event, but is prepared for by a long maturation that takes place in the subconscious. The option is not necessarily expressed in an explicit act or with a distinct and conscious act, but is incarnate in a particular choice. The fundamental option towards God does not consist merely in a spontaneous religious inclination, but is a dedication of the person, and therefore it is a supremely active attitude, the most complete actuation of personal liberty. A true act of love of friendship towards God cannot be anything but a fundamental option, which of its nature cannot be restricted to one single act. It includes necessarily a pledge of dedication to the will of God with all one's being and for the whole of life. To love God above all things does not merely mean that God becomes the last end of one act but that the ordering of oneself to God as to one's last end takes possession of the whole person, giving form to his whole life.

Since the fundamental option is a commitment for the whole of life, its influence is not limited to that instant in which the act is made. The person who has opted for God, has set up a norm for himself and the acceptance of this norm has become the vital form of his moral personality, the determining pole for the values of his affective world. If the fundamental option for God did not exercise a further influence over the affective life, this would indicate either that it was not properly made in the first place, or that it has already been implicitly revoked.

Mortal Sin

In view of the concept of fundamental option, mortal sin, as an act, is nothing else than a synonym for fundamental option. In this sense a mortal sin is that act by which we substantially reject God and assume instead a posture apart from and in alienation from God. Mortal sin is the moment in

which we deny the God who calls us, through and in, creation, and thus paradoxically, deny our own deepest selves. All persons have the same basic physiological and psychological needs. But the two most basic psychological needs that Christian morality ought to be concerned with are: the need to love and be loved and the need to feel that we are worthwhile to ourselves and to others. For the authentic Christian however, the deepest need and desire of the human heart is the need to love and be loved by God. Furthermore, as Christians, we live by loving faith in the same sense expressed by St. Paul: "Faith in the Son of God who loved me and sacrificed himself for my sake" (Gal: 2:20).

Mortal sin then, is the act of sin by which we take upon ourselves the state of sin. But if mortal sin is nothing else than a negative fundamental option, it follows that it is an act of self-disposition occurring through and in concrete particular categorical acts. What is being said here is that real sin is not found in external action but in the inner disposition of the heart. Not what is on the outside of a man that makes him unclean, but what is inside his heart what makes him unclean, in the words of Jesus himself. Thus our real faithfulness to God is our new heart and new mind that God pours into us – the mind and heart of his own Son. In St. Paul's definition sin is that which makes us fall short of the glory of God. The Powers that affect me and make me tend to fall short of such glory and sin, is those decisions which I ratify, that disorder, that alienation, those actions which I approve or, that tendency in me to be shut in myself, shutting others and God out.

In view of our identification of mortal sin with fundamental option, sin is a relatively rare phenomenon. Mortal sin is not a thing that you do just in passing, almost by chance, without having your heart in it. Objectively there must be serious matter, weighty matter, something of significance and substantially important – a direct rejection of the love of God or direct rejection (e.g. hate) of my neighbour. Those extreme stances would be quite rare; but possible. In any case the Church is asking us to reduce the facile multiplication of mortal sins.

Venial Sin

In contrast with the preaching of the Apostles and the teaching of the first centuries of Christianity, there seems to have existed a real obsession in the minds of moralists and of many scrupulous people to determine accurately the borderline between mortal and venial sin. This was perhaps the effect of a Church that strongly asserted her direct or indirect power over all events in the secular world.⁽³⁵⁾ This was also due to the impact of Jansenistic rigorism spreading in a great part of the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile for both Calvinists and Catholics, a rigoristic concept of sin produced innumerable traumas and concealed faith in God who is

35. *ibid.* p. 156

love for all. This type of rigorism upheld that the greatest part of humanity is doomed to eternal condemnation. God, (taught Calvin), who is just, punishes those predestined to eternal damnation. Such teaching gives a terrifying image of God.

Meanwhile venial sin is not to be identified with "not serious". Venial sin is purely and simply a human act which is not fully so; which does not come from the core of the human person and which does not involve a fundamental option. From the point of view of the concept of fundamental option therefore, the difference between venial and mortal sin is the degree of personal penetration and involvement in the act. In venial sin there is no deep core involvement, while in mortal sin there is. When committing a mortal sin the person deciding to do this deed, is also deciding to be this particular person, to reject God, the world and paradoxically himself; whereas in the case of venial sin this is not the case. The person committing a venial sin is choosing to do this deed while at the same time he is also more deeply choosing to be the sort of person who stands opposed to this deed. Hence in every act of venial sin there is an inner contradiction, only possible due to the effects of original sin. In the meantime the insights of modern psychology indicate to us that for a variety of reasons we do things that are seriously wrong without in fact making such a personal decision.

Towards a Psycho-Theology of Guilt

Always speaking in terms of personal fundamental orientation, just as it would be impossible for a wave to be apart from the sea, it would be equally impossible for a man to sin, to be without God, (*sine Deo*) if he would really understand his complete at-one-ment with the fundamental principle of existence. A sinner, in fact, is someone who is victim of insufficient understanding of man's complete at-one-ment with his creative principle, God. But ignorance of existential reality is the common denominator of evil, sin and guilt.⁽³⁶⁾

In order to learn something we must approach it with an open, uncluttered mind. Thus we need to look at guilt with an open mind and heart, if we want to see the meaning and understand the sense of guilt that each and every one of us so often experiences. Guilt is a human phenomenon. It is a universal human experience.⁽³⁷⁾ All of us have a tendency to feel guilty about almost everything. It is a passion rather than an affliction. We just love to feel guilty. When I feel guilty, I am actually saying "I am great", asserting that "I am". This is the self-confirmatory essence of guilt. When we feel guilty, our sense of selfhood is increased. Feeling guilty and confessing to it is a hidden form of boasting.

36. Th. Hora, op. cit. p. 103

37. Bernard J. Bush, *The Critical Eye*, in *Guilt: Issues of Emotional Living in an Age of Stress for Clergy and Religious*, Affirmation Books, Whitinsville, Massachusetts, 1980, p. 35

Real Guilt and Neurotic Guilt

Guilt could be an anxiety-provoking element in one's psyche, or it could be a growth-stimulating factor in one's personality. It is in a sense an automatic self-evaluator in every person; more of a mental process than a feeling. It is a process of judging or condemning one's behaviour, thoughts or words. Guilt is the free decision to evil, evil with regard to God and man.

Real guilt is the conscious awareness of one's free choice of a behaviour that is destructive to oneself as well as to others. The freedom required for acting out of conscience rather than automatically includes the ability to weigh alternatives, select opinions, judge what is the best course under the circumstances, and act decisively. In the last resort, the norm of moral behaviour is love. Good conscience demands that we act out of love.⁽³⁸⁾ Meanwhile, to sustain a loving outlook on life is the result of a life that is free, prayerful and principled, rather than one based on whim, impulse, sheer feelings of the moment, or overwhelming passion.

Neurotic guilt starts in childhood. The child requires security. If he is denied security, the child becomes anxious. Furthermore, the child is emotionally dependent on his parents; and if his parents mete out reward and punishment in approximately equal amounts, he is likely to become confused concerning his relationship with them. He feels insecure because their reaction to what he does is likely to be anger as much as love. An erratic pattern in the distribution of love and anger is very disturbing for the child and is liable in such a situation to learn anxiety. Such anxiety in turn, is bound to be accompanied by a feeling of guilt.

Now, while real guilt is based on a conscious and free act, neurotic guilt is influenced by an unconscious pattern of guilt which has its roots in childhood. Real guilt encourages compunction and a desire for reconciliation with a *Significant Relationship*, whereas neurotic guilt produces shame, anger, and hostility. Real guilt does not inhibit hope, love and trust because of the individual's capacity to accept compassion. On the other hand, neurotic guilt pushes the individual to despair, as (s)he is incapable of compassion or forgiveness and therefore unable to accept forgiveness or compassion from anyone. While real guilt is deliberate, neurotic guilt is compulsive.

The Quest For Truth

Neurotic guilt can only be healed by facing up to the truth of ignorance. Fortunately ignorance can be healed by becoming enlightened on the issue involved. Neurotic guilt is a form of existential ignorance – ignorance of what really is. Our task is to endeavour to relieve the suffering that we are all prone to because of ignorance. We must seek increasingly and search continuously to come into conscious union with the creative source

38. Philomena Agudo, *Guilt: Its Effect on Wholeness*, in *Guilt*: *ibid.* pp. 17 – 27. See also E. Mark Stern and Burt G. Marino, *Psycho-Theology: The Discovery of Sacredness in Humanity*, New York, Paulist Press, 1970, pp. 125 – 138

of our being. It is the purpose of our life to acquire conscious at-one-ment with God, the ultimate reality. Man cannot exist without God. Our life in him and love of him is an existential imperative under which we live. The creator can never be left out of his creation. Scripture speaks of man as the loved son of God, spiritual and perfect, even as his Father is perfect and spiritual. But ignorance of existential reality is the common denominator of evil, sin and guilt. Evil is the absence of good (*privatio boni* according to St. Augustine), in the same manner that darkness is the absence of light. Once man understands real power (the power of God), evil will lose its power and hold on him. Just as light is never really absent, the good of God is omnipresent.

However, despite the fact that we constantly clamour for fulfilment, we are somehow born in ignorance. In his priestly prayer Christ addresses the Father, asking Him to let the Son give eternal life to all those he had entrusted to him. "And", Jesus prays, "eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3). What is meant by "to know" in this context is knowledge in the biblical sense. In biblical language, 'knowledge' is not merely the conclusion of an intellectual process but the fruit of an 'experience', a personal contact, which when it matures, is love. And it is the inner eye of the heart, the eye of real wisdom, the eye of love, which can enlighten us and save us from our existential ignorance.⁽³⁹⁾ Let us not forget that love is the most human of human activities, an activity in which men and women transcend themselves and become authentic. And as believers in the transforming power in our heart and will of the memory of Jesus, we can only justify our existence by accepting in our lives the reality of the love made available to us in the self-emptying of Jesus and his cross.

In comparison with the phenomenal world which comes and goes, truth is eternal. Jesus said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away" (Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Truth validates itself existentially, even if it is seldom popular. The major effect of truth is freedom. Jesus himself tells us that truth is that which sets man free to be what he really is. Each person has to discover what he really is; and once he does that he is enlightened. If we are to know the truth, we have first to become aware of that which is not true. We do so by inquiring about the thought process underlying the particular phenomenon. Then perhaps we can proceed to understand what is what really is. Ultimate reality for man is however, that real man lives in the context of divine reality. Divine reality is the existential context of man: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Discovering the truth will help us discover and accept our real self.

Self-Acceptance

We need to feel good about the constituent parts of our personality; otherwise our possession of ourselves will be hopelessly incomplete. There

39. Cf. B.J. Tyrell, op. cit. pp. 31 - 32

are people who spend their lives trying to please others, undertaking excessive good works and fitting in with everyone else's wishes, in order to gain approval. Deep down inside such persons often is a persistent sense of self-rejection, which no amount of external approbation can alter. A person in this frame of mind would need to gradually overcome the feeling of untouchability and be led to feel acceptable and ultimately lovable.

We often develop guilt feelings to help us maintain our idealized self-image intact. It is psychologically important to keep one's self-image to help provide a sense of personal continuity. Most of us like to think of ourselves as fairly decent individuals, and any inappropriate behaviour on our part attacks that self-image. When I have guilt feelings, I am on the one hand the culprit; on the other hand, I am the condemning judge who is absolutely against those acts. The endangered self-image is protected as the actions of the culprit are judged. The inferior culprit is condemned by the superior judge, both being the same person.

It is the task of the authentic Christian continually to strive to become like Jesus who perceived himself as a perfect manifestation of God's self-revealing presence, unique individuality endowed with all the good, the intelligence, and the love which God is: "I can of my own self do nothing" (John 14:10). "But the Father who dwells in me, he does the works" (John 14:10). Jesus sets us an example of conscious union with God: "I and the Father are one". We can come to such union by knowing how not to hold to, or attach ourselves to ideas, thoughts, or anything not beneficial that comes into our consciousness. The life of those who sincerely seek this conscious union with God becomes more and more harmonious, as they follow the advice of the Psalmist: "Be still and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth." (Ps. 46). He who loves God, prefers knowledge of him to all things made by him, and by desire ceaselessly devotes himself to it. This is nothing short of total attachment to God.

All of us want to hold on to something meaningful which would give us the impression of having a firm footing and grounding on reality. But the tendency to form attachments creates insecurity in man. And as long as we only seek to feel good throughout our lives, we are not interested in being freed from our misplaced attachments and be healed. "You shall know the truth", says Jesus, "and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The truth of which Jesus speaks can heal depressions, liberate from psychological enslavement, as well as bring the joy of freedom into life. We are healed and become sound only when we attach ourselves to that which can give real meaning and value to our lives. He who holds God dear loves the glory of his creator. It is the mark of the soul sensitive to the love of God ever to seek the glory of God in the fulfilment of every commandment, and to delight in its own abasement, since to God alone, on account of his greatness, belongs glory, as is so well asserted in the Book of Revelation: "You O Lord, are the One, who was and who is, the just one" (Rev. 16:5).

Attainment of such self-perception in imitation of Jesus leads us to true humility which is not only the virtue of a sense of reality but also the antithesis of pride and vanity. True humility seeks with the minimum of

psychological defences, to deny not one iota of our worth but neither to add one hair's breadth of anything that does not exist.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Thus by having a constant positive image of ourselves we foster our capacity to grow in the image of God until the end of our days and beyond in eternity. This reminds us of Christ's immense claim of his fulness of awareness and being: "Before Abraham ever was I am" (John 8:58). This means we have to learn to be unafraid of the repercussions of self-acceptance.

The Experience of Forgiveness

We need to face up to our total being and to the claim on us by others. We have to learn to respond creatively to pressure from outside and within us, as we respond to God's summons to us to grow to our full stature. We need to stop relying for security on vain ideas or inane objects and start putting our trust in God, who is present to us in every influence from outside and from within. We ought to seek to acquire a change of attitude and openness to the spirit of Jesus who reassures us in such comforting words: "My own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you." Jesus can offer us this kind of peace because he is at one with the Father. Furthermore, this peace promotes in us only soundness of body but more important still, perfect happiness and the deliverance which Jesus as Messiah brings. Ultimately it will also lead us to the most self-confirmatory statement that we can ever make concerning ourselves: 'God is the only I am; I am because God is.'

Hence we require to change the attitude of the ego, particularly the habit of defensiveness, and foster a readiness in us to experience forgiveness. If God can go that far in tolerating men as they are, then a man should be able to tolerate himself. We need to learn through the burden of our own cross to experience the peace of those who accept themselves because they believe God has accepted them. We need to accept the totality of ourselves, including the bad, the seemingly discreditable side of ourselves. Besides, we need to stop being afraid, because it is the healing work in the spirit of fellowship, of mutual acceptance, that unites.

Freedom from Fear and Guilt

One of the main signs of independence and self-esteem is the gradual loss of fear and guilt. Independence and freedom, along with possession of self and self-esteem are essential ingredients for the experience of forgiveness and self-acceptance. They promote in us freedom from fear and from a neurotic sense of guilt.

At any rate, we are often afraid that others whoever they may be, may destroy us, mutilate us, drop us.⁽⁴¹⁾ It is interesting to notice that the only fear an infant has is the fear of falling. Based on the innate sense in man for

40. Jack Dominian, *Cycles of Affirmation: Psychological Essays in Christian Living*, Great Britain, DLT, 1975, p. 23

41. Andrew M. Greeley, *The Friendship Game*, Image Book, Doubleday, 1971, p. 26

self-preservation, the fear of falling is a primary human fear; and as such is neurological. With the passage of time however, this neurological human factor becomes overlaid with psychological fears. Consequently man tends to refuse to trust himself to his fellowmen because he may fear that once he leaves himself open to others, the others will kill him, either physically or emotionally. Fear, suspicion, distrust, anger well up within the personality of each one of us and we frequently feel that we must either kill or be killed.

However, when we have independence and freedom, we are able to act without fear and move trustingly towards others; and these negative feelings will disappear, as we learn to be truly sorry only when we do not love enough. Little by little our conscience becomes conformed more to that of Christ, for whom love was the only criterion of human and divine integrity. It is Christ's absolute certainty of not being alone and of being one with the Father, as is disclosed in St. John's Gospel, that introduces us to this central aspect in Christ's life, where self-esteem was complete and love the only motivating energy. Christ was so totally available because his love of himself was also complete. There was no thing and no one he had to avoid, except what was altogether incompatible with his nature, namely sin, or the refusal of love.

The Primacy of Charity

Charity enjoys a certain primacy in God's revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments. The two great commandments (love of God and love of neighbour – Matthew 22:34–40 – were explicitly taken by Christ from the Old Testament – Deut. 6:5; Lev. 18:18). In Christ's teaching they were expressly joined together, given a new extension and depth.⁽⁴²⁾ The theological reflection made in John's First Epistle underlines the implications of the new commandment as he insists on love of the neighbour as the ultimate criterion of love of God. "Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen" (1 John 4:20–21). St. Paul further says that love of neighbour is the bond of perfection and is the fulfilment of the Law. In the last resort all that matters is to find God and surrender everything to Him. It is a question of 'falling in love' with God. But loving God does not mean mere attachment of clinging to him or simply loving Him as a good that we long to have for ourselves. To love God is to participate in the divine agape or charity, whereby we desire the glory of God in himself and its spreading abroad to others. However, in the other-centred approach to Christian morality, the best way you can see God operating in you is to observe in you the source of his love when you love your neighbour.

Love is the fundamental act which actualizes the human reality of a human being. It is the fundamental act of his life. Thus when a human

42. Josef Fuchs, S.J., *op. cit.* pp. 28–31

being adopts an attitude of love towards his fellow-men, this very same fundamental act of his life, through the universal divinizing saving will of God, is at the same time implicitly and tacitly but really, an act of charity of the love of God. Meanwhile we need to understand the function of prayer as a way of increasing our ability to love. Thus we realize the importance of love as an eminently integrative value. Through a prayerful attitude and ceaseless prayer, we gradually become aware that it is love of God expressed in love of neighbour which can ultimately integrate the Christian person, and give him a sense of wholeness and wholesomeness. In order to be healthy we must always orient ourselves in the direction of being optimally and maximally loving. Just as it is not possible for us to live without prayer, it is really not possible to remain healthy without love. Our aim is to cultivate a consciousness which is capable of loving in order to be a beneficial presence in the world.⁽⁴³⁾ This becomes existential worship of God which will render us to be a centre of loving in the world. This is a form of prayer which is beyond words and thoughts. Being a beneficial presence or becoming a centre of loving in the world is fostered by cherishing and consciously manifesting as well as expressing spiritual values, such as love, honesty, humility, joy, generosity, assurance, freedom, harmony and health.

In view of the above outlook, sin is deliberately choosing to remain selfish and closed in oneself refusing to open oneself up in response to others and to God. It is remaining infantile and morally underdeveloped so to speak. In this respect, virtue and restraint are considered as necessary steps to personal development and manhood. Obviously this is very much a question of motivation.

Inspired Living

One of many human tendencies is to mistake excitement for vitality. Man has a taste for excitement. We do not want to be dead. All of us want to be alive. There is a universal fear of death, which often expresses itself in a fear of peace and quiet seeking more noise, excitement and external stimulation. We try to feel alive, forgetting that excitement is counterfeit happiness.⁽⁴⁴⁾ But in order to live life fully one must seek to understand what real life is. One may think that one is dead unless life is exciting. In any case it is inspired living what real life is all about, namely, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life", as Jesus told the Samaritan woman in his conversation with her as she came to draw water from Jacob's well. The well of living water that Jesus is speaking about is inspired living in the form of an inner flow of intelligent, creative and loving ideas. This is a discovery

43. Jack Dominian, *Growth in the Capacity to Love*, A Marist Chapel Reprint, Sydney, 1981, p. 9

44. Th. Hora, op. cit. pp. 118-123

of God described as the mysterious source of wisdom, energy, power, love and creativity that flow continually into consciousness seeking expression in wholesome and harmonious living.

Jesus teaches us how to establish contact with this source of inspired living. He teaches us to discover something better in place of what we may mistakenly consider of vital importance. Jesus points to us the method of establishing, maintaining and increasing contact with God, our wholesome source of harmonious living. This method consists of prayer and meditation, as well as the right understanding of the difference between a life of excitement and inspired living.

Concluding Reflections

In recent times much more account is being taken of the fact that the knowledge of truth requires a complex of a delicate and psychological environment. In addition, no matter how convinced one is of the truth of a doctrine, one ought to appreciate more the fact that others may not necessarily perceive it as such. This, of course, is by no means an advocacy of a relativism of truth. Rather, the suggestion is being made that not truth itself but the knowledge and perception of truth is instead relative. Moreover, despite the fact that society is becoming more and more aware of the necessity to integrate all the manifestations of truth, there appears to exist in the modern world a real fragmentation of truth itself. Hence today one could in no way lay a claim to possess the whole truth without showing concern for these fragments of truth.

In view of this it is not surprising that a profound theological crisis exists today. Like every other human being the theologian (or the expert in human sciences for that matter) exists in a social *milieu*, and as such he is, as well, the product of socialization processes. Theological knowledge, as much as any other type of knowledge, is socially acquired, and is in need of social support. Hence, as much as any other 'cognitive structure', theological thinking is subject to social pressures. At the same time, the meaningfulness of the 'supernatural' has been a necessary condition of the theological enterprise. But in a situation where one may speak of the demise of the supernatural, theology is confronted with truly formidable difficulties. There are still religious and theological environments in which the crisis is, at the most, dimly sensed as an external threat in the distance; others may tend to interpret the crisis as a threat deep inside the fabric of religious practice, faith and thought. Personally I would prefer to interpret such crisis as a temporary imbalance providing us with an opportunity of re-evaluating our Christian commitment and our moral behaviour, as we re-consider our stance towards sin and holiness.

Following biblical anthropology I have been suggesting that God made man simple and that man's complex problems are very often completely of his own devising. Hence all thoughts of inferiority, unworthiness, fear,

insecurity, are all man's inventions. They stem from incorrect ways of asserting ourselves. We are often choosing mistaken words and manners to express ourselves, in other words to say 'I am'. As a matter of fact, our happiness, health and success in life depends so much on discovering a meaningful and valid way of asserting our identity. It has been suggested that for the authentic believer the most precise self-confirmatory statement will always remain: "God, 'He Who Is', is the only 'I am'; I am because God is." Furthermore, inspired by St. Paul's teaching on sin and the call to holiness, I have emphasized the idea of belonging to Christ in freedom. St. Paul stresses this liberation brought about by Christ insofar as it redeems man from the bondage of selfishness and for a self-giving love. St. Paul himself has experienced the freeing power of the resurrection of Christ and sought to liberate the early Christian community from those misinterpretations of Law that could have kept Christ's message of love in bondage and unreleased. This can be observed in Romans: 7:24 – 25 and 8:1 – 2: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! In short, it is I who with my reason serve the Law of God, and no less I who serve in my unspiritual self the law of sin. The reason therefore, why those who are in Christ are not condemned, is that the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." In this context St. Paul is contrasting the inward struggle that wars on between good and evil in man and the Christian's call to the life of the spirit. Thus St. Paul first speaks in the person of mankind under the dominion of sin and not yet justified. Subsequently he speaks in the name of the justified Christian with the gift of the Spirit who, nonetheless, is aware of an inward struggle while on earth. This point is further brought out by St. Paul where he shows concern with the body and its component members, namely, with the human being as he actually is, a sentient creature with a sexual life. It is in the body that man lives morally and religiously. However, even if tyrannized by the 'flesh', by sin and by death – (in this sense it is 'a body of flesh', a 'body of sin' and a 'body of death') – it is not doomed to perish. According to the biblical tradition it is destined to live through resurrection. The principle of this renewal is the Spirit, which takes the place of the psyche and transforms the body of the Christian into the likeness of the risen body of Christ. Until this ultimate deliverance takes place, the body of the Christian, provisionally delivered from the 'flesh' by its union with Christ's death, is even now the home of the Holy Spirit, who produces in it a new life of righteousness and holiness, which is meritorious and gives glory to God.

Ultimately, a morality motivated by love, respect and service appears to be the only morality that can help heal the present-day situation; a morality capable of repairing the hateful polarization that exists between men today, convinced, that while violence changes nothing, love changes everything.

Violence in a sense is a form of darkness. In contrast love may be gentle; but it has the power of light and in it we find great strength. Love (along with compassion, understanding and receptivity) is like light which gently but very effectively overcomes darkness. Violence could either be self-inflicted, that is, inflicted by the subject on his very self; or else violence could be inflicted on others. But we do cause violence, which is, as such, an expression of our sinfulness, in proportion to our ignorance of our spiritual identity. Violence however, will be part of our human experience as long as we cherish the unconscious desire to confirm ourselves as a physical entity apart from our Creator. In Pauline terms, it is the case of the unspiritual person who is interested in what is unspiritual. Violence is healed by helping a person to go beyond his assertive materialism as he learns to walk in the Spirit, in order not to fulfil the lust of the flesh. Walking in the spirit involves the realization that we are essentially spiritual in nature, and that the violent and exciting ways of the carnal mind do not move the spiritual man anymore.

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