

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE SURVIVAL OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Editorial

RELEVANCE OF THE COUNCIL TODAY

Cardinal Pericle Felici

ALMS COLLECTED IN A BARRIO CHAPEL

Florencio Testera, O.P.

A STUDY OF SIN IN THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

John B. Balsam, O.P.

THE PSALMS IN THE REFORMED LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Hermann J. Graf, S.V.D.

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THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN ORGAN

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EDITORIAL

The Survival of Catholic Schools

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has formed a committee to study how Catholic Schools could survive in spite of the government's determination to tax schools. It is, really, truly, a question of survival. And it is survival in the face of great odds. The government seems firmly set to eventually take over the whole educational system of our country. If it could do so now, it would. However, it is realistic and it realizes that it does not presently have the capability to provide education for all Filipinos. Its policy, however, is geared toward easing out private educational institutions.

Consciously or not, some catholic groups who, traditionally, have been pillars of catholic education, have started giving up the fight. They take a defeatist attitude and say: our Catholic educational system has failed. After all our efforts, we have not produced better Catholics. In spite of all the time and money we have spent, our graduates have not exercised enough influence in our country's religious, social economic and and political life to notably change the course of our history, making it more Christian.

Such an outlook is too pessimistic. Much of the success of education is immeasurable. We can confidently say that our country today would be in shambles, were it not for Catholic Education. It is generally known that in the past two decades our public school system has been very unreliable. Yet today, among the

developing countries, we still have the highest percentage of educated people. And — do we still have to say it? we can still maintain our claim of being the only Christian country in this part of the world.

It is true that Catholic Education, to be worthwhile, must go beyond "keeping the fort". It must be dynamic, innovative. It must lead the way. But first, it must "be". And now, more than at any other time in our history, we must make sure that Catholic Schools will continue to exist.

Some rationalize the phasing out of Catholic Schools claiming that it will be good for the Church. They say that these schools have served and pampered the rich. By closing them, priests and Sisters could now be free to serve the poor.

We invite such thinkers to ponder over two points. First, it is really more difficult to christianize the rich than the poor. But we cannot just give up on them because we have the duty to work for the salvation of all men. There is no better way of christianizing the rich than to give them a Christian education.

Secondly, you may close your schools for the rich if you believe it is really necessary. But, in the end, let us have more schools rather than less. For every "rich" school that you close, why not open one or two for the poor? This is where sacrifice comes in. It should be clear that if we are not ready to make sacrifices we are not worthy of surviving.

Speaking about Catholic Education in the United States, Father Andrew Greeley said: "Our research evidence shows that in the time of post-Vatican instability, the correlations between Catholic school attendance and religious behaviour have increased. Catholic schools are more important in time of change than in time of stability".

At this time of great change in our country and in our Church, we must hang on to our Catholic schools. Let us close ranks and fight for the survival of our Catholic Schools!

In This Issue

A decade of post-Vatican II ecclesial life may seem to some too short a time to assess its effects. For others, Vatican II is already *passé*. "Yet it is necessary to speak of the Council to clarify some ideas, both for those who have always believed this Council to be irrelevant, as if it had damaged, if not betrayed, the genuine tradition of the Church; and for those who, while they applauded the 'openings' of Vatican I... (were) subsequently surprised by what they consider to be a reactionary outlook..." For Cardinal Pericle Felici the **Relevance of the Council Today** is shown from the very fact that it is a SIGN THAT IS CONTRADICTED. In his article he examines some of the criticisms levelled against the Council and some of its teachings which are misinterpreted.

The existence of several chapels in a parish is usually taken as a good sign of the pastoral care being given to the people. But some chapels also become a good source of income, if something special is connected with it and it attracts devotees. Parish priests should know about the **Use and Apportionment of Alms Collected in a Barrio Chapel**. Fr. Florencio Testera clarifies this matter in this article.

A professor at the University of Santo Tomas, Fr. John B. Balsam, shares with us his **Study of Sin in the Theology of Vatican II**. "Why does man remain 'an unsolved puzzle, however obscurely he may perceive it?' Strangely enough, the answer must be sought in such diverse and opposed causes as **love** and **sin**."

Obviously, the root cause of all this world of conflict, of moral and spiritual warfare is sin, and it is as a consequence of sin that man's life of love is what might be called the prize at stake in all his struggle". He examines Sin in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in Theology, especially in the light of Vatican II.

In the hopes of helping priests derive more spiritual benefit from the Church's official prayer, Fr. Hermann Graf, S.V.D., gives a brief explanation of the **Psalms in the Reformed Liturgy of the Hours**.

OUR LADY OF SALVATION PRINCIPAL PATRONESS, DIOCESE OF LEGAZPI

PAVLVS PP. VI AD PERPETUAM REI MEMORIAM

Quam altas radices, Marialis pietas et religio ceperit in sensibus in animis in moribus totius communitatis ecclesialis Legazpiensis, ipse comprobat numerus maximus ibi templorum et sacellorum paroeciarum et stationum missionalium variis nominibus Deiparae Virgini dedicatarum. Quam vero antiquus acvetustus floreatinter eundem populum cultus Genetricis Dei Mariae annales historiae com-mostrant, ex quibus nempe paret effigiem Dominae Nostrae a Salute ducentos iam abhinc annos sculptam esse venerationique expositam in loco Horgan provinciae Alba. Necdum illuc interea cessaverunt frequentes confluere turmae fidelium qui Matrem Christi sub titulo Dominae Nostrae a Salute concelebrent studiose publiceque honorent. Ut igitur diuturnitas buius fidei Marianae sollemniter commemora-retur utque legitimo iure confirmaretur quod re ipsa diutissime iam illic continebat, Venerabilis Frater Theotimus Pacis Episcopus Legazpiensis pro se ipse nec non pro universo suo grege postulavit a Sede Apostolica ut pronuntiaretur Beata Virgo Maria "Domina Nostra a Salute" principalis apud Deum Patrona eiusdem illius dioecesis. Nos proinde hanc rem consenta neam omnino esse arbitrati et in decus illius populi maiusque commodum spiritale cessorum, e sententia Sacrae Congregationis pro Sacramentis et Cultu Divino, auctoritate Nostra apostolica Beatam Mariam Virgi-nem "Dominam Nostram a Salute" probamus constituimus decla-ramus caelestem coram Deo Patronam dioecesis Legazpiensis ad normam videlicet Instructionis eiusdem Sacrae Congregationis pro Sacramentis et Cultu Divino de Calendariis particularibus atque Officiorum et Missarum Propriis recognoscendis n. 30. Cuncta insuper privilegia liturgica et honores concedimus talibus diocesium Patronis convenientia. Contrariis quibuslibet haudquaquam obstan-tibus. Ceterum praecipimus ut hae Litterae Nostrae suos effectus tam in praesens quam inposterum habeant tempus. Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris, die VII mensis Feb-ruarii, anno MCMLXXVII, Pontificatus Nostri quarto decimo.

† JOANNES CARD. VILLOT
Secretarius Status

SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO SACRAMENTIS ET CULTU DIVINO

Prot. n. CD 1547/76

LEGAZPIENSIS

Beatam Mariam Virginem sub titulo v.d. "Our Lady of Salvation" clerus atque christifideles dioecesis Legazpiensis iam ab antiquo peculiari necnon assiduo cultu prosecuti sunt et adhuc prosequuntur.

Inde Excellentissimus Dominus Theotimus Pacis, Episcopus Legazpiensis, communia vota excipiens, electionem Beatae Mariae Mariae Virginis v.d. "Our Lady of Salvation" in principalem apud Deum Patronam eiusdem dioecesis rite approbavit. Idem vero, litteris die 7 decembris 1976 datis, enixe rogat ut electio et approbatio huiusmodi, ad normam "Instructionis de Calendariis particularibus atque Officiorum et Missarum Propriis recognoscendis", n.30, confirmetur.

Sacra porro Congregatio pro Sacramentis et Cultu Divino, vigore facultatum sibi a Summo Pontifice PAULO VI tributarum, attentis expositis, cum electionem et approbationem ad iuris praescriptum peractas esse constet, precibus anniut atque Beatam Mariam VIRGINEM sub titulo v.d. "OUR LADY OF SALVATION" diocesis Legazpiensis apud Deum PATRONAM confirmat, cum omnibus iuribus et privilegiis liturgicis iuxta rubricas consequentibus, per Litteras Apostolicas in forma Brevis expediendas.

Contrariis quibuslibet minime obstantibus.

Ex aedibus S. Congregationis pro Sacramentis et Cultu Divino,
die 7 februarii 1977.

(Sg.) IACOBUS R. CARD. KNOX
Praefectus

† **(Sg.) ANTONIUS INNOCENTI**
Archiep. tit. Aeculanen.
a Secretis

DIOCESE OF MALOLOS

*Malolos, Bulacan
Philippines*

C O M M U N I C A T I O N

In compliance with the expressed instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its letter dated February 21, 1977, Prot. N. 13/37, it is hereby communicated that due to lack of dispensation, the CANONICAL MARRIAGE entered into by the REV. VICTOR M. CRUZ, is ab initio NULL AND VOID, and that the same REV. VICTOR M. CRUZ has in effect incurred in EXCOMMUNICATION according to the norms of the SACRED CANONS.

By-Order:

(Sgd.) REV. FR. SALVADOR VIOLA
Acting Chancellor

4 March, 1977

FEATURES

RELEVANCE OF THE COUNCIL TODAY

By

Cardinal Pericle Felici

*President of the Pontifical Commission
for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law*

Lecture delivered by Cardinal Felici on November 20, 1976, in Rome.

It may seem strange to speak of the Second Vatican Council today. It is simply ten years since it concluded and the work of implementing it is in full development, not only in the doctrinal and disciplinary field but also in the pastoral one. The revision of the Code of Canon Law also, which has now reached the end of its first phase of study, is inspired by the spirit of the Council as well as by its content.

Yet it is necessary to speak of the Council to clarify some ideas, both for those who have always believed this Council to be irrelevant, as if it had damaged, if not betrayed, the genuine tradition of the Church; and for those who, while they applauded the "openings" of Vatican II (sometimes interpreted for their own private use), subsequently surprised by what they consider to be a reactionary outlook or at least the ultraconservatism of higher ecclesial structures, think they can act on their own, creating other "structures", the nature and purposes of which seem rather to obey an arbitrary transfer of the "deprecated power", to their own advantage. For this reason some people are said to be thinking already of another Ecumenical Council.

To know its teachings

But if we reason serenely, just because the Council has become the **signum cui contradicitur**, we see that its relevance is more keenly felt than ever today.

For us pastors and faithful, to make the Council relevant, it is necessary above all to know its teachings. Evidently it is not possible to demand a deep knowledge from everyone. But it is the duty of all those who must follow the directives of the Council to know substantially what they are. It is the strict duty of those who speak in the capacity of scholars, historians and teachers to tell the truth, with the aid of the historical and doctrinal sources, now open to everyone (24 volumes of large format, amounting to 30,000 pages in all, have been published so far), in order not to fall into the danger, into which many have fallen of distorting facts and events and making the Council say what the **Council** (I say the Council, not a Father or some expert or other) really did not say.

To put the Council into practice, therefore, it is necessary to know it. The doctrine in the first place. As is known, the Council did not wish to propose new dogmas. In some cases, however, in addition to renewing the expression of the content of the perennial Magisterium of the Church, it brought deepening of doctrine, clarification of thought and a more modern style thus consecrating in documents of high value what was already in the wholesome development of the dogma. The Council's is a teaching faithful to the **depositum fidei** and, at the same time, open to the requirements of our times.

Stress on man's dignity

In the practical application, some people may have taken these two characteristics of conciliar teaching as a starting point to take up position on two opposite fronts. However, the true doctrine of the Council cannot be blamed for that just as St. Paul could not be blamed when some points of his teaching, as St. Peter laments, were distorted to sustain those far-removed from Pauline thought (cf. 2 Pt. 3, 16). Moreover, do not some counterfeiters of Christ's doctrine often refer to the Gospel? Do not those who deny the institutional Church refer to the Gospel today? Yet it is written in the Gospel: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church"; and again: "He who listens to you, listens to me; he who despises you despises me"; and finally: "Feed my sheep".

The doctrine of the Council stresses the dignity of man. Some people have wished to see in this the consecration of a humanism. But there is humanism and humanism! The humanism of the Council is that of Christ who to carry out the plan of redemption, assumed human nature. **et homo factus est**, ennobling the human creature with liberation from sin and with the enrichment of divine

life. The leit-motif of the conciliar doctrine on man is taken from the psalm: "Thou didst make him a little lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands" (Psalms 8, 6; Heb. 2, 7). And is it not holiness, that is, imitation of Christ, **homo perfectus**, the supremely verticalist idea that pervades the whole content of the Council?

Conscience and freedom

There has been so much discussion recently on man's conscience and freedom, also in religious matters. These are difficult subjects which are tackled with different mental attitudes and are therefore solved in diverse ways. The Council dealt with them and those who took part in the lively discussions can realize how, here, too, it is necessary to accept Dante's admonition, with great humility: Be ye content, O human race, with the **quia!** For if ye had been able to see the whole, no need was there for Mary to give birth" (**Purgatorio, III, 37-39**). In fact, to the mystery of man is added the mystery of divine economy, so that while on the one hand the Church, teacher of truth, is obliged to preach the good news and have it observed, on the other hand no man can be **obliged**, I do not say invited, admonished, exhorted but obliged, to go against his own conscience, once it has been formed well. Moreover, if there were not the free adherence of the will to Christ's own doctrine, there would be neither virtue, nor merit.

The apparent contradiction that some people note in the conciliar Declaration on religious freedom (cf. particularly nn. 1 and 4) is clarified not only by giving the terms (freedom, conscience, evangelization coercion) their meaning, but also by setting the teaching on religious freedom in the context of the whole conciliar teaching. This, in fact, is centred on the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, Redemption, on the mystery of the Church, which, a pilgrim on earth, is moving towards the heavenly Jerusalem, to which all men are called. And for this reason, while obligation that all the redeemed have to spread the gospel must not be neglected, nor, consequently, the missionary inspiration and impetus characteristic of the Church, which is **missa**, sent all over the world, so that all may believe in God and in the one sent by God, Christ the Lord, the first great Missionary, so that **omnes unum sint**, as the Father and the Son are in the Holy Spirit.

This mission is exercised in the world. The Council dedicated a specific document to the subject: the Pastoral Constitution

Gaudium et Spes. It must be studied and mediated as a whole and in the context of the entire conciliar teaching, particularly the Constitution **Lumen Gentium** on the Church.

It is useful, sometimes necessary, to dialogue with the men of our time. But it must be done with wisdom, prudence and insight. In any case, dialogue cannot remain and end in itself. We must pass to work, to action, which is certainly more difficult than words, but can actualize the Council with unique efficacy. "Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1, 2): the testimony of action preceded his teaching. St. James admonishes: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1.22). This is a model to be limited, a teaching to be followed.

Liturgical phenomenon

Some reflections, finally, on what I would call the post-conciliar liturgical phenomenon". We sometimes hear of a "Mass of Pius V" and a "Mass of Paul VI" as if they contradicted each other both in structure and in language. Now I am unable to understand the meaning of this talk and far less the disobedience to the Pope which results from it and which absolutely will not do!

✓ In the meantime, there is neither a "Mass of Pius V" nor a "Mass of Paul VI". Substantially the Mass is one only, it is that of Our Lord, who sacrificed himself for salvation and, on the eve of his passion and death, instituted the Eucharist as a memorial of his death for our nourishment. This Mass was celebrated from the time of the Apostles throughout the whole course of the history of the Church and will be celebrated **usque ad consummationem saeculi**.

But by Mass is understood also the set of prayers, spiritual elevations, readings and ceremonies that accompany the essential rite, explaining its significance as sacrifice and as spiritual Communion.

Well this set has had different expressions and manifestations at various times and according to the various rites. Without mentioning the many Oriental rites or even the different forms of the Latin rite, we must say that the stage providentially marked after the Council of Trent by Pius V, is one of the stages, but not the only one. The Missal of Pius V itself has been revised at different times: we are thinking particularly of the revisions made by Pius X and above, all by Pius XII, who rearranged, among other things, the rite of the Holy Week **ex integro**. Why should the Council, why should Paul VI not have been able to give a new structure,

more adapted to recent liturgical studies and above all more in keeping with the modern pastoral requirements, which emerged from Vatican II? Unfortunately, there have been abuses of varying gravity; but can they be attributed to the content of the Council or to the decrees of Paul VI? The argument brought forward above, returns. Poisonous mushrooms growing at the foot of a sturdy oak, are not the fruit of the oak!

And let us talk a little of Latin. The person who writes this is not a professional but a modest artisan of the language of Latium and he always expressed himself in this language as Secretary General in the conciliar sessions. So what I am about to say cannot be accused of partiality.

The Council, accepting the wishes of a great many pastors and faithful, established that more space should be given to the spoken or vernacular language, especially in the didactic parts of the Mass. Certainly, the conciliar provision, when put into practice in the reform, had particular determinations. But can it be said that they went against the spirit of the Council?

Using the vernacular

Let me recall a fact. While the work of the Commission for the implementation of the liturgical Constitution of which I was a member, was being carried out, a special session was held in a religious Institute near St. Peter's where in the presence of the members of the Commission an "experimental" Mass was celebrated entirely in Italian except for the Canon or the central part of the Canon, I don't remember clearly. The discussion followed, in the meeting hall. One Father said that he had liked the Mass, but he did not understand why the central part, too, had not been said in Italian. I pointed out, on my side, that it was necessary in the first place to establish the criterion for well-regulated use of the spoken language: if the criterion were that the people should understand more, as the Council seemed to have suggested for the didactic parts, no difficulties could be seen about saying also the central part of the Mass in the spoken language, so that the people would understand it better, all the more so since, Jesus himself, speaking the sacramental words which are transmitted to us by the Gospel in Greek, had used Aramaic, the language He and the Apostles spoke. If, however, the criterion was to give the Latin rite

also linguistic unity in the essential part, then things would have to remain as they were. I was not surprised therefore when the Pope authorized the use of the spoken language also in the whole of the Canon. Provision has been made, furthermore, for the unity of the rite with the typical edition in Latin, by which all the translations must abide, and with the authorization granted to all to celebrate in Latin, where pastoral requirements do not call for another solution. Of course, in practice great care and circumspection are necessary for as we well know **traductores** are often **traditores**.

Love and obedience

I end with a reflection. We sometimes feel elated at the new forms of liturgy, and we are right. But we must also remember that the liturgy with which Christ saved the world, was made up of love and obedience, and the great sacrificial gesture was marked by two bleeding arms, nailed on to the cross, by a bent head and a sublime voice: Yes, Father!

Vatican II finds relevance and realization in love and obedience.

THE USE AND APPORTIONMENT OF ALMS COLLECTED IN A BARRIO CHAPEL

By

Florencio Testera, O.P.

A group of priests and laymen are eager to receive some enlightenment on the apportionment and use of alms collected in a barrio chapel —*visitas*— which is a Center of Marian Pilgrimages. On the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and on the first Saturdays of each month, quite a considerable amount of alms is offered by the devotees who flock at such barrio chapel.

At whose disposal is this collection? Has the civic barrio council anything to do with this collection? And how could the distribution be made? Could the money be spent for the maintenance of the chapel as well as for the other needs of the parish such as catechesis, the maintenance and repairing of the parish church and the support of the clergy? What percentage should our consultant give to each? The answer will serve as a guideline to dissipate some doubts in the minds of concerned people.

Legally speaking we must consider a **barrio chapel** as a part of the parish in whose territory it is located. Indeed, a barrio chapel is a filial church that owes its existence to, and is managed from and by the main or mother church, the parish. From such a valid and legitimate assumption it can be logically said that:

— Alms collected in a barrio chapel accrue to a unit of the mother church, and as such must be deemed church property since the said alms are offering made to a filial church of an ecclesiastical moral person, namely, the parish (c. 1497). Hence the use and apportionment of such collections must be regulated by church law.

— The administration and management of the parish's assets are functions reserved by law to the parish priest (cc. 1476, 1521,1), who, in turn must exercise his administrative and managerial powers in accordance with existing laws and under the supervision

of the Ordinary of the Place or Bishop (c. 1519). Thus it is the exclusive concern of the pastor to keep and dispose of the alms collected in a filial chapel located within his parish boundaries, much in the same manner as the pastor, and he alone, holds and disposes of the offerings made at the parish church itself.

—Laymen, responsible perhaps for the establishment of a barrio chapel and even for its successful running, are not, as a general rule, the legal administrators of the chapel itself, neither they may be deemed managers of the offerings made therein (c. 1521,1). However, the pastor, can, and, as far as possible, should avail himself of the services and expertise of skilled laymen, both in the running of the chapel and in the management of the offerings (VAT. II, **Praesb.**, **Ord.**, n.17).

—The donors' intention in making the offerings must be held at all times and under all circumstances as 'sacred', and should, therefore, set the pattern for the proper use and allocation of the alms (c.1514, 1536).

Based on the aforesaid doctrine, the answers to our consultant's query may be summed up as follows:

1. Who is supposed to dispose of the collections made at the barrio chapel? Such administrative function is reserved, both as a right and as a duty, to the parish priest. He is, therefore, the one to hold and dispose of the offerings in accordance with existing laws and the donors' intention. The civic barrio council, or any lay leaders for that matter, may be called upon to aid the pastor in the running of the chapel as well as in the management of the devotees' donations. Such arraignment, however, should not and can not be construed as a surrender of, or as a restraint to the pastor's administrative powers, who in no way, may waive the ultimate responsibility for the control and effective management of said funds.

2. How should the distribution of the funds be made? The use and allocation of the funds should be made in accordance with the devotees' wishes. Which were the donors' wishes or intention in making the offerings can be easily established by considering the place and the occasion on which the offerings were made. The barrio chapel referred to in the present query is a Center of Marian Pilgrimages where the faithful gather on first Saturdays and on the occasion of other festivities in honor of the Blessed Mother. It stands to reason, therefore, that the donors intend primarily to foster with their alms the cult to the Blessed Virgin. Thus all direct expenses incurred into on account of the

cult given to the Blessed Mother in the said chapel should be defrayed by the devotees' money. Such are, for instance, the expenses related to the purchase of candles, flowers, vestments and the like; the cost of lighting; honorarium due to the chapel caretaker, priests and ministers invited to perform or preside over the various ceremonies, etc. The cost of maintaining the barrio chapel and expenses incurred into on account of the various improvements introduced therein such as remodelling, painting, etc., could be billed against the same fund.

3. Can the money collected at the barrio chapel be used to defray other needs of the parish, such as catechesis, maintenance of the parish church and its clergy? As stated above, the offerings made at the filial church accrue to the mother church and must be administered by its pastor. So, there should be no doubt as to the propriety of using a portion of the alms for other needs of the parish church. The percentage to be allocated for such needs may be determined by the pastor himself in accordance with a list of possible priorities. It is saying the obvious, however, that the money used to shoulder certain expenses of the parish should not be allowed to eat up a part of the funds otherwise necessary for the maintenance of the barrio chapel and for the cult to the Blessed Mother.

A STUDY OF SIN IN THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II

By

John B. Balsam, O.P.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would.¹ Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society.²

1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The above quotation is, to my mind, not only a profound summary of the whole document from which it was taken and a sort of résumé of the collective mind-set of Vatican II, but it serves also as a very handy expression of what this study will try to show. For every Christian who takes his faith seriously and tries to live it twenty-four hours a day, and every day, is really a "homo cruciatus," a "man on a cross," a man at odds, spread-eagled. He seems to be at odds with so many things in

¹ Cf. Romans, 7:14 ff.

² "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", par. 10, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *Documents of Vatican II* (America Press, 1966). This edition with its excellent notes will be used in all other quotations from the documents of Vatican II cited hereafter.

life, with so many people, with so many movements and "causes". Indeed, at times he seems to be at odds even with himself! And why all this internal and external conflict? Why this painful blend of grandeur and misery? Why does man remain "an unsolved puzzle, however obscurely he may perceive it?"³ Strangely enough, the answer must be sought in such diverse and opposed causes as **love** and **sin**. Obviously, the root cause of all this world of conflict, of moral and spiritual warfare is sin, and it is as a consequence of sin that man's life of love is what might be called the prize at stake in all his struggle.

This is not to say, of course, that love is the culprit in man's daily striving to live in love, but rather that the demands and aspirations of true love are so lofty and challenging that he finds it his daily test and struggle to meet those demands and to fulfill those aspirations, those seemingly "impossible dreams," like another Man from La Mancha. In the study that follows we shall try to show that man — in the midst of this cosmic moral struggle — must take a life stance. He must take and keep a life policy — a moral life policy. He must make a core choice of a way of living and of life — and for all his life. He must choose to live in true and generous love — of God, his neighbor, himself and of the world about him. Or — and this is the only other alternative to that life choice — he must choose not to live in such love. And such a "man who does not love is among the living dead".⁴ And to refuse or shun the choice is itself a choice!

2. A WORD ABOUT THE SOURCES USED

In putting together this brief study I have tried to choose the best of two worlds, academically speaking: that of the past and that of the present. The writer is heavily indebted to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, who perhaps more than any other single scholar in the long history of the Church has contributed to the study of human morality and of human and divine love. No author of any real prominence and lasting influence has done any in-depth study in the field of charity and moral life without leaning heavily on this mediaeval Colossus. And since no one and nothing speaks so eloquently and unerringly about the love of God and His plan of salvation for us as does His own Word, the study makes frequent reference to the Sacred Scriptures. Moreover, since Pope John and Vatican II did so much to open the windows both of the Church and of the study of the sacred sciences of dogma.

³ Ibid., par. 21.

⁴ 1 John, 3:14.

moral, and scripture, I have tried to sift out from all the literature written in the field the works which I thought contributed the most from among the scholars of the last two decades or so. A fair spectrum of their writings can be found in the references and footnotes. One may notice that I have tried to avail myself of the latest refinement of thought among present day writers in the field.

The study makes no use of Ockham's razor — superchrome or otherwise refined — for mere moral hair-splitting or whittling away problems. The whole approach is **pastoral** and **personalist**. And if it is true as St. Thomas maintains,⁵ that of all branches of learning theology is the most practical in its consequences and influence on one's life, may this study be for the lasting benefit of author and reader alike!

⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 5, trans. English Dominicans, Benziger Bros., New York, 1946 — unless otherwise noted, this translation will be used throughout the paper.

CHAPTER II

THE REALITY AND NATURE OF SIN — THE BIBLICAL VIEW

From the very dawn of history man abused his liberty, at the urging of personified Evil. Man set himself against God, and sought to find fulfillment apart from God. Although he knew God, he did not glorify Him as God, but his senseless mind was darkened and he served the creature rather than the Creator.¹

What divine revelation makes known to us agrees with experience. Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which can not come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal. At the same time he became out of harmony with himself, with others, and with all created things.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains.

For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment. The call to grandeur and the depths of misery are both a part of human experience. They find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in God's revelation.²

The above passage is one of the most eloquent, exact and concise expressions of man's moral situation in all the voluminous documents written during the long history of the Church. We shall use it as a sort of springboard to get into the main theme of this study, which is mortal sin and man the sinner.

Leon Bloy once wrote: "Sin lies at the heart of Christianity." It is still there. For inscrutable reasons known only to the all-wise God, sin is an integral part of the divine economy of salvation. Though theologians can speculate as to whether Christ would have become incarnate if man had not sinned, speculation ceases about the fact that Our Lord did become man because of sin, as Sacred Scripture, especially Paul and John in the New Testament so often remind us.

As to the reality and presence of sin in the world, and indeed in all of us, we need little reminding. One need only to pick up the morning newspaper and not read beyond the first page to be

¹ Rom., 1:21.

² "Constitution of the Church in the Modern World," par. 13.

amply convinced to the point of shock, oftentimes, of the gargantuan power of evil that stalks man and his world. If we need — and we do not — any further display of the global power, the depth and extent of sin in the world, one need only recall that two wars, history's most horrible and costly in human lives, were fought in this century within the span of thirty years. Those two wars were unsurpassed in history for their wanton slaughter of human life. And sin, being the enemy of wisdom and reconciliation, saw to it that those two world conflicts were followed within a few short years by the pointless and fruitless Korean war and the war in Vietnam, the war in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland. And one must not pass over one of the great tragedies of our day and, indeed, of the history of mankind: the invention and subsequent use of the atomic bomb, followed by the more sophisticated and destructive hydrogen bomb. These in turn gave rise to the potentially world-destroying intercontinental nuclear missiles. And man's "creative" destructiveness will not stop there, nor has it done so. The year 1974 saw one country alone (the United States) publishing the number of abortions **authorized by law** — 900,000; the number has since surpassed the million mark annually. The presumption is that there are many other unrecorded abortions in America. This is the age of the gas chamber where perhaps the majority of a whole ethnic group was destroyed by the millions, not the least numerous among the victims being women and children. This, all in spite of the fact that Our Lord Himself reminded the world that "salvation is from the Jews". To match this monstrous atrocity — if not surpass it — this century has seen millions of men, women, and even children brutalized to death by labor that even beasts could not survive in the cold of the Gulag Archipelago and penned in the most dehumanizing prisons, kept alive — only to drain them of as much work as their bodies could stand. Something of their suffering and torture has been recorded by Fr. Walter Ciszek, S.J., who spent twenty three years in such a living horror,³ and by the Nobel Prize winner, Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn in his best seller, *The Gulag Archipelago*.⁴

Some of the foremost thinkers in the country, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, philosophers, theologians, sociologists, members of the various branches of the medical profession, anthropologists, and professionals in the field of the other behavioral sciences, do not hesitate to admit that our era and our world have arrived at a state of moral permissiveness that could match or surpass with ease the so-called immorality of pagan Rome or Greece. All this is not, and is not meant to be, mere sensationalism nor is it a

³ Cf. his *With God in Russia* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1964).

⁴ Published by Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

"press the panic button" mentality. The sole aim in mentioning these things at all is to underscore the presence, power, and all-pervasiveness of sin in our world, and that in some way, we are all involved in it, directly or indirectly, for there is a personal and social side to all sin.

As a preliminary remark before beginning the study of the concept of sin as found in the Bible and theology, it might be interesting — more for theological than for philological reasons — to trace the origin of the word, "sin." It seems to have had its origin in the German word, "Sünde," meaning "sin." But what is more pertinent to our study is that "Sünde" seems to be derived from the Middle Low German, "sonderen" (Middle English: "sonderen" also) meaning "to sunder," "divide," "separate"; and/or the Old High German, "suntar", meaning, "apart", "aside".⁵ The point in all this is the idea of separation, division, of setting aside and apart. And in fact, basically, that is the whole theological concept of sin as we shall try to make clear and develop in greater detail in the following chapters.

However, before taking up the question of the nature of sin in some depth, and how it affects and has affected us and the world about us, how it makes profound demands and presents challenges that are often both heart-rending and heart-changing, let us first turn to a consideration of sin as it appears in biblical literature, both in the Old and New Testament. With that biblical background of the concept of sin, we shall better understand the notion of sin as treated in theology.

1. SIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the most commonly used Hebrew word for sin is "hatta" or "hattah". According to scripture scholars, this word is rather accurately rendered as, "to miss the mark," and transferred to a moral context, it would mean "to miss one's object or goal," "to fail to meet or reach one's objective," hence, "to fall short, to fail." Another common Hebrew word is "pesha," and this word is used very early among the prophets as meaning, "to overstep", in the sense of "getting off the right path," "to transgress," or "rebel." When used, not to refer to the transgression of some legal or ritualistic observance, it is often used to mean an offence against the Law of God, against the moral code, and

⁵ Sources: *Webster's Third International Dictionary, Unabridged*, Ed. Philip B. Gove (Springfield, Mass., G. and C. Merriam Co., 1971).

Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged, Ed. Jess Stein, (New York, Random House, 1966).

hence in the context of true sin. Thus, we can summarize the cognate meanings of these two Hebrew words by saying they contain, according to context and when used in a moral or theological sense, the notion of an offence or transgression, of a failing in one's duties, hence infidelity or rebellion against God and His laws.⁶

Nowhere in the Old Testament will one find such an explicit and lengthy account of sin as in Genesis, chapters 3-11. Rightly is the book called "Genesis," for it not only relates the story of the coming on the world scene of our First Parents, but the first appearance and "origin" of sin in the history of mankind and his world. After the Fall, sin lost no time in increasing along with the growth and diffusion of the human race. Sin began raising its deadly head and showing its sometimes subtle and sometimes brutal power at the very dawn of salvation history. The Sin of the First Parents is matched by one of their sons murdering his own brother, the famous tragedy of Cain and Abel. From that time onward the glacier of sin kept gouging its valley of evil down through the life of mankind. Indeed, sin so multiplied in magnitude and frequency that the author of Genesis relates: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that the thoughts in his heart fashioned nothing but wickedness all day long. And the Lord regretted having made man on the earth, and his heart grieved. So the Lord said: 'I will rid the earth's face of man, my own creation'."⁷ God sent a flood which punished by death the evildoers, sparing Noah and his family. But hardly had Noah and his family stepped safe again on dry land, when the reality and power of the gathering force of evil started the process of the moral undoing of man and his world all over again. The incident of the Tower of Babel (the Tower of Confusion) was symbolic of the moral confusion and disorder to which man had again fallen a willing victim.⁸

And so with the choice of the Israelites as God's Chosen People, marked as it was with their servitude in Egypt, their providential deliverance by Moses, their forming a kingdom, the protection given them by God, the divine messages of the prophets,

⁶ On the different meanings of the Hebrew words for sin in the Old Testament see Bruce Vawter, C.M., "Missing the Mark," *The Way* 2 (January 1962): 19-27. Also John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), art. 77, secs. 125-131.

⁷ Genesis, 6:5-7.

⁸ Genesis, 11:1-9.

the destruction of the Temple, the Exile, and the other events of the Old Dispensation. Sin kept apace, and infected and corrupted like a disease.

At the very center and foundation of the Chosen People in their long salvation history — as indeed it is today for all the People of God spread throughout the world — is the all important bond or covenant between God and His People which the Hebrews called the "**hesed**". Basically the word meant "faithfulness," "loving-kindness," "mercy," "love". It came to express God's all-merciful preference of this small and unpretentious group of people to all the more powerful and more cultured peoples who were their contemporaries in the millenia that preceded the coming of Christ. This divine preference expressed itself in the form of a special relationship, a bond or covenant. We avoid the use of the word, "contract", because that smacks too much of a relationship or agreement of justice, of "**quid pro quo**", of "**do ut des**". Such language is connotative of fairness and equality. God's covenant with His Chosen people was first, foremost, and forever a covenant or bond of completely gratuitous and creative **love** on His part. Just as where there was no light "He made light," so where there was no love, He gave love. He made what was "unloved" both lovable and loved — and the beloved, the recipients of God's love were the beneficiaries! So that in all truth they could be rightly asked: "What have you that you have not received?"⁹

Of all the forms this covenant or bond could take, and at various times, did take — a father-son relationship — a lord and servant relationship, a shepherd and flock relationship — the one that is most expressive and demonstrative of God's infinitely merciful and prodigal love for His people is that of the relationship of husband and spouse. Some of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament express the love of God's marriage covenant with His Chosen People. This love bond with its connotation of faithfulness and indissolubility is found in numerous places, especially in the writings of the prophets. Suffice it to mention by way of illustration a few of these texts: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:1). And Jeremiah continues: 'I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judath, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord' (Jer. 31:31.32). And Ezechiel reminds the Chosen People: "I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you,

⁹ 1 Cor., 4:7.

says the Lord God, and you became mine" (Ezek. 15:8). And Isaiah brings out this spouse relationship in the famous passage: "Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit . . . I did forsake you for a brief moment, but with great love I will take you back . . . with everlasting love I have taken pity on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Is. 54:5-8). The author of the book of Hosea who devotes a large portion of the text to the theme of marriage writes: "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, with tenderness and love. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (Hos. 2:19, 20). And perhaps the most appealing and simple in its expression of the joy of the covenant love: "The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult with joy over you with his love; he will dance with shouts of joy for you, as on a day of festival" (Zeph. 3:17, 18).

Thus it is seen that the Chosen People were repeatedly reminded of the love of God for them, and since this was covenanted love, since God their Creator had espoused Himself to this people, their duty was to return that love, to love in and by that love in turn. And it is precisely here that we find **the sin of His chosen ones**. They failed, they fell away from this love. They proved unfaithful to their covenant love, to their love bond with God, and they prostituted their love for that of false gods. They turned their backs on their divine spouse, and the prophets, time and again, rebuked them for their infidelity, for their repeated "no" to the call of God and to His love. Much of the message of the Book of Hosea is an invitation by God for his chosen ones to return to their first and only spouse. "Even, now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments'. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:12, 13). What God was calling for was a **change of mind and heart, a change of life style and living**, a return to fidelity to, and a living out of the love which they owed by covenant and bond to "their Husband and their Maker."

Though other sins were, of course, committed — the Old Testament grades the malice of sins of thought, word, deed, omission and commission —¹⁰ the core sin in the long history of the Chosen People was that of adultery of the heart, failing and refusing to respond to love by love. It was the sin of the death-dealing "no"

¹⁰ Cf. for a list of sins and their gravity, Ex. 21, 22; Lev. 19 and 20; Num. 15:20.

to the untiring, relentless, saving appeal by God to love and serve Him. And by that loving service to re-create a new self and a new heaven and a new earth. However, as we shall see, that core sin is a rebellious "no" to God's call to love Him wherever He is found — in every place and in every heart. The world of the New Testament said its "no" also, to God and His Christ, and is still saying it. In one form or another, the sinner of the present covenant, the covenant of Christ, shouts also his loud "no". "No, not Christ but Caesar" The greatest insult to anyone — especially to the God of love — is to spurn, to ignore, to refuse and reject closed-heartedly a love that is offered with utter unselfishness and with such sincere pleading. Thus, as we shall see in greater detail in a later chapter, sin is, at heart, a refusal of the most real and inescapable of all realities — love, the love that is God. And God is the cause of every speck of being and of every degree of true love, whether in saint or savage.

2. SIN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since our treatment of sin is not primarily a biblical but a theological one, we shall confine ourselves simply to sketching a few basic notions of sin as found in the New Testament, seeing briefly how the two writers who treated the subject at greater length than the others, namely, Paul and John, viewed it.

As He Himself mentioned, Jesus met with much the same frame of mind among the Jews, especially the priestly class and the Pharisees as the prophets had done before Him with the leaders of their times. Man, Jew and pagan, was still in the tight grip of the power of sin and darkness. Like the prophets before Him, He, too "came to His own and His own did not accept Him" (John 1:11). The vocabulary for sin and sinning may have changed in time of Christ and the New Testament writers; the reality of sin remained still the same. But there was a basic change of situation, of historical salvation significance. The Son of God made Man had been born in the midst of man. He, the Word of God, preached the word of God and the way to God. For He was at one and the same time both the unique Word and the unique Way. There was no other and would be no other. The Jews and pagans — His contemporaries — were no longer listening to one of the prophets now, but rather to the Incarnate Son of God Who was the very One that all the prophets had pointed to, the teachings of the priests and Pharisees about legalistic minutiae and jots and tittles of the Law, now had living and preaching among them the only Man in history who could claim with utter and simple reality: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6).

The way for all men to follow, the truth for all to embrace, the life for all to live.

Not only did the "**hattah**" of the Old Testament change to "**hamartanein**," and its noun form, "**hamartia**," in the Greek versions of the New Testament. There was also enacted the most important and world-changing event in the history of the whole economy of salvation — the Incarnation of the Redeemer of the whole world and of all men everywhere. Jesus Christ was the love of God and the truth of God Who became one of us and like us in everything but sin. Hence to reject Him was to reject, to refuse not only the love of God but the very truth of God announced and taught in everyday human language, and announced and taught by a life lived such as had never been witnessed before nor since. Hence, the sin of rejection, the "**hattah**" was a rejection both of the love of God and the truth of God, of God Who condescended to come personally into our world, become one of us with our very same nature, and offer openly and directly His truth and His love to all who would but listen, heed, and have a change of mind, heart and life, a "**metanoia**." The New Covenant in Christ had come and was announced and published by the One Who was its divine author.

But He had come, not merely to show us the way, but to open it up for us, to make it possible of attainment. For there was a roadblock, a "wall of partition," separating us from Him and life in Him: "He is our peace, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility that kept us apart" (Eph. 2:14). He tore down that wall of separation by removing it from the salvation scene through His own suffering and death on the cross.

For man to reject now the love and truth of God enfleshed in Christ would add, at least objectively, even greater malice to the rejection. And though with the coming of the Redeemer, and with the whole salvific event of the Paschal mystery, "grace indeed abounded even more," still precisely because of that, because God revealed Himself to men so clearly in the Person of His Son, "sin increased" (Rom, 5:20), for such refusal and disdain of that love incarnate. What St. Paul said about the pagans who did not have the benefit of the revealed word of God can be applied all the more stringently to those who know the Truth of God and His saving message: "Such people are without excuse: they knew God, and yet refused to honor Him as God or to thank Him; instead they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened".¹¹ One of the modern theologians who has done quite extensive and

¹¹ Rom. 1:20, 21.

in-depth study of the theology of sin tends to think that the history of sin "crested" in the rejection of Christ at the crucifixion: "The rejection of Christ, which took shape in his crucifixion, constituted a peak in the history of previous sins and a centre in the whole history of sin".¹² And he continues to describe how this "peak" was reached: "It is an ever-greater grace of God that is rejected: first his barely perceptible presence, of which man became especially aware through the many gifts of creation . . . then the presence of his self-revealing and history-making word in the Old Testament; finally that of his Word become flesh. The rejection of grace has turned into a rejection of the Mediator and Source of grace. The Mediator and Source of God's grace has been exiled from our human existence on earth; he has been killed, which is the most complete and final rejection and exclusion which we human beings can inflict upon somebody".¹³

The Synoptics and Acts usually use the word "sins", that is "hamartiai," in treating of men's transgressions against God. An exception to this is the moving story of the Prodigal Son, also called the parable of "The Lost Son," or in a more positive vein, the parable of "The Father's Love". Here, as in no other parable of the gospels, is described in a very existential and concretized form the case history of apostasy from God, of one's breaking his love bond, of turning his back on God in full deliberation. We have an Everyman's Tale of what it is to sin from one's depths, from the heart. The son in the parable, with full-blown, premeditated malice, took all that his father gave him in his love and generosity and severed his bond and ties of filial love and gratitude definitively, and turning his back on father and family and all they meant to him, he left them to go off on his own, to live by himself and for himself. All the goods that were given him he wasted in a life of debauchery. Coming to his senses and having a true change of heart and sincere repentance ("metanoia") for the way in which he lived in sin "against heaven" and against his loved ones, he returned to beg, with bowed head and heart, for forgiveness. Well may have the father looked for him day after day, and then one day, "seeing him from afar off, he ran to him and embraced him." The beautiful parable is found in Luke, 15:11-32.¹⁴ The whole point of the story is the love and forgiveness of the father, who putting behind him all the son's waywardness, could only shout with joy

¹² Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin*, trans. Joseph Donceel, S.J. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), p. 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁴ For a thorough and very readable exposition of the parable see Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 128-132.

from his heart about the return of his son: "He was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found." And so it is with the all-merciful heavenly Father: He "seeks what is lost," and runs to welcome back the prodigal — prodigal because every sinner is a wastrel of God's gifts and graces.

Every prodigal — every sinner — uses the goods of the world not in grateful and responsible stewardship, but rather misuses them for self-indulgence and spiritual destruction rather than for his own spiritual growth and betterment and the betterment of those about him. The goods of this world have a sort of built-in allurements and fascination for man — and that is exactly as it should be: all good is attractive; otherwise no one and no thing would want it or be drawn to it. But their "riotous" use and an enjoyment of them that get out of hand, go beyond reasonable bounds, will inevitably involve, if persisted in, a turning away from, a turning of one's back on the Giver of all these good gifts and all others in this life. And that is the element which theologians call "*aversio a Deo*," a definitive turning away from God and His call of love. But generally man does not turn away from God merely for the sake of being rid of Him or ignoring Him. There is nothing satisfying or rewarding in such a negative action. Rather, that "*aversio*" is intertwined with a turning to some created good, person, place or thing that demands an exclusive concentration of attention and effort in attaining and/or retaining a sort of other-excluding patent right on the good and its enjoyment. That is called the "*conversio*," or turning to things or goods in the disorderly fashion mentioned above. Hence, at heart every sinner is a wastrel and becomes an idolator of things: "The witchery of paltry things obscures what is right, and the whirl of desires transforms the innocent mind" (Wis. 4:12). We shall see more of this turning away from God and to things in a later chapter.

We wish to mention in passing the chief approach to sin in the treatment of it by John and Paul. In John who prefers to use the singular form of "sin" four times as often as the plural form, the sin is that which is against love: love of God and neighbor. This is especially evident in Our Lord's discourse after the washing of His disciples' feet, John 13, and also at the last discourse, John, 14. It is especially in his letters, particularly the first, that John speaks at length and with great insistence on the necessity of love for the followers of Christ. He reminds the early Christians — and ourselves — that we are all sinners, and that the world "lies in the power of wickedness" (1 John 5:19). It is in this chapter that he speaks of sins that are "unto death," and those that are not deadly: "Every kind of wrong-doing is sin, but not all sin is deadly"

(1 John 5:17). For John, sin is the "normal" situation for Christian and pagan alike: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). But the sincere seeker after the truth will not remain in sin, especially in sin which is "unto death": "No one born of God acts sinfully because he remains of God's stock, he can not sin because he is begotten of God" (1 John 3:9). If we have true repentance for sin, "if we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity," (John 1:8,9) for Christ "is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29) and the indispensable condition for the forgiveness is that we return his love for us, "love for love" (Prologue, v. 16).

Paul has a somewhat different treatment of sin. He stresses the massive force of sin in the world, to the point of almost personifying it. For him sin is a sort of monarch, a vicious potentate of evil which enslaves and has a stranglehold on its victims. Sin in Pauline thinking is dynamic, not static; it is relentless and a constant in salvation history. About it we can never in this life say that sin is finished, a closed book. Paul speaks of sin with greater depth of perception and with an incomparable grasp of its centrality and even necessity in the whole divine scheme of redemption more than any other one sacred author in the Old or New Testament. The masterpiece in all the biblical literature on sin is his letter to the Romans — a work which has challenged (and baffled) more scripture scholars than any other book of the Bible dealing with this theme. For St. Paul, sin is nothing short of an enigma, "a mystery of iniquity". Sin involves a global power struggle between what is good and what is evil. It involves each of us, pagan, Jew and Christian in a battle for life itself, for life in God. There is no abating and no respite in this wrestling "with the powers of darkness," and with their leader, Satan. This theme of struggle, mystery and paradox in the workings of sin is powerfully described in one of the most oft quoted texts of Scripture, and it is well worth citing:

I have been sold as a slave to sin. I can not understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do and I find myself doing the very things I hate. When I act against my own will, that means that I have a self that acknowledges that the Law is good, and so the thing behaving in that way is not myself but sin living in me... for though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. When I act against my will, then, it is not my true self doing it, but sin which lives in me.

In fact, this seems to be the rule, that every single time that I want to do good, it is something evil that comes to hand. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law which my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives in my members.

What a wretched man I am; Who will deliver me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹⁵

And how to resolve this cosmic moral impasse, how to be freed of this moral tension and struggle that grip the lives of all men? Who is to lift this mass of iniquity and perdition, "*massa perditionis*," from our lives? There is a one and only remedy: Christ must put sin to death in us. We must through His redemptive passion and death die to sin, to live a new life in Christ. Paul reminds us:

When we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in his death . . . when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life . . . We must realize that our former selves have been crucified with him to destroy this sinful body and to free us from the slavery of sin. When he died, he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

So in the same way, you also must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:3-11).

Thus we are rid of sin and live a life to God by uniting ourselves and the totality of our lives to the sufferings and death of Christ by living out the redeeming and sanctifying life of the One whom the sacraments, starting with baptism, give us and make our own, make us more our true selves.

From this brief study of the notion of sin as found both in the Old and New Testament we can assemble a sort of synthetic composite of what the two periods of Scripture tell us of sin. First of all sin, is seen as a breaking of the bond or covenant of love with God. Though the Pentateuch may have given much attention to the Law and to ritual prescriptions and prohibitions, yet a gradual evolution of a moral sense and appreciation of the love bond was more and more stressed by the prophets, as we saw. So that sin was the rejection, the deliberate refusal or ignoring of God's covenant of love with His Chosen People, and failure to live up to this mutual love bond.

¹⁵ Rom. 7:14-25. On this passage see the profound theological exposition of Thomas Aquinas in his *Commentaria in Omnes S. Pauli Epistolas* (Turin, Marietti, 1912), vol. I, pp. 98-102. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer's scholarly article on Romans in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, art. 53, secs. 69-78, pp. 311-314.

The teaching of Christ, especially as stressed by Paul and John, was basically the same — love, now as clearly shown for the whole world to see, the love of the Son of God become one of us to share His love “**modo divino et humano**,” in a way adapted to our human situation. He proved that totally gratuitous love for all mankind by an act (or better, by a life) of love that has never been duplicated, nor ever can be, in human history. Through His expiative sufferings and death, indeed by the whole event of the Paschal mystery, He bought us from, and brought us out of, slavery to sin into the life and love event of the Paschal mystery, He bought us from, and brought us out of, slavery to sin into the life and love of His very own being. So that, “now I live, not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I will not treat God’s gracious gift as pointless” (Gal. 2:20,21).

Hopefully, this brief study of the notion of sin as found in Sacred Scripture should help us grasp and appreciate better the notion of sin as found in theology. Obviously there will be no contradiction or opposition between the reality of sin as seen in scripture and theology. For theology depends on divine revelation, whether preserved in the written word of scripture or in tradition, as an indispensable source from which it continually draws for establishing or corroborating its theses. Theology has been the helping “handmaid” and never the master of divine revelation.¹⁶ In a word, the remainder of this study will try to fill out and develop what we have seen about sin in the Bible and try to plumb it at greater depth from the viewpoint of theology and helped by the invaluable contributions of the behavioral sciences.

¹⁶ For the necessary dependence of theology on divine revelation, see *Summa*, I, q. 1., aa. 1-10, especially aa. 1 and 6.

CHAPTER III

THE NOTION OF SIN IN THEOLOGY

The Kinds of Sins — the Faces and Facets of Sin

Before setting out on our study of sin from a theological point of view, it may be well to remind ourselves of the beautiful doctrine (and we may well need a consoling and uplifting theme to fall back on in discussing the reality and extent of sin and its effects), of St. Irenaeus (second century, A.D.) who repeatedly taught that in making man God had in mind His own Son who was to become incarnate. Man was to be modelled after the Son of God Incarnate! God fashioned the whole man after the image and likeness of the Christ who was to redeem that same man from sin for all time and in all places.¹ Indeed, St. Paul tells us that as we experience and live out the continuous conversion of living in Christ, "all of us, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord, all are being changed, from one degree of glory to another, into his image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is the Spirit".² In all the long history of man's tortuous and agonizing odyssey of "missing his mark," missing the one point of all human living down to this hour, there is an all-pervasive constant, and an invariable that will always enable him to rise after every fall: "despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it" (Rom. 5:20).

In spite of the fact that he can sin, and even sin brutishly — or may it be in the over-all picture, **because** he can so sin? — every human being is the greatest and most awe-inspiring creature in the whole universe. Twenty three centuries ago Aristotle called man a microcosm;³ St. Thomas Aquinas commenting on that passage and in treating of man in the *Summa*⁴ called him "a miniature world," a "**minor mundus**". One of the profoundest and most theological of the so-called "metaphysical poets," John Donne, wrote: "It is too little to call man a little world; except God, man is diminutive to nothing".⁵ And he put in the heart and on the

¹ *Against Heresies*, 3, 19, 1; Tertullian writes: "God, when creating Adam, saw the Christ who was to come." *De Carnis Resurrectione*, 6 (CSL, 2, 928).

² 2 Cor. 3:18.

³ *Physics*, VIII, 2, 252b, 26.

⁴ I, q. 91, a. 1.

⁵ "Devotions on Emergent Occasions," 4.

tongue of every man: "I am a little world made cunningly".⁶ Yet with all such incomparable greatness and potentiality for good, at heart he is a sinner, "so weak and yet so strong." He is truly a human I.B.M.: an "Inextricably Baffling Machine" — and at the same moment, an "Indescribably Beautiful Microcosm". God Himself calls him "little less than the angels" (Ps. 8:6). In all his greatness, he is in a sense so pitiful in all his weakness and proneness to sin; he continually evokes our awe and admiration. Destined ever to be in this life of pilgrimage "split within himself," in a "dramatic struggle between good and evil, between life and darkness," he is pulled every which way by his unique "call to grandeur and the depths of misery",⁷ which are a part of his human situation.

One of the most striking and truly significant things that has taken place in the theological world over the past two decades or so has been the volume of literature published, together with the in-depth study made on the subject of sin in all its aspects and implications. It has been nothing short of phenomenal. And for all this the Christian world can be truly grateful! Starting around the 1950's, some of the greatest minds in the fields of theology and scripture — aided in no small way from the data and reflections of experts in the behavioral sciences — have grappled with this "**myterium iniquitatis**", the profound mystery and mystique of the reality of sin and guilt. These scholars in their respective fields, working as a team in a number of instances, have clarified, explicated, and set in balanced focus the true notion of the reality and workings of sin and its all-pervasive effects on man and the world about him. They have uncovered and highlighted critical insights, removed narrow (and harrowing), distorted notions about sin, and made long over-due, positive and realistic clarifications which, it seems to me, had not previously been made with such clarity, courage, and enlightening penetration of the moral, over-all existential of this mysterious power of evil which "lies at the heart of Christianity."

And how painfully needed this study and its results were! It seems to have been the providential task of the last generation of scholars — and not by rejecting but rather building on and refining the invaluable and incalculable contributions of the past (and the towering work of the Scholastics of the Middle Ages immediately comes to mind) — to articulate the subject matter of sin in its present more personalistic, existential form. The doctrine of sin was, of course, taught in the past. But the presentation

⁶ "Holy Sonnets," V.

⁷ "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 13.

of sin was usually treated in an almost exclusively textbook, impersonal, legalistic fashion. In fact, from the time of the first appearance of the rash of moral manuals early in the 1600's, the subject of sin was studied ordinarily from such manuals and the catechisms which followed much the pattern of the manuals, albeit in simplified and far less sophisticated form. And the manual approach held sway right up until a few years ago. A few years prior to the convoking of Vatican II, but especially since Vatican II, a powerful impetus was given to an updating of both the study and teaching of the sacred sciences. Perhaps more explicitly than any of the other documents of Vatican II, both the "Decree on Priestly Formation",⁸ and the "Declaration on Christian Education"⁹ lay special stress on being *au courant* in all fields of learning, not only for candidates for the priesthood and religious life but for all Christian youth. Hence, it is the wish of the Council that there be a profound renewal in all branches of the sacred sciences, catechetics, and the theology of the liturgy. The thrust is definitely for an *aggiornamento* in all fields of learning both in methodology and in adapting the whole of Catholic doctrine and teaching to meet the demands of the times and according to the "signs of the times".

Hence, a change was much needed and inevitable, a change from this neatly codified, almost prescription-like, calibrated handling and solution of life's moral problems with all their variables and complexities. It seems to be a law of history that the more sophisticated, developed (and that word is open to all sorts of interpretations, we are well aware, both pejorative and favorable) "enlightened" a society or era becomes, the more complicated and more global its problems become, not least of all, the problem of decision-making in all areas of moral life. One writer has quite clearly pinpointed the situation we are up against in our hyper-critical and questioning age.

Moral decision-making is never simple and no moral doctrine can ever afford to be **simpleste**. This complexity stems from a great number of factors. Looming large among them is the fact that human situations which call for a response on our part as moral agents are so often situations

⁸ See especially in this document the chapter entitled, "The Revision of Ecclesiastical Studies," pars. 13-17.

⁹ The whole of this document can be read with great profit, especially the sections which call for a revamping of methodologies and keeping apace with the advances in all fields of learning, particularly pars. 8-12. For an excellent study of the interdependence of theology and the behavioral sciences, see Robert H. Springer, S.J., "Conscience, Behavioral Science and Absolutes," *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* Ed. Charles E. Curran (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968): pp. 19-56.

in which moral values are intertwined and conflicting. The simple, clear-cut choice between doing what is good and doing what is evil is an option encountered often enough in the textbook moral cases. It is rarely met with in real-life situations. As we confront such situations and endeavor to "read" them from an ethical standpoint, it becomes obvious that in each of the alternative courses of action emerging as viable responses there are values and disvalues involved, so that any decision, while promoting one or several values, will mean at the same time the exclusion of other values and may mean too the creation of certain disvalues.¹⁰

In a word, in this highly technical and equally complex age in which children in grade school begin to use mathematical calculators, we will rarely find a convenient, ready-to-hand, uncluttered solution to the multitudinous "conflict and tension situations" which daily badger all strata of society.

One tends to shake his head (and to be emotionally shaken) when one recalls the simple questions and, by hindsight, the simplistic answers which generations of Catholics had to learn and memorize from their catechisms which remained, substantially, unchanged for scores of years and for millions of the faithful. And for such a situation perhaps no one in particular could be blamed. Indeed, in its own circuitous way, all this may have been a sort of costly contribution to the convoking of Vatican II with its call to Aggiornamento in just such matters as updating the instruction of the faithful in the areas of moral and dogma. However, up to the time of the Aggiornamento, what groundless fears, doubts, frustrations and guilt feelings, and not infrequently profound unhappiness this simplistic weighing and balancing of the faithful's eternal destiny caused! Moral manuals and catechisms alike gave the same simple triadic formula for committing serious sin: serious matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will. And on that was decided the most important thing in the whole of human life and living: our life of love in God both here and forever hereafter! Or the loss of it!

The all-merciful and infinitely loving God never uses sin as a sort of Venus's-flytrap to ensnare His sin-prone and sin-situated children. Rather, He is forever "writing straight with crooked lines," and with equally crooked hearts! Of him we say: "You created my inmost self and knitted me together in my mother's womb; you know me through and through" (Ps. 139: 13,15). He is ever using sin as a kind of "divine excuse" to search out, forgive and welcome back into His love the host of prodigal sons and daughters who

¹⁰ Nicholas Crotty, O.P., "Conscience and Conflict," *Theological Studies* 32 (June 1971), p. 208.

have finally come to realize that greatest "mark" they ever missed was to turn their backs and leave behind their Father and His unfathomable love for them. He says to them as He says to all sincere seekers: "However great the number of sins committed, grace was even greater" (Rom. 5:21). And, "None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him. ... Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezek. 18:22,23). With that, we can now turn to the consideration of what we might call the general or major divisions of sin.

a. Original Sin — How Original and How Sinful?

Earlier in this study we mentioned that over the past two decades or so there has been a veritable outpouring of literature on the theme of sin. Receiving its fair share of attention, certainly, in this discussion on sin is the parent, the father of all sin — original sin.¹¹ The treatment given to it both from a biblical and theological standpoint is markedly more elaborate and critical than the traditional treatment given to the subject in the past. Undoubtedly this is due, in great part, to the renewed and critical study of Sacred Scripture,¹² the growing interest and involvement in the study of the behavioral sciences, including anthropology, and to the important implications in the now generally accepted theory of evolution.

Biblical scholars and theologians had to take these developments into serious consideration when doing any in-depth study of the nature and effects of original sin. As was to be expected, the result of their researches necessarily were reflected in their speculation and literary output. There is for from full agree-

¹¹ The literature on the various aspects of original sin, its nature, origin, consequences, etc., is voluminous. Suffice it to single out but a few of the better known works on the subject. Obviously, many other studies in book and article form will be well worth consulting and comparing: Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965); André M. Dubarle, O.P., *The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967); Peter De Rosa, *Christ and Original Sin* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1967); Herbert Haag, *Is Original Sin in Scripture?* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969); Henri Rondet, S.J., *Original Sin — The Patristic and Theological Background* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1972); A. Hulsbosch, O.S.A., *God in Creation and Evolution* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965). St. Thomas treats of original sin in the *Summa*, II/II, qq. 163-165, and in greater detail in his *Quaestiones Disputatae*, *De Malo*, qq. 4 and 5.

¹² Timely stimulus was given to the critical study of Sacred Scripture by the Encyclical of Pius XII published in 1950 and entitled *Humani Generis*.

ment among the scholars in the field about the precise nature of original sin, the question of its human origin, or the exact effects it had and has on subsequent sin and the moral life of mankind. In the present study — which purports to concentrate mainly on mortal sin — we shall content ourselves with a brief glance at some of the suggested solutions to the complex problem: to go into the question in any greater depth and detail would be beyond the purpose of this study. The views propounded by a number of the authors approach or depart from the traditional teaching in varying degrees.

Among the questions about original sin considered by the scholars is: Were Adam and Eve actually the **first** man and woman from whom all descended (monogenism)? Or were there other "couples" like them? Were there other humans, whether pre-Adamites or co-Adamites, two or whom, or some or all of whom, sinned and passed that "sin of nature," original sin, on to their descendants- (biological and theological polygenism)? The latest thinking along these lines seems to lead more toward polygenism (the original development and emergence of a number of human being).¹³ But whether one holds to polygenism or monogenism does not substantially affect the **fact** of original sin and its presence and profound effects in salvation history. It has been repeatedly stressed by scripture scholars that the first eleven chapters of Genesis (and what concerns us more here, the first three chapters) can not be taken as strictly scientific history nor as a scientific relation of the how and where of the first appearance of man and woman on our planet.

The Council of Trent which treats of original sin in greater detail than any other ecumenical council simply says that original sin lost for Adam and for the rest of mankind "holiness" and justice," and that this sin is one in its origin ("**origine unum est**") and is transmitted to all posterity by dint of their being offspring of Adam and Eve, and that it is not transmitted by imitation of the evils and "bad example" of other members of the human race, but by procreation ("**propagatione, et non imitatione transfusum**").¹⁴

¹³ For a treatment of the pros and cons of polygenism and/or monogenism see Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., "Original Sin and Man's Situation," pp. 203-208; Zoltan Alszegehy, S.J., Maurio Flick, S.J., "A Personalistic View of Original Sin," pp. 190-202; Alfred Vanneste, "Toward a Theology of Original Sin," pp. 290-214, all in *Theology Digest*, 15 Autumn 1967; also Karl Rahner, S.J., "Original Sin, Polygenism, and Freedom," *Theology Digest* 21, Spring 1973.

¹⁴ See *The Church Teaches, Documents of the Church*, tr. Jesuit Fathers of St. Mary's College, Rockford, Ill. Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1972), nos. 373, 374.

With all their different approaches in treating one or other aspect of original sin there seems to be rather solid agreement that original sin is not something "static" in nature and effect in salvation history. Original sin and its effects are not "just there" at the entrance of each child into his world. Rather, there is a powerful dynamism at work in the effects it leaves in every person, even after the sin itself has been removed by baptism or by at least an implicit life-choice for God in the case of those who do not have the benefits of the Christian revelation or the saving help of the sacraments. We are dealing here with what both St. Paul and St. John refer to as "the reign of sin," "the power of iniquity," "the slavery of sin," "the law of sin". It has a sort of "built-in" drive to evil (part of what the theologians refer to as "concupiscence"¹⁵) and the Book of Ecclesiasticus, "the evil urge" (15:14). It is all part of the reality of the "**mysterium iniquitatis**". The Church reminds us in her teaching on original sin that by the Fall our discernment of good and evil is impaired, our tending toward the good is weakened. (Denziger, **Enchiridion Symbolorum**, 29th Edition, nos. 174, 1643).

But even our very existence tells (or corroborates) the same sad tale. Daily we experience that the easy thing to do is only too often the wrong and evil thing to do. And, contrariwise, the hard thing is to do the right and virtuous thing. And the existential fact is universal: the famous pagan poet and contemporary of Christ wrote: "I recognize the better things and the more virtuous, and I approve of them; but it is the baser things that I choose to follow".¹⁶ Hence, we can see in the Fall of our First Parents a sort of continuous, **an on-going "fall"** of all humankind in the sense that, though the sin may be eradicated, its powerful influence and drive remain on in us, impelling us toward further falls and toward a fallen life situation.¹⁷

Each of us can complain with St. Paul: "I can not even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do but what I hate. What happens is I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:15, 19). In the third

¹⁵ On the nature and workings of concupiscence see Karl Rahner, S.J., "Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," *Theological Investigations*, vol. I (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), especially pp. 369-382; also Leo Scheffczyk, "Concupiscence," *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. I (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 403-405.

¹⁶ "Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7, 9.

¹⁷ For the consequences of original sin in the struggle to do good in the teaching of Trent see *The Church Teaches*, nos. 372, 376.

or resultant child is **totally** human (though this may not be easy to imagine) it would fall under the general laws of the economy of salvation like other humanly formed children.

To summarize this cursory study of original sin we can conclude this section by saying that original sin is a true sin, as Trent taught, that it is sin by analogy with actual sin,²¹ it is not personal sin or personally committed. It is a sin of our nature. One of its effects ("fomites") is to unleash its powers to incline us and our living to what is evil. Like Satan himself, who was the occasion for the Fall and hence for this and all subsequent sin, original sin leaves in all of us evil drives and tendencies which, as we all experience, have an insidious, unabating, almost rapacious dynamism about them, "prowling about like a roaring lion" (1 Peter, 5:9). There is only one effective protection against this and all other sin: a life lived in faith and love, for such are and always will be stronger than any and all sin.

b. "The Sin of the World" — the On-going Sin in Salvation History

God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose. If all the parts were the same, how could it be one body?

As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye can not say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you". What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones . . . that there may not be disagreement inside the body, but that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it.²²

Books have been written about the interdependence of each member of the Mystical Body of Christ with every other member. Pius XII in his encyclical, "**Mystici Corporis**," gave added significance and thrust to the doctrine. St. Paul gave it original expression, and his words have been commented on by some of the outstanding theologians in the Church. All are in agreement on one of the core elements in the doctrine, and that is that there is a certain closely-knit, vital solidarity and moral fellowship among each and all the members of the family of God. "You are the body of Christ. Everyone of you is a member of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). The implications in this doctrine are global. St. Paul tells us that there is a mutual influence, for good and for evil, among and upon all members of

²¹ St. Thomas, *De Malo*, q. 4, aa. 1 and 2, ad 4; and a. 6.

²² 1 Cor. 12:18-22, 25-27.

the household of God. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one members is honored, all the members share its joy together" (I Cor. 12:26).

Hans Urs von Balthasar, the well known European theologian, has caught the spirit of St. Paul's doctrine on the interdependence of all of us, one upon the other everywhere in the world. He has phrased it in a way which is of poetic beauty: "All our destinies are interwoven, and until the last of us has lived, the significance of the first can not be fully or finally clear". All this is but a sort of brief preface to this section on the theme of "the sin of the world".

The "Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" gives us a sobering reminder: "God did not create man as a solitary... For from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). Companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential".²³

The expression, "sin of the world", is found in John, 1.29. He also uses similar expressions repeatedly: "the whole world lies in the power of wickedness" (I Jhon 5:19).²⁴ "Everything in the world affords all that panders to the appetites or entices the eyes, all the glamour of its life, springs, not from the Father but is from the godless world" (I John 2:16). St. Paul speaks of sin in a like vein: "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 6:12). "Scripture has declared the whole world to be prisoners in subjection to sin, sin is master everywhere" (Gal. 3:22); "The myster yof iniquity, ("the secret force of lawlessness") is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Obviously the "world" mentioned by both John and Paul is not meant, primarily to refer to created nature about us, to our planet or the cosmos. Yet it is not excluded from the "infection" of sin. It, too, shares in its own mute way in man's downfall. "We know that the entire creation groans and is in agony even until now. And

²³ Par. 12.

²⁴ "The dreadfulness of these words may appall; yet only such bold language can gather up the essential tragedy of human existence. Life is woefully misread if it is not seen as grasped and possessed by evil so widespread and so powerful that only God can be trusted to deal with it. The picture of the world as lying passive in the grip of evil is true to reality." *Commentary of the Interpreter's Bible XII* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 301; on the same text Bultmann offers as one of the meanings of the passage: "the world is in a desperate state." *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 89.

not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free" (Rom. 8:22,23).

The psalmist complains about this same all-pervasiveness of sin: "Evils beyond number press on me from all sides, my sins close in on me until I can hardly see" (Ps. 40:12). Even though a number of modern theologians seem to equate original sin with "the sin of the world," there is a correspondingly large number of theologians of repute who keep the two biblically and theologically seeparate.²⁵ Besides, to equate the two raises more questions than it supplies answers. Perhaps we can compare "the sin of the world" to original sin as child to parent. Originla sin, in a sense, begot the sin of the world and was and is, in no small way, responsible for its upbringing, its maturing and increase. We might best describe the sin of the world as a **sin-situation**, a sin-existential, a condition of sin, sin-environment. The sin of the world is a sort of **hybrid** sin: it is not the sin of any one person but it is the sin of **all** persons, of the **whole of mankind**, from Adam down to the last man and woman on earth. For there can be a solidarity in good as there can be a solidarity in evil. In man's existential situation there is a sort of collective goodness and virtue and of vice as well.²⁶

Without conceding a moral environmentalism and determinism we just as readily admit that there is a definite climate, an atmosphere of sin in the world. We are surrounded by it and immersed in it. The scriptural passages above and our own daily living bring this home to us in al its stark reality. The whole of mankind can be considered as a kind of "corporate personality". For just as when any mature person acts in any truly human and hence moral fashion ("for moral acts are the same as human acts",²⁷) the whole person acts and is involved. And since mankind is one family, one "corporate person," on that analogy each of us acts in and through the rest of the members of this one corporate person — for the benefit or harm of the rest. It is both a psychological and metaphysical principle — and a daily experience of all of us — that goodness has a magnetic quality about it, it attracts people to

²⁵ For a survey of the views of theologians who do or do not tend to equate original sin with the sin of the world see James L. Connor, "Original Sin: Contemporary Approaches," *Theological Studies* 29 (June 1968); Christa Campbell Betty, "Piet Schoonenberg's Theory of Original Sin," *Thought* 45 (Spring 1970); George J. Dyer, "Original Justice — Original Sin," *An American Catechism* (Chicago Studies 1973) especially nos. 24-42.

²⁶ St. Thomas develops this theme in his discussion of the Mystical Body, in particular, *Summa*, I/II, q. 21, a. 3 corp. and the solutions.

²⁷ *Summa*, I/II, q. 1, aa. 1 and 3.

itself, it draws us to it in any of its many forms. But it is at the same time "generous" of itself to others, it is "diffusive of itself," and its goodness with others: "**Bonum est diffusivum sui.**"

But then **evil has its own generosity**; it, too, shares itself in its own infectious way. Just as the good and the virtuous conduct of a person can influence our lives for the better, so can the vicious conduct of another affect our lives for the worse.²⁸ The sin of the world is so vast, so truly global, it has had a history as old as mankind itself, beginning with the sin of our First Parents, the murder of one of their sons by the other, and so on in an uninterrupted outpouring of sin down through history to the present moment.

And we can not rightfully call the sin of the world the sum total, the grand accumulation of all the sin of mankind. It is a bit more complex than that. It is not merely the multitude of actual sins ever committed, though that forms a definite part of this mosaic of evil. Building upover the centuries, sin has gained a tremendous power, as St. Paul repeatedly reminds us. It has established a "reign of sin", "a cloud of sin". Every human being is born into a sin-situated, a sin-drenched world. We live and work out our salvation in a world "lying prone in sin," as St. John reminds us (1 John 5:19). Our environment, our moral atmosphere is sin-laden. This must and does take its toll on us, like a morally polluted atmosphere. And every day of our earthly existence is lived in this climate of moral challenge and tension. The opposition on the part of the forces of evil is relentless, and not of this world". St. Paul even personifies these forces, and so does St. John: "the Evil One" (1 John, 5:19). Even fifteen centuries ago the Latin Fathers saw the power of evil blanketing the world; St. Augustine called it a "deadly mass" ("**massa perditionis**") and St. Ambrose described the grip of sin on mankind as the "chaotic sway of sin" over the world ("**massa peccatrix**").

It is into such moral (or immoral) surroundings that each child is born and in which he must do battle as he grows and matures in responding to his God-given call to live out his life of love for God and neighbor. The on-going growth, self-discovery, and maturing in the life of one called by God's love will deeply influence and transform his or her life for better or worse. The family surroundings, the historical era into which the child is born and lives out his life, social, physiological, emotional factors, his moral religious training, the good or bad example of family, relatives and

²⁸ Man is a mediator, for good or for evil, to his fellowmen: St. Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 7, a. 6, for human nature is both a moral and ethical entity.

peers — each of these factors makes its deep and ineradicable contribution to the formation of the person. He will be influenced and direct his life according to a set of moral values — or lack of such values. It is in this particular moral world-set, not in a moral vacuum that this person will make his life decisions and live out his divine call. He will be living in a time of full-blown moral permissiveness, “sex consumerism,” international cartels of exploitation and vice (e.g., the drug trade). Two billion of the four billion inhabitants on our planet go to bed nightly either hungry or without proper nutrition while restaurants and supermarkets of the rich nations **discard as waste** what would feed a goodly portion of those hungry.²⁹

And on whose conscience lies the guilt? On no one man's or woman's but on the conscience of all of us, in different degrees and in a scale of graduated culpability according as we contribute by commission or omission to the “**massa peccatrix**” which is the sin of **our** world, the world of our making — and our undoing. To all this imponderable weight of evil we can not give the response of Cain, murderer of his brother, to the God who made them both: “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). For we are the God-appointed stewards of this world, the fullness, goodness and beauty of all of it.

Needless to say, on our own, we can not battle and win out over this sin-situation, this “sin of the world.” St. Paul tells us there is but one solution:

Grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of His power... resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens. That is why you must rely on God's armour, or you will not be able to put up any resistance when the worst happens, or have enough resources to hold your ground... Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion (Eph. 6:12,13,18).

Thus we see that “the sin of the world” is the sin of **our** world, the world of our making. The world's sin is a sort of moral com-site, a synthetic product of all the sins of mankind, a “massa” or cauldron of the world's evil from the beginning of human history, of salvation history. It is the sum total of original sin with all its dire consequences, the heap of human wickedness of every kind and all the human debasement, injuries, sorrows and physical and mental pain that followed and still follows in its broad wake.

²⁹ Over one half million die yearly from starvation even in a non-famine year; 10,000 die weekly: see the article by Bernard Weinraub, Sunday *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1975.

It is the innumerable offenses against God, neighbor, ourselves and the goods of this world that God gives to mankind, not to rape by wanton abuse and waste, but to cultivate in stewardship for God's greater glory and man's physical and spiritual benefit, for his very salvation, for the common good of all mankind and not of privileged elite only.³⁰ And there is what might be called "a collective guilt" for this world sin-situation. St. Catherine of Siena wrote in her **Dialogue** that any sin, committed by any member of the family of God, and anywhere, harms to that extent the whole family of God throughout the world. "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom, 12:5).

This is the existential into which we are all born, and from which we need rescue and redemption. One of the theologians who has written extensively on the theme of sin tends to locate the zenith (or better yet, the nadir) of man's fall in his rejection of his Redeemer at the crucifixion.³¹ He would tend to hold that sin crested at that point. I would suggest that the crest has been gathering momentum from the very first "fall" of man and has become in magnitude a tidal wave, not only because the world shouted, "let Him be crucified", but because man has now less "excuse" for sinning since his Saviour has come and lived with and for him, was sacrificed for man's life and salvation and left him an unlimited treasury of "good news", grace and strength, and sacramental channels for tapping in abundance whatever grace and strength he needs. **"Despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it"** (Rom. 5:21). With "this cloud of witnesses" to the goodness and mercy of God, Christ can say to the whole of mankind now as He did to those who rejected Him and His message in His own day: "Now they have no excuse for their sins" (John, 5:22).

This is the sin-polluted atmosphere in which every human being must live and work out his salvation and help his neighbor do the same. And though sin rolls in and around us every day like a fog that never lifts, the opportunities for growing in grace and for doing good for and serving the whole of mankind match and even far outstrip this sin-encrusted backdrop in salvation history. It is most important to keep this sin-situation of the world firmly in

³⁰ On the use and abuse of private property and wealth see Avery Dulles, S.J., "Aquinas and Consumerism," *America*, Nov. 2, 1974, 258; see also *Summa*, II/II, q. 66, aa. 1 and 2.

³¹ Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin* (University of Notre Dame Press 1965), pp. 195-197.

mind in the remainder of this study which will be treating its main theme, that is, personal sin, and in particular how and when does a person commit mortal sin or the "sin unto death".

c. Personal Sin

Original sin is more often called a "sin of nature" rather than a personal sin even though the person is radically affected by that sin, still it is not a sin one actually commits, but precedes all psychological and moral possibility of making a choice for or against God. Hence, it is a personal sin only analogously. And as we saw, the "sin of the world" is a composite of all the sin, guilt and their effects and scars left on mankind down through the ages. It is the whole bulk of iniquity that has oppressed mankind and is a sort of moral womb in which he is conceived and lives. He is implanted into it by the very fact that he is a human being and a descendant of mankind's First Parents who brought this sin into the world. Rather than a sin, we might better call it a **state**, a condition of sinfulness.

Personal sin as we treat of it in the remainder of this study is restricted to **actual** sin, the sin for which we are individually and freely and by deliberate choice responsible. It is of our own doing, even though such sin is always committed within the general context and in the all-pervasive environment of the "sin of the world". It is the sin we choose, we **prefer** to commit here and now. And since it is only mortal sin that has about it all the elements that make a sin complete and a definitive offense and break with God, the term "sin" is reserved primarily and strictly to mortal sin. Venial sin falls short of the completeness and "perfection" of a definitive break with God, and hence it is called sin by comparison with and analogously to mortal sin.³² Since sin involves a choice, and in the case of mortal sin, a life-decision, a life policy of conduct and of a moral life stance before God, we shall first consider the cluster of factors that come into play in all human decision-making.

³² On the question of venial sin's lacking the element of completeness in the genus of sin, and of its being sin by analogy with mortal sin see *Summa*, I/II, q. 88, a. 1 ad 1; also, *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1 ad 1.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS WHICH COME INTO PLAY
IN ALL MORAL DECISIONS-MAKING

1. THE INTERPLAY OF THE WILL AND INTELLECT IN MORAL DECISIONS

"Every man remains to himself an **unsolved puzzle**, however obscurely he may perceive it".¹ If there is any one body or group, that can speak with unmatched length and depth of experience about the human and moral condition of man, it is indeed the Church. She has lived with him and by him for almost two thousand years and she has shared his struggles to find himself and to help him shape his world for the better. St. Augustine in his autobiographical **Confessions** said much the same thing in his inimitable way: "Man is a great **deep, Lord**. You number his very hairs and they are not lost in Your sight: but the hairs of his head are easier to number than his affections and the movements of his heart!" And Augustine spoke from the best and worst of two worlds! Of the early Latin Doctors of the Church he perhaps had no equal in the depth of his knowledge and the intensity of his love for God and all mankind, the sons of God. As we remarked earlier in this study, every man, woman and child is truly a human I.B.M. — an "Indescribably Baffling Machine".

Before we come to consider the very heart and focal point of this study — and that is, that every human being must, according to the lights that God has given him, make a definitive and basic or core choice to live for and in God or against Him — we should first devote our attention briefly to a discussion of the nature and components of choice in the present moral context. A clear grasp of the cognitive and volitional factors that contribute to the making of that choice should be of great help in aiding us to appreciate both the importance and the necessity of such a moral life choice.

Over the span of the last twenty five years or so some truly pioneering work has been done in the area of moral knowledge and choice, and some extremely important lights have, as a consequence, been thrown on the whole question of sin and its imput-

¹ "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 21.

ability.² This does not mean that the same subject matter was not treated by the Scholastics and later by the manualists. But I believe we can say that it was not treated with such sharp precision and with such badly needed clarification. Moreover, practical conclusions and applications to daily moral living were drawn which are widely used today in much of the literature on the subject.

To help us understand a little more clearly and precisely the interplay between the action of the will and intellect in the whole field of human morality, it may be better to consider each one of these two faculties and their proper or exclusive functions separately. The most essential and formal element in all moral actions is that of **intention**: the goal, end or purpose because of which one performs (or omits) a certain action. And it is the task of the will to "intend", to work or strive toward obtaining the end, whether that end be an intermediate one, as for instance, success in marriage or in one's profession, or the final end of all mankind — eternal salvation. In other words, the will is the **executive** force, the power station or motive and driving force in getting things under way, getting them moving and heading toward a goal or end (intermediate or final, as mentioned).³

But there are two sides, two faces to the will. Both are rooted in the same power, but each does its "own thing". There is what theologians call the **philosophical** freedom of the will and the **psychological** freedom of the will. The type of freedom they exercise is not the same. Philosophical freedom is what might be called basic or core human freedom: the power to do or not to do to choose or not to choose; in a word, it means the freedom of the will from coercion or force. Such freedom to will or not to will is absolutely necessary for any moral act.

² Among the earliest — and best — of these pioneering studies on the interrelationship of the types of knowledge and the resultant choices that determine moral imputability may be mentioned: John C. Ford, S.J., "Criminal Responsibility in Criminal Law and Catholic Thought," *Bulletin of the Guild of Catholic Psychiatrists* 3 (December 1955), 3-19; John C. Ford, S.J., Gerald Kelly, S.J., *Contemporary Moral Theology*, vol. 1: *Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Westminster, Md., 1958): especially pages 203-276; Joseph S. Duhamel, S.J., and Dom Jerome Hayden, O.S.B., M.D., Ph.D., F.A.P.A., "Theological and Psychiatric Aspects of Freedom," *Thought* (Summer 1960), 179-203; Robert P. O'Neil, Michael A. Donovan, "Psychological Development and the Concept of Mortal Sin," *Insight* (Fall 1965), 1-7. Though not exhaustive, this is representative list of the "pioneers" in this question of knowledge and imputability.

³ For a treatment of the nature and function of the intellect and will see *Summa*, I, qq. 79-88; also for the will, *De Malo*, q. 8, a. *unicus*.

But psychological freedom is something a bit more complicated, more sensitive to factors and influences outside it. It is more sophisticated, much less simple and uncomplicated than the more root, metaphysical form of freedom of will, philosophical freedom. By psychological freedom we mean freedom from forces, pressures, influences, fears, impulses and urges — the litany of such factors that affect the free and untrammelled exercise of our choices could be extended almost without limit. Some of these influences or pressures or our choices are from within ourselves and are conscious, sub-conscious or unconscious; and some are from without. Far from subscribing to determinism in the exercise of free will, still one cannot simply shed or shrug off by mere wish the bulk of influences and forces that affect our lives and moral choices, that impinge upon and help shape our daily living and the formation and expression of our very personality. One need only think of the influence of one's family environment, one's peer group, religion or lack of it, accepted customs and mores, permissive or otherwise, the gargantuan influence of propaganda, advertisement, the communications media, type and quality of education or lack of it, and that rather nebulous but nevertheless real "spirit and attitude of the times."

Today, moralists, supported by the data of the behavioral sciences, the medical profession and psychiatry, stress the influence that any and all these factors of modern living have on our moral life. Phobias, fears, compulsions, neuroses, emotional immaturity in any of its many forms, the prolonged use and/or heavy dosage of certain medications, especially sedatives — all these can make inroads on the degree of one's freedom of choice, and hence affect the degree of subjective responsibility and moral imputability. No one can tell for certain to what degree freedom is hampered by such life factors, and to what degree imputability is decreased by this army of intangibles, often imaginary, often real, but always capable of exerting their influence like "silent persuaders." None of us lives in a hermetically sealed, impenetrable life compartment. We are all both susceptible of, and vulnerable to, so many influences, suggestions, impressions, persuasions of such a varied and sophisticated variety.⁴ Books have been written about the false "needs" created in the lives of the public through saturation advertisement by way of all channels of the communications media. The "objects" or things to choose from are almost limitless; the "goods" are there in superabundance. That fact alone can also affect and distort the quality of our choices.

⁴ For a partial list of such influences, see John C. Ford, S.J., Gerald Kelly, S.J., *Contemporary Moral Theology*, especially pp. 207-209.

To summarize briefly what has been said so far about the role of the will in our moral life: the will in its own way, is the driving force, the moral dynamo in human living. It is two-faceted. There is the basic or core element of the will: the ability to choose or not, to will to do or to will not to do. And that is philosophical freedom — a must for all free and moral living. Akin to it and rooted in the same power is the more flexible, open, even vulnerable aspect of freedom — psychological freedom, that can be more readily influenced, “manipulated,” affected by one’s own psychic and psychosomatic make-up, and hence by physical, emotional or psychic health or lack of it. It can likewise be swayed by environment, custom, peer pressures, by what is the “accepted” thing in society (as well as by the “expected” thing in society), by good and bad example, by the “everybody’s doing it” syndrome. The “Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” has remarked at some length on the moral existential and the world situation facing man and his moral life in all its complexities and profound social and moral changes.⁵

Because the end — or in Scholastic language, the “final cause” — is the “cause of causes,”⁶ since it sets all other causes or agents into motion and, in a sense both determines their activity and the direction they take, it is given prime position and honor in moral theology. That is why **the act of intention**, or the will’s tending toward the end and channeling the other human powers and faculties of man to bear toward that same goal, is **the most formal element in moral action**. But the will lacks something indispensable for all right and moral living. **The will is ignorant and blind**. It is true that it is the driving force in human and moral living, but it would be helpless, lost and adrift without the direction and guidance of its very necessary complement, the intellect. There is a marvelous complementarity between the will and the intellect: one is helpless without the other. Together, as a team, they make man the wonder, the “little world” that he is. The will seeks out and pursues, tends toward the good or its end only as pointed out and shown to it by the intellect. The will can only tend toward a good that is known and understood under one or all its aspects of being good. The “knowing” and the “understanding” is the task of the intellect and it shares its findings with its co-worker, the will. The will then will go out to lay hold of that good which it “recognizes” as such now for the first time.

But just as the will has factors and influences which often interfere with its wholly free functioning — fears, passionate urges,

⁵ See pars. 4-10, “The Situation of Men in the Modern World.”

⁶ *Summa*, I, q. 5, a. 2.

obsessions and the whole gamut of forces and factors that bear down on daily living and moral decision-making, so the intellect is beset with its own breed of badgering difficulties with which to contend.

Important and indispensable as the action of the will is in all moral decision-making, the intellect has its own unique and, in its own sphere, equally vital part to play. And just as there are two facets to the will's exercising its freedom — philosophical and psychological freedom — so too there is a double function in the process of knowledge in moral decision-making. The first segment of knowledge that the intellect grasps or apprehends is of a general, abstract and somewhat superficial sort. This type of knowledge is generally called "conceptual" or representative in character. It tells us what the object of our knowledge is, what kind of being it is, what kind of nature it has. It is basic and indispensable to its complementary follow-up in the genesis of knowledge in the process of decision-making, namely, "evaluative" knowledge. **Evaluative knowledge** may be described as **more critical, judgmental, more profoundly appreciate, in the original meaning of that word, meaning weighing and balancing the worth, the value of a thing.** Actually we have here two aspects of the same object of knowledge, each supplying us with its own data, its own "findings."

Since the evaluative knowledge is the more **in-depth**, the more discerning, penetrating and critical of the two, ordinarily it will be acquired and matured and perfected somewhat later on in life than that of the conceptual type. **Evaluative knowledge depends heavily though of course not exclusively, on intellectual and emotional maturity and on life experiences.**⁷ Though both the conceptual and evaluative kinds of knowledge are essential to any moral act, evaluative knowledge has a more immediate influence and bearing on making moral choices as we shall see when we come to consider the question of the basic life-choice or fundamental moral option.

The most threatening enemy of knowledge (and when dealing in moral matters the knowledge in question is of the **practical** order, the order of doing, of action and conduct) is ignorance in any of its varied forms. There is culpable and inculpable, vincible and invincible, affected or "cultivated" ignorance, etc...⁸ The ignorance which is our prime concern in this study is the type which

⁷ For a development of this notion see Joseph S. Duhamel, S.J., "Moral and Psychological Aspects of Freedom," pp. 181-185.

⁸ For a treatment of Aquinas' thinking on ignorance as related to sin, see *Summa*, I/II, q. 6, in particular a. 8; also I/II, q. 76.

is involved in the evaluative knowledge or judgments in moral choices, and most especially in basic options as related to moral sin. This is treated in the next chapter.

As briefly suggested above, besides intrinsic or intrapersonal factors which affect, and to a greater or lesser degree, help color and determine our life-choices, there are also extrinsic factors which exert a like influence in their own way.

2. EXTRINSIC FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE OUR MORAL LIFE AND CHOICES

As briefly suggested above, besides intrinsic or intrapersonal life, it is only too true to say of every person in the world: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind."⁹ Ever since psychology came of age as a science a century ago, and psychiatry and psychoanalysis became recognized as branches of the science of medicine half a century ago, we have come to learn more and more about the multiple factors which from all sides and sources contribute in no small way to the "making" of the human person. Some years ago a rather popular book was entitled *We Neurotics*. In point of fact **each human being needs not only other people but the world itself to help him find himself, to realize his potentialities, to grow and become truly mature, mentally, emotionally, and morally.**

We are at one and the same time the victims and beneficiaries of multitudes of persons, places and things that can help form or deform our lives. Each one of us is born into a situation, an environment, an era and society not of our choosing and not of our making. We are born with inherited characteristics, perhaps with physical, emotional, psychic or psychosomatic weaknesses or propensities for those weaknesses.¹⁰ We may acquire more on our own as we grow toward maturity. Though we have so many things going "for" us; we also have so many things going "against" us: pressures of so many kinds, financial, peer, societal, familial. We are told that ours is the largest tranquilized society that ever exist-

⁹ John Donne, "Meditation XVII."

¹⁰ "German medical literature shows great concern for the problem of the emotions. German authors never tire of stressing that a psychological or physiological disorder is often the result of a *lack of love* and to an emotional life that lacks that healthy atmosphere it needs." See Jean-Pierre Schaller, S.T.D., *Our Emotions and the Moral Act* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1968), p. 44.

ed, and this because of the number of nervous or neurotic disorders. We live in a century of what one might call a moral revolution, of far-reaching permissiveness,¹¹ of violence and terrorism which, if they do not surpass, certainly match any period in human history. Anyone steeped in this life-situation, especially the young who are more sensitive to such things, must begin to question much, to feel insecure, to doubt, and to feel the pull of the crowd. All these factors and myriads more, consciously or unconsciously help shape one's ideas, build up one's system of values and moral judgments.

Doubtlessly, many of these factors will influence, at least to some degree, the free choices of the will and both the conceptual and evaluative knowledge of the mind in daily moral living. Obviously, one's total life situation has much to do with the good or bad habits of one's life, one's attitudes and response to given situations and the here and now existential of daily living. None of these facts or factors is a denial of free choice nor of the ability to make sound evaluative judgments. But any or all of them make one's choices and sound judgments that more difficult, perplexing, and certainly challenging. At times, these factors, taken singly or in conjunction with a combination of them, can and do affect and diminish one's free and open deliberation and moral choices, and hence, proportionately, one's culpability. Indeed, it is possible that because of the intensity and the powerful influence of these factors one may be excused from all culpability in a given act or even series of acts. In dealing with the moral life of man, one has to keep in mind that in every truly human, and hence moral, act the **whole** person is involved **as he is**. No moral act is a fragmented, compartmentalized, disjointed series of isolated actions performed independently by the powers (and their corresponding activity) of mind, will and body. The human person is one and he acts as one, as a complete unity, an "unum per se." In all moral activity, the mind, will and senses — on all levels of existence — both in-

¹¹ That there has been a growing and excessive permissiveness in dogmatic and moral theology see, *inter alia*, the historic "Hartford Statement" of Jan. 29, 1975 drawn up by an ecumenical group of 18 Christian thinkers representing nine denominations, and entitled, "An Appeal for Theological Affirmation," *Time*, February 10, 1975, p. 47; also, Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 34 (March 1973), 77-79; Thomas L. Doyle, M.D., "The Moral and Psychological Effects of the Sexual Revolution," *Linacre Quarterly* 38 (August 1971), 175-179.

fluence and "pressure" one another to produce and elaborate one end product, one human act, towards the production of which, body and soul, mind, will and senses all contributed something, each in its own way and in its own degree.¹² That is precisely why the moral act is designated the "human" act, a personal act. It is in this sense that we can say that we love or hate, and do good or evil "even with our feet!"

It will be of great help to keep this firmly in mind as we move into the next section of the study which is, indeed, the "heart of the matter" in regard to all moral and Christian life and living, and that is the question of the basic moral choice or fundamental option. We shall see later how this life-choice is inseparable from the effective love of God and neighbor or the rejection of such a love and thus the choice of "the sin unto death."

¹² On the interrelation and collaboration of man's powers of mind, will and body in his moral conduct, see the extremely perceptive and lucid commentary of Thomas Gilby, O.P., *Summa*, I/II, qq. 6 and 7, Appendix 1, "Structure of a Human Act," and Appendix 2, "Liberty Within Limits," pp. 211-221, vol. 17; also his commentary on *Summa*, I/II, qq. 18-21, Appendix 5, "The Subordination of Morals," pp. 142-146 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970), vol. 18; also Jean-Pierre Schaller, S.T.D., *Our Emotions and the Moral Act*, in particular, Chapter 1, "The Problem of the Emotions," and Chapter 2, "The Emotions and Sin," tr. M. Angeline Bouchard (Staten Island: Alba House, 1968), pp. 17-72.

CHAPTER V

THE CORE DETERMINANT OF ALL MORAL AND
CHRISTIAN LIVING1. **TAKING AND LIVING OUT A LIFE-POLICY —
THE BASIC MORAL CHOICE**

As we have seen, such expressions as "fundamental option" or "basic life choice" do not appear in the Bible. However, the reality conveyed by such expressions is repeatedly contained in both the Bible and in the writings of the Scholastics.¹ The terminology is quite recent; the reality is as old as the world-changing choice of our first parents to sin rather than to serve in love. Indeed, over the past twenty years or so in the steadily increasing volume of literature on the various aspects of mortal sin, these and equivalent expressions have been widely accepted into general usage.² The new American Catechism uses this terminology in its section on moral.³

As we saw in the section which treated of sin as seen in the biblical concept of it, the whole thrust of all human life, of all moral living is a **theo**-logical one: it is a theo-centric orientation. God is **the** supremely attractive and cohesive force in all truly human, and hence, moral endeavours. There can be no true sin without morality — sin is not a mere "mistake" or failure to realize one's given potentiality — **rather, in its depths it is an offense against God and His creation.** Neither can there be any real sin

¹ In substance, St. Thomas treats of the basic option in the *Summa*, I/II, q. 72., a. 5 also in q. 89, a. 6; *De Malo*, q. 7., a. 1; III *Sentences* d. 31., q. 1., a. 1., resp., and IV *Sentences*, d. 9., a. 5 ad 4; *De Veritate*, q. 14., a. 11 ad 1 and 2; *De Malo*, q. 5, a. 2 ad 8.

² For a cross sampling of the literature on the basic option: Joseph Fuchs, S.J., "Sin and Conversion," *Theology Digest* 14, 1966: 292-297; Thomas N. Hart, S.J., "Sin in the Context of Fundamental Option," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 71, 1970: 47-50; Eugen J. Cooper, Notes and Comments, "The Fundamental Option," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39, 1972: 383-392; Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 27 (1966): 608-610; Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R., *Sin in the Secular Age* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1974), pp. 103 ff., Sean Fagan, S.M., "No More Sin?" *Catholic Mind*, January 1977, pp. 29-40.

³ *An American Catechism* (Chicago Studies, 1974), part II, pp. 248-251.

without there being a God who must be taken into account and confronted in all moral living: "He is Who is we are those who are not." as St. Catherine of Siena reminds us in her *Dialogue*.

Not surprisingly, we shall not find any real difference in the concept of sin as enunciated in the Bible and as held by present day reputable theologians. The reason is that the root of every sin, of whatever kind, is an **offense against love**, and always against the absolutely gratuitous, indeed utterly prodigal love of God. God made a primitive covenant of love with out First Parents. He repeated it even more explicitly as time went on: thus he renewed it with Noah, Abraham, and in a very explicit way with Moses on Mount Sinai. Lastly, "when the appointed time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born subject to the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law and to enable us to be adopted sons. You are no longer a slave but a son! And the fact that you are a son, makes you an heir, by God's design" (Gal. 4:4,5,7). The Word of God Himself came amongst us to establish the final and perfect covenant of love.

This New Covenant was written out, signed and sealed by His salvific life, death and resurrection, indeed by every word He uttered and every deed He did, and the covenant was given its final and perpetual form by the shedding of His own blood to fulfill the Old Covenant of love and to inaugurate the New. "For greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for his friends." So He Himself spoke about His love for mankind (John 15:13). But like all covenants, there was a **mutuality**, a reciprocity involved. God gave His Son and Spirit to us in love and out of love for us. In return God wanted us, our love and service in return: "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him: and we shall come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words. And my word is not my own; it comes from the Father who sent me" (John, 14:23,24).

Repeatedly we are told that the very heart of all moral and God-like living (the notion of theological and theocentric living) is the love of God and neighbor. **Love is the determinant of all virtuous and God-centered living.**⁴ **It is the very core of a full moral life.** If St. Irenaeus could say that the glory of God is mirrored in man fully alive⁵ how much more so is this true in the person who loves God and neighbor with a dedicated and committed love of service! In this whole matter of all that God did for us, with no merit and no deserving on our part, since we are born in a state

⁴ *Summa*, I/II, q. 72, a. 5; q. 89, a. 6; *De Malo*, Q. 7, a. 1; III Sentences, d. 29, a. 3 and d. 31, a. 1, resp.

⁵ *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7 (PG 7, 1037).

of "not yet", of an absence of the saving love of God in our lives, **our nature seems to cry out for that God to come and make something, someone of us, to set us aright.** Each one of us seems to be crying out for the One Who, alone, can make us whole again, Who can re-create us as He alone created us. With Alfred de Musset we feel forced to pour out our common yearning: "I can not help it — in spite of myself, infinity torments me".⁶ But the tormenting is a divine and loving invitation in disguise. And should that infinity not "torment" us? For it rather for Him, we were made. Of each of us God asks the life-long relevant question: "What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given, how can you boast as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor. 4:7). That question calls for a response: "How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the the good he has done for me?" (Ps. 116:13).

And now we are at the heart of the notion of the covenant reality: there is a divine invitation, a loving call on God's part to live in love with Him, to be His helpmates in realizing salvation history, in "renewing" the face both of the earth and of man. In return for our loving response, a response lived out in daily God-like living and loving, we receive nothing less than the life and love of the Triune God Who is our everlasting joy and fulfillment. The mind-reeling mystery in all this is that all the benefits flow from God to us: **Giver, gift and return** are all **His** doing. He makes no profit, gains no premiums. It is all part of that infinitely mysterious divine prodigality by which He sets His goodness and love in us, a sort of Bondsman for His own generous love.

Yet in the face of all these gifts, and even under the sure and yet completely free working of God's grace or concurrence in all of our life and actions, we remain and will always remain, entirely unpressured and open to accept or reject this divine call to grandeur and ultimate and lasting happiness and fulfillment. God works **in** us, not **against** us and our freedom. The acceptance of the invitation, the agreement to living the covenant is our free choice and responsibility. **We can neither choose nor love God through a substitute.** Indeed, this will be the most personal, the most self-committing choice we shall ever make. It involves our whole life and being — the length, the breath and the depth of it! That is why it is called by such sobering and soul-searching names as, a "moral life policy," "basic" or "fundamental option," "moral life-style or life-choice," "moral life orientation," "life-decision", etc. The essential elements in such a choice are that it involves, penetrates one's whole life, conduct and being — for the whole of one's life. Hence, it is a complete, definitive, and lasting decision,

⁶ *L'Espoir en Dieu*, p. 9.

though like all man's free choices he can abandon it. It is a way of life, purely and simply. And we either make this life-choice for God and all that He means and stands for — or we freely refuse to do so: we turn away from Him not only our head and heart, but our life.

If we accept this life-choice for God, it will be with His grace. But that we must make a choice any serious reflection on ourselves and the meaning and purpose of life will point out to any sincere seeker. So that St. Paul would not excuse those who lived before or outside the Law for not knowing and loving God according to their lights. They had the handwriting and "law" of God written in nature and in their conscience (Rom. 1:19-21; 2:12-16).

Sacred Scripture, in both the Old and New Testament, has clear reminders to the People of God that **this life-choice** — one way or another — **must be made by each and all**. We give but a few examples. Thus in the Old Testament: "I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. **Choose life**, then, so that you and your descendants may **live in the love of the Lord your God**, obeying his voice, **clinging to him; for in this your life consists**" (Deut. 31:19,20). And, "He (the Lord) made man in the beginning, and **left him free to make his own decisions**. If you wish, you can keep the commandments, to behave faithfully is within your power. He has set fire and water before you; put out your hand to whichever you prefer. **Man has life and death before him; whichever man likes better will be given him** (Sir. 15-14-18). "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession. . . . **Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments**" (Deut. 7:6,9). "What I want is a steadfast love (loyalty) not sacrifice, knowledge of God, not holocausts" (Hosea 6:6). "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people: and walk in all the ways that I command you, that it may be well with you" (Jer. 6:23).

In the New Testament Our Lord Himself reminds us to be wise in our choices and endeavours: "Do not store up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure which neither moths nor rust corrode, nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart also will be" (Matt. 6:19-21). Hence, there is question here of where one's true treasure, one's true possession or life's goal or purpose is; and there the thrust of one's whole life and being (heart) will be directed. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven" (Matt.

7:21). And again Our Lord says: "Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them — I will show you what he is like. He is like the man who when he built his house dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But the one who listens and does nothing is like the man who built his house on soil, with no foundations: as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became" (Luke, 6:47-49). In both these last two passages, Our Lord seems to be stressing the need for steadfast commitment to Him and His mission, and that, not merely by interior or theoretical approval, but by daily life and action.

And those words of Our Lord which explicitly demand a choice of loyalty and service: "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You can not give yourself both to God and to mammon" (Matt. 6:24). The whole notion of choice for living in God and in Christ is contained most strongly in the First Epistle of John. To take but a passage or two: "We can be sure that we are in God only when the one who claims to be living in him is living the same kind of life as Christ lived" (2:5,6). And, "My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active" (3:18). St. Paul has those rousing words: "Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of truth" (Ephes. 4:23,24). And in the preceding verse: "you must give up your old way of life; you must put aside your old self which gets corrupted by illusion and desire" (4:22). Numerous other texts from both the Old and New Testament could be quoted to point out the existence of the life-decision,⁷ however we wish to summarize briefly what we have seen so far about the nature and necessity of the moral life-policy.

It should be clear by now that the very fact of our free creation by God and our re-creation or redemption by the life, death and resurrection of His Son-become-Man to pay the price of our salvation by His own blood gives rise to demands on our part to respond, to react to this divine act of love and mercy. It is an integral part of

⁷ See also Ex. 20:5,6; Deut. 6:1-9; 10:20-22; 11:13-20; 13:3,4; 30:10-20; Josh. 22:5; 23:6-11; Is. 56:6-8; Wis. 6:17-20; Ez. 18:21-23; and among the passages in the New Testament: Hebrews chaps 1 and 2; Luke 9:23-26; 14:25-33; John 15:7-17; 18:18-26; Rom. 5:1-11. Nor should we overlook one of the most primitive of all God's covenants with His People, that made with Abraham and found in Genesis, 17:1-9. Also, God's covenant with the whole of mankind (the "cosmic" Covenant) in Gen. 9:9-13.

the divine economy of salvation that every human being, according to the lights given him by God, must take a stand on his life and what to do with it, how he is to dispose of it. Those of the Judaeo-Christian world have the Word of God to direct them regarding such a choice. They can not remain neutral, undecided, without a life's purpose or goal. To choose to drift, to temporize or dodge the issue is **already a choice** — in the wrong direction. We are dealing with nothing less than a personal divine calling to each human being "to do what in him lies" to respond to this divine invitation to live in love for God. One's attitude and response to that call will be a determinant factor of what life-stance one takes — with eternal consequences.

Having given the biblical basis for the notion of the basic or life option, we shall briefly look at it and its implications from a theological viewpoint. Our moral life will last as long as our earthly life lasts. Here in this world we shall be called upon to make decisions, some heart-rending, complicated, tension-laden, and conflict-packed as, indeed, they can be in modern technological society. Decision-making of this type and inner struggles to choose what is right and for the good of all concerned will cease only in the vision of the infinitely good God in heaven. There vision and love will reign supreme, with no tensions, no conflicts of interest. But until then, we have to "work out" our salvation. Hence, taking out and keeping a moral life policy with our choice for God and our fellow-men will not be easy. Christ warned us that it would not.

For in the fundamental moral orientation of one's stance, one's whole life, being, and life's activity and conduct are in the balance and on the scales. Such a choice is for keeps and involves and affects one's whole core stand and life attitude. It is really what makes or breaks us as lovers of God and His Son, and will determine how and to what extent we contribute to fulfilling the divine plan of salvation for ourselves and others. For an essential element in this basic life choice is "otherness". To live for ourselves only is to rupture such a basic life choice of love. The one who takes this life choice and lives it out from his innermost being, come what may, does so **out** of love and **in** love for God, neighbor, himself and all creation about him. There is a divine altruism, a divine I and Thou (plural) involved in one's deepest being. For, "the love of Christ impels us who have reached the conviction that since one died for all, all died . . . **so that all those that live might live no longer for themselves alone**, but for him who for their sake died and was raised up. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view" (2 Cor. 5:14-16).

In sum and substance, then, in the fundamental life choice, we are dealing with moral life itself and how to live it. It is called "fundamental", or "basic", because on it and with it we **build up** and **built out** our moral life. This basic stance is the blueprint, the masterplan of our total moral structure. All future decisions and decision-making will be mapped out and followed according to this plan of life and life policy and life style. Hence, the notion of fundamental option be-speaks a basis for all future moral life and conduct. **It involves the one who makes such a choice in the very core of his being** in every layer of his existence, in all his daily moral decisions and activity; and it decides his way of life **here** and **hereafter**. It squarely faces life's realities and the One who makes real things real. Thus it is **self-realizing**; it is so by reaching out to others and to the other in love and service. For unless we reach out, we can never draw others into our life and be freed, formed and fulfilled by them — and by Him. "Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness . . . For God has 'left him free to make his own decisions', (Sir. 15:14) so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him. Hence, man's dignity demands that he act through a knowing and free choice . . . personally motivated and prompted from within".⁸

This **fundamental option** or **basic choice** is so called precisely because there is question here of a **life's** decision, of a weighing of life's options and values — and deciding the moral position to take, a point from which to survey life's situations and from that point of vantage to map out our procedure, our course of action, our "yes" or "no". As one can easily gather, this is not one of the many "games that people play". In such a choice, there is no playing or play-acting. For there is no stage of entertainment here but only of fact and reality: no puppets or marionettes, but of free life, free decisions and equally free determinations of **what our present and the next world will be for us and others!**

Hence, we are dealing here with **no flash in the pan decision but with a stable, enduring, sustained life stance or life style in the moral realm**. From the way we function, we know that such life-forming and life-determining decisions and stands will not be made in one fell swoop. Thus, ordinarily, such life decisions are not made, at least made well, by an overwhelming "bright idea, dramatic experience, hunch or impulse". They will not be made in one stroke of the pen nor of the will, but only after the build-up of an attitude or stance. And precisely here is where the difference between mere conceptual knowledge and the more critical and

⁸ "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 17.

searching evaluative knowledge comes into play. Generally, it will only be after a series or concatenation of judgmental evaluations about oneself, the purpose of life, the reflection about what is morally right and wrong, the notion of final retribution, and thus of the existence, immanence and transcendence of God (according to one's lights) and His action and divine providence in this world and on our lives — it is only after such deep searchings (and they need not be academic or sophisticated) that one becomes equipped to make such a life-embracing choice.

Certainly a sufficient degree of **mental, moral and emotional maturity** is necessary to correlate all these life factors and decide accordingly. We shall attempt in a later section to see at what physical and moral age one can begin to have the degree of discretion necessary for making a moral life stance. It is well to keep in mind that human growth (on all levels of existence) is a gradual process. "Good things do not happen fast"; and that's true whether speaking about the aging of a good wine or about committing oneself to a policy of good moral living. And just as such a stance is prepared for ahead of time, and does not burst forth in one flash, neither, generally, is such a stable, life position, embedded as it is in our whole being by a long line of actions and situations, lost by one isolated action or even a series of actions if one never fully and in depth abandoned this stance by such actions.

2. **BASIC AND/OR FINAL OPTION — HOW BASIC, AND HOW FINAL?**

Akin to the fundamental option or the basic moral life choice is what has come to be called the "final option".⁹ The proponents of this theory, though generally in accord on the essentials of the basic options theory, still differ somewhat in explaining either its nature or its workings and implications. Perhaps the most substantive difference in the "final option" theory as opposed to the basic or fundamental option, is that a sizeable number of its better known

⁹ On the similarities, difference, and critiques of this theory as proposed by various authors, see among the growing body of literature on the subject: Karl Rahner, S.J., *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961); Roger Troisfontaines, S.J., tr. Francis E. Albert, *I Do Not Die* (New York: Desclée, 1963); Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Robert W. Gleason, "Toward a Theology of Death," *Thought* 32 (Spring 1957): 39-68; Dom Cyprian Stockford, "Sin, Hell Sacraments," *Downside Review* 81 (1963): 22-36; Michael Schmaus, "Death as Fulfillment," *Continuum* 5 (Autumn, 1965): 483-488; Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 29, (December 1968): 679-681.

proponents would make the so called final option the **only** ultimate and **completely definitive** choice of one's moral life-stance. Even an otherwise "sin unto death" committed during one's lifetime would be so only if it were charged with a moral orientation, with one's face **irreversibly** set against God and so ratified and finalized at death. All other instances of a basic option (short of the absolutely final one at death) would be only "provisional" and not definitive. In other words, there would be no question of "sin unto death" until the **moment of death**, when the final choice, the very last and utterly definitive self-disposition and the disposition of one's whole moral life would take place. However, such a theory of waiting for the last moment (even after "biological" death) before the finalizing and ultimately decisive choice for or against God and His love, though it may be an attractive theory, raises more questions than it answers.¹⁰

First of all, as this theory makes allowances for, and seemingly "plans on," some sort of divine intervention and special final offer of life-choice at the moment of death,¹¹ who can affirm or deny the real existence of such an offer except the one who has actually experienced death? But we must remember that no such testimony or description of such a choice is communicated by a person at the moment of death (nor, **a fortiori**, after biological death), for as Blaise Pascal soberly reminds us: "**On meurt toujours seul**".

Fr. Robert Gleason, with considerable more realism, points out: "It is true that neither Scripture nor Tradition, the sources of Revelation, offer us an indication that the option proposed by theologians is a fact. It is at best theological speculation. . . . One might attach the note of 'possible' to it if the necessary restrictions are observed in the theory".¹² Moreover, he theory would seem to render it difficult, if not morally impossible, to commit a **definitive mortal sin** during ones' lifetime. Rather, one would have to wait until death to have that sin classified and ratified as truly a "sin unto death". That would seem to set limits to one's self-disposition and the fully free exercise of definitive

¹⁰ See the critique of the final option theory by Richard A. McCormick, S.J., and Bruno Schüller, S.J., in "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 99 (December 1968): 680, 681.

¹¹ "Modern insight into the mystery of death stresses that *in dying the whole personality is expressed in its very center*, and that man then enters a situation in which *he is totally aware as a person of the implications of covenant in his life*. He can see then what he really is, and *he will respond accordingly*." (Italics mine.) Kevin O'Shea, C.S.S.R., "The Reality of Sin," *Theological Studies*, p. 250, footnote 8; see also Michael Schmaus, "Death as Fulfillment," *Continuum* 5 (1967): 483-488.

¹² "Toward a Theology of Death," *Thought*, vol. 32, Spring 1957, p. 68.

moral choices. Since all so-called mortal sins before the final option would be "provisionally" and not actually mortal sins as explained, then the sinner could be quite certain that he could convert back to God because both his turning away from God was only "provisional" and God, on His part, disassociated Himself from the sinner also only provisionally. Thus, the sinner's final conversion would be quite certainly assured him!¹³

Hence, there is a difference, when seen in this way, between these two schools of thought. It would seem that the **final option** theory has over-extended itself, and tends to assert more than it can substantiate, especially in the question of God's proffering one final opportunity to the person involved (either at or after the moment of death) to take a final and irrevocable moral stand.

On the other hand, the **basic option** theory seems to find itself more at home with traditional teaching on sin and free choice, and with the testimony of the Scriptures and with the data of the behavioral sciences.

With this as a sort of introductory backdrop we can now move into the discussion on mortal sin as a basic moral choice of life, a life-decision against the true and only ultimate good of man and every other creature of God.

¹³ See the observations of Richard A. McCormick, S.J., in "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies*, supra (note 10).

The position expounded above in the text on the question of the final option represents one of the more extreme positions and seems to do violence to the human freedom involved while setting limits to the gratuitousness with which God grants his saving graces of forgiveness always and everywhere.

CHAPTER VI

THE BASIC DECISION AND "SIN UNTO DEATH"

1. IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BASIC DECISION,
WHEN DOES ONE COMMIT "SIN UNTO DEATH"?

As a fitting introduction to this section on the interrelation between the basic option and mortal sin, or "sin unto death," we might do well to quote from one of America's foremost moral theologians, Richard A. McCormick, S.J. To situate both the basic option and mortal sin in the renewal of moral theology, Fr. McCormick writes:

The Council insisted that the renewal in moral theology must not be equated with abandonment of its scientific character. One of the most fruitful areas of recent scientific analysis emerges from the literature surrounding what we might call the fundamental option. Several conciliar statements seem to suggest, even suppose, this analysis of moral activity. The term, "fundamental option" is used by moral theologians to refer to the free determination of oneself with regard to the totality of existence, the fundamental choice between love of self and love of the saving Lord. Because man's eternal salvation, his basic position for or against the God of salvation, is at stake in such choice, they must involve a man's total disposition of himself, out of the radical center of his being. Since this is the case, these choices will involve a depth of the person's being beyond formulating (or reflex) consciousness, and hence will escape adequate conceptual formulation.

Fr. McCormick then proceeds to add: "This understanding of the root of moral activity has helped us immeasurably in understanding the meaning of mortal sin, and hence also the difference between mortal and venial sin. It also has helped us to explain the so-called grades within the category of serious sin. It has deepened our knowledge of conversion."¹

As we saw earlier, it is only mortal sin which is truly sin, properly speaking. It alone answers to the full notion of sin. Venial sin lacks the perfection and complete nature of sin. Hence, it is

Cf. also the recent Roman document of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, released on Jan. 16, 1976 and entitled: *Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics*. Paragraphs 9 and 10 treat at some length of the basic moral choice, and the document uses it as a backdrop for issuing its directives on the matter under study.

¹ "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 27 (December 1966): 608, 609.

sin by analogy.² Accordingly, unless otherwise indicated, the following remarks will be restricted to a consideration of mortal sin. It will be recalled from our study of the notion of sin in the Bible, sin is disruptive and destructive of the covenant of love between God and man. Sin is always and everywhere an offense against love—against the love of God, basically, and also directly or indirectly, against well-ordered love of self and love of neighbor. Love is the basis of all virtuous and moral living.³ Hence, mortal sin is an undermining of the whole of the moral and Christian life. It is moral death. Sin strikes God's love in the face.

God invites, without exception, every human being to enter a personal covenant of love with Him. Indeed, everyone is personally called to a divine vocation of love and life in God, as is repeatedly taught in a number of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.⁴ That invitation, according to His own mysterious designs, is given to some more explicitly and more clearly than to others. But to **everyone** there is extended the call to love in God and Christ. Thus, **every human being**, when he has reached a stage of **sufficient moral discription, must come to grips with himself, his purpose in life, what goals or ends he sets up for himself and his life-style.** He will do this circumscribed by a network of factors and influences, personal, familial, societal, physical, psychosomatic, psychic, moral, educative, etc. Each of these factors will have made its own

² *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1.

³ *De Malo*, q. 2., a. 10; *Summa*, II/II, q. 23, a. 8.

⁴ "Since Christ died for all men, and since the *ultimate vocation* of man is in fact *one*, and *divine*, we ought to believe that the *Holy Spirit* in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 22. Also, "Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life." "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," par. 16.

"God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please God." "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church," par. 7. On the grace given to non-Christians and even so-called "atheists," see Karl Rahner, S.J., *Theological Investigations* VI, "Anonymous Christians," (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 390-398; Eugene Hillman, C.S.Sp., "Anonymous Christianity" and the Missions," *The Downside Review* 84 (October 1966): 361-379. See also his "Pluriformity in Ethics: a Modern Missionary Problem," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40 (July 1973): 264-175.

impressions and have had its own peculiar influence on his total development and self-realization. He will make, sooner or later, an in-depth choice, a decision from his innermost being, to follow a moral life-style, steeped as he is in that multi-faceted milieu into which he was born, and in which he grew and developed.

More recent theologians, especially from the time immediately preceding Vatican II and thereafter, have tended to shift the stress in mortal sin to the knowing and willing elements, while still taking into account the part played by the so-called gravity of the external act in sin. More attention is paid to the two former elements of knowledge and choice. It is, in fact, a question of greater stress and focus on one's degree of **subjective involvement** in sin. Sin is not something, some action or deed "out there." What is now more closely analyzed and evaluated is the more formal and constitutive element of sin, namely, the degree of depth and fullness with which one commits himself and his person to sin. If in any particular moral choice one fully and freely, from the depth of his being, with complete definitive and finality rejects and ruptures the salvific covenant of love between himself and God, he commits a "sin unto death," unto his spiritual death and ruin.

This calls for further elucidation, for the whole question of mortal sin hinges on the right understanding of this "total choice." Mortal sin, "sin unto death," is imputed only by a fully personal, all-out, complete, basic self-disposing of one's moral life and being to an action or situation which would destroy the bond of love between God and oneself. This refusal or rejection of God's freely given love must be done with full consent and clear evaluation of what is taking place, and with a like consent to, and and knowledge of, its necessary and eternal consequences. Hence, if a total option or choice involving one's core being (Joseph Fuchs uses the expression, "**tota persona**") is called into play in the instance or situation in question, and one wholly identifies himself with and commits himself to this choice, since the choice in question rejects God and his covenant of love, the resulting sin is likewise rejective and destructive. It is deadly: it kills the life of love in that person. Such a person can only be resurrected through the love and mercy of the risen Redeemer of all sinners and sin.

Every mortal sin, then, as St. John says, makes the sinner a law unto himself. He becomes his own law. There is lawlessness, "**anomia**," in his life-stand (1 John 3:4-8). There is the **dis-order** of breaking with the only One who can put true and lasting order in one's life, for it is God's love which can give purpose and can "make sense" of a world of finitude and sin. Here, therefore, the underscoring is not the gravity or seriousness of the action or situation

considered in itself. What is far more determinative of serious imputability is the degree of **self-commitment** and **self-involvement** with which one identifies and expresses himself and his life-choice with whatever it is that is disruptive and destructive of the mutual covenant of love. If that self-commitment gathers up the whole person **against** God and His love, then there is a definitive severing of the love bond between God and the sinner. Then the good which the person chooses over against God becomes his **god**. There has been a prostitution of the love of God for another love which the prophets so often preached against; indeed, they were killed for their unwanted reminders.

Until fairly recently, sin, as treated in the moral manuals and catechisms laid great stress on this element of "gravity of matter." Such a treatment of sin tended to categorize in an overly simplistic and impersonal fashion such a true "life and death" issue like serious sin. Rudolf Schnackenburg warns us to be most sparing in judging about one's personal culpability when it comes to a question of mortal sin: "Any one who has any sense of the latter's (John's) horror of the domain of death far from God, will be cautious about rapid identification of mortal sin in the life of a seriously striving Christians."⁵

But just as grace was necessary to make one's basic moral choice in life — as Vatican II reminded us in its documents quoted above — since the whole thrust to live for and in God's love is a divine one, and since, too, there is simply too ponderous a weight of selfishness and self-seeking to overcome by one's own unaided weakness and egoism, so also one needs God's grace to **regain** a basic life option that has been abandoned by sin. There must be a corresponding complete "turnabout," a total reversal of life-stand, a sincere withdrawal from and abandonment of whatever disrupted the original choice for God in one's life. This will be effectuated by the grace of God changing, "**ex intimo**," the sinner's mind and heart and turning them to God again. The word used by the Synoptics, Paul and Acts so frequently is the Greek word, "**metanoia**." That prefix "**metá**," has both a prepositional and intensive connotation; the idea being that conversion or true repentance means a complete, **from the heart**, turning back to God and His love. Thanks to His infinite mercy and love, God wants no one to remain alienated from Him and His love: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live?" (Ezek., 18:23). The only moral life-choice that is **irreversible** is the one with which and in which one meets his God and Judge at death.

⁵ *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 345.

2. WHAT DEGREE OF MATURITY IS NECESSARY FOR MAKING A BASIC OPTION?

Obviously, to make a stable, moral life-decision after due weighing of the consequences and evaluating the costs and sacrifices of such a choice, as well as its rewards both here and hereafter — to make such a total life-choice is **definitely not the work of a child**. Indeed, St. Thomas tells us that it is comparatively easy to sin and correspondingly difficult to be constant in the practice of virtue.⁶ Indeed, because of the very constituents that go to make up such a life-decision, the basic option will be made only after many gropings for self-knowledge and self-identification. Most theologians writing on the subject of the basic option and the age at which one makes it agree that it is a gradual process, a process of discovery, of weighing and balancing values, of acquiring both conceptual and evaluative knowledge about one's self and one's place and purpose in life.

So many and various factors come into play in forming and building up such a life-stance. It is not the work of a day or a deed. We mentioned the multi-dimensional influences and life-situations that help elaborate and determine our choices, not least of all such an important choice as this life-choice. Recently there has been a rather large volume of literature on the subject of the relationship between maturity and the imputability of mortal sin. Not least important among the authors have been Robert P. O'Neil and Michael A. Donovan.⁷ They have done some truly pioneering work in the field and have made valuable contributions towards the clarification of this knotty problem. Many of the recent authors on the subject readily acknowledge their indebtedness to the studies of O'Neil and Donovan. After a thorough study of the findings of some of the experts in child psychology and correlating the data of these psychologists, they concluded that **a person could hardly make a life-choice or commit mortal sin before the onset of adolescence, that is, at about the 12th to 14th year**. By way of exception, a precocious child might anticipate that age by a year or two. There is quite general agreement today on their conclusions among moral theologians, including Bernard Häring, Richard A. McCormick,

⁶ See his Commentary on the *Ethics*, 7a, 1106 b, 28.

⁷ Their most quoted works are: "Psychological Development and the Concept of Mortal Sin," *Insight* (Fall 1965): 1-7; "The Question of Pre-adolescent Sin," *Insight* (Spring 1966): 1-10; *Sexuality and Moral Responsibility* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968).

For an interesting survey of the history of the debate over the age of discretion, see Francis J. Buckley, S.J., "What Age For First Confession?" *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 107 (January 1967): 221-252.

Gerard S. Sloyan, Francis J. Buckley,⁸ to mention a few. Interestingly, enough, St. Thomas held that children begin to have the use of discretion at about 10 or 11 years.⁹

The brunt of the argument against children having a sufficient conceptual and evaluative knowledge for making such a total choice and one which actualizes their total person and all their faculties is because they do not have the mental, volitional or emotional data and "know-how" yet, nor the necessary stability and balance of character and personality. All that is still on the way, still "in fieri." Such young people are going through the unique turmoil and, for them the very real and agonizing confusion of finding themselves, of being accepted by their peers, of being and acting on their own, and independently of parental protectiveness and "moralizing." In the midst of such conditions, so uncondusive to say the least, to making an objective, stable, well evaluated, weighed and balanced moral life choice, the child will do well to begin to formulate a value-set and to look for some code of moral conduct. Little more, naturally speaking, can be expected of him at this tempestuous period of his total development,¹⁰ an on-going development at all levels of his being.

Thus, though such youths approaching adolescence may commit sin that has real objective gravity about it, it is quite another thing to say that with their still developing degree of conceptual and evaluative knowledge they have sufficient discernment and give the necessary free consent to commit a sin deserving of everlasting punishment and depriving them of the very love that they are searching for with their whole beings but under a different form and in a guise that is as yet evasive to their will-o-the-wisp fantasies and aspirations. "Sin unto death" presupposes a total confrontation of a person from the depths of his being, involving a choice of an enduring and all-embracing moral life-decision and life-style. Such a momentous decision must be made with sufficient evaluation and a practical and not mere textbook, knowledge of the eternal consequences of such a course. Such a decision must

⁸ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *An American Catechism* II, sec. 21, p. 249; "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 26 (December 1965): 655-57; also op. cit., v. 27 (December, 1966): 608-610; Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R., *Sin in the Secular World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), p. 189; *Celebrating Joy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 35; Gerard S. Sloyan, "The Age of First Confession," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 22 (June 1967: 210-212; also footnote 7 above. See also the authors and works referred to in footnote no. 2 of Chapter V above.

⁹ *IV Sentences*, d. 9, a. 5, ad q. 4.

¹⁰ "It is generally agreed that children prior to adolescence are incapable of mortal sin." *An American Catechism*, II, sec. 21, p. 249.

be made with full awareness of the magnitude of one's offense against God and His love — and against one's own true and lasting good.

It is not without good reason that modern theologians and psychologists see great difficulty in accusing youth who are just entering their teens of "striking God's love for them in the face!" Perhaps religious experience and the wonders of grace have not convinced our youth forcefully enough yet that Jesus Christ was not alternately "yes" and "no"; but rather He was never anything but "yes" — a "yes" to their own searching and seeking, a seeking for Him Whom as yet they have not gotten to know (cf. 2 Cor. 1:19). Does not almost any and every child live out the quest for God which has been described for every generation and for every youth of any time and any milieu in the **Confessions** of St. Augustine? For youth, exactly like their elders, "seek him without, when lo, He is within!"¹¹

Bernard Haring's reflections on this theme can be cited to bring this section of our study to a close. About serious sin among young adolescents he writes: "We may certainly assume that when we are young (in our part of the world perhaps up to the fourteenth year), there can generally be scarcely any question of grave sin."¹² He adds elsewhere:

No civil government, even of the most authoritarian and totalitarian type, would intimate that children of seven, eight, or ten years of age can commit a crime deserving of the death penalty. What image of God do we present if we speak of mortal sin for immature adolescents and even children? Mortal sin carries the same gravity as a crime that would be deserving, in the eyes of the infinitely merciful God, of eternal abandonment and total alienation. The discernment required for the reception of first communion is one thing, but totally different is that discernment that conditions the possibility of subjectively committing a sin great enough to deserve eternal condemnation.¹³

¹¹ *Confessions*, Bk. X, ch. 27.

¹² *Celebrating Joy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 35.

¹³ *Sin in the Secular Age* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), p. 189.

N.B. For some illuminating studies of the evolution of a child's and/or adolescent's development in moral judgments and conscience, see the works of the specialists in child psychology such as: Jean Piaget, *Bärbel Inhelder, The Psychology of the Child*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1948); Guy Yves Jacquin, *The Psychology of the School-Age Child*, trans. A.M. Buono (Paramus, New Jersey: Paulist Press Deus Books, 1969); Pierre Babin, *Crisis of Faith: "The Religious Psychology of Adolescence,"* trans. Eva Fleischner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), especially pp. 23-154.

3. THE FREQUENCY OR RARITY OF "SIN UNTO DEATH"

As we saw, the basic option is a moral core lifestance, a definite and stable moral orientation of one's whole life, of one's way of standing before God. It involves, expresses and actualizes one's whole life and person. It is a committed life-decision to live for God, and really to mean it. There is no place for whim or fancy here: too much lies in the balance: an eternity awaits around the corner! So one does not tumble in or out of such a life-decision; one does not jump on or off, or up and down in such a core moral choice as on a sort of moral trampoline! Hence, in this whole matter there must be **stability**, sustained thrust and on-going tending toward one's life goal and one's God. For if depth of commitment or sincere and total dedication is lacking, there is no real fundamental option, though there may be the semblance of one. Or one may be on the way of making such a commitment, and with God's grace will do so.

The opposite of this basic option or life-choice for God and His love is a like choice for a life of sin. It is "sin unto death." But here again, one does not "fall" into and out of sin like a tumbling circus clown. Every mature adult has to face up to his moral stand in life; a time comes when he must decide on what to do with his life, to be open or closed to the moral life-choice God demands of him. Man existentially lives and acts on the plane of love or sin, since there is no state of "pure nature." Thus we surrender ourselves into God's love or we refuse to do so. That alternative faces every mature human being squarely. One may designedly refuse to confront it. But then this very refusal is already one's choice.

An option for or against God can be deepened and strengthened — or weakened. One's total life decision for God can little by little lose its conviction, its vitality and dedication. It can grow slack, morally anaemic. Indeed, a point can be reached when one reverses his core option from that of love to that of sin. For a basic decision for God does **not** entail **confirmation** in grace; **there is nothing indefectible in one's possessing a life-choice for God**. We have to work out our salvation with daily struggle. And just as a basic choice for God can be "lost," so a basic choice for sin can be abandoned and converted, transformed by God's grace into a

It may be remarked here that for those children whose age may render them incapable of committing mortal sin, the Church may, in the future, adapt the third of the optional rites in the New Rite of Penance ("Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution") as the penitential rite in First Confession and the confession of small children.

life-decision for God and His love. The point is that either option — for or against God and His love can be lost or regained. One's life conduct and life of love and service will deepen and solidify one's choice for God, just as a sin orientation in one's life tends to deepen and solidify one's choice against God. "As moral is, moral does."

We may well ask at this point whether one can change and does actually change his moral stance often. Is he sinner or saint by the day, week or month? Is he "in" and "out" of God's love with ease and frequency? Present day thinking would tend to deny that a mature person changes back and forth between mortal sin and love of God, even though he may be guilty from time to time of acts that are of an objectively grave nature. Generally such acts will not actuate or call upon the exercise of his basic freedom and core option, but rather something short of it — "a peripheral option."

The man who, because of his self-commitment in basic freedom, lives in grace and love will not come so easily to serious sin as another who has not made the basic decision of surrender to God. For he does not only have to carry out the evil deed in free choice, but he has also to **reverse his basic freedom**, his basic free attitude toward God. Therefore it can not be assumed that someone continually — 'seven times a day' — changes from mortal sin to the love of God and vice versa, not only because of the power bias of grace, but also because of the effective power of love. Where the specific acts — grave sins or acts of sorrow — seem to indicate the contrary, one has to deal with more or less free acts **without the involvement of free commitment in basic freedom**. That is to say, the person is presumably in a continuous state either of sin or of justification.¹⁴ (Italics mine.)

Another theologian writes much in the same vein:

Choices originating out of the core of one's being, concerned as they are with the acceptance or rejection of God's enabling grace and salvation, have unique dimensions and intensity. **This excludes the possibility of frequent and repeated transitions between spiritual life and death.** As St. Thomas noted: "Although grace is lost by a single act of mortal sin, it is not, however, easily lost. For the person in grace does not find it easy to perform such an act (morally sinful) because of a contrary inclination." (De Ver.

¹⁴ Joseph Fuchs, S.J., *Human Values and Christian Morality*, p. 105. His whole chapter 4, "Basic Freedom and Morality," throws much light on this aspect of the basic option.

q.97, a.1., ad 9). **This suggests that truly serious moral acts are not as frequent occurrence as catalogues of serious matter would suggest.**¹⁵ (*Italics mine.*)

Modern theologians tend to see morality more in terms of tendency or orientation morality rather than individual or specific acts or transgressions morality. More stress is placed on one's moral core orientation, one's moral life-direction and life-choice. Individual acts or transgressions are often, though not always, indicative of one's basic moral stance or life-style. Such actions or such conduct can be "signs," though not infallible signs of one's inner moral state. But we say that such actions do not necessarily indicate the true and full stance of a person. For it is quite possible that he may, through weakness, passion or because of a sin-laden situation, fall into sins which are serious in nature but in truth do not represent his **core moral stance before God**. He has not reversed his basic life-style, he has not rejected his commitment to God and His love. His actions represent more a "peripheral" surrender to this or that evil action, without his turning his back on God in the depths of his being. His sin or sins, even though they be serious in nature, are not mortally so, they are not "sins unto death." **He did not make a life-decision against God and for this evil.**¹⁶

All this is not to say that a person can not sin mortally by one transgression. He can if he does so with his total moral being, with full consent and evaluative knowledge of the eternal consequences. He then freely wills to reject God and His love, and if he has been living a core option for God, he now wishes to reverse and even destroy that life-choice for God. But as one can readily see, such a complete transformation and reversal of life-pattern can hardly be the work of a passing moment, a fleeting decision. To make that basic change in moral stance and conduct the person in question would have to engage himself and his full moral being in changing over to opposition to God and His love. Ordinarily, therefore, this will not be accomplished by one isolated act or even by a number of such acts if one's moral life-thrust is for God and one's basic choice for God is not fully engaged in such acts. The

¹⁵ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *An American Catechism*, II, p. 249, sec. 19. See also the excellent article of John W. Glaser, S.J., "Transition Between Grace and Sin: Fresh Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968), especially pp. 263-266.

¹⁶ Cf. Karl Rahner, S.J., "Guilt and Its Remission: The Borderland between Theology and Psychotherapy," *Theological Investigations* II (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), pp. 265-281; also, "Theology of Freedom," *Theological Investigations* VI (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 178-196; *ibid.*, "Guilt-Responsibility-Punishment within the View of Catholic Theology," pp. 187-217.

committed Christian and the sincere seeker after God and His love will neither reject nor "neglect God and His angels for the noise of a fly, for the whining of a door."¹⁷

Rather, if and when such a drastic reversal and change of allegiance and loyalty to God does take place it can be attributed to a gradual change in moral attitudes and to a gathering change of heart toward God and the things of God. Such moral change, involving the whole person, the *"tota persona,"* does not come about by leaps and bounds, not *"per saltus."* The lover of God may fall, and fall a long way; he may even fall, at some critical time in his life, fairly often. His fall or falls indeed may pain him, but since he still clings to his bonded love of God, such falls, even while hurting, may in roundabout ways cure. They will not kill; they will not be unto his spiritual death. Only God can write straight with crooked lines, and sculpture beautiful images of Himself with twisted hearts. So often He must "char the wood" before He can "limn" with it! But since love has been called the consummate act of freedom, one can come to a state, to a moral and mental attitude in life whereby one freely rejects God and His love. Such a person can become "fixed," set, and confirmed in such a mind and moral frame of life and conduct. He can choose other "gods" and goals, other than his true God and only goal of all human life. Ordinarily, this will hardly take place without a **gradual reversal** of one's former basic moral choice, one's life-stance about God and the central part that He plays in one's whole moral life. One does not suddenly and, as it were, by surprise, fall in or out of the infinite love of God.¹⁸ One does not necessarily change his whole moral life in one stroke, in one deed or action, nor even in a number of such actions, as we saw above. To change one's whole moral life-course, full circle, will ordinarily call for preparatory and dispositive changes in attitudes, in moral values, and finally in one's basic moral stance and relationship in regard to God and the whole economy of salvation, precisely as it affects the person himself in his innermost being. There is question here of a **"process" of moral deterioration**, of cumulative, tumorous rupturing which finally results in a bursting of the bonds of the covenanted love between God and man.¹⁹ No mature human being plays hopscotch with his eternal salvation!

¹⁷ John Donne, "Sermons," I, 80.

¹⁸ See St. Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 27, a. 1 ad. 9.

¹⁹ For some enlightening remarks on this phenomenon of cumulative "unconcern" and moral deterioration in one's relations with God, see Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 34 (March, 1973): 56-57; also Denis O'Callaghan, "What is Mortal Sin?" *The Furrow* 25, (February, 1974): 73-76.

We can hardly treat of the question of sin without at least touching on the subject of conversion. Fr. Fuchs, S.J., in his article on sin and conversion,²⁰ reminds us that just as to reject God and his continuous invitation to love Him involves a person's core moral choice and orientation in sin unto death, so too, to **reverse**, full rudder, one's moral choice **and return** to that God of love also demands a like exercise of a basic life-choice which cancels out and displaces the previous one. Simply put, it really means a radical change from what, in the last analysis, amounts to an idolatrous love of self to the exclusion of God's love, and a turning back ("conversion") to God and his love again. That can only be done by that same God's love and grace, for sin paralyses our powers to cast it off and return to God's love unaided. In this conversion there must be a sincere change of mind and heart, a fundamental change of loyalty and love, a true "**metanoia**." The sign and proof of that conversion is sincere contrition for playing the prodigal against the Father of love and a from-the-heart decision to amend and live henceforth in and for God and his love.

Fr. Fuchs lists, besides one's first true basic life-choice for God, what he calls a "continual conversion." This can assume several forms. Firstly, a person can **deepen the intensity** of his moral life option on the occasion, for instance, of a retreat, the hearing of a sermon, the reading of a book, during a meditation, etc. Such a person is and acts in a more God-like way for he is, as it were, "a new person." Secondly, besides this type of "new conversion" there can be a continuous growth and development of our stance for God, a day by day actualization of what we are in reality, namely, those who live in the love of God and their neighbor. Such a person will mature and progress in his commitment and dedication to God and neighbor in his love and service for them. There will be a spiritual dynamism in such a life; it will not be content to remain static but be impelled by a sort of impatience to be doing ever more and better. And finally, one will, with a deeper appreciation of who he is and of what God expects of him, gradually shun even slight sin, and this would be a sort of normal outgrowth of the first two types of conversion.

4. KINDS OF SIN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BASIC OPTION

The very first basic moral life-choice ever made, as depicted in Sacred Scripture, was that of our first parents which brought about their "fall" from God's grace and love, and thereby introduced sin into salvation history. Their fundamental option was

²⁰ "Sin and Conversion," especially pp. 297-301.

against God and his love. Much has been written down through the centuries on the precise nature of this sin, on pinpointing its exact species. Suffice it for our purpose to say that it was a fully deliberate and evaluative choice which involved and actualized their whole moral relationship with God. They openly and with complete freedom chose to reject God and his love. And thereby the groundwork was laid for all future sin, the "original" sin of their offspring to come after them, the "sin of the world," and the personal or actual sin of the individual wayfarer.

In this section we wish to examine, in the light of the fundamental life-choice, the division or kinds of sins which seem to be more fully in accord with this way of propounding the nature and workings of sin in the whole human and moral complex which comes into play in the daily living out of salvation history.

At present there is much discussion in theological circles and a growing volume of literature on the subject of how best to divide or classify actual or personal sin. There seem to be two principal schools of thought on the matter. One school would hold for two main classifications of sin: mortal and venial. Venial sin would embrace a graduated scale of culpability, but never involving as such, the reversal of one's basic life-choice for God. In no venial sin is there ever a case of rejecting God and of severing the covenant of love between God and the sinner. Mortal sin, on the other hand, according to this school of thought, does sever that bond of love and involves the rejection of God, the reversal of one's basic option, and the definitive abandonment of one's love and service of God. And for this school of thought the two-fold classification of sin into mortal and venial is adequate and satisfactorily covers the field of human morality.

A second school of thought holds for a **triple** classification of sin into: 1) mortal ("sin unto death"), 2) grave (though not mortal), and 3) venial sin. There are some²¹ who would further subdivide venial sin into slight sin. However, in this second school the more common division is that of mortal, grave (or serious), and venial sin. Though both classifications have their respective merits, the second division into mortal, grave and venial strikes me as being more comprehensive and clear, and tending more to correspond to the moral existential of the human scene.

In preferring the second of the two classifications of sin, that is mortal, grave or serious, and venial, we do so on the grounds

²¹ As an example of this more atomized division of sin see Kevin F. O'Shea, C.S.S.R., "The Reality of Sin," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968): 241-259.

that a sin involving grave or serious matter can be committed without a person's engaging himself totally and definitively in performing that sinful act, that is to say, without rejecting with finality his relation of love and loyalty to God. It is now quite generally admitted that in the past the **quantitative** element of sin was somewhat exaggerated and the **qualitative** element underemphasized. Moral theologians today see the imbalance of such a view and have tried to remedy it by trying to set each element in its proper perspective and to evaluate the degree in which each contributes to the measure of culpability of the action. This is but to say that we can not immediately identify a sin which involves grave or serious matter, e.g., robbery or homicide, as being thereby, **ipso facto**, a mortal sin or "sin unto death." To do so would overstress the quantitative element in sin, oftentimes to the neglect of what, in fact, is the **more formal element**, and thus the element more decisive of the degree of culpability in a given situation.

We can not judge morality according to scales, weights and measures. That road leads to both nit-picking legalism and an incompatible hybrid of moral physicalism. At the heart of every truly moral act lies the human, and **what is specificative of the human is reason and will**, with their acts of knowledge and consent, evaluative discretion and freedom of choice. Whenever a person posits a **fully** human act his whole being is involved in it: his whole person acts, and all facets of his person. Situated in a sin-laden and sin-prone world, immersed in an all-pervasive atmosphere of amoral permissiveness and antinomy, the sincere seeker will be saddled with this moral-set and will have to do daily battle against it. Such a moral-set is a sort of continuous war of attrition, a constant sniping at one's powers and acts of deliberation and free choice. The net result of this unfavorable moral existential is that every sincere seeker after God is put on the defensive, his moral energies tend to become weakened, his powers of evaluative discretion and free choice to be sappd. In the face of this very realistic life-situation, it should not be surprising that such a seeker after God experiences daily the same battle and complaint of St. Paul: "I can not understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate. ...In my inmost self I dearly love God's Law" (Rom. 7:15,22).

It is with this real life moral background in mind that we opt for the threefold classification of sin: mortal, grave, and venial. Thus there may be occasions in the life of those who have in all sincerity made a basic life-choice for God and who are struggling to be loyal to it, occasions in which they may fall into sin which may be objectively serious or involve serious or grave matter. In

such instances if the person concerned does not engage himself in the particular act from the core of his being, if he does not reverse his basic moral position for God and His love, if he does not dispose of himself as a person and does not actualize his basic liberty, but acts, not from his core moral stance but "peripherally", while his basic moral thrust is still directed to God and clings to Him, then he could hardly be judged guilty of mortal sin, of "sin unto death", and hence of eternal damnation. His sin is serious, but not "unto death".

Objectively, the action or omission constituted serious or grave matter but he did not commit himself to it "from the heart". He involved himself in the act more "regretfully than maliciously". This is not to say that such an action involving serious matter is not dispositive or preparatory for an eventual fall into mortal sin in the future. It can definitely be so. But we must keep in mind that we are dealing with a life-stance, a moral life-choice, and hence with something stable and enduring by its very nature. Such a basic moral choice can be forfeited and exchanged by abandoning it and adopting another life-stance opposed to, and incompatible with it. It is then that one reverses his life-option for God and opts for one against Him and His covenant of love. As we mentioned, this will normally be brought about by a "build-up" or cumulative process.

In practice, the "matter" which will be involved in mortal sin will be grave or serious matter, for one does not bargain away one's whole moral life-stance for mere baubles and trinkets, for trivial exchanges or recompenses. However, we can not exclude the possibility, remote as it may be, of light matter constituting the material basis for mortal sin. Clearly it would be the exception that a person would actuate and express his total moral life-choice, his basic orientation to God — or against Him — with all the deliberation and evaluative choice that this connotes, in a matter or situation of insignificance and of patently minor importance or objective worth. Mountains do not go into labor only to deliver a mere mouse. In a word, the usual and by far the most normal matter for a "sin unto death" will be some matter proportionately serious to the eternal consequences of such a choice which involves a moral life-stance and its reversal from being for God and His love to that of being definitively against Him and His love.²²

²² On the question of the possibility of light matter in the area of mortal sin, see *Summa*, I/II, q. 72, a. 5 and q. 88, aa. 1 and 2; also, Joseph Fuchs, S.J., "Sin and Conversion," *Theology Digest* 14 (1966): 296-297; Kevin T. Kelly, "Mortal Sin and Grave Matter," *The Clergy Review* 52 (1967): pp. 599, 600, 605; Ralph J. Tapia, "When Is Sin Sin?" *Thought* (Summer 1972): pp. 223, 224.

Having seen something of the nature of, and differences between the first two members of this three-fold division of sin, namely, that of mortal and grave sin, there remains but to treat briefly of the last member, **venial** sin. The disinctive and constitutive element in venial sin which sets it off from both mortal and grave or serious sin is the fact that it is directly concerned and polarized around, not the ultimate end of man, but intermediate ends or **means**, with things that are ordained to or related with the end, but not the end itself.²³ Hence, a true venial sin will never call upon the full exercise of the basic life-choice for God, man's ultimate end and goal. That is out of its field and beyond its role. A venial sin can not reverse one's life option for God to one that is against God-while still remaining a venial sin. The full exercise of the moral life-choice on occasions when one has to decide for or against God and His love always involves man's ultimate end, not means or intermediate ends.

Grave sin, like mortal sin, is also concerned with man's ultimate end for it involves a challenge or threat to this end. In grave sin, one must decide to cling to God and one's life-choice for God, one's only true end, in spite of all and everything, even in the face of a serious transgression which one may have committed. For if one's life-choice for God is abandoned or reversed, then the sin in question is not grave but rather a sin unto death. As long as the moral life-option for God is radically preserved and retained substantially intact in such a grave sin, an abandonment or refusal of God and His love has not taken place. God's love has not been "struck in the face".

Another important difference between venial sin and mortal and grave sin is on the part of the matter or moral object of the sin. With the exception noted in this section, an exception which should prove more theoretical than existential, venial sin will normally be concerned and associated with "light" or non-serious matter. The direction of a person's basic moral orientation in life is not immediately concerned with the trivia in moral matters but rather with the substantive realities of the moral life. For even though venial sin can be involved in, and associated with "grave matter", it tends not to feel "at home" or comfortable with

²³ For a treatment of venial sin in the doctrine of St. Thomas, see *Summa*, I/II, qq. 88 and 89; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 139.

it. It is, as it were, swimming in the deep end instead of its more familiar shallow end of the moral pool of things. Hence, though it is true venial sin can be caught up in moral acts and situations which involve serious or grave matter, still because of lack of sufficient deliberation and full consent, the sin never gets beyond light or venial culpability.

As a final remark about venial sin it may be well to add that though it may pave the way for committing grave or even mortal sin, it will do so much more remotely and with less influence and immediacy than grave sin would dispose a person for eventual mortal sin. That is because of the inherent "weakness" of venial sin and its remoteness from the field which is proper to mortal sin, namely man's ultimate end — God.

CHAPTER VII

SOME PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BASIC OPTION STAND

1. THE COMMUNITARIAN AND COSMIC DIMENSIONS OF SIN

There is no such thing as a completely and exclusively private, personal, or isolated sin. All sin, without exception, is social and communitarian by nature.¹ Sin hurts not only the sinner; it also hurts and offends the whole of mankind and indeed the whole of creation over which man has a God-entrusted stewardship. Suicide does not only deprive a person of his or her life; it also deprives civil and ecclesial society of the life of one of its members. Each one of us can say in all truth and sincerity: "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind". There is only one plan or order, one economy of salvation, and it is a divine one. And this plan of salvation includes the whole of creation in varying degrees, for St. Paul reminds us that even nature about us, the whole of creation "groans and is in agony until now", and awaits its redemption (Rom. 8:22).

Hence, any and every sin is against the natural and supernatural order of things. It is against God the Creator and God the Redeemer, it is against, and disruptive of, the natural and the Christian order of the world; and in reality man's moral existential is Christian. Sin is, in a word, an offense against **God, ourselves, mankind, and the world about us**. Sin introduces disorder, rebellion, strife and moral and even physical evil into this cosmic divine milieu. That is to act against its good and **our own ultimate good**. Just as man, in his selfishness and greediness, can ravish and prostitute the beauty and goodness of nature, so too can he defy and deface the beauty and goodness of grace.

Of late, a great deal has been written and spoken about the theme of reconciliation. In fact, the year 1975 was declared by Pope Paul VI as a year of reconciliation. Indeed, the theme of reconciliation has been re-emphasized, and fittingly so, in the New

¹ For the social dimensions of sin see *Summa*, I/II, q. 21, a. 3; also q. 71, a. 2; II/II, q. 58, a. q. 59, a. a. 3, and q. 64, a. 5; see also, Raimondo Spiazzi, O.P., "The Social Evil of Sin," *Sin*, ed. Pietro Palazzini, trans. Brendan Devlin (Dublin: Scepter Publishers Ltd., 1954), pp. 191-203; Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R., *Sin in the Secular Age* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 76-103; Joseph Fuchs, S.J., "Sin and Conversion," p. 294; Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *Towards Reconciliation* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1974).

Rite of Penance and in the celebration of penitential services. The communitarian element is found not only in the sacrament of Penance, but it is also clearly brought out in the sacrament of first reconciliation, Baptism, and in the sacrament that recapitulates all the others and is the sacrament of reconciliation **par excellence**, the Eucharist. Nor is the theme of reconciliation lacking in the sacramental rite of the Anointing of the Sick. The presence of this theme of reconciliation seems to point up the global effects of sin as it is counteracted by all the sacraments, each in its own particular way.²

2. THE QUESTION OF INFANTS WHO DIE WITHOUT BAPTISM

Any study of sin in the context of the basic moral life-choice, such as the present one, would be woefully incomplete both from a theological and ecumenical point of view if something were not said about infants who die without baptism. The question is far from being a mere academic one. The statistical religious existential is a most sobering one indeed. Of the over four billion people who inhabit our globe today roughly three billion are non-Christian and unbaptized, a ratio of about three non-Christians to one Christian. Vatican II in several documents³ stresses the fact that every human — and no exception is made in regard to age, sex, color, or creed — is called to the same “one and divine” vocation in life, the life of grace and love in God here and hereafter. Of that vast majority of non-Christians who will remain unbaptized at least for the foreseeable future, those who reach an age sufficiently mature for opting for or against God according to the lights and graces that God gives them can take a moral life-stance. But it so happens that the vast majority of infants who die are both in the Third World and are of non Christian parents. God does not and will not ignore their eternal salvation: “God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please God”.⁴ Fr. Eugene Hillman, C.S.Sp., a missiologist and a missionary for many years in East Africa, has some sobering and yet, at the same time, encouraging words: “Even if the missionary commitments of the Church everywhere were so increased and intensified that the present rate of baptizing adults could be doubled annually, the explicit people of God would continue to be a **progressively decreasing** remnant in

² For an excellent treatment of the notion of reconciliation, see Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *Towards Reconciliation* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1974).

³ See, for instance, “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” par. 22; “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” par. 16.

⁴ “Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church,” par. 7.

relation to the spectacular increasing world population. **Islam alone**, among the other religions of the world, would still be growing in numbers **more rapidly than Christianity**. So the question would remain concerning the universal efficacy of God's love for all the others, because of what the Lord of all has done, **also for them**, 'once and for all' " (Heb. IX, 26-28).⁵ (*Italics mine.*)

But the question remains: what about the scores of millions of millions of infants who every year throughout the world die without receiving baptism? Indeed, in 1974 alone there were 55 million induced abortions,⁶ to say nothing of infants who came to term and were stillborn or who died in early childhood. Neither psychologically nor morally, therefore, could they make a basic life-option such as we have been describing. Yet, if we are to take the teachings of Vatican II on a universal divine call for all without exception at their face value, then we can not rule out the definite possibility or better, probability, of their receiving a divine call also, "in ways known to God", ways beyond our ken but totally in accord with His infinite love and mercy. Certainly God will not treat with any less mercy and love infants who are innocent of any personal guilt than he does us sinful adults. Indeed, if anything, He may well give them a more benign judgment because such a mind-reeling number of them will die victims of abortions of convenience, malnutrition, disease, war, or abandonment — all directly or indirectly the result of a sin-enshrouded society with its greed, selfishness and global exploitation. Parenthetically, without trying to anticipate the teaching of the Church on the matter, one might conceive of a special particular judgment or even a personal option adapted to their unique status which God could give them.

Apropos of this question of unbaptized infants who die, it is perhaps symptomatic that the vast bulk of literature written on the subjects, and on its cognate, the state of the limbo of the infants, was written before the documents of Vatican II cited above. Very little has been written since the teachings on the salvation of non-Christians enunciated in those documents.⁷ It seems, in fact, that a close study of the implications of the message of those documents

⁵ "Anonymous Christianity and the Missions," *The Downside Review* 84 (October 1966): 363.

⁶ *Sunday New York Times*, 2 March, 1975, p. 6E, col. 1.

⁷ See the two very thorough studies on the existence of limbo and the question of unbaptized infants who die in George J. Dyer's *Limbo, Unsettled Question* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964); also Stephen Shimek, O.P., *Salvation of Unbaptized Infants by Vicarious Baptism of Desire*, unpublished dissertation, (Dubuque, Iowa: Aquinas Institute of Philosophy and Theology, 1966) which has an extensive bibliography on the various aspects of the question. Both authors seem to be more comfortable with a more benign interpretation.

exclude any intermediate natural state such as a limbo because of the Council's teaching on the "one and divine" calling for all without exception.⁸ The existence of limbo which was so vigorously debated in the past has now become all the more debatable, if tenable at all. In this whole question of the salvation of infants and adults alike, especially in such a vast non-Christian existential and milieu such as we described, St. Thomas reminds us, and the documents of Vatican II seem to corroborate his teaching, that the mercy and the power of God in dispensing His graces are not confined to the sacraments alone.⁹ Given the fact that roughly three quarters of the world's population today is non-Christian, we must maintain that though these hundreds of millions of people — and through no apparent fault of their own — do not know of the Good News and of God's divine economy of salvation, still God and the redeeming grace of His Son are working, and efficaciously, in the midst of them. Every one is saved only through Christ and the Paschal Mystery — and that applies from the time of our First Parents and will continue to apply until the Last Day. No one is saved outside the Paschal Mystery and all its salvific implications; but **precisely how** this is effectuated "is known to God", and to Him alone, in the case of the non-Christians.

Whatever Jesus Christ, the Saviour, did and said, His "gesta" and His "verba", were said and done for the **whole** of mankind. He founded His Church, He instituted the sacraments for the sanctification and salvation of all. Hence, to share in Him, in what he said and did, we must all, without exception, Pagan, Jew, Christian, and every sincere seeker everywhere, latch onto His life, we must come in contact with our personal Saviour, we must meet and encounter Him. We must stand openly before Him, "face to face", as St. Ambrose tells us,¹⁰ and receive with open hands and open heart the signs and conveyors of God's grace and God's love, indeed, God Himself, those "encounters", His sacraments which bring mankind God Himself, His love and salvation.

But obviously, given the present religious existential, the vast majority of mankind of whatever age of life will never **actually** ("in re") meet and receive Christ and his salvific life and actions in

⁸ "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 22.

⁹ *Summa*, III, q. 68, a. 2; IV *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 72; IV *Sent.*, d. 4, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3; *Comment. in Joan.*, c. 3, lect. 1, and c. 6, lect. 7.

¹⁰ *Apologia Prophetarum David*, 12, p. 58. (PL 14. col. 875).

the sacraments. But the Magisterium of the Church and theology repeatedly tell us that for such vast numbers of people, living in such non-Christian environments, indeed often in anti-Christian milieux, need not come in contact with Christ and His saving mission through the **actual reception** of the sacraments and the **actual incorporation** into the Church of Christ. A sincere desire to live and to do the best one can according to one's lights is already a preparation for God's enlightenment and grace, and is in itself a desire, ("**in voto**") however obscure and implicit, for whatever in God's plan is necessary for salvation. St. Thomas is very insistent on this point¹¹ and reminds us that as long as one does not deliberately put an obstacle in the way of God's grace, God will never deny him whatever is necessary for salvation. "For it pertains to divine providence to furnish **everyone** with what is necessary for salvation. . . . Thus if someone . . . followed the direction of natural reason in seeking good and avoiding evil, **we must most certainly hold** that God would either reveal to him through internal inspiration what had to be believed or even send some preacher of the faith to him". And, "God will not withhold from us what we need".¹² Nothing, especially in the light of the documents of Vatican II (see the citations in footnotes 3 and 4 in this chapter) would in any way suggest that we must except from this principle unbaptized infants who also come under the divine economy of salvation. Rather, in this whole question of salvation their Maker may even give them, because of their early and untimely death a divinely "preferential providence!"¹³

¹¹ See the references, among others in footnote 9 of this section.

¹² *On Truth*, quest. 14, a. 2, resp. 1 and 2; see also the Letter of the Holy Office to the then Archbishop of Boston, 1949 in *The Church Teaches*, nos. 266-280.

¹³ Certainly the grace and mercy of God are no less effective and generous in the New Dispensation with the coming of the Author of all grace than it was in the Old. Indeed, the author of the Epistle to the Romans tells us that "grace abounded even more" at His coming. St. Thomas taught that even before the institution of circumcision children were saved by the faith of the people in the Redeemer to come. And even after the institution of circumcision, Aquinas mentions that those children who, during the Exodus, died in the desert without circumcision were saved by the faith of the Chosen People. A *fortiori*, in this time of the fulness of grace the faith of the Church spread throughout the world could act in the same way in regard to unbaptized infants who die as did the faith of those who lived both before and after the institution of circumcision in the Old Law. For St. Thomas' interesting treatment of this point see *Summa*, III, q. 71; also *On Truth*, q. 14, a. 11 corp. and resp. to 1, 2, and 5.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

As we saw, treating sin in the context of the fundamental option or basic moral life-choice is now quite generally accepted and employed by theologians today. From our study we saw that it is based squarely on Sacred Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament. Given the fact that every human being without exception is given "the one and divine calling" to eternal salvation, each one must respond, reply, one way or another, to that call. The summons to eternal life demands an answer, not merely in words but with one's whole person and by one's whole pattern of living, by his moral life-choice. One's eternal destiny is in the balance and depends on the type of response given: an eternal "yes" or "no". God's call to everyone is to accept Him in faith and love and to commit ourselves to living out His divine plan of salvation.

Deliberately to ignore and reject this divine invitation, to say a definitive, life-deciding "no" to this personal call by God, and this with full appreciation of the consequences for ourselves and others — and here we refer to the social effects of sin on mankind — is to commit a sin which is a sin unto death, a mortal sin.

In regard to the possible divisions of the kinds of sins, we took a middle-of-the-road stand, avoiding an overly atomized classification and an overly simplified division into only two kinds: mortal and venial. Instead, we opted for a threefold classification into mortal, grave, and venial sins. Mortal sin entails establishing one's basic option against God, or changing it definitively from one that was for God to one which is now against God. Grave (or serious) sin falls short of actualizing fully the basic moral life-choice against God. Serious though the matter may be, grave sin does not sever or rupture one's life-commitment to God. Venial sin is never directly connected with choosing or rejecting God as one's last end, rather it is concerned with disvalues which have to do with intermediate goods and means. To choose God and to live His life according to His divine plan of salvation is a **work of grace**; no one can make such a moral life-choice whether for the first time or as part of a conversion after mortal sin, without the aid of grace.

Generally, one commits mortal sin, not by an isolated, disconnected transgression, but after a build-up, a climate of personal sin, after a sinful life-set which gradually and inexorably weakens

one's moral life-choice until the pivotal point is reached when the "yes" to God finally and definitively becomes a moral "no".

Since every human being is given a divine invitation we considered the lot of infants who can not, morally or psychologically, make such an option. We offered as tentative possibilities either some type of "final option" adapted to their status, or a benign judgment according to a "preferential providence" on God's part. We remarked that with Vatican II's stress on the one divine call to salvation for all, the state of the limbo of the infants seemed no longer an "unsettled" question but rather an issue of the past.

We conclude this study on the motif with which we began it, the intricate puzzle that is man and his moral life. But encouragingly, with a wider and deeper study of human behaviour through psychology and other branches of the behavioural sciences, present day theologians have been able to clarify — at least more satisfactorily than in the past — the nature of sin, original sin, the "sin of the World," and personal sin.

More than ever before, and for this we are all grateful, we have come to realize and appreciate the fact that many human forces and elements, personal and collective, such as personal traumas, phobias, ignorance, passion, insecurity, immaturity, the very longing to be known, accepted and loved, the longing even to be one's true self; also one's family and educative background, one's moral environment — all these and many other factors enter into one's innermost life and substantially affect, color, and even limit and change one's conduct and life-choices. In every human, and hence moral, act man is engaged as a person, not as a mind or heart or hand. And he is engaged in such choices and conduct **as he is**, totally as a person with all his multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, conscious and subconscious, even unconscious, acquired and inherited, physical, psychic and psychosomatic drives and quirks. And man is a pyramid of such traits and they are always tending to surface.

From all sides we are being daily reminded that we are living in a sin-saturated world — and still we know that where sin runs rampant, grace is even more abundant. All that we have said does not, obviously, deny the existence of mortal sin in the world. But it does remind us that given this global moral existential, such sin is not committed with the greatest of ease nor with the frequency one imagined in the past. A global holiness, witness to the holiness and love of God, and to the grace of our Saviour, and man's search for his true self, even in the labyrinthine ways of sin, is still a mark of the People of God spread throughout the world.

To conclude this study of sin on a more pastoral and positive note, and to gather together in summary form the whole notion of sin and its remedy as set forth in these pages, we quote from two recent documents of the Church. They capture in a few words the main thrust of this study.

"in reality, it is precisely the fundamental option which in the last resort defines a person's moral disposition". (Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, par. 10, released on January 16, 1976 and approved and confirmed by Pope Paul VI).

"Today's Christians must not think that their vocation can be fulfilled by merely protesting current values. Protest can indeed serve a purpose, but it makes sense only when it is accompanied by an affirmation. Rejecting the false values in contemporary society is not enough; **we must affirm by our lives the true moral values of Jesus Christ.**

"Most important, example wins more hearts than words. The proclamation of Christian moral values must be a lived sermon, not just an exercise in argumentation.

"The solution to the crisis in moral values lies in commitment to Christ on the part of all who claim to be His followers. Jesus came to earth to show us the way, not merely to talk about it. If we are to follow Him (and this after all, nothing less, is what it means to be a Christian) we must do so not in words, sentiments or even doctrine alone.

We must do so by a way of life rooted in commitment to the Lord Jesus". (Report of the Ad Hoc Committee, "On Moral Values in Society", National Conference of Catholic Bishop of the United States, sect. II, November 19, 1974, underscoring mine.)

LITURGY

THE PSALMS IN THE REFORMED LITURGY OF THE HOURS

By H. J. Graf, S.V.D.

By the end of 1976 many of our priests and of the cloistered religious have the complete Liturgy of the Hours — formerly called Breviary — in their hands as reformed by the second Vatican Council. Now they are faced with the problem to make this prayer of the Church ever more perfectly their own. In this effort the psalms often create difficulties, being poetic pieces of a culture of an age long past in a far distant land.

But the psalms are the principal part of the Liturgy of the Hours. There is no canonical Hour without psalms. If the Divine Office is to become fruitful for those who celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours regularly, they have to put in some efforts that they know the psalms and understand them.

Is it not strange that the Church of the New Testament made the psalms her prayerbook? This seems to be the more strange if we know that this was not always so. The young Church composed many psalm-like prayers and hymns of her own as the letters of Saint Paul and especially the Apocalypse witness. Even after the time of the New Testament new "psalms" were composed and used. A change set in some time during the second century. Scholars think that this was in reaction to Gnostic hymns. In these Gnosticism tried to propagate its errors. In a radical move the Church rejected all man-made hymns and adopted the psalms of the Old Testament — a part of Sacred Scripture — as her hymn book.

This was not the only reason for favoring the psalms. Among the books of the Old Testament the book of psalms had a special place: it had been the prayer book of God's Chosen People of the Old Testament. In them the whole history of the people of God is recalled in praise and thanksgiving, in repentance and petition. Christians were convinced that what had been begun by God among the people of the Old Covenant, had to be completed in the Church, the people of God of the New Covenant.

But the ultimate truth contained in the psalms is the mystery of Christ. Jesus had said that the psalms spoke of him: "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you," he said to his disciples before his ascension. "All things must be fulfilled that are written of me in the Law of Moses, and the prophets and in the **psalms**" (Lk. 24:44).

During his public life Jesus had applied the psalms to himself. Recalling Psalm 23 (The Lord is my shepherd) he had said: "I am the Good Shepherd" (Jn. 10:11). Basing his argument with the Jews on Psalm 110 (The Lord's revelation to my Master: Sit at my right), he asked them: "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit calls (the Messiah) Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right, till I put thy enemies under thy feet? ... If David calls him Lord, how is he his Son? (Mt. 22:43-45)'. On the cross Jesus prayed, according to Matthew and Mark, Psalm 22 (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?). According to Luke he used another psalm text on the cross when he said: "Into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46 = Ps. 31:5).

This shows that the psalms speak of Christ. The Church — as Bride — can prefer nothing to the voice of the Bridegroom. For the apostles Jesus was the Lord, i.e., the one whom the psalms implore and praise. From apostolic times on Jesus is the one whom "God made both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), giving him the name above any other name. This insight led to the christologization of the psalms, especially in the prayer life of the Church.

As members of the Church we Christians have the task to make the pre-Christian book of the psalms a prayer book for us, a prayer book that does not only speak of Christ, but in which Christ himself speaks, so that, by saying the psalms, we can pray together with him — as members of his Body — to the Father in the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 8:15).

How can we pray the psalm as **Christian** prayer? The new Liturgy of the Hours offers us various forms of help. There are the psalm-titles, the antiphons and the psalm prayers. Finally, there is a new distribution of psalms as an additional help:

It is endearing to observe that the Liturgy of the Hours did not only take these measures, but that it also explains them to us. In the General Instruction at the beginning of volume One it presents the reasons why these measures have been taken: ten articles deal with these innovations (nos. 100-109).

The Psalm Titles

The psalms of the four weeks' psalterium have now two titles: one in red — together with the respective number of the psalm — the other in italics, as a kind of subtitle. The first title indicates the literal meaning of the psalm.

More interesting is the second title. Very often it is a text from the New Testament, or from one of the Fathers of the Church. Once, Saint Jerome writes: "This psalm shows Christ in his passion" (on psalm 56 [55]). Eusebius of Caesarea writes concerning Psalm 59(58): "These words of the Savior teach us the devotion that all should have for the Father". Cassiodorus gives us a hint in which sense the historical psalms should be said: "We praise God by recalling his marvelous deeds" (on psalm 136 [135]). "Sing in praise of Christ's redeeming work," exhorts Saint Athanasius before psalm 92(91). It would be easy to add further examples.

These sub-titles have been chosen to help us Christians of the end of the twentieth century to understand and pray the psalms — composed in pre-Christian times — in a Christian sense. This leads us to a christologization of the psalms. Sometimes we are told in the sub-titles that the Old Testament psalm has been fulfilled in the New Testament, in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Thus the Old Testament liberation of Israel in the Exodus events, were for Christians a prefiguration of the Christ event and its effects in us. Saint Augustine reminds us of this when he writes before psalm 114(113A): "You too left Egypt when, at baptism, you renounced that world which is at enmity with God".

Not everything that has been foretold in the Old Testament has been fulfilled already. There remain a number of things still to be fulfilled. When psalm 138(137) states that "all earth's kings shall thank you when they hear the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the Lord's ways: 'How great is the glory of the Lord,'" then we know that this has not yet been fulfilled. It will come true only at the end of time when Christ will come again, and will subject everything and everyone to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28). The sub-title of this psalm reminds the reader of this truth by quoting Apoc. 21:24: "The kings of the earth will bring his glory and honor into the holy city".

Sometimes the psalms are directly applied to Christ in a typological sense. In its literal sense psalm 3 is a morning praise after a night spent under God's protection. By means of the sub-title this psalm becomes the morning praise of the Risen Christ on Easter morning, after the night of death in the tomb. The text is taken from the writings of Saint Irenaeus: "Christ fell asleep in death,

but he rose from the dead, for God was his deliverer. "When the New Testament makes this application, it found its place in the new Liturgy of the Hours as shown in psalm 40(3). According to the epistle to the Hebrews Christ said, upon coming into the world: "It was not sacrifice and oblation you wanted, but you have prepared a body for me" (Hb. 10:5). This New Testament text is now the sub-title of this psalm.

On days which have no proper antiphons one may lawfully use the subtitles as antiphon of the respective psalm.

The Psalm Prayers

In the edition of the Liturgy of the Hours, prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, in the four week cycle of the psalterium, we find after each psalm short prayers. In a prayerful attitude they recapitulate the preceding psalm, sometimes applying the psalm to Christ, sometimes to us. Not always is the Father addressed in these prayers. Sometimes they speak to the Son, because the psalm may be understood as the voice of the bride (Church) addressing her bridegroom (Christ). Or the psalm may be considered as the voice of Christ who associates the Church with himself, addressing the Father.

After Psalm 71(70) which is a humble prayer in old age, we pray in the subsequent psalm prayer:

**Lord, God of the living,
through the waters of rebirth,
and happiness through the bread of life.
Do not desert us when we are old
but help us to follow your will
in both good times and bad,
so that we may for ever
praise your faithfulness.**

After psalm 90(89) in which the psalmist says to God: "You are God without beginning and end," we pray in the following psalm prayer:

**Eternal Father,
you give us life despite our guilt
and even add days and years to our lives
in order to bring us wisdom.
Make us love and obey you,
so that the works of our hands
may always display
what your hands have done,
until the day we gaze upon the beauty
of your face.**

Here comes now an example of a psalm prayer addressed to Christ. Psalm 130(129) opens with the words, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord." The sub-title applies this psalm to Christ: "He himself will save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Addressing Christ, the Lord we pray after this psalm:

**Listen with compassion to our prayers, Lord.
The forgiveness of sins is yours.
Do not look on the wrong we have done,
but grant us your merciful kindness.**

These psalm prayers are optional. If they are used it seems to be better, to omit the repetition of the antiphon after the psalm.

Another help in praying the psalms is the new distribuion of the psalms over four weeks, the new assignment of psalms to certain days and canonical Hours, and the omission of the imprecatory psalms. This, however, deserves a treatment of its own.

HOMILETICS

by

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I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR JULY

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
(July 3, 1977)

First Reading: Isaiah 66: 10-14c

Second Reading: Galatians 6: 14-18

Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20 (or: 10: 1-9)

First Reading: A burst of ecstatic joy from the last chapter of Third Isaiah. Exultant joy will fill the Jerusalem of the new People of God, for the Lord has filled her with delight (65:18). All nations flow to her with abundant offerings. Now she is universal Mother of all peoples, fondling her children, and giving them plentiful nourishment and delight. This image of a loving mother, vividly drawn and elaborated, finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Church. Suddenly in v. 14, it is the Lord himself who in the new Jerusalem will act as a mother comforting her children. (This passage gave the impetus to St. Therese of the Child Jesus to initiate her little way of confidence and love).

Gospel Reading: The mission of the seventy-two disciples, prefiguring the universal mission of the Church. Its salient point are:

- 1) For mutual encouragement and help, they are not sent out alone but in pairs.
- 2) Prayer is enjoined so that ample laborers be found to gather the harvest.
- 3) Their mission is urgent and must not be held up by trivialities. Much hostile opposition will be incurred.
- 4) Theirs is a mission of peace, which is bestowed as a blessing. It will only benefit those who receive it properly disposed.
- 5) The laborers deserve their wages in the form of board and lodging, but they are not to be choosy with regard to food and dwelling.

6) They are to proclaim the presence of God's reign over men (through acceptance of the Master). Non-acceptance will be met with a symbolic act of shaking the dust from their feet, indicating that they have no further responsibility in their conversion.

Elated that in the name of Jesus they had power to cast out demons, Jesus gives them the real motive for joy: the presence of God's reign (11:20), which puts an end to Satan's reign over men, and secondly, that they share in this reign (v. 20). Christ's disciples have power over all diabolical influences.

Second Reading: Christ crucified is Paul's sole boast, for that salvific act meant new life for men. Crucified with Christ (2: 19), Paul is dead to the "world", that is, anything inimical to God's reign in Christ. All the external observances with which his opponents were trying to shackle the Christians were meaningless. Inner transformation into a new creature in Christ by his Spirit alone matters. Those who follow Paul in this, constitute the new Israel of God.

The Latin word "stigmata" in v. 17 has a meaning in present usage which Paul did not have in mind. Rather, he is referring to the scars and marks left by the stonings and scourgings he had endured, branding him a slave of Christ. As Christ's possession, he is not to be molested. Now he can really glory in the flesh (in contrast to his adversaries' glorying in their fleshy circumcision). A final plea for peaceful reconciliation is sounded in a last appeal to them as brothers.

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 10, 1977)

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30: 10-14

Second Reading: Colossians 1: 15-20

Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 25-37

First Reading: An exhortation to return to God with our whole being by listening to his voice as it resounds in the word of God proclaimed to us. It is not difficult to lay hold of God's word, as if it were "way up there" or in some remote place hard to reach. On the contrary, God's word is very near: by listening to it attentively, it enters into our very heart. God is present in his word, and it is up to those who receive it to put it into action.

Gospel Reading: The lawyer was aware that supernatural love of God and neighbor is required to obtain life eternal (he quoted a revealed precept in vv. 25-27), but its specific application was not

clear to him. Who was his neighbor? Jesus answered by telling him this parable. The picture unfolds in three scenes:

1) **Misfortune:** A man falls among robbers. It is on the lonely road leading from Jerusalem to Jericho a distance of some twenty kilometers with a descent of a thousand meters amid rugged cliffs and deep ravines, often infested with such brigands. They beat him up badly, strip him and leave him lying there half dead, covered with blood and dirt.

2) **Indifference:** Some countrymen of his come upon him in this pitiful state, even members of the priestly caste. Unmoved, they steer clear of him and pass by.

3) **Compassion:** A Samaritan stops at once at the sight of this misery, and, forgetting all else, is only intent on alleviating the man's needs. Note the striking details:

— He is a foreigner: on no terms of friendship with the Jews.

— He is travelling to Jerusalem and eager, no doubt to accomplish his business (see v. 35).

— Yet, moved to compassion, he sacrifices his best articles for the man: Wine and oil provide food as well as medicine: wine as having an astringent and cleansing effect on wounds, oil for soothing, healing.

— From his own linens, he makes bandages to bind up the wounds.

— He gives him **personal** care, placing him on his own beast and carefully steadying him while he walks alongside till they reach the inn. There he watches over him till the crisis is over. Then he arranges with the innkeeper for continued care, and promises to make up any extra expenses on his return.

In short, this is an exalted picture of love in action. The Samaritan disregarded every consideration of urgent business, surrounding dangers, national sentiments and personal comfort. He offered every service he could think of with promptness, great care, generosity and love. (In the original Greek, eleven verbs are compounded with prepositions which intensify the verb-action).

Jesus made it clear that my neighbor is not only he who lives near me or who is of the same nationality (as the Jews thought); any needy person of any country must be regarded by me as neighbor. Moreover, true love of neighbor is unselfish and self-sacrificing. It does all in its power to relieve the necessities of one's fellowmen in need. (Neighbor is a corelated term. The Samaritan acted as a true neighbor because of his actions. Jesus admonishes the lawyer to follow suit).

Second Reading: A Christological passage of highest import, proclaiming Christ as center of the universe directing all things, and head of God's new creation, the Church:

1) as perfect man (adam) Christ is the perfect visible representation of God. 2) thus he holds supremacy over all (as man was told in Genesis to have dominion over all things) symbolized by the title of "first-born" which gave supremacy over all the others in the family. 3) his supreme position is given in the threefold relation of the universe to Christ: a) "in him": he is the center of all, bringing all things together in harmony (as in Eph. 1: 10). b) "through him": he is actively bringing all things into existence and conserving them in it. c) "for him" he is the final goal and perfection of all creation. 4) the Risen Christ is the Head of his Body-Person, the Church, and the beginning of the new creation. 5) In him resides God's "pleroma", that is, the fullness of God's sanctifying powers concentrated in Christ, who in turn concentrates it in the Church, of which he is the Head. (The ancients considered the head as imparting all vital influence to the rest of the body). 6) Christ in his sacrifice on Golgotha is the means of reconciliation with God for all created beings, and the restoration of peace and harmony of the entire universe. And this is he who was the despised Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified man of sorrows!

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 17, 1977)

First Reading: Genesis 18: 1-10a
Second Reading: Colossians 1: 24-28
Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 38-42

First Reading: In a conflation of various traditions Abraham entertains with consummate Oriental hospitality three strangers, one of whom represents the Lord himself. The simplicity of the divine visit and the intimate conversation remind us of the intimacy of man with God in paradise, marking Abraham as truly the special friend of God. No other scene in Genesis represents God in so human a manner (anthropomorphism). Climaxing the visit is the renewed promise of a son to Abraham by his wife Sarah.

Gospel Reading: The Lord is welcomed into the home of Martha and her sister Mary (who is nowhere identified as the Magdalene). Martha is the active and energetic type, while Mary is quiet and retiring (as can also be seen in Jn. 11: 20). Jesus is well aware that bodily needs must be cared for, yet he gently chides Martha (even

the voice cadence can be heard in the double calling of her name), **for overstressing the material side of things.** Preference must always be given to the spiritual, for this is the Savior's main aim, and Mary has wisely chosen to be nourished first by him. Martha's great faith is evident from Jn. 11:24. (Through some manuscripts have "just a few things" (referring to a few dishes), instead of "just one thing" (referring to the spiritual), the latter reading is preferable, because Jesus evidently understands it thus at the end of the verse.

Second Reading: The tremendous mystery of "Christ in us" (v. 27) presupposes such an intimate union of Christ with the Christian, that the sufferings of each member are accounted as sufferings of Christ. Although Christ's salvific work alone was sufficient for man's salvation, yet all Christians till the end of time must share like Paul in Christ's redemptive sufferings, to bring the Body of Christ to full measure. In Paul's case, his sufferings were intimately bound up with his mission of preaching Christ's gospel message, with its demands of Christian love. This brought him untold sufferings time and again. But he never ceases to preach Christ, for Christ alone is the true glory of mankind.

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 24, 1977)

First Reading: Genesis 18: 20-32
Second Reading: Colossians 2: 12-14
Gospel Reading: Luke 11: 1-13

First Reading: When the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah comes to the knowledge of God (described according to the Yahwist in human fashion), divine chastisement is in order. But Abraham bargains with the Lord in genuine Oriental manner, a delightful scene, which reveals the intimacy of Abraham with God, yet the main issue is a theological one. Will God's justice allow the just to be chastised along with the wicked after the manner of collective punishment? Or, on the contrary, will God's mercy even spare the wicked in favor of a few just ones, should these be found? Here we see the principle of collective punishment mitigated, and the great value of virtuous persons in the midst of the community.

Gospel Reading: One of the finest passages in the Gospels on prayer. Words move but example draws. Fascinated by the Master's prayer-life, the disciples beg to be taught. His response is the prayer now offered untold times daily throughout the world. Luke has five petitions which Matthew has enlarged to the covenant number of seven, a favorite with Matthew.

Jesus teaches us always to approach God as children approach their Father. The first two petitions pertain to God's glory and envisage the blessed day when all creatures will recognize the all-holy God, with his reign fully accomplished in them. The next three regard God's children. "Daily bread" includes all the spiritual and material needs for sustaining their life, not excluding a Eucharistic allusion. Forgiveness of sins is closely bound up with our willingness to forgive those who offended us. "Temptation" is better translated "trial" and refers to persecution which tests one to the utmost.

In the parable of the importunate friend, Jesus describes a man's embarrassment because of an unexpected midnight visitor. In need of something to put before the visitor, he goes to his close friend for provisions. The initial refusal is quite understandable for it involves a lot of trouble. To open the door with its large wooden pegs or iron bolts would have made much noise, and would easily awaken the rest of the family sleeping on mats in the same room. Yet, **by persistent pleading**, the one standing outside wins out and gets all he needs. The point of comparison is obviously **perseverance in prayer and the determination not to give up** will assuredly obtain the desired results. Jesus has evidently the same meaning in mind with the following words: Ask and you shall receive etc.

Yet, Jesus follows up this parable with another in which a son who asks for wholesome food will not be given harmful objects by a loving father. Man often asks God for what he thinks he needs, but in reality it may be harmful to him. So the prayer is heard by God granting what is useful and good. God's supreme gift to man is the Holy Spirit and he wants us to ask for this Gift.

Second Reading: In baptism, the Christian, professing his faith in Christ's resurrection, was buried with Christ and rose in the newness of the Christ-life. (These same thoughts are given in greater detail in Rom. 6: 3-8). By his victim-death on the cross, Christ relieved man of all his sinfulness, as well as of the Law with all its burdens. He paid the debt.

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 31, 1977)

First Reading: Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) 1:2; 2:21-23.

Second Reading: Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 12: 13-21

First Reading: Qoheleth in Hebrew means "the preacher in the assembly". The book consists of reflections on the vanity or tran-

sient and empty character of all earthly things. "Vanity of vanity" is a Hebrew superlative best given as "supreme vanity or emptiness". Apart from faith and spiritual motivation, all man's labors and worries are futile. Someone else inherits all his hard-won profits. (In the final chapter 12:13f, these reflections are summed up thus: "The last word when all is heard is: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all; because God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden qualities whether good or bad")

Gospel Reading: In the midst of an open-air discourse, Jesus is interrupted by a request to settle a dispute over an inheritance. He refuses to arbitrate in family money-affairs. He then takes the occasion to warn his followers against greed, for "a man's possessions do not guarantee his life" (an echo of today's first reading). Then follows a parable which can be pictured in three captions:

1) **Bumper crop:** wealth in an agricultural country is often measured by landed possessions. Foreseeing an exceptionally good harvest, a farmer realizes that his barns are too small to hold the abundant yield.

2) **Selfish plans:** Wholesale buyers were not available in those days as today. Selling surplus is out of the question since his neighbors would be equally blessed that year. His only solution is to hoard it! Bigger and better barns to store up the harvest and live merrily ever after! In all this, there is not the slightest thought of gratitude toward God, nor the least thought of the needs of the poor. A truly selfish man with sheer materialistic outlook.

3) **Unexpected death summons:** That very night he is called before the judgment seat of God. Material goods he must leave behind. Spiritual goods he has none for he has never bothered about God (v. 21). Empty handed he will appear before his Lord and Judge. And all those crops, whose will they be?!

Truly this is the height of folly. Jesus himself concludes that it is the greatest folly to set one's heart only on material goods, while neglecting God's spiritual riches. Earthly riches have no lasting value (Mt. 6: 19f).

Second Reading: New life in Christ demands higher aims and greater striving. Not the "world" (hostile to God) but God's world is man's real goal. Having died with Christ to all "worldly" things, the Christian lives anew in Christ, which in reality is Christ's hidden life in God. How valuable and glorious that is, will be manifest at Christ's glorious Coming.

What remains now is to live up to one's calling. Whatever pertains to sin and sinful old ways must be snuffed out, killed ("mortified"). The new man in Christ is daily to be transformed

more and more into Christ, who is the perfect image of God. In Christ, all are one, with every social barrier finally removed. To be transformed into Christ is man's highest aim.

BIBLICAL NOTES FOR AUGUST

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 7, 1977)

First Reading: Wisdom 18: 6-9

Second Reading: Hebrews 11: 1-2. 8-19 (or 11: 1-2. 8-12)

Gospel Reading: Luke 12: 32-48 (or 12: 35-40)

First Reading: Chapters ten to nineteen of the book of Wisdom re-interpret earlier passages of the book of Exodus, with the express purpose of drawing out from them a spiritual meaning and deeper lessons for the reader's edification and instruction (interpretive midrash). This passage refers to the night in which the Lord slays the firstborn of Egypt and delivers Israel "his firstborn". He thus fulfills the oath sworn to Abraham to safe-guard his offspring (Gen. 15: 13f). While the children of Israel awaited their deliverance in expectancy, they came together to offer the sacrificial meal of the Passover, the paschal lamb, which became the symbol and memorial of both their deliverance from slavery and their being called to be God's People (as is the Eucharist for the New People of God). They agreed to the divine prescription to celebrate it in all succeeding generations, who would share the lot of all Israel. At that sacred rite they praised the Lord for his wonderful works. In later years this evolved into the singing of the Great Hallel, composed of psalms 113 to 118, all beginning with Halleluja, Praise the Lord.

Gospel Reading: Several units are brought together, all with emphasis on the end-kingdom: 1) an exhortation to trust a loving providence, despite present forebodings. They are in God's care, the Good Shepherd of his flock. If they are to inherit God's own kingdom, of what value are all earthly treasures: 2) a parable of servants on the watch for their master's return in the dead of night. Loins girded (belts tightened) and lamps burning betray readiness of action. This vigilance must be constant, and it will be amply rewarded. In v. 37, an allegorical touch points to Christ, the Master, for no human master would act thus. 3) a parable of a thief in the night stresses constant vigilance. The Lord's Coming

will be sudden and unexpected. 4) a parable of faithful and unfaithful servants, emphasizing responsibility in higher positions. It will be rewarded or punished accordingly as those in position carry out their duties.

Second Reading: A magnetic portrait of faith, unyielding in face of all obstacles, illustrated by the exemplary men of old. In the believer's attitude, faith is that strong assurance of possessing what is hoped for, and the conviction of the reality of the object of one's hope. Such faith greatly pleases God.

Abraham is singled out as the foremost model of such faith of the men of old. He manifested it: 1) in leaving his home country Mesopotamia at God's bidding, and travelling to Canaan, a land utterly unknown to him; 2) in sojourning as a pilgrim together with his descendant in that promised land, while awaiting a lasting home prepared by God; 3) in believing the promise of a son (Isaac), through Sarah, his aged and barren wife, while he himself was far advanced in years. Evidently it was Abraham's faith that brought results, though Sarah's initial unbelief (Gen. 18: 12-15) must have changed after recognizing who the visitors were; 4) in Abraham's complete submission to sacrifice Isaac, although it was through Isaac that he had been promised numerous progeny. So great was his faith that it even overcame the prospect of death, prefiguring the Christian's faith in Christ's resurrection.

The author constantly draws the conclusion for his Christian readers that they too have no lasting home here below; and that their staunch faith will bring them through all persecutions and sufferings to the eternal homeland, where God awaits them to reward their faith abundantly.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 14, 1977)

First Reading: Jeremiah 38: 4-6. 8-10

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 1-4

Gospel Reading: 12: 49-53

First Reading: Jeremiah prefigures the suffering Christ in many ways. He predicts the destruction of the Jerusalem of his day, in punishment for its sins, as did Christ in his day. He was handed over by the king to those who demanded his death, as was Christ by the leaders of the people. They were bent on his death, as they were on Christ's. But Jeremiah's whole trust was in Yahweh, God of Israel, as was Christ's.

Gospel Reading: John the Baptist had foretold that the Messiah-King would baptize (immerse) them in the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:26). It is a purifying fire that transforms the inner man through the Good News and its blessings. How Jesus longs to thus transform the entire world! But he knows the price to be paid: at first he must be immersed (baptized) in sufferings and death. His mission was not to bring a false peace and security to the easy-going and self-contented, but demanded that men make a decision for or against the reign of God as announced by him. This decision was at times very difficult to make, and it would cut right through family relations. "He was destined for the fall and the rise of many" (Lk. 2:34).

Second Reading: The life of a Christian is like a race which he enters gladly in order to win the prize. To win, one must be divested of all things that hinder progress (sinful habits), and endure to the end. The many exemplary runners who have gone on ahead (enumerated in the previous chapter) are like a cloud of witnesses watching the Christian run his race. Above all, it is necessary to keep one's eyes on Jesus, the leader and foremost runner of the race. He endured to the end while keeping his eyes on the divine exaltation which awaited him. His example in suffering great affliction will be the best encouragement in the trials that lie ahead. They have not as yet laid down their lives as Jesus did.

EVENING MASS OF THE ASSUMPTION (August 14, 1977)

First Reading: First Chronicles 15: 3-4.15-16; 16: 1-2

Second Reading: First Corinthians 15: 54-57

Gospel Reading: Luke 11: 27-28

First Reading: Amid great rejoicing, the Ark of the Covenant is brought to Jerusalem, carried (correctly this time) by the Levites to the dwelling-place prepared for it by David. It is called the Ark of God, because it was a sign of God's presence, enthroned on the mercy seat. There the Lord manifested himself in power to his People, received their prayers and offerings, leading them also in their expeditions. It is called Ark of the Covenant, because it contained the Ten Commandments, a permanent reminder of the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel. In both instances, the Ark is a type of Mary.

Gospel Reading: In stark contrast to the sinister accusation in 11:15 is this noble praise of the woman. To praise the mother is to recognize the Son. Jesus does not deny the greatness of Mary's unique motherhood, but points out that her true greatness consists in her total commitment to the word of God, which she not only listened to but "kept" in her heart, pondering over it as in 2: 19.51.

Second Reading: Paul describes the final state of the just: a complete transformation to a glorious and immortal existence, won for man by Christ in his Paschal Mystery. Full and anticipated victory over death was accorded Mary as immaculate Mother of the Divine Incarnate Word, and an ever-glorious immortality as Queen of the universe.

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (August 15, 1977)

First Reading: Revelation 11: 19a: 12: 1-6a. 10ab

Second Reading: First Corinthians 15: 20-27

Gospel Reading: Luke 1: 37-56

First Reading: In the book of Revelation we are dealing with apocalyptic symbols which convey theological realities. Mention of the ark of the Covenant indicates God's special presence among his covenanted People (see 1 Sam, 4:3). God's presence became most actual for man when the Son of God became one of us. It is he who is born of the Woman in v. 5, the Messiah-King destined to rule all the nations, who was taken up to be enthroned at the Father's right. It is he whom Satan is determined to destroy (v. 4). But the male offspring (v, 5 Greek) is both an individual and a collective, for, after the Messiah-King was taken up to heaven in v. 5, Satan persecutes "the rest of the Woman's offspring" (v. 17), although no other parturition was mentioned than in v. 5. The rest of her offspring are the true followers of Jesus (v. 17).

Also the Woman is presented as both individual and collective, or rather, in true Semitic fashion, as an individual who represents and embodies in herself a collective. This phenomenon is found in other parts of the same book. Here, the author concentrates on the one and only Woman from whom the Messiah-King and Son of God took up his abode among his People. He projects Mary in her collective personality as the ideal embodiment of

Mother Zion in all her sufferings and longings, awaiting the Coming One; but likewise as the ideal embodiment of the glorious Church of the new Covenant. Stars, sun, birthpangs, desert, etc., are to be taken in their apocalyptic symbolic meaning with theological implications. To take them literally is to misinterpret the symbolic language of this book. Clothed with the Godhead (the sun), the Woman is the unconquered Victor over Satan, and the glorious Queen of the heavens. Mary is the sign of victory for the Church of which she is the perfect model and embodiment, and a projection of the Church's glory. All victory comes from the Divine Son within.

Gospel Reading: Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth is enlightened to proclaim Mary as the Mother of her Lord. For his Christian readers, Luke intends the fullest meaning of the title, for he uses the same title in the following verse with the definite meaning of Yahweh. Elizabeth utters a twofold beatitude regarding Mary, one for Mary and the other for her Child. "You are the most blessed among women" best translates the original Aramaic, which lacks grammatical superlatives. It is the faith of Mary that is extolled in 4. 45, the same word used in 1:20 for Zachariah's lack of it. Note that the twofold beatitude now forms part of the "Hail Mary".

Mary's response is her quiet answer to Elizabeth's congratulations. It is a hymn replete with allusions to the psalms and to Hannah's song of praise in 1 Sam. 2. Mary was well acquainted with these in her intense Jewish faith and prayer-life. The Magnificat is not Luke's invention, else he would have composed it in much better Greek. It reflects an Aramaic original. Luke may well have molded it into its present form, guaranteeing for his readers the thoughts and sentiments of Mary on this occasion. It falls neatly into three strophes:

1) concerning Mary: her heart is penetrated with deep joy over the great God, her Savior, whose praises she sings, but in her own eyes she remains the lowly servant of 1:38. Yet she prophetically announces that all nations till the end of time will take up the praise bestowed on her by Elizabeth, because the mighty hand of God was at work in her.

2) Concerning the anawin, the poor of Yahweh; extolling Yahweh's might, holiness and mercy, Mary pronounces blessed all those who humbly depend on him as Savior. This is forcefully and graphically described in a triple antithetic parallelism.

3) Concerning Israel: Mary's hour is Israel's hour. The promises made to Abraham and his offspring reach fulfillment in her bring-

ing into the world the one Offspring in whom all nations will find themselves blessed (Gen. 22: 18).

The Church daily makes Mary's magnificat her own in the Evening Prayers. Particularly fitting for today's feast is v. 52, which would visualize Satan's dethronement and the exalted enthronement of the humble maiden of Nazareth as glorious Queen of the heavens.

Second Reading: Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own resurrection. First of all, our solidarity with Christ demands it. The first man gave physical life, and from him comes death. In him we are one with all mankind. Divine life comes to us only if we are one with Christ. Secondly, he is the first-fruits. Just as the offering of the first-fruits consecrated the whole harvest, so in Christ's glorious Coming, the whole Body-Person of Christ as the full harvest, will put on immortality as Christ himself possesses it. The Risen Christ continues to reign from the time of his resurrection to the final triumph and consummation of all things. Meanwhile, the Father makes all (except himself) subject to Christ.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 21, 1977)

First Reading: Isaiah 66: 18-21

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 5-7. 11-13

Gospel Reading: Luke 13: 22-30

First Reading: This last chapter of Third Isaiah has a truly universal outlook. The prophet sees God summoning from all directions the nations surrounding Jerusalem and sending some of them to far off lands, in order to make known his "glory". In the light of Jn. 1:14, the glory of the Lord in this messianic prophecy is Christ. He himself is the sign of salvation (cf. 7:12-14; 11:10). A grand procession from all lands converges on the New Jerusalem to worship the Lord, and from all countries the dispersed People of God return home.

Gospel Reading: Jerusalem is the goal of Jesus for there his life climaxes in fulfillment. Since the Jews took for granted all the children of Abraham would have a part in the end-kingdom, the question in v. 23 may well be Luke's literary device to bring out the mind of Christ on this topic. In no vague terms, the Master declares that in order to have a share in the end-kingdom, a great deal of energetic effort will be needed (such is the meaning of the Greek word used). Besides, the door itself narrow, and

one has to try one's best to get through. Those who did not become true disciples by interior conversion, but relied merely on external relationship, will find themselves excluded from the company of Israel's holy ones, while many of the despised pagans from all corners of the globe will be admitted to it. They received the call last, but many of them will be foremost in the end-kingdom.

Second Reading: The exhortation to bear trials is continued from the previous section. God treats his children as very dear sons, whom he disciplines out of love. Such training is very beneficial. It helps the immature to grow into strong Christian adulthood, and personal maturity. In itself, all disciplinary training is demanding, but the outcome makes it very much worth while. Therefore courage! Progress is much advanced by a straight moral life (path).

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 28, 1977)

First Reading: Sirach 3: 19-21, 30-31 (Greek: 3: 17-19, 27-28).

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24a

Gospel Reading: Luke 14: 1, 7-14

First Reading: True greatness in God's sight is always coupled with genuine humility, a proper estimate of one's limitations. The humble person is pleasing both to God and man. Pride on the other hand is like an incurable disease, with its roots deep inside. The wise man gladly learns from mothers, while the proud man knows everything better already.

Gospel Reading: Since it is expressly stated that the Lord is telling a parable, he is not out to teach proper etiquette at a wedding party, but from such proper etiquette he draws a lesson of a higher order concerning the kingdom of God. When anyone receives the invitation to the wedding (of his Son), which is the gift of faith, he is to respond humbly, sincerely aware of his unworthiness. Such a disposition brings a man close to God, and v. 11 expressly states that this is the lesson of the parable. Since the host was a leading Pharisee (v. 1), Jesus may well have meant a warning against presuming to be of great value in God's eyes.

The following verses (12-14) are also not meant as practical advice, but as a spiritual lesson on motivation. Selfish interests have no value in God's eyes. By doing good to those who cannot return the favor, one's motivation can only be pure charity. This will have its reward in the end-kingdom.

Second Reading: To conclude an exhortation on remaining faithful to their Christian calling, the author presents a most encouraging description of the Christian inheritance, contrasted with that of the covenanted People of God of old on Mount Sinai. The New Covenant brings men into intimate union with God and makes them members of God's eternal city, even sons of God and a sanctified People, with God's own Son as mediator with the Father. Although this inheritance is already theirs (now), its full possession awaits them in heaven (then).

II. HOMILIES FOR JULY

Pray the Lord of the Harvest to Send Laborers

July 3, 1977: Fourteenth Sunday

The Human Situation: He was a first class engineer working in Paris on the atomic bomb, when he heard the call. And he gave up everything. Not satisfied to work at home in some prominent part of God's vineyard he opted for the Sahara desert. Such was Brother Paul of the Little Brothers of Father Charles de Foucault. His fellow religious discovered him working alone side a group of men digging a canal to catch rainwater in the dry desert; hot, sweating, dirty, unknown to the men with whom he was working as a religious, yet beaming with joy in his heart in union with his Savior. In the heart of the desert he was giving witness to Christ.

The Good News: It is the Savior himself who sounds the clarion command, to pray that the Father in heaven send laborers into his harvest. Today, that harvest consists of the teeming masses ripe for the kingdom of God on all continents of the earth, many of whom have not yet heard of Christ, and many others have relinquished the religion of their forefathers. The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. So he bids us pray for an increase of helpers.

Did Christ not accomplish all that was necessary for man's salvation? Yes, he did. Could he not accomplish this final result all by himself? Yes, he could. Why should he then tell his followers to pray that the Father send helpers to reap the harvest? Because he has left the harvesting in the hands of man. He wills that the

gathering in of the fruits be the work of the members of his Body. Man is to share in the work of salvation. As God has made man his co-creator in bringing life into the world and in conquering this earth to build a world worthy of God, so Christ also has called men to be his co-saviors, to bring life that is divine and eternal to his fellowmen. As in today's gospel, he shared with his disciples his powers of tearing down the kingdom of Satan and proclaiming the reign of God, so he has given his Church at all times the powers needed to conquer evil in every form, and to establish the reign of God in the hearts of men (Mk. 16:17).

But this needs the joint efforts of all Christians. The mission of the Church to bring Christ to the world is to be shared by each and every Christian. Truly, not all are called to work directly in the harvest-field, but all are bidden to do their part in promoting this great cause of Christ. And foremost among all contributions is the prayers that the Lord bids all Christians to send up to the Father of mercies, to awaken in the hearts of youth the desire and the determination to the Christ's close co-workers in the grand undertaking of man's salvation. It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the hearts of the young, that plants the seed of vocation there, to work according to one's ability in the vineyard of the Lord. Parents and teachers can do much to encourage signs of true vocations. Through generous and frequent prayer, they can win both the grace of a calling and perseverance in that calling for those under their care.

Moreover, there is the prayer of deeds. We can offer our daily tasks, our labors and sufferings, our trials and temptations, for this great intention of the Good Shepherd, who even in his life-time on earth was moved to deepest compassion when he saw the multitudes like so many sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36). Today, these multitudes have grown immensely in all countries of the world. They cry for bread, the Bread of life, and there is no one to give it to them. They are hungry for the truth but there is not one there to offer it to them. There is a great need of priests, Brothers and Sisters to work in God's harvest, and of generous lay persons who will contribute time and talent and financial help for this cause of the Savior. Our prayers, our labors and our contributions will surely move the good God to send laborers into his harvest-field. The parents of St. Therese of the Child Jesus prayed long and frequently for a boy in order that they could offer him to the Lord to be his anointed one. Instead, the Lord gave them a little saint who has become the Patroness of all missionaries. "Ask and you shall receive" said the Lord. Our prayers are always heard.

Our Response: There are many ways in which we can respond to the plea of our Savior for prayers. Individually, in family and other groups, we can initiate prayers for vocations, and we can give every encouragement to those who are training for their goal. Those who have the means to help financially should know that the Lord blesses abundantly those who help his chosen ones reach their goal, for often they themselves do not have the means required to continue on toward that goal. Many is the man or woman who has enabled a young man or woman to enter the ranks of God's chosen ones, and to back them up once they are active in God's vineyard.

Troubled about Many Things

July 10, 1977: Fifteenth Sunday

The Human Situation: Many a person whose busy schedule found him nearly exhausted each night with no time for quiet prayer with the Lord, has experienced a remarkable change when he did set aside daily a definite period for that purpose. He was able to accomplish even more than the usual load of work. The reason is first of all psychological: quiet prayer with the Lord stills the nerves, rests the entire organism, and enables one to avoid much of the unnecessary trivial things that take up one's time and energy. Secondly, the Lord imparts his blessing on those who seek him in regular prayer, so that with added energy, their undertakings bear still more fruit.

The Good News: The lesson of today's gospel is a wholesome one for all Christians. Many are intensely interested in the work of the Lord in one way or another, and give themselves up to much toil for the good cause. This interest shows itself in parish organizations and projects, in meetings and seminars, in prolonged effort for some enterprise with laudable purpose. Yet, in carrying out these undertakings, it often happens that there is an exaggerated over-emphasis on the project itself with many worries and anxieties, but with little or no care given to the spiritual dimension of the work of the Lord.

Surely the Lord was pleased that Martha opened wide her doors to welcome him into her home together with whatever disciples he brought along. Surely he was made to feel completely at home in her house. Jesus was well aware that his bodily needs and those of his companions had to be cared for, and the more material side of life tended to. It was expected of any host to offer water

for bathing, and nourishment in food and drink. All this was in good order, and would only have earned the Master's gratitude and and copious blessing. Yet he gently chides Martha. The double calling of her name shows how tenderly the Master spoke. Yet why did he do so? Because she is upset and troubled in over-emphasizing these matters. She is trying to prepare a repast worth while for the occasion, one that befits her ability. Her anxiety even breaks out in complaint against her sister, and disguises a complaint against the Master himself.

The Savior had never on any occasion shown any interest in special kinds of food or drink. In this matter he remains completely detached. His purpose in coming to a home is to bring spiritual nourishment, knowledge of things that really matter in life, the Good News in depth. Any anxiety or over-emphasis on material matters did not agree with his deeply spiritual outlook on life. He had said nothing to Martha until she requested him to chide her sister for her conduct. But Jesus defends Mary. It was she who had really received him and understood his purpose in coming. She sat at his feet and listened to his divine message. She imbibed the spiritual potion he offered her. There would be time enough to partake of the necessities of life. But man does not live by bread alone.

Many well-meaning Christians can learn from this scene. They work very hard for Church projects or other laudable causes. Yet in doing so, the spiritual side of life is often neglected, and in the end the Lord's blessing is not fully on their work. Sometimes one can be more intent on personal success in work than in advancing God's kingdom. Real advancement does not merely depend on material success. St. Thomas More as grand Chancellor of England under Henry VIII spent many hours of the day in the business of the kingdom, but not before he had spent several hours with the Lord in quiet prayer in the wee hours of the morning. Bishop Sheen, whose column in our newspapers is well known, never lets a day go without a holy hour, despite his busy schedule. And Mother Teresa of India can tell us that unless we put first things first, our work will not have God's blessing. Despite the strenuous work that daily confronts her, she is invariably present at the daily period of quiet prayer and Eucharistic sacrifice.

In prayer we listen to Jesus, like Mary we humbly kneel before him to ask for spiritual food and sustenance. From thence comes strength, correct decisions and perseverance, as well as calm control of our energies and stability in our undertakings. After the Savior himself had spent long hours healing or teach-

ing, how often we find him in communion with the Father! And who has accomplished more for God and his fellowmen than the Master?

Our Response: No one would consider it proper for a mother to neglect the family's needs just in order to attend morning daily mass, or for a father to neglect his work in favor of spending time at prayer. But it is often possible to relinquish part of the afternoon or evening TV program, to devote sometime to quiet prayer. Such a person gives excellent example to the rest of the family and prayer always brings abundant blessing on the household.

Love in Action

July 17, 1977: Sixteenth Sunday

The Human Situation: The fifty-year-old lawyer groaned. On a busy American expressway the motor of his car sputtered and left him stranded. In the next forty-five minutes in the rush hour a thousand cars speed by. No one stopped. Then a truck pulled up. The driver had worked a full eight hours for his company with an additional two hours at his private business. But with a willing hand to spent another three hours getting the stalled car back on the road, and the lawyer finally back home. And he was a Negro. Refusing all remunerations from the lawyer, he simply said: "I figure people can get along fine if they just help one another out". Here was indeed a good Samaritan with a brilliant example of love in action for those who usually made life hard for his kind.

The Good News: For the bulk of the homily, see the biblical notes for this Sunday.

Our Response: Of all the parables this is one of the most appealing. Such a perfect picture of love in action teaches man to conquer every prejudice and habit, personal dislikes and selfish aims. It comes to life in the heroic deeds of noble men and women, above all in God's saints.

Ask and it Will be Given to you

July 24, 1977: Seventeenth Sunday

The Human Situation: José was a plucky lad, He worked hard to help his widowed mother by offering to do chores at the store; but José was handicapped, for he was cross-eyed. Often he knelt

before the shrine of St. Joseph, his patron, begging him to send him help in one way or another. What was needed was an operation but there was no money for that. One day a man noticed José eyes and asked him about it. He took interest in the lad and introduced him to an eye specialist. An operation was arranged and all the expenses were cared for by his newly won benefactor. Now José has a promising future, and he often kneels at the shrine of St. Joseph to thank him for hearing his prayers.

The Good News: Today's gospel gives clear directives on the art of praying, a "must" in the life of everyone. All during his life Jesus gave much time to prayer, as St. Luke points out again and again. Finally, the disciples were so impressed by his example of prolonged prayer that they begged him to teach them as St. John the Baptist taught his disciples. In response, —Jesus gave them that prayer which we daily pray in its longer form found in St. Matthew's gospel. In this prayer, he lays down directives according to which all prayer is to be modelled.

First of all, our prayers are to be directed to the glory of the heavenly Father. As children of God, we are always to approach him in the loving relation of children to a God of love and compassion, of mercy and kindness. Such is the content of the first petitions, namely that the Father be known as the all-holy God, to whom all evil is repugnant, and consequently his children ought to endeavor to avoid sin at all times for it displeases him. They are to be holy as he is holy, like unto his Son. This very Son of his he had sent to wipe out the works of the Evil One, dethrone him from the hearts of men and establish the reign of God by enthroning the God of love in every heart. The reign of God is paramount in importance for all mankind as well as for each individual in particular. We pray that the reign come in all fullness and finality.

Only after giving his disciples this correct hierarchy of values in the art of praying, did he direct their petitions toward their own needs. As children daily depend on their parents to provide all their needs, so we show our dependence on God our Father by asking him day after day for our needs to body and spirit. There is a great need to be free from sin for it is the one barrier to our close friendship with our heavenly Father. If his children humbly ask for forgiveness of their sins, he will readily grant it, provided that they in turn readily forgive those who have offended them. So necessary is this condition that Jesus made it the outstanding lesson of the parable of the unforgiving servant who was severely punished for not forgiving a fellow-servant, when he said: "So

also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Mt. 18: 35). As to temptations, everyone is aware of his own weakness in the battle against evil, and so the last petition is an earnest plea not to let evil forces overcome him. God tempts no man, but unless he offers strengthening grace, man so easily falls back into his old ways. God may try his chosen ones severely, but then the plea is not to be tried beyond one's endurance. This corresponds better with the more recent translations of these words: do not lead us to the test, or not bring us to the trial.

Prayer must have certain qualities if it is to be heard and the first of these is perseverance. That is the thrust of the parable of the friend who goes at midnight to obtain provisions for an unexpected midnight visitor. He kept on persisting and that determination not to give in, won out. Often, however, the good Lord does not hear our prayer at once, because prolonged prayer is a proof of our earnestness and the seriousness of the situation. Prayer has an infallible promise: Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. It is the Lord himself who makes this promise, and there are no conditions attached to the promise. But notice the increased intensity in the words: ask, seek, knock, which supposes persistent and continued petition.

Why then do people sometimes complain that their prayers are not heard? Perhaps the second parable clarifies this point. Every loving father will provide proper food for the child that asks for it. But if what is asked for is superfluous, injurious to health, or unprofitable, will the father grant it anyway? By no means. Instead, something wholesome and useful will be given to the child. How often people ask for what is in God's eyes unworthy of the child of God, even harmful for the good of the person in question. God who is all-knowing and all-loving, cannot grant that request, but will hear the prayer by commuting it to something good and helpful. Here, a word is in place concerning chain prayers. You find them in benches in church and you receive them in the mail. You are told to copy out the prayer and distribute it so many times, and then to say the prayer for so many days, and your petition will be infallibly granted. This is rank superstition. Neither the Scriptures nor the Church give any such guarantee that precisely this chain prayer has an infallible response. God cannot be forced into invariably granting what anyone wants. He acts as an all-wise-Father. All such chain prayers should be destroyed. Genuine prayer is humble, trustful, but dependent on the good will of the Father of all.

Our Response: No father or mother will give in to each and every whim of a child, otherwise the child's health could be ruined in no time by an excess of such things as sweets or harmful drinks. Yet the parents in refusing the child, love the child, and that is why God does not grant precisely what we ask for in every instance, but he directs our minds to ask for what is beneficial. It is always good to add the words of Jesus when praying: not my will but yours be done.

The Folly of Greed

July 31, 1977: Eighteenth Sunday

The Human Situation: Well known is the fable of the dog who had a large chunk of meat in his mouth but as he bent over the water at the pier, the meat seemed much bigger in the mouth of his own reflection, so he let go of it to grab the bigger piece, but it sank at once to the bottom and could not be retrieved. Greed for an imaginary larger amount caused him to lose even what he had.

The Good News: Greed for money and possessions has ruined many a good man. It has set his heart totally on the transient goods of this world, which cannot in the long run satisfy the human heart for it was made for higher things, and earthly possessions cannot be taken along into eternity. The rich fool in today's gospel is a good example how uncertain our possessions are. Death knocks when least expected and they cannot be enjoyed anymore. The parable ends with these weighty words: "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (v. 21).

The Lord himself put this question to us: "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life"? (Mt. 16:26). It is the greatest folly to set one's heart only on the goods of this world to the detriment of one's eternal salvation. What a fool is the wealthy man who neglects God as well as the acquisition of true riches that have lasting value! That is why Jesus admonishes us: "Do not lay up for yourselves, treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6: 19-21).

The preacher in today's first reading saw this clearly. He called it vanity, that is, something empty and worthless, not worth all the trouble, to slave and toil all one's life only to have it all pass

to other hands. Without God in the picture, all our striving is folly. On the other hand, one can make good use of possessions. Riches are not outright gift of God but a trust. The man with many possessions has the bounden duty of using them also to uplift the needy and the poor. On judgment day, this will be required of him. A good use of wealth paves the way to heaven in our Lord's own words: "I tell you, make friends for yourselves through the good use of this world's goods, so that when they fail, you have a lasting welcome" (Lk. 16: 9). Christ is all in favor of industrious and energetic work, for he himself had to make a living all during the long years at Nazareth. But what he wants us to do is to keep before our eyes the lasting and eternal values, and to remember that our goods are also intended for those in greater need. That is why he exhorts us: "Do not be anxious about your lives, what you shall eat, or about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing" (Lk. 12:2:f). Then he raises our minds and hearts to the loving providence of God who cares even for the birds and the flowers. In all our labors, he asks us to keep in mind first of all the kingdom of heaven, so as to keep proper perspective in our lives.

The fool accepts God's gifts but never once thinks of the Giver. Riches have become his god, and he in turn becomes the miserly slave. Every so often the newspapers carry an account of a person who died in great property, so it seemed, but in whose possessions was found a large quantity of money! Why this miserly greed? Yet the allurements of wealth blinds subtly. God is left out of sight before one realizes it, and with greed come the vices of gambling, dishonesty, cruelty, selfishness in the extreme. Let the remedies be applied: Cultivate the nobler aspirations; seek to make other people happy, especially those who have so little. And remember death!

Our Response: To imitate those good people who put aside definite sums of money to help along charitable causes: a scholarship for poor students, funds for victims of floods, earthquakes, fire and like. To these the Lord will offer the lasting welcome of his kingdom, with its hundredfold reward.

HOMILIES FOR AUGUST

READY WHEN THE MASTER COMES

August 7, 1977 (Nineteenth Sunday)

The Human Situation: On March 17, 1957, shortly after midnight, President Magsaysay boarded his presidential plane "Mt. Pinatubo" with a large entourage at Cebu City. He had just finished a round of commencement addresses, among which were the inspiring words he had spoken to thousands of students at the University of San Carlos in that city. Barely half an hour later, the plane struck a lone tree near the top of Mt. Manung-gal and crashed. There was only one survivor: a newspaper man. All others died in the crash. Did anyone of them have the least premonition of the impending disaster? Was everyone of them ready when the Master came?

The Good News: All three parables in today's Gospel-message contain a definite warning to be ready when the Lord returns. It refers in the first place to the Coming of the Lord in glory in the Parousia of the end-kingdom. On most people the thought of the Lord's Coming at the Parousia makes little or no impression, because they cannot imagine it to be near so as to affect them. Yet the Lord clearly says it will come suddenly and when least expected. That could also be in our lifetime. Many false prophets have arisen and have given exact dates for the end of the world, as they call it, causing fear and confusion in the minds of the less informed. But there is no word in Scripture as to when the final consummation will take place. It is sheer folly to give ear to so-called "private prophecies" that pretend to know more than has been revealed by God to his Church.

But there is another message in today's gospel-reading which may have a great impact on us at present. It is the answer to the question: Am I ready when the Master comes for me? Last year a giant tidal wave struck the southwest shores of Mindanao, destroying many coastal villages and sweeping thousands to a sudden unexpected death. A killer earthquake hit that region at the same time, adding to the number of victims. Were all these individuals ready when the Lord came for them? This year alone there has been many number of air crashes in various countries, and some right here in the Philippines. Death came suddenly and unexpectedly. Recall the horrible catastrophe when two air-liners crashed head-in in the Canary Islands with over five hundred victims. Were all those individuals ready when the Master came?

Today, some take refuge in the thought of re-incarnation, as if they will be given another chance for salvation even though death overtakes them unawares and unprepared. But there is not the slightest evidence in the Good News of Jesus Christ that favors such an opinion. St. Paul's very clear statement to the Hebrews is: "**men only die once and after that comes judgment**" (9:27). Such a clear statement excludes wishful thinking of a re-incarnation. The Church has never favored such a doctrine, and her endeavor to bring the last sacraments at all costs to the dying would be rendered meaningless.

So it is imperative that everyone be ready when the Lord comes. But how can one be ready? According to an old saying: "We die as we live"; if we endeavor to live according to God's will, despite human weaknesses, and to carry out the tasks allotted to us as best we can, we shall be prepared. When one is aware of having offended God seriously, one should lose no time to seek reconciliation by a sincere act of compunction and love, and by sacramental confession. It is not difficult to be reconciled to God who is the best of fathers. He is always waiting for us to turn to him.

Our Response: A very good habit to acquire is to make an act of perfect contrition or love on retiring, or on entering a plane or on going on any trip. Should death overtake us, we would always be ready to come as friends into the presence of our Master and Judge. Even the short ejaculation: "my Jesus, mercy" can express sincere compunction and love.

I HAVE COME TO BRING FIRE TO THE EARTH

August 14, 1977 (Twentieth Sunday)

The Human Situation: Fire has many purposes. There is a destructive fire that wipes out and destroys, often causing immense damage to homes and buildings, and a loss of many important items. There is also a beneficial fire that prepares food for the hungry, warms those that are cold, purifies what is polluted, and brightens the hearth in the family home. Still another flame ignites vehicles of transportation, enabling mankind to carry on its daily tasks. All these instances understand fire in the literal sense of a natural phenomenon. But the Lord is speaking of fire in a symbolic sense in today's gospel.

The Good News: What does fire symbolize? In present day thinking, fire symbolizes violence or passion, but also love in its highest forms. We speak of a burning hatred, the heat of passion, the

consuming fire of love, the flames of undying love. Yet, to understand what our Lord meant in today's gospel, it is necessary to know what fire symbolizes in the mind of those who wrote the Scriptures, for theirs is a Semitic mentality belonging to a different age. In the Scriptures, fire is a symbol of the divine presence: "The Lord our God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Dt. 4:24). He appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. :21f). The pillar of fire in the desert guarding Israel is a symbol of Yahweh's continual presence (Ex. 3:21). Ezekiel saw the Lord like gleaming fire (Ez. 1:27).

Often in the prophetic books, the divine presence is one of judgment and chastisement. In Isaiah, we read: "Lo, the Lord shall come in fire . . . to wreak his wrath with burning heat and his punishment with fiery flames" (66: 15). Or again in Jeremiah: "If you do not obey me and keep my sabbath, I will set unquenchable fire to the gates of Jerusalem" (17:27). In the Apocalypse, the divine Judge has eyes that blaze like fire, while his face shone like the sun at its brightest. It is Christ the Judge of hearts (Rev. 1:14). But he did not come at first to judge and chastise the world. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:17). So when Jesus says in today's Gospel: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already" it cannot mean the fire of judgment and chastisement.

There is still another symbolic meaning of fire in the Scriptures and that is cleansing, purification, transformation to a more perfect state. When the prophet Isaiah had that stupendous vision of Yahweh, God of hosts, high exalted on a throne, with the Seraphim crying out "holy, holy, holy", he was overcome with a sense of his own unworthiness before the all-holy God. But the burning Seraphim cleansed him by the symbolic act of touching his lips with burning coals, and he was at once transformed into a docile servant of the Lord, ready to do his bidding (Is. 6: 6-9). Malachi, the prophet, foretold that the Messiah-King himself would "be like a refiner's fire . . . purifying the sons of Levi" (3:2). When the Holy Spirit fell upon those in the upper room on Pentecost, it was in tongues of fire. They were at once transformed from timid and cowardly men into valiant witnesses of the Crucified, preaching everywhere the Resurrection from the dead. This is what the Savior came to do: to cleanse, to purify, to transform: purification from all evil, transformation into a new creature, a son of God, sharing his own divine sonship. That is what John the Baptist prophesied of him: He will baptize you, that is, immerse you, in the Holy Spirit and fire.

How will the Savior bring this about? First of all by the preaching of the Good News of the Kingdom. When the two disciples

were instructed by the Risen Lord on the way to Emmaus, they said to each other: "Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us"? (Lk. 24:32). The Good News has the dynamic power to burn itself into the heart, and set it afire with the things of God. This, it has done innumerable times since the Apostles began to preach it at the Lord's command (Mk. 16:15). It has made sinners into saints, sons of darkness into sons of lights.

But besides the Good News, Jesus left us two other great gifts which continue to transform the heart of man daily more into Christ. The first is his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The food we take in, becomes through combustion our bodily heat and our new strength and vitality. The Eucharistic Food on the contrary imparts fire and heat to us, and the strength to live our Christian commitment. The very purpose of the Bread of Life is to fill us with that fiery energy that is necessary to be transformed into Christ. The second gift is that of his own Holy Spirit, the divine Fire that transforms ordinary men into new creatures. His Flame is at first painful, for it must consume all impurities like the fire consumes the impurities of the metal it penetrates. But in the end, his work is perfect. This is what the Savior longs to accomplish in each of his members.

Our Respons: To deepen your Christian spirituality, take up your bible daily, especially the New Testament, even only for a few minutes. Ponder a bit on what you read. Let it sink in, and endeavor to live that message daily. "God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hb. 4: 12). It will gradually open to you new vistas of God's plans for the world and for you in particular, it will make you more attentive to the Spirit within, and more appreciative of the great gift of the Bread of Life in the Eucharist. And you will be able to bear your troubles and your crosses with greater equanimity, realizing that they are the means to be transformed more into Christ.

MARY, THE LIVING ARK OF THE COVENANT
(Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary)
(August 15, 1977)

Today, all over the world, the children of the Church look up to Mary, their heavenly Mother, who was taken up to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of her Divine Son, enjoying full glory and immortality with him, in the midst of the whole heavenly

court. Mary is the living Ark of the Covenant for all God's People. What the Ark of the Covenant was to Israel of old, Mary is to us today.

Most sacred to Israel was the Ark of the Covenant, situated in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle of the Lord. There, God manifested his divine Presence, enthroned on the seat of mercy over the Ark, borne up by the Cherubim. There Yahweh, God of Israel, received the prayers and offerings of his People. But it is in Mary, his living Ark, that God manifested his Presence most perfectly, for he took flesh and blood from her and became in all reality her Child. Man can now approach God with confidence, for the Son of Mary is truly the Son of God himself. He who sees Jesus, sees the Father, he told his Apostles (Jn. 14:9). God has come down, God is near, Emmanuel, enthroned in the arms of his Mother, as he was found by the Magi (Mt. 2: 11). Here, the Christian People bring their prayers and petitions to the Lord, for they know that if he has come to them through Mary, they can also return to him through her. The Son does not refuse the requests of the Mother.

The Ark of the Covenant took the lead in all the journeys and battles of Israel against her enemies. It went ahead of the tribes through the desert, it went ahead when they crossed through the Jordan, it took the lead when they marched around Jericho and conquered it. It was the sign of victory for Israel, whenever it was carried properly as prescribed. With the Christian People of God, Mary leads against the onslaughts of Satan. She is the invincible sign of victory over the red Dragon who fights against her offspring. With Mary's help, the Christians will overcome all enemies, and penetrate all barriers. For she is the living symbol of God's mighty presence with the race of man. It is her Son who is the Savior of all mankind.

David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem amid great rejoicing and loud exultation, to place it in the dwelling place prepared for it. What must have been the rejoicing of all heaven, when Jesus himself introduced his holy Mother into the New Jerusalem! There he enthroned her at his side in the place he had prepared for her. There he proclaimed her Queen of heaven and of the entire universe. Today, the Church approaches Mary as her faithful children, knowing full well that she is truly the Seat of Mercy where God's goodness flows out on all mankind. Today, the whole world rejoices, because the humble maiden of Nazareth has merited to take her place next to her Son in the realms of glory, because of her staunch faith and undying love. Today, all mankind looks up to her who has anticipated the glorious resurrection of those that have gone ahead, and sees in her the Sign

of Salvation, the Hope of mortals, the Glory of the whole Church. All praise to Mary, ever glorious Virgin, assumed into heaven, and proclaimed Queen of the universe. All praise to the Son who took flesh from her and now clothes her with the glory of his divinity. All praise to the Most Blessed Trinity, for truly, the Almighty has done great things for Mary.

Our Response: In times of trouble, look up to Mary, Star of the sea, Ark of the Covenant. In finding her, you will always find the help you need, for "no one has ever fled to her protection, or asked her help and was left unaided". Let our supplications to the powerful Mother of Jesus be daily, for it is her daily help that we need. She will see us through to victory.

THE NARROW DOOR

August 21, 1977 (Twenty-first Sunday)

The Human Situation: For a long time now, illegal logging has been carried on a wide scale, with destructive results. Forests are denuded, wide area stripped of trees. Nothing was done to stop this wanton destruction. Now the ill effects are being felt. Hundreds of hectares of what used to be fertile rice-fields are covered with sand and stones, as a result of flood waters flowing down from denuded mountains. This is the consequence of giving full reign to avarice and greed: a path that inevitably leads to ruin and destruction.

The Good News: "Freedom! Freedom to do what we please!" That is the cry heard round the world today. Parents are not to expect obedience from their children; teachers are to cater to the demands of their students; superiors are careful not to go against the wishes of their subjects. Let the individual person decide what is best for him. Let his inclinations be his guide.

Permissiveness! That is the attitude that has caused such havoc in the past decade. And what are we witnessing? A breakdown of traditional values that have stood the test of centuries; a breakdown of morals to an astonishing degree; a breakdown in the faith itself among thousands who are confused and no longer know the meaning of existence and the purpose of life. Drug addiction has reached alarming proportions in several larger countries. The crave for alcohol now extends even to high school teenagers. Pornography is a common commodity, with self-control, modesty and decency thrown to the winds.

This is not what the Savior warns his followers to do in today's Gospel message. They are to strive to enter the narrow door if they want to obtain lasting fulfilment and salvation. Many will try to enter and will not succeed. It is not just a mild admonition, but a very serious warning. It is not the easy trip of hallucinations of the drug addicts. It is not the short-cut to enjoyment of the pleasure seekers. Try your best, he warns, for many will try to come in and will be unable for they came too late. In a parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel, the message is even more dire: "Enter the narrow gate. The gate that leads to damnation is wide, the road is clear, and many choose to travel it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how rough the road, and how few there are who find it!" (Mt. 7: 13f).

How little this warning is taken to heart by thousands today. Many choose to travel the wide road that leads through the wide gate to damnation. It is the road of self-indulgence, greed, lack of charity toward the needs of others, selfishness, and a positive craze for all kinds of pleasure. Immediate enjoyment, pleasure now, with no thought of the future and no thought of what eternity brings! How often we read of young people ruining their lives that could have been brilliantly lived in the service of God and man, merely for the sake of the enjoyment of the moment, produced by a needle or a bottle! To what depth of degradation can the human person descend, though destined to share the very sonship of Christ! Once promising youth turn out to be listless mortals, with no honest ambitions, no desire to lead a life worthy of man, but bent merely on self-gratification to an extreme degree. Nor is it only the youth who follow this path. Greed and avarice can make any man or woman into an intolerable tyrant and the cruellest of masters. But their end is frustration. "Away from me, you evil-doers" they will hear the Lord say to them, "I do not know you". It is an awful thought that some will be rejected by Christ from eternal enjoyment and salvation. And yet this is the message of today's Gospel.

It is necessary then to heed the timely warning of the Master. We are to exert real effort, to make every endeavor to follow the path he has laid down for us. This very challenge is a healthy means to goad us on toward the goal. No battle is won without a combat. No prize is won without running the race. No crown obtained without striving to the utmost to gain it. What a surprise awaits us in the heavenly home. Many who seemed to be of little account in our eyes, may be among the first in the Kingdom, and enjoy the closest companionship of the saints. A man's external accomplishments are not God's norm of rewarding, but one's inner

striving to do his will out of utter devotion and love. "Some who are last shall be first, and some who are first shall be last".

Our Response: One of the worst deterrents to doing good is the *mañana* habit, putting off a conversion or a good resolution till it is too late. For once the master has risen to lock the door, all our knocking and clamoring will be of no avail. Decisions now! Conversion now! A change of interior dispositions now! Then it will not be too late.

HE WHO HUMBLER HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED

August 28, 1977 (Twenty-second Sunday)

The Human Situation: Thomas Edison, the famous inventor of the phonograph and the electric light bulb, was at heart a truly humble man. He once said to his assistants: People call me a great inventor. I'm no inventor worth talking about. When I think that I can't even build the simplest kind of being that could think and speak at least something on his own, then I know that there is only one real Inventor. At that he pointed his finger heavenwards.

The Good News: At first glance, we might think that Jesus in today's Gospel is giving a lesson on etiquette and manners at table. He is displeased at seeing the guests all making for the first places and his remarks betray his displeasure. But as he comes to the end of his words, his real purpose shines through. What he observed became an image of his saving teaching. He used the incident as a parable, and drew from the scene a lesson concerning the Kingdom of heaven.

What is this lesson? It is a lesson of humble recognition of one's unworthiness in the sight of God in face of his gracious favors. All who have received the gift of faith have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb with his Bride, the Church. No one can claim a right to that invitation, for neither nationality, nor forebearers, nor prowess nor anything else can merit it. The gift of faith is a sheer act of benevolence on the part of God. It must be accepted humbly. Anyone who wishes to enter the Kingdom of God must be small in his own eyes, and avoid all self-righteous claims, as if he deserved a high place in the Kingdom. Only the lowly will God raise up and bring closer to himself, "for he who humbles himself shall be exalted" as Jesus concludes his lesson himself.

"God rejects the proud but gives his favor to the lowly" (Jam. 4:6). That is the lesson brought out by Jesus, and all during life

he gave the perfect example of a humble disposition, always submissive to the will of his Father, and always meek and gentle with all with whom he dealt. "To the humble God bends down, and raises them up to himself" (Ps. 113:7). It was the humble tax-collector in the Temple, not the proud Pharisee, who obtained pardon for his sins, by simply acknowledging himself to be a sinner (Lk. 18:14). And after the great Apostle Paul had received many exalting visions and favors, he was also given a humiliating trial, something that was like a nasty thorn in his flesh, to keep him humble (2 Cor. 12: 9).

It is our Lady herself who gives a marvellous example of genuine humility. Greeted in a special manner by the heavenly messenger, and told that she was chosen to be the Mother of the Savior, Mary simply declares: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me as you say" (Lk. 1:38). This humble handmaid God raised up to the greatest heights of heaven, while Lucifer, who boasted to place his throne above that of the Most High is relegated to the abyss. When Elizabeth praised Mary, Mary did not deny the multiple favors accorded her but referred them all to their source. He has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid; henceforth all generations will call me blessed"! And in the same Magnificat, Mary sees the same favors accorded to all who are lowly of heart: "He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places" (Lk. 1:52).

In the life of St. Bernadette Soubirous, to whom our Blessed Mother had appeared at Lourdes in France, we read that her Novice Mistress, who was a lady of noble birth and high standing, could not see how the Blessed Mother would appear to such a lowly peasant and not to herself! But our Lady feels much more at home with the humble and the lowly of heart, even if they are uneducated peasants, than with the refined and educated if they are self-righteous and proud of heart. It is Bernadette whom God has raised to the altar of sanctity.

Our Response: It is necessary at times to examine one's motivation in acting. Pride lurks in the heart of everyman, and the desire to be favored over others can easily spoil the best of actions. True humility compares oneself with God, not with others. With the psalmist, the humble man cries out: What is man that you should be mindful of him? (Ps. 8:5).

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"Or else they seek to bring together—for hearing and meditating on God's word, for the sacraments, for the bond created by the agape—groups homogenous in age, culture or social condition (spouses, young people, people in the various professions, etc.).

"Or the groups may consist of those who already share the same life-style because they are fighting side by side for justice, fraternal help of the poor or human development.

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Lay Ministries in the Church

"Here we see that the importance of various ministries and new forms of ministry done by the laity, and the value of their charisms take on a new weight and significance for the Church. And we see also that there is increasing necessity for a more adequate formation of the laity for the participation in the Church's task which is theirs: the need of theological formation, formation in prayer and the ways of the spirit formation for the ministries they take up, apostolic formation." (Julio Cardinal Rosales, Archbishop of Cebu).