

Historically it was one manifestation among many of that general growth in intellectual, spiritual and emotional *refinement* which so evidently affected the western world, and especially France, throughout the twelfth century. It was the age of St Bernard and the Victorines, of Abelard and the school of Chartres. Viewed in that context courtly love becomes entirely explicable. To paraphrase a remark of Gilson's, it was the effort of a society 'polie et affinée par des siècles de christianisme' to elaborate a code of human love that would be neither mystical nor bestial but simply human.<sup>7</sup> The effort led to heresy, the code was not a Christian one; yet there were elements in it—particularly a new reverence for women—which one is reluctant to call pagan.

## A Theological Chronicle: Sin

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

Philosophers have measured mountains,  
 Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings;  
 Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:  
 But there are two vast, spacious things,  
 The which to measure it doth more behove;  
 Yet few there are that sound them—Sinne and Love.  
 (Herbert, *The Agonie*)

I cannot remember ever having seen an article in BLACKFRIARS on sin—not sin and Mauriac or Graham Greene, or sin and homosexuality or sin and Jung: just sin. This may very well be due to my own pre-occupations; it is easy enough simply not to notice an article which doesn't seem to offer anything to one's immediate structure of interests. But even then, it may be, this inadvertence would not I feel be untypical. If the Catholic intelligentsia today is very conscious of having moved, and having to move still further, from a Catholicism almost wholly

<sup>7</sup>I take this from the appendix, 'St Bernard et l'amour courtois', in *La théologie mystique de Saint Bernard*, Paris, 1934.

turned in on itself, psychologically and sociologically, almost wholly 'interior', it is hardly surprising that the Catholic themes which excite and hold attention are 'exterior' ones: liturgy, the lay apostolate, 'the Bible' (the Bible as proclaiming a message, kerygmatic, and not as 'devotional'). Again, it isn't easy to write about sin or to think about it, to make it an object of serious contemplation, to hold it before the mind's eye. One's own crude and violent experience of sin interferes with the peaceful contemplation; the mind's eye is blurred, one is too personally engaged at levels of one's own experience and of one's capacity for experience which haven't yet been fully resolved and which remain too naive and immature, too sore, to allow of precise observation and registration: we can't have pity enough on our own souls. For surely the capacity for pity here presupposes a security in God, a simple acceptance of his holiness at work and present in us, which not many of us would care to claim. We can't bear our sin because we can't bear the intimacy of God's love; and we remain at heart stunted and loud, angry children with bright ideas.

Perhaps this is why sin is left to the writers of 'spiritual reading' and the textbooks of moral theology, both, it is commonly assumed, no longer deserving credit and respect from adult Catholic minds. All the more welcome is due, then, to the large and imposing symposium on sin, the first volume of which has recently been published in the Louvain series, *Bibliothèque de Théologie*, the seventh in its section of moral theology.<sup>1</sup> After a stimulating introduction by P. Delhaye, the contributors deal with the Old Testament (A. Gelin), the New Testament (A. Descamps), sin among primitive peoples (J. Goetz) and among the Greeks (A. Jagu); C. Boyer and M. Huftier deal with the theology of original sin, and of actual sin, mortal and venial; finally V. Palachkovsky and C. Vogel discuss Orthodox and Protestant doctrines. The second volume is to deal with pastoral problems. It may fairly be said that as an *instrument de travail* the work is invaluable; to work through this massive volume is to exercise oneself most profitably. (I must, however, record with regret that the article on the New Testament is most disappointing. A solicitude for 'method' has led Canon Descamps to omit any consideration of St John and the later Pauline epistles; and even the analysis of Romans, where it does not rely on Cerfaux and others, is hardly satisfactory). If this is also the best that can be said of it, the implied limitation bears on the conception of a symposium on sin,

<sup>1</sup> *Théologie du Péché*; Desclée et Cie. Mention may also be made here of the useful little book by H. Rondet, *Notes sur la Théologie du Péché*; Lethielleux.

and indeed on any theological subject. It is not easy to see what the professedly theological articles by Boyer and Huftier have to do with the 'positive' articles by the first four contributors; and even the theological articles themselves seem to be incapable of freeing themselves from the historical method. Huftier, for instance, writes with the greatest insight and persuasiveness on St Augustine and then with rather less sympathy on St Thomas (one has a slight feeling that St Thomas is being 'worked up' to be as existential as possible); but it doesn't really emerge that all this speculative analysis is meant to bear on an experience which is brought to birth in a response of faith to Revelation. We are familiar enough now, I suppose, with the deficiencies of a dogmatic theology which proceeds in a sort of vacuum and where the object of theology appears to be theology itself and not the living God; but we have hardly begun yet to animate our moral theology with the same communion of life in faith.<sup>2</sup> In a symposium like this, where Scripture has been dealt with in the first two chapters, the theologian is left to animate his theology (if he can) by treating it as the reconstruction of an experience: to suggest resonances of a *personal* kind for the abstract language. But surely the personal resonances, precisely as personal, can be relevant at most only as further data, aspects of Revelation as this is disclosed in the isolated response of faith of an individual, granted, an individual *saint*. What we have to look for in a *theology* is the way in which the thought and language 'fix' the resonances of Revelation itself, and the extent to which a given theology does so; and finally to consider how we may enlarge our speculative views to 'fix' and comprehend *more* of Revelation.

One simple example will illustrate this distinction. St Augustine and St Thomas, and the Catholic tradition generally (in the West, at least), agree in making pride, *superbia*, the core of sin, the *peccatum commune ad omnia*, as St Thomas puts it. Now the tradition rests on the Vulgate translation of Ecclesiasticus 10, 15, *initium omnis peccati superbia* (a reading also found in Alexandrinus and the Syriac version). In fact, however, according to the generally accepted reading, Ecclesiasticus 10, 12-13 (14-15) should read:

The beginning of man's pride is to depart from the Lord;  
his heart has forgotten his Maker.

*For the beginning of pride is sin,*  
and the man who clings to it pours out abominations. (RSV)

<sup>2</sup>But see B. Häring, *Das Gesetz Christi*, available in French as *La Loi du Christ*, and now appearing in English translation as *The Law of Christ*.

There is a sin, that is to say, in some sense prior to pride; and this is to 'depart from the Lord', *apostatare a Deo* in the Vulgate. And it is at this point precisely that St Thomas's analysis of sin needs to be read in the light of the Revelation it is trying to explore. For St Thomas we could say that pride is the general 'human form' (or in fact 'creaturely form', to allow for the angels) of sin, the human face worn by all our sins: it is the general form of the *conversio*, the intramundane aspect of all sin. But it is not strictly the *aversio a Deo*, the negativity of sin, its transcendental aspect. It is true that for St Thomas, sin, strictly speaking, is not simply the deficiency of the will, but an action posited by a deficient will—there is no transcendental sin which lacks a human face, a grin without a cat; but the deficiency itself, the failure of the will, is the negative potentiality of sin, its ultimate mystery, the darkness 'brought out' only by the light of Revelation. St Thomas isn't offering an analysis of metaphysical sin but a metaphysical analysis of sin in the light of Revelation—a theological analysis. And the analysis points to, 'fixes', that inchoateness of sin, its 'couching at the door' of the heart, of which we read in the Bible. Sin is a failure before it is a refusal, a failure to allow God's grace to assume the intrinsic dynamism of the will, its spontaneity for transcendence, into the mysterious economy of his plan for our salvation. Biblically speaking, sin is lack of *faith*. (To say 'biblically speaking' here is to make it clear firstly, that 'faith' is meant in the biblical sense, and not merely as one of the theological virtues; and secondly, that I am assuming the concretely realized economy in which we actually live, not some hypothetical 'natural' economy, though it would be possible to abstract from the concrete economy in such a way as to make the account hold good in the hypothetical economy too).

This at least is one of the preliminary formulations arrived at in one of the finest books it has been my good fortune to read, a book which one had felt obscurely *must* have been written somewhere, sometime, or was waiting to be written; and now at last here it is, or at any rate the first volume: *Péché d'Adam et Péché du Monde*, subtitled *Bible-Kippur-Eucharistie*, by Louis Ligier S.J.<sup>3</sup> This is not just 'biblical theology'; it is the Bible read with a sensibility disciplined but not deadened by extensive scholarship, a sensibility which is literary *because* it is religious, where the play of language is delicately observed and registered and prolonged to its last faint vibration because the writer is firmly and exactly orientated in the fundamental, fine sense of the

<sup>3</sup>Collection *Théologie*, Aubier.

biblical Revelation—very simply, God's *approach* to man. Consequently there is no need to impose 'theories' or 'theologies' on the texts: they are simply helped to speak for themselves, as in the liturgy; and in fact Ligier makes use of both Jewish and Christian liturgies to confirm his readings. Throughout there is the same respect for the Word as one finds in the best Jewish exegesis, from the little I know of it; after a hundred and fifty years of biblical criticism, where the utmost violence has often been done to the Bible in the service of arbitrary theories and monstrous self-assertion, it had hardly seemed possible that Christian exegesis should again be capable of the same respect, while making full use of the new critical resources. The theme of this first volume is the way in which the whole Old Testament experience of sin is condensed in the archetypal image of the Genesis story of Adam; the obvious rightness of this approach—not the analysis of the Adam story in itself, with reference to other biblical and extra-biblical texts, but the gradual consolidation of the biblical experience and its re-apprehension as a unity in the Adam story—emerges with each successive step in a piece of truly creative writing. I have not the slightest doubt that the professional exegetes will be uneasy; the disquiet could be sensed in an extremely sympathetic and laudatory discussion of the book by A. M. Dubarle in the *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, and one has only to think of the absurdly unperceptive review of Durrwell's *The Resurrection* in the *Times Literary Supplement* of September 1, 1961. Perhaps it will be possible to fault the book here and there, where intuition has leaped ahead of itself, as it were; at any rate, the present writer, who is no professional exegete, can only record his gratitude for a book which has made it possible for him in some measure to take the dimensions of sin in an articulate experience without being reduced to the impotence of private fear and perturbation or escaping into neo-Existentialism or a secularized metaphysical legalism pretending to be theology.

God's *approach* to man, God coming and coming *near*, *der kommende Gott*. God comes near 'exteriorly' and 'interiorly', the kingdom of God is 'among' you and 'within' you, *entos humôn*. So sin too is exterior and interior; it derives its unity from its cohesive opposition to the God who comes exteriorly and interiorly. Today we know and must never allow ourselves to forget that for the rest of human history we shall never again be able to rid ourselves of the power to bring that history to an end by nuclear dissolution; never again shall we be able to condone even mildly what has been called (by Günther Anders) *Apokalypsblind-*

*heit*, blindness to Apocalypse, here lack of faith in the God who comes in judgment. Where the mystery of iniquity seems to have reached its climax we may once again be able to recover the sense of sin before the approach of God in the Second Coming; not in fear and distress merely, but in the urgent expectation of the manifestation of the children of God. For sin is revealed in the drawing near of God: that is the common witness of the Bible and, say, St John of the Cross. If we say—and we *must* say—‘Come Lord’ and ‘Thy kingdom come’, our longing must include and surpass in hope our involuntary solidarity with the mystery of iniquity; for although we are exposed, precisely in the dimension of our transcendence, to the hostility of principalities and powers, yet we hold fast in faith that we are ‘in Christ’ who has been enthroned at the right hand of the Father above every principality and power (cf. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, and, more recently, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*).

And we have a pledge of the power of that love which reveals and overcomes sin, which surpasses our fear, first in the eschatological encounter of the Cross, and then in its daily commemoration. As Herbert tells us again:

Who would know Sinne, let him repair  
 Unto Mount Olivet . . .  
 Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,  
 Which my God feels as bloud, but I as wine.

## The Pan-Orthodox Meeting at Rhodes

JOSEPH MINIHAN

Eight hundred electric lights brilliantly outlined the façade and cupola of the new market that looks out on the Mediterranean quayside. On the top of the building, angled eastwards, was a large illuminated X P (Chi Rho) symbol, surmounting the words, *Pan-Orthodox Meeting of*