

HUMANITY, HUMANITY: ‘A MONSTER OF DEPRAVITY’?¹

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Byron’s dark anti-hero Childe Harolde ‘felt the fulness of satiety’, ‘For he through Sin’s long labyrinth had run’. By now, gentle reader, you may well feel somewhat satiated, even if you have not been spending your days ‘in riot most uncouth’. If you have run or even plodded through all the labyrinthine preceding chapters, what have you learned that will be of any profit? That there are better ways of spending one’s time than wallowing in sin, perhaps?

As convenor of the conference which generated all the preceding papers, I grant myself the privilege of attempting to pull a few threads together and to suggest future lines of investigation. It is imperative that all this hard work by so many gifted and committed people should produce insights that will ultimately be of practical benefit in the life and ministry of our denomination in Europe. If that sounds insular or sectarian, it is not meant to be. It would be wonderful, if, in the mercy of God, we were seen one day also to have performed a service for the wider church in the wider world.

Our tackling the subject of Original Sin in as rigorous a manner as possible has not been a way of keeping us off the streets or even of earning academic brownie points. It has been an attempt to address collectively what for me as an individual has always been the biggest stumbling-block in the Nazarene articulation of scriptural holiness.

A PERSONAL INTEREST

My interest in Original Sin goes back a long way. In my teens in London I attended many a Holiness Convention and sought many times for the blessing of entire sanctification, as expounded in our tradition. The command to be holy, because God was holy or to be perfect, as my heavenly Father was perfect, always resonated with me in a very profound way. I had no difficulty getting my head around the need for complete consecration, slightly more problems about what being filled with the Holy Spirit might entail in practice, and considerable problems over the cleansing of the heart from ‘inbred sin’.

Looking back with the wisdom of hindsight, I can see that the sin problem was expounded to me in terms and concepts derived from a long-standing Western theological tradition originating with Augustine and furthered by Luther, Calvin and the Puritans. I stand open to correction by my Principal on this but it appears

¹ This catchy little phrase does not actually refer to the sinful human being, but to Macavity, one of T S Eliot’s Practical Cats. I like it better than my very bland original title, however.

to me that in John Wesley's *Treatise on Original Sin*, he differed little from this evangelical tradition in his diagnosis of humanity's spiritual problem. His original contribution to Christian thought was to suggest that if we can be cleansed from all sin at the moment of death, why not beforehand? The American 19th Century Holiness Movement, under the influence of such people as Phoebe Palmer, then systematised this notion into a rigid doctrine of a second blessing for all believers in which the heart is purified by faith as a consequence of 'putting one's all on the altar'. By the time I was exposed to such teaching in the 1960's the following illustrations were the favoured means of clarifying cleansing from all sin. Sin was likened to a tree, which is cut down to ground-level at conversion and then has its roots pulled out at entire sanctification. Or sin is like a rotten tooth, which is snapped off at conversion, and then extracted by the root subsequently. The Keswick tradition, which proffered a daily overcoming of sin, was disparaged as a considerable watering-down of the allegedly Biblical doctrine of eradication.

I was given to believe that sin was universal, hereditary, and that within us to which external temptation appealed, a sort of spiritual fifth column, if you will. This sin rejoiced under a variety of synonyms, such as depravity, 'the flesh', the carnal nature, the 'old man', and so on, and apparently needed to be crucified, mortified, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, and such like.

Time without number I knelt at an altar of prayer, consecrated every last bit of myself that I could think of and asked to be cleansed of my five besetting sins: selfishness, pride, irritability, lust and laziness. For a day or two there would be a marginal improvement but it wouldn't be long before my family's annoying little habits and the soft-porn magazines on the top shelf of the newsagent's triggered all the usual reactions, before the favourite television programmes took precedence once again over homework. The only conclusion I could reach in face of such repeated spiritual defeat was that I must not have exerted sufficient faith.²

For years I assumed that the gap between the theological rhetoric and my experience of life was all my fault. Looking back, it becomes apparent that I was looking for a spiritual panacea—a crisis experience which would strip me of all

² It is interesting to compare one's own experience with John Oswalt's overview: 'A century ago the idea of holy living was an essential part of experiential Christianity in Great Britain and the United States. But that idea has fallen into its present low repute because of the failure at various levels to communicate accurately. As a result, many who sincerely sought the power of the Holy Spirit to make them holy people felt that the promises did not match the reality either in themselves or in those around them. They saw people who claimed to be sinless who seemed to be harsh, censorious, and self-righteous. They found in themselves feelings and reactions that they thought holy people would not have. As a result of these kinds of experiences many despaired of ever being the holy people they wanted to be. Some became cynical and hard, but the majority simply settled for the comfortable idea that God does not expect us to actually be holy, only to be accounted so through the blood of Christ.' J N Oswalt, *Called To Be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 165.

human instincts and emotions, which would in fact de-humanise me. It was only when I began formal theological education that the possibility opened up for me that many of the theological assumptions pressed upon me in my youth might turn out to derive more from Augustine than from Scripture. The more I tested the proof-texts exegetically the less they confirmed Augustine. The more I read in historical theology the more the accusing finger pointed at him. An undergraduate essay on Infant Baptism and Original Sin up to the time of Augustine inclined me to the opinion that ‘Augustine took a relatively minor but growing strand of baptismal custom and a relatively minor but growing doctrine and by fusing them together established a world-beating combination’.

But the combined weight of Roman Catholic, Reformed and Wesleyan hamartiology is a very large windmill at which to tilt. Those who have dared in previous generations have almost all been blackballed as ‘Pelagian’, ‘Semi-Pelagian’, or ‘Socinian’. What do these theological swearwords mean? Various papers in this volume have attempted to give substance to these epithets. Hopefully, lessons both positive and negative can be learned from those who have challenged the received wisdom in bygone years.

The church in this current generation needs desperately to hear afresh the call to be cleansed from all sin and to live holy lives, but the message must be both coherent and true, true to the Bible and true to experience. We can sing it and shout it as loud and long as we like, but only the gullible will swallow it, unless it can cohere with people’s grasp of Scripture and of doctrine. So just how coherent is it?

OUR PRESENT DOCTRINAL FORMULAE

The doctrinal distinctive of the Church of the Nazarene must surely be Article X on Entire Sanctification. It reads like this:

13. We believe that *entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.*

It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.

Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

The following section then makes a clear distinction between a pure heart, which ‘is obtained in an instant’, and a mature character which comes through growth in grace.

The parts of the article that have been highlighted point up the fact that any re-definition of the doctrine of Original Sin will of necessity have a knock-on effect on our doctrine of entire sanctification. Since this lies at the heart of the Church of the Nazarene’s identity and message, the potentially seismic significance of the questions raised in the preceding papers should not be under-estimated!

But to return to the Manual...if Article X Section 13 describes the solution, what then is our human plight?

This finds expression in Article V, entitled ‘Sin, Original and Personal’. Section 5 provides an overview and Sections 5.1 and 5.2 address Original Sin specifically, as follows:

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity, and actual or personal sin.

5.1 We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that *original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until eradicated by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.*

5.2 We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provided remedy is neglected or rejected.

The choice of language in the highlighted portion clearly reveals the influence of the 19th century American Holiness Movement. It shows up too in popular Holiness-preaching and testifying in bygone decades, which took the basics of our credal statements and rendered them simply and memorably, in something like the following manner:

| PROBLEM | SOLUTION | TESTIMONY |
|----------------|---|--|
| Sins → | Salvation → OR Justification OR Initial Sanctification | 'I was saved on such and such a date...' |
| Original sin → | Full salvation → OR Sanctification OR Entire sanctification | 'I was sanctified on the night of ...' |

A RESPONSE TO THE PRESENT FORMULATION IN LIGHT OF THE CONFERENCE

At the end of a conference (and a journal) as full and focussed on a single issue as this one, I wonder who can put their hand on their heart and affirm that this choice of language does best justice to what our investigations in biblical, historical and dogmatic theology have yielded. This participant came away with the impression that in our part of the theological spectrum (Western, Augustinian, Protestant, Wesleyan, Holiness) the sin problem in general, and Original Sin, in particular, has suffered several distortions which must inevitably skew to some extent our formulations of the remedy. In Stephen Neill's pithy words, "...if we start from a non-biblical idea of sin, it is unlikely that we shall arrive at a truly biblical idea of holiness."³ Some of what follows emerged explicitly at the time but other ideas came along subsequently, as the mental juices continued to flow.

Methodologically, it would seem advisable to devise and revise any doctrine in light of God's revealed word. This word comes to us in two mutually-dependant forms: Christological and canonical, the incarnate word and the inspired word which bears witness to him. Without Christ, the scriptures are merely an Old Testament, waiting in vain for the consolation of Israel - a promise looking for fulfilment. Without the scriptures, we have no record of Christ's life and no categories within which to interpret his person and work.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be formulated in light of Scripture.

The classic proof-texts of the OT in no way prove the Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin.⁴ The classic NT texts in Romans fail to do so either.⁵ Augustine's

³ Stephen Neill. *Christian Holiness* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 36. I attribute these words to Neill although his book gives credit to R Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1934, 1968) 335. The earlier part of the quotation used by Neill is in Flew on the page cited but this sentence is not. Nor does it appear later in the chapter in the 1968 edition. It looks as though an editor either allowed Neill's comment on Flew to be assimilated into the actual Flew citation.

⁴ This is no startling new insight. "... it is clear that to find ground for the doctrine in the Story of Eden is to find in it a meaning of which the Hebrews of Old Testament times were quite innocent. The other Old Testament passage usually quoted in support of the doctrine of Original Sin is the Fifty-first Psalm. It has already been seen that, though the concept of sinfulness is clearly present in this Psalm, it does not teach Original Sin. *The Old Testament has no doctrine that men are sinners willy-nilly because sinfulness is transmitted at birth. Its doctrine is 'societary punishment', not 'original sin'* (my emphasis). The first sin is no more the origin of other sins than A is the origin of the other letters of the alphabet." C Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin* (London: Epworth, 1953), 38.

⁵ Had there been time, it would have been good to have considered other portions of the NT. The following lengthy quotation hints at what we might have found. The comments of the eminent Roman Catholic New Testament scholar, the late Raymond Brown, on the sin/sins distinction in 1 John 1 correct both his own tradition and ours: 'Some would make a great deal of this variance between the singular and the plural...a comparison...has led many to posit a theological difference, e.g. pre-Christian sinfulness in 7e versus sins committed after becoming a Christian in 9c, or justification versus

doctrine of Original Sin seems to have derived more from his desire to justify the church's practice of infant baptism than from an inductive study of scripture.⁶ In the Bible humanity is portrayed again and again as depraved, but this is never a necessity. The two-path theology underlying all Hebrew thought and re-iterated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount presupposes that all people can choose to obey or to disobey God.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be formulated in light of the Incarnation of Christ.

Once it has been regarded as innate, sin has inevitably been portrayed as intrinsic to our created-ness, to our being human, which has caused all kinds of confusion concerning the kind of humanity assumed by Christ in his incarnation. Was it sinful? Was it fallen? Was Jesus born with Original Sin or not? In the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, was he really made like his brothers and sisters in every respect? If he was, how could he be sinless and therefore our sinless sin-bearer? If he wasn't, how could he truly be said to have been tempted in all points as we are? After all, being free of any inner propensity to sin would seem to give him a horribly unfair advantage over the rest of us, would it not? Elsewhere I have ventured the proposition that perhaps we have traditionally interpreted Christ in the light of our anthropology and now we ought to be re-interpreting what it means to be human in light of our Christology.

sanctification. Such theories neglect the fact "all sin" is certainly as inclusive as "our sins". Let me comment on the peculiar form of theological difference posited by Cook, "Problems" 251. For him v 7 deals with the defilement caused by the sin nature, while v 9 deals with defilement caused by sinful acts. Such a distinction imports into the first century later (largely post-Reformation) theological concepts. More seriously, it supposes, first, that there is a Johannine theory of a sinful human *nature*, and second, that this human nature is not totally changed by belief but needs to go on being controlled. *In my judgement, the Augustinian theology of 'original sin' goes beyond anything in the NT, and even then it is closer to Pauline than to Johannine thought* (my emphasis). According to John 3:3-6, by natural begetting one is of the flesh, which is a mark of incapacity and mortality but not of sin or evil. By being begotten of the Spirit one is dramatically changed, becoming a child of God living by His life. The rule of evil exercised by the Prince of this world is external to human nature, and only by their personal sins do human beings belong to the devil. There is no proof that 'sin' for John is an antigodly determination of human nature..., for perduring in sin is the result of personal choice (John 9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11). Personal sins create an orientation towards darkness and away from light; then the orientation leads to more sin. I remain very dubious, then, about profound distinctions found between the singular "sin" in v 7 and the plural "sins" in v 9' *The Epistles of John* (The Anchor Bible) (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 204-205.

⁶ According to C Kirwan, of the five proof texts that Augustine used for Original Sin, three are mistranslations and the other two are misconstrued! *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), 131-132, cited in footnote 81 of Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be formulated in light of the Life of Christ.

the one who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. The Eastern incarnational tradition can sometimes create the impression that in the act of assuming our humanity, Christ sanctified it entirely. That seems to leave insufficient place for sanctification achieved by our Lord's *life*, as distinct from his birth and passion. Luke declares that the boy Jesus *increased* in wisdom and in years or stature, and in divine and human favour. The testimony of Hebrews is also that he *learned* obedience and was made perfect through suffering. Even the Holy One of God himself didn't 'get it all' when he was born, and he did nothing whatsoever of messianic significance until the Spirit came upon him after his baptism. We separate Christology from pneumatology at our peril! We also impoverish a major biblical metaphor of the holy life as a journey in the company of/footsteps of our Lord, if we reduce it to its starting-point.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be formulated in light of the Atonement of Christ.

A key but under-used theological model for conceiving of the holy life as life set free from the domination of the power of evil is the ancient and classic Christus Victor model of the atonement. This motif illuminates the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. It serves to correct the post-Enlightenment rationalism, which has often tended to patronise sin and evil as vestigial remains of primitive superstition. The reality of the demonic power of evil manifests itself in Herod's pathological hatred of the boy-child and consequent atrocities in Bethlehem. Jesus escapes through the warning message from his heavenly Father being acted upon by his earthly father. The subtlety of temptation as an external power of seduction is revealed in the wilderness. But Jesus overcomes Satan through the power of the scriptures. The ugliness and destructiveness of demonic power is revealed in the behaviour of the demonised, whom Jesus encounters in his public ministry, but Jesus casts the demons out through the power of the Spirit who has anointed him to free the captives. Through the treachery of his close friend Judas and the intimidation in Gethsemane, through the Sanhedrin's perversion of their own laws and the calculated indifference to justice of Pilate, through the cowardice of his own disciples and the brutality of the Roman execution party, through the imputation to him of all sin past and future and the apparent estrangement from his beloved Father, Jesus Christ faces the power of sin and evil in all its guises and faces it down. Through dying and rising from the dead, he disarms the principalities and powers, triumphing over them.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be formulated in light of the Holy Trinity.

Archimandrite Kallistos Ware suggests a very helpful line of thought, when he writes that the reason for human solidarity in sin is that ‘human beings, made in the image of the Trinitarian God, are interdependent and coinherent. No man is an island. We are “members one of another” (Eph. 4:25), and so any action, performed by any member of the human race, inevitably affects all the other members. Even though we are not, in the strict, sense, *guilty* of the sins of others, yet we are somehow always *involved*.’⁷ I happen to be reading through the book of Joshua at the moment. The judgement on Achan and his household and the salvation of Rahab and her household both furnish early biblical evidence of the sort of human inter-relatedness that Ware describes. If corporate holiness is the visible expression of the life of the Godhead in the mutual love and integrity of the people of God in both testaments, then corporate sinfulness is its obverse.

The doctrine of human sinfulness must be tested in light of eschatology.

Eradicationist language lends itself too easily to an over-realised eschatology, leading to some claims tantamount to sinless perfection. The resistance in certain segments of the Holiness tradition to the prayer of confession within the Lord’s Prayer is the crassest way of denying spiritual reality. Reducing sin to a hypothetical root which was allegedly extirpated in a moment overlooks the ongoing conflict between the present evil age and the in-breaking age to come, between the Spirit of God within the redeemed and the anti-Christian forces, historically characterised as the world, the flesh and the devil. A balanced eschatology acknowledges the biblical truth that we do not yet see all things under Christ’s feet and that full salvation in the sense of the final conquest of sin, death and Satan awaits the Parousia. All of this is of course in addition to the need of ongoing transformation of mindset and character for the Christian implied by Paul in Romans 12:2.

The implications of various doctrines of human sinfulness must be explored for their bearing on pastoral theology.

The Augustinian model has been heavily internalised in the West through portrayal primarily as an inward propensity or self-centredness and there is truth in this. However, this is a vastly complex area. The insights of the various psychological disciplines into behaviour, character-formation, the interplay of nature and nurture, the conscious and unconscious motivation and such like need to be integrated into models of defilement and of cleansing, of the deforming and transforming of the mind. Reducing it all to hereditary depravity, dealt with in a single crisis of cleansing followed by a constant process of ‘growth in grace’ is a

⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (London & Oxford: Mowbray, 1979, 1981), 81.

gross over-simplification. The stories of the people of God throughout the Bible give the lie to it. Leaving all to go wherever God directs does not undo all of Abraham's weaknesses overnight. A glorious deliverance from slavery and a spiritual marriage at Sinai does not remove all Egyptian values from Israel at a stroke. Leaving all and following Jesus all day every day does not make the disciples instant saints. The pressures of life lived in Jesus' presence constantly flush sinful and selfish attitudes to the surface, which require ongoing repentance.

Ecclesiologically, is it right, as the traditional doctrine of Original Sin would imply, to regard the children of Christian parents as sinners outside the covenant and the family of God, who need to opt in through repentance and conversion? That is not how the family was viewed in the Old Testament. Children of Israelite parents were born into the people of God. Circumcision confirmed this fact, and only grievous sin would cause them to be cut off from God's people. It was foreigners who had to jump through hoops in order to join the people of God. Does the New Testament confirm or reject this pattern? Are children of godly parents to be regarded as sinners who must opt in to the people of God or believers who are born in and have to opt out? If the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit is the private privilege of individual Christian after individual Christian, so be it. But what if the Spirit is also the bond between us, that which we have in common? This has huge implications for the pastoral care of children in baptism, confirmation, participation in Holy Communion, child evangelism, nurture and so on.

Pastorally, what is the good news of the gospel for those who have been grievously sinned against and scarred for life? In contemporary culture increasing evidence is coming to light of horrendous physical, emotional and sexual abuse. How does inner healing relate to sanctification? In what ways can the Spirit working through the body of Christ mediate the benefits of his death and resurrection to those who have been traumatised by sins suffered at the hands of others?

Missiologically, we have to think through afresh our own doctrinal distinctives in relation to the historic Christian traditions of various European countries to identify the areas of commonality and of disagreement. As formulated so far, holiness-doctrine has managed to convince only a minute proportion of those who call themselves Christian in Europe. For those with any Christian religious sensibility at all, the Augustinian pessimism about human nature bulks massively in countries where Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism or Calvinism have been the state religion through the centuries. If that particular view of innate human depravity is imbibed with mother's milk, how can a call for the many to live holy lives in the here and now be taken with any seriousness? The gospel message in its most rudimentary form may make headway here and there but the prospects for the holiness message in Western Europe may appear comparable to trying to

scale the north face of the Eiger in winter in carpet slippers.⁸ To compound the problem, many Europeans have either rejected religion altogether or are committed to other world faiths which may already have their own clear definition of the holy.

In the early centuries when the gospel confronted paganism, converts were assumed to need deliverance from bondage to demonic powers. Exorcism was an integral part of baptismal rites. The same confrontation has been evident down through the centuries where Christian missionaries have encountered animism. With paganism, occultism and hedonism resurgent in Europe, does the Western Church need to re-learn how to recognise and deal with cases of demonisation—bondage to the powers in its most personal form?

It was probably only when I began reading the church fathers that I cottoned on to the fact that Eastern Orthodoxy had always maintained a different view of human nature and of sinfulness than had the Catholic West. What if they were right and we had been wrong all along?⁹ Intriguingly, the closer we move to our older common roots in Irenaeus, Athanasius and the Eastern Fathers for our anthropology and hamartiology, the greater our potential for making inroads for holiness-teaching in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. However, even here a great deal more work needs to be done. Deification is not an exact synonym for sanctification but it is one area where dialogue obviously beckons. The Orthodox tradition is even more congenial ground for the idea that the normal Christian life overcomes sin,¹⁰ but ties its view of holiness very closely to monasticism, mysticism and sacramentalism. Small group fellowship and

⁸ The scale of the task seems enormous—to redefine Western anthropology and hamartiology—in order to construct a coherent apologetic for holiness for the whole Church in this life. However, there are all kinds of kindred spirits within these various traditions with whose ideas we can make common cause.

⁹ Kallistos Ware: ‘The Orthodox tradition, without minimizing the effects of the fall, does not however believe that it resulted in a “total depravity”, such as the Calvinists assert in their more pessimistic moments. The divine image in man was obscured but not obliterated.’ He goes on to say, ‘Original sin is not to be interpreted in juridical or quasi-biological terms, as if it were some physical “taint” of guilt, transmitted through sexual intercourse. This picture, which normally passes for the Augustinian view, is unacceptable to Orthodoxy. The doctrine of original sin means rather that we are born into an environment where it is easy to do evil and hard to do good; easy to hurt others, and hard to heal their wounds; easy to arouse men’s suspicions, and hard to win their trust. It means that we are each of us conditioned by the solidarity of the human race in its accumulated wrong-doing and wrong-thinking, and hence wrong-being’ 80-81.

¹⁰ ‘God’s Son became man.../to join together, as a true mediator, and as Himself being both divine and human, the sundered aspects of our nature; to break the chain of sin; to purify the defilement that sin introduced into our flesh...to show how our nature as created by God is good...’ Gregory of Palamas *Homily 16*, cited in Georgios I Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 27. See also Mantzaridis’ own words: ‘According to Gregory Palamas, baptism renews created man, admits him to the life of the new age, which is above the sense and the mind, and makes him a sharer in incorruptibility and sinlessness’ 46.

engagement with the world in transformative social action might be part of the Wesleyan legacy to bring to the table.¹¹

A properly biblical doctrine of salvation/sanctification affirms that God has a complete answer to every aspect of the sin problem. However, the solution is disclosed in stages. Herein lies the contention between the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed and Wesleyan traditions. At what point precisely are the stages all complete?

A TENTATIVE SUGGESTION

In the light of the above, what then can be said about hamartiology, the doctrine of sin, and anthropology, the doctrine of humanity? Sin has been reified, that is to say widely viewed as some sort of 'entity' received at birth,¹² but it isn't one. Metaphors of disease and corruption encouraging this have often been absolutised, but they needn't be.¹³ The whole concept has become thoroughly individualised in the Western Church. Although the Bible portrays the whole world lying in the hand of the evil one, one looks in vain in the Nazarene articles of faith for some sense of the corporate and human solidarity in sin. Evil within institutions, cultures and societies needs careful consideration. The net needs to be spread beyond personal morality to include systemic evil in the fields of politics, economics and culture. The work of Walter Wink and others like him needs to help us develop a grasp of bondage to the powers in its corporate form.

My paper to the conference was predominantly negative, in that it attacked a long-standing Augustinian way of reading certain OT proof-texts. I should like to end on a more positive note by offering an intuition on where our theological heritage might have taken a wrong turning and how it might be corrected. In an article I wrote a little while ago I concluded by offering the following:

¹¹ 'A serious concern for holiness has many times gone hand in hand with a recovery of the sense of the importance of the small Christian group, and of intimacy in Christian fellowship. The classic example is Wesley's institution of the class meeting,' Stephen Neill, *Christian Holiness* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 72.

¹² R Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1934, 1968) 334-335: '*Inheriting as he did the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, Wesley tends to speak of sin as a quantum, or hypostasis; as a substance which might be expelled, or rooted out, or as an external burden which might be taken away.* As Dr Sugden has pointed out, he never quite shook off the fallacious notion "that sin is a thing which has to be taken out of man like a rotten tooth"' (emphasis mine).

¹³ According to Henri Blocher, 'The master metaphor, in the doctrine of original sin, has been drawn from medicine and genetics.' Anselm spoke of lepers begetting lepers, the Augsburg Confession (art 2) described original sin as an 'inborn disease' and a modern writer, David L Smith, compares Original Sin to a virus transmitted from parents to children, like HIV, or to a genetic disease. What needs to be borne in mind, though, as Blocher points out, is that sin may be like a disease but it is not one. For him the shortcoming of the metaphor is that it excludes wilful intent and moral responsibility, *Original Sin* (Leicester; Apollos, 1997), 110-111.

The hypothesis that I wish to set up on the basis of Genesis 1-11 and test in the rest of scripture is that holiness at creation was both a given and a goal. *Sin is not an intrinsic feature of human beings even after the Fall, but an aggressive and seductive external power which must be resisted or else it will enslave.* Deprivation of intimacy with a holy God is the fundamental Adamic legacy. Forfeiture of dominion over the created order is another result of heeding the serpent. Ever since, unless God intervenes, when human spiritual weakness confronts the pressures of a wicked world, depravity of mind and conduct is the consequence. Other consequences of the Fall include a loss of access to immortality, a curse on the ground, and a clouding of the blessings of marriage, childbirth and work.

Augustine's various theories of Original Sin, which view it in both hereditary and substantial terms, do not appear to be grounded exegetically in Genesis 1-11. The Reformers and Wesley all accepted Augustine's diagnosis, but Wesley attempted to match it with a relational solution—perfect love. *The 19th Century Holiness Movement resolved the mismatch by redefining the solution. A substantial definition of the sin problem came to be matched with a substantial view of the solution—eradication. In my judgement they changed the wrong half of the equation.* A relational view of sin, which sees it not as some sort of quasi-biological substance but as the outcome of spiritual deprivation and as a distortion of humanity's relationship with a holy God, appears to do better justice both to scripture and to experience.¹⁴

A CONCLUDING INVITATION

Our next conference needs to pick up where this one left off and to move the discussion on towards the remedy that God has provided for sin. To that end it may help if we move on from the predominantly descriptive task of this conference's biblical and historical papers and tackle in more depth some of the substantive matters that require the constructive approaches of biblical and dogmatic theology. We have already outlined some of the pastoral and missiological implications which require further consideration. Our work would be incomplete, though, if we failed also to ponder some of the following questions pertaining to Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality:

1. Which aspects of the sin problem were dealt with in the once-for-all self-offering of Christ?
2. Which aspects of the problem ought to be dealt with/are dealt with, when a person becomes a Christian?

¹⁴ 'Re-Minting Christian Holiness. Part 3: Holiness in Genesis 1-11', *The Flame*, Vol 65 No 2 (April-June 1999), 8.

3. Which aspects are dealt with when a Christian consecrates their whole life to God, if this happens subsequent to conversion?
4. Which aspects are dealt with progressively throughout the Christian life?
5. Which aspects will be dealt with only at the end of all things and therefore remain a threat even to the sanctified, Spirit-filled Christian and to the Church throughout this life?

In the mercy of God we hope together to continue this task of producing a contextualised theology of sin and sanctification at our next conference round about Easter 2003. As Nazarenes based in Europe, we have been attempting to frame discourse appropriate to our own mission-field. However, as members of a world-wide denomination, we also wish to engage brothers and sisters on every continent in our dialogue. Your particular cultural context may necessitate finding some different master metaphors to convey biblical truth about human sinfulness and God's marvellous remedy, but we hope that we have done some of the necessary exegetical and theological spadework for you.

The final creative group work performed by the 40-45 participants made two things abundantly clear to all present:

1. That there was demonstrable need for significant reconceiving and revising of our articles of faith.
2. That the task of re-casting both concepts and language is likely to prove a Herculean one.

If you would like an invitation to attend, please contact one of us. If you would like to pursue the conversation this conference began, please communicate with any or all of us by e-mail. If you would like to offer a paper or to attempt a first draft of a revised article of faith, you would put us all in your debt.