

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

#### (I) EXISTENCE UNDER THE WRATH OF GOD

THE fact that man has been created by God means that his whole existence is determined by his relation to God. His existence, as we have seen, is that of a "subject-in-relation", or, responsible existence. In two directions, this relation of man to God is based on freedom: first of all, the freedom of the generous love of God, which calls man to love Him in return, and in so doing calls him to communion with Himself; secondly, the freedom of man, who has to respond to this call. But this freedom does not exist in a neutral sphere, far above the world in which man has to make this response; it is not an indestructible freedom, or a freedom which is entirely independent of the kind of answer man has to give. On the contrary, if a person gives the wrong answer to the call of God, if he turns his back on the generous grace of God, by this act he loses his original freedom. "Everyone that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin."<sup>1</sup> From the standpoint of man, the breach with God is irreparable; man cannot get back, unless God does something about it. His communion with God has now been destroyed, and this means that he has also lost his original freedom. It does not mean that *all* freedom has been lost; man does not cease to be a subject, and his existence does not cease to be one which is based on decision. Man is, and remains a moral personality; but he has lost the possibility of ordering his life in accordance with his divine destiny.

But this lost possibility is not something purely negative, that is, something which is no longer there, but it is something which may be described as "negatively positive", or "positively negative". Man's sin does not shut God out of human existence. The man who has "distorted" his relation with God finds God's presence in a different way.<sup>2</sup> To the sinful man God is present as the Holy God, who allows the disobedient man to feel His resistance.<sup>3</sup> The Bible calls this "resistance" the Wrath of God. Instead of God attracting man, He now repels him; this is the negative form of the original love of God.

<sup>1</sup> John 8: 34

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 138: 26

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. 5: 5

As sinner—and this is his “theological existence”—man stands under the Wrath of God.

Subjectively, this objective situation is reflected in the bad conscience, in the state of “anxiety” before God. The first consequence of the Fall, in the story of the Fall, is this: that man tries to hide from God.<sup>1</sup> All human religion outside the particular revelation is characterized by this effort to hide from God; indeed, not only all religion, but the whole life of the sinner bears this mark. There is no expression of human cultural activity which does not bear this stamp. It is also an effect of sin that man cannot decipher this characteristic of his existence; indeed that he does not even notice it. Blindness is due to sin. The sinful man does not know how great a sinner he is, in spite of the fact that he is constantly tormented by his bad conscience, even when he does not want to admit the reality of sin at all. The consciousness of guilt is suppressed and driven below consciousness; there it assumes the strangest forms, which the psychoanalyst or the psychiatrist describes for us.<sup>2</sup> In the mythical consciousness this sense of the Wrath of God is expressed in the figures of the Furies and of the avenging deities.

## (2) THE LAW

The idea of “Law” in the New Testament, and especially in the writings of St. Paul, is foreign to man’s original relation with God. “The law came in beside . . .”.<sup>3</sup> In the original relation of man with God nothing “came in between” the generous will of God and the childlike trust of man—no abstract, impersonal “law”. Man stands directly over against the generous God who claims him for His Love. The only duty is this: Let yourself be loved, live in My Love! But this obligation, just because it is the summons to receive love, is not a “law”. Man may eat “of all the trees of the garden”, or, as St. Paul says later: “All things are yours”.<sup>4</sup> The only tree whose fruit man may not eat is that which grows on the “tree which is in the midst of the garden”. Man is not to trespass on God’s preserve; he is to be wholly dependent upon God; thus he is wholly unlike God, since his freedom consists in dependence,

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 3: 8

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. G. Jung: *Psychologie und Religion*; A. Maeder: *Selbst steuerung und Selbsteheiligung*, especially the analysis of Cellini

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 5: 20

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 3: 21

not in independence. The eating of the tree of knowledge and of life, the infringement of the divine preserve, is the effort to achieve autonomy, to be entirely self-centred; it means exchanging the *a Deo esse* for an impossible *a se esse*. If man had not yielded to this temptation, he would have lived in communion with God; he would have received life as a gift; daily he would have received it as a gift at the hands of God.

This would be the right way to live as a human being; it would be life in the love of God. But now, through man's breach with God, this direct relation has been lost. Its place is taken by the law. There is now a neutral or abstract authority between God and man. God no longer confronts man personally, but He is represented by an impersonal authority, by the Law. Instead of the living Presence of God there is this "representative presence" through the law. Henceforth man cannot help misunderstanding his existence in a legalistic manner. He has now fallen into the moralistic error of feeling compelled to do the Good, by his own efforts, believing that because he *must* do so, he *can*. All natural religion, and all natural morality is legalistic. It is as though the Father had said to the son, who wants his share of his inheritance, "Well, you want to be independent! *Be* independent!" "Work out your own salvation! Do good in your own strength!" The wrath of God consists in the fact that when man asserts his independence God takes him at his word. Legalistic existence, and self-righteous morality and religion are the same thing.

The Law is the will of God, it is true, but it is no longer the fatherly, personal will, which touches man directly, but it is impersonal, concrete, and fixed. The law is the concrete form of the will of God. Hence it is the will of God, and yet it is not, it is ambiguous. The more legalistic it is, the more it takes statutory form, the less is it identical with the real will of God. It always requires "something", whereas God does not ask for "something" but always wants "me" for myself. Even where the law is summed up in the commandment of love, and the statutory element has been removed, still, as law, it is not the essential will of God. For the real will of God is not first of all a demand, an abstract demand, but it is first of all the offer of love, and the claim on man to respond to this offered love which is the gift of God. The will of God cannot truly be expressed in the form of the law, of the law in an established or fixed form.

In the Old Testament the Law certainly appears as an element in the revelation of the Covenant. Thus it is not primary but secondary. "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, therefore thou shalt have none other gods before Me." The Law is embedded in the Gospel; only so is it the true will of God. But this is still not the whole truth. The whole truth is only seen fully where God first of all and without conditions, reveals Himself as the loving generous God in Jesus Christ, who is therefore the "end of the Law".<sup>1</sup> But this revelation at the same time breaks through wrath and legalism, and removes guilt by vicarious suffering. This sinister legalism and the reality of wrath can only be removed when its nature is fully recognized.

The Law is therefore, on the one hand, the wrathful answer of God to the sin of man; on the other side it is the means through which God brings the sinful apostasy of man to a head.<sup>2</sup> Man has to be shattered by the Law, if he is to understand and receive the grace of God. Only through the fact that God binds man wholly to the Law, and confronts him wholly with the law and its radical demands, can man learn that he is a sinner, that his way of living is perverted, that if there is no other way for him, he is lost. Through the radical Law man must learn what the "curse of the Law" means, in which the curse of his sin is seen in God's sight.<sup>3</sup>

### (3) UNFREEDOM, THE *SERVUM ARBITRIUM*

The decisive point for the understanding of man is the understanding of human freedom. It is no accident that it is at this point that conflicts break out, which have never yet come to an end; some, indeed, are still going on at the present time. Those who do not understand human freedom, do not understand man. Those who do not understand the "unfreedom" of man do not understand sin. The earliest Christian theology, that of the Greek Fathers, entered the lists primarily in defence of man's freedom; for it was the concern of these early theologians to break through the barrier of ancient determinism, and to understand man in the dignity of his person, given him by God, and in his God-given responsibility. But this interest in freedom prevented them from gaining a right understanding of sin and guilt. It is with Augustine that

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 10: 4

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 7: 7 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 3: 12 + 3: 22 ff.

the reaction sets in. Even he had first of all to free himself from the determinism of the Stoics and the Manichees before he could take up the cudgels on behalf of freedom. Then, however, he saw the nature of sin as “un-freedom”, and stressed the truth of the *non posse non peccare* against Pelagius. His doctrine of Original Sin was an attempt to express this *non posse*, but this, for its part, led once more to a dangerous determinism. In the Middle Ages there was a set-back in the emphasis on the *liberum arbitrium*; the profound understanding of sin which Augustine had revealed was lost. The Reformers were needed, in order to remind men that the sinner is characterized precisely by the *servum arbitrium*. Once more, however, the stress on the *servum arbitrium*, combined with the Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin, made an opening for a wrong kind of determinism, which to-day—in the era of naturalism or pantheism—cannot fail to have a devastating effect. It is therefore an urgent necessity to re-formulate the doctrine of freedom and of unfreedom.

Through sin man has lost his original freedom. He is no longer free to realize his divine destiny, and to be good, as God would like him to be. Evil has taken possession of us; it is radical evil, from which we cannot be freed by any mere “revolution in the disposition” (Kant). If we could do so, we would not need redemption. To see the necessity for redemption, and the impossibility of achieving it, comes to the same thing. Augustine’s formula, *non posse non peccare*, hits the nail on the head. This is our condition. Thus we are incapable of realizing the fact that we have been made in the Image of God in its material sense, that is, to be truly loving towards God and man. No moral or religious effort will enable us to break through this barrier of the *non posse non peccare*. This is the true meaning of the *servum arbitrium*.

We must, however, be on our guard against the error of combining this *servum arbitrium* with any kind of determinist metaphysic, or against regarding it as part of a doctrine of predestination, understood in a determinist sense. Rather we should always start from the fact that man never ceases to be subject. Thus even as sinner, man is not an animal but a responsible person. He still always possesses that quality which in the Old Testament—in contradistinction from the New—distinguishes him as “person” from the animal: namely, all that is meant by “being made in the Image of God”, the quality which makes him, as person, like the divine Person. It

is then quite irrelevant to ask whether man has lost the *Imago Dei*, either wholly or partially. He has lost it wholly—through sin. He is not a truly human, truly loving being. His nature does not reflect the nature of God, who is Holy Love. We are not taking sin seriously if we speak of a “relic” of the *Imago*, which man still possesses—presupposing that by the *Imago* we mean the New Testament conception. If, however, we mean what we see in the Old Testament—that which distinguishes man as man from the animal, or from the other creatures—that is, to put it more exactly, existence in responsibility, then we cannot speak of the “loss” of the *Imago Dei*. Sin itself is a sign and an expression of the fact of our humanity; the more we understand man as sinner, the more we understand him as a responsible being. The depth of human sin does not diminish man’s responsibility; on the contrary, the greater the sin, the more responsible and therefore the more guilty does man become. Thus we would be minimizing the gravity of sin, were we to deny that man possesses the *Imago Dei* in this sense, or even were we to minimize its reality. This means, however, that the two forms of the *Imago Dei*, the formal and the material, are not in competition with one another; to describe the one as permanent, as untouched by sin, does not deny the fact that the other kind has been completely lost. Even the sinner is a personal being, and in this fact, even as a sinner, he resembles the personal God; but this similarity does not alter the fact that through sin, in another sense, he has *completely* lost his “likeness” to God.

Now although, in itself, it is quite easy to perceive this distinction, there is one point which raises a difficulty: namely, the fact that human existence, in the formal sense, is combined with all that we call capacity for culture and creative freedom. Man has not lost his capacity for culture by being a sinner. Even as a sinful human being he can be an artist, a scientist, a legislator, or a statesman. Now in all this cultural thought and activity sin is evident, so that, in point of fact, there is no culture which is not sinful—art, science, law, politics. But the fact of sin does not make itself felt everywhere in the same way, or to the same extent. The more we are concerned with the relation between man and man, and still more with the relation between man and God, the more does sin become evident; but the further a sphere is from these personal relations, the less evident does sin become. In the sphere of mathematics for instance, the sinful man is no worse off than the less sinful

person, but his sin does affect his personal relationships; moreover, the State with its power of legal compulsion cannot be conceived apart from sin, while marriage is never actually without sin, although it can well be conceived without sin.

Thus, even as sinner, man possesses freedom, namely, freedom which forms part of his capacity to create culture; but he has not the freedom to create a truly *human* culture, one which is really pleasing to God. He is free to be a virtuous sinner, but he is not free not to be a sinner at all. He possesses freedom in the sense of a *libertas civilis*—not only freedom from compulsion, but creative and moral freedom, in so far as we eliminate from this freedom the element of true goodness, in the sense of real love to God and man. When we look at the subject more closely, however, we see that the abstract formula “man has . . . man has not . . .” is not adequate. All that we can say with complete confidence about human existence as a whole are two extreme statements. There is no man who is not a sinner; “we are all sinners”.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, no man is without responsibility, and thus without a certain degree of freedom, namely, that degree apart from which he would not be a human being at all. But between these two ultimate points there are endless gradations of freedom and unfreedom, both of the cultural creative capacity, as well as of moral freedom, which man can increase through discipline, and can diminish through lack of it. Hence the degree of freedom for each individual varies greatly. But what does not vary, and is true for every human being, is the truth that everyone is a sinner, and everyone is a responsible being.

#### (4) MAN IN REVOLT

It is not simply characteristic of a certain type of human being—the divided self, the sick soul (William James)—to be man in revolt. To be “in revolt” is to be a sinner. For through sin man is in rebellion against his destiny; therefore he is fighting against his nature as God created it. The sinner is in revolt within himself—that is his chronic disease, whether he knows it or not, whether he is conscious of the “contradiction” or not. Sin is being divided not merely from God, but also—since human existence is always a relation to God—within himself. This situation has been expressed with devastating effect in the Epistle to the Romans: “The good that I would

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 3: 23

I do not, but the evil that I would not that I do.”<sup>1</sup> But what Paul says of himself is true of every man, whether he knows it or not. The man who is there described is the sinner, essentially. All that varies is the degree in which man realizes this situation.

The most direct consequence of sin is the fact that the whole direction of man's life has been distorted. Instead of thankfully accepting his life from the Hands of God, and loving Him who has first loved us, man is now, in his inmost nature, a *cor incurvatum in se ipsum* (Luther); that is, his very heart has been deformed and perverted. His perversity is of two kinds: self-deification and deification of the world, egoism and love of the world, the craving for the pleasure which the world offers. Since, however, even as sinner man does not cease to be destined for God, sin manifests itself as a perpetual state of conflict, in which man oscillates between the desire to escape from God, and the longing for Him; between an atheistic denial of God's existence, and a superstitious fear of God; between impiety, and pseudo-piety, between secularism and religiosity.

This fundamental conflict recurs in a great number of particular variations. For instance, one result, and one symptom of this conflict is the false relation between morality and religion, which leads partly to a mistaken autonomy on both sides, and partly to a mistaken combination of both. There is a morality without religion—to the extreme of mere utilitarianism and conventionality—and there is an a-moral religion, which goes to the other extreme of immorality and cruelty practised in the name of “religion”. In the sphere of human relations this conflict is expressed on the one hand as an intense individualism (which has no use for the community), and on the other hand, as a collectivism which is hostile to persons; thus here both individual freedom and true community are misunderstood. Human history is the story of these conflicts within human nature, in which the changes are rung now on one aspect and then on the other, sometimes the one and sometimes the other getting the upper hand. Hence a dialectical view of human history has in fact a good deal to be said for it; such a view can throw a good deal of light on many points, while, on the other hand, owing to its connexion with a monistic-evolutionary *schema* it does violence to the facts (Hegel).

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 7: 19