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## ONE OR MANY ADAMS?

IN an age of dialogue one notes with interest an ever intensifying and frequent exchange of ideas between the scientist and the theologian on the subject of polygenism and original sin. There are two elements involved in this dialogue: the nature of original sin in itself and the dimension of its originator. The latter involves a general scientific question regarding the origin of man from one pair (monogenism) or from many couples (polygenism). If this question were purely scientific, there would be no need for the many articles on this topic currently appearing in theological books and magazines.<sup>1</sup> The question has theological implications, and it is with these implications that complications set in.

### THE SIN OF NATURE

As the progenitor of the human race, we read in the Bible, Adam seriously offended God. Because Adam had the gift of integrity, as Karl Rahner would explain it,<sup>2</sup> Adam's offence was a complete commitment to evil. As a result of his sin, Adam lost the extraordinary gifts with which God had graced him. He lost them for himself and for all his descendants. As a personal sin, Adam's offence was personal to Adam: it was his own doing, his own act; but as a state of sin, as a condition involving the absence of sanctifying grace, it was handed down by generation to all the members of the human race, who consequently stood in need of redemption which Christ provided in his Paschal Mysteries. This is the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church as contained in the documents of the Council of Trent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. G. Weigel, S.J., 'Gleanings from the commentaries on "Humani Genesim"', *Theological Studies*, 12 (1951) 520-549.

<sup>2</sup> K. Rahner, 'Theological concept of concupiscence', *Theological Investigations*, I (Baltimore, 1961) 345-382.

<sup>3</sup> DS 1510-1516; TCC 220-226.

If all men are not descendants of Adam, if the human race has descended from many couples instead of one, then the whole structure of original sin and the consequent need of redemption would seem to be called into question. In his encyclical *Humani Generis*, issued in 1950, Pius XII declared that Catholics were free to accept the theories of evolution, but not those of polygenism, because 'it does not appear how such views can be reconciled with the doctrine of original sin'.<sup>4</sup>

Sixteen years later, in July 1966, Pope Paul VI addressed a group of theologians and scientists taking part in Rome in a symposium on original sin. While reminding theologians of the teaching of Trent on the subject of original sin, Pope Paul insisted on the need of presenting the truths of our faith in terms and concepts that can be understood by the men of today, and finally exhorted them to look for a more modern definition of original sin and for an explanation that would fit in better with modern science.<sup>5</sup>

#### POLYGENISTIC CONTEXT

It is therefore clear that the Pope's intention, if anything, was not to exclude polygenism once for all and to close all doors for further investigation. At the time of *Humani Generis* it was not yet clear how polygenism could be harmonized with the doctrine of original sin. If and when such a harmony should become manifest, then, it would seem, one would be free to accept polygenism. The latter, after all, will always remain a scientific question, and one would therefore in vain expect that the Church's magisterium should come out with a definite statement for or against it.

The problem, therefore, is: can we harmonize the Church's teaching on original sin with the theory of polygenism? In an article written three years ago, F. Ayala<sup>6</sup> has suggested that the Catholic theologian should steer away from another Galileo involvement, where theological opinion was retracted too soon. We do not believe, however, that there is anything approaching a Galileo impasse here. The situation seems rather to parallel the confrontation between theology and science in regard to the Genesis account of creation taken literally and the evolutionary origin of man. Both before and after the Biblical Commission statement

<sup>4</sup> DS 3897; TCC 205b.

<sup>5</sup> AAS, 58 (1966), p. 654.

<sup>6</sup> F. Ayala, O.P., 'Man in Evolution', *The Thomist* 31 (Jan. 1967).

of 1909,<sup>7</sup> to the effect that a Catholic had to accept as historical fact the biblical account of creation and could consequently neither accept nor teach evolution, Catholic exegetes found themselves temporarily deprived of the freedom necessary for working out a solution. The situation was reverted by Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which came out in 1943, with its definite enunciation of the necessity for the study and interpretation of literary forms in the Bible.<sup>8</sup> The air was, therefore, cleared in regard to evolution.

But the same cannot yet be said about polygenism. There are still difficulties on the way of harmonizing the data of revelation with the theory of polygenism, but there is no doubt that theological opinion is veering more and more away from monogenism and, in our opinion, it is not too optimistic to say that a breakthrough on the problem is in sight. A brief review of some significant recent publications on the subject should substantiate our opinion.

#### NEW FORMULATIONS

The Dutch theologian A. Hulsbosch, O.S.A., has presented a neat summary of his research in a most readable book published in 1965.<sup>9</sup> After listing the specific elements of original sin included in the official teaching of the Church, he presents the reader with what he calls an 'attempt at a new formulation'. On the strength of metaphysical arguments, he tries to remove the existing tension by pointing out that, on the basis of fossil evidence — so incomplete in the past and so uncertain in the future — scientists could not possibly reach certainty on polygenism now or later. Scientists are, however, content with their evaluation of the question. Then the author asks what one could take as a rhetorical question: 'If polygenism is not a burning point for scientists, why should it be so for theologians?' While making specific reference to the fact that creation is still going on, he stresses the generally accepted data of man's antiquity and his biological descent from prehuman forms of life.

Against this background of billions of years, Hulsbosch maintains that 'the static image in the old way of presenting original sin gives us no real historical point of reference for theological appreciation, ...

<sup>7</sup> DS 3514; TCC 198.

<sup>8</sup> DS 3825-3831; TCC 126 a, b.

<sup>9</sup> A. Hulsbosch, O.S.A., *God in Creation and Evolution* (Sheed & Ward: New York, 1965).

and that we must therefore refer to the historically accessible work of salvation done by Christ and illuminated by the prophetic teaching of both testaments.<sup>10</sup> Thus, according to this author, one must take a wider view of original sin: sin has taken root in the human community, and it is mankind in its totality that must be considered the cause of the present state of affairs.<sup>11</sup>

#### COLLECTIVE SIN

Pierre Smulders, S.J.,<sup>12</sup> maintains that we must place the doctrine of original sin in the area of consciousness of personal and collective sin. Each sinner contributes to this sin, which grows down through the centuries, and ratifies it by his own personal sins. The real import of sin, claims Smulders, is missed if theologians focus on the extreme case of Adam's original sin, and also on the sin contracted by the new born infants with the consequent debate on the fate of unbaptized babies. The real essence of original sin in us, according to Smulders, consists in the deviation from our God-appointed destiny. Original sin keeps on growing through mankind, so that the environment of sinful mankind is a 'concrete form of original sin'. His whole inference is that Adam's sin went on snowballing, and that each human being has added his own small or great contribution to its weight. The deepest root of original sin, then, lies in man's general refusal 'to pass beyond self into Infinite Love. Man folds in upon himself and turns away from God'.<sup>13</sup> This line of reasoning on the nature of original sin skirts the whole question of polygenism, for it involves all men no matter who their progenitors were.

Maurice Flick, S.J., who took part in the symposium on original sin mentioned above, evidently interpreted the Pope's message as still leaving an open window for research on the harmonization of polygenism and original sin. He asks a significant question at the beginning of one of his recent articles:<sup>14</sup> 'Can we transfer the account of sin in the

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> P. Smulders, S.J., *La Vision de Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris, 1964), summarized in *Theology Digest* 13 (1965) 172-176.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> M. Flick, S.J., 'Adam's Fall: the Task of Reinterpretation', *Catholic World* (April 1967); cf. also M. Flick & Z. Alszeghy, 'Peccato Originale ed Evoluzione', *Civiltà Cattolica* 117 (1966) vol. 2, 440-447; by the same authors, 'Pec-

Garden of Eden from a rigidly fixed conception to an evolutionary conception of history?' His article tries to do just that. The evolutionary thrust, according to him, stresses direction into the future, not the past. The evil for which we need a redeemer is no longer a falling away from a perfection that existed in the past, but a gap separating us from the perfect end to which evolution has not yet attained.

With regard to polygenism, Flick proposes this interpretation: that in the evolutionary process different and various couples existed who had not reached the full development that would come with the ability of making a moral decision. The one who first attained full psychic maturity committed the first sin. The first 'human' had failed, and this failure slowed down the process of evolution. From then on, evolution would be carried on only in view of the Paschal Mystery through Christ's redemptive Incarnation. Another type of salvation was thus offered to all men based on the grace of Christ, as Adam's gifts were based on what theologians call the grace of God. Flick suggests that in this evolutionary view there is a unity of common ancestry, since men are never absolutely independent of each other. All men, at any rate, passing through various genetic phases, have at least come from a common primordial matter which God had created to be the substratum of hominization.

#### CORPORATE PERSONALITY

Flick maintains that the biblical concept of corporate personality can help in the understanding of an influence exerted on all men by one who was not their father in a physical sense. Mankind has a vocation to form the People of God. The first sinner is the only one who could at the moment of decision accept or reject the divine call. Even more easily can we understand that his response is in effect the response of the whole of mankind, for whom not only the physical person of the sinner, but all mankind as a corporate person determined its own situation before God. This author, therefore, thinks that the Garden account of sin can be formulated, worked out and expressed in evolutionary terminology, though he admits after this attempt that the doctrine of original sin still retains a 'sense of mystery'. And how could it be

cato Originale in prospettiva evoluzionistica', *Gregorianum* 47 (1966) 201-225; Z. Alszegehy, 'Development of the doctrinal formulation of the Church concerning the theory of evolution', *Concilium* 26 (1967), Paulist Press, N.Y., pp. 25-34.

otherwise, if it is an object of supernatural faith?

Similar ideas are again put forth by Patrick Fannon, S.M.M.,<sup>15</sup> who brings out as a salient idea in the treatment of original sin that the first Adam acted in a corporate capacity and as a representative of the whole emerging human race. Adam's sin, as the sin of one person, introduced a state of rebellion which spread and resulted in an environment of sin in the world. Original sin was then the accumulated sin of the world into which all men are born and by which all men are influenced.

One of the most readable articles this writer has come across was written by John J. O'Rourke a few years ago.<sup>16</sup> The author announces on the outset that he will discuss polygenetic theories within a Christian concept and recognizes that, for the most part, scientists accept an evolutionary process which they regard as monophylactic, but polygenetic. Since such a theory is generally accepted by scientists, he sees no reason why theologians should not review their position and see whether or not the data of revelation could possibly be understood just as well, or even better, in the new context.

#### THEOLOGICAL SPECULATION

This the author attempts to do from a metaphysical point of view and against an exegetical and theological background. He begins by presenting the difficulties for the scientist if monogenism were to be held by an assent of divine faith. Serious difficulties would arise from the fact that science deals with groups and multiples, and not with individuals and single instances; they would also arise from the scientifically inadmissible assumption that the upward sweep of evolution among the anthropoids would have terminated in one single individual, or at least in one single pair. For these and other similar difficulties O'Rourke has a metaphysical refutation.

There is then in O'Rourke's article a discussion of the theological aspect of the question and an analysis of *Humani Generis* with reference to polygenism. The author's conclusion is that 'the words of Pius XII are not to be understood as declaring absolutely that polygenism is irreconcilable with Catholic doctrine'.<sup>17</sup> In the exegetical

<sup>15</sup> P. Fannon, S.M.M., 'The changing face of theology', *Clergy Review* (May 1967).

<sup>16</sup> John J. O'Rourke, S.J., 'Some considerations about Polygenism', *Theological Studies* 26 (Sept. 1965), 407-416.

<sup>17</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 411.

discussion he examines five New Testament texts which are frequently quoted as demanding monogenism. His findings are interesting. He claims, for instance, that Romans 5, 12-19 (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*) cannot be said to exclude every possible polygenistic interpretation of the origin of mankind. In discussing historic unity, he cites incidents in the Old Testament where 'common descent from a forefather did not provide common rights', or where 'membership in a community did not always depend on birth into that community'. He reaches a conclusion to the effect that the New Testament does not explicitly state how all mankind is connected with Adam.

Another author, J.P. Mackey<sup>18</sup> poses a central question: 'How far are experts to observe a respectful silence in view of an authoritative though non-infallible pronouncement of the Magisterium?' He goes on, then, to treat what he calls the 'escalation of theological opinion' away from monogenism. Exegetes, he claims, are generally in agreement that there is no 'proof' of monogenism in Scripture, and dogmatic theologians today are far from feeling handicapped by Trent in their presentation of original sin in a polygenetic context.

In a survey-article of this type, relating as it does to a theological problem of no mean importance, one is naturally curious to know what Karl Rahner thinks on the subject of polygenism. The truth of the matter is that, on this point, there has been a marked change in Rahner's theology. His first essays relating to the subject of original sin and evolution, published in 1954 in the German series of Theological Investigations, are definitely in favour of monogenism, which he then considered as implicitly contained in the Tridentine definitions.<sup>19</sup> In a more recent article, however, published in *Concilium* in 1967, Rahner not only favours polygenism and provides a number of theological explanations of original sin in that new context, but puts forth with no small insistence a suggestion that the Church's Magisterium should refrain from pronouncing itself, and still more from defining, any such scientific points as monogenism or polygenism.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> J.P. Mackey, 'Original sin and Polygenism', *The Irish Theological Quarterly* (April 1967) 99-114.

<sup>19</sup> K. Rahner, 'Theological Reflections on Monogenism', *Theological Investigations*, I (London, 1965), 229-296.

<sup>20</sup> K. Rahner, 'Evolution and Original Sin', *Concilium* 26 (1967, Paulist Press, N.Y., 61-74.

## TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

This article would take us too far if we were to give even a minute idea of the many contributions that have recently appeared on the subject of polygenism in connection with the doctrine of original sin.<sup>21</sup> One recent publication, however, must be mentioned to conclude the long list: a book published by Christopher Mooney, S.J., on the teachings of Teilhard de Chardin.<sup>22</sup> In presenting an interesting analysis of Teilhard's confrontation with the idea of original sin, the author declares that monogenism had little influence, if any, on Teilhard's approach to the problem of sin. The eminent scientist and theologian was not concerned so much with reconciling scientific and theological opinions as with safeguarding the connection between Christ's work of redemption and man's role in the universe as the carrier of creation's upward movement.<sup>23</sup> Teilhard's treatment is always a large sweeping one, an ever deepening surge to the ultimate perfection of the Parousia; his basic desire is to rethink the data of revelation in the context of scientific data concerning cosmic and organic evolution.

It is commonly known that Teilhard de Chardin took a dim view of the general understanding of original sin that was current in his day, which was static, historical and personal, and therefore too limited and negative. 'We continue to think of original sin', he wrote, 'on the small scale, i.e. as an accident that took place towards the end of the Tertiary era in some small corner of the earth'.<sup>24</sup> Teilhard's attempt to universalize original sin, identifying it with physical imperfection in the world at the moment of creation and then with the presence of evil in the ensuing process of evolutionary change, may seem to be at variance with the teaching formulated on the subject by the Council of Trent. But, then, is it not here a question of distinguishing between the doctrine itself and the formulation of that doctrine?

## CONCLUSION

Truth is one, and between truths in different disciplines there can

<sup>21</sup> For further bibliography on the subject, see: M. Eminyan, S.J., 'L-evoluzzjoni u d-dnub originali', *Problemi ta' l'um* 7 (1967) 293-297; 'New Thinking on Original Sin', *Herder Correspondence* 4 (1967) 135-141.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Mooney, S.J., *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (London, Collins, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 137.



never be a real contradiction. In the writings briefly referred to in this paper there may seem to be an apparent clash between a scientific theory known by reason and a theological explanation of a revealed datum. By way of summary, our remarks can be lined up somewhat as follows:

1. Scientists today generally accept polygenism.
2. The latest official statements of the Magisterium declare that the traditional teaching on original sin does not yet harmonize with polygenism.
3. Theologians have understood such statements not only as not ir-reformable, but as leaving the whole subject open to theological research.
4. While refraining from any clear statement in favour or against polygenism, which is a purely scientific question, today's theologians, for the most part, present an explanation of original sin in a context of polygenism.
5. In such a situation, in the opinion of many theologians today, a tacit approval of the Magisterium can be said to exist, marking a definite development of doctrine on the official level.
6. Theologians today veer to the idea of a collective sin, or of a sinful situation, into which each man is born and which each man ratifies by his personal sins.
7. The principles relating to literary forms and historical context should be applied to any formulation of doctrine for the authentic understanding of its content, whether that formulation be a biblical or an ecclesiastical one.
8. The unity of mankind, which is essential to safeguard the universality of original sin and the consequent universal need of Christ's redemption, can be better explained and ensured if made to depend on the God-Man Christ rather than on Adam as an individual person.

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