

Cross and Redemption

We have all heard of Original Sin – and there is abundant evidence that it is still with us. But what is it? Begin with recognising the fact that there is collective and social violence accompanying everyday living [*starting with Cain and Abel*]. It has been called humanity's family secret [*Sebastian Moore, OSB*] – it is against this backdrop that one man shedding his blood becomes real.

Salvation through shedding blood has had every possible expression and meaning. To appreciate this better, we need to be more aware not so much of how we get to God, as how God gets to us. Original Sin has things to tell us about ourselves in a way that highlights the wonder of salvation.

It is only natural to assume that what I desire starts and ends with me – I know what I want. But there is a prior question: do I make my desire or does my desiring make me? My desiring first comes through being aware of some other person desiring. This prompts me to follow, even imitate, until eventually and inevitably, imitation gives way to rivalry: I may like what you are wearing enough to do the same – but then seek to justify the choice as being mine only; it is in this way that I identify myself *through being me against...* [X has a big house I will get a bigger one] – And that is me.

Being passed-over causes resentment, and sets me against – what makes my desire mine is that it isn't yours! The me is now in place through being opposed to other [*not me*] is the fruit of my desire. By contrast, Jesus sees himself as only gift – given to myself by Abba, to enjoy, and to know where I'm from and where I can go. This is the crux of the matter – not me through being opposed to other.. I'm me as only gift... Given by the totally other to me. And this is not just a personal reality it is social and cultural – waiting in the wings to be kick-started by any desire intense enough to do so. [*Desire is what humankind has in place of animal instinct*].

The fact that my way is illusory means that it cannot be natural, a mistake cannot be of the essence of anything. That this is world-wide and world-old cannot make it natural. Revelation has something to tell us about living together; and we must avoid supposing an autonomy of social science, which forgets that modern social theory is formulated specifically against theology. It shares the same illusion of seeing reality as setting one against another. As a consequence of faith in the Incarnation, we receive the awareness that self-awareness comes from seeing self as total gift – no rivalry, as each one is unique.

Goodness and Truth are not self-evident to reason or to logical argument. Faith shows that the good and the true are those things about which we have a persuasion, or faith. Human thinking is dialectical – resolving issue through argument – and we need to get back to the beginning, not simply to postlapsarian [*after the fall-thinking – after rivalry had set-in*]

We need to remember that before Original sin there is Original Grace. God's ways are not dialectic [*arguing one's corner*]. Truth is self-giving – but, we need to learn how to receive this giving, so as to be free of dialectical entrapment. We need the enlightenment of Revelation to discover the presence of Wisdom. S John's Gospel presents Jesus as wisdom incarnate. He lives and speaks from his origin – as beloved of Abba – with the promise to

make this available to anyone wishing to receive it: *To all who believe he gave power...* It is revealed – yet needs to be picked-up through human effort.

Why does the infant struggle to repeat words and sounds; a process we take for granted? It isn't automatic [*and often missing in the autistic*]. This pull we feel confronting us, is as gravity is for the planets. It is a call to imitate, *it is repetitive learning*. We move into adult life through relating and, like gravity, such imitating both attracts and repels. We are attracted and we imitate, but eventually imitation leads to rivalry, using the same model differently. Our model is now our rival; through whom we define ourselves against.

Imitation has 3 elements: *imitation; repetition and reproduction* as a way of life. In all 3 cases the other comes before. Repetition provides space for socialising to develop; repetition provides time for memory to develop and language to emerge. It is the space dimension that allows the emerging of society – it is the time aspect that keeps us together with common language etc. The infant imitates the adult; there is no me in the infant independent of the adult; from this the infant takes on gestures and the like which indicate objects other than self – pointing – trying to get the infant to look at what is being indicated; playing with a toy to get the infant to do the same.

We imitate not just what the model looks like – but also what he/she has; it is this moving towards an object other than the model that we call desire. It pulls us away from the model into a kind of autonomy. But something more is required to *make* me. This involves focussing on the model as being – wanting to be who the model is. It is this imitating that eventually leads to rivalry, an impossible rivalry. Which is resolved by excluding or marginalising the victim – asserting individual self, over the self of the other – I establish me through many victories gained in this way.

Does this mean we are all victimisers? The sense of self is always given – not acquired. It is the tension set in place by my sense of self as given, and *as self-acquired by violent means* – this is the essence of Original Sin. My sense of self is unstable, changeable, other-dependent – other, who is there before me. My me is *dependent on the desires* that gave rise to it.

Christian scholars seek to understand how we humans relate to God in terms of where we come from, where we are going and how to get there. Why are we here? What are we like? What are we here for? Rahner went much further, by showing that God is an *essential* part of our lives and we are all related, whether we realise it or not. God is at the core of every aspect of experience. We are never satisfied. We never reach a point where we know all that there is to know or experience all that there is to experience because we are always open to newer and more fulfilling experiences. Our thirst for knowledge and new experiences is never quenched.

We can always go beyond what we know. But we need to remember that this transcendence includes our knowledge of the finite; we go beyond every finite object, thanks to our openness to the infinite; to recognise a limit we must transcend it. Imagine the fence around an area. You might think that when you reach that fence, you don't need to go beyond it to recognise it as a limit. On a physical level, you're right. However, in thought you've already transcended the fence. You've realised that there's something beyond it but that you can't go beyond it. In the same way do we take hold of the finite we aspire to. In supposing that we're

limited by a finite horizon of questioning, we go beyond this and experience ourselves as able to transcend. So, *the fact that we know the finite requires the existence of an infinite.*

What we call Original Sin shows us to ourselves. It is natural to assume that my desires are mine! Which means that I am me before I decide to desire; whereas in fact my desires make me. Something is triggered in me when I experience another person desiring something. I too can begin to desire like that. Eventually and inevitably this leads to rivalry – mine's better... and then I am set against the other, which is how I *experience* me as different. This rivalry is simply I am me and not you – is the way I establish myself.

Desire has become mine and what makes it mine is that it is not yours! Some call it friendly rivalry, or competitive spirit. In fact, the me that is now opposed to the *not me* is the product of my desiring. Much time and energy is spent on fostering and preserving this artificial self; whereas, as we discover from the Incarnation, our real self is total *gift*. My own sense of self is me in contrast to you, whereas my *real* self will see others as gifts freely given to me.

Society becomes possible through imitation, by keeping humans together while forming individuals psychologically. The infant imitates the adult, reproducing what the adult does; there is no me in the infant, independent of the model that fashions it. The adult plays with a toy to get the infant to do the same; eventually this will lead to desire, which tends to detach us from the model through seeking autonomy.

However, much more than imitation is needed to make me. This results in my wanting not simply to do what the other is doing, but gradually to be who the other is. This in turn can lead to an unequal rivalry – *I'm not like you, I'm me*. Rivalry tends to be resolved by the excluding of the other, asserting my emerging self against the other. It is this tension between my sense of *being as given*, and my acquiring of it by more or less violent means, that is at the heart of theology of Original Sin.

Where is my awareness of God in whose image I'm made? St Augustine looked to memory, understanding and will. Unfortunately, Original Sin was taken as the starting point, independently of the truth that before ever there is Original Sin there is Original Grace. *That there is something radically wrong with the human race* became the foundational reality for understanding salvation. God made everything perfect which we spoiled, and God had to *get a man in!* This is salvation *from* the world rather than *of* the world.

Revelation is the gift of self-discovery, by which cultures rose and fell, people were formed, and writings happened and were edited and re-edited. This is the human way. Revelation does not need protection from it. There is a discernible connection between being *almost* human and the possibility of being *fully* human. We are the only animal-kind for whom collectively remembered scenes exist. There is by definition no evidence of what was pre-human.

The Resurrection happened to Jesus. What impact did it have on the disciples? Death happens to the person dying, and the New Testament makes it clear that Resurrection did something about this. As death happened solely to Jesus, so also did Resurrection happen to him, not to the Apostles. There has been the claim that the apostolic witness to the Resurrection is unsafe. If this were true not only would the Resurrection be in doubt, so too would be the historical evidence for Jesus' existence. We either accept this witness or we do not. Others have suggested that the apostles thought the Resurrection was real, when it was only a

subjective experience. This makes no sense if we say we accept apostolic witness, but not this bit!

The disciples' connection with Jesus seemingly ended with his death. They had memories, unrealised hope, along with guilt at their desertion of him. Jesus was not just a friend who had died, but a leader who had made promises. They had trusted him enough to give up everything to follow him. They were a group of frightened and disillusioned semi-traitors. This was the situation when Jesus appeared at Easter, a totally gratuitous happening.

Someone who is attacked may well retaliate - but someone who is killed can't. The Resurrection was not part of any experience they could relate to. First reaction is fear; which is why he says don't be afraid; neither did they breathe a sigh of relief when they eventually recognised him. If this had been an apparition it would have left us with nostalgia - if only you had seen what we saw - in the New Testament accounts of the Resurrection there is no hint of nostalgia - because he hadn't gone away, they were aware of his real, ongoing presence.

There was something familiar here, and yet totally other. They could not absorb him into their world. He remained the familiar Jesus yet there is a difference. It is a human presence - he did not die as a man and rise as God! It is a forgiving presence, in no way holding them accountable. He didn't need to say I forgive you... because *it is a forgiving presence*; so much so that they become empowered to forgive in their turn as they spread the Good News of his presence. Jesus was not just 3 days older, with wounds healed by God. He was present as one *simultaneously alive and dead*. Not that the Lamb slain had recovered. Resurrection emptied death of its power by showing the shape of death - the mortal wounds - without its content, he carries the marks of death and is very much alive.

This presence, is always *present-as-death-overcome*. Resurrection is a new way of being human, or a rereading of the original human story that had been obscured by death. God's affirmation of Jesus' living and dying is Resurrection. Jesus Risen did not simply reveal *information* as yet unknown, but shows a reality *as yet unseen*, being clouded by death. The Revelation is not that there is Resurrection from the dead [*this was known at the time of Maccabees*] It is not in being human that we rise from the dead, like the next step on a journey, we rise from the dead *through association with Jesus-Risen*, it is an entirely new way of being [*as Jesus told Nicodemus*]. Prior to the Resurrection, the disciples couldn't understand what he was saying or where he was leading - now they see something new about him, about God and about themselves, they saw as he always saw.

They can now re-member their memories and see what, thus far, had remained beyond sight. They read the Scriptures as preparing for and leading to what they were now witnessing. They are now able to distinguish between the human Jesus and the Spirit. In Acts the Ascension happens before the giving of the Spirit. When John tells us that *Jesus breathed on them*, he was giving them something that is his, yet not totally identical with him. John is clear that the Spirit will clarify who Jesus is; and show them how Jesus' understanding of God is entirely new. His death was not an unfortunate mistake, but was where his new way of living would take him. This new post-Resurrection understanding was the pre-Resurrection awareness of Jesus.

Their understanding, like ours, had been shaped by what Jesus was here to change: *the way we operate through rivalry, exclusion and blame*, now they see through the victim's eyes. Jesus does not see the same other that we see. For him, other is Abba, of whom he himself is the perfect image – with total equality. We see now how the Sermon on the Mount is about life lived in solidarity with the powerless, to the extent of taking on suffering in order to do so – because he is the perfect image of self-emptying God.

We are located within anger, violence and revenge and need to be set free to live gratuitously, even with our victimisers – full freedom is to be myself no matter with whom. This was not the disciple discovering new ways, but, and for the first time, seeing how Jesus actually lived; and how he can teach this new way because he was never tainted by violence. Jesus didn't want to die or be a martyr. To seek martyrdom is still to be in the grip of violence; whereas Jesus says *no one takes my life from me...* it was the sheer gratuity of Jesus' living that led the disciples to see this man, living like God. In the Prologue to John, self-giving is already present in Jesus, before any rejection.

God is known as totally without violence through Jesus surrendering himself freely to death, and we relate to this *either by complicity or through penitential solidarity*, having seen the real victim – God, and ourselves as victimisers – bringing us to a new way of being human, starting and ending in self-giving. God's eternal desire is here with us in person.

Jesus gives us his most remarkable words at the Last Supper. The Passover sets-up Israel, God calling his victim people into Covenant on Mt Sinai – *I will be your God and you will be my people...* There is now salvation among the *nations*. Jesus calls this to mind at the Last Supper – with this crucial [*literally*] difference, it is now really present in his own real presence among them. He is simultaneously total self-giving and victim; and not just for a new Israel, but a new, universal Israel; the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the way this universal Israel would follow. Not founded on the murder of Abel, or the arrogance of Babel [Gen.11].

The unity of this new way of being human cannot be tied or restricted to any single social grouping. Peter had to be pushed into his first Gentile baptism. It was at the Council of Jerusalem that the universality of Jesus' call was defined. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is not implying that the Samaritan is an anonymous Jew, but that Grace is universal. The greatest sign of this Creative Grace, is the Eucharist-based Church.

Divine self-giving cannot be confined within the limits of an established Church. The field of opportunity is universal – as when Paul speaks of *the God you call unknown* to his Greek audience. Sadly, it is true that Church members have excluded, and left people by the wayside; just as there are people outside the Church who don't hesitate to live their lives for others. To be Christian is to embody Grace in ways that are infectious and unique.

What matters is not the claim to be Christian, but whether the Christo-conformity of Grace is being lived. There is no Grace available that does not involve a turning towards the victim. Grace justifies by bringing into existence a new way of being human that doesn't seek to justify self over and against any group. Justification is by Grace through Faith. Grace makes present the self-giving of the victim *as forgiveness*, through people whose good works have nothing to do with self-justification.

Creation

In the Bible narrative we have the expelling of Adam and Eve, and the Cain and Abel story. The bible seems at variance with the Resurrection. Creation *ex nihilo* [*out of nothing*] shows God to be prior to the chaos of human victimising. The self-giving Logos reflects the self-giving Father perfectly. The self-giving of God, present in Jesus, is put into human hands that we might learn how to donate self – i.e. by seeing the end [*Resurrection*] the beginning becomes more clear, in that Christ pre-exists creation.

Jesus taught the disciples to see God differently.

S Mark shows Jesus identifying himself with God – announced at the beginning of the Gospel, confirmed at Baptism and Transfiguration, made accessible at Caesarea, acknowledged by the Centurion on Calvary. Matthew has a theological approach [*note number of references to Father – especially in Beatitudes*] – to be perfect, as is the Father. Luke pictures God's visitation as bringing to life, health to the sick, forgiveness to sinners...

Seeing Jesus as *the one you are persecuting*, has Paul insist that the Law cannot save. Both Paul and John take God's threats and rewards seriously, seeing Jesus as the promised Hope. God exhausts his threats in the death of Jesus by raising him up – 2Cor.1.19 – and again: when God made him to be sin who knew no sin – 2Cor.5.21 – shows Jesus absorbing anger without passing it on, and in so doing is Hope for all.

God is nothing else but total love, with the Son sent into the thick of human violence to be treated as victim. This makes the cross the meeting point of human violence and divine love. The Son, sent as an act of love, showing what love-present really means; the dynamic between *Father sending* and *Son arriving* is Holy Spirit. Jesus surrenders his spirit to the Father who returns it, in Resurrection and who together send the same Spirit on anyone wishing to receive it. Love is totally God; violence is the totally unredeemed human.

Whilst the Son is revealed as dependent on Father, yet is totally equal, without rivalry; we are called to live dependently, yet equal and without rivalry, which Jesus shows to be humanly possible. In contrast, the Pharisees are shown as dependent on the reputation gained from others. Who is other for me, who moves me? Jesus is moved by Abba, the same Father who chose Abraham; whereas there is a very different other moving his questioners; and the evidence of this violent other is their intent to kill. We are moved either by the other of self-giving or by the other who maintains order by expulsion and violence. Whoever draws close to Abba, moves towards the victim; *not knowing Abba* is what has us create victims.

Resurrection and Original Sin:

The formal doctrine of O Sin is not present in the apostolic witness, no more than is the doctrine of the Trinity. What is crucial for understanding God-with-us in Jesus is the real presence to the disciples of Jesus at once crucified and risen. The only reason why there is Christianity is the Resurrection. Any doctrine that cannot trace its origin to the Resurrection is

to be discarded – Gal.1.8. - *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*

The Resurrection was not a mysterious event within a pre-existing framework for understanding God, but the event by which God recast *the possibility of human awareness of God*. God blew apart former understandings of God in the birth, life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Death is a matter of complete indifference to God -Mk.12.18, which has Jesus telling the authorities *you are very much mistaken!* Any understanding of God based on death cannot even begin to know God. God's love in Jesus is totally unaffected by death; love carries on being reciprocal right through and beyond death.

We saw God as one who cannot die or come to an end, but always in the context of what does happen to us – we die. This man who was dead is alive – God loved this man.

There is no divine necessity for death – death simply is, but Resurrection shows it need not be. Death is not just a biological reality, but a sinful reality. There is both an active and passive aspect. Not only do we *suffer* death, we can also inflict it. God raised up this man we had killed, for us. Our victim is our forgiveness, since death is not just killing, but also forgiveness. We live within the inevitability of death – we live and then die.

The doctrine of Original Sin is that death is not a necessity. The presence of Jesus crucified and risen reveals that we were wrong about God and wrong about ourselves; not wrong as in mistaken, but that we were going the wrong way. Divine forgiveness makes known the accidental nature of mortality. In John 9 we read Jesus' response to who is the sinner: this man or his parents... *I have come that those who do not see may see, and those who see - become blind* – 9.39. The conversation starts with sin being the cause of his blindness, through which he is excluded. By the end sin is the act of exclusion, a changed perception, because of the Resurrection.

Sin is seen as casting out Jesus, as is every casting-out. Jesus has no problem with the so-called sin of being blind, nor with the adulteress, only with *those who seek to exclude them*. He is pointing out that sin is the mechanism of exclusion – sin is not why there is exclusion but *the exclusion itself*. Blind from birth goes to the original aspect of sin, back to human birth in the very beginning. Jesus is presented as the Light of the world. We are all blind, but blindness is compounded by complicity in the excluding; now blindness becomes culpable. Jesus is forgiveness of sin, holiness and righteousness is love made flesh in the circumstances of being victim. My first awareness of my sin [*not just awareness of evil*] comes through recognising my complicity. Being wrong is not the issue, being wrong can be put right, it is the insistence that we are right that shackles us in original sin.

In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul focuses on the righteousness of God. Wrath is not vengeance in God, rather is it *the handing over of God*, God's non-resistance to human evil, the handing over of the Son and our killing him. Law provides knowledge of sin, and rather than being salvific is immersed in the world of mutual judgement and recrimination. *Law increases sin*, is death-dealing, whereas Resurrection means new life in Grace comes through righteousness.

Sin is forgiven through faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The Law is problematic in presuming that people are justified through knowing good and evil. Not only

does law not allow us to become just, but locks us into judgemental attitudes as *those who know themselves to be saved*. The death of Jesus shows how sin is compounded by law. Christ is the end of the Law, *that everyone might be justified who has faith...* Rom.10.4. The Law achieved its purpose in Jesus' death. Universal sin is linked with death: *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...* Rom.5.12. Death was not invented by law, because sin was present pre-Law from Adam to Moses.

Identifying himself as Bread of Life – satisfying all hunger, scandalised many of his disciples and drove them away from him; and the few who were not scandalised by his life – as bread to be eaten – will certainly be by his death, only remedied by the Resurrection. The insurmountable obstacle is the human impossibility of a self-emptying of the kind that takes power away from death. The disciples follow him in his healing and preaching, but were unable to follow him in his dying until after the Resurrection when death had been emptied out. He prepares them to be witnesses to his death, saying they will be scandalised at his dying. *The scandal is the need to blame and exclude* – the work of what John calls the flesh, whereas the Spirit makes one of many, creating discipleship in the new way of being human.

The evil in unredeemed desire is far deeper than the law could engender – which is why we are told that anger - murder; and lust – adultery, need forgiveness, not exclusion. We need to learn *to desire without the need to compete*, blame or measure ourselves against. We need to be free, to relish good wherever it is found – but who decides what is good?

In the Genesis allegory God gave a prohibition for our protection – which we have consistently ignored – not to eat of the tree whose fruit is knowledge of good and evil. Seeing something withheld from us led to rivalry and envy – we'll show him – we'll do it our way. Paul tells us that the Law is not sinful – Rom.7.7. – *I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the command came sin sprang into life and I died*. Paul sees the Serpent not as the Devil but as sin. Desire is a gift of God, but not when distorted by envy. We have victimised the Law making it an instrument of redemptive violence, yet not redeeming anything, and locking ourselves within the shadow of death.

Desire turned to envy making what should have been the irenic way, the sphere of rivalry, envy and exclusion. Now all life is infected [*universality of Original Sin*] by such distorted desire – *they saw that they were naked* – all this through ignoring that the prohibition that was there to ensure our well-being.

It is my awareness of me as "I" that results from knowing other than me. Paul insists that it is Faith that allows us access to desire redemption, to desire in ways that owe nothing to envious rivalry. Sin means my "I" is not in control, but is itself controlled by distorted desire. What is needed is the way of living that Paul describes as: *It is no longer I but Christ living in me* – Gal.2.20.

We emerged into life at peace with God, grateful gift receivers, able to love and dwell within creation without rivalries or exclusions. Then free desire became distorted through envy – desiring the forbidden fruit – Eve, creation, even God became rivals for Adam. It is the work of the Spirit – Rom.5.1. – to bring to us the new way of living in the likeness of Christ; fashioning the "I" anew. As Jesus told Nicodemus – we must be born into a new way – not going back and starting again. – Jn.3.3. Death was seen as an extrinsic punishment for sin –

we all sin, we all die! Death and sin *are* connected – distorted desire cannot bring life, since only God is life!

Devil

In the popular mind, through Genesis, death is linked to Original Sin. In New Testament the only role the Devil has is one in the process of being defeated – Lk.10.18; Col.2.15; Jn.12.31. Jesus' free and total self-giving has overcome the power of the world. This is no abstract concept, but the way Jesus lived through and absorbed the onslaught of violence, injustice, persecution and death, he faced it full-on, without passing it on; and the Resurrection is what happened. Crucifying Jesus led to the power of the world being lost forever.

When Peter's protest resulted in get behind me Satan Jesus was not talking about Satan possessing Peter, rather that the way of the world distorted what Peter thought to be virtuous – *Jesus mustn't put himself in danger*. This reaction was an obstacle in the way of universal salvation. See this also in the negative impact in the Temptations, how humanness allows itself to be subverted, trying to undermine Jesus' self-confidence by getting him to feel he lacks something.

With the simple question can Satan cast out Satan – Mt.12.22; Mk.3.22, Lk.11.14.- Jesus takes us to the very foundation of human community – telling us that when human culture walks that way we are destined for self-destruction – the ways of violent exclusion, founded on "we" are themselves divided... By contrast, through complete self-giving, Jesus is present in every aspect – presence, words, actions – he lays the foundation for genuine human belonging in the image of God. It is the way of the self-giving victim and not the direct and deliberate excluding of victims. But what awareness of this did he have before the Resurrection?

Original Sin and the Church

Is Church simply a theological construct, or does it have its own anthropology? In Ex.7-10 we have the conflict between Aaron and the Court Magicians [*10 plagues*]. After each plague the magicians produce similar effects. But when Aaron produces gnats, this is too much and the magicians say this is the finger of God. This is no one-upmanship but indicative of the presence of God.

Israelites see God setting them free to become the people who will be an example to the whole world; the Egyptians see nuisances disrupting the established order. When Jesus is accused of using Beelzebub he sees his accusers as latter day Egyptians, seeing Jesus as a nuisance. The real sign of the presence of God, for Jesus, as for Moses and Aaron is the sign of God's people being founded. This is something far deeper than simple confrontation. Satan's kingdom is built on division and exclusion [*which many Institutions still do – including the Church as Pope Francis reminds us*].

The new people will be the undoing of world structures founded on division, exclusion and self-destruction. It is Jesus' self-giving that establishes the new way: *he who is not with me scatters* [*divides, excludes, blames*]. He is not reforming Israel but introducing an entirely

new way. God, whom Jesus claims to be Abba, is the rock foundation of Israel. Simon becomes the new rock once he has ceased to be a stumbling block.

When S John speaks of the vine he is showing how Jesus' way works. The alternative to being grafted onto is to be cut off. In the Genesis story of Babel 11.1.- the word scatter appears three times. In Lk.11.23. it is God who founds and we who scatter; as with the people of Babel whose own foundational order scatters, so too do we if we are apart from the vine who is Christ.

Jesus' Foundational Order

Now we can see what is cut away once we are grafted onto the Vine [*Original Sin*]. Jesus sought a people of undistorted desire, to be with him, even to see his death, to be his witnesses of what was to come – living evidence of the way of self-giving. They receive a new identity, one that knows no rivalry, no envy; no grasping onto what is mine, but as gift from the one self-giving victim. Our natural state is shot through with distorted desire, making us incapable of receiving our identity gratuitously offered by another, preferring the way of rivalry and exclusions – which makes of our best intentions at gathering a scattering. This brings conflict between the individual and the social, identity building using the *over against* methodology, I'm me because I'm not you. There will be no fraternity where there are designated roles for those who are in and those who are out.

The New Way enables fraternity *through the healing of desire...* when the group is able to love beyond the reaches of rivalry. This happens only through the *many being made one* in the self-giving victim, becoming totally free to be fully alive. Our unredeemed self is in constant need of self-justification attempted through comparison and rivalry - *thank God I'm not like the rest*. It is of the essence of our new identity that it be received as gift, not a self-construct and cannot be grabbed, only received. Our unredeemed state sees Original Sin as our way of coping with evil, by blaming someone else – Adam, the Serpent, Eve... which becomes an excuse for not overcoming evil.

Jesus shows that Original Sin is not of our essence, it is simply evidence of a faulty foundational principle [*way of life*]. Paradoxically, what Jesus was founding was subversion of the notion founding – in the sense of achieving identity by contrasting with others. His way is totally gratuitous in every way... something that existed long before our capacity for distorting desire ever happened. Before Original Sin there is Original Grace.

All four Gospels assert that Jesus must suffer – because our accepted human ways are death-dealing for the self-giving victim – and only through fidelity to this total self-giving will the human order be freed from necessary death. The People of God are without the trappings of selfishness and exclusions – symbolised by God bringing them out of Egypt. When human ordering tends to mask original murder [*Cain*] by substituting animal victims, Israel faced ambiguity; accepting sacrifice as obligatory; and so, seeing pacific relationships as preferable to sacrifice [*via Prophets*].

At the last Supper Jesus clearly substitutes human for animal sacrifice, *uncovering the victim state as basic to all human gatherings*. He delivers us from being in thrall [*controlled*] to death by his freely giving himself into the consequences of human ways; in effect the murder basis common to all societies. By doing this he opens up the new way, one that knows

nothing of death. He brought together a people who will live the Tradition in new ways, thus fulfilling and completing the Law. Based on individual conversion, this people will be constantly engaged in making the particular universal.

The tragedy of Original Sin is not that it is universal, in the universality of the new people we discover what is *possible* for "I" – it can be enabled to move from the universal to the particular; conversion requires recognition of our equality as the foundation of human dignity; unity in diversity, equal but not the same. Original Sin is what we are leaving behind when we take new life seriously. We realise the reality of Original Sin through those who have been set free from it.

Conservative views see Original Sin as a universal infection [*true*] as our foundational reality. This means that political life means managing people seen as self-centred; making competitive rivalry a social virtue. This fails to see Original Sin as a present reality needing to make way for the new way of being human – the overcoming of histories of oppressive inequality... through forgiveness, the real foundation of Christian living.

Is denunciation of evil a good thing, or simply a pathetic consequence of our efforts to bring about a plan for living? Seeing denunciation positively as a way to foster belonging by removing exclusions in the manner of forgiveness? A group brought together by conflict will live by conflict. This is why the Christian way can never be anti, since the essence of anti is over-against. Christian living is a call to be prolife at every level.

Trinity – Creation – OS

In Jn.14 onwards we see Jesus aware of God as his Abba, and his total desire is to give this to all who would receive it; not a new revelation so much as bringing it about universally. This has always been the desire of God. He tells the disciples not to be worried about his impending death, since faith in God is a reality beyond the reach of death.

There is nothing in God determined by the monotony of necessity, nor being in any way dependent on death or the fruits of death. *In my Father's house there are many rooms...* there is creative diversity. God is not simply beyond the reach of death – a monotonous concept if only applied to God – God has nothing whatever to do with death, and everything to do with us. *I am going to prepare a place for you...* is not just going ahead to open the door for us to get in. Focus on I am going... into his self-giving through death – this is his going to the Father and at the same time preparing a place for us. It is the opening up of God as Abba *to be the experience of everyone*; something that could not happen until something had happened to our experience of death.

I am the way, the truth, the life... through self-giving himself to death comes about the universal experience of Abba, that knows nothing of death. Several times Jesus insists he is doing the work of the Father – even on the Sabbath: *The Father goes on working and so do I...* bringing creation to its fulfilment. The Sabbath for S John is a symbol of *Creation interrupted*, its observance makes us unable to continue the work of the Father. Jesus is not bringing something by some extrinsic divine intervention, it is a reality that we ourselves are about, the divine fulfilment of Creation by the new way we live in it.

...you will do even greater things... Jn.14.12. means that Jesus' going to the Father opens the possibility for those who believe him to be where he is. We will be more creative than Jesus – I go to the Father.. whereas we, because of this, can enter into ways as yet unheard of – to live in a deathless creation. *Whatever you ask in my name...* in as much as we are one with him we will bring about this universal divine paternity.

We are one with him by sharing his priorities – to do the work of the Father, and to do this through following the way of self-giving love, without exception. On Calvary Jesus explicitly hands over his Spirit to the Father to be given to all who would receive it. In electing to be part of this the disciples will see him through this new sensitivity which calls for self-giving – in as much as you do this... It is in being faithful to this new way that the divine sonship of Jesus is experienced through knowing God as Abba and ourselves as the beloved of Abba.

The Spirit sent in Jesus' name means the bringing about of the presence of Jesus wherever there is what is exemplified by the way God comes into our world – *a helpless child clinging to a human breast*. It is in being aware of this and moving towards it that is the real presence – where he promised to be. The Spirit is not a stand-in for Jesus, rather is it the energy that prompted Jesus' living, dying and rising, being available to anyone willing to receive it. Doing this in memory of him is not a substitute for his absence, but making available his creative energy here and now. This is the peace the world cannot give; because it is focussed on conflict, exclusion and suppression, for even the resolution of conflict is conflict based. Jesus brings that primordial peace which is within the Creator from the beginning.

We should be happy that he is going to the Father – as he told us to be. He is not leaving us to go to something bigger and better, but by following the way he goes we will do even greater things. His going to the Father creates belief that he is taking us with him, now as the place where we belong; not access to truths but life eternally expanding: *It is the Father's will that everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life* – Jn.6.40. It is access to God beyond death that allows for the reordering of life.

Jesus goes through death, incarnating the love death cannot touch; going into death to create faith – the hypnotic attraction of supreme goodness. This means living as if death isn't there – not denial, *but with death included* my life story has no end. Jesus' dying and rising makes this happen; growth in new life is co-terminus with the self-giving of the victim. Not knowing the Father confines us within the parameters of birth and death. Any kind of victimising, blaming, excluding is death-dealing.

This shows the reality of sin. John identifies two kinds of desire – hatred and love. Hatred is rivalistic living – *I'm right, everybody else is wrong...* Love affirms through self-giving to the other, no matter who the other happens to be! Jesus removed the barriers that left creation unfinished. Ignorance of this is not overcome by getting new information. The evil spirits had correct information about who Jesus was. In going to the Father Jesus introduces the new way of living – by donating his spirit – *Into your hands...* the Father is now free to give this spirit to whoever will receive it.

This is not a divine decree made universal, but an offer for individual living that puts an end to death being the end. By his living and dying Jesus opens up access to the Spirit as a human experience so as to make the Incarnation an ongoing presence. The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, and uncovers lying and dissembling – above all the supreme lie that it is always

necessary for the victim to die. Jesus' going to his death instilled fear in the disciples, but like a woman in travail brings forth new life, he brings life that knows nothing of death. This is why they ask nothing of him, but of the Father, who brings Christ to birth through the Spirit.

Paul sees creation bonded to decay purposely so that the new order could be established. The first fruits of the Spirit are what lead us to experience God as Abba – Rom.8.26. This new way is identical with God's intent for the whole Creation; the possibility of human imagination in Jesus Christ to bring this about by being in no way touched by death. John is convinced that the Son of God walked this earth, lived our full human experience, and died our death with all the creative freedom of God. Moreover, *he did it in such a way as it is possible for us to do the same, leading us out of the closed circle of death.*

The originally *intended man* came among us in no way determined by the culture of death, with the express purpose of making this possible for everyone. John insists that God is not just Jesus' Father. Jesus' identity is totally in the Father, and brought into being in a specific way, the perfect imitation of the Father by the Son now in human form. Being totally free from rivalry, the Son is able to let Abba's love flow through and out in its totality, a love completely deathless brought about by his own liberating death on the cross. Jesus is totally dependent on Abba without any appropriation by comparing himself over against.

This is why he asserts that what he does, only the Father can do, never claiming them as his own. His questioners cannot understand this, precisely because they receive their identity from each other, not seeking the glory that comes from God. It is because they are locked into receiving identity in this rivalistic way that they cannot know true peace which comes only from God – *a peace the world cannot give... Jn.14.27.*

In receiving all from the Father Jesus makes the Father present by being fully himself, the person of his word accepting whatever is asked of him to make the Father's love known – even death on a cross. In our rivalistic living, desire is always according to the desire of another, which eventually leads to rivalry when the desired object becomes obstacle. The relationship between Father and Son is the total inverse of this. But desire does not properly describe this because desire implies a lack of something. The self-giving between Father and Son is the fact that they are equal though not the same, one in creative diversity – the Holy Spirit. Where two enjoy their equality is because they produce diversity among themselves as an independent reality – Holy Spirit.

This has nothing of necessity about it, nor does it compel them to create; the complete interpenetration and diversity is infinitely beyond any creative possibility, which makes creation totally gratuitous. The humanity of Christ is the creative presence of eternal generation of the Son. Jesus' self-giving into death is the image of the total self-giving between Father and Son bringing forth the Spirit. Living his life even through death is the sending of the Spirit to anyone open to receive. This means that humanness is now part of the creative diversity proper only to God, and this at the level of equality.

Gratuity is crucial – that it is received totally as gift... Sadly, we chose to create our own identity – we did it our way which has resulted in rivalistic and death-dealing competitiveness. In a sense this is always a possibility, since gratuity must imply choice – to say yes or no. Though it was not necessary for this to happen, necessity is born only when appropriation is preferred to a gift-received identity. Such is Original Sin. The Incarnation

makes possible the recovery of Original Grace which precedes Original Sin; we can recover our God-intended identity by receiving it as gift.

Revelation and Creation are not independent realities, showing us the need to celebrate and enjoy creatureliness. Jesus is the original man – in that he is the first to openly receive all from God. He was able to imagine creatively, with nothing of self intruding, becoming truly totally of God – *I and the Father are one*. This mutuality between Father and Son fully present in Jesus is the sending of the Spirit – completed when Jesus lives through death. *It is accomplished* means the human story is now complete – I hand it to you to give it freely.

Life in the Spirit of God is now possible for all humanity because it has been fully lived by one human being. Original Sin means that we are not yet proper creatures because it denies the necessary gratuity of our being. Jesus makes real what creatureliness is all about. *Original Sin is not that I put on disordered desire, but that I am less than what creature means*. Salvation is more about receiving humanity than divinity; since *it is through being genuinely human that we are open to being gifted with divine living*.

This is not implying that creatureliness is a negative. Everything created is able to bear witness to its origin; and this can be seen when even the total goodness surrounding us is distorted by appropriation. There is at once within us God's total gratuity, and the stunted vanity that seeks to get for oneself; so that even our flawed and sterile vanity can still show evidence of God – through absence as well as presence.

To see evil as the product of sin will cause problems. Evil is not the product of sin – but of goodness. It is the bringing to be of the good that produces evil. In our desire to produce for ourselves the New Jerusalem we have created a backwash of discarded and excluded people. Jesus' going about doing good was extremely limited. He didn't heal everyone. He sought a new creation that would ensure that doing good would not expire within the partial and the partisan. It is his free movement into death that inaugurates deathless living.

Purely human efforts seem to produce evil, all the while seeking the good – witness the hostility to peace movements; the inability of a world power like UN to attain world peace; Divine creativity is not available within the world that disowns its Maker. When it was introduced by Jesus, it had to be got rid of – on Calvary. Divine creativity is universal forgiveness. Such forgiveness is not about those moments when we either feel the need to forgive or to seek forgiveness, but is foundational for an entirely new way of living.

Such living focuses on the rejects, the excluded from every day good living – whose being has been emptied of any possibility of becoming, *because they don't fit*. The Risen Jesus is present as forgiveness; telling us that Resurrection is a flesh and blood reality, and does not belong in the ethereal realm of spirits. All because Jesus, through the Spirit of God, lived a full human life, died a human death and is alive in a new way of living.

Obstacles

The sour fruits of Original Sin persist, even after Baptism – we still have a leaning towards sinfulness, though Baptism enables us to be successful in resisting – not in a way that means constant battling, but being made able to see goodness for what it really is; and to discover real freedom through actively searching for it. Original Sin locks us into myopic living with an

active aversion to ways that are not ours. This means that life, culture, history and tradition are shot through with self-seeking and disordered desire.

Being led by the way the world desires is not sinful, but a condition that can give way to being led by the Spirit of real life. We are pre-formed by the world's desiring, but re-formed by creaturely creativeness gifted to us through Jesus Christ. All levels of humanity – will, intellect, sexuality, emotions, sense of time and memory... have been distorted through being grounded in the culture of death. Just as the suffering and death of Jesus reveals the cost of making the transition, now it is Hope grounded in the newly given way of imagining, that fires up the desire for the something more promise in Hebrews. This real struggle is aptly expressed: How is it that I cannot do what I would want to do...? – Rom.7.15. He answers his own question when he writes: thanks-be to God, Jesus Christ. Distortion is, at every level of our desiring, yet it is capable of remembering Original Grace! It is the gift of being able to be opened up to God's gratuity of deathless living that is the foundation of Hope – is not yet, but can be for me.

If concupiscence [*disordered desire*] is a human condition, then no amount of Law-making will be of benefit, since Law-making itself is caught-up in it; far from being the remedy it is part of the problem. It is only within the panorama of *what could be* rather than what is, that we tend towards a true perspective; something gifted to us through creative imagining. This is why S Paul says, because of Baptism we are different, and can behave differently – exposing us to the deathless reality of God as an invitation.

This gift is new desiring through willingly letting my imagining to be guided by goodness, without taint of any death-dealing influences. Grace has a priority over Law; because we are gifted with some things, we can do without other things – not the inverse – to do without in order to get! Our prior attraction to good is triggered into consciousness by the variety of experiences of goodness in everyday living; far more attractive than trying to combat the negative head-on, it is to be open to the lure of goodness.

Why does Jesus select children as the model of adult behaviour? When the disciples were at loggerheads over who was the greatest, he points to a child; and later rebukes them for keeping children away from him; not that children are always innocent, but that their motivation is less complex: they know what they want and go for it. Jesus taught in terms of reward, without any hint of embarrassment – we are doing something to receive something – indeed it is living consciously within the tension between desire and achievement that is enlivening.

The prompting for this is the personal enjoyment of freedom. S Francis was deliberately led among people he couldn't stand, not simply because no one should be excluded, but because there was this area of unfreedom within him – and *God is praised when we are fully alive!* Evangelisation is necessary not so that all may appreciate the Catholic Faith, but to become more and more aware of the infinite generosity of God. We must preach God, not just Church!

Life is not like waiting in the departure lounge at Heathrow to escape up there, but to have our eyes opened to what is really down here. Hope is destroyed not by ruining it but by having it realised! Once we achieve what we set out for – what then? We must strive beyond our reach; this is the only way we can live with hope that knows no end, as mortals destined

for immortality. The thief uses sleight of hand for purposes other than theft; just as the gift of communication is to enable others to live well, and not to put them down or keep them in their place. Walking in the light is not shunning darkness, but to show what living really is, able to awaken desire in others.

Gnosticism sees Jesus as a heavenly messenger, come to help us escape from history, Salvation is essentially historical, not only in its coming about, but also in the ways we get involved with it. There is no such thing as a universal secular history – simply a profusion of histories constructed by people giving a shape to life by the way they actually live it. Salvation essentially empowers all who have been emptied of meaning by purely secular values. Christ Risen is the risen victim, not by passive endurance but through eminently active forgiveness. What does this do to secular history? History becomes holy *through practical charity* – through presenting the reality of the victim by those set free from the fear of death through Jesus Risen.

It is the forgiveness of the dead and risen victim that brings theology and anthropology together, when the self-giving of God on Calvary is one and the same self-giving God in Creation. The change that comes about is to see the victim glorified and no longer annihilated – the same victim. To understand Original Sin is to appreciate both the difference and the continuity here. The presence of the forgiving victim transforms us into transformers! It is this transformation that changes concupiscence, disordered desire, into an ordering for the well-being of others [*seen in S Francis embrace of voluntary poverty*].

Symbol of Original Sin

Jesus' risen presence to the disciples brought new awareness of a deathless God, who relates creatively. Original Sin well describes the opposing of *the coming to be* of the New Creation – the new way of living that sets us free to become truly self-giving. When the Church says that Jesus and Mary are without disordered desire [*II Constantinople 553*] it is saying they are both, in different ways, presenting a new way of living; and that resistance to this good work was external to them, not internal as with us. They are not complicit in promoting the old way.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus make all this change of perception possible [*from Yahweh to Abba*]. The flawed view that saw human beings offending – God punishing – and because the offence was against the infinite, so must the recompense also be. We live guilty lives and death as our punishment. Whereas, Salvation is historical, through which human beings move from one way of living to another, actively participating in the way God lives a human life. When human history evolved into human culture it was in contrast to this new way. Paul insists all have sinned, not so much stressing the universality of sin, but the uniqueness of what had happened through Jesus. There is a history of Original Sin, the futility within every human culture.

Salvation is the giving of an entirely new way; of a deathless and creative relationship with and at the invitation of Abba. This means that the old way cannot have been of the essence of humanness; Original Sin cannot be linked to Biology or Nature – Cain did not have to kill his brother; this is made clear. Futility belongs to human history, the way we actually live, not the way we have to live. It is not necessary. To accept this is to say that Original Sin as co-

terminus with human culture is an historical fact. The Salvation offered is equally co-terminus.

So – what is the historical fact that started all this? The universality of sin must have had a starting point. No one's salvation depends on our ability to do something about it. Strictly speaking, we don't need to know the actual how for salvation to be effective, simply that it is there. Even if we could pinpoint the actual event it doesn't affect our understanding of Salvation. Actually, searching for a cause is not far removed from finding someone to blame, which runs contrary to the ethos of salvation.

S Luke presents with *the blind leading the blind* – 6.39 – *impossible to remove the speck without first removing the beam*. There are two ways to approach the other: unaware of my own complicity; and identifying the obstacle in myself first, accepting similarity the groundwork for a relationship. Traditional understanding of Original Sin is locked into the former – Adam and Eve to blame, Jesus the solution. We accept they were like us, on a journey. It is not how Adam's sin affects us, but how Christ's forgiveness affects Adam. Our first parents needed the love that we need. We are not trying to find a cause of Original Sin, but what happens now that Jesus has brought this new way. We cannot be forgiven for an accident – seeing Original Sin as a consequence of someone else's mistake. *We can only be forgiven for what we have done or failed to do*. We can't know what it was like to be human before Original Sin.

Jesus' self-giving into death is seen positively through the eyes of Apostolic witnesses to the Resurrection. It is seen as undoing Adam's attempt to divinise himself – Rom. 5–7; Phil.2. – undoing the order based on fratricide: - Jn.3. *No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother* - 1Jn.3. Baptism into Jesus' saving death is behind the story of Noah's Ark – 1Pet.3.20. and Christ gathering after the scattering of Babel – Acts.2.

Genesis 3 shows Original Sin to be the product of disordered desire – something becomes desirable because it belongs to another. Desire becomes rivalry, with the other being seen as a threat. Good and evil were defined not in terms of God but by appropriation – self is not seen as given, but as something to be self-constructed; thus began the ethos of judging over against – the exclusion from gratuitous receiving of self.

For the Hebrew, Salvation is via the Torah, and it is S Paul who shows the error in this. Christ's salvation dispenses with Law as norm, and would have us pre-empt prohibition [*forbidden fruit*] by reminding us that in the beginning there is Person, not Law. God desires us to see each other as unique yet belonging, able to relate in irenic imitation rather than aggressive rivalry. Sins against God are in fact sins against self and other than self – those intensely and uniquely desired by God [*Cain and Abel* - Gen.4.]

Cain did not have to kill. An unnecessary act of fratricide instigates a culture of violence, with God stepping in to establish peace, portrayed as the Avenger. This was not just a one-off happening; the text says he became fearful of what others might do to him because of this. Christ's killing was not a solo happening either. For John, Cain is the collective symbol for

Christ's murder – Jn.8; and Paul sees the Law as canonising violence – the way he persecuted Christians.

Science

Evolution is not, in itself contrary to Revelation; sadly, the Church did attempt to subject Science to the demands of Orthodoxy. Theology is social theory from the perspective of Revelation. What actually happened to cause the change from pre-Original Sin to post-Original Sin?

Christianity has every right to state its version of what happened. It has an important factual statement – the non-necessity of such an event; the involvement with death in the area of desire, that such a happening must include [*to reject life leaves only death*].

Why bother with the Doctrine of Original Sin? How would the average Christian be affected if the Church suspended belief in this doctrine? Chalcedon defined Original Sin as a consequence of the impact of the Resurrection on our understanding of God and of ourselves. Chalcedon or not, this issue would have had to be faced.

God is totally willing to become as we are, in order to bring us back to intimacy. Original Sin is not an accusation against humanity. We have no available explanation of sin and evil; we do have a revelation of Salvation – *to know God as Abba through Jesus as brother*. There is no universal understanding of evil [*or indeed of good*]. It is the competing of human traditions that shapes different visions of good and evil.

We have a starting point: the historical fact of the Resurrection of a murdered man is key to the new creation. This sheds light on evil by showing us what we are leaving behind when we seek to embrace the new way. Lot's wife turned to see what she was leaving behind! This tells us that it is not for theology simply to speculate, but *to enter into the experience of leaving*; we are on the way out – it is a journey, not a theory.

Evil and sin sheltered under a cloud of vagueness prior to the Resurrection. Experiencing the forgiveness of sin gives us an awareness of what sin is. Any and every understanding of sin and evil that doesn't issue from the experience of them being forgiven will be suspect.

Surely, we instinctively know that rape, murder... are wrong; and we don't need forgiveness to tell us? Understanding evil is not a matter of being well informed, but *arises out of being human*. Does this awareness come from being accused or from being forgiven? S Luke tells us that the way of accusation fosters blindness, whereas forgiveness helps us see.

Church Teaching

Human awareness of death as we know it is not willed by God, and in that sense is not natural, as this would mean that Christ's death has not redeemed death. Death as we know it is a reality in need of redemption. We cannot save ourselves, we are other dependent. The whole human being is involved in sin, which is not an infection, but arising from within. With the Incarnation we now have the possibility for the whole human being to become better.

The Resurrection reveals we are all in a parlous state of spiritual death, and subject to a bodily death not willed by God. Trent is not here referring to Adam's sin as foundational, but to Salvation in Jesus. It stresses there is no way out of this parlous state other than by Grace; and that normal access to this gift is Baptism. Original Sin cannot be understood as a sole individual act that infects the rest of us. Our collective collusion in death-dealing, revealed in the Resurrection, has an historical origin.

Pelagius advocated a situation in which each one of us freely chooses to sin or not [*and so no need for Christ*]. Augustine saw the biological act of procreation as sinful, which meant every conception is flawed, thus is Original Sin universal. Trent did not agree, seeking to exclude any morally neutral moment in any human life.

From the beginning – without being intrinsically evil [*Manichaeism*] – we are pre-involved in sin. There is no such reality as a purely natural human being. It is not that we are first a natural reality and then a cultural reality. From the beginning all humans are cultural. In promoting infant Baptism, Trent stresses that there is no one who possess the new way *as of themselves*.

Pelagius sought to make salvation unnecessary; Luther says a real human salvation is not possible. Pelagius would make Grace redundant by stressing merit; Luther stresses Grace enough to make merit impossible. There is only one life story.

It is not a bad thing for us to be infected by another [*concupiscence – disordered desiring*]; the problem arises through the distortion of concupiscence, which takes time and effort to address. Being constituted by another is part of the process of being human – the key issue is the nature of the relationship and which other?

Rom.5.19 - *For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*

This obedience is not doing what I'm told, but living as God foresaw it. We should not interpret Genesis 3.3. as Adam's *refusal* to go along with what God asked - *You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die*, but as showing love as the intended way of human living, and so able to become one with the divine. It is such obedience in Christ that highlights Adam's disobedience, not vice versa.

Catholic faith is that the human soul is created directly by God. As there is no human involvement in living the divine life [*the gifted creation of the soul*] *we will need to be shown* what living in love means, love that is totally God-given. This new way is the total self-giving of Jesus, to death and Resurrection, as forgiving victim.

We are invited to share intimacy with God. Creation is not complete in any of us until we are freely involved in the life of the Other. God has never repented of the desire to invite matter into intimacy; even though we have distorted material living through selfish appropriation: man created good, sinned, and so needs redemption.

Pelagians say man is born healthy, and needs no doctor, Manichaeans say man is essentially evil and cannot be redeemed. Augustine says our origin is not important, but our destiny is; as long as we confess our absolute need for salvation, all will be well. Augustine maintained

that suffering comes through involvement with sin, even as infants, but this makes Jesus a sinner, because he suffered: Christ was made sin for us – 2Cor.5.21. Punishment for sin *is self-inflicted*, not done by God.

Reason can know about God, and about good should be done; but has been so distorted by Original Sin that we need the help of Revelation to reach truth.

Who decides what is good? Original Sin means human culture was born from and seeks to maintain itself from a lie. The lie is revealed in the death and Resurrection of Jesus:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

1Cor.2.6-8.

We don't need to have ceased to be the animal we are to see the lie for ourselves; we are capable of recognising that we are wrong. The Mystery of Christ shows us what we were and what we can be.

The Resurrection shows we are now able to receive the creative imagining that is in Jesus; capable of following a *modus vivendi*, one that owes nothing to death, envy or exclusion. There is no Master Plan. We start with small beginnings [*yeast and mustard seed*]. It can be seen as a Master Plan in as much as all our victim stories point to *the Victim*.

The idea of a way of life that owes nothing to creating victims makes sense. It starts from where we are, with our need to be evangelised, *able to notice the poor man at the door, to be proactive in addressing this*.

This means exposing the lies which lead to victimising and exclusions. Good for all requires unremitting attention. This can only be sustained by emptying power of its terrifying potential. *Since the crucifixion redeemed even death itself, it is well suited for the redemption of politics*. This is an anthropology in which *the natural* enjoys autonomy within the supernatural – the lamb at once slain and risen.

That there is evil in all of us is beyond question, but what its actual source is we don't know; and this is why the significance of death remains obscure. The crucifixion helps us here, showing us that death is not just a consequence of evil, but evil can also cause it; through faith we gain insight as to the origin of evil: – a paradox, in contemplating the cross, I become aware that as a crucifier of Christ I am, at the same time, loved and cherished by God, through him!

Evil is not localised in us – is diffused; saturates every aspect of our way of being human. The crucifix shows the crucifiers as the cause, a reminder of the consequence. All of us alike, are crucifiers of victims *who are not evil*. We experience evil as a *climate* in our world, to which we all contribute in crucifixion. Because the victim is sinless, as is Christ, we know at one and the same time, our worst and our best: I am a crucifier, and I am totally accepted by God.

This *climate* is active within us, we kill in ourselves and in each other; and so death, normally regarded as a symbol, becomes the visible evidence of evil. It is how God's love shines – that

extraordinary love that highlights our evil, and yet leaves us in no doubt that we are loved. We experience *love* when we contemplate the crucified; and this, because the extent of evil's action has been obeyed *to the letter* – we can experience the plunging of the spear into his side as opening-up for us the spring of his new way of being human.

Our faith is that Christ is – *way, truth and life* – our way to God. Our experience can tell us that there is another way, other than formulating and contemplating these truths. First – becoming convinced that God's love is all-pervasive and totally inclusive; that evil in me is real and extensive, and that there is no way I can experience myself as accepted by God without the presence in me of another reality.

God's love is willing to meet my evil. This reality of the Cross, regarded by God precisely to show how much I am loved and cherished. To be convinced of my acceptance I need to experience being accepted at my crucifying worst. God shows me to myself as worse than I ever imagined – crucifier of the totally sinless one; this is to leave no further room for doubt that I am totally loved and cherished.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the meeting between God and evil that is way beyond the reach of reason – [*why did God choose crucifixion and not simply draw good out unintended evil?*]. This *experiencing Christ* is a movement, not from Christ to Abba, but from Abba to what is human at its best – Christ victim, enduring human at its worst – the crucifiers.

Paul never knew Jesus prior to Damascus road – but he knew what is involved in wrestling with sin; and he resisted with all his might the awareness of a God who could undercut this with an all embracing love. Jesus knew what he was going through –

We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad.

Acts.26.14.

Only with my sin could God get through to me!

This shows the Incarnation, not simply as the descent of God into Mary's womb, *but shows God being in us. Christ is our way to the Father only because he is the Father's way to us.* What is visible in Christ is God's touch, reaching into our depths where sin defines us – only God can reach in there; his touch flows through us as the wonder of the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection. The forgiveness of sin.

We are natural optimists – always seeking to improve our experience of life. In this positive way we come across a God who loves us, who will help us in our daily struggles. God accepts what we see and stays with us while we slowly turn and face the real chaos of our living – a chaos that has a name – sin.

When we praise God, sin doesn't contradict, but goes underground to continue to belie our belief in God's love. God's presence is that this love is true.

When God's love and my own flourishing refuse to coincide – God's presence lets me see my real self, when they do coincide. I am still embedded as a crucifier in my world – and it is here that we see the wonder of blood being shed, as God's total acceptance through forgiveness.

It is now that Christ becomes Jesus on the cross; sending us to create history backwards – down through Jesus' life to his virgin-birth. I am the crucifier of this life, he is the crucified who is present with me through all this. Till I slowly accept my new and acceptable self, one with him – the transition from the one who crucifies, to one *nailed to the cross with him*, made possible through the invitation to see my real self in his face.

God uses the crucifixion to show me that, at my very worst, a crucifier, I am totally desired and acceptable. Evil brought to its essential self-expression succumbs to the love of God; it is embraced within the love that is all-inclusive. *This* is the definitive sign of God's all-accepting love, because it is the last that evil can do. The way things are in me, is sin actively crucifying the sinless. The cross reverses this – the victim giving new life to me, the crucifier.

We have to have God come into us as we are, taking our shape of sin – *he has been made sin for us* – to make our sin work our salvation. What sin is in itself is seen in the crucified – embraced by Christ crucified, is forgiveness. What is it about me, my humanness, that God sees as his glory, asks Irenaeus? Neglecting God in favour of self, making crucifixion very real?

What is real to me, is a sinless man, crucified on a hill in which I am totally complicit; what is *really real* is this act of crucifixion is expressly showing God's unswerving love for me in total acceptance.

As long as I am living in this world, my life I experience the tension between this mystery of evil and its redemption – *I experience myself as crucifier and crucified*, that because of the cross, my sin becomes my redemption. It is in embracing my sin that God gets through to me – loving me at my very worst [*as Christ crucified*] removing all possible doubt that I am truly lovable.

We all have hopes, dreams and desires to make life better for ourselves – yet the evidence is that we really do not believe in ourselves – there is a kind of death-wish, even in the good times. Not only do I know I will die – I let this persuade me that all my best efforts are ultimately in vain.

This is not just a failing – it is a resistance against the invitation to become fully alive. This is the mystery of evil – the inability of the death-wish to be simply that; there is a need to justify my resistance which shows up as resentment in the presence of anyone embracing the new way – a need to denigrate the obviously good person. Push to extremes – we even crucify.

Some might think that once this is pointed out to us we could do something about it. Faith presents us with Jesus, the man without evil in him, destroyed because he is without evil. Prompted by the Spirit, faith challenges us to see where we are in the getting rid of the good, and to discover ourselves accepted by the love that made it all possible – to experience the *cosmetic cover* of our death-wishing as murder, and *through that experience* feel the love that overcomes it. Love can only reveal itself to us fully within the context of our hating.

Gazing on the crucified lets evil become sin, and sin become forgiveness, showing me who I really am, one set free from the evil atmosphere that is the *air* of our world. It is impossible

to see the crucified as that which transforms evil into sin and sin into forgiveness without seeing that this eternal love anticipates all evil. Christ' blood streams through the universe from the beginning ensuring that all will be well whatever the cost.

It is trivial to speak of God taking a risk in creating potentially sinful humans, with a cross waiting in the wings, when the risk became disaster. This ignores the underlying truth – *not that God draws good from evil, but that God embraces evil*. There certainly is no evil in God, but God's reality [*total love*] mysteriously transforms evil. Evil is not so much an obstacle that God can overcome as the negative that has to change, when embraced by the totally positive: *the lamb who was slain and is alive* – Rev.13.8.

Christianity has a bad name when considering the ethos of suffering – the so called desiring to be nailed to the cross with Christ. We can't avoid this *if we ignore* the *unique* saving power of Jesus' suffering. To see his suffering as the effect of our evil is to understand it as what I am inflicting upon myself. As we have seen, conversion is moving from seeing myself as the crucifier to the crucified. Jesus lays bare the suffering in our evil and alienated state by turning it into our salvation. If we fail to see this self-reality as our saving, then we simply see him as suffering from what we have done to him.

Jesus crucified – is not for imitation. The suffering he freely endured was not chosen as *a way of life* but *as the consequence of living a sinless life in a sinful world*. The reason why Jesus is not for imitation is not because he is beyond our understanding, but that his identity is becoming ours. On the cross he sets us free from what put him there – *him* means Jesus and the whole human family. He does not take us down from the cross, but frees us from putting ourselves there. The cross teaches that the wicked, the destroyers of lives and of life, are sufferers; victims of their own malice.

He teaches us that true peace sets in when we stop running away from the fear that turns into the need to hate and crucify, by giving way to being loved. Man running away from himself becomes violent. The solution is not simply in non-retaliation, but resolving that which provokes retaliation. I need to be freed from hating myself in another so as to see myself as a gifted other – where my true peace and full living emerge.

Once I can see what we call evil as in fact sin, then forgiveness is real. There are two ways of seeing sin – a defect in our human condition; and a defect by which we harm others and ourselves. As a defect it relates to our world in which we are *not the centre*; in the second way it relates to the world in which we *are* the centre. Sin is complete indifference to the *whole*, of which we are simply a part, and without which we have no meaning; it is a refusal to accept our very real dependence which is the real evil in us.

Forgiveness

The majority of us find no difficulty in seeking and accepting the forgiveness of God. It is a sobering reminder of what we are about, first to recall that Jesus never criticised the Pharisees for their sinfulness but for their goodness!

Arguably forgiveness is the most powerful human experience. Two-thirds of Jesus' teaching is either directly or indirectly involved with it. You could say *forgiveness is God breaking God's rules!*

Its attractiveness is because of three things that happen simultaneously: when you forgive you are choosing the goodness of the other over their faults; you experience goodness happening within yourself; you start to identify yourself with goodness. It is at once a coming together of what is of God and what is of me within myself. Forgiveness, given and received, is the true expression of human dignity. My true self instead of that tiny false self that is always offended and complaining. This is the new gift that all believers offer to the world.

The gift comes from the grace of being able to appreciate yourself as being like God, seeing heaven and earth as mirror images of each other... as it was in the beginning, is now... Reality is an analogy for God's presence. Somehow this northern end of Europe never quite caught-on to genuine Gospel behaviour, insisting on a sober and severe attitude to things religious. Hilaire Belloc puts it so well:

Wherever the Catholic sun does shine, there is singing and dancing and good red wine! At least the Bible tells me so, Benedicamus Domino!

Protestant and Jewish minds tend to see things from another perspective - stressing the difference between God and the world... continually stressing the otherness of God. The Incarnation would be unthinkable to every Jew - which is, paradoxically, where it happened! God is both present [*immanent*] in the world, and at the same time beyond ordinary experience [*transcendent*]. In other words, Catholics tend to stress the immanence and Jews and Protestants the transcendence.

The down-side of this for Catholics was that God seemed to become too pally and forgiving, for which our Protestant sisters and brothers rightly took us to task. At one time of the year, in Italy, was given over to holy days. Life meant being at home in the world with God, one another and our bodies. At the same time Catholic countries are notorious for tolerating dictators, political corruption, class distinction and non-accountable leadership. Put to shame by clear headed Anglo-Saxon Protestantism's respect for law and order.

If forgiveness is not part of my priorities, then I'm like the older brother of the Prodigal - living in a meritocracy, a quid-pro-quo attitude. Whereas forgiveness thaws out frozen logic, and unravels reason and worthiness. It is the way into unearned love - *going home*. Forgiveness is the beginning, middle and end of the Gospel. Grace must always be free, free to work. Forgiveness guarantees the future.

Sadly, hatred is here to stay. Hatred unites a group quickly, it takes away doubt and any anxiety. Hate is much more common than love, and much more instantly effective. It is really hate that makes the world go round! There is no other way to save us than for us to be saved from our need to hate.

In Jn.12.31 Jesus says Satan is prince in this world. In a world living on hate, love is a nonsense. Jesus took on the consequences of hate publicly, by a new way of being human. He absorbed hatred without putting it on or passing it on. He didn't write a book about it, he walked right into it - and said follow me!

Fear lurks in the wake of hate - often masquerading as control - even control-freaks are afraid of losing something! For fear to survive it must seem reasonable - *the need* for order,

discipline, justice... even spirituality all provide excellent cover. Only those set free from self-preoccupation, alert to the priority of charity will be able to transcend debilitating fear. This is a faith reality - realising that I don't have to have all the answers, or even fix all the failures; there is someone I can trust - not trust to do these things, simply someone I can trust!

We can easily displace our fears by projecting them elsewhere - scapegoating. Trust does not mean finding someone to do this for me, simply believing in one who believes in me and has shown it in so many ways. Paul needed to be thrown to the ground and blinded before he realised that *in the name of religion he had become hate...* even a murderer. The cock had to crow three times before the first pope realised he was doing what he said he would never do. These two pillars of the Church were transformed from hate and fear. This is not the exception, but the norm. There is something we discover by losing that we would never know through safety-first. Virtue isn't just will-power; *it is vice overcome!*

The most effective and most common way to turn social hatred into social harmony is to scapegoat. Now it is socially acceptable, so normal it goes unnoticed.

It is 100% certain that what I fear, what I deny, what I pain-avoid will be projected somewhere else. There is a link between fear, hatred and violence. Such violence has been elevated to the level of being the good thing to do, sacred violence.

It is a sad fact that religion has been the most effective proponent of hatred and fear, and therefore of violence. How sad when we recall Jesus' mission - forgiveness of sin. We have even had clergy blessing nuclear weapons. *Religion is the safest place to hide from God.* In its healthy state it is the safest place to find God. [*corruptio optima pessima!*]. How Adam treats Eve, Cain and Abel... it is the original lie - calling evil good. No wonder history is largely a record of who kills, imprisons, terrorises, exploits, steals, abuses... always in pursuit of the bad guys!

It is the mystics and prophets who honour religion for what it truly is - *redemptive suffering and not redemptive violence...* a genuinely new story line, exposing the self-serving lies of hatred and power abuse and all the things that delay the resurrection of humanity.

Resurrection will be taken care of for us quietly and gently as on that early Sunday morning, once the lie of Friday is exposed and uprooted. *Once Jesus put all of himself into that Friday, God took care of Sunday.*