

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MAN: II ¹

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II. Ethical and Religious Notions of Anthropology

If Biblical anthropology can give us an image of man which far surpasses the conclusions that may be drawn from ordinary experience, it is because it refuses to know man other than in his individual and collective history. Man is, for it, a historical being, and his image must bear strongly the mark of his historical specificity. Moreover, his personality has existence only through his relationship with others and especially through his relationship with God. Man without God does not exist and consequently he could not become an object of knowledge. The existence of man is made effective only *by* and *in confronting* God. That is why it can be said that Biblical anthropology is always and primarily a reference to God. "Man does not know himself truly except as he knows himself confronted by God. Only in that confrontation does he become aware of his full stature and freedom and of the evil in him." ²

1. *Man as Creature or the Notion of Dependence.* If, then, the bond which unites man with God is the basis of Biblical anthropology, the first characteristic of this relationship is expressed in the double affirmation, man is a *creature*, God is his *Creator*.

In fact, the entire creation has for its objective this position of God vis-à-vis man. This irreversible rapport between the Creator and the creature is the unique motif of all the move-

¹ The first part of this article was published in *AUSS*, II (1964), 156-168.

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York, 1941), I, 131.

ment of the world. Desiring a witness to his work, God speaks to himself and decides on the creation of man: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." And Genesis adds, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."³

The entire Bible echoes this fundamental declaration of the creation of man, and in this it opposes itself once more to the most widespread anthropological concepts of antiquity as well as of modern times. Certainly, as Karl Barth has said so well, "Natural science may be our occupation with its view of development; it may tell us the tale of the millions of years in which the cosmic process has gone on; but when could natural science have ever penetrated to the fact that there is one world which runs through this development? Continuation is quite a different thing from this sheer beginning, with which the concept of creation and the Creator has to do."⁴

Limited to our anthropological point of view, these concepts establish in the first instance, the absolute dependence of man vis-à-vis God. The existence of the creature beside the Creator is possible only through an uninterrupted participation in Being. Not only is it true that "all things were created by him, and for him," but "by him all things consist." "In Him we live and move and have our being."⁵ Creation signifies here that while there exists a reality different from God, it does not exist in itself, but only through God. This different reality is thus not autonomous; it cannot be God any more than it can exist without God. In other words, there is not on one side the creature and on the other the Creator, as two independent realities, the world and God, as if there were two kingdoms, two separate worlds. We have here neither pantheistic monism nor cosmological dualism.

³ Gn 1 : 27.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York, 1959), p. 51.

⁵ Col. 1 : 16, 17; Acts 17 : 28.

“What God does not grudge the world is creaturely reality, a creaturely nature and creaturely freedom, an existence appropriate to the creation, the world. The world is no appearance, it exists, but it exists by way of creation. It can, it may exist alongside of God, by God’s agency. Creaturely reality means reality on the basis of a *creatio ex nihilo*, a creation out of nothing. Where nothing exists—and not a kind of primal matter—there through God there has come into existence that which is distinct from Him. And since there is now something, since we exist because of divine grace, we must never forget that, as the basis of our existence and of the existence of the whole world, there is in the background that divine—not just *facere*, but—creation. Everything outside God is held constant by God over nothingness. Creaturely nature means existence in time and space, existence with a beginning and an end, existence that becomes, in order to pass away again.”⁶

The Biblical notion of creation then is not a simple theoretical question; it is a question of existence. The creature exists only by the good will of the Creator. The life of man depends on the grace of Him who has created the world and who maintains its life. If the authors of the Bible return constantly to the activity of the Creator, it is in order to emphasize more strongly the omnipotence of God and the absolute dependency of man.⁷ For them it is less a question of recalling the original event, the first beginning of man, than to establish the fact of his existing only to the extent that God wills it. These continual allusions to God the Creator develop to the maximum our consciousness of being only a *creature*, that is to say, a being continually menaced by the possibility—excluded by God and by God alone—of *nothingness* and of *ruin*. This possibility, on the other hand, depends entirely on the free decision of the creature, and on it alone.

The absolute dependence of the creature in relation to the

⁶ Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁷ Ps 33 : 8; 103 : 14 = Job 10 : 9; 33 : 6; Ps 139 : 13-16.

Creator emphasizes without doubt the smallness of man and his state of perpetual grace, but does not imply thereby a notion of imperfection, of weakness, even of sin, as is so often believed under the influence of dualistic philosophy. According to the Bible, the creature, no more than the creation, is evil, because he is not God, or simply because he is distinct from God. The finite world, dependent and contingent, is not evil because of its finitude, of its dependence or of its contingency. In the same way, man is not a fallen being because of his state of creatureliness. On the contrary, the Bible affirms expressly and emphatically that the entire creation is good because of the fact that it is of God: "God saw all that he had made; and behold it was very good." For all that God had created is good." "His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." But as for men, if they are corrupt it is not the fault of God, the shame is to his children. For "God has made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."⁸

According to the Bible, the principle of evil is not in the fact of creation, or of not being God; this is why, moreover, evil did not originally exist. Karl Barth affirms: "This whole realm that we term evil—death, sin, the Devil and hell—is *not* God's creation, but rather what was excluded by God's creation, that to which God has said 'No.' And if there is a reality of evil, it can only be the reality of this excluded and repudiated thing, the reality behind God's back, which He passed over, when He made the world and made it good.

⁸ Gn 1 : 31, 10, 12, 18, 21, 26; 1 Ti 4 : 4; Dt 32 : 4, 5; Ec 7 : 29.

"The whole Biblical interpretation of life and history rests upon the assumption that the created world, the world of finite, dependent and contingent existence, is not evil by reason of its finiteness . . . Nevertheless Christianity has never been completely without some understanding of the genius of its own faith that the world is not evil because it is temporal, that the body is not the source of sin in man, that individuality as separate and particular existence is not evil by reason of being distinguished from undifferentiated totality, and that death is not evil though it is an occasion for evil, namely the fear of death." Niebuhr, *op. cit.* p. 167; cf. *idem.*, p. 169.

'And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.' What is not good God did not make; it has no creaturely existence. But if being is to be ascribed to it at all, and we would rather not say that it is non-existent, then it is only the power of the being which arises out of the weight of the divine 'No'." ⁹

The Bible clearly shows that evil appears in the universe and in the world only with the desire of the creature to wish to be self-sufficient and to realize its being independently of Being, as if the creature could exist separated from the Creator. In other words, the sin of man resides essentially in this pernicious and perpetually renewed temptation to make himself "God" rather than being willing to be only a creature "in the image of God." "The real evil," declares Reinhold Niebuhr, "in the human situation, according to the prophetic interpretation, lies in man's unwillingness to recognize and acknowledge the weakness, finiteness and dependence of his position, in his inclination to grasp after a power and security which transcend the possibilities of human existence, and in his effort to pretend a virtue and knowledge which are beyond the limits of mere creatures." ¹⁰

However, this may be, the simple possibility of the creature's being able to break the very order of creation presupposes that man, inasmuch as he is a creature of God, has received a power of individualization which permits him to think and act freely, whether in accord with the will of the Creator, or contrary to this will. This is what the story of the creation of man indicates: after having affirmed first of all that he is a creature, it points out: "God created man *in his own image, in the image of God created he him.*" ¹¹

2. *Man as the Image of God or the Notion of Freedom.* To the idea of man's nature as creature, the story of creation thus adds a complementary notion: that of his being in the

⁹ Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹¹ Gn 1 : 27.

image of God. The first term marks the fundamental distinction between the creature and the Creator, while the second emphasizes, on the contrary, that which God and man have in common between them.

Although this concept of *image* and of *likeness* of God is found explicitly only in Genesis,¹² the teaching of the Old Testament on the subject of man always implies it. The New Testament repeats it a number of times,¹³ and these allusions make its comprehension easier; for although the sense of the expression appears clear, it has been a subject of discussion by theologians for centuries. A great number of them think that the Hebrew terms *šelem*, "image," and *dēmût*, "likeness," designate the spiritual or moral functions of man: perfection, freedom, reason, etc.; others see in them one of the constitutive substances of human nature: the immortal soul or the divine in man; while still others, on the contrary, think that these terms relate to psycho-physical nature, since in the Bible they designate regularly an exterior physical appearance, a plastic image, effigy or statue.¹⁴

In our opinion, with the exception of those interpretations influenced by dualistic philosophy, these divergences are more apparent than real. For us, physical representation is always the expression of a corresponding psychological reality. If then the exterior aspect of man is "in the image" of the Creator, this is due to some superior power in man which not only distinguishes him from the rest of creatures, but also causes him to exist in the "likeness of God." A careful examination of the text in Genesis, moreover, confirms this point of view. If man is created "in the image of God," this signifies, first of all, that he is the representative of God on earth. In all the ancient Orient, an image was a manifestation, and a sort of incarnation of that which it represented. Thus the image of a god or of a sovereign expressed his real presence

¹² Gn 1 : 26, 27; 5 : 1, 3; 9 : 6.

¹³ Jas 3 : 9; 1 Cor 11 : 7; Eph 4 : 24; Col 3 : 10.

¹⁴ Cf. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, pp. 152 ff.; p. 153, n. 4.

and his dominion over the place where it was set up. Accordingly, man must exercise his function of representation by ruling the world in general, and the animal world in particular. This is precisely what the text specifies: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that crept upon the earth."¹⁵ In this sense, on earth man is "the image and glory of God,"¹⁶ to use Paul's expression.

But if the Creator could give man "dominion over the works of [his] hands," if he has "put all things under his feet" according to Psalm 8, which is certainly our best commentary on the theme of the image of God, this is in relation to the clearly indicated fact that "Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honour."¹⁷ Referring to this text, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that there is a direct relation between the dominion of man and his moral behavior in regard to his Creator. "Likeness of God" is a function of moral perfection, of a certain state of holiness which in its turn depends on obedience freely committed to the divine will.¹⁸ Man can be the representative of God on earth only to the extent that his bonds with the Creator are renewed "in knowledge after the image of him that created him."¹⁹ The being of man is not only a question of existence; it depends also on the knowledge of God. Life eternal is "that they might know thee the only true God."²⁰ And this knowledge of God implies the consent of man, a free decision of a creature.

Not only does God confer the privilege of being on that which is not himself, in giving to him a characteristic reality, a nature, but also he gives the human creature a power,

¹⁵ Gn 1 : 26.

¹⁶ I Cor 11 : 7.

¹⁷ Ps 8 : 6, 7.

¹⁸ Heb 2 : 6-11.

¹⁹ Col. 3 : 10.

²⁰ Jn 17 : 3.

similar to that of the Creator, which permits him to think and to act, to accept or to refuse Being. This is what it means to have been created in the likeness of God. Man created in the image of God is free, with an absolute freedom in the sense that his life and death no longer depend on the Creator, but on his own free decision. Access to "the tree of life" depends simply on his good pleasure to will to recognize God as Creator and his own nature as creature, or on his decision to dispense with God and to be himself "as God." On this major decision depends at the same time the existence of man and of the entire human reality in all its manifestations. For in truth, the liberty God gives to the creature in creating him in his image, in his likeness, means there exists a contingency, a possibility of action by the creature, a freedom of decision, a power of being.

Karl Barth remarks, "But this freedom can only be the freedom appropriate to the creature, which possesses its reality not of itself, and which has its nature in time and space. Since it is real freedom, it is established and limited by the subjection to law, which prevails in the universe and is again and again discernible; it is limited by the existence of its fellow creatures, and on the other hand by the sovereignty of God. For if we are free, it is only because our Creator is the infinitely free. All human freedom is but an imperfect mirroring of the divine freedom."²¹

Let us note, in any case, that the freedom of choice God has given man is not that of choosing between good and evil, as too often is concluded from the story of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. The freedom of the creature as God conceived it originally consists essentially in knowing "to refuse the evil, and choose the good."²² Barth acutely remarks, "Man is not made to be Hercules at the cross-roads. Evil does not lie in the possibilities of the God-created creature. Freedom to decide means freedom to decide towards the Only One

²¹ Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²² Is 7 : 15.

for whom God's creature can decide, for the affirmation of Him who has created it, for the accomplishment of His will; that is, for obedience. But we have to do with freedom to decide. And here too danger threatens. Should it happen that the creature makes a different use of his freedom than the only possible one, should he want to sin—that is, to 'sunder' himself from God and from himself—what else can happen than that, entered into contradiction to God's will, he is bound to fall by his disobedience." ²³

Now, this is precisely the meaning of the dramatic recital of the Fall, as it is related for us in Genesis. Some think of it as a myth, a legend or a parable; but call it what you will, to deny its historical reality is to renounce any desire to comprehend the nature of man as it is daily manifested with increasing evidence. Existentialist writers have described it with loyalty and precision, at times even with brutality and cynicism. This human reality is composed of misery, anguish, contradictions, vanities, a reality which the Bible very simply calls a *carnal* nature, because it is controlled by sin. And this affirmation constitutes precisely the third characteristic of Biblical anthropology, which after having declared man to be a creature, but a creature in the image of God, presents him to us finally as a sinful man.

3. *Man as Sinner or the Notion of "Sarx."* Man could be nothing else than a creature; the fact of being a creature in the image of God is then a particular privilege. Now this privileged situation of man, participating at the same time in the determinism of Nature and in the freedom of God, necessarily constitutes a problem. This is resolved by the Creator, but the solution must also be freely entered into by the creature. Being thus at once both free and bound, man is tempted wrongly to interpret his privileged situation. The danger, the only one, is that man may forget that he is only a creature, that he derives everything from his Creator, that he has every freedom, save that of dispensing with God, every

²³ Barth, *loc. cit.*

position except that of God. For even if God had made man a god, he would not have remained less a creature. The absolute danger is that man himself may wish to attribute something to himself, that he may seek to become his own end. The mortal danger is that man may touch the forbidden fruit of the tree of good and evil, that is that he may transgress the limits of creaturely condition and desire to become more than a creature.

These are exactly the terms in which the problem is found presented in the story of Genesis. The text specifies that God, in His goodness, had clearly traced the boundaries, established the conditions of life and warned man of the danger that he would have if he willed to change the order of Creation. The permanent presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, marking the boundary between man and God, must permanently remind him of the necessity of God and the absolute condition of his freedom.²⁴

We do not know whether or not man by himself would have transgressed the order of God. For the false interpretation he has of his situation at a given moment, which becomes the source of temptation with inevitable consequences, is truly not the product of human imagination. It is suggested to man by a celestial being represented by the serpent, whose experience of evil precedes the creation of man.²⁵ It is not relevant here to probe into that which the apostle Paul calls "the mystery of iniquity."²⁶ Although theological explanations of it are infinitely varied, there can be no doubt that the Fall with its universal consequences constitutes a fundamental premise of Biblical teaching regarding the nature of man. It is certainly possible to give many names to the often contradictory powers which act in us, but it is impossible to deny them. Every sane psychology is forced to admit that the choice of the conscience is not determined alone by

²⁴ Gn 2 : 15-17.

²⁵ Gn 3 : 22; Jn 8 : 44; 1 Jn 3 : 8; Is 14 : 12-15; Eze 28 : 11-19.

²⁶ 2 Th 2 : 7.

value judgment, but that there are also forces active contrary to these very values.

The experience of evil is universal and the result of the first sin manifests itself in the life of every man. Often without knowing its origin, pagan writers have described the effects of it in a language strangely similar to that of the apostle Paul. Plautus, for example, makes one of his characters say: "I knew how I ought to be, but miserable person that I am, I could not do it." The Latin poet Ovid wrote: "Desire counsels one thing, reason another." "What is it then," cries Seneca, "which when we lean to one side, pulls to the other?" And Epictetus affirms, "He who sins does not do what he wills to do and does what he does not will." Thus, men have ever identified in themselves this duality between good tendencies and evil, and after the fashion of Paul have experienced human powerlessness to accomplish the good. "What I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do." "This duplicity of man is so evident," writes Pascal, "that there are those who have thought that we have two souls. A simple subject appears to them incapable of so great and so sudden varieties of unbounded presumption." This is probably what led Plato, and after him all the dualistic philosophers, to believe that the conflict is between soul and body, whereas Christian psychology teaches us that the conflict exists in the conscience between "the law of the mind," powerless in itself, and "the law of sin," to which we are captive. On this view, the present situation of natural man is no longer that of a being absolutely free to choose between the forces which solicit him, for this choice has been made in the course of his history contrary to his nature.

In yielding to the foreign power which solicited him, man from the beginning set himself in a direction contrary to God. Having failed to recognize his true existence as creature, he has sought life where it is not to be found. So doing, he has directed his being contrary to the order of creation. In disobeying the law of God, he has become a slave of the law of

sin, for one is always the slave of that which has conquered him.²⁷ His power of self-direction is alienated to the power of sin, and because of the solidarity of the human species, all humanity was involved by the choice of the first man. For, "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . ." ²⁸

Commenting on Romans 7, on the present situation of man as he is subject to the dominion of sin, Paul Tillich writes: "It is our human predicament that a power has taken hold *over* us which is not from us but *in* us . . . The name of this power is sin . . . Sin in the singular with a capital 'S.' Sin as a power, controlling world and mind, persons and nations." And examining what it is within us which gives a dwelling place to this power, he answers: "But one thing is certain. Paul and with him the whole Bible, never has made our body responsible for our estrangement from God, from our world, and from our own self. Body, flesh, members, that is not the *one* sinful part of us, with the inmost self, mind, and spirit comprising the *other*, sinless part. But our whole being, every cell of our body and every movement of our mind is both flesh and spirit, subjected to the power of Sin and resisting its power."²⁹

The carnal reality of man is thus a real anthropological notion, although not in the common and ordinary sense that is true of the other terms already studied. First, the Hebrew and Greek equivalents of "flesh" are never employed to designate a constitutive element of the being, as in the case with their terms for "body" and "spirit." Moreover, the notion of *flesh* is so closely bound up with each of the other anthropological notions that it includes them all at the same time that it surpasses them. This notion, in fact, introduces

²⁷ 2 Pe 2 : 19; Jn 8 : 34; Rom 6 : 16.

²⁸ Rom 5 : 12.

²⁹ Paul Tillich, "The Good I Will, I Do Not," *RL*, XXVIII (1958-1959), 54^o-44.

an ethical and religious sense absolutely unique, without the comprehension of which our knowledge of man is altogether incomplete, if not false. Certain aspects of it, indeed, have not escaped existential psychology.

For all these reasons and still others, it is imperative that we define clearly the anthropological notion, both ethical and religious, contained in the Hebrew *bāsār* and in the Greek *sarx*. This is all the more important since Christian theology rapidly lost the true meaning under the influence of Greek thought which designated by "flesh" only the corporeal substance (the body itself insofar as it is material substance, as opposed to spiritual substance) and which, in addition, saw in the one the principle of evil and in the other the principle of good. This metaphysical dualism is absolutely foreign to Jewish and Christian thought, just as is strictly anthropological dualism.

There are numerous texts to be found in which the term "flesh" is used simply to designate the fleshly parts of the body³⁰ or the entire body insofar as it is visible and material.³¹ But, even in these cases, the part designated fleshly or carnal is never placed in opposition to another part not so designated. On the contrary, the Bible explicitly affirms of man that "he is flesh."³² All that is in him is carnal, to the point that Paul can conclude: "I am carnal."³³ The carnal reality of man is so completely applicable to all that is human that the expression "all flesh" comes to cover the whole of humanity.³⁴

Like *sōma*, *ψυχῆ* and *πνεῦμα*, *sarx* also designates essentially an indivisible totality, a nature of the complete man. Even more emphatically, *sarx* defines as carnal the very state of the personality, its essence, the "I" as Saint Paul so clearly declares. And to better demonstrate that this carnal reality is applied to the totality of the being as well as to each one of

³⁰ Gn 2 : 21; 41 : 2; Job 10 : 11; Eze 37 : 6-8; Lk 24 : 39; 2 Cor 12 : 7.

³¹ Num 8 : 7; Ex 30 : 32; 2 Ki 6 : 30; Jn 6 : 51; Acts 2 : 26, 31; 1 Cor. 15 : 39; etc.

³² Gn 6 : 3 (RSV); Ps 78 : 39.

³³ Rom 7 : 14.

³⁴ Gn 6 : 13, 17; Ps 136 : 25; Lk 3 : 6; Acts 2 : 17; etc.

its parts, as an adjective it qualifies each of the other anthropological notions. Each nature is found to be conditioned by *sarx*. Its influence is exercised on the body ³⁵ as well as on the mind.³⁶ It determines the emotional life ³⁷ with its passions and its desires ³⁸ as well as the mental life, characterized by will and thought.³⁹

But this is not all. Further analysis of the notion *sarx* shows that flesh defines not only the human being in himself, but also the whole human sphere, all that touches man from near or far, all in the created world that bears his imprint, all that is humanized by man. Thus, not only "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," but "they that are after the flesh do *mind the things of the flesh*." "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption," for "the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like . . ." ⁴⁰

As is evident, this nature, which Christian psychology calls "carnal," is manifested in man, in his life and in his actions, everywhere and in all places that he exercises responsibility. This is why Paul defines this nature by such characteristic expressions as "to live after the flesh," or "to walk after the flesh," or again, "to war after the flesh." ⁴¹ *Sarx* thus is more than the substance of the human being, more even than his psychological structure: it is rather, as has been said, "the particular dimension in which the life of natural man manifests itself." ⁴²

Finally, Pauline theology accords to the notion *sarx* an

³⁵ Col. 2 : 11.

³⁶ Col. 2 : 18.

³⁷ Rom 8 : 6.

³⁸ Gal 5 : 24, 16.

³⁹ Eph 2 : 3.

⁴⁰ Jn 3 : 6; Rom 8 : 5; Gal 6 : 8; 5 : 19-21.

⁴¹ Rom 8 : 4, 8, 9, 12, 13; 2 Cor 10 : 2, 3.

⁴² Mehl-Koehnlein, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

ethical and religious sense of the highest importance, which we must make more precise. The authors of the Old Testament, by use of the Hebrew term *bāśār* and by comparison with God, had already emphasized that which is creaturely in man: his limits, his finitude, his powerlessness, his weakness.⁴³ But the apostle Paul would appear to go further, in that he establishes a definite connection between *sarx* and sin. "I," he said, "am carnal, sold under sin. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." For "with the flesh [I serve] the law of sin."⁴⁴ In other words, a mysterious power makes man the slave of "the law of sin," incapable of submitting himself to "the law of God," even when he delights in it. And this power which dwells in him isolates him from God, makes him powerless and presses him to act against God.⁴⁵

Does this mean that man is a sinner because he is carnal? Is the flesh then the principle and the seat of sin, as is often thought? If such were the case, it would be difficult to understand how, in the search for God, the flesh as well as the soul "longeth for thee."⁴⁶ If the flesh were evil in itself would God propose to pour out his Spirit on all flesh?⁴⁷ Also, if the flesh were the principle of evil in man, how could Jesus have lived in the flesh to be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?"⁴⁸ By the very fact that "God sending his own Son . . . for sin, condemned sin in the flesh," it is possible to conclude that the two terms "flesh" and "sin" ought not to be regarded as designating the same and single thing.⁴⁹

⁴³ Gn 6 : 3; Ps 78 : 39; Is 40 : 6; Dt 5 : 26; Is 49 : 26; 66 : 16; Jer 12 : 12; Eze 21 : 9; Ps 9 : 21.

⁴⁴ Rom 7 : 14, 18, 25.

⁴⁵ Rom 8 : 7, 8.

⁴⁶ Ps 63 : 2; Is 40 : 5.

⁴⁷ Joel 2 : 28; Acts 2 : 17.

⁴⁸ Heb 4 : 15; 1 Pe 2 : 22; 2 Cor 5 : 21.

⁴⁹ Rom 8 : 3.

If such were the case, Paul could not have spoken of the possibility of man's being delivered from the bondage of sin while continuing to live "in the flesh." Still less could he say, "That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." ⁵⁰

A careful analysis of all texts treating of the flesh and of sin permits us not only to draw a sharp distinction between these, but further leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to establish a supplementary distinction between sin, properly speaking, and the power of sin. On the one hand there is the transgression itself, and on the other, the power of temptation; the one is the evil consummated, the other, the source of all possible temptations. In fact, "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." ⁵¹ In truth, "sin is the transgression of the law." "For where no law is, there is no transgression." Therefore, even if sin exists, "sin is not imputed when there is no law." In other words, the knowledge of sin is possible only with the knowledge of the law. "I had not known sin, but by the law." ⁵²

The act, however, of regarding himself in "the perfect law of liberty," as "in a glass" has the effect only of showing to man "his natural face," that is to say, his state of sin. ⁵³ The law revives in man the power of sin, "for without the law sin was dead." "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." With the commandment, sin revived: it "wrought in me all manner of concupiscence," and "taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me." So that which was in the beginning only a potential sin ended by manifesting itself as a sin, that is to say, by a transgression of the law. ⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Php 1 : 22, 24; 2 Cor 4 : 11; 1 Pe 4 : 2; Gal 2 : 20.

⁵¹ Jas 1 : 14, 15.

⁵² 1 Jn 3 : 4; Rom 4 : 15; 5 : 13; 7 : 7.

⁵³ Jas 1 : 23-25.

⁵⁴ Rom 7 : 7-13.

From all this it is evident that the flesh is neither an evil substance nor the power of evil that Paul sometimes personifies and calls simply "sin," nor above all, is it incarnate sin. Flesh is only "flesh of sin" because man, a creature of God, has separated himself from the Creator and has delivered himself to the power of sin. "I am carnal," said Saint Paul, because I am "sold under sin." "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." "Now if I do that I would not, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." In other words, the carnal state denotes the powerlessness of the natural man to govern himself. In yielding to sin, he has alienated his freedom to the control of the power of sin, which now dwells "in me (that is, in my flesh,) . . . bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."⁵⁵

Such is the tragic situation of carnal man, delivered to the power of sin: a dead man who does not know true life because he is a captive of powers contrary to life.⁵⁶ For man to disobey the law of life is to introduce in himself death. And this death begins with the unbalancing of the personality. Instead of living—which involves continuity, the creation of conscience and the free unfolding of personality—carnal man knows only a miserable existence. Of the three terms of the law of life: to endure, to create, to flourish, only the first remains. We exist, but we do not live; and further, this duration is passed in narrowness and sterility. From a spiritual point of view this man is dead in spite of the duration in which his existence is pursued. He has no spiritual future; rather he has no other future than that of the flesh, which is death, "for the wages of sin is death."⁵⁷

This makes understandable the anguished cry of Paul: O

⁵⁵ Rom 7 : 14, 18-20, 23.

⁵⁶ Eph 2 : 1-7; Col 2 : 13; Rom 6 : 23.

⁵⁷ Rom 6 : 23; 8 : 13.

wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" There is in this cry something of the existentialist *Angst*. With the apostle there was further the awareness that the situation is such because he was alienated from God and in revolt against him, because he was subject to sin in spite of him. Nevertheless, even if in this respect Christian anthropology recalls certain existentialist conclusions, happily it does not stop there. Its last word has not been said with any emphasis in affirmation of the anthropological reality of human carnal nature. Quite on the contrary, its whole *raison d'être* resides in the revelations it brings anguished man to draw him out of this impasse. For although man no longer knows freedom, although he is a slave to powers contrary to life, he still has the possibility of being freed from them and of being born to a new life, that of the Spirit. This is why, to the question, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul replies: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." ⁵⁸

With this response, Christian theology opens a new chapter, that of Jesus Christ, bearer of the Spirit, proposing to us the Spirit as an anthropological reality as certain as that of the flesh, and alone able to deliver man from the dominion of sin.

(To be concluded)

⁵⁸ Rom 7 : 24-25.