

The Crawdad in the Cookie Jar

Another Look at
Genesis, Chapters 1-11
And
Original Sin

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The Crowdad in the Cookie Jar

Preface

This essay was never intended to be a scholarly critique of the Catholic Church's theology. However, I think its approach to *Genesis 1-11* is as sound as any other, and I challenge anyone, layman, priest or bishop, to prove otherwise. It simply presents the musings of an old man who wants to put in his two cents worth in the ongoing internal and external struggles of the Church in relationship to a world that does not embrace it. While my training was mostly in Catholic theology, the themes explored here apply equally in all religions that accept the Book of Genesis as inspired Sacred Scripture, including the Jewish, Islam Orthodox and Protestant churches.

Judeo-Christianity has given the world a treasure-trove of truth and beauty in its Scripture and Tradition. It is a shame that many truths that these sources were meant to teach are lost or rejected due to the hermeneutical error of preaching an allegorical storyline as truth while the truth that the story was meant to teach is rejected or otherwise lost.

The story of Adam and Eve in Paradise is such a story. Its purpose was to teach ancient Jewish theology, especially where it differed fundamentally from that of pagans. It taught, for example, that there was one and only one God. God was the all-good and sole creator of the entire universe. Evil did not come into the world from God but from Man's abuse of free will. That abuse was portrayed in the story of Adam and Eve, two allegorical persons who lived in a fictitious, utopian garden, graced with preternatural gifts of immortality, integrity, impassibility and infused knowledge. In the story, they disobeyed God's law by eating forbidden fruit and were expelled from the garden, cursed to live on the earth in which ancient Jews found themselves, with all of its pain, sin, fear and death. Their disobedience supposedly cost these fictional characters and all their progeny the equally fictitious preternatural gifts that have never graced any *real* human beings. Their sin brought man into opposition with God and excluded all mankind from coming into Heaven and God's presence. This loss of "Original Justice" is what the Catholic Church calls Original Sin. She claims that all of humanity inherits this sin from the fictitious Adam and Eve.

The doctrine of Original Sin makes no sense except for the purpose of teaching, among other truths, that mankind is a unique and universally sinful race, and that sin could not have come from the all-good Creator-God. It postulates that after the first man sinned, God started creating sinful babies that are repugnant to him from their very beginning and that Adam and Eve were now in a state of mortal sin. Not only that, but all of his descendants were born that way, alienated from the God who made them that way! Human beings continued being created, but now no longer in God's image and likeness. Each and every newborn child was in a state of sin simply because it was born that way. This is how the fundamentalist explains the universal sinfulness of the human race. The only explanation that makes sense all around is that the Eden-story is an allegory describing the sinful kind of world in which the ancient Jew found himself, and how it got that way.

For the Jew, the remedy to sin was the offering of sacrifice, which became a standard ritual in their worship. The early Jewish Christian deduced that Father God had to send Son God into the world to be sacrificed so that the Original Sin could be atoned. With that, the choice between being a saint or sinner could be put back into the individual human being's hands. The Church created

the ritual called Baptism, whose purpose was to restore a sharing of divine life (sanctifying grace) to the human soul and thus make it pleasing to its Creator once again.

The Eden Story, along with the other stories in *Genesis 1-11* makes sense only as allegory. This book will attempt to show a way in which *Genesis 1-11* can be validly understood as doing just what an allegory is designed to do — bring the reader to valid conclusions that make sense. Unfortunately, the conclusions thus drawn often differ from the traditional Catholic view. To their credit, however, they can effectively teach valid truths without needing miracles to make them credible. That is simply the way allegory works. A text like *Genesis 1-11*, full of incongruities and even contradictions, such as a period of three days and nights before the sun and moon are created to measure their timing, a talking serpent-tempter, an inherited sin from the very first human couple, and a God who is Pure Act but rests at times, all demand an allegorical interpretation. The Eden-story, along with the rest of *Genesis* up through chapter 11 is decidedly and entirely allegorical in nature.

* * * * *

The title for this book, *The Crawdad in the Cookie Jar*, comes from a story that I learned as a child. It was told to me by my mother before I ever started school. I want to share it here.

There was this little boy who was irresistibly drawn to snitching cookies, which his mother had forbidden him to do. The cookie jar was situated on a shelf that was sufficiently high so that the boy had to climb a footstool to reach into the jar. The boy paid no heed to his mother's commands, and occasionally helped himself to a forbidden cookie. One day, his mother decided to teach him a lesson. She took the cookies out of the jar and replaced them with a live crawdad. As expected, the lad came to snitch a cookie and reached into the cookie jar, where one of his fingers was immediately seized by the crawdad's vicious pincers. The lad ran screaming and crying to his mother, who pried the pincers open with a butter knife and released their still bawling prey.

"So, you disobeyed me and tried to snitch a cookie?" the mother demanded. "Yes, Mom" the boy replied, "but I'll never do it again!" And, he never did.

There ends the parable of the crawdad in the cookie jar. Later in life, of course, I came to realize that this story was not a true story about anything that had ever actually happened. It was fiction, but I came to realize something else. It was OK. Mom hadn't lied to me. It was never her intention to deceive me. She simply wanted to teach me a very important lesson: that a child must obey its parents. It was an early lesson in morality.

My mother was not alone in telling such stories to teach a lesson or an abstract truth. Jesus did nearly all of his teaching by means of parables (which are actually allegories). Aesop, too, was a master at such allegories, commonly called fables. They conveyed truth in that they taught important lessons. Only moronic fools would think that the events as described in the fables and parables actually occurred somewhere in real life. Many of them are even impossible. On the other hand, it would be equally foolish to reject their messages as "just stories."

I am firmly convinced that if the Catholic Church is ever to regain credibility in our highly literate and educated world, she will have to re-assess every interpretation she ever made of the stories, events, admonitions and exhortations in her Sacred Scriptures, beginning with the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*. She needs to distinguish the allegorical storyline from the truth that it was meant to convey. We must do likewise. We need to discern between the medium (the narrative) and the message (the truth that the narrative is meant to teach).

Mistreating allegorical writings by regarding them as historical creates insoluble difficulties and contradictions for intelligent truth-seekers. Today's fundamentalists resolve the problem in an extremely simplistic way. Faith, they say, must supply what reason cannot understand. In other words, we are obliged to believe some doctrines that seem incredible, simply because God (through Sacred Scripture) said that it is true despite all evidence to the contrary. What we cannot see and understand is due to our minds having been darkened by the Original Sin. This approach, however, leads to a dilemma. If we are to accept the "Word of God," as interpreted by his infallible church as inerrant and true, than God does not always tell the truth! For example: was man created after all the rest of creation, or before? If one accepts a fundamentalistic approach to Scripture, God has to be telling something that is not true, either in chapter 1 or in chapter 2. The two narratives are mutually contradictory and therefore cannot both be true. A literal understanding pits us against any and all theories of evolution, maintaining that if God says, in his Word (the Bible) that he created the universe in six days, then that's simply the truth of the matter, regardless of voluminous evidence to the contrary. Case closed! God's Word trumps all further discussion!

The only sensible way the problems posed by such fundamentalistic interpretation can be resolved is by acknowledging that much of Sacred Scripture is allegorical in nature, building upon and interspersed with a skeleton of the Jews' historical past, and, in later times, that of Christians. After all, we can know nothing about God and our relationship with him *except* by allegory, for Divinity and eternity are infinitely outside the realm of human experience.

No humans were in existence when all the rest of the world was created, and so no one could have given an eyewitness account of the event. Eve was supposedly the only human being who ever witnessed a serpent talking about good and evil and about becoming gods. These stories were never intended to give us a history of how the world was made. To treat them as historical facts is to do violence to their intent, their literary forms and their very credibility.

If all people of faith — Christians (Eastern, Western, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox), Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, American Indians, Aztecs, Incas and all the rest — focused on the truth behind the allegories rather than on their storylines, the struggle for the unity for which Jesus so fervently prayed would be greatly facilitated. In fact, unless the allegorical dimension is acknowledged, unity of faith in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church will remain literally and absolutely impossible.

Part 1: The Genesis Stories

Chapter 1 The Sabbath

Why are there seven days in the week? It cannot be copied from anything in nature, because nothing in nature is exactly seven days long. The year is a measure of time that marks one revolution of the earth around the sun. The day marks one revolution of the earth on its axis. The day is further divided, for convenience, into 24 hours, each of them representing 15 degrees of rotation by the earth on its axis. The hour was further divided by sailors and oceanographers into 60 minutes, each of which is further divided into 60 seconds, which system is still in use by surveyors. Nowhere in our world do we find a precise, natural measurement of seven days.

The only possible response is that the seven day week is a human convention. Regardless of how it came to be observed, it was already in place among the ancient Jews long before *Genesis* was composed around 1500 BC. By that time, the ancient Jews had already agreed among themselves that every seventh day should be a day of rest. It was already in place among the ancient Jews at the time when the Book of Genesis was written, and its promulgation was one of the reasons for writing the book in the first place.

Genesis 1-11 is a story written to illustrate and teach about the world at the time, being very careful to include God and man's place in it. In the process, it also debunks the pagan ideas of the various non-Jewish tribes around them. It shows that all of creation was performed by the one God, Jahweh. This debunks the pagan notion that multiple gods created various aspects of the universe and that certain gods created all the evil in the universe. To the Jew, that included moral evil, illustrated in the story of Adam and Eve. In the story, they are the first pair of human beings from whom all others descended, illustrating the single family of mankind. To show that they introduced sin into the world, they were given a commandment, which they then violated, thus bringing concupiscence, ignorance, suffering and death into the world.

The story also sees to it that the Jewish custom of resting on the seventh day is honored by having God create the universe in six days and then resting on the seventh. This convention was created by the Jewish community and was taught and honored by way of the creation-story of *Genesis*. In the first century of Christianity, the seven day week was adopted by the Christians, which later was carried into the Roman and Greek worlds by the apostles that were sent forth to win these countries over to Christianity.

Contrary to what many Christians believe, the Eden-story cannot in any way be regarded as history, telling of things that happened in the past, but must be regarded as allegory — a fiction of the imagination with a symbolic message, like the “Crawdad in the Cookie Jar,” which never actually happened, but which carried a message to its hearers. The story itself has internal contradictions that make it impossible to have occurred as described.

For example, the source of all light on earth, namely, the sun, moon and stars, were not created until three days after the creation of light itself. Man was created after all the brute animals in chapter 1 (Gn 1:24-26) but created before all the animals in chapter 2 (Gn 2:18-19).

To believe one is to deny the other, and vice versa. Either way, we must believe a falsehood in one statement or the other, because both cannot be true.

The only reasonable way to solve this dilemma is to note that the Genesis 1-11 account is definitely not history. It is allegory. It has also been labeled as a distinct literary form known as "Protohistory," which serves to set the scene for the history of Abraham and his descendants that follows in chapter 12. If we read it as such, we can learn the truths that the authors were trying to impart, and we don't have to be concerned with incongruities in the text, just like we don't have to be concerned about the incongruity of flying reindeer in the story of Santa Claus. After all, there were no eyewitnesses to the creation story, for all the rest of the world had been created before man ever appeared on the scene. The focus was on the way things were in their world, not on how they had come to be that way. The only reasonable interpretation of this part of Genesis is an allegorical one. The six days of creation and the seventh day of rest came from the Jewish ethos, which was well established long before the several creation stories of *Genesis* were written. The seven day span in Genesis, which has become universally accepted as the measure of the week, could, as a matter of fact, only originate by way of allegory, because absolutely nothing in nature as we know it is exactly seven days long, nor is any natural time-rhythm any multiple of seven days. All the basic measurements of time employed by mankind today *except the week* are based on natural rhythms. A day marks one rotation of the earth on its axis, a fact that was not known to Jews in 1500 BC! The day was divided by political convention into twenty-four hours, which was further divided into hours, minutes and seconds,

Incidentally, many time-spans, somehow, seem to amount to seven years, and showed up long before modern biologists announced the amazing discovery, if it is true, that every cell in the human body is replaced every seven years. It takes about seven years for a baby to develop the use of reason, another seven years to arrive at puberty (adulthood to the Jews), and yet another to become what we term as an adult. It's been said that a person needs about seven years to get over the loss of a loved one. There is talk about the "seven-year itch." And so on. It is quite possible that such rhythms were recognized by the ancients, so that the number "7" took on a very special significance in their minds, philosophies and scriptures.

For whatever reasons, the ancient Hebrews, following the wisdom of their folklore, did have a special regard for the number 7. As stated above, they were observing the seventh day as a day of rest long before the creation-stories of Genesis were written. Their account of the six days of creation and a seventh day of rest by God (Who, in philosophical understanding, is pure ACT and never actually rests), was obviously intended to bolster the religious practice of observing the Sabbath that was already in vogue, and that has been canonized not only by the Christian Church, but even by modern secular society because of an instinctive need for periodic rest from one's labors, worries and daily concerns.

Biblical fundamentalists don't understand all this and maintain, despite all geological evidence to the contrary, that the world was literally created in six days some six thousand years ago, on the authority of the inspired "Word of God," who "cannot lie."

However, like Aesop and many others, the purpose of the authors of Scripture was to teach a lesson by way of a narrative. It was not a scientific account of the physical creation of the world. If it were, their accounts would, in fact, contain more errors than truths! On the other hand, when the creation-story is understood as an allegory, there is no contradiction between Sacred

Scripture and an evolving cosmos. Incidentally, the universe is still evolving today, and the evolutionary process is not ruled out at all. It is simply a fact that God is still creating!

The “Six Days of Creation” is an allegory used by the ancient Jews to teach a rule of conduct: keep holy the Lord’s Day. Amazingly, nearly the entire human race has adopted the seven day week as a standard measure of time, notwithstanding the remarkable fact that it has absolutely no counterpart in the rhythms of nature.

Chapter 2

The Creation Story

Almost everyone, at some time or other, has wondered about past generations, the origins of the earth, the starry heavens and human life. How did it all start?

Modern geological studies of the earth offer convincing evidence that Planet Earth has existed for billions of years. Similarities of physical makeup between closely related species suggest that the myriad life forms we see today may well have developed in an evolutionary process of some sort.

According to the Bible, God created the world out of nothing in six days some six thousand years ago. (Gn 1-2.) Traditionally, many Christian churches, most emphatically modern fundamentalists, hold that these two chapters tell exactly and in every detail how the universe was came to exist.

Actually, there are too many contradictions in the account itself to make this position logically tenable. The fundamentalist defense of the story lies in insisting that it is all literally true as written, that God is all powerful and truthful, and has worked many miracles to make the truths that appear contradictory plausible, and the frail human mind simply cannot comprehend such truths, which can only be accepted by faith in the Almighty.

The authors of *Genesis* describe creation in the light of ancient Jewish cosmology. For example, they saw the earth as being essentially flat. The sky was a sort of an astronomically huge, inverted dome that “separated the waters above (the source of precipitation) from the waters below (the source of springs and wells).” (Gn 1:7) This dome served further as a framework upon which God hung the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) and upon which He moved them about to create the cycle of day and night. It also was equipped with the “floodgates of heaven” (see Gn 7:11) by means of which God could cause rain to fall or withheld it, as he saw fit.

Accepting this creation story as factual history brings one face to face with conundrums that require miracles for their solution. Why did God wait until the third day to create the sun and the moon, described as the lights for day and night, when he had already created light on the first day? And how were those first several days measured before the creation of the sun, by whose rising and setting the day is defined?

There are also internal contradictions, both expressions of which cannot be true. In the first story of creation, God creates man on the sixth day, after having created all the fish, birds, and terrestrial animals. (Gn 1:25-26.) In the second story, man is created before the animals (Gn 2:18-20) How could God say one thing in chapter 1 and explain things in such a contradictory way in chapter 2?

And, later in the account, we run across descriptions of a flood that is literally and physically impossible, “covering the highest mountain top.” (Gn 7:19-20.)

Who witnessed the events of the first five days of creation so as to be able to tell about them? According to the creation account in *Genesis*, man came into a world that had already existed for some time. How, then, could he have known about all the details of how it had been created? And if the creation story was dictated by God, who is presumed to know every intricate detail, why wouldn't He have told us what the world was really like, rather than that the Jewish

perception of it was scientifically correct? Fundamentalists of our day insist that every detail of the creation story must be accepted as fact. For example, that the sky is a dome that separates waters above from the air space below, and forms a framework upon which the Creator hangs the heavenly bodies (stars, sun, moon) to rule the day and the night. How can they explain that God, who cannot tell a lie, is actually doing so when He paints such a misleading picture of the world that He had made?

They cannot. But then, it is not their primary thesis. What they are apparently about is not at all about modern scientific cosmology. Their primary thesis is that the “Word of God” must be accepted in its literal sense and the *Genesis* story must be treated as factual history; to do otherwise is, in their estimation, is to reject the Bible and, in doing so, calling God a liar. This is apparently why they condemn theories of evolution as being false and misleading, and that the truth is to be found, ultimately, in “God’s Word,” understood in its literal sense as meaning exactly what it says.

This creationist reading of the story of the origins of the earth, however, posits far too many contradictions to be accepted as actual historical and geological fact. Nonetheless, the creationist cites it as the “Word of God,” which trumps all other considerations and attempts to close discussion of the matter. Never mind the mountains of physical evidence pointing to a world that has been billions of years in the making, the impossibility of a worldwide flood (7:19-20), the anomaly of a serpent that talked (3:4), and the instantaneous origins of multiple languages in the story of Babel (11:7). All of these events require miracles upon miracles, which should not be assumed if reasonable explanations are possible.

A more reasonable explanation is indeed available, and it is this. The *Genesis* account of creation is an allegory. It is not history at all, nor can it be, considering the contradictions that exist within the story itself. Allegory is a literary form that expresses truth by means of a story. It has been used by countless authors and teachers like Jesus when he spoke in parables, and, perhaps better known to the youth of our day, Aesop with his fables or, for that matter, Santa Claus! The mere fact that there are so many contradictions in the *Genesis* story is convincing proof that the points around which they revolve are *not* the subjects about which the author set out to describe!

When we read the Parable of the Prodigal Son for example, there is no point in wasting our time and energy trying to establish when and where the “incident” in the story took place; it simply doesn’t matter. In fact, to do so would be to miss the point of the story entirely, namely to show that God is not only willing, but anxious to forgive the sinner and is even extravagant in the blessings he showers upon man, even upon such as have committed serious crimes. When we read the story of the tortoise and the hare in Aesop’s fables, we miss the point of the story (that steady progress wins the race), if we spend our time and effort “proving” that the story could not possibly have taken place because hares and tortoises cannot talk.

In the same way, we miss the truths that *Genesis* seeks to impart if we cling to the position that the account is historical, as if it actually happened in six 24-hour days some six thousand years ago. (Some have even calculated an exact number of years. Their conclusions range from 3836 to 5501 years, to which the years following the birth of Christ must be added.) The creation story is set in the environment of the ancient Jews. They had to write their story in the world as they saw it, even if such a world didn’t actually exist, a world that is essentially flat, with a dome

for a sky, water above and below, etc. This takes not an iota away from the story's real messages, which include, among other truths of faith, the following:

- * There is only one God, and God is good;
- * God created the whole universe and everything in it, and saw that it was good;
- * God is compassionate and not only generous, but extravagant in his blessings (a point that is all too often lost in the Christian world's preoccupation with sin).
- * God did not create evil, nor did any evil demigod do so. Sin is the inevitable by-product of endowing man with free will, which he would often abuse by sinning.

The ancient Jew was convinced with religious faith that these factors were real and operative. They saw what their world was like. The authors of *Genesis* had their ideas about God as well as certain modes of worship. They created, out of these and other elements in their theology and religious customs, a beautiful allegory in order to share these ideas with others and with their progeny. The allegory's messages also contrasted their life style with that of their pagan neighbors

In producing the allegory of Genesis, the Jews apparently adopted a story similar story to one that was circulating in neighboring Babylonian circles, but modified it to express their own religious doctrines, especially in matters where their convictions differed from those of the Babylonians. The Babylonian Creation Stories, which date back to approximately the 12th century BC, were written in cuneiform and found in the ruins of the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. An English translation can be found at

<http://www.cresourcei.org/enumaelish.html>.

What is most important to remember is that Genesis 1-11 is allegorical in nature. With that in mind, we don't need to sweat contradictory details and the like. Just read it as the allegory that it is, and the true meanings will become quite evident especially when contrasted with those of their pagan counterparts.

Chapter 3
Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
Genesis 1-3

The authors of *Genesis*, describing their world and its possible origins, had to account for it as they saw it in the limited vision of their experience. They found themselves in an imperfect world. They witnessed murders, insurrections, dishonesty, sexual deviations and all other sorts of evils in the world that God had made. Even apart from what they considered moral wrongs, there were the natural evils. It was difficult to wrest a living from the land, what with the droughts, floods, insects, ravenous beasts and the like. Their women screamed in pain as they gave birth to their offspring. How could a God who was all good create a world that was seemingly filled to the brim with bad things, persons, and such adverse conditions?

It was an awesome challenge to the authors of *Genesis* and several somewhat different traditions, which were later merged into the document as we have it today. The resolution of the challenge was both simple and profound. The evil in the world was not created by God but by Man. Their creation story had to include an account of how the all-good world that God had created and which we still acknowledge as basically good, changed into the hostile place in which they found themselves. How could their convictions be expounded?

The answer was to teach their truths by way of an allegory that depicted the “fall” of Adam and Eve. For reasons already cited, it could not possibly be done by any literary form other than allegory. It was simply a way of showing that evil came not from God, but from the creatures who were created in his image. The story has the first man and woman placed in the Garden of Eden. Eden is depicted as leaving absolutely nothing to be desired. It was, indeed, all good. Everything was in order. It was limned as an ideal world, a utopia, a Paradise in which there was no pain, no suffering, no evil, no concupiscence, no death, no problems of any kind — an all-good world as it came from God’s creative hand. It cannot be overstressed, however, that this scene was not reality, but a product of the author’s imagination.

The tree represented as offering the forbidden fruit was unique among the other trees in the garden. It was called the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Gn 2:9). This, too, is an allegorical concept, for there is no such tree. The temptation to partake of its fruit might have played on the Babylonian concept of many gods, suggesting that Adam and Eve may have thought that they could become like one of them, or even like the God who walked in the garden with them, which is another allegory. At any rate, such thoughts must surely have been lurking in the minds of the devout Jew who was to read this account to acquaint himself with the “facts of life.”

The faculty of knowing good and evil meant more to the ancients than simply recognizing something as good or bad — right or wrong. It meant, rather, the power to *decide* whether a proposed act was good or bad — akin to the “subjective morality” of someone who, spurning all the factors that must be considered in determining the morality of an act, decides for himself the morality of certain acts. The temptation of Adam and Eve was portrayed as ambition to rise to the level of God Himself, who alone designed the heavens and the earth and who thus alone was

competent to establish, in his plan of creation, what was in keeping with natural law and what violated it.

In the story, it would take some powerful convincing to persuade the Man and the Woman, living in such a perfect state of being, to risk forfeiting their immortality. Again, the resourceful Jewish imagination came up with the idea of portraying the serpent as the most cunning of God's creatures (and doubtless alluding to some evil Babylonian demigod rather than to our "Satan"), and having him tempt Eve into eating the forbidden fruit by leading her to believe that doing so would improve their already splendid condition and elevate them to the level of divinity itself, with the power of deciding what was good and what was evil. That, in the authors' minds, could comprise the effective bait to get the Man and Woman to disobey God's command, and bring upon them the curse of mortality that God had warned would follow: "on the day you eat of it you shall surely die!" (Gn 2:17.) Here the authors of Genesis were dealing with a basic fact of life that they already knew from long experience, namely that every human being must ultimately die. That's just the way it is and always has been. It was part of the world as the ancient Jew found it. Interestingly enough, the "curse" was not carried out, at least not literally. Adam and Eve, the only humans on earth, did not die "on the day" that they ate the forbidden fruit." However, they lost for the entire race to follow, the preternatural gift of immortality. and became the ancestors of mortal humanity, They became the mortal beings that the Jews knew from their own experience. Everyone they had ever known had to face the ultimate end of their human life in death.

Except for now having to die, God continued to bless Adam and Eve extravagantly. They were blessed with progeny, lived to the age of almost millennium (at least Adam did, according to the story; the Jew didn't worry much about how old the women became). They had "many sons and daughters." All the earth was theirs to enjoy and populate with their offspring through generation upon generation.

The author of *Genesis* taught some important lessons here. God is good. Man is essentially good but capable of evil, and that there is a good future to be hoped for because God is extravagant in his blessings despite man's innate penchant for wickedness. Adopting this view of humanity runs counter to one traditional Christian viewpoint, namely that mankind is basically evil, born in sin, though he can be redeemed.

In describing the created world as they observed it, they also gave a convenient and plausible, though allegorical, explanation for other matters that were quite familiar to the Jewish people; that man has to work hard to make a living; that giving birth is painful; that people instinctively cover their genitals without knowing why they should; and snakes crawl on their belly. All these characteristics of life in the human condition are accounted for in God's allegorical curse. Fables, comic strips and cartoons are an art form of all their own, and are often instructive, affirming, or at least entertaining. It doesn't matter that they portray "creatures" that are not found in our natural world. No lion ever existed that rewarded a mouse for pulling a thorn from its paw, but nonetheless the message of the fable comes through that good deeds do not go unrewarded. Such allegories, far from being frivolous or even mendacious, can be powerful instruments of teaching.

Jesus himself made extensive use of parables, a specialized form of allegory, when speaking to the crowds. "All these lessons Jesus taught the crowds in the form of parables. He spoke to

them in parables only, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden since the creation of the world.” (Mt 13:34-35; Ps 78:2.)

Why must the story of Adam and Eve and their fall be interpreted as an allegory and not as history? There are many reasons, among them the following.

- * It uses anthropomorphic terms to describe the invisible God.
- * Serpents, like the one that tempted Eve, don't talk, nor did they ever “not crawl on their bellies,” nor are they intelligent.
- * A “tree of knowledge of good and evil” is obviously allegorical, as no such tree exists in our world and knowledge does not grow on trees.
- * According to the story, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden but the garden itself was guarded and not destroyed, and so would be presumed to have remained in existence. However, it has never been found.
- * The “cherubim” that “guard the way to the Tree of Life” and which, according to later theology, consisted of a choir of angels, remains unmentioned in all the rest of Genesis.
- * The Eden-story speaks of objects that are not part of our real world and therefore call for allegorical interpretation, among them: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; the Garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve were expelled and which was not destroyed, the “Cherubim” and “the fiery revolving sword” (perhaps a metaphor for the hot desert sun?) guarding the way to the tree of life.
- * Seeing the Eden-story as allegory, while preserving all of its pedagogic values, sidesteps difficulties that reasonable people have with certain conclusions resulting from a literal interpretation. For example, the Church teaches that God personally and individually creates every human being “in His own image and likeness”; how then, can we maintain that every baby, being born in sin, is therefore abhorrent to the very God who created it, and cannot enter Heaven until the sin is removed in Baptism? Consider, too, the obvious allegories of the seven-day-week, of a world created to conform to an ancient cosmology that has long since been proven false, of a God who walked in the garden (how do pure spirits “walk”?) and rested (God is immaterial pure act and never rests!), of the story of a physically impossible flood (Gn 7 & 8) and the incredible and simplistic explanation of how different languages and races had their origin in the story of the Tower of Babel (Gn 9:1-11). It is absolutely impossible that this story is historical. Miracles upon miracles are demanded as far-fetched solutions to seemingly insoluble problems raised by a literal, historical interpretation.

Most importantly, to interpret Genesis 1-11 as allegory is not to deny the Bible as God's Word but to embrace it. After all, the focus is not on the narrative of the allegory, but on the lessons that the narrative is meant to teach. For example, it's more important to know that it was our one God who created the world, than that he did it in six days some six thousand years ago, and we can still observe the Sabbath, regardless. It is more important to realize that man is good but capable of evil, than to believe that a utopian Garden of Eden actually ever existed. It is important to know that human free will, which empowers mankind to love, is the very power which, in its abuse, brings evil into the world; that for us mortals suffering is simply a natural part of the human condition, rather than a result of some ancestor eating forbidden fruit a long, long time ago.

Chapter 4

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4-5

The story of Cain and Abel is well known. Both were sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a “tiller of the soil” while Abel was a “keeper of flocks.”

In time, the two of them felt the need to offer sacrifice to the Lord God. This need apparently reflected a Jewish (and pagan) practice of worship. Cain offered some fruits of the soil, while Abel offered one of the best firstlings of his flock. The story goes on to say that God was pleased with Abel’s sacrifice, but, for some untold reason, was not pleased with Cain’s. Cain was consumed with jealousy and killed his brother.

So, here we have the first story of a violent crime, and it is portrayed as having occurred in the first generation of humanity, suggesting that wickedness is part and parcel of human existence. This crime represented the beginning of wickedness in the world and man rising up against man, a situation of which the Ancients were as well aware as are we today. As the story has it, Cain’s crime was not lost upon the Lord God, who roundly scolded him, but also “put a mark on him,” to prevent anyone from slaying him in retribution for his crime. Cain then moved away and settled “in the land of Nod, east of Eden,” probably becoming a nomad (the name “Nod” means “Land of the Nomads.”)

Most people who retell the story end it there. Abel was dead; Cain moved out and was never mentioned again. Only one other son of Adam and Eve, Seth, is mentioned by name. Nonetheless, Cain found a woman, who would have had to be a relative, who could bear him a son. One might question whence this woman came. We can’t be too critical of the story line because it is, after all, an allegory, and woman was not all that important to the ancient Jew. In this primitive and totally patriarchal society, it was the man’s “seed” that carried on the lineage; the woman was merely the “garden” in which the man planted his seed.

The story goes on to tell about increasing wickedness in the human race. The story of Abel’s murder is only the beginning. It was going to build up to the point where God would repent of having created “evil” mankind (imagine that – God repenting!) and resolved to destroy it with a gigantic flood, which remained to be told in the story of Noah.

It took generations upon generations of long-living men and women to fill the entire world with Adam’s descendants. In time the human race became so wicked that, in the Jew’s concept of crime and punishment, it could prompt God to wipe out all living flesh from the face of the earth. The authors of *Genesis* set the stage for the Flood by creating the so-called Table of Generations tracing the lineage from Adam down to Noah. (Fundamentalists have relied on this table to determine the age of the world since its creation.) This set the scene for the gigantic flood in which everything living was to be wiped off the face of the earth except for Noah, his family, a pair of each species of the “unclean” animals and seven pair of the “clean” species to repopulate the earth.

The lineage from Adam to Noah is told as follows. In addition to listing the series of male firstborn descendants that started with Adam and ended with Noah, the writer also tells how long each of these people lived, as well as the age of the father when each person in the succession was born. In the following list, the number following each man’s name is the man’s

age when his first-born son was born: Adam (130); Seth (105); Enoch (90); Kenan (70); Mahalalel (65); Jared (162); Enoch (65); Methuselah (187); Lamech (182) and Noah. According to this account, the human race was 1056 years old when Noah was born. The life span of each man was listed in the lineage and varied from 365 years (for Enoch) to 969 years (for Methuselah). Specifically mentioned for each is also that they “had other sons and daughters.”

In this dramatic way, the writer builds up a scenario that would have the world populated with billions upon billions of people by the time of the flood. However, the extent of the world’s population is not important here, except to show that the world would have been populated by a huge number of people by the time of the flood. Thus, in this allegory, the writer speaks about the vast number of people living on the face of the earth, and how wickedness had burgeoned exponentially among them during succeeding generations. To make the multiplication of offspring more dramatic, the story has men living anywhere from 363 to 969 years. It is utterly preposterous to think that one man (Noah) could remember all these details and pass them along to us, since presumably any recorded records prior to the flood would have been destroyed in it (Noah received no orders to carry along a genealogical record!) And Noah, of course, had plenty of other problems to occupy his mind and body before, during and after the flood!

As with all allegories, the emphasis is not on the individual elements in the story, as though they were historical fact, but on the lesson that the allegory is attempting to teach or the truth that it is intended to convey. In this case, it might well be yet another witness to the fact that human beings are sinful, even wicked, and that this is simply an inevitable by-product of endowing mankind with intelligence and free will, thus rendering them concupiscent (often attracted to evil acts).

We continually hear the observation made that wickedness (murder, religious indifference, sexual deviations, robberies, vandalism, wars, etc.) is abounding and becoming more and more commonplace. Some televangelists today are predicting that “God can’t put up with this trend much longer — the end is near”! To this the wise man responds, “’Twas ever thus!” Yes, indeed! Even in Noah’s time!

Chapter 5

Noah, The Flood and Noah's Posterity

Genesis 6:5 – 10:32

In this twenty-first century AD, the cry is often heard: "What's this world coming to"? We hear tale upon tale about evil. The media are replete with stories of crimes, disorderly conduct, greed, lust, war and the like that are unfolding all over the globe. Actually, it has been that way for centuries. The phrase, "The younger generation is going to the dogs" was found on a piece of graffiti dating back to the 8th century BC. (<http://goodwingrowth.com/younger-generation-going-dogs/>). And there are plenty of fundamentalists who see wickedness of mankind today, as an omen that the world will soon come to an end.

It was probably no different for the Jew living at the time when *Genesis* was written, several thousand years before Christ. Apparently in his day the human condition had reached a crisis point in the mind of those who authored this particular part of *Genesis*, all the more so because the Jewish nation was a devoutly religious tribe that had such deep faith in the one good God whom they worshipped as Yahweh. There were rumors about the Babylonians having had children sired by evil gods, the resultant offspring being responsible for all havoc that evil men, mostly from the pagan nations, were inflicting upon the human population. People were becoming increasingly wicked as time went on. *Genesis* tells about this in a story. God looked upon the world that he had created and how depraved mankind had become, and it moved him to repent of having created mankind in the first place. His solution to the problem of wickedness was to kill all men and women that he had created, except for the single upright family still living on earth, namely that of Noah. Noah, following instruction and specifications from God, built a giant ship on which he, his family and selected animals rode out the flood that God sent, and in that way survived to repopulate the earth. The story of Noah and the flood is another allegory that has God flooding the entire earth with water so as to kill off all the living things He had created. In this way the authors expressed a holy and righteous dismay at all the evil that they witnessed in their world, and "proved" that the evil did not come from their all-good God, Jahweh.

Noah, the story goes on to say, obeyed the Lord's command and survived, along with his children and their spouses, to repopulate the world, and become a model of obeying God's commands and a hero for saving the human race from extinction. The emphasis here is upon the sinfulness of man and also reflects the very human concept of appropriate and necessary punishment for crime.

Certain fundamentalist groups today desperately attempt to harmonize the physical reality of a year-long global flood with their scientific knowledge about the known world. But in trying to defend the thesis that the story of Noah was factual history that took place at a definite time and place, they are speaking from an untenable position because their arguments fly in the face of known scientific facts.

The most logical argument against interpreting the story of Noah as literal history lies in a simple question of science: Where did all that water come from, and where did it go when the

flood ebbed to expose dry land once again? The story makes sense only if one's worldview is the primitive one described in the Creation story, namely that our flat Earth is surrounded by water, which is kept from collapsing onto the earth by means of a huge physical dome called the sky. Once it is conceded that this is not geologically true, the story of Noah's flood becomes an impossible fantasy and therefore must be interpreted as an allegory.

Fundamentalists may argue that the story of the flood must be true because other ancient peoples have recorded similar incidents whose details closely match the account in *Genesis*. It is, indeed, true that ancient writings had similar stories, notably in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. However, this additional witness does not constitute proof that the flood actually took place. Rather, it can be true that one of the accounts copied from the other or vice versa. In the case of *Genesis*, it differed from the pagan account so as to reflect the Hebrew concept of God, of evil, and of the universe, as was also done in the story of Creation.

Simple mathematics demonstrate that in order to cover the highest mountain in 40 days and 40 nights, the water level would have to rise at an average rate of approximately 30.2 feet per hour (that's 29,000 feet/40 days/24 hours). That's an incredible rate of rise in the water level, even if part of it was coming from underground, from the "abyss of the deep," as the story has it. And then, where did the water go after the rain stopped? It may have gone back into the "void" in the Hebrew understanding of the universe, but would be obviously impossible on a globe such as the planet Earth.

According to the story, Noah and his wife, sons and daughters-in-law were sealed into the ark by God a week before the rains started. After the rains ended, they remained sealed in for another 300 days, for a total of 347 days, surviving on stores of food that they had put on board to feed themselves and the animals for the duration. Problems of sanitation would have taken on gigantic proportions, not to mention all the feed they would have needed to keep all the animals alive for a year. The only non-problem was that there would be no lack of potable water.

Unless a miracle intervened, another problem would arise. After the earth was covered with water for 300 days, there would have been no vegetation left on the earth, except possibly for underwater plants such as algae and kelp, because all land-based plants would have literally drowned. Nowhere would the dove that Noah released have been able to find a green olive branch to bring back. And there certainly would have been nothing for the survivors to eat, be they brute animals or human beings. All living flesh, including that which survived the flood itself, would have starved to death in a global famine following the flood.

The story would also seem to imply that a natural phenomenon, the rainbow, did not exist prior to the flood, because the story has God presenting it to Noah as gift — the sign of a new covenant with him and his posterity. God would see the rainbow and remember his promise never again to destroy life on earth by water. Today, it is a known fact that a rainbow is formed when sunlight is broken into light of different wavelengths by the prismatic action of rainfall, and that such a phenomenon occurs after rain when the sun is in a certain range of positions in the sky. That is a hard fact of physics. But in the flood-story, the rainbow is something that God "set in the sky" as a sign of a new covenant with Noah and all mankind, assuring humanity that it would never again be destroyed by a flood, which, in turn, would imply that rainbows did not exist prior to the flood.

The fact that the writer apparently paid no attention to all the factors that would make such a story incredible to the reader shows without question that it was intended as an allegory. Just as surely as a mother told the story of the crow in the cookie jar without ever believing the story to be literally true, so the sacred writer could get his point across without having to be a geologist, a historian, a meteorologist, a farmer or all of the above. The allegorical explanation is the only one that truly fits in all respects, and this is the interpretation that must be accepted by persons who are studying the history of the Hebrew nation and trying to discern what their Scriptures are intended to teach.

Of course, each and every one of these anomalies, as well as others not listed here, could be explained by postulating miracles. But, as stated above, that is totally unacceptable when interpreting Scripture in the face of the contradictions that arise in the story. In such cases, it must be assumed that the account, or at least that part of the account, is allegorical in nature.

The author of the story simply intended that this story teach that man is sinful, and that God is an avenging God who sets everything right by destroying the wicked (at least, that conformed to the authors' understanding of how God would avenge the wicked).

There is perhaps one more element in the Jew's world that the author of the flood-story may have wished to "explain." namely, justification for enslaving the Canaanites because they engaged in certain indecent sexual practices such as sodomy and bestiality, along with human sacrifice (see Leviticus 18:19-24 and 20:23). Incidentally, the story also explains why there were different colors of skin, such as the black skin of the Canaanites whom the Jews enslaved. They were dark-skinned, so the story went, as the result of a curse that Noah had laid on Canaan, the son of Ham. Canaan had made fun of his father as he lay drunk, naked and asleep in his tent. Ham's two brothers, Shem and Japheth, were blessed for covering their father's body with a robe, bringing it in backwards so that they would not see their father's nakedness, (Gn 9:25-28.)

Chapter 6
The Tower of Babel
Genesis 11:1-26

Another reality of the world in which the Jews lived was that many people spoke in foreign languages that the Jews could not understand. And so, to complete the allegory that set the scene for what was to follow in the story of Abraham, yet another story was added to explain the phenomenon of the many languages in the world. That story was the *Legend of the Tower of Babel*.

The story of the Tower of Babel starts with the statement that “the whole world spoke the same language.” (Gn 11:1). The statement is made despite the report in *Genesis 10:5* that each of the clans descending from Japheth was “with its own language. Such a faux pas is easily explained away by noting that both of the stories were allegories and not historical documents.

The story then goes on to say that some men who gathered in the valley of Shinar decided to build a “city and a tower with its top in the sky” so as to “make a name for themselves lest they be scattered all over the earth”. They were apparently talking about building a temple tower known as a ziggurat. For some reason not very apparent from the text, the Lord God looked down, saw what was happening, and confused their speech, so that nobody knew what the others were saying. The story concludes with “That is why the place was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the speech of the entire world.” (Gn 11:26.)

Obviously, this was an allegory which, like the others that preceded it, gave an account of how the world as the Jews knew it had come to be the way it was. In this case, it explained that many of the world’s citizens spoke with different words and different language, so that the Jews and other tribes could not communicate, simply because they could not understand each other.

Then too, the authors obviously felt that one more lead-in to the story of Abraham was necessary: to tell of the generations between Noah and Abraham. This was done in *Genesis 11:10-20*. The format is the same as in previous genealogies — mentioning the age of the father at the birth of his first son in the list.

All of these first eleven chapters of *Genesis* are intended to lead the reader from the creation of the world to the call of Abraham. It is called protohistory, a word signifying that the story antedates history, and merely sets the scene in which the truly historical accounts, found in *Genesis 12:11ff* are set. The lineage is as follows: Noah (500), Shem (100), Arpachshad (35) Shelah, (30) Eber, (34) Peleg, (30) Reu, (32) Serug, (30), Nahor (29), Terah, (70) Abram (later changed to Abraham). Each of Noah’s descendants had “other sons and daughters” that lived for an average of 272 years. So, in addition to having the named descendants at an earlier age than in earlier genealogies, they still lived long lives. Again, the names and ages are not to be taken as literal historical facts, but they do indicate a considerable time between Noah and Abraham — enough to make credible the repopulation of the earth after the flood, considering that they started having babies at a relatively earlier age and lived on though great lengths of time.

When all of these factors are considered, the only acceptable interpretation of *Genesis 1-11* is that it is allegorical in nature and definitely not historical. This, in turn, gives rise to some very

serious difficulties for the Christian Church and the acceptability of its theology. The remainder of this book is devoted to pointing out some of these difficulties and offering some viable alternatives.

Part Two

Ramifications of an Allegorical Interpretation
of Genesis 1-11

Chapter 7

The Great Hermeneutical Error

It is understandable that through the centuries of its history, Christians have clung to a literal and historical interpretation of the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*. It served to facilitate understanding and teaching about the world of the ancient Jews, in the context of their particular observations, customs and beliefs. The stories were exactly what their authors had in mind. They were not interested in the least about the history of the world, other than that it was God's handiwork. Rather, they sought to explain reality as they found it, by means of an allegory that would tell of what was important to them: that there is only one God and that the earth as they knew it came from his creative hand, etc. The mature adult sees the message imparted by the story; the child, however, sees only the storyline of the allegory and "knows," for example, that Santa is real and brings toys to good little girls and boys.

The use of allegory as a teaching tool is dangerous in that it can suggest meanings that the author did not intend. For example, the allegory that provided the title for this essay (see preface) could possibly deliver several messages – that snitching cookies is improper, OR that crowdads can inflict a painful wound, OR that feeling around in spaces without first looking into them is unwise! The ultimate and unquestionable criterion in the discernment of the allegory's message is: "Why did its author write it? What was he trying to teach?"

Most importantly, *an allegory's message is never its storyline*. If it was, it would cease to be an allegory! Santa Claus does not live at the North Pole and fly around the night before Christmas delivering presents to good children. Rather, the story of Santa Claus is a subtle statement of affirming that obedience and praying are good traits and deserve to be rewarded.

Nonetheless, some might see the storyline of the allegory as a historical truth to be conveyed. In the creation story, for example, some Christian fundamentalists glean the "truth" that the world was created in six days, while others gather that people need to set aside the seventh day of each week for rest in the story of God's resting on the seventh day

Accepting the storyline itself as a historical fact that the allegory is intended to teach, constitutes a serious hermeneutical error. It strips the allegory of its teaching power by insisting that it conveys only what it literally describes. This, in turn, might well be as false as the description of the inconceivably gigantic sky-dome in *Genesis 1:6*.

The story of Adam and Eve's sin is an allegory, or myth. It was obviously designed to teach, among other truths, that all mankind is mortal, sinful and suffering, as it has been from its very beginnings, perhaps billions of years ago. The Eden-story myth did not create that situation. Myth is never the cause of reality; it only serves to illustrate an already existing reality. It is existing reality that gives rise to myth. The lamentable human situation, with all its sin, disease, famine, suffering, and dying, gave rise to the myth of Original Sin to explain that such evils as these were not created by the all-good God, but have existed since the very beginnings of the human race and are part and parcel of what it means to be human.

Many passages in Sacred Scripture involve impossible situations. One might cite, for examples, a flood that is impossible in the light of more recent cosmology, or the conflict between a six-day creation story and the geological evidence of a world that has been billions of

years in the making. Other examples include: An intelligent, talking serpent; the contradiction of a sinless God creating sinful babies in his own image and likeness; and reducing all the parables of Jesus to mere stories that were utterly useless in his teaching mission.

Readers who accept a fundamentalistic interpretation of the “Inspired Word of God” accept such anomalies as literally true simply because God says so, and with God all things are possible. This is true, of course, but not in the way that the fundamentalist understands it. Yes, God can do whatever is possible. However, he cannot do anything that is naturally impossible. He cannot create a nothing, like a square circle or a stick with only one end! He cannot make the past not to have been. All of these “projects” imply a contradiction in terms, in that one specified aspect rules out the other, and so both qualities cannot exist in the item described. They literally are “no things”! Yes, God can do all things, but he cannot *do* “no things”!

In addition, the description of the creation event was composed by persons who didn’t even exist at the time when creation actually occurred, so nobody would have knowledge of the creation event. In fact, according to *Genesis*, man did not even exist until everything else had been created!

All of this faulty interpretation of mistaking the storyline for the message constitutes a grave hermeneutical error indeed! How convenient! It explains everything! And how tragic, that the full message of the allegory is ignored or, what is even worse, denied.

We can clearly recognize all the stories of *Genesis 1-11* as allegories. They have been utilized by preachers the teaching tools that they were meant to be, but with the passage of centuries without any explanation of their literary form, their stories seem to have come to be understood as historical truth or have at least been treated as such. Since they were “facts of history” they appeared to be immutable. In our lifetime, we have run into solidly established beliefs that a man named Adam was guilty of bringing misery down on the entire universe, and not only that, he also passed his sin on to all of his progeny!

Even the councils of the Church have fallen into this trap. However, due to the doctrine of infallibility, they have not been able to replace the story about Adam’s sin and its supposed replication in all of their progeny with the allegory’s true message. The Church has been softening up the meaning of such doctrines. Nowadays people are no longer born in a state of personal sin; they simply inherit a “fallen” human nature — human nature as it was being experienced by human beings long before the account of “Original Sin” was written up in *Genesis*. However, this “fallen” nature is still an impediment to entrance into Heaven and must be removed by baptism to bring a person into a “state of grace.” This, however, does not restore a person to the kind of life that Adam and Eve are described as having enjoyed in Eden!

Many doctrines, as well as subsequent biblical stories, are based upon such allegories. This makes it necessary to point out an important hermeneutical principle, namely that *the storyline of an allegory must never be treated as historical fact or as a truth to be believed; rather, it must be treated as a figment of the author’s imagination that is utilized to teach truth*. A prime example of such an allegory-become-fact is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, describing the Eden allegory’s storyline as if it were part of the actual history of pristine mankind. The paragraph reads as follows: “*Adam ... has transmitted to us a sin with which we all are born afflicted, a sin which is the “death of the soul.”*” (CCC 403.) Pope Saint John Paul II,

in his introduction to said Catechism, goes along with that theme and assures us that each categorical statement “faithfully and systematically presents the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition in the Church and the authentic Magisterium.” (John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Fidei Depositum*, Section 2.) There is no statement whatsoever that the Eden story is allegorical in nature, nor is there any apology for presenting the Eden story as factual history. This, in turn, prompts a thinking person to judge these apparently contradictory statements untenable and reject them, along with other doctrines of the Church that might flow from them. At the very least, they could be judged as being not authentically scriptural.

Genesis 1-11 does make sense as an allegory. However, the Catholic Church has never explained this form of literature to the people in the pews. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, allegory has been presented as literally historical by the many prophets, by other authors of the Old Testament. and by Jesus himself (or at least by the evangelists who wrote his story), and by Christian theologians and preachers through the ages. Even though they may have been *accepted* as allegory, they have been *treated* as history. Thus the pronouncements and writings of the prophets, the psalms, and historical books of the Old Testament, along with any other book that cited or referred to the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*, seem to have accepted the Eden-story as history. “Bible History” was commonly taught in 20th century grade-school catechism classes. This writer remembers illustrations in Schuster’s *Bible History* that depicted the wicked folks splashing around in the flood waters and pleading for help, while Noah and his family sat placidly by along with his animals, floating in the safety of the Ark. Some fundamentalistic Christians today hold obstinately to the tables of generations as found in chapters 5 and 10 of *Genesis*, and categorically proclaim with certitude of faith that the earth is a mere six thousand years old, all geological evidence to the contrary notwithstanding.

The situation worsened when a “believe all, doubt nothing” philosophy established a position of power in the Church’s teaching mission. Once the Sacred Scriptures were canonized as the “Word of God,” no room was left for possible alternate meanings that differed from the established doctrine. Preachers could speak convincingly, secure in the knowledge theirs was the only position that correctly taught everything theological and spiritual because, after all, that’s the way it all happened. The message, coming from God Himself, was incontrovertible and left no room whatsoever for discussion. To make matters even worse, the Church has proclaimed herself infallible in teaching about faith and morals, which are largely derived from Sacred Scripture, many of whose passages are allegorical in nature and could have alternate meaning but are treated as historical fact. The doctrine of Original Sin is the prime example.

The question of whether such stories could be allegorical in nature was never raised in twentieth-century seminaries (at least not in those that this writer attended!), further providing candidates for the priesthood with a subtle and subconscious conviction that the stories are true depictions of events that actually took place at some particular time. For example, we were certain that, as related in *Genesis*, a fall from grace was experienced by the first human beings through what has come to be called “Original Sin.”

This kind of literal interpretation of Sacred Scripture is, naturally, fraught with difficulties and contradictions that cry out for an explanation. Was man, for example, created before the

brute animals or after them? Could serpents actually talk in Eden, and did they once have means of locomotion other than crawling on their bellies? Do snakes actually eat dirt? Was the universe actually created in six days? Does God, who is pure act, really ever rest from his work? And so on.

In addition to obvious contradictions, there are awkward juxtapositions within the *Genesis* story. Did God really create light before he created the sun, the moon and the stars? What about the ancient defective cosmology that has God creating a flat world, supported above the waters in the “abyss” on four pillars and covered with an astronomically huge inverted dome called the sky “to separate the waters above from the waters below?” (Gn 1:6.) Who was there to witness the creation story during the first five days of Creation so as to pass the story on to the rest of mankind? How did these Scriptures survive the worldwide flood? And so on!

Insistence on a historical interpretation of allegorical passages in Scripture would have one believe many things that run contrary to the natural order. For example, the story of Noah (Gn 7:6-8:12) describes a flood in which, in order to cover the highest mountain on earth (Mount Everest, rain would have had to fall at the phenomenal *average* rate of *30 feet per hour – 720 feet per day* – for 40 days and 40 nights, all over the globe, in order to deposit more than *ten billion cubic miles* of water upon the earth. (All the existing water on earth amounts to just over an unchanging 332 million cubic miles of water in the form of liquid, ice or vapor.) Where did all of that extra 9 billion cubic miles of water come from, and where did the water go when it receded?

The fundamentalist interpretation of the allegorical flood as history has given rise to many doctrines that are either beyond a natural explanation or, worse, simply impossible. The response of the Church is to postulate the miracle. Justification for such solutions was found in God’s omnipotence and in treating the Bible as if God had dictated it word for word and is therefore known as the “Word of God.” In the process, things got mixed up and the medium (the storyline) became the message (the truth intended by the allegory).

Such difficulties simply disappear when the *Genesis 1-11* is seen as an allegory, properly called *protohistory*, whose purpose, among others, is to provide a (fictitious) prehistoric setting for known history. In the Bible, the actual historical account begins only with the story of Abraham in *Genesis 12*, and describes events that may, in fact, actually have taken place.

A protohistory is certainly *not* a history; it is allegorical by definition. It is created in the mind of its author to set the scene for an actual historical event. In all allegories, we can learn the scripture’s lessons without having to believe that the described characters ever existed or that described events ever happened. As a matter of fact, they usually did not, even though they may have been built around the framework of an actual historical person or event. The parting of the sea in Exodus may well have been based on the legend of a volcanic eruption in the Mediterranean Sea that doomed the fabled city of Atlantis. Following the eruption, water would rush from surrounding seas to fill the void left by the eruption. Waters may first have withdrawn in a tidal wave, long enough for the Israelites to cross, and then come crashing down on the Pharaoh’s armies. (Gn 14:21ff.) To hold that persons described in such protohistories actually existed, and that they acted exactly as the story says, is to defeat the purpose of the allegory. *Genesis 1-11* is an allegory that sought to set forth what the ancient Jews believed, especially in

areas where their beliefs differed from those of their contemporaneous pagan neighbors. Examples of these beliefs include one and only one God who created all else that exists, the goodness of all of God's creation, and attributing the evil in the world to mankind's abuse of his gift of free will. That's the *real* "original sin" (note the lower case!) – simply the sinful world in which the ancient Jew found himself and had always been thus, ever since the first human beings came into existence. The book of *Genesis* shows, in a masterfully crafted allegory, how that has been part of the very history of man. The problem arises when the *storyline itself* is naively judged to be what the writer intended to teach, because that would mean that Divine Inspiration forces us to believe something that cannot be true. The basic solution to the problem is amazingly simple. *Genesis 1-11* is allegorical, and truths of faith can be discerned from the storyline used to teach them. What is written here will attempt to illustrate some of the differences in these two approaches to Sacred Scripture.

If we continue to interpret the allegory of *Genesis 1-11* as a history of actual events, then, under the fundamentalistic principle that "it is God's Word and God cannot tell a lie, we would have to believe, without exception, the following propositions as being "divinely revealed" truth, exactly as they are described in *Genesis*. The resulting scenario is absolutely absurd and therefore not worthy of our belief!

- * (Error.) The cosmology of the ancient Jews is scientifically correct. The earth is essentially flat, and the sky is an astronomically huge dome under which we live and beyond which there is nothing but water. The dome separates the earth from waters above and below and is used like an astronomical ceiling upon which God hangs and moves the sun, stars and moon around, and controls its floodgates so as to provide rain for the earth when He wants to do so. (Truth is that this is what the earth looked like to human beings before the invention of telescopes, satellites, etc.)
- * (Error.) Serpents, as originally designed, were able to walk until the curse incurred for tempting man to sin condemned them to crawl on their bellies and "eat dirt." (Truth is that the pagans had an evil god, symbolized by the snake, which was said to cause all the evil in the world.)
- * (Error.) Though God is said to have promised redemption immediately after the "Fall" by "putting enmity between the serpent and the woman," it took him some 4000 years to get around to it. All during that time, people lived and died in sin and didn't even know it. In many cultures, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, they never had a chance to hear about it for yet another millennium and a half. Because of this invincible ignorance, all of these people of good will were to be saved without ever being able to know about Jesus, the Redeemer of all mankind. (Truth is that the woman mentioned in the curse of the serpent was the imaginary Eve herself, and not Mary, the mother of Jesus.)
- * (Error.) God has been creating human beings in a state of sin throughout the history of the human race. That's not "in the image and likeness of God" because there is not a trace of sin in God! Furthermore, this sin in which everyone is created is normally removed by a quasi-magical ritual called baptism. (The truth

is that no one is in the state of sin from his very beginnings; Original Sin is a myth.)

- * (Error.) The universe, which, incidentally, is still expanding, is only about six thousand years old, and was actually created in six days. (Truth is that the earth is billions of years old.)
- * (Error.) Vegetative life on earth can actually survive after 300 days of inundation. (Truth is that it really cannot do so!)
- * (Error.) More than *ten billion* cubic miles of water in addition to the 332 *million* cubic miles already on the earth (the ratio is 33,200 to 1.) fell on the earth during Noah's flood so as to submerge the highest mountain, and then somehow vanished. Where did all that water go after the flood? (The truth is that no such flood could ever possibly have occurred.)
- * (Error.) When God created the earth, he designed it to *appear* to be billions of years old. (Why would he ever do such a thing? To deceive us?) Geology gives us a much different story than that of an earth created in six days. All scientific geology would have to be questioned and found lacking. It would appear that God is sending us one message in the Bible and another in the rocks.

The solution to this hermeneutical problem is simple. We need to acknowledge the allegorical nature of the Eden-story. It is a myth, and the myth had nothing to do with making human beings the creatures that they are today and have always been. It was one way to impart the truth about the nature of man and his relationship with God and the world in which he found himself.

Not only would such recognition of the allegorical nature of *Genesis 1-11* solve the problems of the apparent contradictions found there; it would also obviate the need to postulate miracle upon miracle to make the described events and their results possible at all. In the process it would also do away with many rituals that simply smack of magic, which is so roundly condemned by the Church. (CCC 2117.)

In time, interpreting allegorical scriptural passages as history has produced apparently insurmountable problems in our theology. They result in impossible teachings that could only be resolved by postulating a miracle, which in turn mandates recognizing the passage as allegorical. Take the doctrine of Original Sin as an example. Adam passed his sin down to all humanity, which is supposed to have reduced us to the human nature that we know today, which in turn had to be redeemed. Thus was spawned the redemptionist model of salvation, which demands the redeeming sacrifice of a God-Man, a theology that has been embraced by Christians even to this day and that gives rise to many incongruities, inconsistencies and impossibilities. Among them:

- * It paints God as a humanoid whose anger at the Original Sin had to be appeased by the ultimate sacrifice, namely, the cruel and ignominious death of his only Son, who is equally God with him!
- * The newborn, innocent child, created in the image of God Himself, is unfit to enter into communion with him in Heaven because it is abhorrent to its Creator, who designed and created it in a state of sin, though in his own image;

- * A new and abstruse theology of “sanctifying grace” had to be developed, so as to identify the status of a soul redeemed in the eyes of God or one who has sabotaged his own relationship with the divine by serious sin;
- * Human Sacrifice is depicted as an effective means to calm down God’s anger over the sinfulness of man;
- * Original Sin is passed down from father to child and must be removed by the sacrament of Baptism. Even though said father’s Original Sin had been removed by Baptism, he still has it in his genes to pass it on to his offspring! How could that be possible?

The protohistory named *Genesis 1-11* is not scientifically accurate, nor was it ever intended to be. It was written in the setting of the ancient Jews’ worldview, which it describes. To the readers in its time, it was simply the nature of their world, regardless of how it may have come to be what it was. More importantly, however, it provided an effective vehicle for teaching the truths that the ancient authors wanted to teach, such as monotheism. It represented the theological beliefs of the Jews at that time and emphasized the differences between their views and those of their polytheistic pagan neighbors.

Treating the storyline of an allegory as history serves no purpose. To do so is to do violence to the literary form itself as well as to the classic truth it is meant to convey. Accepting the storyline as historical truth violates all rules of historical research and gives rise to countless errors. It’s like believing that there actually is an Easter Bunny who appears once a year to lay decorated hardboiled eggs, and a “Good Old Saint Nick” who lives at the North Pole, where he makes gifts for good little boys and girls!

Creationist fundamentalists apply one rule above all else: The Bible is the Word of God and cannot contain any error; therefore whatever is stated in the Bible must be taken at face value. The words simply mean what they say and cannot mean anything else. There is no allowance for the possibility of literary forms, especially allegory, poetry and the apocalyptic. If the Bible says it rained five miles deep then we must believe that it somehow actually rained five miles deep!

Confusing the storyline with the lesson that it is meant to teach is extremely misleading. To illustrate, consider what falsehoods Joyce Kilmer’s classic poem, *Trees*, would tell if interpreted literally as a scientific document instead of the poem that it is. Suppose that a visitor from outer space came to an Earth that had been utterly destroyed by a nuclear holocaust some thousands of years from now. Scouring a barren landscape denuded of all vegetation, he stumbles upon a copy of the poem, *Trees*, which was somehow preserved and which the visitor could somehow read and understand. If he would then read the poem as a scientific description, rather than as the poem that it is, he would certainly get a very weird impression of a tree! (Read the parenthetical statements that follow to see what misleading “doctrines” would be inspired by such an approach, and what sort of “botanical” picture of a tree would emerge!)

I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree...

(A tree is a poem, whatever that might be.) ...

A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed against the earth’s sweet-flowing breast...

(The tree is a mammal; it nurses at the breast.) ...

A tree that looks at God all day ...

(The tree is an intelligent creature that can see God.) ...
And lifts its leafy arms to pray...
 (The tree is a religious creature.) ...
A tree that may in summer wear A nest of robins in her hair...
(trees are female and have hair)
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,
 (The tree has a bosom, or breast, as does the earth which it suckles.) ...
Who intimately lives with rain ...
 (Trees enjoy intimacy with the elements.) ...
Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.
 (The tree, which is a poem, is made by a fool.
 But only God can make a tree.
 Therefore, God is a fool!)

Such an interpretation would demand miracle upon miracle; a literal interpretation of the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* would demand a multitude of miracles!

No reasonable person would accuse Joyce Kilmer of trying to convince the scientific community that the parenthetical statements above are botanical truth. On the other hand, neither would anyone deny that the poem, true to its nature, has a message that goes far, far beyond the literal meaning of its words.

This is equally true with *Genesis 1-11*. The authors were not conducting classes in cosmology, geology, science or history. In fact, nothing could have been further from their mind! What they *were* doing was expressing their monotheistic beliefs and philosophies in the setting of the world in which they lived. As a respected classmate (J. O.) once chided this writer, “Ray, haven’t you ever learned that the Bible is half poetry?” Touche! The authors of *Genesis* taught their convictions, which were accepted in their world and are still accepted today. They usually stand in stark contrast to current pagan theologies that were contrary to the Jew’s understanding of matters. The Jews believed that there is only one God. God is good. God is the creator of everything else that exists. Man is created to be like God in that he, unlike the brute animal, has intelligence, creativity and free will. Woman, having been created from man, is equal to him in dignity. There is much evil in the world. Evil is not created by evil gods, but by sinful, concupiscent human beings. Man would be incapable of sin, were it not for his faculties of intelligence and free will, which are also absolutely necessary to enable man to love.

If the Church is to seek the greater authenticity, which is so desperately needed today, she will have to admit and preach the difference between the storied figures in *Genesis* and the message they are meant to convey. Doing so will also sidestep the many contradictions and impossible scenarios that the allegory holds, such as a global flood, the talking serpent and a miraculous “confusion of tongues” among the builders of the Tower of Babel, along with a ridiculous and untenable timeframe.

Reading *Genesis 1-11* as history has spawned innumerable doctrines, the most obvious of which is that of Original Sin, which in turn necessitated a Redeemer who would set things aright with God by means of the perfect sacrifice. These concepts would have fallen by the wayside at the outset, had the allegorical nature of protohistory of *Genesis* always been acknowledged and

respected. The consequences of accepting the account as literal history are mindboggling, and very threatening to many important teachings of Christian churches today. Some of the consequences of confusing the allegory with history, along with some suggested antidotes by way of alternate understandings, will constitute the matter for the remainder of this book. But first, a few comments are in order.

It is axiomatic in philosophical studies that matters of the spirit-world can be learned and understood *solely* by way of allegory. The concept is aptly summarized in the philosophical principle: *Nihil in intellectu nisi prius fuerit in sensu* — Nothing can exist in the intellect unless it has first been experienced in the senses. However, the power of human reason is able to draw philosophical truth out of sensual experiences by a mental process called *abstraction*. For example, one can come to know “redness” even though redness does not exist by itself, but only in *something (a substance) that is red*. Similarly, man can arrive at the conclusion that there is a singular, uncreated Creator, to whom we ascribe the names like *God, Allah, the Almighty* and *Jahweh*. His essence is to exist. He necessarily lacks nothing in Himself, and is the efficient cause of everything else that exists. Beyond that, all of what we know about the spirit world is known by way of allegory, and the allegory’s storyline does not necessarily depict the real nature of its subject; actually, it usually does not.

This principle has extensive ramifications in religious studies, which deal in so many matters not observable by our senses, such as soul, grace, sin, virtue, forgiveness, angels, demons, Satan, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory and Limbo.

Such entities cannot be scientifically demonstrated because we cannot detect their existence or their absence by any of our five senses. The most that man can do is to reason to the *possibility* of their existence. In fact, when we consider the sheer expanse of creation that we do know, it would be logical to assume that God has created pure spirits such as angels, including some who may have chosen to become demons. It is quite possible that he created every conceivable kind of living thing. However, proving that some particular creation like an angel actually exists is a far cry from merely proving the possibility of its existence. Many features of Christianity, such as Original Sin, Baptism, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Eucharist and Indulgences, have been shaped by the adoption of a redemptionist model of salvation, whether that was done early or later in the Christian era.

The great hermeneutical error is at least partly responsible for the multiple divisions in Christianity that have occurred in the course of the past twenty centuries. If Christianity is to come to unity ever again, the use of allegory as a base for doctrine will need to be carefully and painstakingly re-examined. A friend of this writer once sagely remarked that “if we would just cut out all the folderol and get down to basic truth, we would find unity in all bona fide Christian religions and, indeed, in all bona fide religions of the world.” Touchè! The statement that “truth is one” is axiomatic, and so it really should be possible to arrive at agreement and unity among all men of good will so that “that all may be one,” — a fulfillment for which Jesus so fervently prayed, (Jn 17:11.) and which has been so roundly sabotaged when allegory is treated as history.

Chapter 8

Models of Salvation: Redemptive or Incarnational?

Treating the Eden-story as a historical account of actual events has radically influenced the dogmas of the Church in countless ways, for weal or for woe and however it may have happened. It has influenced Christianity in that it has, from its very inception, demanded a redemptionist approach to salvation and the sacrifice of a God-Man to redeem us from our sinful condition. There is no scriptural justification for insisting on the redemptionist approach. It has prevailed simply because it has been the Church's custom, teaching, understanding and practice. On the other hand, Sacred Scripture would certainly support an incarnational approach, reflecting belief in a God of love, mercy, blessing and forgiveness over a God of vengeance, strict justice, and punishment for mankind's sin.

Unfortunately, whether at the outset or through a gradual and almost unnoticed metamorphosis, Christianity has interpreted the Eden Story as history and hence followed and taught the redemptionist model of salvation throughout its history. This model holds that it was necessary for Jesus to die by sacrificing his very life on the cross, just to redeem mankind and making it possible for man to live in friendship with God on earth and in Heaven after death. It would be good at this point to discuss the identifying marks of the two models and the differences in their approach to salvation.

The Redemptionist model of salvation.

The redemptionist model of salvation calls for a Redeemer, the need for whom flows from reading the Eden-story in *Genesis 3* as a historical account of man's beginnings. This model is well known and has been generally preached from the very onset of Christianity. It does not call for any scriptural interpretation because it holds that Sacred Scripture simply and literally means what it says and nothing else. That has its appeal because it requires no exegesis and infallibly proclaims the truth. However, this attitude toward Scripture brings up many contradictory elements that call its validity into question. It holds that Adam, the sole ancestor of all humanity, committed this first of sins in the Garden of Eden and transmitted it to all of his descendents, thus estranging all of humanity from its Creator. To get mankind back into a love relationship with the Divine, God had to become Man in the person of Jesus the Messiah, and offer himself as a sacrifice to redeem (which literally means "to buy back") man and restore his filial love-relationship with God the Father. In addition the individual person needed to be baptized in order to be restored to a full father-son relationship with God through the miraculous infusion of a special quality known as "sanctifying grace."

A critical observation is in order at this point. The literal interpretation of *Genesis 1-11* cannot make sense without multiple miracles to make it ring true or even credible. Thus we are told of such miracles as the creation of woman from man's rib, conversations with a snake, creation of human beings by God in his own likeness but nonetheless sinful, the miraculous start of all the languages of the world at Babel and a worldwide flood that is physically impossible.

Such a prominence of miracles shows that the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* are doubtlessly allegorical in nature and therefore must be identified and treated as such.

The Incarnational Model of Salvation.

The Incarnational Model of salvation rejects the dogma of Original Sin because nothing created by God in his own image and likeness can have the slightest sin in its makeup, for there is no sin in God. However, it does leave room for original sin in that it acknowledges original sin in the sense that human beings, unlike brute animals, have always been personally sinful from their very beginnings.

The Incarnational Model is eminently more reasonable and credible than the Redemptive Model. It is based much less on abstract concepts like sinfulness, grace, sacrifice, miracles and the like. It finds its justification in a reasonable interpretation of the allegory of Adam and Eve and requires no miracles make it sensible. The truths revealed by the allegory are in harmony with most of the Church's basic teaching except for the doctrine of Original Sin and its corollaries. It is a perfectly acceptable interpretation of the Eden-story when read as the allegory that it certainly is.

Redemptionist compared with Incarnational Model of Salvation

The Redemptionist Model is based on a literal understanding of *Genesis 1-11*, which demands that the storyline be taken as a direct statement of what we believe to be true. Exactly how Christians came to interpret the Eden-story in that way is unknown, but apparently it has never been interpreted as allegory during the first twenty centuries of the Church's existence.

The Incarnational Model is based on an allegorical interpretation of the storyline, which teaches truths that are represented allegorically and not literally.

The Redemptionist Model starts in a decidedly negative fashion, maintaining that people are born in a state of sin; the Incarnational Model holds that every human person is the product of an immaculate conception and starts life absolutely innocent.

The Redemptionist Model requires many miracles to render its message credible. The Incarnational Model requires very few miracles if any at all.

The Redemptionist Model humanizes God by assuming that God acts like human beings do. The Incarnational Model deifies man, in that he is born in the image and likeness of God, and therefore without sin.

The Redemptionist Model demands that man needs redemption through the all-sufficient self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Incarnational Model maintains that no such redemption is necessary because no man has ever been born in a state of sin.

The Redemptionist Model stresses God's punishment of sin. The Incarnational Model stresses God's infinite love, mercy and blessing.

The Redemptionist Model regards sin as an act of rebellion against God, which is usually treated as a tort in that it must be punished. The Incarnational Model regards love as the default way of salvation, and sin is forgiven primarily by a personal decision to reject the sin and return to loving God and neighbor.

The Redemptionist Model stresses the overcoming of temptation. The Incarnational Model stresses rejoicing in God's love, goodness and mercy.

The Redemptionist Model holds that Jesus became man to redeem us from our sin. The Incarnational Model holds that Jesus came to tell us of the Father's love and teach us the way to eternal life.

The Redemptionist Model stresses the removal of sin from one's life; the Incarnational Model stresses becoming more and more loving.

The Redemptionist Model's approach to life is pessimistic, starting as it does with the ugliness of sin and our lifelong struggle to rid ourselves of it; the Incarnational Model starts with the beauty of God, his love for us, and wonder at all his works, and urges us in turn to love him and our neighbor.

The Redemptionist Model must find a way to explain how zillions who have never heard the Gospel might have been saved without Baptism. The Incarnational model is confident that there is no barring them from Heaven unless they personally reject it by commission of, and persisting in a state of, serious sin.

The Redemptionist Model says that man starts his life in sin. The Incarnational Model says that man starts life in holiness.

No doubt it will be a long, long time before the Church sees fit to favor the incarnational over the redemptionist approach to salvation, though some progress has been made since Vatican II. The greatest obstacle to such a transition is that it runs counter to the doctrine of Original Sin. Meanwhile, the Church has "painted herself into a corner" by the declaring the dogma of her infallibility in matters of faith and morals, making it impossible for her to retract any of her teaching. Unfortunately, one of two doctrines, either that of Infallibility or that of Original Sin, would have to be modified or dropped, because the two are diametrically opposed to each other and cannot both be true. The Church will probably stay her current course and stay with the redemptionist model of salvation.

Chapter 9

Original Sin

Naturally, the gospel story was heavily influenced in its development by the theology, liturgy, Sacred Scripture and views of the early Jewish Christian converts.

Several factors played into the development of Christian theology and New Testament Scriptures during the approximately forty years between Jesus' death and the first gospel. Notable are the following.

- 1) The Christians of that day seem to have accepted the Eden-story as a historical account, from which they gathered that Adam's Sin was the cause of all the evil in the world.
- 2) Therefore, Adam's sin needed to be atoned.
- 3) Their chief instrument of atonement had always been the offering of sacrifice.
- 4) The perfect sacrifice was provided by Jesus when he offered his very life by allowing himself to be crucified in atonement for mankind's sin.
- 5) Jesus was recognized as the Messiah, who had been promised in their Scripture and who was now seen as having materialized in the God-Man, Jesus.

The budding Christian Church in the first centuries of its existence either took the Eden-story as literal historical truth, or used the story as the teaching tool that it was meant to be, or treated it as a combination of both. In any case, not only the faithful but also the hierarchy appear to have come to accept it, in time, as history. Along with that, they came to believe that mankind was evil, since it was tainted with sin, and was punished by God in the very same way that he punished Adam, driving him out of the Garden and subjecting him to suffering, concupiscence and death.

The Church seems thus to have come to the conclusion that mankind needed redemption from this sin by which all human beings were separated from intimate union with Jahweh, just as Adam's sin had driven him out of the Garden of Eden and barred the way to the "Tree of Life." (Gn 3:24.) This sequence in theological thought, of course, spawned the concept of a need for a redeemer, and that's the scenario of how the infant church came to regard the mission of Jesus. The "Redemptionist" model of salvation was born, which has characterized most of Christianity ever since and even today.

Had early Christians recognized that Adam's and Eve's "Original Sin" was fictitious in nature, Christian belief and worship would doubtlessly have steered a course quite different from that which has been passed down through the next twenty centuries. It would certainly not have called for a Redeemer, for there was no "Original Sin" from which to be redeemed.

Of particular interest here is how their historical interpretation of the Eden-story shaped the original Christian's view of Jesus as the Messiah. In their understanding of that "history," Adam "has transmitted, to all of his descendants, a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "death of the soul." (CCC 403.) In their view, this (Original) Sin estranged them from their God, and they saw Jesus' death as the ultimate and perfect sacrifice that redeemed them, restored them to intimacy with God and promised them eternal life, just as human beings had originally enjoyed it in Eden.

The supposed bondage of the human race by Original Sin and mankind's redemption from it gave rise to the redemptionist view of salvation, so called because it holds that humanity needed redemption and the one to redeem it was the promised Messiah, Jesus, who offered himself as

the perfect sacrifice to atone for mankind's universal sin. This shaping of the doctrine in view of the effects of Original Sin made the gospels quite different from what they might otherwise have been. The Messiah, who so often delivered the Jews from their political enemies in the Old Testament, was now seen as one who brought them back from sin and re-established them into the friendly and intimate relationship with God, a relationship that had been lost for every man and woman at the moment of their conception.

Since Original Sin is a myth, as has been shown, the mission of Jesus could not have been to deliver us from the bondage and isolation that this sin had supposedly imposed. He appears, rather, to have died as a witness to the truths that he taught and the lifestyle of love, service, meekness, humility, etc. that he advocated and that was so absent in his day (and even now). This description of Jesus' mission has aptly been called an "incarnational" model of salvation, in which God became incarnate as the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6), to point out the true way for mankind to rise above his sinfulness and thus attain perfection and salvation, and the goals for which he was destined.

Naturally, the theology, liturgy, Scriptures and life-views of the early Jewish Christians, along with their oral tradition about Jesus, greatly influenced the development of their gospel-stories and their liturgies.

Had Original Sin not been in the picture, or had the allegorical nature of the Eden-story been recognized, Jesus quite possibly might simply have been hailed as *the* Great Prophet of Jahweh, as Mohammed has been hailed as Allah's Prophet in Islam. It may well have been Jesus' teaching that changed their expectation, from a political messiah to one that would offset the curse of Original Sin.

All of this played out in a culture that they shared with pagan religions of the time. Following the lead of their Sacred Scripture, sacrifice was considered the ideal instrument for averting the wrath of an offended God and bringing mankind back into His good graces. They saw the focal point of Jesus' ministry, therefore, in the sacrifice of himself in atonement for Adam's sin. All of these considerations had a powerful and inevitable effect on the developing story of the Messiah, and how the story of the God-Man, his deeds and his teachings evolved into the Gospels.

It is of prime interest to speculate on how differently that story might have developed, had Original Sin not been in the picture. When we become convinced that Original Sin is a myth and not a true teaching about the nature of man, we have to recognize that we are stuck with the doctrines that naturally stem from it. Such truths are not truths at all because they are logical corollaries of a falsehood. At the very least, they are confusing and misleading. Some of them will be listed here, starting with some "facts" gleaned from *Genesis 1-11* by fundamentalistic readers of Sacred Scripture.

* Original Sin is the enabling cause of all the evil in the world. (CCC 390, 397, 401, 402, 407.)

The truth is that man's concupiscence is a natural trait of man's material nature. It is the product of creating a living, material being endowed with an immortal soul, intelligence, and free will. These qualities are essential for man if he is to be capable of loving. Were he unable to love, he would be equally unable to sin. It is this combination of these faculties in the natural makeup of human beings that is the *enabling* cause of sin. Adam's sin is only an allegory which observes that man is prone to sinning. His story describes the sinful state of the world as the Jew's experienced it; The Eden-story shows that there is sin in the world and that it is not part of God's creation.

- * Mankind initially enjoyed special graces called preternatural gifts, which transcended human nature and rendered the first human beings *superhuman*. To our knowledge, no real person has ever been endowed with such gifts, which are themselves mythical, and are used in Genesis so that the perfect man, Adam, would be rendered capable of sinning at all. At least, this is the way that Adam is described. These gifts are described as having been lost by disobedience to God's commandment. (CCC 375, 399, 404.) The Eden-story illustrates the concept that God did not create evil, and yet evil abounded in the world in which the ancient Jew found himself. The natural sinful state of mankind was the basis for the Eden-story, and not vice-versa.

- * Every human being inherited Adam's Original Sin unless miraculously spared. (CCC 417.) It would be better to note that Adam had special gifts to make him superior to anyone who lacked them. It's only a fictitious storyline, anyway! For example, the authors of Genesis might have composed a similar story had the first man gifted with wings so that he could fly, and something he did sheared off his wings. He would then truly have fallen, and, with flying power removed, could be said to have a "fallen" nature, as the catechism describes the entire human race. However, every human being ever created has had the same nature. Natures simply do not transmute into anything else, including a "fallen" human nature.

- * Original Sin is normally removed by Baptism. (CCC 1250.) This preoccupation with Original Sin has redefined the very meaning and purpose of baptism as being the removal of Original Sin. It is true that John preached baptism as a sign of man's repentance and God's forgiveness. With Original Sin out of the picture baptism can reasonably be administered as a sign of initiation into the congregation that regards Jesus as "the *Way, the Truth, and the Life*." John baptized people so that they would follow the one who was to come after him, "whose sandal straps I am not fit to stoop and untie," and who would "baptize them in the Holy Spirit." (Mk 1:7-8.)

- * Jesus accomplished our redemption by his sacrifice on Calvary. (CCC 616, 617.) This book was written to show that redemption was unnecessary because the commission of "Original Sin" never happened. Living according to Jesus' teaching and supporting each other in our effort to do so is far more necessary for human beings than having a mysterious, imaginary sin removed in a process that has all the marks of magic.

- * *Genesis 1-11* is factual history. No! *Genesis 1-11* is obviously a great allegory! (See chapters 1-6, above.)

- * The Earth is flat. Nobody would agree to that statement anymore! It is self-evident that the planet Earth is a globe.

- * Jesus was said to be "taken up" into Heaven. Which direction is "up" from a spinning planet?

- * God hung the heavenly bodies inside the sky dome (Gn 1:14-18) and moves them about at will.

- * Man was created *after* the brute animals in *Genesis 1:25-27*. Man was created *before* the brute animals in *Genesis 2:19-20*. These two statements contradict each other and therefore cannot both be true! The Bible would be teaching falsehood in one or the other quotation!
- * God rests at times, notably on the Sabbath (Gn 2:1). Truth: God is pure act, the sole source of all creation. If he rested (stopped his activity) for only a moment, all of creation and God Himself would cease to exist.
- * The Garden of Eden still exists, guarded by the Cherubim and a fiery sword (Gn 3:24). The Garden of Eden has never been found! The “fiery sword might well refer to a nearby desert suggesting a hot desert sun East of Eden. No doubt, this is an allegory, and might well refer to a nearby desert, the “flaming sword” being an allegorical reference to a hot desert sun “east of Eden.”
- * During Noah’s Flood, the earth and its oceans were covered by more than 10 billion (10,000,000,000) cubic miles of water, “submerging the highest mountains,” (Gn 7:19.) This is obviously allegorical, and would only have been possible only if the sky was, indeed, a giant dome as described in *Genesis 1:6-8*. Otherwise, whence did all that water come, and whither did it go?
- * All the different languages spoken by Earth’s inhabitants were created in a single instant at the Tower of Babel’s construction site. (Gn 11:7-9.) Actually they were the naturally different languages all over the known world by peoples who lived in groups that were isolated from the other groups for centuries.

* * * * *

The following are examples of Church teaching that present theological or philosophical difficulties. (The list is neither intended nor guaranteed to be exhaustive.)

- * Creation of sinful babies. The Church teaches that God creates every human being in his own image, but also that each newborn babe is in a state of sin. This involves an intrinsic contradiction because there is no sin in God!
- * *The removal of Original Sin in Baptism.* The Catholic must believe that the gates of Heaven are possibly closed to each and every newborn child because they are all in the state of Original Sin (See CCC 1257, 1261.) and lacking in the sanctifying grace required as the ticket to enter the heavenly realm. But note that “Baptism is necessary for salvation for those *to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.* (CCC 1257, [emphasis added].) Water is poured on the subject, a few magic words are recited, and *voila!* The sin is gone and the soul is filled with sanctifying grace! The person being baptized has nothing to do with the process, has not heard the gospel preached, has not chosen it, cannot reject it, and cannot refuse to say the profession of faith that others are making in his/her stead. Nonetheless, the candidate’s soul is cleansed of Original Sin and the child becomes an adopted child of God, enabled to live forever in God’s presence in Heaven.

Our whole approach to Baptism is radically changed once we realize that all human beings are conceived immaculate and born holy. The rite of Baptism, rather than washing away some flaw in God's handiwork and supplying some sort of a superior quality substitute called sanctifying grace, is celebrated as welcoming the individual into the Christian family as a believer and a member of the Mystical Body of Christ. (CCC 1267.)

Actually, the rite of Baptism, when performed on babies or on an otherwise unconscious person, is no different than magical procedures that are so roundly condemned by the Church. (See CCC 2117.)

* Original Sin and the Spiritual Life. The theology and philosophy associated with the doctrine of Original Sin is largely responsible for the emergence of a negative and narcissistic spirituality. Many faithful Christians have been afflicted with it. In the face of overpowering sexual urges and other appetites, described as resulting from Original Sin, man has often despaired of resisting the lure of forbidden pleasure and felt helpless in his struggles against his own sexuality. As a result, he has branded himself hopelessly evil and in need of redemption.

In the world of Original Sin, human beings are born bad (in sin) and challenged to become good (holy) and even seek to be perfect in their spiritual life. It is seen primarily as a struggle against sin. Its influence is still strongly felt even after baptism, which is said to wipe out Original Sin and "restore" sanctifying grace to the soul. In this scenario, the spiritual life involves not only wrestling with one's concupiscence, but also with mysterious, invisible powers — ultra-smart and malevolent spirits called demons or fallen angels. We are at spiritual war with evil spirits that we cannot see, but about which we have been informed by way of other allegories, such as the one of fallen angels led by Satan, their leader, in the Book of Revelations. (Rv 12:7-9.)

In the redemptionist mode, life consists of a spiritual warfare in which, enabled by Jesus' sacrifice and grace, our major focus and our first and most important task is to rid our lives of sin. We may well be aware of the abundance of God's blessings upon us, but our focus is on his wrath, fear of his punishments, our sinful condition and our narcissistic struggle to rise above the bad persons we believe ourselves to be. The focus is not on God, who is love, but on "me" — sinful, sinful "me"! Small wonder that many Christians suffer from a devastating and frequently manifested scrupulosity. It evokes worry about one's spiritual health and visions of God's wrath, rather than praise for His goodness and blessings. The emphasis is on weeding out imperfections rather than growing the fruits of loving God and neighbor. It's like starting out in a deep pit and spending a lifetime just getting out of it. Small wonder, then, that in the modern Church there is call for infant baptism, frequent confession and communion, indulgences, and works of asceticism such as fasting, abstinence and mortification. It's a very discouraging worldview, and one that has been responsible for innumerable cases of depression, sometimes sufficiently severe to lead to despair and even suicide.

All of the undesirable demands in this worldview can be resolved very simply by recognizing that the Eden-story is not a “revealed” historical document nor a code of religious law. Every human being is conceived in the image of God and starts life without sin and in a state of friendship with God. Borrowing and adapting a term from existing theology, we are justified in claiming that each individual human being is the product of an immaculate conception and is born in a “state of grace.”

Replacing the doctrine of Original Sin with one of Immaculate Conception would be conducive to a positive, optimistic and joyful outlook on life. Man sees himself as inherently good because he was created in the image of God Himself, and therefore holy! This is not said out of false pride; it is simply an intelligent and acceptable scriptural appraisal of facts. Man is endowed naturally with intellect and free will, making him capable of love and charity, though he is also, by that very fact, capable of selfishness and sin. Our Creator must have placed a boundless value on creating man with the ability to love, considering that this also and inevitably makes possible all the evil in world. On the other hand, man without free will would simply be a robot in the hands of his creator, with neither sin nor virtue, neither hate nor love. Man would just another brute animal, a toy in God’s playpen and nothing more.

What a difference it makes when we turn our focus away from our supposed badness to our natural goodness and God’s abundant and even extravagant blessings! We are born basically good and already holy and godlike because God created us his image, and God does not make junk! We live in a deeper reverence for our bodies, and our spiritual life becomes increasingly enriched as we live in deep gratitude for all of God’s blessings, knowing that Divine Providence is there to supply every good thing that we can possibly need, including bliss in Heaven forever! Rooted in the confidence that all is well, we are freed up to love fellow man, re-creating ourselves and all of mankind ever more in the likeness of God, who is Love. The life of each individual takes on a mission of blessing others as he or she has been blessed. “Love one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn 15:12.). We are enabled to become co-creators with God as we become agents of a dynamic and exponential explosion of love in our world! We share in the very dynamism that prompted Divine Love to create the stupendous and mind-blowing universe that came forth from his loving hand with mankind at the peak of his creation and the ultimate reason for its creation in the first place!

* The Immaculate Conception of the BVM.

The doctrine of Mary’s immaculate conception was apparently designed to “disprove” some startling and even ridiculous conclusions that arise as corollaries from a doctrine of Original Sin. A few of them will be listed here. There are many miracles in Catholic doctrine because they are demanded when a historical interpretation of the allegorical *Genesis 1-11* gives rise to otherwise insoluble conundrums in the Catholic faith. To complicate the matter further, there is no way

of verifying that a miracle actually has taken place, because such miracles cannot be discerned by the senses. This, in turn, confirms that the text is allegorical and not factual, as the fundamentalists would have it. Let us now consider some of these other examples that of teachings that depend on the doctrine of “Original Sin.”

Sacred Scripture and the Church teach that Mary was a virgin who conceived Jesus miraculously by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit rather than by sexual intercourse with a man, as the pagans would have had it. This served to preserve her virginity. (CCC 499; *Lumen Gentium* 57.) Her virginity, however, is a secondary issue. If her son was the Son of God, he could not have a human father because he would have passed Original Sin to his spouse’s offspring via his sperm. God provided an alternate solution. “The angel answered her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God.” (Lk 1:35.) There is a bonus in this arrangement that is not often noted by those who read it. The Church also teaches that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the personified mutual love between God the Father and God the Son. So, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the personified mutual love between God the Father and God the Son. Even in the human world, conception ideally takes place in the mutual love-making of husband and wife. An inspiring thought!

It must be noted here that this particular scenario of Mary’s impregnation was demanded in the allegory whether or not the early Christians believed in Original Sin. If Jesus was to be hailed as the Son of God, he could not stem from a human father. However, he could have a human mother, because the ancients did not believe that the mother contributed to the genetic makeup of the child. She was simply the “garden” in which the father planted his seed. The mother was not believed to pass on Original Sin, or any other attributes, to her children. That was considered specifically as being passed on by way of the father’s sperm.

Pagans of the time had their own particular beliefs about people whom they called “sons of God.” They were said to be conceived when a god took on human form and copulated with a human being of the opposite sex. In Mary’s case, God did not assume a human form, but impregnated the Virgin Mary through the power of his Holy Spirit, by “overshadowing” her. (Mt. 1:18.) It is what being a son of God demanded. This, of course, postulated a miracle, and there is, of course, no empirical proof that this is what actually happened.

The Church, however, takes Mary’s virginity a step further and teaches that that Mary remained, physically and perpetually, a virgin – that her hymen, the physical mark of her virginity, remained intact even during and after the birthing of Jesus. There is no way to verify that, but all this fuss is not about Mary’s hymen anyway. It is about sidestepping the question of whether or not Mary had other children, an issue that is raised in the Gospel of Mark.: “Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, a brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters our neighbors here?” (Mk

6:3.) “Brother” is not limited to our sense of the word, as being born from the same parent. In the Jewish situation, as well as in the Greek language, “brother” can refer not only to sons of the same parent(s), but also to close relatives such as cousins. The quotation in no way implies that Mary mothered any children other than Jesus.

Chapter 10

Sanctifying Grace

Sanctifying Grace was invented by Christian theologians as an allegory in its own right. The word “grace” appears in the Bible seventy-eight times, but never in the sense that the Church means it when referring to sanctifying grace. Paul probably comes closest to the subject in his use of the word; he preaches that “Everything is grace.” (Rom 4:16.) Old Testament Scriptures usually used it to describe the benevolence of God towards man.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes sanctifying grace (also called “habitual” grace) as a “permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God’s call.” (CCC 2000.) When a person has such a disposition, he is said to be in the “state of grace”; if one lacks it he is said to be in the “state of mortal sin,” and not eligible for Heaven should one die in that state.

The Catechism also puts it this way: “(Adam) has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the ‘death of the soul.’” (Cf CCC 403; quotation marks are in the original.) This is another way of saying that the newborn’s soul is “dead”, that is, without the life-giving quality of sanctifying grace. In other words, it states that Original Sin is real and that constitutes a barrier for the unbaptized to enter Heaven. This is the default setting, so to speak, for every human soul ever created, even the unborn. If that is the case, it provides one of the most powerful arguments for rejecting the redemptionist model of salvation!

That quotation from the Catechism, incidentally, cannot be taken literally. There can literally be no death of the soul, for the soul is immortal by its very nature, as the Church also teaches!

On the other hand, if Original Sin is a myth and not a reality, human beings are conceived immaculate, created in the image and likeness of God, and is already pleasing and holy in God’s eyes and therefore in the “state of grace.” Assuming that the major thesis of this book is correct (Original Sin is merely a myth and is not inherited through reproduction), we can understand the human person as being in the “state of grace” by default, sharing in divine life from the moment that he/she is created in God’s image, which must necessarily be sinless.

“Sanctifying grace” is an analogous term that describes a personal friendship with God and carries with it the eligibility to gain entry into Heaven. Given that human beings are products of sinless conception, as this book has endeavored to demonstrate, everyone begins life in the “state of grace,” which is forfeited only by the personal and deliberate commission of serious sin.

Sanctifying Grace is, indeed, an allegory in its own right. It cannot be perceived by human senses, nor can its existence be discerned through a reasoning process. Logic can neither demonstrate nor disprove its existence, which can only be believed or ignored. (CCC 2005.) The existence of sanctifying grace in any particular person can be known with certainty *only* by the person involved, because it is immediately dependent upon decisions freely made by the individual. (Incidentally, this truth provides a substantial basis for the admonition, “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” [Lk 6:37.]

Thomas Aquinas defines sanctifying grace as a quality of the soul. It is a quality of the soul, and a quality can exist only in a substance. “Redness,” for example, does not exist independently and by itself, but must qualify a substance such as blood, which is therefore said to be red. So also must grace, a quality, be a qualifier of a soul.

The Catholic Church today speaks of sanctifying grace as a participation in the life of God. (CCC 1996.) This, too, is an allegorical statement, describing, as it does, a matter that defies perception by the senses. However, whether grace is present or lacking, the term is useful as a

descriptor of a person's relationship with God. Saying that one is "in the state of grace" means that one has not turned away from God through mortal sin, or, if he had, has repented and obtained forgiveness. The Catechism describes sanctifying grace as a "stable and natural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God and to act by his love. (CCC 2000.) This definition certainly fits. Sanctifying grace is a "disposition," and identifies the bearer as one whose will is properly disposed in his relationship to God.

Sanctifying Grace is the solution to a problem created by the literal interpretation of an allegory – the eating the forbidden fruit and God's punishment for that offence: "The moment you eat of it, you shall surely die." (Gn 2:17.) The death, in that case, is not as one by ordinary human beings, but by mythical persons were stripped of their preternatural gifts, including immortality, thus making them liable to death; in other words, reducing them to a merely human nature. The very fact that everyone has to die was a phenomenon experienced by all human beings and taught by the Eden-story.

No one has ever seen grace. It is not even mentioned in *Genesis* in connection with the alleged sin in Eden by which mankind was said to have lost it.

Nonetheless, and regardless of how it came about, the "state of grace" has come to signify a condition of the human soul that is the direct opposite of being in a state of (mortal) sin. When we die, the "state of grace" enables us to spend eternity in the presence of God, while a "state of mortal sin" (complete lack of sanctifying grace) would forever exclude us from his presence.

Chapter 11

The Gospels

Before considering the awesome mission of Jesus, we need to explore the origins of the gospels that tell his story. Who wrote them? What was the message that they were intended to convey? How did they take shape during the first years of the Christian community?

During the early Christian era, spanning some forty years from the death of Jesus to the emergence of the first written gospels, his followers preserved his memory, deeds and teachings by way of an oral tradition within the Jewish society. It was the story of this marvelous God-man, Jesus, a wise teacher and a unique miracle worker among the many others that practiced their healing art in Galilee. During the forty years following his death on Calvary, Jesus' story was passed along by word of mouth from parents to children, friends to friends, apostles to their audiences and community to community. The stories were sometimes written down. Many of such documents were lost with the passage of time, while others were preserved and became supplementary source-material (*Quelle*) for the various evangelists. Meanwhile, much of the Christian tradition was being revealed to the Gentiles in letters of a self-proclaimed and privately commissioned Christian missionary from Tarsis by the name of Paul. Some of Paul's letters may also have found their way into the developing Judeo-Christian tradition in Jerusalem. The first of these four gospels, the *Gospel according to Mark*, appears to have been written around the year 70 AD.

It is simply ludicrous to assume that a story such as this, based on oral tradition and written down countless times during the forty years after the event, would faithfully report exactly what happened, and what was said by whom and when. The evangelists were no more historians than were the authors of the Eden-story. They, like the authors of Genesis, were men with a message of faith. In the telling and retelling the story would naturally be modified to conform to the convictions and beliefs of the early Christian community. The story of such a hero, who claimed to be the Son of God, who dealt so well with Pharisaical legalism, Roman imperialism and the luxurious lifestyle of the Jewish priests, and who had such a high regard for the poor and the helpless, would certainly undergo much embellishment, as stories about folk heroes generally do.

The gospels, from their very beginning as an oral tradition, were intended to tell the story of the Messiah for whom the Jewish people had longed and who was discussed in their Sacred Scriptures, to which we now refer as *The Old Testament*. There were, indeed, many stories floating around about this man named Jesus. Jewish rabbis, steeped in the sacred writings of the Old Testament, found elements there that resonated with the Jesus-stories, and came to regard such texts as prediction-prophecies. Thus some of the Jesus-stories that spoke to issues in their own day came to be regarded as fulfillment of certain Old Testament "prophecies," but only after they had already been fulfilled.

Many preachers regard some books of the Bible such as *Daniel* and *Revelation* as prophecy, but they are not foretellers of future events, nor were they ever meant to be. Rather, they belong to a special type of writing called "apocalyptic." (Thus, the last book in the Bible, *The Revelation of John*, was originally called *The Apocalypse*.) These highly figurative writings are literary works that tend to emerge in times of religious oppression and persecution, and are intended to comfort the persecuted and strengthen them in the hope that all will be well with them if they cling to the faith they have received. The message of apocalyptic literature in the Bible is announced in symbolic, highly figurative and often grotesque language that is rooted in Old

Testament imagery. The Jew or Christian recognized what these symbols meant while the pagan, unfamiliar with the Jewish tradition, dismissed them as mere gobbledygook. For example, in *Revelation* there is the image of a dragon sweeping a third of the stars from the sky with its massive tail. (Rv 12:4.) No, it is not depicting Lucifer's revolt in Heaven and his being consigned to Hell, taking with him one-third of the angels in Heaven. Rather, the dragon doubtlessly symbolizes the Roman tyrants, while the stars represent a third of the Christian population that was put to death by him in the Roman Persecutions that had recently transpired. And yet, many claim that it describes an event that happened in Heaven and that offers us vivid images of both faithful and fallen angels, Heaven, Hell, and the like, or even that it predicts the end of the world, when, as they say, "all the signs mentioned in that prediction will be in alignment."

The gift of Prophecy is simply that of recognizing truth and sharing it, thus speaking *for* God, who is truth. The truth is what the prophet proclaims, not the symbols that he uses in the proclamation. It is classic truth that holds in all times, events and circumstances. Because it is timeless and eternal, it can rightly be said to be the Word of God, who is Truth. However, because it deals with concepts that cannot be sensed, it must be treated as an allegory and, as is true of all allegories, be easily misunderstood because its symbolism can suggest differing meanings to different people.

The prophets of the first century recognized classic truth in the teachings of Jesus, and created an oral tradition by which these truths were preserved and passed along, often by way of the parable and the allegory, in the manner that Jesus was said to have taught. (Mt 13:34.) The material for the gospels that we know today came mainly from this oral tradition, passed along from generation to generation, as is the story of any folk hero. The central figure in the gospel story is the God-man called Jesus.

The connections between Jesus-events and Old Testament prophecies may well have started with an astute Jewish rabbi, well versed in the Jewish Scriptures, who saw in this storied Jesus, the miracle worker, prophet and teacher, the fulfillment of prophecy after prophecy, accounts of which are found especially in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Micah, and reasoned that this Jesus seemed to be exactly what those prophets had described. Add to this an insight inspired by the Eden-story, of first parents who had lost an idyllic lifestyle through disobedience, and that the Messiah who was to come would restore it, and the story of Jesus begins to unfold. The early Christians saw in him the prophesied Messiah, whose mission had meanwhile, somehow, become regarded not so much as delivering the Jews from their political enemies as undoing the sin of our first parents and restoring an intimate relationship between the human and the divine.

Thus, the story of Jesus came to be seen, to an ever greater degree, as corresponding to statements of classic truths found in the Old Testament — statements, often poetic, that were initially calculated to stress God's care for his "Chosen People" (as they had dubbed themselves) and that now came to be viewed as prophetic with regard to Jesus. In all probability various Jewish theologians added to the story and embellished it, as would be expected in the story of such a folk hero. He came to be seen as the miracle-worker *par excellence*, raising people from the dead, especially raising himself from the dead, would show forth his infinite divine power over death, which had been incurred by Adam for himself and all his descendants by his disobedience. Curing diseases and other malfunctions showed forth Jesus' power over "demons" that were believed to cause such maladies. Feats like walking on water, quieting the storm, multiplying the loaves and the fish to feed a multitude, and changing water to wine showed his power over nature. All these stories, any or all of which might have been created in the process

of developing this oral tradition, reflect what might be expected from a hero who was regarded as being both human and divine!

The Jesus-stories in this early Christian tradition were calculated to bolster the claim that this person, Jesus, was truly “the Son of God.” The early Christian Community saw, in the fulfillment of prophecies, a proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Many, if not most of the gospel stories, were tailored to show the person of Jesus as fulfillment of Old Testament “prophecies.” Most of them were, indeed, utilized to make the point that, like the pagans of the time, the Christians had a son of God in their midst, but this one was the real stuff — the *only* son of the *one and only* true God. He had to be God, if he was to undo the curse that had been cast upon the entire human race by God himself, and was shown to be God Incarnate by the miracles that he worked, the prophecies that he fulfilled, and finally, in the greatest of all his miracles, his own resurrection from the dead.

Such embellishment of a historical person, thing or event, though not appropriate for writing about historical events, is perfectly acceptable when utilizing the allegory as a medium to express a truth. Each author tells truth in his own way and with his own limitations. It is their starting point that is different. For the historian, it is a group of facts to be organized; for the gospel writer, it is the doctrine to be taught.

The historian first gathers facts, tests them for historical accuracy, and then draws certain conclusions to tell a historical fact, answer a question, illustrate a point, or perhaps merely recount an event. The allegory develops in the exactly opposite direction. The writer starts with convictions to be shared and then supplies *any* kind of data, whether historical, fictitious, poetic or a combination of all three, and composes an allegorical story that can illustrate those convictions. In the case of the gospels, the evangelist already knew what he wanted the story to illustrate. One might say that he “knew the punch-line,” and then supplied names, places and dates to flesh out the story so that it could be easily remembered, understood and told to a simple and generally uneducated people without needing to use a lot of philosophical language and argumentation. Some elements of the story, such as place names, prominent persons such as Herod, Pilate, and the like, could be taken from real life and included in the story to add an air of realism and credibility. A gospel might be attributed to some prodigious person other than its real author in order to provide an aura of authority to their work. For example, the Book of Revelation may well have been written by someone other than John the Apostle, to whom it was attributed.

When the gospels were composed, several generations had passed since the death of Jesus and most of the eyewitnesses to the described events had passed away. They constituted a written account of the oral tradition about Jesus, which had grown and been embellished with practically every mouth through which it passed, as oral traditions do.

The story of Jesus, one of the myriad “miracle workers” in Palestine at the time, filled the bill perfectly. Though the account would naturally include names of actual places, persons, customs, and the like, it is not important for the story actually to relate such hard data accurately, because reporting historical facts is not its purpose. The evangelist was not in the least interested in historical accuracy, but only in sharing knowledge about Jesus and, especially, faith in his message. Hence it may well be that stories about Jesus and sayings that were attributed to him, were embellished or even originated by describing events that never happened and word-portraits of people who never lived. In fact, the gospel accounts as a whole may well be legitimately regarded as myth or fable, except for the basic *fact* that a man named Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate was crucified, as described by pagan historians of the day. It is the message of an allegory such as the story of Jesus that comprises its important element, rather

than the elements that look like historical facts. If historical facts are included, they are of no importance whatsoever except for proclaiming the Christian message. “All these lessons Jesus taught the crowds in the form of parables He spoke to them in parables *only*.” (Mt 13:34. *Emphasis added*.) The evangelists did likewise.

Like the creation account in *Genesis*, this Messiah was seen as being at odds with polytheistic pagan traditions. The Romans had many hero-sons of gods in their religious tradition, and Jesus was seen by the Jew as the *only* Son of the *one and only* God. Once their tradition established that, it also became the last word in any discussion. If this was God speaking through the human ministry of this Jesus, it gave absolute credibility to the words that he spoke and therefore to all of his teaching, while discrediting any opinions that opposed it.

It must also not be overlooked that the Gospel stories were considerably changed and edited during the first decades of the Church’s existence. At one time, there were some thirty to fifty known gospels, each of them scrutinized by the then current ecclesiastical authority to make sure that whatever truths they conveyed conformed to their understanding and convictions about Jesus and his teachings. Many documents were rejected because they were written too long after the events, because of their underlying Gnostic themes, or any number of other reasons. Their number was finally reduced to four in the year of our Lord 180, by a reasoning process that was quite bizarre. The number was proposed by Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, who maintained that “there must be no less than four gospels and no more than four, because the earth was supported in the abyss on four pillars, and there were four winds.”

The history of the gospels’ development should make it clear that, contrary to what some may think, it was the Church that produced the Bible and not vice-versa. The faith of the Christian is *ultimately* faith in the Church and what the infant Church believed, rather than in a collection of writings called the “inspired” New Testament. As time went on, The Christian Church came to decisions as to what was true and what was unacceptable, and made decisions as to what was to be included and what was to be excluded from the Sacred Scriptures. .

This is not to deny that the gospels were inspired — far from it! After all, what does it mean to say that a work is inspired? First of all, what does it *not* mean? It does not mean, as some fundamentalists would have it, that God somehow dictated a word-for-word text to the evangelist, who then put it in writing, exactly faithful to God’s every word.

What inspiration does mean is truth is “breathed into” (From the Latin *in + spirare*) the evangelist in one way or another. We often hear the work of artists described as being “inspired,” particularly when they create something very beautiful. It happens through the working of the human intellect and imagination. Then, when something is shared with the result that practically all who hear it marvel at it’s wisdom, it can come to be seen as a God-given truth — one that God “breathed into” the author’s mind and imagination. In the case of the Scriptures, such incisive dogmatic and moral information is presented that can easily deserve the acclaim of having been inspired. It deals in classic truth. It is really the collective wisdom of the ancients, along with the Church that was borne of that wisdom, which can lay claim to having been inspired. It’s no different with the Native Americans, for example, and the systems of beliefs that they developed about their “Great Spirit” and their “Happy Hunting Ground,” which are allegories in their own right and similar, in many respects, to our gospels.

However, it needs to be repeated and stressed that wherever allegory is used as a literary form in the sharing of truth, the truth must be carefully distinguished from the imagery of the story that is used to convey it. And that, as they say, is easier said than done!

If the allegorical nature of a text goes unrecognized, it can give rise to absurd, if not impossible, scenarios, which in turn must explained by postulation of a “miracle.” For example,

the teaching that every human person, created in the image and likeness of the sinless God, is born with an inherited “Original Sin” as part of his or her makeup and it has to be removed by the equally miraculous rite called baptism. Would it not make more sense to say that babies are born sinless (ask any mother!), and that baptism is more properly seen as one’s initiation into the community of the faithful?

Those who deny the miracle and insist on an allegorical interpretation are tagged with derogatory designations such as “humanists,” “naturalists” or “heretics,” guilty of failing to accept a particular doctrine of the church. However, approved hermeneutics insist that the miracle is not to be invoked if a rational interpretation of a passage is possible by way of a reasonably possible alternative.

To be sure, miracles have often been used not only to make an incredible text seem credible, but also to impress the reader with the awesome power and majesty of God, whose ways far surpass man’s ways, and for whom nothing is impossible.

To summarize, the oral tradition that hailed Jesus as the promised Redeemer arose in the generations that succeeded his death and resurrection. During that time, the Christian story was propagated by way of an oral tradition that survived through several generations, all the while picking up additional details like gossip on a “grapevine”! Jewish scribes added tidbits from their Scripture that seemed to them like prophecies regarding some detail about Jesus and his mission. As many as fifty writers wrote down the story of Jesus, his teachings and his works. These gospels were then edited and critiqued by the bishops and councils of the Church. The hierarchy finally approved four of these gospels in the year 180. The number of gospels was limited to four, because Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, insisted on that number, no more and no less, because the earth stood on four pillars, and there were four winds!

There is every reason to believe that these “gospels” are as allegorical as they are historical and probably even more so. The early Christians created an allegory of their own, based in part on the allegory of the Eden-story. It is indeed a most remarkable allegory. It portrays a man who was also God, who was wise, preached love rather than hate, peace rather than war, altruism rather than selfishness, hope rather than despair, and spirit of the law rather than its letter. In all this, it held out the promise of eternal life to those who believed in his message and acted upon it. Here, Jesus is portrayed, not only as a son of God, but, in contrast to the prevailing pagan theology, as the *only* son of the *only* God. This omnipotent son of God was able to accomplish what he promised and provide whatever mankind needed. This allegory and its subject, Jesus, have been the focal point of Christianity ever since its beginnings. As in all allegories, the incidents as described are unimportant except with respect to their function of teaching truth. The *truths taught by this allegory*, and not the story by which these truths are told, constitute the faith that the Catholic Church professes as the infallible Word of God.

The allegory is indeed a powerful teaching tool as long as it is used as an allegory. Allegory does not proclaim its storyline as a historical event. Rather, it tells, often in poetic terms, the truth that its storyline is designed to illustrate. As stated earlier, confusing the two and treating the storyline as history or as a dogmatic statement is a catastrophic mistake. Nonetheless, that is exactly what the Church does when she promulgates the *storyline* in *Genesis* as a truth. (See CCC 397 ff.) She states, as a doctrine that must be accepted as a condition of membership, that a man called Adam actually ate forbidden fruit in Eden and thus lost friendship with God for himself and all his progeny. The truth needs to be distinguished from the allegory — the message from the medium. The truth is that sin and other evils have characterized the human race since

its very beginnings, and that newborn babies are innocent. Confusion between the allegorical and the historical has cost the Church much credibility in today's highly educated world. If that credibility is to be regained, the Church must deal with the allegory-versus-history question realistically and logically, and not simply ignore the question, nor brand it as the product of a misguided rationalism.

Consider how the gospel stories, like the one about Jesus, came to exist in the first place. Many of them, like the stories of Eden and Christmas, consist of monotheistic revisions of contemporary pagan myths, with due consideration for their respective differences.

Christmas is derived from a pagan celebration marking the sun's return following the winter solstice. As days were becoming noticeably shorter before the solstice, there was widespread fear that they would shorten to nothing at all, the sun would be gone forever, and the world would be plunged into perpetual night. Then, when the days again started to become measurably longer, there was rejoicing and celebration at "the return of the sun." Christians modified this celebration to proclaim the birth of Jesus, the "Son of God" and "Light of the World," as he called himself. (Jn 8:12.) In addition, the nativity-story, even though it is an allegory, served as a "protohistory" to the story of Jesus, in the same way that *Genesis* 1-11 provided an allegorical backdrop for the history of the Jews starting with Abraham.

The Christmas story tells of the Incarnation (coming into human flesh) of the son of God, but that does not mean that Jesus was actually born in a stable in Bethlehem on December 25 of God-knows-what year. Absolutely not! It has too many inconsistencies to be credible as historical fact. However, it simply doesn't matter. We can well accept that Jesus is the "Light of the World" without believing the less credible proposition that he was born in Bethlehem "to fulfill a prophecy" uttered by Micah some seven hundred years earlier (Mic 5:1), or that Mary, nine months pregnant, had undertaken such a difficult and dangerous 80-mile journey by donkey and that Joseph actually agreed to it, in order to comply with the law of the census that would crowd this tiny city with thousands upon thousands of David's descendants, all coming for the same purpose of being registered in David's home town of Bethlehem!

Another example; according to today's canon law, the marriage of Joseph and Mary could be declared null on at least two grounds: intention against community of life (engaging in sexual intercourse), vows of chastity by Mary ("I know not man), and intention against children. If the story of the nativity of Jesus were set in modern times, Jesus would be illegitimate!)

Christians have, indeed, seemed to believe that Jesus was actually born on December 25. This "reality" also set the scene for celebrating the birth of his forerunner cousin, John the Baptist, on June 25, immediately after the *summer* solstice, when the days started getting *shorter* rather than *longer*. It was a picturesque way of expanding the allegory of Christmas to show that John the Baptist had remarked that "He (Jesus, the 'Light of the World') must increase; I must decrease," (Jn 3:30) even as the days start to shorten in June and lengthening in December. This, however, does not prove that John the Baptist was born on June 25! Incidentally, such allegorical symbolism about Jesus' origins is completely lost on people in the Southern Hemisphere, where Christmas Day falls shortly after the *summer* solstice, when the span of daylight hours starts becoming shorter rather than longer!

It is likely that Jesus of Nazareth was one of myriad "miracle workers" in Palestine in his day, as well as being a wise man and a great teacher. This, along with a number of other elements such as the Jews' monotheistic theology, would figure into the story that developed in, and emerged from, the oral tradition of the first Christians.

There was, indeed, a man named Jesus who lived in the time frame described in the gospels. This is borne out by the writings of a number of secular historians of the time, notably Flavius Josephus and Tacitus, both of whom attest that a man named Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Of course, these historians provided no information about Jesus' origin, his teaching, his miracles or the like. All such details were supplied by his disciples and were matters of faith. The historical Jesus, on the other hand, provided the Christians with a real person to serve as the core of their presentation of the God-Man, be he real, allegorical or a combination of both. The story was further enhanced and rendered more credible by adding geographical, historical and political data, religious groups of the time such as the Pharisees, and civil rulers such as Herod and Pontius Pilate.

Another feature of the story of Jesus, designed to show that claims about his divinity are valid, is how he "fulfilled" certain prophecies foretold in the Old Testament. These were actually announcements by the prophets of old that became regarded, under certain circumstances and after the fact, as predictions of what was to come in the era of the promised Messiah. As noted above, the story of Jesus developed on the "gossip line" of oral tradition. Again and again, Christians of Jewish lineage, familiar with the Old Testament writings, would find elements there that suggested something about the expected Messiah. The Christian Oral tradition wove these elements into the story, making them seem to have been foretold in ages past and constituting proof of their divine source and the validity of their message. No doubt the oral tradition gave rise to the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem so as to fulfill the announcement by Micah (Mic 5:2) that the Messiah would be born there, in the City of David. Likewise, the Jesus-story would include a flight into Egypt because Hosea had said, several millenia earlier, that the messiah would spend time there. (Hos 11:1). Weaving such threads into the nativity account served to "prove" that the story was the fulfillment of an Old Testament "prophecy," that God knew it all along and had the prophets proclaim it, and that this was an assurance that Jesus was, indeed the promised messiah. As a bonus, the nativity story also provides a protohistoric backdrop for the subsequent story of Jesus' life, and establishes him as a true son of God because he was conceived, not of Joseph by means of sexual intercourse, but of God, by the "overshadowing of his spirit."

As the "gossip line" provided more and more details about this wise man who advocated love, service and peace rather than law, power and war, the story of Jesus developed into that of a superhero, his teachings and his works.

The Messiah that God sent would be his very own son. The pagan religions had their multiple sons of gods, but the Christian's son of God would have to be an only son of the one and only God. In the pagan traditions, the pagan "sons of god" were generated when a god took on human form and copulated with a human being. In a similar but somewhat different mode, this mother of God, Mary, would actually be impregnated by God himself. "The power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God." (Lk 1:35.) He was to be born of a virgin and thus be untainted by a man's sperm, which was thought to be the agent of transmitting Original Sin to one's offspring. (At the time, it was commonly thought that the mother made no contribution to the genetic makeup of the child, but was merely the "garden" in which the father planted his "seed.")

The Son of God would, of course, have all the powers of the Godhead, like the power to work miracles that other "miracle-workers" of the time could only attempt, and that would confirm his divine nature. No mere human had ever succeeded in bringing the dead back to life! Jesus,

however, was said to have raised several people from the dead including himself. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the gospels is it written that the resurrection of Jesus was actually witnessed by anyone. The first visitors to the tomb on Easter morning are said to have found only the empty tomb in which Jesus had been laid.

If Jesus was to rise from the dead, of course he would have to die, and that's precisely what the gospels describe. This part of the Jesus story — his crucifixion — is without doubt a historical reality, as is testified by secular historians of the day. It is also credible, and even expected, that he would be killed. He was at odds with the Pharisaical theology of salvation through perfect observance of the law, and the aristocratic Saducees who governed Palestine and were its priests, as well as with the Roman civil authorities, whose recipe for unity and peace was to deal harshly and pitilessly with any possible revolts against their government.

Jesus confronted these groups, all of which wanted to get rid of him because threatened their way of life and/or their power and authority. The focus of today's Christian, however, is fixed almost entirely on the extreme suffering endured by Jesus in his crucifixion and the events leading up to it, and the love shown to all men by Jesus in "redeeming" them from the consequences of Original Sin and reopening the gates of Heaven to all believers.

Strange to say, the Original Sin inherited from Adam is not even mentioned in the gospels at all!

Chapter 12

Jesus

Since Original Sin is a myth and mankind never had any real need of redemption, who was Jesus, who is commonly called what Christians believe him to be our “Savior” or “Redeemer?” What was his mission and what did he do? Does one even dare ask the question? Yes, one does, and one must.

As has been shown in chapter 9, Original Sin is unquestionably a myth. The Eden-story is fiction that had specific objectives in mind, but was obviously never intended to be a geological statement of how the universe was created or as a biography of the first human beings.

Genesis 1-11 is really not about Adam and Eve at all, but about the world in which people found themselves and, in particular, about mankind as a whole, particularly in religious thought that differed from that of the Jews’ pagan neighbors. The “fall” of Adam and Eve as described in *Genesis* never took place because the Adam and Eve of *Genesis* have never existed in real life. Human beings have always come into the world in the same condition — good but prone to evil — because human nature today is the same as it has always been, as God initially designed it. This is just as true as the fact that the earth is global rather than flat, that a man has the same number of ribs as a woman, and that Noah’s Flood was a physical and geological impossibility. The painful, sinful and sorry condition of the world was simply earth’s and man’s condition from their very beginnings, and both were described as good! God made man that way so that he could love God as God loves him. Moral evil and its consequences in the world have always been the inevitable side effect of gracing man with free will. If that is an accurate description of “original sin,” then its remedy would naturally have been to withdraw the gift of free will from all humanity.

This, however, has not happened. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has it that “Adam ... has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the ‘death’ of the soul.” (CCC 403.). That sin has been called “Original Sin.” To Catholics, “Death of the soul” means “lack of sanctifying grace”; (a “dead soul” is a contradiction in terms). Since all human souls were deprived of grace by Original Sin, it needed to be restored, for all humanity by the sacrifice of Jesus, and from individuals by baptism. What has been overlooked here is that God did not take away free will subsequent to Adam’s sin, nor does baptism restore it. What he did take away from the human race in the Eden story is the preternatural gifts with which Adam and Eve had been graced *over and above their human faculties of intelligence, reason and free will*. These gifts have been named as immortality, impassibility, integrity and infused knowledge. No human beings have been born with these gifts, not even Mary, the Mother of God! Adam’s sin did not have any effect of the qualities of intelligence and free will, which are natural to human beings and, along with their physical makeup, actually define it! The reason preternatural gifts were part of the Eden-story was simply to describe man as a creature that was able to sin but had not been born in sin. Since they were gifts that were *added* to human nature, man could lose them without destroying his human nature, and thus explain why God, who could never create evil, created such a bittersweet world for mankind.

Even so, thanks to a literal interpretation of *Genesis 1-11*, Adam has been blamed for all the evil in our world, including the closing of the “gates of heaven” to us (as suggested by driving Adam and Eve out of Paradise). Jesus has been hailed as the Redeemer, the son of God, who, so the Church’s teaching goes, took on human nature in order to atone for Adam’s sin and, by his

sacrifice of himself, bring the sinful human race back into the good graces of God (CCC 601) and thus “reopen the gates of Heaven.”

However, the human race has never actually been infected with Original Sin in the sense that Christianity has understood it. Everyone begins life with a clean slate, so to speak, created in the image and likeness of God, in whom there is no sin. One can logically conclude from this, that mankind did not need the redemption that Christianity has traditionally attributed to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice when (so they theologized) he offered himself and his very life to atone for mankind’s sin, and perpetuated this “sacrifice” in the Mass.

Unlike Adam and Eve, the Jesus of the Gospels was indeed a real and historical man. He is mentioned by the secular historians of his time as having been crucified under Pontius Pilate. This provided the evangelist with a real human being to serve as a model for their story. This is not to say that every detail of their descriptions of his life, death and resurrection were historical fact; he was, rather, described as having all the characteristics that they would have expected in a Messiah. Actually, he was probably one of myriad “miracle workers” in Palestine at the time. Dozens of evangelists proceeded to describe the Jesus that we see depicted in the gospels. Consider the following.

1) The followers of Jesus in his lifetime seemed to have regarded him as the hoped-for liberator who came to free the “chosen people” from the oppression of the Romans, in the same way that God, through some heroic figure or other, had delivered their ancestors from the enemy time after time. To them, “Original Sin” was meaningless. It provided no cause to view Jesus as one who would offer atonement for the sin of a mythical character named Adam. In fact, his crucifixion and death brought them only disappointment as it marked the end of their hopes that Jesus would deliver them from the tyranny of the Romans. Judas Iscariot’s motive for betraying his master might well have been to set the revolution against the Romans in motion under the leadership of Jesus. Then, when Jesus refused to take the bait, Judas realized that Jesus had no intention of leading a rebellion of any kind and despaired of its ever happening. With his hopes in Jesus as the promised messiah shattered and having nothing left to live for, he committed suicide by hanging himself.

2) Christians, whether oblivious to the allegorical nature of the Eden-story or continuing to use it as an allegory, have, in effect, regarded it as a true story, according to which the sin of two persons, since they represented the entire human race because they alone constituted it at the time, had to be atoned by means of sacrifice, namely, the sacrifice that the early disciples of Jesus found in his death on the cross.

3) Gentile polytheism featured many men who were also gods. Many of them abounded in Gentile polytheism. Many of them claimed to be sons of God, notably among them the emperors of Rome. This claim led the Jewish Christians to claim a God-man of their own in the person of Jesus. Contrary to Roman and Greek conventions, Jesus was the *one and only* son of the *one and only* God. He was described as possessing real, divine power over life and death. In fact, he was said to have accomplished what no other person claiming to be a god had ever done — raising himself from the dead. The Christian accepts on faith that Jesus is truly the incarnate Son of God, in virtue of a mystery that man cannot even begin to comprehend.

4) There is only one item about Jesus recorded in the secular histories of the time. It states that a man named Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. All the rest of the gospel is based solely on the oral tradition of the early Christians. However, it must be noted that lack of evidence for a particular event cannot prove that it did not, in fact, occur. There is no record of

Jesus' birth, for example, other than one that was obviously contrived to prove his divinity by painting him as being fathered by God and born in Bethlehem of a virgin as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies, notably of Isaiah and Micah. The Jews never envisioned a Messiah to rescue mankind from "Original Sin," which doctrine they have never accepted. Rather, they envisioned their messiah as someone one who would, like other Old Testament heroes, restore political power to the Jewish nation, which called itself "God's Chosen People."

5) The early Christian Church "proved" that Jesus was the messiah by the fact that he fulfilled Jewish prophecies about him. Some 109 prophecies about the coming messiah were claimed to have foretold his coming. What is most likely however is that the early Christians of Jewish lineage picked out certain lines in their Sacred Scriptures that seemed to fit their concepts of the now departed Jesus and, recognizing their potential to add realism and "proofs" to the Jesus-story, wrote them into the gospels as prophecies, even though this was done only after the "prophecies" had supposedly been fulfilled. The prime example of this is the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, which happened *exactly* as Micah had foretold (so they claimed). No civil record of Jesus' birth has ever been found. He was said to have been born in Bethlehem, as "predicted," in Micah 5:2. The community in which he grew up, however, was Nazareth, some 80 miles north of Bethlehem.

Since much of what the scriptures say about the messiah is expressed by way of allegory, what has been said here does not detract in any way from the Christian *message*, whatever that might be. It only seeks to distinguish between the allegory's message and the medium through which it is presented. The use of allegory does not detract from its intended message in the least. In fact, it strengthens it and presents it in a format that is more easily grasped and remembered. A diligent effort must be made in all reading and interpreting of Scripture to distinguish the conveyed message (the truth) from the medium used to convey it (the storyline). This is true in reading and interpreting *any* allegory, whether it is poetry, the Eden-story, Aesop's Fables, the parables of Jesus, or anything like them. The literary form of any document must always be respected lest one be led into serious errors, and this might well be more difficult than it seems to be.

It is safe to say that the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel never really existed, and that the figure of Adam was fictitious. He was created by the author of *Genesis* and represented the entire human race, whenever it had come into existence (perhaps billions of years prior) and however it became what it is today (perhaps through an evolutionary process?) Adam was not some superhuman character who ate forbidden fruit from a tree called "The tree of knowledge of good and evil." In the myth of Eden, Adam is described as enjoying special gifts such as immortality, impassibility and integrity that made him some sort of superman. The story was obviously crafted in that way to show that sin brought mankind to what the author of *Genesis* observed mankind to be, and not some perverted, subhuman creature that was repulsive to its creator because it was in the state of some kind of sin!

Nonetheless, that recorded allegorical "event" has been interpreted as changing Adam and Eve and all their descendants into persons who were, inherently and by definition, in a state of sin, lacking grace and justification from the moment of their creation, and therefore *unlike* the God who created them "in his image and likeness." This, in turn, was seen as alienating them from their Creator, Jahweh, in some mysterious way.

Actually, this scenario could not possibly be real because God would then have to be at least a bit sinful in order to create sin-infected human beings "in his image and likeness." That there

is no sin in God, and that he created man in his image and likeness, are both teachings of the Catholic Church and indeed of all Christianity. If God is without sin and creates a person *in his image and likeness*, it is impossible for that person to be in a state of sin.

However, the early church seems to have embraced and espoused a historical interpretation of Adam's sin and consequently blamed all the curses of the earth on Adam's disobedience rather than seeing it as an allegorical explanation of all the grief, pain and death that naturally afflicts material creation such as human beings.

The problem is that the Church reads *Genesis 1-3* as a history, not only about the origin of the human species, but also how mankind became sinful, rather than explaining that there is sin in the world because of man's gifts of intelligence and free will. This is how the concepts of "original" sin and "Original" Sin have become confused over the Christian milieu. The church has concocted the explanation that we inherit a "fallen" human nature from Adam, and that the human nature can be restored by baptism. That does not make sense! If we inherit sin from our father, we cannot inherit it from a baptized father because he no longer has it after baptism! Adam did not lose his human nature in any respect by his "sin." He only reverted to real human nature by losing the preternatural gifts. Incidentally, our "Redeemer" did not restore any of those gifts, nor does baptism! They had placed the imaginary Adam to exist as a superhuman creature, who by sinning simply reverted to a *natural* human being.

This scenario was *Genesis'* way of maintaining that everything that God created was good and, in the case of man, *very* good, and that he is still creating individual human beings that are, from the outset at conception, very good, created in his image and likeness, and not defaced by any sin whatsoever.

Regarding the idea of redemption, the Jews were looking for a Messiah in the style of a David, Joshua or Judith to deliver them from political oppression. They never had conceived any concept of "Original Sin" as understood by Christians today, nor do the Jews of today entertain any notion of an inherited Original Sin. They would certainly not have envisioned a messiah that would undo the effects of a curse in which they never believed!

However, the followers of Jesus who congregated after his crucifixion and death somehow gave the Eden-story a new twist. By means of whatever processes that intervened, it seems they came to see the Eden-Story as history. They must have believed that the curse following upon an Original Sin, as described in *Genesis*, was real and, in one way or another, came to see the long promised messiah in a different light, namely as one that would mend the breach in relationship that had supposedly resulted from Adam's sin and through it, the sin of the human race. They may even have accepted the Eden-story as allegory. Whether or not that is how the messianic expectation switched, Christians certainly have come to see it in the context of a redeeming sacrifice.

All this is speculation, of course, based on "before and after" concepts of the Jewish and Christian messianic expectations, respectively.

In any case, offering sacrifice was a commonly practiced religious rite in both Paganism and Christianity, between the monotheistic Jews and their polytheistic pagan neighbors. Redemption from the effects of Original Sin would be accomplished by means of a sacrifice. Such a rite, while it was important to the early Christians, is not very meaningful to modern man. In the Jews' view, sacrifice was the only sacrifice that could appease the Godhead to the extent of once again extending his friendship, grace, and intimacy to the sinful human race in a

new covenant. That's all right, as long as the allegorical source of the teaching is recognized, so that the medium (the storyline) is not regarded as the message (the truth).

Any story based on and supported solely by an allegory is also, necessarily and in turn, allegorical in nature. For example, the fact that, in 1939, Rudolph (the red-nosed) Reindeer was added to Santa's team of eight reindeer does not make Rudolph a real-life character, but just another myth like his allegorical teammates. If the Eden-story and its image of Original Sin is allegory, as it certainly is, then the story of redemption by Jesus is, in turn and by necessity, an allegory. Allegory begets allegory. It is *fact* that begets history. The allegorical storyline is never the creator of the reality that it signifies.

It must be recognized and stressed, that it doesn't really matter if the stories of Eden and Jesus are allegories! What does matter are the truths that these documents are meant to teach, even if they, in turn, are expressed by way of allegory. *The truth does not, nor can it ever, change*, but the medium (literary form) through which truth is expressed can and does change. For example, the *truth* that there is life after death does not change from one religion to another. It is equally described as fact by the Christian's Heaven and Hell, the Sioux's Happy Hunting Ground, or the Buddhist's Nirvana. It is imperative that the allegorical nature of a given scripture passage be recognized, if it exists and one is to understand the truth that the allegory is meant to teach, whatever that might be.

It is historical fact, attested especially by the secular historian Josephus, that a certain "Jesus," a good and wise teacher, was crucified under Pontius Pilate. This fact of history served the early Christians well with a vehicle to describe what they believed to be a man who was also God. This, in turn, served to illustrate their religious beliefs, among others that:

- 1) Every human being labors under the human curse of inherited Original Sin;
- 2) Sin is atoned for by a suitable sacrifice;
- 3) Jesus, the sinless Son of God, qualified as the perfect sacrifice, and
- 4) His death set the scene for his biggest feat of all, his resurrection.

The stories about Jesus' feats were doubtlessly embellished with new details as they circulated among the pre-gospel Christians during the period between his death and the appearance of what we now know as the Gospels. During those forty-some years, the stories were sometimes put down in writing — a laborious task in those days! Paul of Tarsis, in his letters to various church communities, added to the mix, and his letters are considered the best descriptions of the early Christians' theology and religious practice because they were the earliest written accounts. They predated the written gospels by some years, though they were not gathered together into a collection of scriptures until certain gospels had appeared.

It is unknown how many of such writings existed, but many of them did serve as sources for the four accounts of the "Good News" that we now call the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

According to the commonly accepted interpretation of the Gospel stories in the second millennium, the main mission of Jesus was to sacrifice his very self in martyrdom, so that the Father, who apparently needed to have such a sacrifice offered to him, would reopen the gates of heaven to mankind and make it possible for all persons to enter Heaven when they died. Jesus had (and still has) two natures in that he was both divine and human — both God and Man. The awesome miracles portrayed in the gospels, especially raising people from the dead, were calculated to teach mysteries of life and death portrayed as events that actually took place in a certain place and time. The stories of miracles helped Christians believe that Jesus was truly

God, that he had the power to forgive sins, and had all the proper credentials, unlike any mere mortal, to teach the truth about the meaning of life, the nature of things, and the difference between right and wrong, He was depicted in the gospels as the eternal priest, prophet and king.

The gospel stories all have accounts that appear to be historical, but many factors suggest that the Jesus of the gospels might well be an allegorical figure whose persona was built up around the historical Jesus, a wise man, a teacher, and one of the hundreds of miracle-workers found in Palestine at the time. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and his persona was doubtlessly embellished in the telling and retelling of wondrous deeds and wisdom that are depicted in the gospels.

What the gospels put forth cannot be regarded as a day-by-day biography of Jesus, literally describing historical details of his birth and his life. His crucifixion is the one exception. Some of the scenes depicted may, of course, have been real, but they can just as easily be allegorical depictions of the faith of the early Christian generations.

As has been shown, the Eden-story, and particularly the narrative of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, is an allegory. What is of interest, at this point, is that somehow the storyline of this allegory came to be misinterpreted or accepted as history. This, in turn, gave rise to the doctrine of an Original Sin that infected all of humanity (except, through God's intervention, Jesus, Mary and possibly John the Baptist). Christians saw in the death of Jesus the redeeming sacrifice that atoned for the Original Sin and brought the entire human race, born in sin, back into a state of intimate friendship and communion with Yahweh.

Disciples of Jesus used the story of his death and added his teachings, spawning the new faith that has been come to called "Christianity." They adopted the values that Jesus taught and used the allegory to teach the basic truths of their faith, and particularly their faith in Jesus. It should be noted that they may well have used the allegory in keeping with its nature, namely that of teaching truths by way of stories. Jesus himself is said to have consistently done that by use of a literary form known as a parable.

Since myth cannot create reality, the mythical "doctrine" of Original Sin cannot convict anyone of being born in a state of sin. Rather, each human person is born pure, innocent, good and holy, having been created in God's own image and likeness. Even the Jews, who gave us the Eden-story, do not believe that human beings are born in a state of sin.

Given that there is no Original Sin, mankind has never been in need of redemption. However, it must not be forgotten that the early Christians, who developed the gospel stories, did apparently believe that Original Sin was a reality and that a suitable sacrifice was the ideal means to atone for sin and thereby bring man back into an intimate relationship with God. The Eden-story, even when regarded as allegory, did provide a background for faith in Jesus and the role attributed to him as the redeemer of mankind.

The very notion of sacrifice, which was widely practiced in the ancient world, was understood as having the power to appease an angry God who demands his "pound of flesh" for every wrong ever done by his wayward creatures. The very idea of human sacrifice, not to mention the bloody and ignominious sacrifice of an only son, is totally incompatible with the portrait of God that emerges from the Bible and the teachings of Jesus. Rather, the story of Jesus sacrificing himself is a striking image that dramatically and powerfully tells of the infinite love that God showers upon mankind and also signifies, in the humanity of Jesus, mankind's submission to God. These were key factors in the faith of the early Christian.

It is simply inconceivable that a God who is Love has not infinitely loved all humanity from its very beginnings. *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1 Jn 4:16.)* It would be his nature to love the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Romans, the American Indian, the Eskimo, and any other races or subgroups, with the same infinite love that he showered on those who called themselves “God’s chosen people.” It would certainly not be like such a lover to delay both promising and fulfilling redemption for all these people for some four thousand years or fifteen billion years (whatever may be the history of the human race!

The Jews had hoped for a Messiah. Christians have claimed that Jesus filled that role. The redeemer was to undo the effects of Adam’s disobedience, according to the “prophecy” that was supposedly made in the Eden-story curses. However, it is quite a stretch to read *Genesis 3:15* (“I will put enmity between you and the woman....”) as a prophecy about Mary, when it was Eve who, according to the story, was the only woman in existence at the time, and the “enmity” probably alluded to struggles between husbands and wives. The curse was obviously directed at that one woman and her progeny. Actually and obviously, the curse is intended only and simply to explain the difficulties that human beings, being material creatures, must naturally contend. Along with that It maintains the doctrine that all of God’s creation is good, and that God does not create evil. Actually, the curse was an allegory and not a historical event at all. *Genesis 1-11* can, nonetheless, be used as a teaching tool, as long as it and all theological theses based on it are treated according to their nature, as allegory, if that is what they are.

Since Original Sin is myth and not reality, there never has been a need for an atoning sacrifice, even if sacrifice is regarded as an effective means of placating an “offended” God. On the other hand, it is a fact that most Christians, including Catholics, do treat the Eden-story as a historical reality, if only because the Church has proclaimed it as a doctrine for most of the years during which Christianity has been in existence. This presents a serious problem for the Catholic Church, which claims infallibility in matters of faith and morals, and even today presents the “truths” of the fall and Redemption as doctrines that can never be challenged. Such a challenge would compromise the teaching of infallibility and this, in turn, would cast a shadow of doubt on every other doctrine that the Church has ever proclaimed. After all, an infallible teacher (assuming that any such indeed exist) simply cannot admit that they have ever been wrong about anything, for to do so would imply a contradiction in terms — an infallible authority making mistakes by making statements that are not actually true. One could even seem to say that the doctrine of the Church’s infallibility is itself a wrongly interpreted allegory!

The confusion between allegory and history in the Scriptures has postulated miracle upon miracle to explain such elements as sanctifying grace, the quasi-magical washing away of Original Sin in the waters of Baptism, and a re-opening of the gates of Heaven that had never shut by the “Original Sin.” Volumes have had to be written about the complexities of properly understanding the Church’s doctrines with their many exceptions, fine distinctions, and whatever else is required to make a teaching at least palpable even though incredible. Innumerable rifts have been caused in the evolution of doctrine because some detail was found unacceptable to some sincerely inquisitive scholar or church. Usually that was because the questionable item came from an allegory, which was interpreted as meaning different things to different people.

This strongly suggests that concepts about invisible and/or other-world “realities,” such as grace, Eden, angels, demons, Satan, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory are questionable as realities, and logically must likewise be understood allegorically. The Church has claimed to know things

that she couldn't know except on the basis of her own self-styled wisdom such as is contained in the Bible (which the church created) and has arrogantly gone into areas where she has no business, and into matters that aren't really all that important, anyway. Really! Why can't we simply settle for "Whatever is, is," and, given faith in a God who is omnipotent, provident and infinitely loving, rest assured that whatever will be, will be good, because in the final analysis, God is still in control!

While it was not necessary for Jesus to sacrifice himself in atonement, it cannot be said that his death was without meaning. He certainly did die as a martyr for the cause that he preached — a countercultural way of life characterized by a spirit of penance, humility, love, service, peace and inclusion, in stark contrast to the legalism of the Pharisees, the arrogance of the Sadducees and the abusive dominance of the Roman government, all of whom considered Jesus a threat to their lifestyle, and therefore conspired to bring about his demise. (Mk 14:1, Lk 22:1-2.) The death of Jesus also set the stage for his resurrection, which teaches the Christian conviction that there is indeed life after death, and that death is neither the end nor the purpose of human life. Note that the gospels do not offer any witnesses who could testify to actually observing Jesus emerging from the tomb! They only tell that disciples who went to the tomb after the Sabbath had passed, found it empty, and were told by "an angel" (of course) that Jesus had risen from the dead. This strongly suggests that the Resurrection-story is an allegory in itself, reflecting the Jewish and Christian faith in an afterlife.

The position that redemption was not necessary does away with some quite unacceptable misconceptions of God, implicit though they may be. For example, that God, who is all perfect in himself, has needs that can be satisfied by mortal flesh. The prophet Hosea cries out, "... For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts." (Hos 6:8.) To say that God (the Father) needed the sacrifice of his own son in order to reconcile mankind to himself is to paint him as a cruel, bloodthirsty tyrant and a perverted, ungodly sadist, not to mention an abysmally poor planner! How can one logically accept the statement that God (the Son) sacrificed Himself (the Son) to Himself (the Father)? Apparently the newly born Christian Church thought it made sense. On the other hand, it might have again put the allegory to work, painting the Father in human terms as a loving but punishing father and the Son as a meek, humble and infinitely loving God.

The "Sacrifice of the Mass" must really be regarded with reservations because, though the historical Jesus was indeed crucified, the Jesus-sacrifice that the Mass supposedly perpetuates as the cause of man's redemption never took place because there was no need for it, simply because there was no Original Sin.

So what was Jesus all about if he didn't "buy our way" back into Heaven by the excruciating pain of his sacrifice? He could certainly be a martyr to the cause that he preached. His martyrdom was inflicted upon him by powers that did not like his recipe for a good way of life and frowned on those who lived a way of life that he advocated — a life in which people comforted the poor, consoled the mourner, yearned for justice, practiced mercy toward others, strove to be holy, advocated peace and made efforts to bring peace and those who were persecuted for the love of God and each other. (See Mt 5:3-12.) He gave himself up for us when he died rather than take back his teaching and thus abandon those who believed in him— which might well be reason enough in itself to celebrate his martyrdom in a liturgy known as the "Mass." But it should be celebrated as the death of a hero-witness to the truths of their faith, not

as a “sacrifice” to redeem mankind and open the gates of heaven to man. Those gates, to our knowledge, were never closed!

Another big problem with the “Sacrifice of the Mass” as an act of worship is that the very fact that sacrifice has lost its sign-value in today’s world. To the ancients, sacrifice was a bona fide act of worship; to modern man, it rests on the false interpretation of an allegory. Moreover, it more closely resembles a series of magical incantations (especially when celebrated in a language unfamiliar to the hearer, as it was before Vatican II)! Actually, it does not even rate as a sacramental sign, which needs to be discerned by one more of the five senses. The Eucharistic species (the body and blood of Jesus) cannot be sensed at all, and are therefore totally ineffective as a *sign* of anything. If Eucharist is to be a sacrament, its sign is bread symbolizing the “Bread of Life” that Jesus called himself. Likewise, the wine is a fitting symbol of the very life of Jesus. (Lose your blood, and you’re dead!), which the Church calls sanctifying grace.

Where else in our world does anyone still offer something to God by destroying it so as to appease Him, praise Him, or persuade Him to be nice to mankind or to particular individuals? Indeed, there are still martyrs today (Martin Luther King is a prime example), but there is no custom of religious sacrifice in our world. This makes it difficult to understand the Mass as a sign of a grace-giving something in Christendom. Perhaps all this is why the Church has never regarded the Mass as a sacrament in itself. On the other hand, receiving Holy Communion *is* a sacrament even when received, even apart from Mass, though the Eucharist is more aptly a sign of Jesus, the Bread of Life, than as a sign of his actual physical flesh.

Chapter 13

Sacrifice, the Mass and the Eucharist

Most early Christians were Jews, born into the Jewish culture which regarded sacrifice as the most appropriate means of adoring their God, thanking him for blessings, praying for favors and atoning for sin. Adam's sin, as described in *Genesis*, was apparently viewed as isolating all of sinful mankind (since Adam & Eve were its sole constituents) from a friendly relationship with its God. Given the customs of worship prevalent at the time, the Jews of the early Christian community quite naturally turned to sacrifice as the most desirable means of setting things aright with their Creator.

The utter universality of Original Sin called for a sacrifice of infinite proportions. In the early Christian Church this infinite sacrifice was found in Jesus, who was not only himself the perfect sacrifice, but also the perfect priest to offer it and so, according to the theology of the early Christians, Jesus became both priest and victim on Calvary to redeem mankind from the effects of Original Sin. It is of interest to note here, that what Adam and Eve had lost by their sin, namely immortality, integrity, and infused knowledge, was *not* restored to man by Jesus' sacrifice! They could not do so, for they weren't real! They were the imaginary attributes of two imaginary people!

Had early Christians recognized Adam's and Eve's "Original Sin" as fiction, there would have been no call for a redeemer at all. Jesus might rather have been regarded as the great prophet, teacher and life-guide, similar to Mohammed being regarded in Islam as the "Prophet of the One God, Allah."

Had it not been for the notion of Original Sin, Christians would have regarded Jesus' death, not as redemption, but as martyrdom, the most powerful means of attesting to the validity of one's teaching. He would submit to being killed rather than acquiesce to the Pharisees, Saducees and Romans, all of whom had very distorted notions concerning what all was needed for the good life.

The Saducees may have feared, perhaps rightly so, that they would lose their leadership role in their Jewish priesthood to the very popular Jesus, and looked for a way to have him arrested and killed. (Mk 14:1; Lk 22:1-2.). The Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat, not only to the Mosaic Law but also to their legal authority to interpret it. The Roman state saw Jesus as a rabble-rouser and feared that his extreme popularity posed a threat to their power and to their so-called *Pax Romana* (the *Roman Peace*). Furthermore, those who saw fit to get rid of Jesus had to enlist the aid of the Romans because they were the only ones who could put someone to death. If "Original Sin" was actually a myth, as has been argued here, Jesus would not have needed to die in self-sacrifice to liberate mankind from its effects and heal the rift that it had supposedly created between God and mankind. Rather, he died as a witness to the truth of his teaching and the lifestyle of love, service, meekness, humility, *et cetera* that he advocated then and his church advocates today.

This description of Jesus' mission, pointing out the true way to fullness of eternal life, especially in the practice of charity as demanded by the two great commandments, has been aptly called an "incarnational" model of salvation, in which God was born in human flesh to teach the way to eternal salvation rather than redeem man from Original Sin (redemption).

If "Original Sin" is an allegory and not a reality, a scripturally supported alternative to our current understanding of Mass and the Eucharist must be found, because: 1) there was never a

need for a Redeemer and a redeeming sacrifice; 2) Eucharist must be explained otherwise than by transubstantiation and 3) the mission of Jesus must be seen in a different light than is now envisioned.

If only for the sake of discussion, let us open mindedly stipulate that Original Sin is indeed a myth, as has been aptly demonstrated. If that is accepted as truth, then an alternate but equally valid interpretation of the texts on which the Mass and Eucharist are based is not only possible but even mandatory. While there is a certain charm and comfort to be found in a teaching about an incredible and wonderful phenomenon that keeps Jesus in our presence forever, — that of transubstantiation, based on a literal understanding of Jesus' words at the Last Supper — there are cogent reasons to explore the imagery that might emerge if those words of Jesus were interpreted as allegory, as were the rest of his parables. Further, it is axiomatic that a miracle is never to be assumed as having occurred if a reasonable explanation of a particular text, or group of texts, is possible in its stead.

The celebration of Eucharist as currently understood requires multiple and complex miracles. Bread and wine must be changed into flesh and blood. Since neither of these changes can be detected by the senses, their presence must be explained by way of a miracle without any visible results, for the bread still looks like bread and not like human flesh, and the wine still looks like wine and not like blood. That smacks more of magic than miracle, and the Church condemns magic unconditionally. (See CCC 2117.)

Another miracle whose results cannot be detected by the senses is required in the ordination of the priest who presides at the celebration. One cannot tell, by means of data gathered through the senses, that he has the ability to change bread into human flesh that still looks like bread. Priests look like any other men. What is detectable in the priest is that he has been ordained by the hierarchy in a sacrament called "Holy Orders," which produces not a whit of difference in the sense-detectable appearance of the ordained man. In reality, the whole process an exercise in the child's game of "Let's Pretend"!

Furthermore, the words of consecration, "This is my body, which will be given up for you" cannot be construed as signs of a redeeming sacrifice to be offered by Jesus the next day because no such sacrifice was ever needed to redeem mankind. The need for redemption from Original Sin is as mythical as "Original Sin" itself. It could, however be interpreted as a prediction that Jesus would go to his death because he would not withdraw his teaching.

Assuming now that the words of consecration are indeed allegorical, deep and powerful meanings can be found in them without a need to invoke any miracles whatsoever. This provides a decisive argument for the validity of the allegorical interpretation, which gives rise to a teaching that is 1) reasonable, 2) sacramental, and 3) independent of miracles to convey the message intended by the author of the passage.

Creating the body and blood of Jesus anew in the form of bread and wine, to be symbolically and perpetually offered as a sacrifice in atonement for an imaginary "Original Sin" is absurd indeed! However, it is quite possible and more likely by far, that the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper were actually intended as allegories, as were all of his (other) parables. Rich meaning can indeed be drawn from those words when they are read in the context of the many other truths that Jesus taught during his public ministry. These meanings can be drawn from his words without positing the need for transubstantiation or any other miracle.

So, what did Jesus really mean when he spoke to his disciples gathered with him at the Passover Celebration? Surely he did not intend the literal sense, as Christians have done or at

least *seem* to have done in subsequent centuries, even up to the present time. He could not have meant that the bread he was sharing with them was no longer bread, but human tissue and blood! Why not? The following reasons can readily be cited.

1) The disciples would be ordered to drink blood, an act absolutely forbidden to Jews under the Mosaic Law. (Lv 7:27, Acts 15:20.)

2) The senses cannot detect that transubstantiation has taken place.

3) The sacramental signs in Eucharist would be bread and wine. This would be in keeping with both, the symbolic observation of Passover and the nature of sacrament.

4) Nowhere in all of creation does one substance ever change into another substance *while still retaining its original form*. Transubstantiation could not serve as the matter of a sacrament because it is not perceivable by the human senses. This alone makes the doctrine highly suspect.

5) If the disciples did see eating bread and drinking wine as eating the living flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood, they would certainly grasp that Jesus was speaking allegorically, for cannibalism and the drinking of blood were strict Jewish taboos, and Jesus would surely not have given a command to do something that was prohibited by Jewish law! (Lv 17:12-15.) Jesus' command to consume human flesh and blood can only make sense if it is recognized as allegory, and that the bread and wine are only a sign, and not the substance, of the complete Jesus.

6) The "Real Presence" of Jesus in the transubstantiation cannot be a sacramental sign because it cannot be detected by the senses; in Eucharist the visible sign of the sacrament is only bread and wine, not the living flesh and blood of Jesus!

7) When Jesus solemnly assured his audience in Capernaum that "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you," many of his followers left him. It was Simon Peter who recognized that Jesus had identified himself as the "bread of life" and Peter's reply was, "To whom shall we go? You have the *words* of eternal life." (See Jn 7:53-69. *Emphasis added*)

An alternate and equally valid interpretation of Jesus' words at the Last Supper can indeed be found in the gospels! When considered as allegory, they, along with the bread and wine, provide a strong and perceptible sign of the sacrament. The commands of Jesus to "take and eat," "all of you must drink from it" and "do this in memory of me" could have been directed to all of his followers and not just to the apostles and the priests who were to become their vicars!

An allegorical interpretation of the Last Supper texts would do away with the miracles needed in the conventional interpretation, namely, invisible miracles that produce invisible effect and actually look more like magic than miracle. After all, what good is a miracle if its result is imperceptible by human beings? The alleged product of transubstantiation, flesh and blood, cannot be perceived by the senses and therefore must be treated allegorically. Furthermore, the traditional and literal interpretation has Jesus commanding his disciples to drink blood, which was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic law (Lv 17:10, Dt 12:23) and also in the Christian community, according to Apostle Paul. (Acts 15:20). That there were other variations in the gospels describing the Last Supper imply that the "words of consecration" should not be taken literally. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus does not even utter the pivotal words, "This is my blood" (See Lk 22:17-18.) Mark has Jesus calling the wine his blood only *after* the disciples had partaken of it, thus making the wine itself, and not the blood of Jesus, the sacramental sign of a New Covenant. This is reinforced when Jesus still calls the wine the "fruit of the vine" *after* he referred to it as "my blood." (Mk 14:23-24.) These statements indicate very strongly that transubstantiation was not exactly what Jesus, the early Christians and the evangelists had in

mind! On the other hand, the passages can have a different message if regarded as allegory — a message that is thoroughly sacramental, sensible and, by way of a bonus, not offensive to devout Jewish sensibilities.

The Eucharist, after all, not about sacrifice at all; it is about Passover. Even if the moot point is conceded that sacrifice is an effective tool for mending a broken relationship between God and Man, it would serve no useful purpose in this instance because mankind has never actually been alienated from God in the sense that a literal interpretation of the exit from Eden would have it. Finally, if the Last Supper scene is recognized as an allegory created by early Christians and evangelists during the several generations after the events that inspired it; it could and should be interpreted like any other allegory.

Here is precisely what Jesus told his apostles at the Last Supper, according to chapter 22 of St. Luke's Gospel:

¹⁴ When the hour arrived, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.

¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

¹⁶ I tell you, I will not eat again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ Then, taking a cup, he offered a blessing in thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you.

¹⁸ I tell you; from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the coming of the reign of God."

¹⁹ Then, taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body to be given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ He did the same with the cup after eating, saying as he did so: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." (Lk 22:14-20, and, with variations, Mt 26:26-29 and Mk 14:22-25.)"

In Mark's gospel (the first gospel-account to be written), note that Jesus does not call the wine his blood. Interestingly enough, these words of consecration are not found at all in the Gospel according to John, who is more concerned with the need to love one another than with the Passover celebration.

When these passages are read *as an allegory*, they offer many messages for possible consideration.

1) The fact that these words were spoken during the celebration of the Passover is, itself, revealing. Called to its observance by Jesus himself, it amounts to a continuation of the basic theme of Exodus, namely that God provides protection from the enemy for all who are faithful in celebrating this event. (Compare Ex 12:23-28.)

2) According to a *literal* interpretation, Jesus told the apostles that "this bread" was his body and this wine was his blood, and that they should keep on doing the same thing — changing bread and wine into Jesus' flesh and blood. This would require miraculous intervention in every instance, and Jesus was ordering his apostles to do things that were absolutely intolerable under their Mosaic law and in budding Christianity. They were not to eat human flesh nor drink blood of any kind. Furthermore, a miracle is not to be invoked when the text supports an alternate rational interpretation, which this text certainly does, crying out for an allegorical rather than literal interpretation.

3) The command, "Do this in memory of me," could, more aptly and not surprisingly, be a simple command to continue celebrating the Passover, which had been enjoined on the Jews as the Lord God delivered them from bondage in Egypt. "You shall observe this as a perpetual

ordinance for yourselves and your descendants.” (Ex 12:24.) Jesus, in keeping with Mosaic law, observed this memorial with his disciples, as he could be presumed to have done in the several previous years. The apostles would continue to celebrate the annual Passover event and remember Jesus, along with everything that he had told them about himself during the three years he had been with them. They would recognize him “in the breaking of the bread,” as several disciples had done on their way to Emmaus after Jesus had arisen. (Lk 24:35.)

4) Jesus had described himself earlier with the well known “I AM” statements, which are found in the Gospel according to John. He would surely want to be remembered by them because they are allegorical self-descriptions of himself and his mission.

“I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry. No one who believes in me shall ever thirst.” (6:35.)

“I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever. (6/51.)

“I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness. No, he shall possess the light of life.” (8:12.)

“I am the (sheep) gate. Whoever enters through me will be safe.” (10:9.)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. (10:11.)

“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.” (11:25-26.)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.” (14:5.)

These would, no doubt, be the chief descriptions of the Jesus that his disciples were to call to mind whenever they celebrated the Passover meal in his memory. They are obviously and undeniably allegorical in nature. Certainly, Jesus was not a loaf of bread, but was the spiritual nourishment for which man instinctively hungers. He was not a physical beam of light to illumine the way of the believer, but a teacher of everything that illuminates the mind and inspires the goodness for which a hero is honored and rewarded. He is not a sheep gate nor a shepherd, but a welcoming agent of safety to man, who lives in the midst of great spiritual dangers. He represents a way of life and a set of truths that would lead a person to his ultimate goal in life, namely, perfect union with the Father in Heaven.

Many of Jesus’ disciples left him because, being Jews, they could not accept the idea of eating human flesh and drinking blood. Peter, however, was obviously aware of the allegorical implications in what Jesus said and recognized him as the ultimate in teachers, prophets and spiritual directors. He stood with Jesus saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (Jn 6:68.) No doubt he recognized the allegorical sense of Jesus’ words, and was also aware that Jesus had never commanded them to do something which Jewish law forbade, so Jesus must have meant something *other than the literal* meaning of his words.

The passage, then, could be interpreted as meaning that, in the celebration of the annual Passover (which had been ordered “in perpetuity” in *Exodus 12:24*) we accept anew as the most important element in our life, the teachings of the one who is our divine guru and our ultimate model by which to live. We recognize Jesus as the great prophet and teacher and we eat the symbolic “Bread of Life” and drink the wine symbolizing his life-giving blood, thus wholeheartedly embracing in our innermost selves all that Jesus was and what he taught, stood

for, and ultimately died for. In so doing, we become more and more modeled on Christ and bring the good news of salvation to all that we meet.

With this allegorical interpretation of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, the command of Jesus to "do this in memory of me" would naturally refer to the entire Passover observance and mean that "when you celebrate the Passover in the future, let the bread and wine remind you of me as a sacramental sign of my presence, of everything that I have taught you and of all that I have commanded you." The dismissal at the end of Mass would be more than a simple announcement that the liturgy has come to an end. This happened to be a misnomer prior to Vatican II. After the announcement "Go, the Mass is ended" there was still a part of the liturgy to take place — the reading of the "Last Gospel" (Jn 1:1-14). *Ite, Missa est*, "(Go, the Mass is ended)" could have been slightly modified to express a commission *Ite, missi estis* ("Go, you have been sent") to spread God's teaching and his love to everyone in your world!

No wonder Jesus said at the beginning of the observance, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Lk 22:16.) (Incidentally, the word "Mass" appears only nine times in the Bible; each time referring simply to being used as it is defined: a quantity of matter.) Since it was his last discourse with them, he would surely have wanted to share those things by which he wanted to be remembered and which were closest to his heart. And surely nothing was "closer to his heart" than to share the good news of salvation with all of humanity through the outreach of all his followers, so that the world would know of the love that God has for Man. "... *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you, and know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!* (Mt 28:18-20.)

Actually, it would not be far-fetched to regard the entire Eucharistic conversation at the Last Supper as allegory. In fact, it would replace unreal, magical and obscure expressions with reasonable statements and put to rest awkward or contrived claims about Eucharist, such as that the bread and wine have been turned into living flesh, blood and deity by a process called transubstantiation (which occurs nowhere else in the created universe and could not, therefore, serve as any kind of sign of anything)! And yet, in today's Catholic dogma and its logical elucidation, it demands a miracle at every Mass, even though its results cannot be verified, but must simply be believed as an authentic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church! Ultimately, we are called upon to believe it because some early authorities in the Church made the mistake of reading an allegory as history. In doing so, and in a questionable exercise of the "Power of the Keys," they concluded that God hadn't done it correctly in the first place, and was now giving the Church the power to correct it. The Church, in turn, forced God to work miracle upon miracle so as to set the world straight!

As a side note, the Church insists that the eucharistic bread must be made from wheat and the wine from grapes, under pain of invalidity of the sacrament. One wonders why strawberry wine (or any red wine) could not serve just as well. Furthermore, the words of consecration must be uttered *exactly* as the gospel text specifies. Any variation, like "By divine power this bread now becomes the flesh of Jesus," instead of "This is my body," nullifies the whole rite and the bread remains just that — bread. If the entire rite is viewed in the light of an allegorical interpretation, there are no such problems, and any variety of bread could be a sign of Jesus, the "Bread of Life."

It should be noted that any particular passage of Scripture or of any other literature is subject to either allegorical or literal interpretation. Usually the circumstances will indicate which option ought to be followed. Ultimately, however, the decision as to whether a particular text should be interpreted literally or allegorically is the mind of its author.

Allegory is not an exception to the literal understanding of Sacred Scripture, which at first glance might seem to be its format. Quite the contrary, only a small percentage of the Bible is literal history. The Bible uses allegory freely throughout, beginning with *Genesis* itself. It is literal interpretation that is the exception and that breeds the most error and misunderstanding if applied to an allegorical passage.

Allegory is predominant in the Bible, as it must be because it deals mostly with intangibles like God, miracles, Heaven, Hell, saints, Purgatory, punishment due to sin, angels, demons, salvation, love, hate, sin, sanctifying grace, etc. A prime indicator that a passage is allegorical rather than historical is present when a miracle is required for the passage to make sense.

The Bible itself can tell us something about this. Both Mark and Matthew mention the teaching method used by Jesus, and state that when he was speaking to the crowds, he spoke to them *only* in parables.

I use parables when I speak to them because they look but do not see, they listen but do not hear or understand. (Mt 13:13.)

By means of many such parables he taught them the message in a way that they could understand. To them he spoke only by way of parable, while he kept explaining things privately to his disciples. (Mk 5:33-34.)

So, then, when the Apostle John has Jesus speaking to the crowds, it is undeniable that he was, as usual, teaching by way of the parable. He spoke about our need to eat his flesh and drink his blood, and not having any life without doing so. The apostles recognized the allegorical meanings but the crowds did not. It is not the apostles who complained that Jesus was speaking nonsense. It was the crowd, to whom Jesus spoke only in parables and who objected to the *literal* meaning of his words. It was his apostles who saw the allegorical meaning behind his words about Eucharist, (which he had obviously explained to the apostles) instead of all the repulsive implications of eating human flesh and drinking human blood. Peter, however, speaking for the other eleven, responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! It might well be that the early Christians simply followed the literal meaning of Jesus’ words without invoking any allegorical significance, thus developing the liturgy that became the norm several generations later. Jesus himself upbraided the skeptical Jews, who did interpret his words literally: “Though you have seen me, you still do not believe!” This, too, would strongly suggest that he was speaking to them by way of allegory.

Jesus’ words “Eat my flesh and drink my blood” can be validly interpreted as allegory, as can the many other allegories that Jesus used in teaching. We find those words used extensively in St. John’s Gospel. Of special interest here is the following excerpt from chapter 6:

³³ “It is my Father who gives you the real heavenly bread. God’s bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir, give us this bread always, they besought him.

³⁵ Jesus explained to them: “I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry; no one who believes in me shall ever thirst,

³⁶ But, as I have told you — though you have seen me, you still do not believe.

It should be obvious that when Jesus emphatically states that he is, indeed, the “bread of life,” he is speaking allegorically, because a literal interpretation simply makes no sense. No one would ever refer to himself as “bread” unless he was speaking in an allegorical sense!

It does not make sense that the Father would literally send bread down from Heaven to give life to the world. It does make sense allegorically, for it says that the Father sent into the world Jesus, who is not only the “bread of life” (bread is commonly referred to as the “staff of life”) but also the “way, the truth, and the life.” (Jn 14:6.) In verse 35, Jesus does not say “anyone who eats me,” but rather “anyone who comes to me,” giving further endorsement to the allegorical sense in which the words were intended.

Jesus says further, “No one who believes in me will ever thirst.” This cries out for an absolutely allegorical interpretation because a literal interpretation would convict anyone who dies of thirst in the desert dies because he did not believe in Jesus!

Everything logically falls into place when these passages are identified as allegory. The message would seem to be that Jesus supplies everything that is needed for a vibrant spiritual life and eternal salvation. No further explanation is necessary, and not a single miracle is involved, nor even called for!

Now, after the experience of the Last Supper, surely the apostle’s minds would have wandered back to the day when Jesus told the crowds that he was the “Bread of Life,” and how Jesus rebuked those who did not understand that he was speaking figuratively.

Taking this all into consideration, it is possible to interpret the words of Jesus at the Last Supper in a very different light and from a different perspective than the one that has traditionally been embraced by the Catholic Church. Jesus came, not to reopen the gates of Heaven (which were never really closed), but to assure us that Heaven is already ours — that’s the good news proclaimed by the Gospel — “The Kingdom of God is within you!” (Lk 17:21.) No redeeming sacrifice was ever necessary! Nor does Jesus need to be made present to mankind by a priest saying quasi-magical words that change bread and wine into the living body and blood of Jesus, because Jesus is always present to us by his essence, presence and power, which is also a doctrine of the Church! Insisting that Jesus is “really” present in the consecrated species serves only to confuse, since he is *really present* in all of his creation already. Consider the fact that the beginning of Sacred Scripture did not occur when someone composed the Eden Story, but when God revealed himself in the very act of creating the universe! Furthermore, no redeeming sacrifice of Calvary or of the Mass was ever needed for the salvation of mankind because Original Sin, which posited the “need” for such a sacrifice, is pure allegory; but note that this allegory conveys many truths when properly interpreted!

Bread and wine *can* be a sacramental sign of Jesus, who called himself the “bread of life.” He even went so far as to say, “Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (Jn 6:53.)

The undetectable body and blood of Jesus that are now *believed* to be present in the Eucharist *cannot* be the sign of a sacrament. The outward sign of a sacrament must be one that can be detected by one or more of the five human senses, and we cannot sense the “real presence” of Jesus in the bread nor in the wine. It is the other way around: we can detect the bread and the wine, and *they* can become *signs* of Jesus’ presence, but cannot become, really, the body and blood of Jesus.

Incidentally, the word “Eucharist” has nothing to do with sacrifice. It is a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.” What is now called “the Sacrifice of the Mass” is known to have been

celebrated as “The Lord’s Supper” in early Christianity. Furthermore, if Original Sin is a myth and mankind has no need for redemption from it, the “Sacrifice of the Mass” is pointless, for there is no universal sin calling for atonement.

Why, then, would Jesus have had to die? Several possibilities can be envisioned.

First of all, his death and subsequent resurrection and ascension can teach the Christian belief that there is, indeed, life with God in Heaven after our physical, mortal bodies naturally die, due to their corruptible nature.

Secondly, his death at the hands of his earthly enemies makes him a martyr who died rather than deny or minimize the truth of his teaching. He taught a way of life that was quite countercultural to the prevailing institutions of his day, and gave up his life as a martyr at their hands rather than capitulate to them by denying anything that he had taught.

The Romans lived by the sheer might of their armies, crushing any threat to their power and any danger to their famed *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), which consisted mainly of beating down their opposition by brute force to the point where further resistance became impossible. The Roman persecutions of the first century show how intensely they feared Christianity. Jesus had gathered such a following of devotees in his public life, many of whom acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, who would deliver them from all their oppressors, the Romans in this case.

The Pharisees were right-wing lawyers who taught that the way of salvation was the faithful and meticulous observance of the Mosaic Law, as enshrined in the books of Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers. They were strongly opposed to Jesus’ teaching about love of God and neighbor as the greatest commandments of the law. They were highly threatened by the teachings of Jesus, wished that he would simply go away and plotted ways to do away with him.

The Saducees were the Jewish priests, whose chief function was that of offering sacrifice. They were known to be members of the upper class and lived luxurious lives, similar to the civic royalty of their day, a life style that Jesus did not approve in his teaching.

These two religious bodies set about to persuade the Roman government, which alone had the political authority to kill anyone, to do away with Jesus. (See Mt 12:14; Jn 11:53.) They succeeded in their quest, and Jesus was killed in the manner that Rome executed its criminals: they crucified him.

When the doctrine of Original Sin is recognized as the allegory that it is, it becomes clear that the corollaries that flow from it are bereft of scriptural support because they are as unreal and allegorical as the Eden-story upon which they are based. Among others, these corollaries include doctrines concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the necessity of baptism for salvation.

The “Sacrifice of the Mass” presents some conundrums for theologians to consider. The Church teaches that Jesus sacrificed himself to redeem mankind from Adam’s sin. However, as has been amply demonstrated in this treatise, Adam’s sin is not real and there was no “original sin” from which to redeem mankind, and the purpose of the allegory was to describe the real condition of humanity. Nor is there any philosophical proof that sacrifice of any kind could serve to change God’s mind, such as his supposed anger at all the sin in the world. That anger itself is allegorical because God, who is all-perfect, cannot change; any change would be into imperfection, which is incompatible with God’s eternal and infinite perfection. It is also worthy of note that Jesus’ “sacrifice” did not undo Adam’s sin because it did not restore preternatural gifts to humanity!

Texts that speak of the saving sacrifice of Jesus must be re-examined. There is need for an interpretation of Church teaching that makes sense and does not postulate miracles to render impossible situations credible. In other words, the texts upon which our “redemption” rests must be recognized as allegory, except for the one that describes the crucifixion and death of Jesus, which rests on a historical fact.

There are possible and valid interpretations of the crucifixion story and its inclusion in canons of Sacred Scripture. One of them can be seen in the real-life story of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which teaches that it is all right to die because it leads one to Heaven. In addition, it validates everything that Jesus taught, in that he chose to be murdered rather than implicitly approve the teaching of those responsible for his death. Both can flow from the Last Supper citation of “This is my body, which will be given up for you.”

The question arises then of how the Last Supper might be understood and celebrated without reference to a sacrifice that was unnecessary in the first place.

The Last Supper could be easily regarded simply for what it was — the annual celebration of the Passover, which God had ordered to be observed “as a perennial institution” (see Ex 12:17.), and which had probably observed during the earlier years of Jesus’ public life. After all, it was Jesus himself who instructed Peter and John to prepare for the Passover observance. (Lk 22:8.) The celebration would be a sign of our ongoing journey through life to our eternal “Promised Land” of Heaven, like the exodus from Egypt signified a passage from a life of slavery into the Promised Land of Israel.

Now, instead of celebrating God’s action in that ancient biblical ritual of offering something of value by destroying it, it would celebrate the entire Jesus, the Lamb of God, and his recipe for bringing mankind to full perfection by following his teaching in the manner that he, the “bread of life,” and “the way, the truth, and the life,” had instructed them. The bread and wine, symbolizing the entire Jesus and consumed in memory of him — reminds his people that Jesus is always with them on their journey if they accept him and everything he stands for. See Chapter 14 for further comments.

When Jesus says, “This is my body ... this is my blood,” he is holding the bread and wine up as *signs* of his total self, and when he says “Take and eat ... take this cup and drink from it,” he is saying, by way of allegory, that when we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are taking him, along with all he stands for, completely into our selves, committing ourselves wholeheartedly to all of his teachings and commandments, which are to become an ever increasing part of us, so that we become more and more like him in everything we think, say or do. Thus we are challenged and empowered to love all people as God loves them, simply because we become lovers, like Jesus, reaching out to all who need our help in any way.

The wine is a symbol of blood, which in turn is a natural symbol of life, because when we lose our blood, we’re dead! When we drink this cup we take on the very life of Jesus, who told us, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (Jn 14:5.) The wine, as a sacramental sign, commits the receiver to make his life correspond to the ways of Jesus, by dedicating himself to Jesus’ mission, proclaiming the good news of God’s love and the promise of eternal life to all mankind. (Mk 16:15.)

The Eucharistic celebration could well be fittingly seen as the continuing celebration of the Passover, which was enjoined upon the Israelites “as a perpetual ordinance for yourselves and your descendants.” (Ex 12:24.) Both Passover and Eucharist symbolize and celebrate the fact

that God is with his people, protects them, and leads them into a better place and a higher quality of life.

This understanding of Eucharist challenges us to live a life imitating the life of Jesus, especially as specified in his two great commandments — that we love God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves. As signs of divine love, we represent Jesus to everyone we meet through our own call to a life of love, respect, service and humility. We take on an obligation to be Christ to our neighbor by reaching out to him as Jesus does, with love, forgiveness and mercy.

On the same night that he gave us the Eucharist, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and told them, “I give you a new commandment: Love one another; such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other.” (Jn 13:34,) Eucharist was established in the same meeting. This would seem to imply that Eucharist is not intended as “comfort food” to make us feel good due to our intimate union with Jesus through our consumption of his human flesh and drinking his human blood, practices that were totally at odds with Jewish moral theology, which made eating human flesh and drinking the blood of any animal a horribly evil act. Rather, it is a call to action, namely to love our neighbor as ourselves and as Jesus has loved us.

What has been outlined here is a different but equally valid and scripturally supported approach to the Eucharist. It postulates no miracles whatsoever. Rather, it appeals to our power of reason to arrive at the meaning of the allegory. Since no sacrifice is involved to expiate a non-existent Original Sin, the Mass would flow more naturally from the Last Supper than from the sacrificial execution of Jesus on Good Friday. There is evidence that they might have followed this pattern in the early Church, when the Eucharistic celebration was actually known as “The Lord’s Supper.”

This allegorical interpretation of the establishment of Eucharist renders a clear and positive message needing not a single miracle to make it all possible, plausible, effective and appealing. It makes the Christian message immeasurably more credible and easier to accept, but also makes it far more challenging to live! Further, it reaches out, through the Christian, to all people regardless of their personal religious persuasions.

This understanding of Eucharist also does away with an implied and commonly assumed misconception that Jesus is really present *only* in the consecrated host reserved in the tabernacles of Catholic churches. Today’s literature and preaching stress the “Real Presence” of Jesus, “body and blood, soul and divinity” in the reserved Blessed Sacrament, as if to say that Jesus is *really* present only there, in what still has all the appearances of bread and wine, and nowhere else! Many Catholics, at the urging of the clergy and religious, make visits to the Blessed Sacrament as part of their spiritual life. They do so in churches that reserve the Blessed Sacrament in their tabernacles. However, does not the Church also teach that God is present everywhere? Why, then, do we make visits to the Blessed Sacrament in order to experience the presence of Jesus? Why do we call a church building the “house of God?” Jesus is not confined to the tabernacle as in a jail. Indeed not! He is present in the entire universe that he has created and as the Church also affirms. Why are today’s right-wing conservatives so upset about confining Jesus “in a closet” (side chapel) instead of in the main part of his house, when he is actually, really and fully present in both locations and everywhere else as well?

The term “Real Presence” is as unfortunate as it is misleading. Under this fairy-tale representation, we go on through life failing to see him in each other, in the sacramental love-union of husband and wife, in the community of the Christian Church, in those who are kind to

us or suffer alongside us. We don't see his hand in all the blessings that God so extravagantly showers upon us during this earthly pilgrimage, nor in the countless wonders of nature, expressed so beautifully (with the substitution of "Lover" for "Savior") in Carl Gustav Boberg's magnificent hymn, *How Great Thou Art*:

*Oh Lord, my God! When I, in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made
I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed,
Then sings my soul, my Lover, God to Thee.
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

Chapter 14

Sacraments affected by the Doctrine of Original Sin

A. Baptism of Infants

The writer of these lines has been told that he was baptized on the day after his birth. This was Catholic practice in the 20th century, which developed from the teaching that a child must be baptized in order to enter Heaven because the “Original Sin” inherited from Adam disqualified one from entering. His older twin brothers Peter and Paul were baptized at home by their grandmother immediately after their birth, and died less than two hours later. Neither they nor any of their siblings remembered being baptized, any more than they remembered their birth and their first taste of mother’s milk! This scenario cannot really be called a sacrament, which is defined as “an outward sign (to the recipient) of inward grace.” A sign is meaningless to someone who cannot discern it.

The necessity of Baptism for salvation is a corollary to the mythical doctrine of Original Sin and is therefore a myth as well. Myth never morphs into reality! Baptism cannot remove a barrier that does not exist! Nonetheless, it has been an immemorial custom in the Catholic Church to baptize infants as soon as possible after their birth; for fear that the child might die before it becomes able to ask for baptism on its own. Further, Baptism could not be considered a sacrament necessary for salvation.

Most Catholics accept the doctrine and practice of infant baptism, but many do so with serious reservations. They wonder how God can punish an innocent child for a sin that it never committed. Are babies not created in the image and likeness of God, in whom there is no sin? Yes! Then how is it possible for God to create a child with sin as part of its nature? Even if it were possible, what does such a doctrine imply about God’s wisdom, providence and love for his creatures? Does not the curse of Original Sin, as well as its invisible removal by a specific ritual (baptism), smack of the occult and magic, which the Church so roundly condemns? And why should the absolutely sinless Jesus insist on being baptized by his cousin John, if the purpose of baptism is to remove Original Sin? It is very apparent that the entire doctrine of Original Sin and its consequences constitutes a fertile field for multiple and serious breaches of logic, and that therefore no one can be forced to believe it!

These are serious questions indeed, and they need to be studied and resolved with a reasonable discussion and argumentation. Possible solutions that would make them attractive and realistic will be suggested and tested here. They all imply a rejection of the redemptionist model of salvation. They are acceptable because they are reasonable and require no miracles. They argue that all babies are born, miscarried or aborted while totally free of any sin whatsoever. What is termed “Original Sin” is nothing more than an allegory, as has been amply demonstrated above.

A friend of this writer relates how she witnessed her mother standing outside the boundary of the local cemetery, weeping as she mourned a deceased daughter. Her natural grief was immeasurably intensified because the newborn child had not been baptized. Further, church regulations as preached in 1934 forbade burial of the unbaptized in “consecrated ground,” so her older sister was buried in the cow-pasture outside the cemetery’s fence. This, in turn, tormented the mother, a simple, deeply religious, devout and conscientious woman, with the unbearable

thought that her child would be forever barred from entrance into Heaven, and doomed eternally to a fate known only to God. (This doesn't sound much like Divine Providence, does it?)

The author of these lines was once the pastor of a small country parish. He vividly recalls a similar scene that played out before his eyes in the early 1960's. A parishioner and personal friend had been bereaved by the loss of an infant child who had died without baptism. Since there could be no funeral service for such a child (so I had been led to believe), the man arrived at the church alone and, with a shovel on his shoulder and a tiny casket under one arm, walked to the cemetery to bury his unbaptized child. In that pre-Vatican II era, the man (and I, the priest) had been informed that there could be no funeral liturgy because the child had not been baptized. I watched the scene from a rectory window and wept, "knowing," correctly or not, that I was forbidden by the rules of the Church to participate in the burial of the unbaptized baby, because it had not been received into the church community. I could not even offer a blessing, prayer or a message of condolence to the bereaved father. In fact, I was under the distinct impression that I was not even allowed to accompany him to the cemetery. I could only stand helplessly by and weep, out of compassion for the man and anger at the Church for imposing such cruel, heartless and useless regulations.

I trust that the reader will have read Chapter 7 above, which demonstrates that it is impossible, even for God, to create a baby in his own image and likeness but nonetheless in a "state of sin," because these two elements are as intrinsically contradictory as the fabled square circle. Rather, every human being is pleasing to God from the moment of its conception on, and continues to be so unless and until the person deliberately sets himself in opposition to God by the commission of serious sin. How was it then that the Church adopted the view that babies are to receive baptism as soon as possible after their birth, lest they forfeit their right to enter Heaven if they were to die unbaptized? How did the custom of infant baptism get started? What occasioned it? What problems did it resolve? What new problems did it spawn? We need to explore how infant baptism got started, and how the practice of baptizing them soon after their birth has happened to become the norm.

The basic instruction for the administration of baptism and reception of an individual into the church community is found in the words of Jesus that were uttered just before he ascended into Heaven. He instructed his disciples in the following words:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world. (Mt 28:19-20.)

This and all other accounts in the New Testament regarding the reception of baptism say substantially the same thing: candidates for baptism should be baptized only *after* they have heard the good news of the gospel preached to them and have expressed belief in the gospel and desire to live by gospel standards. The instruction obviously envisions the baptism of persons who are capable of making informed decisions on their own. (See Mk 16:16; Mt 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-41; 16:31-33.)

The apostles obeyed Jesus' command, preaching the Good News and baptizing those who believed its message. For the ones baptized, it was a process similar to what was experienced by those baptized by John the Baptist. It was endorsed by the sinless Jesus when he asked John to baptize him.

Since Jesus was sinless, the *primary* purpose of baptism could not have been the cleansing of a sinful past. Since “Original Sin” is a myth and not a real component of an infant’s makeup, baptism can only be regarded as a sign of initiation into the church community of like-minded converts who support each other in their efforts to live a life in keeping with gospel values. It would seem that the baptism of an innocent infant can only be a sign of welcoming it into the community of believers promising to support it in its quest for holiness.

It can be assumed that the apostles at first did not baptize babies and that the practice was started only later, when church leaders often received converts along with their entire families into the Church. The infant, along with older siblings, would be informed of the gospel values in due time by its parents, who had agreed to the gospel values in their own conversion. This made good sense in the early church, when the adult converts shared their faith with their offspring, much as they shared other items of wisdom in all things that parents normally teach their children. Children instinctively adopt the personal values of their parents. The faith that was called for in the convert would come as naturally to the children as learning the language, customs and other beliefs of their now Christian parents.

Certain circumstances arose, however, that rendered this system useless in some circumstances. How would the baptized learn the religious facts of life if they had lost their parents of faith who could share the faith with them? They might have been children of heretics or apostates. Their parents might have failed to live their lives in accord with Christian values.

Early leaders of the Christian faith utterly failed to teach that the story of Adam and Eve is an allegory, and “discerned,” rightly or wrongly from a literal understanding of Genesis, that individuals, due to Adam’s curse, were barred from Heaven if they died unbaptized.

The early converts to Christianity were Jews, who did not even believe in a doctrine of Original Sin. Early on, they had no convincing reason to be baptized, other than to join up in faith with those who believed in what Jesus taught.

The practice of baptizing babies appears to have been a quick but somewhat gradual development. It was not long into the Christian era, in the second century at the latest, when entire families, including the babies, may have been baptized along with their newly converted parents. There was no reason not to baptize them because the children would receive the gospel message through their parents, or at least absorb it by a sort of osmosis as they observed and practiced the lifestyle and religious practices of their parents.

Since those who have not yet attained the use of reason cannot grasp the gospel message, the Church instituted the role of godparents, whose main function was to see to the catechesis of the child in the event that parents could not or chose not to catechize their children. The godparents speak for the child in making the baptismal promises.

Jesus instructed his disciples as follows: “He who believes and accepts baptism will be saved; the man who refuses to believe in it will be condemned.” (Mk 16:16.) In the course of time, this may helped to give rise to the doctrine that baptism is necessary for salvation since, in the mind of the Church, it is the ordinary means of removing Original Sin. (CCC 1257.) Note, however, that condemnation is restricted to those who made a positive decision *not to accept* the gospel message, which cannot apply to those who have never even heard the message.

The Church’s teaching about the necessity of baptism for salvation is actually a corollary to her doctrine of Original Sin, “with which we are all born afflicted.” (CCC 403) That doctrine is based solely on the myth of *Genesis 3*, which cannot be validly interpreted as meaning that everyone is born in the state of sin. (It *can* and *should* be interpreted to mean that, historically,

humanity has always been sinful due to personal sin.) Nonetheless, the Church insists on teaching that the newly created soul is lacking in grace because it inherits Original Sin from its mythical male ancestor. Since, in the Jewish view, mother contributes nothing to the genetic makeup of the child, but is only the “garden” in which the father plants his seed, Original Sin is passed along via the father’s sperm. This gives rise to another question to those who argue against universal immaculate conception. If the father has been baptized and no longer has the sin on his person (or specifically in his sexual apparatus), how could he possibly pass it along to his offspring? This definitely does not “smell right,” and what makes it “not smell right” is simply the erroneously literal interpretation of *Genesis 3:1-11*.

The Catechism explains away the anomaly by stating that “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.” (CCC 1257.) This provides an admittedly feeble support to the Church’s teaching on the necessity of baptism, along with some hope for the salvation of the unbaptized. However, it also reaffirms its doctrine of “Original Sin” in the newborn.

The Church goes on to explain “Original Sin” as follows. Each human being is born with the so called “fallen” human nature that the first man passed on to all of his descendants. However, the myth of *Genesis 3* does not claim that man’s nature fell to a lower level than that which defines man as man. It only states that the mythical Adam fell to a state lower than the one in which *he* was created. His “fall” brought him down from the supernatural to natural humanity in all respects a human being in the world, namely, a living animal with intellect and free will. In other words, the mythical Adam lost only preternatural gifts that needed to be included in the story to make the sinning man *merely* human and not *subhuman*! He lost immortality and must die, as does every material creature. He lost the gift of integrity and must grapple constantly with concupiscence, which strongly tempts him to sin. He lost his gift of infused knowledge and had henceforth to gain all his knowledge the hard way, namely by observation of the world in which he found himself and gaining knowledge of spiritual values by a process of abstraction! And that pretty well describes the *natural* human condition that the story leaves in its wake, while it preserves the teaching that everything God created was *good*, and that all the evil in the world was brought on by man’s wayward free will, and not by some evil god like those featured in pagan theology.

It should therefore be obvious that the custom of baptizing the newborn child as quickly as possible is based on an erroneously literal interpretation of *Genesis 3*, which would have it that a child is born without sanctifying grace. This, along with a “better safe than sorry” attitude, made it unwise for the Church to take the chance that the child would not be saved if it died without personally having chosen baptism for itself.

The initial signification of baptism in Sacred Scripture was associated with baptism as practiced by John, who called for repentance and joining with others in a community for mutual support in their quest for living a life in keeping with all that Jesus taught. This signification was preserved in the baptism performed by the apostles after Jesus ascended into Heaven. The rite offered a powerful sign, chosen by Jesus Himself, of leaving one’s sinful past behind by “washing it away” and becoming true followers of Jesus. And is it not strange that nowhere in the gospels is there anything said about the baptism of the apostles?

Thanks to treating the allegory of *Genesis 3* as literal historical fact, baptism’s initial signification extended to “washing away” that mythical, inherited sin as if it soiled one’s inner being and rendered it repulsive to the God who created it. Thus the understanding of how

baptism worked changed, from repenting one's sinful past, to the removal of a mysterious, quasi-magically inherited sin that negated one's holiness and wholesomeness.

It is impossible to envision how baptism can be a sacrament for an infant. The signification of baptism is obviously lost on the infant who can neither perceive the sign of a sacrament nor have the slightest knowledge of what it means. The same could be said of anyone who has not heard the good news of the gospel! Furthermore, it stressed that believing certain revealed doctrines as listed in the Apostles' Creed was more important than a commitment to the penitential life such as was demanded by John's baptism.

In the incarnationalist model of salvation, Original Sin does not exist. (See above, chapters 3 and 7.) Incidentally, this view is also held by Jews along with certain Protestant Christians. The newborn child already shares divine life and is fit for Heaven simply because it is human, created in God's image and undefiled by personal sin. The primary purpose of baptism cannot be the removal of an "Original Sin" that does not *really* exist. Removing Original Sin was apparently *not* the purpose of baptism in the mind of the early church. Rather, baptism was patterned after the action of John the Baptist as a ritual that signified one's rejection of a sinful past and joining a community of other like-minded persons, as John was urging them to do. John's Baptism was obviously not intended for babies!

Incidentally, this sequence of events — learning the message of the gospel and only then being baptized — is the one currently followed in the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The Church insists that adults who wish to join the Catholic Church spend a considerable length of time becoming acquainted with the gospels and the laws of the Church *before* being baptized.

This line of thinking also discredits the idea that millions of unbelievers could be baptized and freed from Original Sin by turning the fire hose on them and pronouncing the words of baptism! (The formula would have to be modified slightly to say "I baptize you all . . .") Well, is that too far-fetched to someone who can baptize the unaware person who cannot understand the move at all?

If the doctrine of Original Sin is recognized as a myth, and God still creates human beings in his own image and likeness (and therefore sinless by default), the problems posed by a doctrine of Original Sin disappear. A person sins by making an informed decision to act against his conscience, and not simply by being born!

To those who believe that human beings are born sinless, the chief signification of Baptism reverts to what it originally seems to have been, a rite by which a sinner pledges to abandon a sinful past and join the community of faith, the Church. Jesus asked to be baptized by John because he wanted to approve John's message of repentance and expectation of the Messiah. In requesting baptism, a person professes faith in what Christians believe and stand for. It makes no sense to have a godparent do that for a baby, long before it can become aware of what it all means!

When the Catholic ritual calls for renewal of baptismal promises, as is done at the Easter Vigil Service, it makes sense that one is renewing a pledge that was personally made and is now remembered. Treating the Sacrament of Baptism in this way would also do the Church a big favor by abolishing procedures that smack of magic, as discussed above in the chapter on Sanctifying Grace.

If Baptism is seen primarily as initiation into the church community, it is more fittingly administered to someone who is conscious of the proceedings and can request it on his own.

Preparation for Baptism might well be combined with preparation for Eucharist, which could then be administered immediately following his Baptism, for the baptismal promises would be substantially the same as the eucharistic pledge of living by everything that Jesus taught and stood for.

No longer would there be a felt need to baptize a baby immediately after birth lest the child be denied Heaven should he die unbaptized. A mother whose child died without baptism would be comforted by the conviction that her innocent child is with God. Her natural grief ought not to be amplified by the haunting idea that her child may never see the face of God. In this regard, strangely enough but honestly, Holy Mother Church admits that she cannot know the eternal fate of unbaptized babies: “As regards *children who have died without Baptism*, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God.” (CCC 1261.)

That we were graced by God from our very beginnings makes sense. The doctrine of Original Sin, on the other hand, makes no sense at all! It only creates conflicts in our intelligence, knowing that the all loving, all good, all providential God carelessly adds a “flaw in the slaw” when he creates human beings and literally floods them with natural gifts, but not the one that is most wonderful of all – the gift of sanctifying grace (to adopt a product of Christian theology) which is demanded as the key of Heaven for the individual!

One final note. If there is any issue in which the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) can be invoked as proof for the truth of a teaching, it is this: babies are not conceived nor born in the state of sin. Nearly everyone, and particularly the Christian mother whose beloved child died without baptism, strongly believe in *original innocence* rather than in Original Sin. *Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.* (Mt 19:14.)

* * * * *

Three other sacraments have changed considerably over the centuries, either in the sign, the action of the sacrament, or by factors that changed the conditions under which they were administered. These three sacraments are Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance. Before exploring these sacraments individually, some comments are in order regarding these sacraments in general.

The administration of any sacrament to an infant is marked by incongruities and contradictions. A sacrament is defined as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give inward grace. The contradiction arises because an infant can neither sense the sign nor know the effect that it is said to produce. Witnesses may be able to sense and interpret a sacramental sign, but they are not the ones receiving the sacrament! For the infant, it is not a sign of anything at all, and even if it were, it cannot be understood by the infant. Thus this situation has all the appearances of magic: invisible agents creating invisible effects, which the Church so strongly condemns. (CCC 2117.)

The Church teaches that the neophyte receives the Holy Spirit at Baptism and that Confirmation completes the gift of the Spirit by strengthening baptismal grace. (CCC 1287-1288.) This does not make sense, and especially not when both sacraments are received together. It is incongruous to say that while the Holy Spirit indivisible, it can be received anew for a second time, or that the Holy Spirit received at Baptism is somehow incomplete!

We can recognize a very real correlation with the Blessed Trinity in these sacraments of initiation, each relating to a distinct portion of a human life.

Baptism is logically the first sacrament to be received, signifying and celebrating the beginning of a new life in the Church.

Eucharist signifies nourishment for the journey to Heaven, as did manna from Heaven for the Israelites in the desert on their way to the promised land (Ex 16:4-6), and the presence of Jesus as the “Bread of Life” and the “Way, the Truth, and the Life,” in our journey to our final destination, the “promised land” of Heaven.

We attribute the creation of the universe and of each person to the Father, as we attribute the beginning of our life of grace to our baptism.

Our sanctification is attributed to the second person of the trinity, Jesus, who nourishes our spiritual life with his very presence in the Eucharist: “This is my body ... this is my blood” (Mt 26:26-30); “I am the Bread of Life” (Jn 6:35, 48). We become spiritually holy as we develop in the natural order of things, the skills we need for our physical survival.

Finally, the Holy Spirit, the personification of the mutual love between Father and Son, inspires us to become lovers, which normally starts taking on special importance during one’s teenage years. The Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles in the form of a flame settling on each of them. Confirmation represents the Spirit in the confirmed person that has him or her reaching out to others to bear witness to our faith in a God who is Love, and reach out in love to all of our fellow human beings, whatever their needs might be that should be addressed.

Although the Catechism warns that “we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth (CCC 1303), it is not inappropriate to consider that these three sacraments of initiation do in fact correspond to progressive traits in the various stages of human life. That Confirmation is sometimes called the “Sacrament of Christian maturity” has a counterpart in the psychological development that brings the human person to maturity, making him other-centered and loving. (Cf CCC 1308.)

With that, let us proceed with discussion about individual sacraments.

Confirmation

From early Christianity onward, Confirmation has been considered a “sacrament of initiation” along with Baptism and Eucharist. The Eastern Churches have maintained the tradition of initiation by administering all three sacraments together, even when baptizing infants. In the Western Church, Eucharist and Confirmation are normally (and more appropriately, we think) postponed to a later date. First Eucharist is received at the age of 7, when a child is assumed to have attained the use of reason, and Confirmation, at an age determined by the local bishop.

In the rite of Confirmation, the celebrant prays over the ones to be confirmed in the following words, listed in the Catechism, #1299:

Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding;

The spirit of right judgment and courage;

the spirit of knowledge and reverence;

Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.

Wisdom, right judgment, courage, knowledge and reverence are emphatically not characteristic of babies! They are sometimes, though rarely, found in the preadolescent. A striking change normally takes place for those in their teens. They become increasingly interested in others, especially those of the opposite sex. Teamwork becomes more attractive

than before. In the process they become more and more altruistic in their relationship to each other and also to other persons. They become more adept at loving others for their own sake. The adolescent desires, and begins to look forward to, sexual union with a beloved. God, through Mother Nature, is simply preparing them for childbearing and raising a family, which often demands all of the love that husband and wife can muster.

Teenage would seem to be the most appropriate time for the sacrament that signifies the receiving of the Holy Spirit, the personified mutual love of God the Father and God the Son! Basically, love is not an emotion; it is a decision that is often difficult to make, especially when caring for a family, the product of mutual love between husband and wife. Love that is lavished on our neighbor is often spent on them at a heavy cost to the lover. The Holy Spirit, received in a special way in Confirmation, inspires its recipient to do the loving thing, and furnishes the strength that makes the struggle worth it.

Confirmation reasserts our having been baptized into the community of the faithful, and does so especially by signifying the special trait of the most important action in the believer's life, namely, putting God first and being of loving service to everyone in our world. (Cf Mk 12:30-31.)

Penance

The Sacrament of Penance is designed for the forgiveness of personal sin, based on the words of Jesus when he granted the "power of the keys" to the apostles. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. (Jn 20:23.)

Private confession has always been available for the forgiveness of private sins. However, serious sins that were public had to be confessed, resolved and forgiven publicly. In the Roman Church, this rule held for at least the first six centuries of Christianity. Public Confession of such sins resolved a dilemma in the Church, for she would appear to be condoning the sin if she forgave it secretly in the privacy of the confessional, scandalizing both her own members and those of the civic community.

Public confession demanded that the sinner, when asking for forgiveness, demonstrate his repentance by performing a public penance, usually an arduous one that extended over some time, as designated by the bishop. That having been done, the sin was publicly absolved and he or she was allowed to rejoin fellow Christians in church, and the Church could uphold her teaching about the evil of the sin.

Public confession was demanded in the case of certain specific public sins, such as idolatry, murder and adultery. Other sins, mortal or venial, were forgiven by the priest in a private confession, as has been done in the Church ever since apostolic times.

Penance was celebrated in this fashion for at least the first six centuries of Christianity. It was unconcerned about secret sins, even if they were mortal sins of which the public was unaware. Nor was Penance concerned with lesser sin called "venial sin." The Catechism of the Catholic Church informs us that "During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the 'private' practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest."(CCC 1447.) This was a major change in the sacrament of Penance.

Some have twisted section 1447 of the Catechism as saying, or at least implying, that public confession was the norm until the 7th century, and that before that time all confessions were public. Section 1447 does not say that at all! What it does say is that the Irish missionaries popularized secret confession as we have it today, even when the sin was a public and serious sin. A trace of some elements of public confession remains in the process of excommunication and its absolution, but the confession remains private.

Holy Eucharist

Eucharist has been thoroughly discussed in chapter 13. We will merely summarize here.

In apostolic times, Original Sin was seen as mandating a sacrifice of atonement, which was found in the death of Jesus. This sacrifice is being offered *for all time* in the Mass. The Mass creates the invisible Real Presence of Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine. The Real Presence, in turn, has given rise to rites of adoration and blessing in a devotion called “Benediction,” and to the practice of private adoration in “visits to the Blessed Sacrament.”

All of this makes no sense when we discover that Original Sin is a myth! Mankind never needed redemption. Dying on the cross was never required for the redemption of mankind; Jesus died for other reasons. Bread does not change into Jesus’ body, but it is a sign of Jesus’ presence from his self-description as the Bread of Life come down from Heaven. The “Take and Eat ... This is my Body” makes sense only as allegory, for otherwise it would demand defiance of the Mosaic Law. The “Real Presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist cannot be a sacramental sign because it is not perceptible by the senses. It is the bread that becomes a sign Jesus and his mission rather than his “Real Presence,” for he is actually present everywhere. The sacramentality of the “bread of life” challenges the partaker to take on the likeness, strength, and love of Jesus into his or her very being, makeup, character and life. The Mass takes on its real significance in the words of dismissal at the ritual’s close “Go, the Mass is ended.” The very word, “Mass” (*Messa* in German; *missa* in Latin) is derived from the Latin word “mittere,” which means “to send”! “Ite, missa estis.” “Go now, *you are sent* into the world,” to make Jesus, the Bread of Life, present and glorified through your own life, especially by your love of God and each other! Note that the same Latin word is also the root of the words, *missal* and *mission*.

This signification of Eucharist makes it a more powerful sacrament than it ever was before!

Chapter 15

Additional Corollaries to the Doctrine of Original Sin

The corollaries to the doctrine of Original Sin are many indeed. Some of the more prominent ones will be listed in this chapter.

The Immaculate Conception.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception presumes that all human beings are born in the state of Original Sin. This sets the stage for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as having been conceived with the singular privilege of being preserved from Original Sin. This made sense in the early Church, when the story of Adam and Eve and their “Fall from grace” held sway, for it was unthinkable to have the mother of God born in a state of sin! If Adam’s sin is recognized as myth, this doctrine would be meaningless, for everyone is born in the “state of grace”!

It is interesting to note that Mary, who was to be the mother of God, is not listed in the gospels as having descended from Adam, or even Abraham. In Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 1:1-16) Jesus’ genealogy is traced from Abraham to *Joseph*, not to Mary.

Mary’ Perpetual Virginity.

The concept of “original sin” (note lower case) makes sense when it is understood in the context of a world that was all good but filled with sin by man’s abuse of his free will. Given man’s concupiscence, sexual sin was high on the list of sins that created a barrier to any intimate love-relationship with the divine. In time, however it happened to come about, shame of sex was attached to the awesome process by which new life is generated, and mankind’s sexuality was regarded with shame. Augustine, for example, taught that sexual intercourse was sinful unless its *sole* purpose was to bring a new life into the world.

Adam and Eve were said to “cover their nakedness” out of a sense of shame. They were said to hide when they heard God calling them in the Garden (Gn 3:10.) St. Augustine seized upon this and taught that the Original Sin was sexual in nature. In the Eden-story, where praeternatural gifts gave man complete control over his passions, the acts associated with copulation would be perfectly controlled by the human will, calmly and without any internal struggle. After (Original) sin and the loss of control it occasioned, these acts blindly followed the lead of uncontrolled passion. It was sexual passion that ruled, and that was sinful. Augustine did, however, concede that sexual intercourse could be performed without sin, provided that its *only* purpose was to create new life. To engage in it only because it felt good was at least a venial sin for married persons; for the unmarried, it was cause for eternal damnation.

However, this teaching cannot be said to be a result of Original Sin because it is based on the storyline of an allegory. Hence it could be regarded as an *allegorical* explanation of man’s lack of control, but not be the cause of it. Allegory only illustrates a doctrine; it cannot be cited as its proof.

Original Sin and the Spiritual Life.

The theology and philosophy associated with the doctrine of Original Sin presents a predominantly pessimistic view of life and has thus been influential in the emergence of the negative and narcissistic spirituality with which many faithful Christians have been afflicted to this day. According to this view, human beings are born bad (in sin) and challenged to become good and perfect (holy). The spiritual life is seen primarily as a struggle against sin, whose influence is still strongly felt even after the baptism that is said to wipe out Original Sin. The spiritual life involves not only wrestling with concupiscence, but also with mysterious, invisible powers, ultra-smart and malevolent spirits called fallen angels (which are also allegorical figures). We are at a spiritual war with evil spirits that we cannot see, but about which we have been informed by way of other allegories, such as the account in the Book of Revelations that tells of fallen angels led by their leader, Lucifer. (Rv 12:7-9.)

Life thus consists of a spiritual warfare in which, enabled by Jesus' sacrifice and aided by grace, one's major focus and most important task is to rid one's self of sin. Our focus is on commandments rather than beatitudes. We may be aware of the abundance of God's blessings upon us but our focus is on his wrath, fear of his punishments, our sinful condition and our narcissistic struggle to rise above the bad persons that we believe ourselves to be. The focus is not on a God who is love, but on "me" – sinful, sinful "me"! Small wonder that a devastating scrupulosity frequently manifests itself. It evokes worry about one's spiritual health rather than praise for God's goodness. The emphasis is on weeding out imperfections rather than growing the fruits of loving God and neighbor. It's like starting out in a deep pit and spending one's lifetime just getting out of it. Small wonder, then, that in the modern Church there is call for infant baptism, frequent confession and communion, indulgences, and works of asceticism such as fasting, abstinence and mortification. It's a very discouraging worldview, and one that has been responsible for innumerable cases of depression, sometimes sufficiently severe to lead to despair and even suicide.

What if a more plausible interpretation of "God's Word" is possible? What if the Eden-story is recognized as allegory rather than treated as a historical document and code of law? We would immediately see allegorical nature of Original Sin, and that actually each and every human being is conceived in the image of God, and therefore starts life without sin and in the state of grace. We can rightly claim that each individual human being is the product of an immaculate conception.

Replacing the doctrine of Original Sin with one of immaculate conception would make it mesh much better with other teachings about God, his creation, and his providence. For mankind, it would be conducive to a positive, optimistic and joyful outlook on life, rather than the negative and narcissistic one described above. Man sees himself as inherently good, being created the image of God Himself, and therefore holy! (That's not said out of false pride; it is simply an intelligent and Scriptural appraisal of facts.) Man is endowed naturally with intellect and free will, making him capable of love and charity, though he is also, by that very fact and his personal choice, capable of selfishness and sin. The Creator must have placed a boundless value on man's faculty of loving, considering that gifting him with it is also the enabling cause of all the evil in world! On the other hand, man without free will would simply be a robot in the hands of his creator, with neither sin nor virtue, neither hate nor love. Just another brute animal, a toy in God's playpen and nothing more.

What a difference it makes when we turn our focus away from our supposed badness and focus, rather, on our natural goodness and God's extravagant blessings! We are basically good

and already holy, already godlike because we were created in God's image, and God does not make junk. Our spiritual life becomes increasingly enriched as we live our lives in deep gratitude for all his blessings, knowing that Divine Providence is there to supply every good thing that we can possibly need, and including eternal bliss in Heaven! Rooted in the confidence that all is well, we are freed up to love fellow man, re-creating ourselves and all of mankind ever more in the likeness of God, who is Love. The life of each individual takes on a mission of blessing others as he or she has been blessed. "Love one another, as I have loved you." (Jn 15:12.). We are joyfully enabled to become co-creators with God as we become agents of a dynamic and exponential explosion of love in our world! We share in the very dynamic that prompted Divine Love to create the stupendous and mind-blowing universe that came forth from his loving hand, with mankind at the peak of his creation as the ultimate reason to create it all!

A doctrine of immaculate conception also disproves some startling and even ridiculous conclusions that arise as corollaries of a doctrine of Original Sin. A few of them will be listed here. There are many such miracles in Catholic doctrine because they are demanded when a historical interpretation of *Genesis* gives rise to insoluble conundrums in what Catholics are to believe. To complicate the matter further, there is no way of verifying that a miracle has actually taken place, because the particular miracles cannot be discerned by the senses. This, in turn, confirms that the text is allegorical and not factual. Consider some examples that represent "useless baggage of Original Sin."

The Church teaches that Mary was a virgin who conceived Jesus miraculously by the "overshadowing" of the Holy Spirit rather than by sexual intercourse. This served to preserve her virginity. (CCC 499; *Lumen Gentium* 57.) Her virginity, however, is a secondary issue. Given that her son was the Son of God, he could not have a human father, from whom he would have inherited Original Sin.

Note that this scenario of Mary's impregnation was demanded whether or not the early Christians believed in Original Sin. If Jesus was to be hailed as the Son of God, his father could not have been human. However he could have had a human mother because the ancients did not know nor believe that the mother contributed anything to the genetic makeup of the child. She was simply the "garden" in which the father planted his seed. Furthermore, mother never passed on Original Sin to her children. It was the father who passed it on to his descendants, specifically as being passed on by way of his seed, the sperm.

Pagans of the time had their own particular beliefs about people whom they called "sons of God." They were said to be conceived when a god took on human form and copulated with a human being of the opposite sex. In Mary's case, God did not assume a human form, but is said to have impregnated the Virgin Mary through the power of his Holy Spirit, by "overshadowing" her. (Mt. 1:18.) This is what being a son of God demanded. This, in turn, postulated a miracle, and there is, of course, no *empirical* proof that this is what actually happened.

The Church, however, takes Mary's virginity a step further and teaches that that Mary remained, physically and perpetually, a virgin — that her hymen, the physical mark of her virginity, remained intact even during and after the birthing of Jesus. This too was miraculous, of course. Baby Jesus miraculously passed through the hymen without destroying it. (CCC 499.) There is no way to prove that this is what actually happened, of course, but all this fuss is not about Mary's hymen anyway. It is about sidestepping the question of whether or not Mary had other children, an issue that is raised in the Gospel of Mark.: "Is this not the carpenter, the son

of Mary, a brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters our neighbors here?" (Mk 6:3.) In the Aramaic language, "Brother" can refer not only to siblings but also to other close relatives such as cousins, uncles and aunts. The quotation, therefore, does not necessarily imply that Mary mothered other children beside Jesus.

Chapter 16

Infallibility

The very thought of re-interpreting the Eden-story as allegory will meet with strong resistance for at least two reasons.

First, to do so is to go against the tradition of the Church by changing what has been proclaimed as a doctrine for centuries. The Eden-story may have been used as the allegory to teach that everyone is born into a sinful world. However, what the Church has consistently taught is that each individual, personally, is actually born in the state of Original Sin. Her understanding of that passage has it, that *“Adam has transmitted to all of his descendants, a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the “death of the soul.” (CCC 403.)* Death of the (immortal) soul has traditionally been understood as meaning that one is in the state of mortal sin, and therefore ineligible to enter Heaven. It implies that the newborn babe who has not been baptized cannot enter Heaven due to a sin he has not committed, for which he should not be punished.

As a result, most Christians today do indeed believe, as they think they must, that the *Genesis* story (chapters 1-11) is history and must be understood as literally true. The doctrine of Original Sin must be regarded as a revealed truth.

It has been the burden of this book to show that the story of Adam’s sin is fiction that cannot possibly be logically accepted as a factual historical account, because this amounts to accepting a falsehood as a truth. The process of forcing one to believe a proposition that cannot possibly be true constitutes an abuse of man’s faculty of reason. The human faculty of free will *must* accept what the intellect presents as truth, and reject what the intellect presents as false. Forcing the will to accept falsehood as truth, or vice versa, has aptly been called “brainwashing,” which no reasonable person approves. Getting rid of brainwashed ideas involves a long and tedious process indeed. To “cradle” Christians, it will seem like betraying the faith that they have professed for their entire lives. Many devout Christians will be made extremely uncomfortable by reading what has been written here and will, as likely as not, find ways of discrediting its author in one way or another.

Second, recognizing that Original Sin is a myth threatens the Church’s claim to infallibility, since she has defined it as a doctrine of faith. If that doctrine can be changed, the Church cannot be infallible in matters of faith and morals because she will have been teaching error and hailing it as infallible truth, either before or after the change. (Perhaps the notion of infallibility needs to be revised?)

The Catholic is obliged by the Church to accept the doctrine of Original Sin along with all of its corollaries, some of which have been outlined in this book. One must do so even though he or she is honestly convinced that the doctrine of Original Sin, described as a blemish on the soul of each person at birth, stems from a misguided interpretation of the Eden-story. In reality, original sin (note lower case) is a way of expressing the inherent sinfulness of the human race which, abusing the gift of free will, has been sinning as long as it has inhabited the earth.

While the teachings of the Church are eminently worthy of our credence, the doctrine that the Church can never err in matters of faith and morals falls into the category of a universal negative proposition, which can be refuted by a single positive proposition to the contrary. Hopefully this book has presented some of these.

Quite apart from the matter of whether or not a particular definition by the Church is infallible, forcing someone to assent to a doctrine that does not make sense, and is therefore unreasonable, is problematic in yet another way of which the doctrine of Original Sin is a prime example. It deals with matter that cannot be perceived by the senses and can be taught only by means of allegory. Thus, the only way we can know what the allegory is meant to teach is by *accepting the message intended by its author*, rather than the storyline that is used to impart it.

The rules for discovering the message to be drawn from an allegory are the rules of valid reasoning. If a proposed allegorical message is inconceivable because it conflicts with other valid teachings, one can be quite certain that he is on the wrong track in discerning the allegory's meaning. He must then, reassess the passage in the light of common sense, social conditions at the time, the laws of the universe, and other biblical passages that might have something to say about the matter at hand.

All too often the storyline of the allegory has been accepted as true doctrine. This can easily happen over generations when the allegory is used as a teaching tool, but the message it is said to deliver differs from what its author had in mind. An allegory tells truth differently than history! If the storyline is passed off as the meaning of the allegory, it ceases to be an allegory and the author's message is lost. It is similar to insisting that there really is a Santa Claus who actually resides at the North Pole and traverses the world on a flying sleigh drawn by eight (or nine) reindeer! When this sort of impossible scene happens, the only way to make a "revealed doctrine" credible is to postulate a miracle. (In the example and among other elements, the miracle would be one of flying reindeer and an airborne sleigh.) As has been repeatedly stated in this document, the "Fall" of Adam can definitively be said not to have really occurred, because

1) Adam and all the other persons mentioned in *Genesis 1-11* were mythical characters who never really existed.

2) Adam's sin, as reported, did not alter human nature because the *preternatural* gifts he was said to have lost by that sin were never part of human nature.

3) Human Nature has obviously remained unchanged since the first human being physically appeared on earth. In fact, science tells us that the nature of a human being never changes, for human nature defines what it is to be a human.

4) The explanation that we inherit a "fallen" human nature is totally inadequate. Human nature has remained unchanged through the entire time that human beings have inhabited the earth. The author of *Genesis 1-3* obviously meant to teach something other than some sort of inherited "Original Sin," which Judaism itself has never accepted as a revealed truth. The story could simply be a means of telling what was already universally known, namely, that mankind is sinful, and that man's sinfulness is neither created by God nor inherited from one's parents! What *are* inherited are the faculties that make sin and virtue possible, namely, intellect and free will. It is human beings who, abusing their free will by choosing evil, are responsible for all the sin in the world! Adam," who is said to have committed the "Original Sin," could not have had anything to do with it because he, fictitious character that he was, never even existed!

Real progress could be enabled in discussing controversial doctrines, not only within the Catholic Church, but also with other religious denominations. Much of such progress is stymied today because of the Catholic's claim to infallibility about certain matters based on literal reading of allegorical passages in Sacred Scripture. The doctrine of Original Sin is the prime example but not the only one, not by a long shot!

It is refreshing to note that the noted Swiss theologian Hans Kueng has called upon Pope Francis to permit an open and impartial discussion on infallibility of pope and bishops.” (*National Catholic Reporter*, March 25, 2016.)

It is fervently hoped that what is written here will lead to new bases of understanding in such matters as the “Sacrifice of the Mass,” Eucharist, and Baptism, all of which are rooted, in one way or another, in the allegory of Eden. If the related Scriptures could be understood from an alternate but reasonable interpretation of the allegories, there would be no need for miracle upon miracle to explain the nature and purpose of the sacraments. Many of such matters, which have been discussed in this book, have been treated with exactly such a purpose in mind.

One could go on and on about the ramifications of mistaking the Eden-story for historical fact. Theologians will agree that no one, not even the Church, can know truths about God, the after-life, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, demons, angels, saints and the like, *except* by way of allegory, since they fall completely outside of man’s sensual experience. As the traditional principle from Greek philosophy has it, “There can be nothing in the intellect unless it was first in the senses.”

In John’s Gospel we read, “No one has seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at his Father’s side, who has revealed him.” Again the question of “history or allegory” keeps asserting itself. Is Jesus really the son of God in human flesh? Or is he yet another allegorical figure created by early Christians, based on earlier allegories, and constituting an insightful adaptation of the mythical “sons-of-the-gods” stories embraced in pagan circles?

Wherever the truth lies, man must be attentive and recognize allegories for what they are, glean the truths that they are meant to teach, and refrain from insisting that persons in the allegory are literally real persons that once walked on the earth, or that things portrayed in the story lines of allegories have actually happened.

If the Church wishes to keep intelligent and sincere human beings in her fold, she must admit that she has erred when she treated the storyline of biblical allegories as histories. She must return to understanding these scriptures as the allegories that they have always been meant to be. If she simply does that, little of her dogmatic teaching would need to be sacrificed as unworthy of belief, a huge step would be taken toward Christian unity, and faith in the Church’s teaching would be immeasurably strengthened.

All that has been written here admittedly challenges the Church to re-examine her teaching, especially with reference to her claim of infallibility. To be forced to question whether the Church is really speaking truth in everything she teaches is a potent source of grief for the devout believer. If, at any time, one learns that the Church has issued contradictory teachings in some matter or other, the conscientious Christian will naturally have to be skeptical about other things that the Church teaches in matters that are not discernible by human senses. Those who have been shown a single example of error must be wary about everything else that the author of that error teaches, even under claims of the charism of infallibility.

Examples include the following. It is to be expected that there are many others. If only one of these doctrines is proven false, the Church can no longer claim the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. She might, however, be able to show that that the matter in question was never defined as being infallible. Here are some examples.

* The Church teaches that in sexual sin there is no parvity of matter. The teaching is cited by Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667) in response to a question posed to the Holy Office, as to whether confessors who commit the crime of solicitation should be denounced, with *due*

consideration to parvity of matter (emphasis added). To this, the pope responded: “Since there is no parvity of matter in the sexual sphere, ... they are to be denounced.” (“*Cum in rebus venereis non detur parvitas materiae ... censuerunt esse denuntiandum.*”) (Denzinger Bannwart, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, citation 5005.) If it is true that there is no parvity of matter in sins that involve venereal pleasure, then every deliberate enjoyment of a forbidden sexual pleasure is a mortal sin. For example, if an unmarried man consciously and deliberately welcomes and enjoys the sensation accompanying a spontaneous erection, even for a very short time, he is branded with the guilt of mortal sin. That such a matter is serious enough to condemn a soul to eternal damnation is utterly incomprehensible! It would roughly be equivalent to condemn someone to capital punishment for the crime of stealing a gum drop. Does this really reflect true proportionality between light and grave matter?

* An infant has been created in God’s own image and likeness, but carries in its very being a sin that is called Original Sin. This item has been extensively discussed in preceding chapters of this treatise. The Church offers explanations for these anomalies, but they are most unconvincing to reasonable people. An infant is born in a state of sin even though it is not “guilty.” The “sin” is removed without the infant’s knowledge or consent by the quasi-magical rite pouring the waters of baptism and reciting those eighteen magic words, *exactly* as dictated by Rome!

* In keeping with ancient physiology, Original Sin is passed along through the father’s sperm. This theory brings up a problem in hermeneutics. When a child is baptized, Original Sin is removed. After that the baptized person would no longer be capable of passing it on to his own children simply he no longer has it!

* Proportionality must be considered in determining the gravity of immoral acts. Most reasonable persons would think so. Deliberately enjoying the pleasure derived from a spontaneous erection should not be deemed as grave as adultery!

* Back in the 1950’s, moral theologians spelled out the gravity of theft quite precisely! When stealing from a common working man, anything less than five dollars was considered to be light matter, and anything more was serious matter. This led to a ridiculous but reasonable corollary: stealing \$4.99 was venial sin; stealing \$5.00 was mortal sin. One could be condemned to Hell forever for stealing one penny (the 500th one)! (Today, considering inflation, the dividing line between light and serious matter would probably be more like a hundred dollars!)

The Church needs to acknowledge and make known, in her catechism and in plain language, the difference between allegory and history. For example, instead of reading the story of the “Fall” in Eden as a sin that keeps all unbaptized babies out of Heaven, the story should be presented as showing that sin is not inherited from one’s father, but is, rather, the inevitable result of human beings being endowed with intelligence and free will, so that they are capable of loving God and fellow man, even while it was known by the Creator that many would fail to do so and thus bring sin into the world.

Chapter 18

A Look Ahead

Many are leaving the Church nowadays for any number of given reasons. Some are reacting to clerical sex scandals of the past several decades. Some are adopting a spirit of secularism. Some cannot reconcile their conscience with the Church's demand to believe in propositions that are literally impossible or that closely resemble fairy tales.

In the opinion of this writer, much of what these people cannot accept as infallible truth stems from mistaking the storyline of a scriptural allegory for the truth that it was intended to teach. We need to understand how such confusion can come about, and how a resolution of the problem is desirable and possible, but obviously, as they say, "Easier said than done!" The truth must be discerned from the allegory, and the storyline of the allegory must not be mistaken for, nor promulgated as, truth. To illustrate, which of the following statements is obviously the more truthful?

- 1) We are mortal and concupiscent because Adam sinned and was punished by God along with all his descendants with mortality, loss of control over passion, darkened minds, etc.; OR
- 2) Mortality and concupiscence are natural and essential qualities of the human being, who, endowed with intelligence and free will, are thus enabled to choose between acts that are good (loving) and evil (selfishness).

Statement #1 describes the doctrine of Original Sin which the Church has adopted, apparently through a literal interpretation of *Genesis* (See Gn 3:16-19 and CCC, Sections 396-409). This doctrine has been preached from apostolic times, mostly by retelling the story of Adam and Eve as written in *Genesis*.

Statement #2 describes the nature of all material creation; it is corruptible, passible, mortal, and, in the case of man, concupiscent, intelligent and having free will, so that he can be loving or sinful through personal choice.

It is of utmost importance here to note that the storyline of *Genesis* did not engender Original Sin. It's the other way around! The natural condition of mankind engendered the allegory of *Genesis*, which uses allegory to describe the reality of the human condition.

Perhaps it is unreasonable at this time to expect the Church to switch doctrines away from the literary storylines upon which they are based and onto reasonable interpretations of what these allegories were originally meant to teach. However, if the Church is to live up to its own self-image of being the ultimate source of truth for earthly sojourners, she owes it to them not to continue presenting make-believe allegorical storylines as truths nor order its members to believe that allegorical storylines are true accounts of events that actually occurred. The least that the Church can do is to apologize for her mistake of accepting the storyline as the doctrine. She might even insist that she was simply using the allegory for what it was intended to do, namely, to teach truth. However, when the storyline itself is interpreted as the truth, the allegory loses all of its character and persuasive power, and we are left with a historical "fact" that cannot be substantiated as a truth that must nonetheless be believed.

It would be great if the catechism would simply list whatever doctrine a particular allegory teaches, rather than erroneously teach the storyline of the allegory as being the doctrine. The citation for the doctrine would simply be the biblical reference to the allegory that reveals the truth. For example, the doctrine (truth) is that man is sinful because of concupiscence, which is a necessary adjunct to free will, which in turn is required if man is to be capable of love. A citation such as “*See Gn 3:1-24*” would be an apt footnote.

No doubt, such a revision of the Catechism would also require at least a short course in the interpretation of allegories, which seem to account for most of our Bible, so that the reader is not fooled into thinking that the storyline of an allegorical passage is a truth to be believed!

If this were done, the credibility of the Church and its teachings would be markedly enhanced. No longer would the Bible tell of mysterious and incomprehensible mysteries, such as sinful newborn babies, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic species, baptismal water (which washes away Original Sin), Jesus’ sacrifice as atonement for Original Sin by which he opened the gates of Heaven to mankind! All of such mysterious miracles would fall by the wayside, and the Church’s teaching would emphasize truths that are stated directly rather than by allegory, and would therefore not be so difficult to comprehend, believe and accept.

Whatever the “sin with which we are all born afflicted” is (CCC 403); it actually predates the story of *Genesis 1-3*. Since the man’s nature does not change, his concupiscence was present for eons before the appearance of the Eden-story, whose characters are not even human beings, but figments of imagination. It was undeniably the human condition that led to the allegory of Eden, and not vice-versa.

The allegorical story of Adam tells about everything that makes man different from all the rest of God’s creation. His very name means “earth,” and in the beginning God “formed man out of the clay of the ground” (Gn 2:7.) This tells of his material nature and that, like all material creation, he was subject *by his very nature* to corruption, death, suffering and concupiscence. In the allegory, however, its superhuman hero was endowed with the *superhuman* qualities of which he was stripped when he sinned, thus leading to the story of a man whose life became similar to ours with suffering, death, and sexual shame. In allegory, even intrinsic contradictions can be tolerated and used to convey a message to the reader. The message here is “Dust thou art, and to dust you shall return.”

It is not difficult to understand how things got so mixed up when the storyline of Eden was taken to be its teaching. The Apostles followed Jesus’ mandate and preached the Gospel to the whole known world. They did so by telling the parables of Jesus and stories about him that were being preserved by way of an oral tradition and sometimes written down, whether or not they included any guides for interpretation. In time, these stories were accepted by the Christian Community as the “Word of God.” These teachings probably made their way into the oral tradition without reference to their allegorical nature.

In this writer’s experience as a seminarian and in the best of his memory, no biblical stories other than the parables of Jesus were ever identified as allegories. The question of how the storyline in *Genesis* should be interpreted never came up in our Scripture classes. Rather, Scripture studies’ major thrusts were to become familiar with certain “proof” scriptures to back up what we learned in dogmatic and moral theology. It is unfortunate, and indeed tragic, that so

many truths taught by biblical allegories have been lost and replaced by the storyline of the allegory. Consider, for example, a story line in the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church (with emphasis added):

*403 Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination towards evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the **fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted**, a sin which is the "death of the soul". Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.*

A fitting response to this statement would be that there is, in fact, a different way to understand why we, as human beings, are afflicted with sin and death. It is this. We are material creatures, corruptible by our very natures and subject to suffering and death, as is the nature of all material creation. Man is a material creation combined with spiritual faculties of intelligence and free will, which enable human beings to freely choose between what is morally good (virtue) or evil (sin). This enables us to exercise our free will to choose the good for ourselves and thus love ourselves and others. Without these faculties, we would only be meaningless robotic toys in God's playpen, understanding nothing, our behaviors absolutely controlled by instinct with no option to freely choose one way or the other. We would be unable to sin, but more importantly we would be unable to love!

Given that all human beings are able to choose between good and evil courses of action, it is inevitable that they will, from time to time, make decisions that are neither good for themselves nor for society. The source of all sin in the world is man's selfish choices to abuse the God-given faculty of free will, which empowers him to love. To put it another way, man has been sinful ever since the first human beings were created. His nature was identical to man's nature today. His makeup is a combination of spiritual and material elements, the latter rendering him mortal, concupiscent, passible (subject to suffering) and sinful.

The Church has, unfortunately and for whatever reason, "painted herself into a corner" when she claimed the charism of infallibility, so that every teaching about faith and morals that she has ever "infallibly" declared to be true must be believed as a condition for membership in the Church. In so doing she has represented falsehoods (not lies, since there was no intention to deceive) as truth, the most glaring and fundamental example of which is the doctrine of Original Sin. Infallible teachers can never admit that they have made mistakes. Wherever the Church has run into a proposition that cannot be possibly be true, she has explained the situation by saying that God has performed a miracle, and has blamed our inability to understand on having inherited a "fallen" human nature from Adam. That we are born with a "fallen" nature is a fallacy; the nature of an object never changes because it defines the object! The Church must recognize that she has been wrong in treating the Eden-story as history. She must admit that she has failed to recognize the *message* intended by such parables in hundreds of allegories found in the Bible.

In the matter of interpreting allegory, certain principles can be invoked to discern the allegorical message in a writing that appears, superficially, to be a historical document. These principles include, but are not limited to, the following.

- 1) Stories that contain intrinsic contradictions *must* be regarded as allegories.

- 2) Writings about realities that cannot be sensed nor discovered by reason *must* be treated as allegory. Examples include matters about Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, Angels, Demons, Original Sin, Redemption, Eucharist, sanctifying grace, sin, etc.
- 3) Teachings that require a miracle (even unseen) to make sense are highly suspect of being the literal storyline of an allegory rather than its message.
- 4) Nameless persons are probably allegorical figures. “A sower went out to sow his seed.”
- 5) Prehistoric incidents such as the creation of the world can be described *only* by way of allegory.
- 6) If we are to know the message of the allegory, we must know the mind of its author.
- 7) The mind of an allegory’s author can often be discerned by the use of reason.

These common-sense rules for interpreting the meaning of the multitude of allegories in Sacred Scripture should, of course, be embraced and followed by all interpreters of the Bible. The detours over which Catholics have been led in the past are the result of inadequate interpretations of Sacred Scripture, notably in its allegories. Mostly, and most seriously, this has occurred when, in the common estimation of both laity and clergy, the literally interpreted allegorical sections of Sacred Scripture have been mistaken for truth, while the real meaning of the allegory, that is, the truth that the allegory was designed to teach, has been lost or otherwise rejected.

All doctrines of the church need to be scrutinized under such common sense rules for interpreting the texts of Sacred Scripture upon which they depend. The following rules, for example, deserve to be considered in this respect.

- * When the storyline of an allegory is treated as history, it ceases to be an allegory.
- * Baptism is not for “washing away” the residue of Original Sin, but for initiating a person into communion with the Church.
- * Confirmation is designed to signify a person’s moving away from self-centeredness to altruism in matters of the spirit, calling him or her to spread the gift of communion received in baptism, to others in his or her world.
- * Penance was originally designed to reunite the sinner with the community that he had left by committing a serious sin of a public nature that scandalized the community. There are other avenues of obtaining forgiveness, even of mortal sin, simply by repenting of past sins and resolving to sin no more. (See Ez 18:21) Perfect Contrition is known by most Catholics to be an effective means of obtaining forgiveness, even for mortal sin.
- * Eucharist needs to be recognized as a call to embrace the entire program of Jesus’ mission. By accepting the entire Jesus, symbolized by the bread of life (as Jesus called himself) and wine as the visible and natural sign of his very life-blood, the believer is called upon and promises to share in spreading Jesus’ love and teachings to everyone in his world.
- * Mass: The “Sacrifice of the Mass” should not be considered the perpetuation of the sacrifice of Jesus to redeem mankind from Original Sin. Original Sin is a myth, not a reality.
- * The Mass would better be regarded as a celebration of the ancient rite of Passover which commemorates God’s protection of those who believe in Him and claim Him as their God. After all, this is the ritual that Jesus celebrated with the Apostles at the Last Supper.

- * Mankind must not be described as having a “fallen” human nature; man’s nature is precisely the same as it has been for the entire span of the human race of some ten million years.
- * The Eden-story was misinterpreted as history and thus gave rise to the doctrine of Original Sin. One of the real messages of this story is that, contrary to tenets of contemporaneous pagan cultures, evil is Man’s doing and not God’s.
- * The doctrine of Original Sin has given rise to a redemptive rather than an incarnational model of salvation.
- * The doctrine of Original Sin has, over the centuries, spawned other teachings that are dependent upon it, at least in part. Such teachings must be discerned and either modified into credible accounts that don’t need to be explained with a miracle, or rejected if a Catholic is required to believe them in order to remain Catholic.

* * * * *

Solving the many theological problems raised by the doctrine of Original Sin is complex indeed. These problems will remain irresolvable as long as the Church persists in the great hermeneutical error of regarding the allegorical story of Adam and Eve as its message. On the other hand, if she would recognize that Scripture has been misinterpreted, giving rise to a faulty teaching, the solution to all the problems raised by the current doctrine of Original Sin would vanish. The Church would recognize the allegory for what it really is and use it to teach what the Eden-story was initially intended to teach — that there is only one God, who created everything else that exists, that man is unique among animals because he is gifted with free will, which in turn can and does bring evil into the world, and so on.

This would solve the problem of an impossible Original Sin but would also render all teachings that have arisen as its corollaries meaningless. The redemptive model of salvation makes no sense because mankind was never in need of redemption. The teaching that Jesus offered himself in sacrifice to redeem mankind would call instead for an incarnational model of salvation, in which Jesus’ became incarnate to “show us the Father” (Jn 14:8), guide us in our quest for holiness and our ultimate goal, Heaven. The Sacrifice of the Mass is meaningless and superfluous because it would not continue to be the commemoration of a redemptive sacrifice that was never needed nor offered for redemption from sin. The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, which in today’s teaching is absolutely dependent on the “Sacrifice” of the Mass, might perhaps be changed into a memorial of what Jesus celebrated with his disciples at the Last Supper, so as to continue the celebration of Passover, in which the faithful are called to embrace or re-embrace Jesus and live according to his commandments. “Do this in memory of me.” Baptism would no longer be necessary for salvation because everyone is in the state of sanctifying grace at the moment of his/her creation; it would become a rite patterned by John the Baptist, primarily as a sign of accepting the believing candidate into the mystical body of Christ and the community of the church.

Even the most profound truth can indeed be taught and learned by means of allegory, and often only by allegory. The authors of *Genesis* taught profound truths by weaving them into the allegory of *Genesis 1-11*. Early Christians did the same thing when they recorded the story of Jesus for all posterity, and the Gospels describing his ministry also contain many allegorical passages. However, hermeneutical error seems to have reasserted itself as the Christian story was, in turn, taught by way of misinterpreted allegory and preserved by oral tradition in a

largely unlearned society. It would seem that the storyline of the allegory has, after some centuries of repeatedly being read as if it were a historical document, been mistaken for the truth it was intended to teach. The story of Adam and Eve's sin in Eden came to be regarded as a fact of history and the doctrine of "Original Sin" was proclaimed as a teaching revealed in Sacred Scripture. In time, the doctrine of infallibility of the Church, along with the redemptive model of salvation, made it impossible to change the doctrine of Original Sin. Today, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in Paragraphs #397 to #405, still presents the events described in *Genesis 3* as having actually happened, rather than as an allegory designed to teach other truths. Other doctrines, like the necessity of baptism for salvation, the need for Jesus' sacrifice to redeem mankind, and the substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, were inserted into the deposit of faith as corollaries to the doctrine of Original Sin.

A priest-friend of the author of these lines once sagely remarked that "if we would just cut out all the folderol (including the *storyline* of the allegory being taken as a truth) and get down to basic truth, we could find unity in all bona fide Christian religions and, indeed, in all bona fide religions in the world. Then, there could indeed be "one flock and one shepherd." The statement that "truth is one" is unquestionably axiomatic, so it really should be possible for all men of good will to arrive at agreement and unity, so that "all may be one," a fulfillment for which Jesus so fervently prayed. (Jn 17:11.)

Most doctrines of the Church would survive such scrutiny. The basic truth in the doctrine would be recognized as such; the storyline would be recognized merely fabricated by its author for the purpose of teaching truth. Conversely, any particular truth might be taught by way of a completely different storyline in differing cultures. For example, faith in an afterlife, "revealed" to the Native American Indians as a "Happy Hunting Ground" and to Buddhists as "Nirvana."

An alternate and scripturally acceptable interpretation of *Genesis 1-11* has been outlined in Part One. The same has been done for Scriptural passages that support an equally acceptable understanding of Eucharist. In keeping with the hermeneutic principle that miracles are not to be invoked if other interpretations are possible, these alternate interpretations neither do any violence to the Scriptural text nor do they demand any miracles to render them credible. Therefore they are the more favorable interpretations of particular texts. They are also infinitely easier for today's educated population to accept.

In the current tradition, the Church enjoins the sacrament of Penance upon sinners for the forgiveness of serious personal sin. Her power to forgive sins has been based mainly on the following two passages from Sacred Scripture:

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained (Jn 20:23); and

I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:19).

Both of these passages do indeed authorize the apostles to forgive sins. However, if this authorization is taken to be literal and without exception, it would also mean something that Jesus would surely not have espoused, namely, authorizing them to *refuse* to forgive a sin, and thus condemn the sinner to Hell! Surely, this is not the mind of Jesus, nor could it be what he meant when he said what he did! However, a reasonable explanation is possible.

In the early history of the Roman Catholic Church, this sacrament was used mainly for the forgiveness of *public mortal* sins; if the sin was private or venial it could be confessed in secret.

(See <http://stjoseph-marysville.org/faqpenance.htm>.) Public mortal sin had to be confessed before the whole community, and it was then up to the church leaders to decide whether or not to forgive the sinners and welcome them back into the community. An assigned penitential practice was demanded to demonstrate the sinner's sincerity, and if it was fulfilled, then the sinner could be absolved and welcomed back into the community of the Church.

Of course, the words of Jesus can be understood as giving the apostles the necessary authority to govern the church that Jesus established and which he had just commissioned them to govern, which would include authorizing them to decide whether or not public sinners should be barred from the community, for otherwise the Church might be seen as condoning their sin.

It would seem, in the light of the early history of the Church, that this was indeed the interpretation that she applied to these passages. Public confession was celebrated only for serious sin that were public in nature because fellow church-members already were aware the sin. Forgiveness was *publicly* granted following a show of *public* repentance, thus *publicly* reconciling the sinner with the community.

It is strange that Jesus' orders in these passages did not include insistence on a firm purpose of amendment and sorrow for sin on the part of those who were *not* public sinners. There is no evidence in the history of confession that secret sins such as masturbation were even suitable matter for confession. In dictating the terms of the sacrament of Penance, the church was seemingly concerned not so much with secret mortal sin and venial sin as it was with public sin against the community. Those who were welcomed back into the community were required to show their sincerity beforehand, expressing their purpose of amendment by performing the public penance that the Church imposed as a condition for forgiveness.

The Old Testament words of the prophet Ezekiel speak to obtaining forgiveness of sin as follows:

If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

(Ez 18:21.)

This actually sets forth one condition, and demands only one, which suffices for the immediate forgiveness of sin of whatever magnitude. It is called a "firm purpose of amendment." However, by today's rules, this does not suffice to obtain forgiveness, even in the case of secret sin. Today, one must plead guilty to all mortal sins, including secret ones, in the "tribunal of confession," giving specific species and the number of times committed, to an ordained priest who is authorized to hear confessions and absolve the sinner. It is unlikely that any member of the Church sees this as a means of reconciling the sinner with the *community*, as stated in the Catechism. (CCC 980.) The community is not even aware of any specific secret sin.

The one and only context in which the authority to forgive sins makes sense is in reconciling the sinner with the Church, which has been seriously damaged by his public sin.

The Catechism speaks of the Sacrament as reconciling the sinner with God and with the Church, but it is difficult to see this effect in the community of the Church when the sacrament is administered in utmost privacy and/or for secret sin. The Catechism does admit that those guilty of secret sin can also be reconciled to the Church, stating that "It is through the sacrament of Penance that the baptized can be reconciled with God and with the Church" (CCC 980); and states, flatly and without qualification, "This sacrament *reconciles us with the Church*." (CCC 1469, emphasis in the original.) This fits well with public sins forgiven in public confession, but it is impossible to discern any reconciliation with the Church when the sin, the confession and

absolution take place in absolute secrecy. In that case, the Church, the “People of God,” has no knowledge of it. This can be likened to telling a bartender about serious conflicts with one’s wife. He’s talking to the wrong person!”

One cannot but wonder why Jesus added the second part of the commission, to wit: “Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” This clause makes sense only in the context of public penance, when the bishops, having considered the matter, have the authority to either admit the sinner back into the church community or deem it better not to do so. The decision would affect or deny only the penitent’s reunion with the Church. The forgiveness of his sin can be accomplished in other ways, for example, by perfect contrition.

Regardless of how and when changes took place in the form of the sacrament, public confession ceased to be practiced by the end of the first millennium. Along with it, the Sacrament of Penance has been encouraged and sometimes mandated for the forgiveness of sins. The focal point of the sacrament, however, has shifted from peace and unity in the community to peace in the sinner’s conscience. Over the centuries, Penance has morphed into what today could well be called a different sacrament altogether.

It is not our purpose here to encourage abolishing confession as it is practiced today. No doubt it has brought untold peace and comfort to those who utilize it. That having been said, some other points would be in order for consideration:

- 1) Understanding sin as an injury to self, others and possibly the Church should be stressed over seeing it simply as the violation of law;
- 2) Confession should not be represented as the sole channel of forgiveness, even for grievous sin;
- 3) Repentance, that is, turning away from sin, should be stressed above all else in the process of seeking and obtaining forgiveness;
- 4) Communicants should not be banned from Eucharist for secret sins;
- 5) “Reconciliation with the church” should not be represented as an effect of a sacrament that is conducted in utter secrecy and without the community’s knowledge.

Letting go of the traditional understanding of Original Sin and its effects would have many desirable benefits, not the least of which would be an infinitely more positive outlook on one’s spiritual life and one’s relationship with the Lord God.

Many if not most Catholics born in the twentieth century have grown up with an attitude that focuses on their supposedly inherited sinfulness and makes getting rid of sin the immediate and primary goal of one’s spiritual life. With this attitude, as preached by many preachers even today, one is led to focus narcissistically on one’s badness and on how to get rid of one’s sin. This is all negative, unattractive and downright discouraging. It has also been the cause of mental illness and even suicide. Penitential practices, such as frequent confession, fasting, abstaining from meat and other mortifications, are the order of the day. Some spiritual directors refer to this as “The Purgative Way,” because it is seen as a “cleaning up” process through which everyone must pass and in which getting rid of the evil in one’s person is needed before entering into the more joyful and fulfilling stages of illumination and contemplation. Most devout Catholics stay in the Purgative Way nearly all of their life, never moving on to the next steps in the program. This is a sad, discouraging, and sometimes desperate way to live. It’s an endless struggle to climb out of the pit of sin in which we were supposedly born and into which we so easily relapse.

How different it is when we realize that we were not born in such a pit, but came from the hand of God as innocent, unique, loveable and indeed holy and sinless persons. We come to know about sin, its allurements and its effects, but that fails to distress us because we are the more wrapped up in God's goodness and gifts, and have it in our power to refuse to entertain what we see as sin. We live in constant awareness that God is close to us, in fact, that he is *with us always* (Mt 28:20), and that we can look forward confidently to complete union with him and all the saints when we leave this "vale of tears" behind. Life is joy-filled as we contemplate the countless blessings that God has so lovingly and extravagantly showered upon us and so, secure in his love for us, are able to love ourselves as the good creatures that we are, which, in turn, frees us up with the security that enables us in turn to reach out in love to our fellow man.

Refusing to accept an allegorical interpretation of the Eden-story and insisting that the storyline is factual truth causes many anomalies in Christianity (including all of its heretical and schismatic sects) that it turns off the prospective convert and creates severe conflicts of faith in the minds of thoughtful "cradle" Christians of all denominations. It calls for so many mysterious miracles that must take place behind the scenes — miracles that can neither be explained, demonstrated nor even witnessed, but only put forth as mysteries to explain unexplainable teachings that one does not and cannot understand. These miracles have, perhaps to their credit, been effectively employed to paint a picture of the ineffable Godhead and inspire deep religious awe and wonder at his works.

The number of miracles demanded by the doctrine of Original Sin is mind-boggling indeed, occurring at practically every turn in life. To make a bad thing worse, nothing of the sacramental event or its effect can be perceived by the senses. The outstanding example of this is the miracle of Eucharist. We cannot observe the bread being transformed into flesh nor can we observe the resulting flesh with our senses. However, the bread, whether consecrated or not, could be recognized as *symbols* of Jesus, the "Bread of Life," the heavenly bread sent to us by the Father, and the very life of Jesus could be symbolized by the wine. Such an interpretation satisfies the principle that no miracle is to be postulated when a rational explanation of the text is possible.

It would appropriate here to list some of the differences in the way that certain church teachings might be understood and applied, once allegory was recognized as such, and the kernel of truth was threshed out, as they say, and separated from the chaff. In many cases, it would be a vast improvement.

The Bible is utterly loaded with allegory.

In no way did the writing of scriptural allegories end with *Genesis 11*. Most of the truths proclaimed in the Bible are not the kind that can be perceived by the senses and can be communicated only by way of allegory. This explains the plethora of allegories in the Bible. Some of them flow from the allegory of Original Sin and have been discussed in the preceding chapters.

It might be well to point out some other truths (are they really truths?) that can be learned only by way of allegories, along with faith in the knowledge and credibility of their authors.

A partial list of such allegorically expressed truths, for example, would include the following: the Immaculate Conception of Mary; the virginal birthing of Jesus; Mary's perpetual virginity; Jesus' birthday and place of birth; the dream as a communications device; the parables of Jesus; miracles attributed to Jesus; the Resurrection; the Ascension into Heaven; the Mass as Jesus' perpetual sacrifice; transubstantiation and the Real Presence; the removal of Original Sin in

baptism; sanctifying grace; forgiveness of sin in the confessional; temporal punishment due to sin; indulgences; Heaven; Hell; Purgatory, punishment due to sin; Limbo; intercession of the saints; patron saints; angels as defenders, messengers and guardians, and demons (especially as tempters), etc., etc.

So what? the truths that are brought to us by way of the allegory would be true even if they had never been expressed in one, and the allegory is the only medium by which we can know them. Even so, the recipient of the truth cannot own it unless he knows that the author of the allegory can be relied upon to tell the truth. This is our faith, whether it is in the Bible, the Church, or anyone (Aesop, for example) who uses allegory as a tool for teaching truth. All of our knowledge initially comes to us through the senses, expressed in the Aristotelean axiom as “Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.” (Latin: *Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu.*) Therefore, we human beings cannot know anything of the spiritual world except through the medium of the allegory. Since allegories can be interpreted differently from the intention of their authors, it is not surprising that there can be such variance in the “truths” that these allegories reveal to us.

No doubt it will be a long, long time before the Church sees fit to favor the incarnational over the redemptionist approach to salvation, though some progress has been made since Vatican II. The greatest obstacle to changing from redemptionist to incarnational is that it runs counter to the doctrine of Original Sin. Meanwhile, the Church has “painted herself into a corner” by the declaring the doctrine of her infallibility in matters of faith and morals, making it impossible for her ever to retract any of her teaching. Unfortunately, one of two doctrines, either that of Infallibility or that of Original Sin, would have to be modified or dropped, because the two are diametrically opposed to each other and cannot both be true. Therefore, the Church will probably, and unfortunately, continue on her current course and stay with the redemptionist model of salvation.

What can be done? The Church, bound by her self-proclaimed infallibility, cannot or will not withdraw the doctrine of Original Sin in favor of alternate and valid interpretations of Scripture. However, it would seem that the doctrine of Original Sin and all doctrines that are dependent on it, along with other doctrines that have arisen from similar misinterpretations, could be laid aside and ignored in favor of latent interpretations that are more reasonable while not violating Sacred Scripture. The truths revealed by allegorical interpretation could gradually displace the myth of the traditional storyline-based doctrine. Doctrines founded on conundrums which even a highly trained theologian cannot decipher without resorting to the miracle, could be replaced by teachings that do make sense without the miracle. In time, the teaching of “original sin” (*Mankind has been sinful from its very beginnings*) could replace the doctrine of “Original Sin” (*Adam, the first human being, sinned and infected all of his progeny with his sin*).

Baptism — If the hierarchy ever becomes convinced that the storyline of *Genesis 1-11* is myth and not history, then there will no longer be any basis for their teaching that every human being comes into the world in the state of “Original Sin.” The newborn is already resplendent in God’s grace and has no sin to be “washed away.” The baptism is more like the one preached by John, calling on *adults* to repent and renounce personal sin in their lives as they prepared for the coming of the Messiah. John used baptism to symbolize the forgiveness of sin obtained simply by the hearers’ contrition — forgiveness as described in Ezekiel 18:21. The forgiveness was symbolized by a bath to “wash away” the convert’s sins so that he or she could welcome the

Messiah with a clear conscience. In this action they formed a community of like-minded people, with the common goal of assisting each other in maintaining the purity of their now reformed life. Today, that community is the Church. Baptism is the tool for the recipient's initiation into the community of the Church. The primary purpose of Baptism is to welcome a believer into the Church, though it may also remit personal sin, depending on the recipient's disposition. It would not remit the so-called Original Sin it simply does not exist! The baptismal song "Welcome In" by the St. Louis Jesuits described the situation perfectly:

Welcome in! Take my hand!

Let us walk no more and talk no more as strangers in this land!

As we meet here in the causeway of His love and your desire,

Let's set the night on fire! Welcome in!

Such an induction into the Church would best be done after the child has attained the use of reason. He or she should learn what the allegory of Genesis 1-11 was designed to teach. Baptism could, indeed be combined with first communion, and no "first confession" would be required. Even the Church recognizes that both Baptism and Eucharist are "sacraments of initiation."

The Eucharist is another doctrine that has taken shape with a misunderstanding of the allegory. It is truly a complicated development, the end product of which was described above in chapter 14.

In Eucharist, the emphasis could gradually be diverted from the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the form of bread and wine to accepting the challenge and taking to heart the spirit and mission of Jesus, who referred to himself by the many allegorical titles in the well known "I AM" statements, such as "I AM the "Bread of Life"; I AM the "Good Shepherd"; and I AM the "Way, the Truth and the Life." After all, Jesus is already "Really Present" in all of creation and especially where "two or more are gathered in Jesus' name."

Early on, the Church initially proclaimed Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation the "sacraments of initiation," which were to be received in that order. A problem arose when Eucharist was postponed so as to be received only after the recipient had acquired the use of reason. Then, since personal sin was possible, "first confession" had to be inserted between Baptism and Eucharist. What about Confirmation to be received? When was it to be received? The decision regarding age of Confirmation was left to the local bishop, with the result that the age varied, sometimes considerably, from diocese to diocese.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the stress could be on a lay apostolate to which the recipient is being called, rather than an abstract reception of the Holy Spirit (which the Church teaches as having been already received at baptism). The main feature of Confirmation would be described as a challenge to adolescents, who are growing into a natural awareness that needs the share his faith with others and defend the faith against those who profess doctrines alien to those of the Church.

In Penance, the emphasis could be put on repenting rather than on the confessing of personal sins to a priest. After all, confession is ineffective without a "Firm Purpose of Amendment", and the prophet Ezekiel assures us that turning away from the wickedness one's sins suffices in itself for obtaining forgiveness for it. (Ezekiel 18:21.) If this is true, the obligation to confess one's (serious) sins once a year is of no purpose, with one exception. It makes sense when the sin is an act that is destructive to the Christian Community — the kind of sin that merits excommunication in today's church. In such cases, public confession and public

absolution would make sense, as it did early on in the Christian era, when private confession was unheard of. It is said that Saint Augustine, for example, never went to confession in his life.

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