

XIX.

The Holy Spirit in the Mystery of the Incarnation.

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.”—*John i. 14.*



There is one more question in the treatment of this subject: What was the extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit that enabled the Son of God to assume our fallen nature without being defiled by sin?

Altho we concede it to be unlawful to pry into that behind the veil which God does not freely open to us, yet we may seek the meaning of the words that embody the mystery; and this we intend to do in the discussion of this question.

The Incarnation of Christ, with reference to His sinlessness, is connected with the being of sin, the character of original sin, the relation between body and soul, regeneration, and the working of the Holy Spirit in believers. Hence it is necessary for a clear understanding to have a correct view of the relation of Christ's human nature to these important matters.

Sin is not a spiritual bacillus hiding in the blood of the mother and received into the veins of the child. Sin is not material and tangible; its nature is moral and spiritual, belonging to the invisible things whose results we can perceive but whose real being escapes detection. Wherefore in opposition to Manicheism and kindred heresies, the Church has always confessed that sin is not a material substance in our flesh and blood, but that it consists in the loss of the original righteousness in which Adam and Eve bloomed and prospered in Paradise. Nor do believers differ on this point, for all acknowledge that sin is the loss of original righteousness.

However, tracing the next step in the course of sin, we meet a serious difference between the Church of Rome and our own. The former teaches that Adam came forth perfect from the hand of his Maker, even before he was endowed with original righteousness. This implies that the human nature is finished without original righteousness, which is put on him like a robe or ornament. As our present nature is complete without dress or ornament, which are needed only to appear respectable in the world, so was the human nature, according to Rome, complete and perfect in itself without righteousness, which serves only as dress and jewel. But the Reformed churches have always opposed this view, maintaining that original righteousness is an essential part of the human nature; hence that the human nature in Adam was not complete without it; that it was not merely added to Adam's nature, but that Adam was created in the possession of it as the direct manifestation of his life.



If Adam's nature was perfect before he possessed original righteousness, it follows that it remains perfect after the loss of it; in which case we describe sin simply as “*carientia justitix origirialis;*” *i.e.*, the want of original righteousness. This used to be expressed thus: Is original righteousness a natural or supernatural good? If natural, then its loss caused the human

nature to be wholly corrupt; if supernatural, then its loss might take away the glory and honor of that nature, but as a human nature it retained nearly all of its original power.

Bellarminus said that desire, disease, conflict, etc., naturally belong to human nature; and original righteousness was a golden bridle laid upon this nature, to check and control this desire, disease, conflict, etc. Hence when the golden bridle was lost, disease, desire, conflict, and death broke loose from restraint (tom. iv., chap. v., col. 15, 17, 18). Thomas Aquinas, to whom Calvin was greatly indebted, and whom the present Pope has earnestly commended to his priests, had a more correct view. This is evident from his definition of sin. If disease, desire, etc., existed in man when he came from the hand of God, and only supernatural grace can restrain them, then sin is merely the loss of original righteousness, hence purely negative. But if original righteousness belongs to human nature and was not simply added to it supernaturally, then sin is twofold: first, the loss of original righteousness; second, the ruin and corruption of *human nature* itself, disorganizing and disjointing it. Thomas Aquinas acknowledges this last aspect, for he teaches (*Summa Theologiæ*, "prima secundæ, ix., sect. 2, art. 1) that sin is not only *deprivation* and loss, but also a state of corruption, wherein must be distinguished the lack of what ought to be present, *i.e.*, original righteousness, and the presence of what ought to be absent, *viz.*, an abnormal derangement of the parts and powers of the soul.

Our fathers held almost the same view. They judged that sin is not material, but the loss of original righteousness. But since original righteousness belongs to the sound human nature, the loss did not leave that nature intact, but damaged, disjointed, and corrupted it.

To illustrate: A beautiful geranium that adorned the window was killed by the frost. Leaves and flowers withered, leaving only a mass of mildew and decay. What was the cause? Merely the loss of the sun's light and heat. But that was enough; for these belong to the nature of the plant, and are essential to its life and beauty. Deprived of them it remains not what it is, but its nature loses its soundness, and this causes decay, mildew, and poisonous gases, which soon destroy it. So of human nature: In Paradise Adam was like the blooming plant, flourishing in the warmth and brightness of the Lord's presence. By sin he fled from that presence. The result was not merely the loss of light and heat, but since these were essential to his nature, that nature languished, drooped, and withered. The mildew of corruption formed upon it; and the positive process of dissolution was begun, to end only in eternal death.

Facts and history prove even now that the human body has weakened since the days of the Reformation; that bad habits of a certain character sometimes pass from father to child even where the early death of the former precludes propagation by education and example. Hence the difference between Adam, body and soul, before the fall and his descendants after the fall is not merely the loss of the Sun of Righteousness, which by nature shines no



longer upon them, but the damage caused by this loss to the human nature, in body and soul, which thereby are weakened, diseased, corrupted, and thrown out of balance.

This corrupt nature passes from the father to the child, as the Confession of Faith expresses it in article xv.: “That original sin is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected in their mother’s womb, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof.”

However, the relation between a person and his ego must be taken into account. The disordered condition of our flesh and blood inclines and incites to sin, a fact that has been observed in the victims of certain terrible diseases as their effect. But this could not result in sin if there were no personal ego to allow itself to be excited. Again, tho the unbalanced powers of the soul which cause the darkening of the understanding, the blunting of the sensibilities, and the weakening of the will arouse the passions, yet even this could not result in sin if no personal ego were affected by this working. Hence sin puts its own mark upon this corruption only when the personal ego turns away from God, and in that disordered soul and diseased body stands condemned before Him.

If according to established law the unclean brings forth the unclean, and if God has made our birth to depend upon generation by sinful men, it must follow that by nature we are born—first, without original righteousness; secondly, with an impaired body; thirdly, with a soul out of harmony with itself; lastly, with a personal ego which is turned away from God.

All of which would apply to the Person of the Mediator if, like one of us, He had been born a human person by the will of man and not of God. But since He was not born a human person, but took our human nature upon Himself, and was conceived not by the will of man, but by an operation of the Holy Spirit, there could not be in Him an ego turned away from God, nor could the weakness of His human nature for a moment be a sinful weakness. Or to put it in the concrete: Altho there was in that fallen nature something to incite Him to desire, yet it never became desire. There is a difference between the temptations and conflicts of Jesus and those of ourselves; while our ego and nature desire against God, His holy Ego opposed the incitement of His adopted nature and was never overcome.

Hence the proper work of the Holy Spirit consisted in this:

First, the creation not of a new person, but of a human nature, which the Son assumed into union with His divine nature in one Person.

Second, that the divine-human Ego of the Mediator, who, according to His human nature, also possessed spiritual life, was kept from the inward defilement which by virtue of our birth affected our ego and personality.



Hence regeneration, which affects not our nature but our person, is out of the question with reference to Christ. But what Christ needed was the gifts of the Holy Ghost to enable His weakened nature, in increasing measure, to be His instrument in the working out of His holy design; and finally to transform His weakened nature not by regeneration, but by resurrection into a glorious nature, divested of the last trace of weakness and prepared to unfold its highest glory.



Sixth chapter.

THE MEDIATOR.

