

Whatever Became Of Sin?

Still falls the rain
Dark as the world of man, black as our loss-
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty
nails Upon the cross.

The word sin is making its come-back. The famous Dr. Karl Menninger, a psychiatrist and author of numerous books, has published a new work entitled: *Whatever Became of Sin?*

Its contents can be summarized with three quotations: "Egocentricity is one name for it. Selfishness, narcissism, pride and others have been used. But neither the clergy nor the behavioral scientists, including psychiatrists have made it an issue. The popular leaning is away from notions of guilt and morality. "Some politicians are groping for a word have chanced on the silly misnomer permissiveness. Their thinking is muddy but their meaning is clear. Disease and treatment have been the watchwords of the day and little is said about selfishness or guilt or 'the morality gap.' And certainly no one talks about sin." "Recognition of our part in the world transgression is the only remaining hope."

This trend of thinking is a most welcome turn of the tide. In more optimistic days when classic theological liberalism was at its height of influence, it was blithely believed by its adherents that, given time, mankind would be able to work out the beast within him, and that the ape and the tiger at his heart would eventually disappear. We were told that the great thing to grasp is the developing and progressing and improving nature of man. Of course, they were prepared to admit that man is not yet perfect and has still a distance to travel, but is on the way to a better world. The general improvement of human nature is just around the corner. Universal education and improvement of social conditions were to do it. When the right conditions have arrived, humanity will automatically respond with better behaviour.

Reality has of course poured cold water upon this unwarranted optimism. We can't even speak any longer of the "animal passions" which must be overcome. What animal passions? How silly it is to hint that our basic troubles are due to our so-called "animal ancestry." This very view is slandering to the animals. "A Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," says one of Dostoyevsky's characters, "told me of the crime committed by Turks and Caucasians in Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ear to the fences, leave them there until morning, and in the morning they hang them – all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that is a great injustice and insult to the beasts. A beast can never be as cruel as a man, as artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws; that is all he can do. But he would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it." Indeed, it is quite clear that it is specifically in our own human nature that we must

look for the source of our own sinfulness. If we are honest with ourselves we must say with the words of Shakespeare:

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings."

As one said when asked if he believed in the brotherhood of man: "Of course I do; we're all Adams and Abels."

Dr. Menninger encourages us to think again about the reality of sin, but he is not saying anything new. Its apparent newness lies in the honest diagnosis of an age old problem by a prominent psychiatrist. The strongest saints and the strongest skeptics alike have always taken the problem of sin as the starting point of their arguments. The word, sin itself is a Bible word. It is described as the refusal to walk in the ways of God, as man's stubborn determination to be master of himself, and as a rebellion against God. The Bible tells us unequivocally what God thinks about man. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3: 23)

What is the remedy? What is the Christian answer to man's fatal disease? Man will go on in fruitless search for peace and spiritual health, his life marred by wretchedness and misery, until like the once profligate and sinful Augustine, he comes to realize that his trouble is with himself and in his relationship with God, and cries out: "Thou hast created us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." This is precisely the message of the Bible: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Roman 6: 23)

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