

(This first of three articles about the evil and good religious use of the symbolising finger appeared in Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research in 1997. Half concealedly it refers to the Girardian mimetic theory and questions the general view that the latter is unaffected by the gender issue. This is the 1997 version, slightly touched linguistically)

Adam's (ir)religious fingerⁱ

by Wiel Eggen

What purpose can be served by returning once more to old Adam and to that most famous and most debated story of world literature? Many theologians tell us to let it rest and go on doing theology, by fighting all the abuses to which this story of Adam's fall has given rise, notably in its dogmatic interpretation as 'original sin'. Indeed, theologians like Tissa Balasuriya have viewed this as the chief factor disrupting 'right relationships' between the nations and between individuals due to how it is linked to the message about Jesus as the sole dispenser of the grace that God has offered to remedy our universal quandary.ⁱⁱ The story has been decried as a key to the discrimination, both against the non-Christians, who were said to revel in satanic deceit, and notably against women, who were accused of harbouring an uncanny conspiracy with Satan's lure. The root of this discrimination is invariably located in the Gn 3 story of the Fall and in Paul's alleged deformation of the Christian message. My thesis, however, will be that these two sources rather contain the exact opposite. I do not deny that the doctrine of 'original sin' has had those deplorable effects, or argue that these effects are imaginary or negligible, but rather that the Genesis story and the Pauline views on it actually are our most powerful sources of a remedy against them.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even though the theologians' urge to leave this story rest is not without grounds, I still wish to question some common views on it and rather relate it to the context of the inter-religious encounter, as well as to the gender debate. These two, no doubt, demand a separate approach and I shall deal with them in two respective parts. But right from the outset, it must be clear that they are interrelated because of the universality, if for no other reason, of the discrimination against women in most if not all (ir)religious settings.^{iv} It is well known, that numerous feminist authors term the male domination over women the true 'original sin' and the wellspring of all evil. There sadly is a profound truth to this, as we shall see.

There is no summarizing the myriads of comments that have viewed the Fall in sexual terms. Myths in many regions of the world indeed link creation stories to the first sexual contact, as well as to the origin of death. Anthropologists are eloquent in telling us that the enigmas of death and sexual procreation form the hard core of major parts of mythological and ritual traditions. Although biblical theology has spent much energy on showing how Genesis actually off-loaded this sexual proclivity, it needs no further telling that the notion of 'shame', and the numerous comments on it by renowned theologians, caused many a Christian to identify 'original sin' with sexuality, and to see the feminine lure as the prime cause of it. Outrageously bizarre in fact is how the procreation as such could be considered as an evil, because it brings into being a human marked by that 'original sin', who is a "shrine of the demon", as St. Eudes has it.^v Even if we refrain from comments on such curiosities, it is worth noting that, in all these views, the woman is blamed. She is not only the tempter of Adam, but also the (meta)physical origin of demonic feats. Feminist theologians, who rightly expose such mind-boggling absurdities, are lightly dismissed by comments that these are just excesses that are readily discarded by the Bible itself as well as by theology. It is pointed out that the Bible consistently calls

the 'original sin' a responsibility of Adam, rather than of Eve.^{vi} But although that cannot be denied, I wish to submit that this argument is more spurious than it looks. For, even though Adam is made the culprit of the original fault, who brought death onto humankind, a closer look reveals that discrimination of women has indeed much to do with it.^{vii} What we must learn to understand is the real obscenity involved in Adam's pointing his finger at Eve. Still, I also wish to show that this affects, not only gender issues, but first and foremost the theology of inter-religious contact.

A case of disobedience?

My father, a devout yet unsophisticated Christian, was faithful and consistent in teaching us that disobedience was the core of Satan's demonic tricks. "That is how it all started in Eden", he was wont to tell us, "when Adam repeated Lucifer's words: *Non serviam*".^{viii} It may have been a streak of mere recalcitrance which has made me question this reading of the Eden events all my life. I wish to take a closer look at it, and to suggest that the text actually expresses the opposite of what we were made to believe. Not the rebellion against the law, but rather the undue following of the divine law was the real trespass. Even though Genesis 3 understandably is the *locus classicus* for the imagery of 'original sin', we are well aware that the Pauline discourse opposing Adam and Jesus - as the old and the new man - holds the clue to all further dogmatic developments. To attempt a hermeneutical analysis of the latter is certainly beyond my intent here. But anyone who does attempt it should first mind Derrida's warning that there is no inside or outside of the text. In so sensitive a matter as ours this warning is far from irrelevant. The Pauline views on the core of the Christian message opened up this theme for virtually any angle of dogmatic developments in the twenty subsequent centuries. Recent debates, however, on the avenues to salvation in non-Christian religions have brought out a particularly relevant

dimension. For, we now realise that Paul's main concern was with the rapport between the Christian faith and the obligations of the Torah, precisely with respect to inter-cultural contexts.

Paul's main argument, as shown both in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians, and by the Lucan tradition in Acts, is quite clear. Paul relates it to his own remarkable life story.^{ix} At the execution of Stephen, he bears the responsibility of the crime, as the perpetrators put their clothes at his feet. Next, he sets out persecuting the Christians, until he receives insight in Jesus' truth and Stephen's veracity. The latter had faced the Hellenistic Jews who accused him of preaching against the Temple by proclaiming Jesus' announcement of the Temple's end. As a Pharisee, Saul must have been sensitive to the criticism on the Temple's role. But Christians combined this with a further critique of religious legalism. When Saul understood the core of their message and came to appreciate Jesus' faithfulness onto the death in fighting the discriminatory abuse of the Law against the various outlawed, he readily accepted Stephen's argument that Abraham was saved through faith, that the prophets had preached against all legalism and that Jewish leaders had a sad history of opposing God's ways, on this score. Having thus converted - Paul explains - he chose to proclaim Jesus' basic message that the Torah, being a valuable help for the people to come to the saving faith, must never be turned into an obstacle for faith. In the letter to the Galatians, he concluded his autobiography with a forceful summary saying that salvation comes from the faith of Jesus, the Christ, which now is the very essence of his life. After many centuries of Christological debates and of turning Jesus, the Christ, into a metaphysical entity, we have forgotten to read Gal 2:16 in its prime meaning to say that salvation comes through obedience not to the Law, but to the faith of (rather than in) Jesus Christ.^x It is beyond doubt that Paul wrote his christology with the aim of showing how Jesus overcame our enslavement to the Law, as a

condition to divine salvation.^{xi} Remembering the Antioch incident (See Ga 2), as he prepares for his mission to the West, he wants to avert from his future base in Rome any similar strife with the 'judaizers'. While subscribing to the role of Israel and to the theology of the covenant, he tries to prove that Israel actually disowned the Abrahamic legacy, and fell victim to the logic of Adam's fault. After having stated his belief that God proved His faithfulness, eventually, by raising the faithful Jew Jesus from the dead, Paul tries to show the contents of this faith(fulness) of Jesus, which was an extension of Abraham's faith(fulness), and the opposite of Adam's sin. The gist of his argument, then, is that Abraham did not found his position on laws and rules concerning 'good and evil', as Adam did. The Jews took the rituals of the covenant - that were to be only a symbol of their faithfulness - to be the foundation of their religion, thereby forfeiting their Abrahamic claim of excellence. Until the time Jesus came to restore the true faith.^{xii}

Paul doubtlessly admired Jesus' uncompromising critique of any abuse of the Law for discriminatory aims. Starting from there, he develops this theme theologically, to show Jesus' faith which consists in relying on the love of/to the Father and surmounting any dependence on observances. This offers us some most valuable guidelines for the theology of inter-religious encounters, and we shall consider especially the striking argument Paul develops on the theme of the old versus the new man: Adam versus Jesus. If we are right in seeing Paul's main argument in his opposing righteousness through faith in (of) Jesus to the discriminatory abuse of the Law, which he took to be the true (primordial) source of sin, his views on the old and the new man become quite enlightening. It is an illustration of how Paul must have read the story of Gn 2-3 on the primordial (original) sin. This may somehow be termed a sin of disobedience; but its deepest meaning is to be found, not in the breach of a law, but rather in the contrary: the prime sin is excessive reliance on the law.

Which tree was forbidden?

Westermann follows the general wisdom of the exegetes who, after G.von Rad, have outlawed any speculation about the divine plan or intention in prohibiting the fruits of the second tree of the Garden.^{xiii} The many mythological links to the different trees in the creation stories of neighbouring peoples made it basically impossible, so they argued, to delineate the semantic contents of this symbol in Israel's tradition. The source of Gen 2:9 reduplicating the 'tree in the middle of the Garden' (the single tree being the common image in the Bible) is only indirectly of our concern, as we try and read the logic of Paul's understanding of this passage from his arguments on Jesus' message about surmounting reliance on the Law. Without dismissing the import of the exegetical work about how the Gen 2-3 story drew on material from in other traditions, we shall stick to the narrative as it stands, and which Paul had in mind when he opposed Jesus to Adam, as the new man.

Paul, here, never mentions Eve and her part in the Fall.^{xiv} This has been attributed to a male bias in Paul's milieu. But it has also been remarked that God's prohibition was pronounced before Eve even was created. In the composition of the story this is not without significance. The composition of the story as handed down to us should be recognised as very solid. It is most dramatic and follows the best rules of story telling, as appears from the fine literary device of the reduplication of the tree: after having sinned by eating from one tree, man is dramatically banned from the other one. This is remarkable, since the latter is truly the tree of life, the one containing the medicine of eternal life, while the former is curiously called the tree of knowledge, turning out to be the tree of death.

There is clearly some value in realising that the text refers to certain superstitious insights from foreign religions.^{xv} But Paul does not use this connection, when he refers to the link

between knowledge and death. This is of great importance for our argument about the inter-religious contact. The tree in the middle of the Garden was duplicated: a tree of life (the classical one of many myths) and a tree of death, as a sequence of knowledge of good and evil. This is a most curious fact, which Paul uses to the full. Although Adam had already become individualised, among Jewish scholars at the time, and was no longer just a symbol of mankind as such, Paul did not consider his act as an individual case of idolatry or sorcery, as one might think, given the Jewish sensitivity in this matter. He links the idea of knowledge of good and evil, not to sorcery, but to the notion of the Law which brings death, although he is eager to stress that it is not the (knowledge of the) Law as such, which brings death.

A certain fundamentalist strand among exegetes has it that it is a sign of irreverence to God's transcendence, if we were to ask the reason of His prohibition. Still, many Bible-readers have been justifiably appalled by the arbitrariness of God, selecting one tree at random and telling Adam that he would die if he were to eat from it. Surely, there should have been something special about that tree?! Were its fruit perhaps toxic or hallucinogenic, containing the clue to eternal life? Exegetes who forbid us to ask this kind of questions, surely have a point, when we see the imagination run wild and suggest that the fruit must have been aphrodisiac, given the fact that Eve and Adam discovered their nakedness by eating it. Indeed, the arousal of the sexual drive by transgression of a divine order is not an unknown theme in mythology. But, it must be clear that the feminist movement has nothing to gain by pushing this line of thought, and suggesting that the Genesis story is basically the prohibition of sexual gratifications and the exclusion of female attraction. But even if we follow von Rad and cut short any speculation of this kind which questions God on the nature of his primordial order, this still leaves us entitled and even obliged to ask how Paul viewed this episode in his letter to the Romans.

Paul's text, in fact, requires as much subtlety of analysis as the Genesis story itself, because it is equally well constructed, albeit with different discursive techniques. To drive home his understanding of Jesus, as the one who gave his life for that fight against any bigoted understanding of the Law - His fight being ratified by His being raised from the dead - Paul suggests a fascinating reading of this Genesis story: Adam sinned not so much by transgressing the command of God as such, but rather by trying to become himself the master of the divine commands.

Pointing the finger

The duplication of the tree, even though not mentioned as such by Paul, becomes quite significant here. After Adam's infraction regarding the second tree has been healed by the Jesus' death and resurrection, the road to the other tree is open again, as Rev 22:3 points out.^{xvi} But how to understand Adam's sin, if it is not just the disobeying of an arbitrary decree by God, and certainly not the succumbing to sexual arousal, as popular views have it? What is the act of the old and the new man?

Let us return to the stringent logic of Paul's argument, viewing Adam as the negative image of the new man who appeared in Jesus. If Jesus is understood to expose the Law as the realm of sin that leads to death, then Paul's understanding of Adam becomes clear, albeit with the essential caveat that Paul only speaks of the Law in the sense of the wrong, discriminatory application of the Law. That is what brings 'tears, death, mourning and sadness' (Rev 21.3-4); that is what Jesus fought against, and that is the core of Paul's conflict with the preachers, who caused confusion by demanding that the gentiles should submit to Jewish laws of circumcision. The enormous amount of discussion about the original sin - ever since Augustine decided to combat Pelagianism and its stress on the moral effort of imitating Jesus with this very concept - has

obfuscated the instructive value of combining the two letters of Paul to the Galatians and the Romans. The theme of Adam and Jesus appears only in the latter, but can be interpreted best from the two combined. The view that Paul does not tell us precisely how sin entered the world, save through Adam's 'transgression' (5:14), 'trespass' (5:15) or 'disobedience' (5:19) seems to be the final wisdom on this score.^{xvii} Yet, perhaps, something more can be said about it.

Many are distracted by the question of how sin (and grace, for that matter) can be imputed. Paul's arguments about this may easily lead astray. By claiming that the combination of sin, law and death has been overcome by Jesus, he invests the latter with a universal significance which formally speaking, makes even Abraham dependent on the Christ event. To explain this he takes an apparently even more dubious turn by bringing in the person of Adam, who in his days had been individualised in Jewish debates.^{xviii} So, when the objection is made that sin and death were in the world before the Law (Torah) came, he seems to get into an impasse, which has overly preoccupied commentators. Paul was clearly in a debate with his Pharisee colleagues (by then mainly grouped in the Spiritual Centre of Jabneh) who generally accepted an influence of the individualised Adam on the human race as a whole. But they did not have Augustine's idea of the imputation of the 'original sin'. Their question was how those between Adam and Moses had sinned and died, if unlike Adam they could not be accused of breaking the law? Paul speaks of disobedience (*parakoë*) and obedience (*hypokoë*) in opposing Adam and Jesus, but what he means must be understood from his view on the latter. Jesus obedience was not a submission to some command or law, but rather faith in the loving Creator Father, which transcended the law by refusing to let the letter decide on His dealing with others and with the Father. Reasoning backwards, Paul now saw the true command of God to Adam to be a prohibition to strive for the knowledge of good and evil as a tool or means to discriminate between good and evil and thereby to put oneself

in the position of judge and master.

No doubt, Adam transgressed a command, but his fault was not so much the formal transgression, but rather the pursuit of the law as a means of discrimination. And those who came after him, up to Moses, even without having a revealed Torah, did sin by that very same mechanism which Adam brought into the world. So let us briefly return to the Gen 3 story and consider this masterpiece of story telling. Is it really true that the text gives us no other indication of what sin really is, except the trespass of a formal (and arbitrary) decree from God, viewed as the absolute master? I do not believe so. The dramaturgy of the tale is remarkable and deserves a close scrutiny.^{xix}

As said before, the woman was not yet created, when God gave his decree about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In fact, she enters the scene immediately after the decree is spelled out. The eventual disaster is written on the wall, so to say, when God decides to remedy the man's loneliness by making him a mate. A mind-blowing and tense moment, indeed, that invites the audience to scream and tell God to stop and think twice. Omniscient as He is, He should foresee the disaster to come. Or, does He have a black-out? Well, God does go ahead and Adam welcomes Eve as his counterpart. They are one flesh - as the Jesus (Mk 10:8) and the letter to the Ephesians say - and are not ashamed of their nakedness in each other's presence. This is a pivotal statement in the text, but refers only remotely to sexual activity.^{xx}

The serpent's cunningness is stunning. Yet, it does not, as many a commentator would have it, exploit the female curiosity nor her luring skills, but rather her very best and essential side, namely her loving care. She wants her husband to have this beautiful and mighty fruit, which will open his eyes and will make him like the gods, by knowing good and evil. Even though the gods have not been mentioned before, the public is supposed to know what is at stake. The tension is reaching a climax, exactly by this mentioning of the gods. For the

Israelites know how the idols of the neighbouring peoples and their idolaters treat and manipulate the common folk. The eating follows; with an apparent end of the story, when their eyes are opened and they recognise their difference. Yet, this is neither the end nor the climax of this masterly tale. The climax is still to come; it is prepared by a lull - a kind of pastoral intermezzo - that pictures God strolling in the cool of the evening.

The suspense is almost unbearable. The trespass has taken place, but sin seems not really to have entered the Garden yet. All is quiet, till God questions Adam, asking him how he learned about the difference between man and woman, so as to become ashamed of his nakedness. At that moment, the full blow of sinfulness enters on stage. Adam marks his difference from the woman; he points his finger at her and disowns her. She is no longer the flesh of his flesh; she is the demonic serpent enticing him into disobedience. The brutal force of this denouncement leaves no doubt about the true evil: he now becomes her master, knowing good and evil, and abusing these ideas so as to get the better of her. Here he is, the one who marks their difference and declares his own power - cached behind the fig leaf - to be infinitely superior to her bleeding nothingness.

Dubious rejection of gods and women

The enigmas of death, of sexuality and of religious idols are clearly part of this dramatic story. But the disobedience which Paul refers to is not to be defined just formally: a violation of a divine law.^{xxi} Looking at what Paul is trying to point out about the obedience of Jesus - which is the obedience of faith, rather than of laws - we must read Adam's disobedience (*parakoë*) in counterpoint. Just as Jesus had the courage to surmount the law to make faith and universal love the directives of His life against all odds, Adam is seen in retrospect as disobeying by making the law and the judgments

about good and evil the tool of rivalry and condemnation. Adam fails in faith as he pursues safety in playing a power game of shifting the blame on Eve. Obedience, on the side of Jesus, does not mean surrendering to a preordained plan which includes accepting the tree of death, but rather to share the faith of God in all His creatures and losing not a single one of them. (Jn 18:9) Disobedience, on the other hand, is eating from the tree of knowledge and share in the dubious role of gods who lord it over their devotees.

It goes without saying that the consequences of this analysis are far-reaching in respect of gender issues, as we shall see in the second part of this study. I wish to finish this part, by looking at the inter-religious encounter. To do this, we must first face the apparent contradiction in what was said so far. While we have started out by stressing Paul's emphasis on the open-minded approach of Jesus who made faith, rather than the observance of the law - be it circumcision or baptism - the true path to salvation, we have ended up by criticising very harshly the idolatrous worship of gods, as the epitome of sin. Here we seem to slip into the (false) dilemma between what has been defined as 'inclusivism' and 'exclusivism', two lines of thought which are generally (albeit only partly correctly) linked to the theology of K.Rahner and K.Barth respectively.^{xxii}

In his brilliant analysis of Paul's letter to the Romans, Barth had rightly identified as its central theme: Jesus surpassing the Law as a tool of discrimination and self-justification. He noted that all religions, Christianity included, must be viewed as systems that, while making people aware of their sinfulness, also entice them into the greatest form of sin because religious knowledge of good and evil proves to be a treacherous tool.^{xxiii} Later, Barth realised that the faith which Paul preached, risked to turn self-righteous, unless it was ecclesially embedded in the believing community. But his *Church Dogmatics* now came to be read as a triumphalist celebration of the exclusive superiority of Christianity over all other

religions and as an outright call to condemn all the others. It is a sobering experience, to see the paradox of the finger raised against all religion to be turned into such a discriminatory tool. But somehow it proves how right Barth's basic insight was: religion as the target of Jesus' prophetic calling to fight Adam's sinfully err-religious obedience of raising a discriminatory finger.

Thus, the queries about the primordial fault and its subsequent imputation coalesce. Both have been endlessly discussed in philosophically phrased theology. But the tendency towards a formal rather than a material definition may dupe us by viewing disobedience and the breach of the divine command as the core of the matter. Indeed, the case is much more paradoxical since this command itself is at the heart of evil. The dilemma facing Paul is acute as he has to relate the law, sin and death. Is God's command a cause of evil just by being a command? The answer must be affirmative as from the moment that one human uses it against another and tries to become like a god. That is what we actually do, notably when we blame Adam for this 'original sin'. Adam's (human) sin it is to blame Adam (i.e. other humans) putting them in the position of Eve.

Here we are meeting a watershed situation, similar to the famous question faced by anthropologists, when they try to discern the divide between 'nature' and 'culture'.^{xxiv} Speaking with the Banda of Central Africa, I noticed that their word *ama* covers a gamut of meanings, from 'mouth', 'word' and 'language' to 'conflict'. When they relate this semantic cluster to the origin of religion, they indeed refer to a watershed between 'nature' and 'culture', which is akin to what we are referring to by our notion of the 'original sin'. They actually hold the view that all rituals and totemic practices - and in fact their very division into clans - exist only so as to allow them to marry each other. Differences are created for the purpose of the exchange. The exchange (love, unity) is holy, but differences are its awful prerequisite, and this presupposes

ama in all its horrifying aspects. The junction of these insights and their implications would suggest that the notion of a primordial fault must be situated near the structural divide between nature and culture. In fact, it identifies the knowledge of good and evil with the basic mechanism of rational discernment: to see the differences and to apply them to our exchanges. But if that is the conclusion to be drawn from this line of thought, do we not risk to prove the Creator to be the cause of evil, by making man as He did?^{xxv} Is evil ingrained in humanity's very essence or did it start through a specific event? If the latter, how could man trigger off evil, if it was not part of his very constitution from the outset?

In his profoundly intricate, structuralist studies on mythology, the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss regularly reminds us that myths are just intellectual efforts to reconcile irreconcilable facts in life and that our analysis should not look for profound meanings, but rather for the complex mental mechanisms (called: structures) by which this realised. The narrative sequences are instructive of logical operations, and the analyst should be aware of the feedback mechanisms that may be much more refined than the actual text may suggest. Texts, like the Genesis story, having gone through centuries of reworking within many a religious community, are packed with layers of such feedbacks. Since it is so hazardous to claim one unique and basic meaning of the Fall-episode, therefore, we should not appear to imply this. Even if we restrict it to the Pauline version, we cannot reduce the story solely to the rejection of religious or sexual discrimination. No doubt, Paul sees Jesus as the one surmounting the religious bigotry of pharisaism, but this can be understood only within his complex views on religion in the eschatological era that was about to begin.^{xxvi} He undoubtedly saw the annulment of the primordial fault by Adam as a key issue, which he links to the controversy over the use of legal precepts as distinctive markings for divine acceptance. One might argue that he thus used the story apologetically to explain both his personal life and the events

affecting the communities, thereby making it just a convenient myth that was unduly enlarged by later theologians. Yet, there is a substantial argument for placing this view on the old and new Adam at the heart of Pauline theology about the dispensation of God's kingdom.^{xxvii}

Gn 2-3 has admittedly been used to tell contradictory and bizarre stories about God's intent with humankind. Von Rad is therefore quite right in discarding further speculation about whether God wanted to curb man's knowledge or just put him to the test. The Kantian formalism seemed a plausible escape for a while. But the question keeps coming back: was man to bow to some heteronomous order against any pursuit of knowledge, or was insight still to be held as the highest aim of redemption, as the gnostic adversaries of early Christianity held? In stead of choosing between these alternatives views on the original myth, Paul offers another, much more useful key through the formula of old - new man. Although he follows the scribe's idea of an individualised Adam, he does picture him as one who incorporates the crux of social-religious faults: to desire knowledge not for loving communication, but as a tool for base power drives, that is the basic evil of untruth.^{xxviii} The old dispensation, having reached its crown in the Law and the knowledge of good and evil is not entirely despicable as such, but the new dispensation of Jesus' faith exposes its shortcoming and makes it obsolete.^{xxix}

Sinning by excess obedience

We now must return to the puzzling enigma of how this liberating message could ever have turned into its opposite and become a tool of discrimination again. The crucial factor seems to have been the theory of how both the old and the new dispensation affect individuals; in other words, how the guilt and the saving grace are imputed.

While briefly reflecting on how Adam's act could have

influenced all humans, I wish to avoid any speculation on monogenism^{xxx} and on God "visiting the sins of the fathers on the sons"(Ez 18). Augustine was certainly right in his anti-Pelagian emphasis on what we would now call the 'structural' influences, both on the side of sin and on that of grace.^{xxxi} At stake is not just the conscious imitation of either Adam or Christ. Sin, epitomized in its devastating form of the discriminatory finger, has actually entered into the very fabric of our institutions and our genes. And this has had a historical starting point: through one person this came into the world. Man became human (or, as Nietzsche would say: all too human) by the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil that allowed him to wield the power of judgment.^{xxxii}

We saw that the starting point of evil, in mythological thought, must concern a situation which is beyond the rational, in the reconciliation of the irreconcilable. How to link the universal benefit of human knowledge, and the equally universal abuse of knowledge as root of evil and discrimination? Stronger even, how to accommodate the inevitability of discrimination when the very construct of concepts and definitions involve a sinful mechanism of disjoining what God has joint? How to justify that we call this a man, and that a woman? How to differentiate, if God decreed that to be his image was to be of one flesh, one in plurality? Could there ever be knowledge without what we have called an err-religious act i.e. without an urge to analyze the cause of mishap by the mechanism of blaming each other? ^{xxxiii}

The search for monocausal explanations which so strongly denotes our scientific approach - and of which I, for one, shall clearly be accused at this point - is a watershed, since it marks the very glory of humankind and its deepest downfall. The question whether there was an absolute beginning of this predicament, which then influenced all humans afterwards, is both beyond knowing and at the same time conspicuous. Inspired mythology, in the person of Adam, depicted clearly what was at stake. The evil of structural sin is with us, but is not

anonymous. Adam's trespass is what we share, not just by openly imitating him, but by moving in the structured system he got going. Paul and Augustine make much of this point, mainly because they want to stress its resolution: the effect of Jesus' mission. On that side, too, it is not just a conscious imitation of the revolutionary and prophetic faith of Jesus what we should consider. The structural embodiment of his work (of his death and resurrection) is primarily an object of faith: the faith in Jesus, of which we must - and yet should never - claim that it is unique and embodied in the Christian church.

This has the paradoxical consequence that we should embrace both Barth's dialectical critique of religion and Rahner's respect for all religions. If it is true that sin is universally embodied in the religious 'abuse of the knowledge of good and evil', which calls for Barth's criticism, we should equally affirm - so as to avoid contradiction - that the faith of Jesus, surpassing this 'abuse of the religious laws' is also embodied in the various traditions. If the body of Christian believers is able, by God's grace, to give some structural embodiment to that prophetic transcendence which Jesus brought, the question arises why this same self-critical thrust should be denied to traditions that have not had the gospel preached to them. By calling it 'anonymous christianity', Rahner provoked scorn from many sides, but I fail to see what better alternative have been offered by 'pluralist' approaches so far. If Rahner's approach were to deviously try and swell the ranks of Christian churches or to raise the finger to instruct others about what they really are, it would clearly be relapsing into Adam's habit. And Barth's warning would be there to redress it. As it stands, however, it would seem to do justice to the Pauline tradition.^{xxxiv}

Concluding this first instalment, therefore, let me repeat me that the sin which Jesus took upon Himself unto his death on the cross - so as to expose and remove it - was not disobedience to the law as such, but rather the excess

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- i. See note 4 on the notion of (ir)religious or rather err-religious.
- ii. See T. Balasuriya 1991. However brilliantly Augustine used this notion of an 'original sin' to steer clear of the multiple ideologies of his time, it is clear that its potent imagery has had damaging effects, which we still seem to find it hard to put up for discussion without provoking disciplinary action. It has had a close semantic link with the notorious adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, which professes an ecclesial monopoly on God's grace. The Qur'an, which correctly stresses God's free gifts of grace (Q 57:29), does not itself refrain from such exclusivist claims. See Phipps 1996, p.235 on Q 3:85 and Q 98:6. See further Zhuo Xinpeng, Original Sin in the East-West Dialogue - a Chinese View. In: *Studies in World Christianity* 1(1995)1 p.80-86
- iii. Here again we seem to find that curious phenomenon of remedy and poison being interrelated, on which Plato already commented in regard of the notion of *pharmakon*, and which has played a great role in the analysis of violence in the school of René Girard. See Girard, Bailie, Wallace.
- iv. The expression (ir)religious should rather be replaced by the (even odder looking) err-religious. The underlying idea is the ambiguity of discrimination being part and parcel of the widespread misconception of all religion. Our argument is that Adam erred by trying to be religious in a overly zealous manner and to master the skill of 'discernment', which in his hands became a tool of 'discrimination'.
- v. Quoted by Balasuriya 1991, p.191. Here we readily recognise a modified gnostic-manichaeian thought, according to which birth by itself is evil, because it captures sparks of the eternal life in the darkness of the body. It should be noted that the apprehension about bringing into the world an 'unbeliever' was frowned upon, also in Jewish circles, as an injunction of Jesus' time said: "An Israelite midwife may not aid a gentile woman in childbirth, since she would be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry". (*Abodah Zarah 2:1, quoted in Phipps p.150*) The notion of 'original sin' mediates between two apparent opposites - the one capturing good sparks in evil flesh, the other bringing a satanic being into the good creation. But the three cases agree on the disapproval of the woman's role. It is a grim paradox that Augustine's notion of 'original sin' continues to be associated with the manichaeian views, which he did so much to combat.

- vi. Sometimes 1 Tim 2:12-15 is quoted to the contrary. In another context, I shall argue this not to be its true meaning. See also note 14.
- vii. This is important, not in the last place, because it paradoxically explains how putting all blame on Adam succumbs to the same pattern by even robbing women of the possibility of being equally responsible for sin.
- viii. It is remarkable how 'simple' believers retained the Latin phrases that summarised the gist of sermons. The training of ministers, who are to work in oral settings generally pays too little attention to the images and the symbolic power of words, and focuses exclusively on rationality and theory. The women's partaking in the ministry seems to be remedying some of this shortcoming.
- ix. The fascinating question to which Paul is following Jesus' views or imposing his own version of christianity can not be discussed here. See on this the comprehensive new study of D. Wenham, 1995. We seem to be safe in accepting that he not only knew about the Jesus' tradition, but also intended seriously to be faithful to its main thrust.
- x. See F. Matera 1993 and D. Wenham 1995, p.356. Wenham points out that a growing number of exegetes do accept the 'subjective' genitive to be essential for Paul, but also that this subjective genitive does not contradict the christology which insists on an objective genitive. Paul stresses that he now lives through the force of that faith which was in Jesus and kept Him faithful to the end. This is the gospel which he is not ashamed to proclaim: God shows his might and his righteousness in Jesus, through whose faith we too now have faith and life. See also Rm 1:16-17 (out of faith into faith). Although such scholars as Dodd and Fitzmyer read this difficult phrase as an emphatic formula, rather than literally, Wright's argument seems reasonable in reading *ek pisteos* as referring to the faithfulness of Jesus. See 1995, p.65. But saying this does not mean that Jesus is turned into a mere example of faith. Paul's elaborate theology is there to prove it; and Augustine, in his bi-focal anti-gnostic and the anti-pelagian struggle, was evidently justified in stressing the objective genitive and denying that our effort of faith itself brings salvation.
- xi. To translate this as Torah-free faith is missing the point, given the fact that both Jesus and Paul envisaged the perfection, rather than the abolition of the Law, as E.P. Sanders reminds us emphatically in his prolific writing on the subject. (Sanders 1983; see also Wenham 1995, p.255-261) The precise contention between Jesus and the authorities is still a subject of much debate. The

Pharisee Paul certainly shared what Sanders calls Jesus' generally loyal attitude to the law. (Sanders 1985, p.245) He must have been in a debate with his fellow Pharisees, but it would be wrong to see just bitter rivalry in his words, rather than an honest concern. His thesis remains that the faith to which Adam and Abraham were called, and of which the covenant was the sign, was meant for Israel, in the first place, and would be theirs if they gave up their stubbornness of considering the letter of the law greater than the faith which Jesus restored.

xii. Let us remember that this argument has a missionary context in two ways. Not only is it a 'tactical letter' for preparing a harmonious base in Rome for Paul's western mission, but it also forms a summary of his missionary message of salvation through faith. I mainly follow the view of N.Wright 1995; but it remains an open question whether intense proselytizing, as we understand it now, was necessarily the logical consequence of this missionary view. (See Goodman 1994).

xiii. See C.Westermann 1974 p.341 There certainly is some wisdom in refusing to speculate on philosophical or theological level about God's command and about the nature of Adam's disobedience. But the combined logic of Genesis and the Pauline texts, seems to urge us in a precise direction, taking further the modified Kantian view, which J.Wetzel has recently developed in his article on Moral personality, perversity and 'original sin' (1995, including his debate on the issue with G.Meillaender).

xiv.1 Tim 2:13-15 refers to Eve in a context of pastoral rules concerning the role of women in the congregation. Paul is by no means exonerating Adam, and blaming Eve, when he says that not Adam but Eve was seduced into a downfall (*parabasis*). Whereas Eve may have given in to weakness, Adam contravened his basic calling of faith. Indeed, Paul seems rather to refer to the protection God has given the woman by her procreative role which, however, should not be jeopardized by her desire of a too prominent public role. This, at least, could be inferred with a type of thinking that we find returning in the Qur'an (Q 4:34), where clothing the woman's nudity is compared to God giving her protection. There is, nonetheless, the apparent contradiction with Gn 3:17, and with Rm 5:12, where Adam alone is accused of sinning (which is often used by muslims to point out the NT-failings. See W.Phipps 1996, p.224.) It should not be inferred from our explanation that Eve was without guilt; she was part of the breach of God's directives, which Adam whoever converted into outright rejection of the original righteousness.

xv. A number of trees and shrubs are named as being believed to

contain the medicine of eternal life. In certain African languages the link between *tree* and *drug* is so close that there is only one word for it. E.g. the Banda language, which uses that same word also to signify 'deity'. See Eggen 1976.

xvi. It is commonly agreed that Rev 22.3 should follow Rev 21.4, but its position behind Rev 22.2 makes perfect sense, and the two positions reinforce each other, confirming the reading about the victory over death, portrayed as victory gained over sin on the tree of the cross, which undid the effect of the other tree.

xvii. J. Fitzmyer 1992 p.411

xviii. Let us remember that Paul's main aim is consistently to establish the relation between Israel and the Christ, rather than the "implication of justification for the individual believer". See the conclusions of F. Thielman's *The story of Israel and the theology of Romans 5-8*. In: D. Hay and E. Johnson 1995, p.169-195.

xix. My thesis seems to join the critique of the formalist ethics of Kant, to which M. Scheler devoted the greater part of his life. Mythology does not argue in the form of abstract notions. It sees concrete aspects as symbolic summaries of wider relationships. The two approaches may also be seen to reflect the debate between the *peccatum originale originans* and *originata*. What follows is another attempt to show how the two must be thought together, as has been the general conviction ever since the classic study of P. Schoonenberg on this theme. (See Schoonenberg 1965). There is no doubt that my approach has been inspired by R. Girard, and his theories about the 'scapegoat-mechanism'. Recently, G. Bailie (1995, p.138) has applied a similar analysis to this basic myth of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, stressing how much Paul in particular was aware of the Jesus' anti-persecutionary message, as he remembered to have been questioned by the Lord: "Why do you persecute me?" (Id.38)

xx. A classical study on the idea of 'original sin' by Dubarle acknowledges that the nakedness indicates perfect mutual respect between Adam and Eve, but unfortunately he fails to see the (mytho)logical implication of this for humanity's fall. He dismisses that the desired 'knowledge' means carnal knowledge, but he fails to see the other aspect, the utter breakdown of respect between the partners. See Dubarle 1964, p.74-76

xxi. Mythology seldom speaks in such a formal manner. Rivalry and indirect killing are rather the core of its message. As with the Samburu, in Kenya, who blame the arrival of

death on their selfish ancestor who, at the passing away of his rival's child, refused to speak the formula for bringing the deceased back, which he had received from heaven. Mankind were henceforth doomed not to be reborn like the moon; they pass away without ever returning. Let us notice that the Samburu too blame their primordial ancestor for this disastrous sin of rivalry!

xxii. The recent flood of studies on a universalist approach of the theology of religion, epitomised by J.Hick's and F.Knitter's discussions about the multiplicity of God's name, rightly claims that both approaches of Barth and Rahner are inadequate to face the present religious situation of pluralism. However, they were addressing totally different questions (the answer to liberal protestantism and secularism respectively), and at closer scrutiny, I hold their views to contain valuable elements for the theology required. See M.Barnes 1989 and S. Mark Heim 1995.

xxiii. Barth's brilliant analysis of Paul's struggle with the concept of a religious law that is both sacred and a cause of sin and death (on Rm 7) is unsurpassed. See K.Barth 1933, p.229-270.

xxiv. This question has received much attention in the structuralist school headed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who kept struggling with this, mainly because he saw culture itself rather in a determinist manner, as he thought it to be structured by subconscious mechanisms. When we link the notion of 'original sin' to this question, it does remotely refer to his famous thesis that the incest rule is the decisive factor, because it is both universal and subject to all sorts of variants. Paul's notion of the original fault should be read at this level, but not in terms of 'sexual desires'. His paradox is mirrored in the struggle of phenomenologists, like R.Otto, trying to describe the divine as both fascinating and terrifying for man to meet. Like the rule of marriage exchange, the knowledge of good and evil is terrifying, as a social tool, but a fascinating gift to desire; a poison and a remedy, like Plato's *pharmakon*.

xxv. We know that this was one of the major theological issues Augustine was facing: was the free will an encroachment of evil on the creative act of God? (In: *De libero arbitrio* III 24, 251 and *De Genesi ad literam* XI 7.9). Although Augustine was clearly limited by his task to answer the numerous philosophical strands of his day, the popular view was clearly wrong in attributing later forms of dualism to his complex attempts to combat precisely this dualism. I wonder if the recent book by Kermit Scott (1995), despite its detailed and valuable presentation,

has not rather strengthened this basic perception.

xxvi. The eschatology of the Kingdom was doubtlessly Jesus' main message, which He conceived in Jewish terminology, and which is clearly much more than the bare announcement of religious relativism or pluralism. See E.P. Sanders 1983 and 1985. Pauline theology mirrors Jesus' views quite closely on this point. See Wenham 1995 p.303.

xxvii. The fascinating question remains why Paul - contrary to Jesus' attitude - insisted so much on converting the gentiles. Was it just his rivalry with his former fellow Pharisees, or did he mainly want to drive home his point to the other apostles (as M. Goodman seems to hold, calling it a demonstrative argument. See 1994 p.171-173)? Or should we hold that Paul was not just arguing his corner, but saw this option truly as the core of the message about the Kingdom?

xxviii. The close link of the quest for knowledge with interests, rather than with communication, has been amply investigated by J. Habermas in many works. It is remarkable that John Paul II took this dilemma of truth and interests as the underlying thought in an encyclical about ethics which he called *Veritatis splendor*, and which among others reflects his phenomenological views (in the line of Scheler) that the axiological dimension of man is the prime reality to be reckoned with.

xxix. *As Sanders points out, albeit without reference to the figure of Islam (see 1985 p. 137-141). He stresses that there are notable developments, and even contradictions, in Paul's thoughts on this topic of the Law, between the letters to Galatians and Romans. It is even uncertain that Paul truly understood the real reason of Jesus' rejection by the Jewish leaders, as is now hotly debated among exegetes. Sanders 1983 seems to be more sceptical on this point than Wenham 1995.*

xxx. This view rules neither positively nor negatively on monogenism, except to the extent that the latter constitutes a 'logical condition' for our mutual respect: all people are born from God's unique 'act' of creating humanity as a unity, stemming from male-female interrelatedness. It is in this sense that the Qur'an also proposes a monogenetic view in Q. 49:13. Phipps rightly stresses this anti-racist stand of Islam, which unfortunately does not preclude other forms of discrimination. (1996, p.151-152). Jesus clearly worked from the idea of one humanity, loved by the one Father, even though he did not envisage the mission to all gentes in the way Paul conceived it. (See Wenham 1995 p.168)

xxxi. The notion of structural sin has entered into the official Vatican documents, after having been popularized by liberation and political theologians like Boff, Metz and Nolan. But it is arguable that the concept of 'structure'

indicates more than the political system, and has more to do with the mental make up underlying human culture, as understood by French (post)structuralists. Without psychologizing too much, we should be aware of the exchange mechanism that influence our actions even ahead of the action. A teacher or parent may suffer in advance from subsequent evil deeds a youngster may do, when he or she realises to have failed the child's education. Hurt, pride, but sincere concern as well may bring this about. In fact, both evil and good deeds throw their shadows forwards as well as backwards.

xxxii. We know how Freud transformed this story by linking it to the sexual rivalry between the sons and the father, which resulted in the murder of the father and subsequently in the formulation of social-ethical rules. His seemingly odd theory has recently been given a wider context by R. Girard in his ambitious and controversial studies on the scapegoat mechanism (1978 and 1985). As we saw, the Banda of the Central African Republic link evil and religion with the appearance of language, as in their language, one term *ama* indicates both 'word' and 'conflict' and their proverbs say that there would not be any god if it were not for *ama*, i.e. human controversies. See W. Eggen 1976, p. 62/e.

xxxiii. We might call this a 'TODI-err' (the err of "The other did it"), which is the opposite of the Christ's 'To Thee', siding with the outlawed victims until death. This 'Todi-err' is the instrument of power, which divides and discriminates us, whereas what is divinely intended, is the absolute unity in which the intellect and scientific exploits are not put at the service of rivalry, but of common health in mind and body.

xxxiv. It also agrees with to the famous pericope of Jn 4, in which Jesus, after having announced to the Samaritan woman at the well the worship in the Spirit, as a new source of living water, tells his disciples that all sowing and growing had been done by other labourers, and that their task was restricted to harvesting. The role which the evangelist allows the Samaritan woman to play in this crucial chapter of Jn 4 should be among the themes of a second study devoted to our christian fight against Adam's err-religious finger-raising. Here it suffices to note how depressing it is to see Paul's argument against any religious formalism contravened and inverted by the allegation that he preached the formal and ritual adherence to Jesus as the sole redeemer of sins to be the touchstone of righteousness and acceptance by God.