

Karl Barth – Church Dogmatics IV/1

§ 60 THE PRIDE AND FALL OF MAN

The verdict of God pronounced in the resurrection of Jesus Christ crucified for us discloses who it was that was set aside in His death, the man who willed to be as God, himself lord, the judge of good and evil, his own helper, thus withstanding the lordship of the grace of God and making himself irreparably, radically and totally guilty before Him both individually and corporately.

1. THE MAN OF SIN IN THE LIGHT OF THE OBEDIENCE OF THE SON OF GOD

We now turn to questions of the perception of the human situation in the light of the event in which for our sake the Lord became a servant, the Son was obedient to the Father, the Word became flesh of our flesh, the Judge was Himself judged on the cross of Golgotha. In the verdict of God it is decided that this took place once and for all for us. It is also decided what it incontrovertibly means for the human situation. This verdict has been revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in the first instance to those to whom it is proclaimed and who can confess it in faith, but to these in anticipation of the final revelation in which (as it concerns all men) it will be revealed to all men.

The determination of the human situation which we have to consider at this point is the sin of man, or rather the man of sin, man as he wills and does sin, man as he is controlled and burdened by sin; and we have to consider this man in the particular form in which he is revealed under the aspect of the divine act of reconciliation which concerns us in this context. It is to this man that there relates the justification which we shall have to portray as we turn to the positive content of the divine verdict. From the standpoint which is here regulative for us it is the light of the resurrection of the crucified servant of God. But this light arises from a shadow, and it can be seen as light only in relation to this shadow. It is the solution of the riddle posed by the existence of man. It is the radically new determination of the human situation which as such causes an existing situation to vanish. It is the *iustificatio impii*. To understand it we have to know this shadow, this riddle, this existing situation, the *impius*, the man of sin.

In this section we are apparently going back a step behind the knowledge that we have already won of the salvation which has come to man in the self-sacrifice and death of the Son of God in our flesh and which is revealed in His resurrection. We are apparently concerned with the negative presupposition of this event, the disruption of the relationship between God and man which made this event necessary and which was overcome by this event. In our discussion so far we have always assumed this disruption. We have dealt with the way of the Son of God into the far country, with His self-humiliation to solidarity with sinful men, with His suffering and death in their place, with the judgment fulfilled on them in His person. But we have not

so far looked specifically at the contrary element which forms the occasion for this divine action. We have treated its presence and nature and significance as something that we already know. We must now return to it because its clarification is essential to all that follows.

But the question immediately poses itself: Why is it only now that we have come to speak of this matter? Why have we not followed the example of the dogmatics of all ages, Churches and movements and begun with a doctrine of sin, first stating the problem, then giving the decisive answer to it in the doctrine of the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ, then continuing along the same direct line and developing it in the doctrine of justification, of the Church and of faith? Why have we begun with Christology, thus making it necessary to go back to an understanding of its negative presupposition? Or is it the case that the going back is only in appearance? Had we not to speak first of the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ because the man of sin, his existence and situation and nature, is revealed and can be known only in the light of it? Are we not really going straight forward when we turn our attention to it now, only now, in this light, and directed to it from this point? This is the question to which we must give a radical answer in the first part of this section.

Let us suppose that the traditional and current view of the knowledge of sin is right. The knowledge of it precedes that of Jesus Christ, and in some way it has a basis which is autonomous in relation to it. The knowledge of Jesus Christ must look back to it. If this is the case, then it is too late for us to turn our attention to it at this point. At that earlier point or even now, our first task should be to state from where we think we have this knowledge if Jesus Christ is not the basis of it.

But in the knowledge of sin we have to do basically and in general with a specific variation of the knowledge of God, of God as He has mediated Himself to man, and therefore of the knowledge of revelation and faith. This we can presuppose as something which is acknowledged and maintained by all serious Christian theology. That man is evil, that he is at odds with God and his neighbour, and therefore with himself, is something which he cannot know of himself, by communing with himself, or by conversation with his fellow-men, any more than he can know in this way that he is justified and comforted by God. Anything that he accepts in this matter which is not from God, but from communing with himself and his fellows, from his own understanding and consciousness of himself, may well be the inner tension between a relative Yes and a relative No, between becoming and perishing, between strength and weakness, between the great and the small, between achievement and will: the dialectic in which human existence has a part in the antithesis or dualism of light and darkness which runs through the whole of creation. But this tension has nothing whatever to do with man's being in sin as such. It may be a sphere for his good nature and actions as well as his bad. There may be an analogy to evil in it. But it is not as such the evil which makes man the enemy of God and his neighbour and himself, and puts him in need of atonement, of conversion to God. In itself and as such it belongs rather to the nature of man as God created it good. An understanding and consciousness of himself which man can attain of himself may also embrace the fact that he does not merely suffer but creates this inward tension, that he continually produces this dialectic. He may understand and recognise that he is limited, deficient and imperfect. He may be aware of the problematic nature of his existence as man. But this does not mean even remotely that he is aware of his being as the man of sin, at odds with God and his neighbour and himself. The imperfection and the problematical nature of his existence is not as such his sin. Not by a long way. It is only his limit. Within the sphere of

self-understanding how can he ever come to accuse himself of this contradiction, to regard himself not as imperfect but as evil, to confess that he is finally and totally guilty in relation to God and his neighbour and himself? Certainly in the sphere of his self-understanding he can understand that he is limited. But does there not always remain the possibility of turning this limitation to his own advantage as a mitigating circumstance? He may accept that his being in tension is his own work. He may not be a complete stranger to something like remorse. But can he not still give to this remorse the form of self-pity, and because of the very sincerity of this pity think that he is excused, or even justified, and therefore at bottom good? Within its limit the nature created by God is indeed good and not bad. Within the sphere of the self-knowledge not enlightened and instructed by the Word of God there is no place for anything worthy of the name of a "knowledge of sin." There is not revealed that which, if man is not to remain a sinner and perish, can be removed and made good only by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Men preoccupied with themselves have no eyes to see this or categories to grasp it. They do not have these because they lack the will to see it and to grasp it. Access to the knowledge that he is a sinner is lacking to man because he is a sinner. We are presupposing agreement on this point. All serious theology has tried to win its knowledge of sin from the Word of God and to base it on that Word.

If there is agreement on this point, it is better not to consider the insight into the problematical nature of his existence which man can reach of himself apart from the Word of God even as a preparation or a kind of initial understanding in relation to the knowledge of sin. It is true, of course, that in and with the knowledge of actual sin we do win through to a very useful insight into the problematical nature of human existence. It is true that while this is not identical with man's disharmony with God and his neighbour and himself, with the real breach in his existence, it can be an analogy to it which may help to make his guilt and need all the more plain. But it is not true that his inner conflict as such, and the remorse and pity with which he experiences it, have for him even such an analogical significance that they can bring him in any way closer to a knowledge of his guilt and need, and therefore of the breach in which he does actually live. On the contrary, it is also unfortunately true that the real evil in which man enmeshes himself and is enmeshed is only too active in the way in which he experiences and understands the inner conflict of his existence. Even in the knowledge of sin which he has in the sphere of self-understanding without listening to the Word of God, he is the man of sin and therefore one who has no knowledge, who is completely closed to this negative determination. This is revealed in the fact that he does not see beyond the natural inward contradiction of his existence, in face of which he is capable of remorse and pity and melancholy, or even rueful irony, but not of genuine terror, in face of which he can always quieten and excuse himself, remaining obstinately blind and deaf to the contradiction which is his guilt and the breach which is his need. He sees and thinks and knows crookedly even in relation to his crookedness. And this being the case, how can he be even on the way to seeing and grasping that which he needs to see and grasp enlightened and instructed by the Word of God? Crooked even in the knowledge of his crookedness, he can only oppose the Word of God which enlightens and instructs him concerning his crookedness.

In this connexion we may recall what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 7:8-11 concerning the twofold possibility of λύπη (concern or sorrow). There is a λύπη κατὰ θεόν. This is a self-concern, a concern about the corruption revealed by God (as had happened to the Corinthians as a result of Paul's letter), which comes from God Himself and therefore corresponds to the will of God. It leads to an attitude which, although it has the character of λύπη, no one will ever regret accepting: μετάνοιαν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀμεταμέλητον ἐργάζεται (the repentance in which man is already on the way to salvation, in which he

cannot give way to self-pity even though it does cause him this “concern,” from which he cannot even wish to escape). Because Paul thinks he can assume that the letter which disturbed the Corinthians has put them on the way to this repentance—the signs or fruits of which he describes as σπουδή (carefulness), ἀπολογία (clearing of themselves, in the sense of deprecatio), ἀγανάκτησις (indignation), φόβος (fear), ἐπιπόθησις (longing) and ἐκδίκησις (zeal)—he himself does not repent but rejoices that they had been given a concern—κατὰ θεόν—by His apostolic word. But in v. 10 he contrasts this concern with quite another, the λύπη τοῦ κόσμου which works death. Was he afraid for a moment that he had plunged the Corinthians into this concern? If so, he would have repented it, for they would not have understood and accepted his word as apostolic, as the Word of God, and they, for their part, would have taken a way which they also would repent. They would have been given the kind of concern which is all that the world, all that autonomous and self-sufficient man, is either capable of or wills, disturbed, unsettled, alarmed, working it out in one of the movements of human dialectic, but not finally frightened or perplexed, not stirred up to a horror of his own existence and the desire for a different existence, ready to come to terms with himself at a level which is deep, but not too deep. This kind of concern would not have led them to repentance and its works, but from one obstinacy to another, from an optimistic to a pessimistic, and then perhaps back again to the reverse. Not σωτηρία but θάνατος would then have been the final end and goal of their way. It is quite clear that Paul could not regard this λύπη as a kind of preparation for the first. In it man is looking in quite a different, indeed the opposite direction. He must live in either the one or the other. But as he cannot go back from the first to the second, he cannot move forward from the second to the first. Obviously, therefore, he cannot regard his self-understanding in the second λύπη as an initial understanding of the first.

But quite apart from this special question we cannot say that we are altogether satisfied with the basic and general agreement that the knowledge of sin is possible and can be actual only as the knowledge of God and therefore as the knowledge of revelation and of faith. For in the locus de peccato which precedes the doctrine of reconciliation the agreement of older and more recent theology consists concretely in the view that by the knowledge of God, which makes possible and actual the knowledge of sin, we mean the knowledge of God in His basic relationship with man—as distinct from His presence, action and revelation in Jesus Christ: that is, the knowledge of God in His majesty and holiness as Creator and Ruler of the world, in the demand with which He confronts man or encounters him in history. But, concretely, this means the knowledge of God by the law which is revealed to man by nature and generally (through the mediation of conscience), or the knowledge of God which is specially revealed in history, especially in a particular part of the biblical message which is distinct from the Gospel. In this knowledge of God, which is before and outwith Jesus Christ, and in the law of it as understood in the broader or narrower sense, we are thus dealing with that Word of God which has the special function of teaching man that he is a sinner and showing him in what his sin consists. Man finds himself confronted by God in the sublimity of His pure Godhead. He sees himself unmasked and has to recognise and confess himself as disobedient to God, as the one who is at odds with Him and with his neighbour and himself, as the man of sin. The existence, revelation and claim of this God are the judgment in which the divine sentence is proclaimed to him, in which he finds himself reached and scorched by the fire of the divine wrath, by which he is plunged into the divine sorrow by which he is led to repentance—perhaps when he hears the same Word of God as the Word of Jesus Christ and therefore as the Gospel. Against this presentation of the matter serious objection must be taken.

In the first place, it presupposes a division of the knowledge and Word of God. In this context we can only indicate our objection to this presupposition. We have developed it at length and given our reasons for it in earlier chapters of the Church Dogmatics, especially in the doctrine

of God and creation. The notion of an abstract existence of God in His pure Godhead as Creator and Ruler of the world, the notion of an abstract authority of His claim as such, are elements which are alien to the biblical knowledge of God and cannot, therefore, be put to any Christian use. According to the biblical knowledge of God, God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is concretely one both in His inner being and in His presence, action and revelation in the world and for us. Similarly His eternal election and will, and His action as it is the basis and fulfilment of time, are one. And whether this is known to the men of different times and places or not, this one God and His one work and Word is Jesus Christ. He, the Son of the Father (in the unity of the Holy Spirit), is the face of God, the name of God, the form of God, outside which God is not God. He is the beginning and end of all the ways of God, even in His control and activity as Creator and Ruler of the world, and in His authority and claim in relation to man. In this basic relationship especially God is this God and no other. A division of God into a god in Christ and a god outside Christ is quite impossible. We cannot start from such a division even in our question concerning the basis of the knowledge of human sin.

In general terms it is true enough that the knowledge of God alone includes within itself the knowledge of sin, and that this knowledge arises only in the confrontation of man by the majesty and holiness of God.

Obviously we cannot contradict Luther when in a sermon (dated 1532 according to E.A. 6, 49) he declared: "Theology teaches us to compare man with God and say: God is eternal, righteous, true and in summa everything good. As against that, man is mortal, unrighteous, deceitful, full of vice, sin and blasphemy. God means everything that is good, man means death and the devil and hell-fire. God is from eternity and to eternity. Man is set in sins, and in the midst of life he is constantly in death. God is full of grace. Man is without grace and under the wrath of God. Such is man compared with God."

But to be true, this general statement needs to be filled out concretely. It does not involve the confrontation of man by the abstract law of an abstract god, because according to the biblical testimony such a god and his law are a product of the free speculation of the human reason and of arbitrary human imagining, and therefore an unreal quantity. If we compare man with this god we can only expect that the resultant knowledge of human sin will correspond to what man himself understands by it and not what Holy Scripture itself understands by it. If this god—the abstract god of an abstract law—cannot justify man (and even those who maintain this opinion do not believe that he can), then how can he really and truly and validly accuse and condemn him?

It can be shown that he cannot and does not do so. Let us suppose for a moment that this division of the concepts God and law is legitimate. Outside God in Jesus Christ we still have to do with the same God—distinct from this form—in the quite different form of the Creator and Ruler of the world. We still have to do with His law, revealed to us in our individual or collective conscience, or in a native law of nature, or in a concrete manifestation of His will and commandment (as in the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount). Such a confrontation may serve and be quite useful to stir up a sense of, and to measure intellectually, the infinitely qualitative difference between God and man. But can it also awaken the knowledge that man finds himself in contradiction against God (and therefore against his neighbour and himself)?—a contradiction which he brings about himself, for which he therefore knows himself to be responsible, so that he must acknowledge that he is guilty. This divine being and

his law obviously confront man with demands. But in what sense can and will their demands be binding on man—binding in such a way that he is unsettled by his failure to meet them, binding in such a way that he regards himself as responsible for not meeting them, and knows that because of them he is accused and sentenced and condemned? Will the self-knowledge necessarily induced by this confrontation lead him in fact any further than the point which he can and usually will reach by mere self-communing and without this confrontation—the knowledge of his imperfection? Can he not easily retreat to the statement that his failure to measure up to God and his deviation from His law is laid upon him by nature in view of the difference between himself and the being that commands—for what is the creature in relation to the Creator?—that it is therefore necessary and insuperable, that it cannot, therefore, be understood as in any true sense wilful disobedience? Are we not excused and indeed justified from the very outset in the position in which we find ourselves when confronted in this way? For in what position do we find ourselves but that of our natural limitation? Is there a single man who has seen himself to be evil, the man of sin, in this confrontation? And in the obvious ineffectiveness of this supposed confrontation, of this imaginary god and his claim, is it not shown that he is simply a supposed and imaginary god, an arbitrary invention, the positing of which is simply another act of self-understanding? Is not this god simply a reflection of our own existence, the essence of our own “existence in transcendence,” in relation to which we have merely sublimated and dramatised and mythologised our own self-communing? Is it not pure imagination that in respect of it we have received a word addressed to us from outside and by someone else? Is it not the case that we have really been soliloquising?

Concerning this god and his law and how these fictions arise and what is their significance for the life of man, we shall have more to say when we come to speak of sin itself. This god and his law are not by any means harmless fictions, for in them the real God is dishonoured and His real Law is emptied of content. The man of sin has every reason to divide the living God in His living Word, regarding Him as God, and His Word as the Law which is given to him, only in the form of this abstraction. But God is not mocked, and He will not allow this division to go unpunished. There can be no question, however, that there is no knowledge of sin when the god and his law to whose revelations man listens are in fact this idol and his imaginary claim.

Nor is it clear how it can be otherwise than that a doctrine of sin which precedes Christology and is independent of it should consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, move in the direction of this idol and his claim. To affirm evil as such it is forced to have a standard of good and to apply that standard. But independently of Christology what standard can there be other than a normative concept constructed either from philosophical or biblical materials or a combination of the two?—a concept of righteousness and holiness, or of a supreme good, or of pure spirit, or of supreme personality, concerning the content of which we can boldly accept and maintain that it is the nature or will or law of God, the authority which demands from man faith and obedience or humility or even love and sacrifice, and that the rejection of it, the infraction, transgression and negation of its demands, is human sin, to forgive and to remove which Jesus Christ came into the world and died for men. As was said in Ex. 324 when the molten calf was set up: “Behold thy gods, O Israel.”

It is not inevitable that the concept used in this process should be this idol and his claim. And from this process there can, in fact, arise a fairly—and in some respects supremely—relevant knowledge of sin. This happy situation arises when the concept is constructed, not out of philosophical, but wholly or mainly out of biblical materials, as was done with very great care in Reformation theology especially. If in setting up this standard and determining the nature

and will and law of God we keep directly or indirectly to the texts of Holy Scripture, if we allow them forcefully to interrupt us—as did Augustine—correcting the concept which we have originally formed from some very different source, then the worst dangers of this method will not be quite so acute. There cannot lack at least the severity of the judgment that man is a sinner before God, and guilty before Him. For the texts of the Bible are all in some way or other orientated and determined and characterised by the substance of the Bible, in the Old Testament by God's covenant of grace with His people, and in the New by the appearance and person and work of Jesus Christ Himself as the fulfilment of the covenant proclaimed there. Because of that they have a weight which, if we let them speak for themselves, will necessarily lead to the greatest severity in the judgment of man. Where they are accepted and used as the source of knowledge, and in proportion as they are the only source, this will be seen even where—as was unfortunately the case with all the Reformers—we do not allow ourselves to be guided in the establishment of this norm by the substance and centre of the Bible, but only by individual pronouncements and passages determined by that centre and substance.

That this was the case in Reformation theology is one (and not the only) result of the lack of attention which was then paid to Christology. In this respect the doctrine of the early creeds was subscribed as self-evident. It formed the presupposition without which the Reformation doctrine of justification and faith is unintelligible. Because of the rift in the question of the Lord's Supper there were, too, certain interesting differences of emphasis in Christology in Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. But no independent attention was paid to this central theme. Interest in Christ was mainly within the framework of the *beneficia Christi*. It was, of course, said that Holy Scripture is the Word of God to the extent that it presents Christ. But the programme of Reformation theology did not allow for any radical consideration of the meaning, importance and function of Christology in relation to all Christian knowledge. For that reason this theology was in many spheres—with illuminating exceptions—able to think and argue from Christology only very indirectly and implicitly, or not at all. This was the case in the doctrine of sin, and the question of the standard by which we know good from evil.

The inevitable result of this omission was that no very certain or illuminating and relevant answer could be given to the question of the judgment, and the content of the judgment, which has to be pronounced on man in accordance with this standard. Of course, under the guidance of the Scripture principle what was said concerning this judgment was quite true in spite of the omission, thanks to the force of the texts as seen directly or indirectly in relation to the centre of the Bible. Indeed many true and important things were brought to light. It was certainly not by that idol and his claim that man was measured and his state as the man of sin was seen and understood. Although from a distance and with a certain indistinctness, it was by the true and living God and His Law.

To refer to Calvin, we can see this clearly from *Instit*, 1, 1, 2-3, where he emphasises that man can have a true self-knowledge (*pura sui notitia*) only when he looks at God and from that comes down to consider himself. Why then and only then? Because of ourselves and without a clear proof to the contrary we always regard ourselves as upright, wise and holy. But we can never find this clear proof to the contrary so long as we look at ourselves and not at the Lord. By nature we are inclined to hypocrisy. We are satisfied with an empty show of righteousness, as though that were true righteousness. We regard as pure that which in a mass of impurity is a little less impure. We regard as

light a mere glimmer in the darkness. Because our perceptivity is sufficient for things around and beneath us we think that it cannot be surpassed, not pausing to consider what becomes of it when we lift up our eyes to the sun. Hence our satisfaction with our own goodness within the limit of our humanity. But this falls to pieces when we lift our eyes to God and His perfection by which we are really measured. Where then is our righteousness, wisdom, virtue and purity? Our wickedness and folly and impotence are mercilessly exposed. Hence the terror ascribed by Scripture even to holy men in the presence of God. Obviously it is only in this encounter, but then truly and radically, that they experience this terror at their own state, the *cognitio humilitatis*, the *consternatio*, which involves a *horror mortis*. “We shall surely die, because we have seen God” (Jud. 1322). This was the experience of Job, and Abraham, and Elijah and Isaiah. *Sola est lux Domini, quae potest oculos nostros aperire, ut perspicere queant latentem in carne nostra foeditatem*, while in the darkness of our sin in blind self-love we are not able to estimate the nature and extent of the filth (*sordes*) heaped up in us (Comm. on Rom. 621, C.R. 49, 117).

It is noteworthy that Calvin plainly regarded the Old Testament as supremely instructive in this respect. It never seems to have struck him that this *lux Domini* has truly and decisively shone upon us and exposed us in man's confrontation by God in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, not even when he came to discuss this part of the New Testament. There is simply a general antithesis: God on the one hand and man on the other. It is simply maintained that this antithesis breaks through man's self-deception and gives a genuine self-knowledge. (It seems doubtful to me whether we can agree with T. F. Torrance in his fine book, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 1949, p. 83 f.—and we would be only too ready to do so if it were a fact—that with Calvin the doctrine of the corruption of man is a corollary of the doctrine of grace.) In the introduction to the *Institutio*—at the beginning of the book *De cognitione Dei creatoris*—he seems to have regarded it as self-evident that for the moment we cannot and ought not to speak of man in his confrontation with Jesus Christ. For this reason his account of the encounter with God and its effect is not altogether dissimilar to that given by R. Otto (in his book *Das Heilige*) of what he calls the experience of man—even non-Christian man—in relation to the *fascinum* of the Wholly Other. The consequence is that for all the impressiveness of the statement the description of the effect on man cannot (1) offer any real explanation of what occurs or (2) describe it in other than strong but very general terms (that man is shown in all his unrighteousness, folly, impurity, depravity, etc.). When Calvin wrote he had constantly before him the examples of Job, Abraham, Elijah and Isaiah. Thus we are always in the sphere of the biblical concept of God, even though we are not at the centre. The presentation does not leave anything to be desired in clarity. It is God alone who convinces man of his corruption, and when God does it He does it radically, and there is no possibility of any softening of the verdict that man is corrupt. We find the same methodical weakness but unmistakable practical strength of presentation in Luther, Zwingli, the younger Melancthon, and to a large extent the older Protestant orthodoxy. When in the application of the method the thinking and teaching are *biblicist* if not *biblical*, by a happy inconsistency they could and can produce serious results.

But this caveat is not in itself a justification of the method. If we are determined not to keep to the biblical centre and substance and therefore to Jesus Christ in this matter of the fall of man, if, therefore, we are forced to construct our own normative concept as a standard by which to measure man, then it is hard to see what will prevent us from taking supplementary (and sometimes basic) material from some very different source—from philosophy, combining the Scripture principle with one form or other of that of reason.

We must not forget that the transition from biblical to *biblicist* thought does involve the transition to a rationalism—supranaturalistic though it is in content. Therefore the relationship of theology to the truths of revelation which it has taken from the Bible is no longer the relationship to an authority which is superior to man. It has fundamentally the same assurance and control with regard to them as man as a rational creature has in regard to himself, his

experience, his thinking and therefore his world, believing that he is the master of himself as subject and therefore of his objects, or of his own relation to them.

As is well known, the supreme achievement of the older Protestant orthodoxy was the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture as developed in the later 17th century and given confessional status in the Helvetic Formula of Concord in 1675. There can be no doubt, however, that this was not merely worked out as a bulwark against a growing rationalism, but that it was itself, not an expression of an over-developed faith of revelation, but a product of typical rationalistic thinking—the attempt to replace faith and indirect knowledge by direct knowledge, to assure oneself of revelation in such a way that it was divorced from the living Word of the living God as attested in Scripture, pin-pointing it, making it readily apprehensible as though it were an object of secular experience, and therefore divesting it in fact of its character as revelation.

The irremediable danger of consulting Holy Scripture apart from the centre, and in such a way that the question of Jesus Christ ceases to be the controlling and comprehensive question and simply becomes one amongst others, consists primarily in the fact that (even presupposing a strict and exclusive Scripture principle) Scripture is thought of and used as though the message of revelation and the Word of God could be extracted from it in the same way as the message of other truth or reality can be extracted from other sources of knowledge, at any rate where it is not presumably speaking of Jesus Christ. But if Scripture is read in this way, the Scripture principle will not stand very long. Secretly the book of revelation is being treated and read like other books; and the question cannot long be denied whether the message we gather from it cannot be gathered from other books either by way of addition or even basically; whether the truths of revelation in the Bible are not of a series with all kinds of other truths; whether in them we do not simply have concretions of what is revealed concerning God and His will to all other men as such and by nature, of themselves, by the dictate of their reason? If Jesus Christ is seen to be the whole of Scripture, the one truth of revelation, this question cannot even be put, let alone given a positive answer. There is no other book which witnesses to Jesus Christ apart from Holy Scripture. This decides the fact that only in Holy Scripture do we have to do with the one and the whole Word and revelation of God. But if we do not see this, it is inevitable that the question of other sources of revelation should be put, and that sooner or later it should be given a positive answer.

The rise of this danger can be illustrated by examples from 17th century Reformed theology.

It is clear that when it first threatened plainly it was seen or felt, and could be avoided. , in his *Aphorismi Doctrinae christianae* of 1589, gives us a short summary of *Institutio*, in which on the very first pages he gives excerpts from Calvin and an interpretation which makes Calvin say something which in *Instit.* 1, 1-5 he did not really say at all. According to Piscator, there is a twofold knowledge of God: *una naturalis, altera acquisita*. The natural knowledge of God is impressed on the natural instincts of all rational adults (*sana mente praeditis*) as is plain from the religions, or the religious awe of the heathen. The *cognitio Dei acquisita* is based on instruction, either by human philosophy or by Holy Scripture. The natural knowledge, and that which is attained by the instruction of human philosophy, is what Calvin called the *semen religionis*. But, of course—and here we have a powerful safeguard—this is corrupted by human folly and wickedness, and in practice can lead only to false religions. Even the knowledge of God from His own Word—the general knowledge which is gained

affectu pietatis—can serve only to make man inexcusable before God. There can be a true and saving knowledge of God from His Word only where He is known with a heart's trust not only as Creator but as Redeemer. Piscator had neither the capacity nor the desire to develop systematically his doctrine of a twofold knowledge any more than Calvin. Even in his doctrine of the Law and sin we seek in vain for any outworking of this doctrine. The Law is given by God through the ministry of angels and Moses. Sin is the transgression of the positive commandment which was given to our first parents. That is all. But with the further development of Reformed theology both Law and sin came gradually but irresistibly to be spoken of in quite different terms.

Already W. Bucanus (*Instit. theol.*, 1605, XIX, 3) was defining the law as the *doctrina hominum mentibus a Deo indita et postea a Mose repetita*. According to the well-known misunderstanding of Rom. 2:14f., the Law was thought of as the law of nature written on the heart of man, which Moses merely repeated, expressly proclaiming and interpreting it (11). We seem to be listening again to Luther who, in his work *Wider die himmlischen Propheten*, 1525 (W.A. 18, 81, 18) had written: “Why do we keep and teach the ten commandments? Because nowhere are the natural laws so finely and orderly stated as in Moses.” But Bucanus seems to have meant seriously his reference to the obscuring of this natural law which made necessary its fresh promulgation. And it is remarkable that in his presentation of the fall of Adam he only hints at this thought: the fall consisted in the *voluntaria transgressio* of the first positive divine commandment and the *ordo divinus* (XV, 13), by which is meant this primitive form.

Polanus, too (*Synt. Theol. chr.*, 1609), as was now the general custom in Protestantism (VI, 9), allowed quite definitely and eloquently for a twofold *patefactio*: *tum naturalis, tum supernaturalis*. In the first of these all men have a share *qua homines*. Apart from the *liber naturae*, i.e., the visible external works of God in creation, it includes the *liber conscientiae* or the *lex naturae*, i.e., the *naturalis notitia* in *prima creatione cordibus hominum impressa, tradens discrimen honestorum et turpium*. Polanus accepts this *lex naturalis*, which being identical with the *vera philosophia* cannot contradict the Word of God. But against it, and he obviously means this seriously, he sets the statement that the unregenerate man (by reason of his native blindness and corruption) can deduce from this natural revelation only false ideas of God. What is left is a warm defence of the legitimacy of a formal use of the *recta ratio*. But materially theology must keep strictly to Scripture. In the chapter on the Law (VI, 10) Polanus does not actually mention the *lex naturae* again, let alone allow the concept to be palpably determined by it. The same is true of his doctrine of sin (VI, 3). Here, indeed—one of the happy inconsistencies—we find the definition that sin is the evil which arises in the will of man and which deserves and will necessarily bring death apart from forgiveness for the sake of Christ the Mediator.

But with Joh. Wolleb (*Chr. Theol. comp.*, 1626, I, 9, 1) the case is different. The definition of 1 Jn. 3:4 is now made a consistent formula: sin is *ἀνομία*. What Bucanus had only hinted is now stated expressly. By the law which our first parents transgressed we have to understand *tum praecepta et interdicta homini primitus proposita, tum lex naturae cordi eius insculpta*. Even more plainly (I, 9, 2, can. 6) sin is transgression of the whole *lex naturalis*, which does not differ in content, but only in the form of revelation, from that impartation of the will and commandment of God (in the Decalogue, etc.) which was revealed by Moses and later purged by Christ from its Pharisaic corruptions (I, 13, can. 1 and 7).

Meanwhile a further step had obviously been taken in Reformed Holland. The Leidener Synopsis appeared for the first time in 1624. In the opening section (Disp. 1, 9) we read that the theology presented is to be based on the “supernatural” revelation mediated by God through the Holy Spirit. But in the doctrine of the Law (Disp. 18, 13 f.) we learn that there is a *lex naturalis* identical with the *lumen et dictamen rectae rationis in intellectu, hominem κοινῶς ἐννοίας seu communibus notionibus ad iusti et iniusti, honesti ac turpis discretionem informans, ut quid faciendum sit vel fugiendum, intelligat*. These notions communes have indeed been obscured and almost extinguished, at any rate as practical principles of the human spirit, but as scintillae of the fall of man they still remain in such strength—as outwardly attested by the laws of the heathen and inwardly by conscience—that

they are sufficient to accuse and condemn sin. According to this presentation the moral law transgressed by our first parents (Disp. 14, 7) is simply the *ὑποτύπωσις* of this natural law.

From the second half of the 17th century we will consult the *Synopsis Theologiae* (first published in 1671) of that great systematiser of Federal theology, F. Burmann of Utrecht. The introduction of the term covenant which underlies the whole is promising. But almost from the very first in this school the covenant between God and man in its original form is, unfortunately, not a covenant of grace, but of nature, law and works. The way was thus opened for an even more zealous preoccupation with the conviction of a moral law of nature normative in this original covenant. According to Burmann (IV, 3, 2), the *lex moralis* is in *sese eadem*, and therefore identical with the *lex naturalis* written on the heart of man, of which there remain even in sinful man certain *reliquiae et rudera*, certain *principia et ideae* in respect of right and wrong, and the universal validity of which is proclaimed in the law-codes of all nations— with certain vacillations in understanding, and the less clearly the more the conclusions deduced have departed from it. It is claimed of the *lex naturalis* that in its original form it proceeds from the nature of God Himself. As such, therefore, it is necessary and inescapable, and it is called the *lex aeterna* (3). Its form in connexion with the created order is, within limits, unalterable and indispensable, in contrast to its form in the positive divine commandment which is clearly alterable (4). But as the *lex aeterna* it is the *expressissima sanctitatis divinae imago, plenissima officiorum omnium norma: cum erga Deum, tum erga homines, denique hominis erga seipsum* (7), the sacred guarantee (*sanctimonia*) of all human laws (11). It is, therefore, very much the same as what we have called the normative concept of good by which we can measure evil. That this is Burmann's meaning is no mere conjecture; he says it himself quite expressly in his depiction of the covenant of nature broken by Adam (II, 2, 18): *lex ipsi lata proprie lex fuerit naturae et conscientiae dictatus ac lux*. What was really demanded of Adam was obedience to this law, the concrete commandment of God being only a *praeceptum symbolicum* to give him the test which he failed.

Returning to Reformed Switzerland, we find the same view expressed, if anything even more clearly, in *Medulla Theol. Christ.*, 1696. Heidegger, too, was a Federal theologian. And he, too, based the original covenant between God and man on a law of nature given by God and to be kept by man. But he says directly what his predecessors, and even Burmann, had never stated, although it was in keeping with their thought: that this law is called the *lex naturae* because in it nature as the principle of all human activity not only had, but has, its norm and canon (*habuit et habet*). In the person of Adam, God implanted the *notitia honesti et turpis* in the rational nature common to all men (IX, 11). The statements which describe Adam historically are all formulated in the present. The reason given to all men knows the existence of God, the strict demand for obedience, the necessity for ordered human society. Heidegger can make the noteworthy statement that the way in which the divine law is imparted has nothing whatever to do with its nature (content, authority and function): *neque enim modus legem promulgandi ad essentiam eius pertinet* (IX, 12). It is of no importance whether the promulgation of the divine law takes place in such a way that God speaks with man in the revelation of His will as the Lord of the covenant or whether the law revealed by God resides in the heart of man and he speaks with himself. Moreover, although there is still a caveat in view of the obscuring of this knowledge by sin, its importance is only theoretical. In practice there is no hesitation in giving the first and decisive word to the law inwardly revealed and therefore to the man who interprets it. It is in that which agrees with the *recta ratio*, with the principles of every rational being, with the social character of all human life as obviously striven after by all men and affirmed by all civilised peoples, that we have to see the dictate of this natural law, which cannot have any other source, which has therefore supreme authority (13). The Decalogue is an instrument to facilitate a recognition of this law, and it emphasises that the obedience we must give it should be primarily inward (14-15). The binding force and authority of the positive and concrete commandments of God derives from the commandment of the *lex naturae*, which cannot be altered even by God Himself, and which summons us to obedience towards Him as our legitimate Master (16-17). In this connexion Heidegger can make the further pregnant statement that God allows us to judge even Himself by the standard of the natural law, and he thinks that there is a biblical foundation for this statement, e.g., in Is. 53: “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard,” or Gen. 1825 (cf. Rom. 36): “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” In the original covenant of law and works one of

the positive commandments of God (given for the purpose only of testing man, according to Heidegger) was the prohibiting of the first man from eating of the tree of knowledge (18). If therefore—as is laid down generally in the doctrine of sin—the obligation to obey God does not rest only on this or that concrete expression of the will of God (a *lex Dei libera et arbitraria*), but on the law of nature—for otherwise Heidegger fears that man's obedience might acquire the character of an act which is correspondingly free—then sin is not evil merely as a failure to keep this or that *lex libera* of God but primarily and decisively as a failure to keep the natural law written on the heart (X, 2-3).

It must be noted that the voice which we have heard is not that of 18th century rationalism but 17th century orthodoxy. This theology had not been taught by the Reformers themselves to learn from Jesus Christ as the substance and centre of Scripture what is the will and Law of God and therefore what the sin of man is. And the theology itself obviously had no power of itself to rectify the omission. For this reason it could and indeed had to think with a growing intensity and speak with an increasing clarity along the lines discussed. At this critical point in its exposition of revelation—hesitantly at first, but then more confidently—it could and had to go beyond the Scripture principle which it proclaimed so loudly to another principle, that of reason. The transition to the Enlightenment and all that that involved was not the terrible innovation that it has often been called. In many respects, and in this respect also, orthodoxy itself was engaged in a wholehearted transition to the Enlightenment—a further proof that the slogan “Back to Orthodoxy,” and even the slogan “Back to the Reformers,” cannot promise us the help that we need to-day. “Back to...” is never a good slogan.

Why and to what extent is it dangerous to try to learn what the Law is and what sin is from another source—and perhaps radically and decisively from another source—than from Scripture, from the concrete expression of the will of God and the concrete proclamation of the judgment of God as attested in Scripture? There is no doubt that in the measure that we think we know what the Law and sin are “by nature” and therefore (because the Law of God is written on the heart) of ourselves, to that extent our knowledge will not in fact be the knowledge of faith. It will not be the knowledge which is mediated by the Word and Spirit of God, but the knowledge which we suppose to be immediate, which we have won from our self-communing. But what if the knowledge of faith from Holy Scripture and knowledge in the form of immediate self-knowledge do not compete with one another? What if the true and basic form of all man's knowledge of the Law and sin is immediate self-knowledge? What if the concrete expression of the will of God degenerates into a *praeceptum symbolicum*⁷⁵¹ to make clear that which man can learn from himself by this immediate self-knowledge? What if the concrete proclamation of the divine judgment is only an underlining of the verdict that man can and must pronounce upon himself? What if in this matter man is at bottom only engaged in a soliloquy which he has dramatised and mythologised with the help of biblical reminiscences—a discussion in which he not only presents both sides of the case but is also the chairman who can terminate it with a casting vote? Well, we can only repeat our question whether in this case there will be, or can be, any knowledge of the real demand of God and the real sin of man. We have seen—and Reformation theology proves this—that this is possible so long as an equilibrium is maintained between the two factors; so long as the supposed law of nature in the heart of man does not become the over-riding norm, the decisive canon of human self-knowledge; so long as the concrete expression of the divine will and proclamation of the divine judgment as attested in Holy Scripture can in its own power compete with and control and correct the voice of that supposed natural law. Even then the situation is dangerous. And if the reversal takes place, then all the biblicist dramatising and mythologising of that self-communing cannot prevent man from sooner or later forming notions of God and His Law on the one hand, and His own guilt and need on the other, which

deviate considerably from the witness of Scripture and the truth, which are very acceptable to himself but most inappropriate because they are harmless and conciliatory and compromising.

They are notions which will quickly invade and colour his conception of justification and then his understanding of the atonement. He may not at first be moved away from the statements of Scripture and dogma—although that will not be for long. But soon, in all probability he will no longer understand that there can be for him and for the race no atonement, no hope or peace, apart from the forgiveness and righteousness purchased for them by Jesus Christ in His death on the cross. He will then be easily satisfied with the hope and peace which we can have and know without the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the verdict of the Holy Spirit, except perhaps in a symbolical and illustrative form. He will then very quickly find himself in the sphere of a general philosophy of religion or life or existence. Once we begin to toy with the *lex naturae* as the inner *lex aeterna* we are well on the way to this. And once the reversal has taken place—as it did in Protestant theology at the turn of the 17th century—there can be no stopping on this way. It is not our present task, however, to follow the matter to its final end, in which God Himself is ultimately reduced to a mere symbol or cipher.

What concerns us now is the form of the danger as it arises at the beginning of the way. It consists in this, that sin takes on the appearance of something which is quite comfortable. The biblical statements concerning it are still repeated with a certain uneasiness, but at bottom they cannot be made with conviction. The contours in which they describe it are too sharp. The contrast between God and man as sketched in the light of it is too deep. The assertion of the irremediable nature of human guilt and need is carried too far. Syntheses are sought and found. The relationship between grace and sin must not be exclusive. It must be one of continuity and compensation. The conflict in which man finds himself must be passed over and man understood in his unavoidable limitation and relativity. God and the world which is so very different from Him, God and man in his distance from and antithesis to Him, must be seen, not in a history, in the fulfilment of a decision, but as substances which are formally of the same character. The grace of God and the sin of man must be approached as states on the one level, in a relationship which—if it has been disturbed—cannot be really jeopardised or broken, and therefore at bottom does not have to be renewed. Sin must be seen as a possible element in this relationship, not altogether unprofitable, indeed in its way indispensable. It is the middle act in a drama, preceded by others and followed by others, and in the strict sense necessary by reason of that which precedes and follows. Taking everything into account, the moment man acknowledges that he is a sinner he is already comforted (because he has never really been discomfited); he is already definitively and totally at peace, because he has never been anything other than at peace with God and his neighbour and himself. At bottom, man is quite able to cope with himself even as the man of sin. He always was. And the supposed *lex naturae* in his own heart certainly will not prevent him but invite and demand that he should see it in this way. In so far as this law is in our own hearts it gives us the competence, in so far as it is eternal it gives us the authority, and in so far as we ourselves are the men of sin we have the need and the desire and the self-confidence, to arrange and deal with ourselves as the men we are in this very comfortable way.

There is nothing of all this in the Bible. And we will soon tire of using it symbolically and by way of illustration because quotations from other good books are better adapted for the purpose. The Bible itself insists on saying something quite different concerning Law and sin from what man says about or to himself—whether or not he uses the texts of the Bible, whether or not—directly or indirectly, mildly or more severely—he criticises that which it says.