

LAST SERMON SERIES
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As far back as I can remember, the problem that bothered me most about myself was Original Sin. I can remember wondering why Adam and Eve's sin was my sin. It just did not seem right to me at eight or nine year old. None of the answers my catechism gave to us made any great sense to me. That question was to haunt me in some way or another for most of my life. Until I began to realize that I was asking the wrong question. That insight did not come to me until I began to reflect deeply on evolution.

In that time frame my thoughts and reflections went all over the map. I started my quest by beginning to read anything I could find on creation as it was revealed in Genesis. That was not a very fruitful exercise, but it consumed much of my early research. My first questions were if Adam and Eve are considered saints by the church, could their sin have been so grave? Then there was the story of Abel who was a just person. Next there was Enoch who walked with God. If they were able to be holy persons, why do we have the so called first good news in Genesis 3:15? There God tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel." The church has always taught that this was the promise of a savior.

I began to wonder if there is any earthly answer to the question of Original Sin. Then one day I was talking to a friend of mine who was an obstetrician and in the course of the conversation he said that he was amazed every time he delivered a healthy baby because of the million of changes that a single cell had to make to become a developed baby ready for birth. That gave me something to think about. I knew about the theory of evolution and how we have changed over history of time. It was the first time that I began to see that evolution was not just something that happened over a long period of time but that it was happening in my own life.

That gave me a new perspective to consider. I began to read about evolution and how it had changed us from a simple being to the complex being that we have become. I admit that I was bored by biology when I took it in college and wished that I had listened more carefully when I was studying Abbot Mendel's work. But that did not help me further my understanding of the issue as it stood at that time. A good deal of time and fruitless study and reflection was to pass until I picked up a small book entitled *Quantum Theory: a very short introduction* by the Reverend John Polkinghorne a physicist and Anglican Priest. That book gave me the opening that I needed to begin to come to a better understanding of what the question was that I was trying to answer.

It took a physicist and a theologian to bring a proper balance into the theory of evolution. Basically he gave me the understanding that the act of creation was an act of God's chaotic love. Before I go any further let me explain what I mean by chaotic love. Theology teaches that God's act of creation was an act of love. In that explosion of love, we call the big bang; God set in action the matter of creation with all its properties to

become what his final end of creation would be. Now I do not pretend to have even the slightest inkling what God's final end of creation is, except that it would have to be for his greatest honor and glory. What that end is particularly who can know except God and as far as I know he has not revealed that.

In speaking about chaos, there is the general chaos of the big bang and then the intermediate smaller resolution of chaos within chaos. Order comes as chaos resolves and evolves into more developed matter. As the laws of physics drives the resolution of chaos we come to a more developed universe. At one point in the development of the universe on the earth there developed humans. They developed from more primitive beings into human beings. At that point in the history of creation we became the interested parties in the development of the earth. As far as we know we became the first being in creation to possess a soul that is the principle of being and spirituality which fully enlivens us so that we are persons with a spiritual quality.

Humans arose with an intellect and will endowed with freedom. Freedom became the basis of our real distinction from other living beings. From this point on our development became intertwined with our freedom. The ability to make choices changed the way we could develop. When in the plan of God we began to possess a spiritual soul and I would maintain that this did not happen until we had developed sufficiently to be able to use it and thus had the possession of an intellect capable of handling free will. Archaeology has been able to show us that the development of the hominid which eventually became the humanoid developed ways of acting and relating to one another that would be part of the reservoir of knowledge developed that continued to remain in the habitual life of the hominid and retained by the humanoid.

Recently, in Israel the remains of a community was discovered in which the hominids had homes with different rooms used for particular purposes. There were bedrooms, kitchens, discrete spaces for particular purposes and this community dated back to 400 millions years ago. This was long before the appearance of humanoids. The development of the ancestors of humans was progressing more quickly than we had previously thought. The human who developed from this strain of ancestor was far more advanced than we had previously thought. When God chose to give humans a supernatural soul, our ancestors were far more ready than I had thought to live on the level that God wanted them to live.

God in giving humans supernatural life created him that he might know God as He really is as we describe it that he sees God face to face. This now is at the heart of the problem that perplexed me. The early teachings of the church about the creation of humans were based on creationism. With our present knowledge of the development of humans the answer to my question seemed to come into a clearer focus.

The experience of the earlier ancestors became a storehouse of knowledge that was passed on to the first man and woman upon which they were able to build their knowledge and conscience. Without an informed conscience they would not be able to understand the concept of good and evil, love and hate, desirable and undesirable, etc.

Without this abstract understanding of these thoughts and the ability to integrate them into their intellectual life and the ability to choose and understand the consequences of their choice there could be no culpability for their actions. The question of what God revealed to them about this new level of life of their spirit is somewhat murky. The scriptures tell us he gave them a revelation on what they should not do and the consequences of what would happen if they chose to break his command. What would have happened if they had obeyed is moot. So we really do not have to go there.

Scripture tells us that the promise of eternal life was lost but then God promises that he will send a redeemer. That they were not completely devoid of grace from that time on is rather evident in our accepting as saints, Adam and Eve and many of the holy men and women of Israel. Now I arrive at the root of my problem. How do I understand Original Sin? That Adam and Eve lost their original holiness and justice is indisputable. However, that only pertains to the supernatural life of Adam and Eve. They also had natural gifts and life that remained after the fall.

Their loss of supernatural grace, their original holiness and justice, brought to them from God a promise that they would at some time be redeemed. Since original sin is not a personal sin what kind of grace were the people of the time before Christ given so that they might live a life of holiness and justice in order to be able to receive the redemption of Christ when he would come. That they received grace is indisputable since we believe that at the death of Christ many of the people who had already died when Christ died accompanied him to heaven after the resurrection.

What loss did original sin cause to Adam and Eve and their descendants who lived before Christ? Since they did not lose their natural state with its gifts and powers, how can we describe these things? First, they were then subject to death. Then as finite beings they were subject to the imperfections of finite beings. The growth of intelligence and experience as well as other physical qualities also diminished the limitations of our physical and intellectual qualities. Where Adam and Eve were physically and intellectually is not where we are.

I see Original Sin and effects in the light of what Christ called the *πλερομα* that event when the body of Christ has reached its completeness and perfection at the second coming of Christ.

I maintain that the principal effects of Original Sin were to put us back in that state where our person is again subject to our natural state. With that in view, what is the practical application of this to our personal spiritual life. I feel that we have to begin to look at our finiteness as the principal cause of sin in our life. Our development, physically and intellectually are part and parcel of the development of our spiritual life. The Latin's had a saying, a healthy mind in a healthy body, which pretty well puts that in a capsule. I believe spiritual writers recognized this with their teachings on the virtues and vices. I feel that we have neglected this for a while.

I think that psychology has a lot to speak to us in developing the human mind and psyche to develop spirituality for us. Those psychological tendencies, which direct our spirit to choose wrong rather than right need to be addressed by every person. I am not contending that psychology can do this alone, but a strong spiritual development of the virtues has to accompany this.

Virtue is the development of good habits to direct our actions. Without a strong grounding of our faith in an active spiritual life all of what I have said is meaningless. Our development of virtue is a life long process. As we get to know ourselves better we begin to discover what our strengths and weaknesses are. Then we must determine what our priorities are and make a plan of life to work to strengthen our weaknesses and further develop our strengths. All of us are born with natural gifts and weaknesses. Our life's work is to make these gifts with the help of grace aids to a greater spiritual life. On the other hand we need to turn our weaknesses into strengths by minimizing their harmful effects on our life.

I can give an example from my own experience that can elucidate this. While I was in my formative years and well until my adulthood I was kept in the dark about "The Family Secret." I was never told that my grandfather had been an alcoholic. I had taken enough psychology that I knew that I had alcoholic tendencies. Not the desire to drink, but the hiding that is so a part of that kind of life. To this day it is difficult to put in writing my own thoughts. That revelation gave me a tool to get to know myself. It gave me an opportunity to see what my DNA really consisted of and to have a realistic perception of my strengths and weakness. As a student in the Seminary studying the theology of spirituality I would consider various kinds of personality and try to categorize myself.

I did not have all the pieces of the puzzle to put together the whole picture of who I was and so understand myself as I truly was. The person I had developed into did not know the full story to sort out the real me because I was working with an incomplete picture to begin with. That really got my attention because I realized that my make up did not start with me but went back into my family history. Original Sin may not be hereditary but the gifts and sins of our ancestors certainly become an addition to our personality.

I quickly began to see that to understand my strengths and weaknesses I would have to get to know my family. I had always had an interest in genealogy and that awakening made me pursue learning about my family almost to the point of an addictive behavior. I did say that my grandfather had been addicted to alcoholics. With the help of some trusted friends and directors I began to learn about myself and work to be able to deal with my weaknesses and learn better to use my strengths.

I began with talking about God creating with his love and in the beginning God's love was chaotic. God's love in us begins with the chaos of lack of knowledge and understanding and our life reaches for knowledge and understanding to know ourselves so that we can love ourselves and then love God. We had a nanny when we were small kids and whenever we would begin to be unruly, she would tell us "Be yourself". We did

not understand what she was saying to us, but once I read about Socrates maxim “Know yourself” a light bulb went off.

She had encapsulated in two words what I am expressing this evening. We can try to run away from ourselves but just like our shadows, we never escape from ourselves. This last sermon is not finished, but it is up to date as it tells the story of a small boy who asked himself a question that is still not fully answered.