**The Sin of Adam and Eve**

Original Sin was defined by St. Augustine and later formalized by the Council of Trent in the 16th century. CCC 385-421 discusses the Fall, which takes place in Genesis 3.

# **History or Allegory?**

**Allegory**=a symbolic representation which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning; a story that represents abstract principles by characters or figures. *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Russian Revolution.

Among all the Scriptural texts about creation, the first three chapters of Genesis occupy a unique place. From a literary standpoint these texts may have had diverse sources. The inspired authors have placed them at the beginning of Scripture to express in their solemn language the truths of creation - its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the "beginning": creation, fall, and promise of salvation. – CCC 289

Adam and Eve may have lived in a literal garden, been forbidden from eating from a literal tree, and been deceived into doing so by a literal talking snake, but it is not necessary to believe so. The only thing Catholics are bound to believe is that we are all the descendants of a single couple who chose to rebel against God.

# **Differing Teachings**

## **Calvinist Protestant**

**Calvinism** teaches **total depravity**: concupiscence is insurmountable even with God’s grace.

* We share in the guilt of Adam and Eve’s transgression.
* We are incapable of doing good.
* **Imputation**: Grace covers our sin rather than transforming us and enabling us to do good.
* Pelagianism=the opposite error: original sin is just Adam and Eve’s bad example. We can earn our own salvation without God’s help.

## **Catholic**

The heart of Man is not compound of lies,  
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,  
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,  
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.  
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,  
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned…  
– J.R.R. Tolkien, “Mythopoeia”

Human nature is wounded with 4 wounds, expressed by the Venerable Bede and explained by St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa. Each wound deprives the soul of its proper relation to something, and 1 of the 4 Cardinal Virtues is the remedy.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Wound | Deprivation | Virtue |
| Ignorance | Truth | Prudence |
| Malice | Good | Justice |
| Weakness | Arduous | Fortitude |
| Concupiscence=a desire for the lower appetite contrary to reason; a desire for a lesser good, for a good to excess, etc.\*  “I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:21-25) | Delectable, moderated by reason | Temperance |

\*Concupiscence is not in itself sinful.

* Just because I want another slice of cake doesn’t necessarily make me guilty of gluttony.
* This is merely a disordered inclination; I sin if I act on it.
* In the Confiteor, we say, “…I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do.”
* Whoever looks at a woman lustfully commits adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28).
* Not every single impure thought that arises in a man’s mind is ipso facto a sin. He does not sin unless he entertains them.
* Martin Luther conflated concupiscence with sin.
  + The desire for the second slice of cake is sinful even if I resist it.
  + Impure thoughts are lustful even if the man didn’t put them there.
  + It’s a short step from here to total depravity.

## **Orthodox: Ancestral Sin**

* Humans were created for theosis/deification: ascending through levels of glory to become like God.
  + Not in the Mormon way
  + At Mass, the priest says, “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share our humanity.”
* God will not force anyone to choose deification.
* Adam and Eve had the choice either to remain immortal by accepting God’s love, or to become mortal by refusing it. Their sin was a refusal to trust God. So is all sin.
* We do not share in the guilt of Ancestral Sin as if we committed it ourselves.
* As a consequence of their sin, everyone is born with the disease of sin and death.
* The Church is a hospital and the sacraments the medicine for this disease.
* If this sounds a lot like the Catholic understanding of Original Sin and you’re wondering what the difference is, there isn’t one. They just think there is.
  + The Orthodox mistakenly believe we believe in original guilt: the idea that we are all guilty of Adam and Eve’s sin. We don’t.
  + Language barrier: they use Greek; we use Latin; they don’t always translate well.

# **What it Isn’t**

## **A crime**

* It was a crime on Adam and Eve’s part.
* For us, Original Sin is a disease (the lack of Original Holiness and Sanctifying Grace), not a crime.

## **Knowledge**

* It is not the Tree of Knowledge, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
* Adam and Eve already knew good from evil; they had infused knowledge before the Fall.
* Knowledge is a Gift of the Holy Spirit.
* They chose to disregard what God said and define for themselves what was good and what was evil.

## **Sex**

* Many read Genesis 3 as a metaphor for Adam and Eve’s sexual awakening. This reading tends to make Eve a temptress seducing Adam, thus making women entirely responsible for sin.
* God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply before they sinned, so clearly sex isn’t sinful in and of itself.
* Many theologians have speculated that without the Fall, sexual pleasure would have been greater, but without lust.
* The Original Sin may have been of a sexual nature, but we don’t know.
* Whatever the act was, it was born of pride, the mother of all sin. Otherwise, Adam and Eve would not have decided to determine good and evil for themselves.
* All sin comes from pride: “You shall be as gods.”

# **Death**

Then the Lord God said, “See, the Man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take fruit from the Tree of Life, and eats of it and lives forever?”  
– Gen 3:22

This may sound vindictive, but God is our Father. Good parents always do what’s best for their children. That includes discipline.

Happy the one whom God reproves;  
The Almighty’s discipline do not reject.  
For He wounds, but He binds up;  
He strikes, but His hands give healing. – Job 5:17-18

We might even consider death medicinal:

A divine ‘punishment’ is also a divine ‘gift’, if accepted, since its object is ultimate blessing, and the supreme inventiveness of the Creator will make ‘punishments’ (that is changes of design) produce a good not otherwise to be attained: a ‘mortal’ Man has probably…a higher if unrevealed destiny than a longeval one. – The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, no. 212

Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden was an act of divine compassion to keep them from becoming immortal in a fallen world. Otherwise, they would still be alive, still suffering, with no hope of escape—not even at the end of the world, since that is also a consequence of the Fall. In *Perelandra*, C.S. Lewis calls it

…the wiping out of a false start in order that the world may then begin. As when a man lies down to sleep, if he finds a twisted root under his shoulder he will change his place and after that his real sleep begins. Or as a man setting foot on an island, may make a false step. He steadies himself and after that his journey begins. (276)

# **Felix Culpa: O Happy Fault!**

In the Exsultet at Easter Vigil, the priest sings:

O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!  
O happy fault  
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

The Middle English song “Adam Lay Ybounden” says:

Ne had the apple taken been,  
The apple taken been,  
Ne had never Our Lady,  
A-been Heaven’s queen.  
Blessed be the time  
That apple taken was!  
Therefore we may singen  
Deo gratias!

This does not mean the Fall was in itself a good thing. St. Paul discusses this in Romans 5-6. “What then shall we say? Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not.” (Rom 6:1)

God can draw straight with crooked lines. He has written a symphony and made us its musicians. He has foreseen our wrong notes and woven them into the music, which is more beautiful now because of them. But the notes were still wrong; something else was written on the page that we were meant to play.

Of course good came of it. … Whatever you do, He will make good of it. But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him. That is lost for ever. The first King and first Mother of our world did the forbidden thing, and He brought good of it in the end. But what they did was not good, and what they lost we have not seen. And there were some to whom no good came nor ever will come. – C.S. Lewis, Perelandra 155

Would the Incarnation still have happened were it not for original sin?

* We obviously don’t know.
* Yes: The Incarnation was the greatest part of Creation. God would not leave His greatest work to chance. Jesus’s Incarnation would have bridged the gap between God and Man, but He would not have needed to be our Redeemer.
* No: Since God only allows evil because He intends to bring out of it a greater good, the change of plan consequent of the Fall means history is greater now than it would have been.
* Even though it’s a valuable discussion, I think the question is founded on a false premise.
  + With God, there is no *was*, *will*, or *would*. There is only *is*.
  + We ask, “What if Man hadn’t fallen?” God answers, “He does.”
  + Jesus was predestined from all eternity to become Man.
  + God knew from all eternity that Man would fall, even though He didn’t plan it.
  + Therefore, Jesus was predestined from all eternity to be our Redeemer.

# **The Immaculate Conception**

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of Original Sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.

A man walking through the woods does not see the bear trap covered with brushwood in front of him; he falls in, and the park ranger pulls him out. A woman walking through the woods doesn’t see it either; the ranger holds her back before she falls in. The ranger saves both of them. This is why Mary calls God her Savior (Luke 1:47). She needed Jesus’s death just as much as we do, even though she benefitted from it before He was conceived. Have whatever opinion you have about the song “Mary, Did You Know,” but the lines “This child that you deliver / will soon deliver you,” while imprecise, are not in fact heretical: even though she has already been delivered, her Son’s work that delivers her has not yet happened.