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Trends in Present Day Theology. II.

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IN our first article we were considering modern trends of thought with regard to God and His work in the world ; in this article we shall consider modern trends of thought with regard to man. As last time we tried to show that the recent outlook in theology could be styled " dogmatic ", so here we hope to show that the recent outlook in this doctrine of man can in short be styled " realistic ". The development of the Doctrine of Man towards a realistic view is then the subject of this article.

As we take up this study of man, we must take up that which is distinctive of man among the creatures, namely, his sin. No doctrine of man can be presented apart from Hamartology. The course we shall follow will be precisely that followed previously. *First* we shall remind ourselves of the Traditional doctrine of man; *secondly*, we shall indicate what is the modern doctrine of man; *thirdly*, we shall examine the present day outlook which we have already described as Realistic.

We begin then with the *Traditional* doctrine of man. Some one once asked the question, What is a theologian? The answer was given—" A man whose Greek Testament automatically falls open at Romans v." There is truth here for the doctrine of man begins at Rom. v. 12. and no anthropology is complete which does not take it into account. The significant verse is—" Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death passed into all men for that all sinned ". However, the verse is explained, and exegesis is not our present function—it certainly is the " Fons et origo " of the Traditional view and cannot be forgotten in any doctrine of man.

The Traditional view reads the Adam story literally and historically. In Adam before the Fall we are to see a state of original righteousness. Because of Adam's sin, the whole human race, naturally engendered of Adam, is corrupt in nature. Since, however, Christ Himself was not naturally engendered, but supernaturally, through the Virgin Birth, His nature is not so corrupted. This fault and corruption of every man's nature is called original sin, a phrase which attempts to go behind the individual sins of man, the ἀμαρτήματα and attempts to account for sin itself (ἀμαρτία) which always rears its ugly head in every life. Strictly speaking, the phrase " original sin " is inaccurate, for if man was in a state of original righteousness he could not have been in a state of original sin, but it is clear what the phrase attempts to explain. Moreover there attaches to this original sin in man original guilt, so that every person born into the world deserves God's wrath and damnation. Not that children dying before committing " actual sin " are damned, for their stain is wiped away by an objective atonement already accomplished by Him whose nature is sinless.

How then is the nature of man viewed? Let us look for a moment at St. Augustine. Augustine held that the fall of man was complete,

the power of spiritual good was henceforth entirely lost, ever afterwards man wills nothing but evil and can do nothing but evil. The fall was not limited to Adam ; as the stem of the human family, he corrupted his entire posterity ; the whole race shares his guilt and cannot by its own efforts escape the penalty due. The only possible means of recovery is through Grace—the free gift of God—drawing man to Christ. Man does nothing and can do absolutely nothing to implement his recovery, he is as passive as the child in infant baptism. Original sin has rendered every man incapable of even moving in the direction of God, it has rendered man completely impotent.

This is how Augustine read the Adam story. How did Pelagius, his opponent, read it? He declared :

- (1) That Adam was created mortal and would have died if he had not sinned anyway.
- (2) The sin of Adam hurt only himself.
- (3) Infants are therefore good as Adam was before the Fall.
- (4) Man is able to keep God's commandments if he will.
- (5) All men may be sinless if they choose, and many saints, even before Christ, actually lived free from sin.

Quite clearly then, Pelagius denied the doctrine of inborn sinfulness and with it the belief that man needs supernatural help to keep God's laws. He tended to conceive of sin as individual acts only, ignoring all that is meant by environment, heredity and habit.

So a double course was open to the Church. Was it to follow Augustine and say that the nature of man is that he is wholly depraved, utterly unable to make any steps in the direction of salvation? or was it to follow Pelagius and regard man as completely free, free to follow which path he will, free to follow that of righteousness or free to follow that of sin? As a matter of fact, Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy in 418 and 431, but this did not mean Augustinianism was followed. Rather semi-Pelagianism became the norm in which *both* man's will *and* the Holy Spirit were recognised as efficient agencies in the renovation of man. Grace was not denied nor was man's power, at least to do something. This semi-Pelagianism became the backbone of Roman theology and it was against this, with its accompanying view of salvation, that Luther and the Reformers reacted. In them, but especially of course in Calvin, we see Augustine's pessimistic doctrine of man's nature worked out with unscriptural and pitiless logic. "*Total corruption*" was its resultant view of man's nature. "Man is utterly leprous and unclean"—What do they mean by this description? Is it not wholly unrealistic? Certainly, if it means what the Westminster Confession seems to make it mean, *viz.*, that "we are utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil", it is plainly indefensible. If "*Total corruption*" means that every man is as bad as he can be, then the sooner the Reformers are dismissed the better, for the doctrine is plainly contradictory to common sense and the Scriptures. But in spite of some of the wild language of Luther the Reformers clearly did not mean this when speaking of the Total Corruption of human nature, they meant that sin extends to the whole range, there is no part of it which is not tainted, even man's virtue is marred. That is to say the river of human nature is not according to them solid mud, but is wholly muddy, no part

is quite clear ; some parts are even more muddy than others, but mud does extend to the whole of it. What the Reformers were doing, which made them use the term " Total Corruption ", was looking at human virtue, not from an ethical but from a theological angle and in that light all our righteousness *is* as filthy rags. They meant that man is wholly unable to come unaided to a saving knowledge of God. " Thou must save and thou alone ". The Doctrine of Total Corruption is the Reformer's answer to the Renaissance Humanism and is to be read in that light. It is untrue to say they had no interest in ethics, they had. They recognised, too, degrees in evil, extenuating circumstances, and they valued man's cultural arts, but what they were driving at was this—that all such things, however good in themselves and good ethically, are unable to answer the heart's deep question, " What must I do to be saved ? " Perhaps in our 20th century we shall find after all that the Reformers were much more Realist than we have been wont to imagine.

Total depravity so interpreted has remained a fundamental of Protestant Doctrine in its view of human nature. But the rigid determination of Calvinism and its austere predestination has been watered down. Arminianism did it. Some results are seen in the 39 articles, but when we say that Arminianism has blunted the edge of Calvinism the world over, we are not to see in Arminianism Latitudinarianism although there were developments that way. Methodism was Arminian through and through and every one knows its power in the past as an instrument of revival. Everyone knows its insistence on the text " By Grace are ye saved through faith, it is the gift of God ", but its great contribution to the doctrine of human nature was that it kept alongside of its insistence on Grace the fact that the light of God has not completely gone out in the soul of man, he is still, in spite of the total depravity, made in the image of God, and there is still in man, every man, something to which the appeal of God can be made.

What we are saying then is this, that before the rise of modernism at the end of the 19th century and since, the Traditional Doctrine of man was based on a literal reading of the Adam and Eve story. It embraced ideas of original righteousness, original sin and original guilt. Justification was by Faith alone, yet at the same time it recognised good works and lofty aspirations in and before faith. It steered then between Augustine and Pelagius, profiting by the Arminian outlook. This *via media* of course particularly appealed to England. In Scotland, America and the Colonies, pure Calvinism took deeper root.

Before now we pass on to state and examine the modern view of the nature of man, in order to take our bearings, it will be well for us to comment at one or two points on the Traditional view of the Nature of Man. As Denny points out in his " Studies in Theology ", It is a pity the study of the nature of man has always been considered as if it were a study of the nature of Adam. When men have asked what is man, theologians have, along the line of Tradition, tried to tell them what was Adam. Man is before us and in us, we can know some things about him but Adam is not within our reach. It is exposing ourselves unnecessarily to refutation by archaeological science to approach the question in this way, for the early chapters of Genesis

will certainly not be taken by the scientists as science nor by historians as history. There is no need to dogmatise about Adam, man's nature can be seen by what he is, enlarged and interpreted by God's dealings with him, and above all in Jesus Christ. Furthermore at the outset we can lay down two broad principles about man.

- (i.) His nature according to Scripture was made in the image of God, destined for fellowship with God.
- (ii.) His state is in contradiction to his nature and may be called sinful.

In man then, as we know him, we see his state or present condition in contradiction with his nature, the lofty position for which he was made. It is far better not to describe sin in terms of original righteousness back in some dim age, for original righteousness is an obscure and unknown thing.

Neither is there need to explain or rather try to explain why it is man sins always and everywhere by a doctrine of original sin tied up with Adam's transgression in a historical past. To see sin in its full range we need only look at man. We shall see it as an incident in the actions of a particular man. We shall see it as a state of character of a particular man and we shall see it as organic, related to the natural character of all men.

Quite clearly sin emerges in man's consciousness as an incident. It is a sin of which man accuses himself, a blot, a stain, to be dealt with by itself. The Adam story is a true picture in giving this. But this is by no means all, Pelagius was mistaken in thinking of sin so simply and many unwittingly still follow. It needs little reflection to realise that nothing in a man's life has this purely incidental character. Life is all of one piece, there are antecedents and consequences. Man's will is affected by the choices he makes, he gains character and direction by them. If the atomic theory of sin were all the truth there would be no such thing as a bad or a good character. Acts of sin affect the character and character affects acts of sin. Man then not only commits *acts* of sin, he is in a *state* of sin, so that we see sin referring (i) to actions; (ii.) to persons. But even this is not all. Further reflection shows us that no one lives unto himself. Actions and their consequences affect others besides the actors, our circle of influence widens to an incalculable extent. Sin then is not only personal but social, and furthermore, any sinful life is not without effect on its children. And all this is summed up in the one word—heredity. We have arrived then at a full view of sin and man's nature; sin as individual, sin as social, sin as organic—all without launching forth upon the uncharted seas of the state of primitive man. And this is the point for our present concern—we can, it seems, maintain the essential content of the Traditional Doctrine but need not tie it up to a Disputed Form.

We can pass on then to the second point in our consideration and examine the modern outlook and chiefly as it is presented by Dr. Tennant. In result, if not in aim, modern theories of Sin tend to reduce the sphere of human conduct in which sin, in the strict sense, can be applied, and they cast suspicion on the alleged consciousness of guilt. Such are Kant's theory which confines sin to the will of man, Hegel's theory which makes sin a necessity, all theories which confine

sin within the bounds of religion, and theories which seek to explain sin from empirical observations such as Pfeleiderer's and Tennant's.

Since Tennant's is the oldest and most widespread of the modern views it is with this that we shall concern ourselves. Its rise was due to the current anthropological interest and discoveries, and it constituted an attempt to bring the theological doctrine of man into line with them. Briefly sin is an 'evolutionary overhang' from man's animal origin. For the sake of clarity we may begin with a simple illustration—the habit that a dog has of turning round and round before lying down. That habit is an 'evolutionary overhang'. It belongs to an earlier stage in the process of the development of dogs. It was essential then, it was part of life. So the primary incentives to sin in man are natural, inborn, morally neutral instincts and passions which belong to man as evolved from a lower creation. These non-moral incentives to action are the common inheritance of the human stock from its mammalian origin. They are forces necessary to life, to the very preservation of the human species. They are, therefore, morally innocent and indifferent in themselves, being the basis and constitution of our virtues as well as of our vices. They are in short the raw material of man's moral activity.

Furthermore these inborn tendencies in man must not be confused with the human will. Sin is a matter of the human will. In spite of Augustine and the Reformers these non-volitional propensities cannot be regarded as sinful. It is impossible to talk of man being in a sinful state in the Traditional sense. It is man's will which shapes, not the stuff which is shaped, which calls for approval or disapproval. It is not the existence in man of appetitive senses which makes him a sinner, but his voluntary surrender to them. The propensities are the condition of sin's emergence, and sin emerges as man with a will develops from an animal with an impulse. Sin is therefore as we said an 'evolutionary overhang', and its universality is accounted for by the theory that conscience is a later development of impulse in the course of man's evolution.

Three criticisms of this modern theory are presented. The first is that this theory may tell us—it may perhaps tell us truly—how it is that sin happens. But still it has failed to answer our question. Granted sin comes into being when man's will consents to appetitive senses within him. But our desire is to know why men's wills always consent to the appetitive senses within them. Why is sin universal? Why is sin virtually inevitable? As has been aptly said, 'We may abandon the classical doctrine of original sin when it is bound up with the insupportable doctrine of Original Guilt, but we are still left with the historical fact of universal moral imperfection . . . whose reality that grim doctrine attested.' After all, as Edwyn Bevan put it, 'How is it that all over the world to follow the good impulses has seemed like going uphill, and to follow the evil ones like going downhill?' This theory has not told us.

The second criticism is this. Suppose we did determine the causes of universal sin, would we not therefore have removed from man all responsibility for it? If, according to certain bygone facts, man is bound to sin, can he be blamed for it? He is no longer therefore morally responsible for he is not morally free to do otherwise than

sin—he is bound, he is determined. And if he has no moral responsibility he has no personal responsibility. So then we see that if it could be explained how sin arose, and why it arises, it would mean a determinism which deprives man of moral and personal responsibility. And this is contrary to the empirical facts.

Another criticism according to Von Hugel is this. The single source theory may be plausible for sins like gluttony and sloth. It is easy to account for them by a consent of the will to primitive animal appetitive and necessary senses, but it is extremely difficult to include in the same theory such sins as self-love and pride, which are deadly in the eyes of an enlightened Christianity. 'This single derivation' writes Von Hugel, 'simply will not work.'

All these views then arose along with, and because of, the prevailing interest in anthropology of the latter years of the 19th century and in the early 20th. Similarly the outlook today arises along with and because of present day prevailing conditions.

"It is common form to-day," says Whale in his book on Christian doctrine, "to dismiss most forms of liberalism in sociology, politics and theology, as unrealistic and sentimental," or, as Professor Hodges wrote, "The gospel that goodwill is the one thing needful is so clearly false that people who see its falsehood have been driven away from Christianity because they have been led to think that this is Christian doctrine."

The fact is realism is in the ascendant, and the complacency of idealism is nauseating today. The world is suffering from disillusionment, and the optimistic theory of man's evolution is plainly discredited by the facts of life around us. This is the case even in America, or as Dr. Bennett, an American theologian has recently expressed it in his book "Christian Realism", "Nothing is too terrible to be possible." Seeing as we do the depths to which the hearts of men can sink, we realise that after all public enemy No. 1 is not stupidity, nor a defective social order, but sin as a deep-rooted mystery in the heart of man.

Recently then, the modern doctrine of man has been discredited along three lines:

1. It fails to take a large enough view of human nature, clinging to a vague notion that somehow, in the end, man's better self will come out top, when present facts of life are against it. In short, the evolutionary view is unrealistic.

2. It has concentrated too much attention on that sphere of life in which there is undoubted progress—the natural and scientific, and this has been foisted on to the whole world in general with the result that it makes the whole world conform to a single pattern—Progress with a capital 'P'. But history does not exhibit such neat simplicity. Niebuhr expresses it most tersely of all when he says, 'History is the story of an ever-increasing cosmos creating ever-increasing possibilities of chaos.' In other words, as our world advances it makes at the same time bigger possibilities of a total collapse.

This view of history is expressed in the parable of the wheat and the tares. Both good and evil grow together until the harvest. Men ask, "Is the world growing better or is it worse?" Both are true. Evil

is more evil, more corrupt, more integrated, more scientifically cruel, and goodness is growing better, more enlightened. No apostle today would tolerate slavery. There is progression and there is retrogression, and they continue until the harvest—this is realism.

3. The now discredited modern view of man's nature did not look closely enough into man's goodness. Had it done so it would have found that even there there is corruption. The Pharisee went to the temple to pray, but was defeated in his attempt to reach God by the pride in his own soul. Even if man has the will to see God he may stand in his own light. Even if the Christian is humble he may fall from the topmost rung of the Christian ladder by being proud of his humility. The modern view is misled and misleading. It does not examine closely enough the human heart. Righteousness can overlay a wealth of smugness, and the Devil is not slow to pose as an Angel of Light.

Perhaps now we are in a position to state three principles concerning man and his nature which will, so it is held, stand examination in the modern world. They are derived ultimately from Brunner's book "Man in Revolt"—

1. Man is God's creature—like the animals he is God's creature, but he is on a higher level than they are because he is aware of it. This knowledge is a constitutive element in the fundamental fact that man is made in the image of God—God, who is also above the creatures, Apart from this it is impossible to understand man's basic disharmony—he is able to stray because he is made in God's image.

2. Everywhere, and from time immemorial, men have rebelled against God. The will to rebel seems part of him. This rebellion differentiates man from the animals. Man is superior to the animals in that he is a sinner. The essence of sin is man's denial of his distinctive endowment—the *imago dei*. He will persist in thinking that his greatness exists in his own right. *Imago dei* is interpreted to mean "Ye shall be as gods." Man is a sinner because he revolts against the very dependence on God which constitutes his greatness. The fundamental ground of the rebellion is pride, and the tragedy of man's rebellion, with its tragic results, is deep because this is corruption of the best of God's creation—*Corrupto optimi pessima*.

The result of the rebellion is two fold. First it means alienation from God. Sin began, according to Gen. iii., in man's desire to be autonomous. He was driven out. Sin arose in the prodigal's heart with his desire to be autonomous. His own desire drove him out. Rebellion against God means alienation from God.

Secondly, the result of rebellion is the Wrath of God. This is the terrible way the alienation works out both for the individual and the society. The point is that although man is banished as a rebel, as the immortal Genesis story will never allow us to forget, he cannot destroy God's image—his fundamental endowment. He still experiences the Love of God, but the form in which he experiences it is wrath. As Brunner says "Man cannot be Godless without God." The rebellion does not destroy the image.

3. The third principle witnesses to Man's solidarity in Evil. Sin is an individual act. That is plain. But we cannot say with Pelagius that that is all. Sin is also a state, and apparently is part of our empiri-

cal make-up. This is what the New Testament teaches. Man cannot separate himself from the infection of evil. It is so strong that in the New Testament it is ascribed to a personal enemy—Satan. He is our common enemy. However we explain the fact there is no doubt that individual sins are inspired, directed and reinforced by a kingdom of evil.

How then is man's nature viewed today? Pessimistically? No! That is pagan—although Augustine came perilously near it, and some continental theologians, notably Gogarten, assert that the function of Christianity as far as this world is concerned, is solely to preserve it from its inevitable journey to Hell. Nor—on the other hand is the present view of man's nature optimistic as in the immediate past. Neither of these. Rather it is realistic. Man is made in the image of God. Apparently he has rebelled, but he has not lost that image.

What then of the Fall story? It is not abandoned by present day scholars. Much more attention is paid to it than by the modernists. It embodies the very essentials about man's nature and about man's state. It is the truth but it is not truth in historical form, but in mythological form. It involves no scientific description of historic things. The Fall does not refer to some aboriginal calamity, but to an active human experience on the part of every man. It says that we, every one of us, has been created for fellowship with God and has repudiated it: and not only do we individuals do this, the whole race does it and has done it from time immemorial. As Whale put it, "Every man is his own Adam, and all men are solidly Adam." The paradise before the Fall is not a period of history but our memory, our knowledge, our consciousness of a divinely intended quality of life given to us along with our consciousness of guilt.

We are to see today then in this doctrine of man a return to the Bible, and with a desire to let the Bible speak for itself and interpret human life. This new attitude is as much to the fore in America as in Europe where we have been shocked out of complacency by the strident voice of Barth. But there is this difference: here we have more respect for tradition—the Barthian School acknowledges the halo it puts round the head of Luther, and Calvin—but America will have none of this. Strictly empirical is its temper, its strength and its weakness, but there too, realism has replaced Utopianism.

It is in the light of this realistic view of man's nature and state that we can appreciate how the newer dogmatic theology outlined in the previous article, fits.