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Scripture

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ORIGINAL SIN AND GOD'S JUSTICE

(Translated from the French¹ by B. Dickinson)

The doctrine of original sin often raises a difficult problem in some minds: How can a just God allow every man to be a victim for the offence of a remote ancestor? Having sought to establish the precise nature of original sin according to Scripture,² there remains the question whether the Scriptural account leaves room for resolving or lightening this objection, which seems a shocking one for many. The fact is that the Biblical authors did not dwell upon this question. But if they have no ready-made solution to offer us, almost all of them have strongly maintained the principle that divine retribution is just. Some of them have even outlined its application to problems akin to the one just stated. Now, even when we are expounding Biblical theology, and taking care to distinguish methodically the analysis of the Scriptural *datum* from the systematic development of the *data* thus compiled, there still remains the possibility of pointing out certain indications which the speculative theologian must take into account.

If Israel's faith was for a long time satisfied with a conception of justice that made it merely approximate and applying to social groups, families and nations rather than to individuals, yet the inspired testimonies to this faith nowhere lost sight of the individual completely. Almost every book of the Bible contains, if not the precise formula, 'God will render to every man according to his works,'³ at least some

¹ Any article appearing in translation from another language has been written specially for *Scripture*, and is not a reprint from a foreign periodical unless this is explicitly stated.—ED.

² The present article is the conclusion of a series of studies devoted to original sin in Scripture, the principal being: 'Original sin in Genesis,' in the *Revue Biblique*, 64 (1957), pp. 5-34; 'Original sin in St Paul,' in the *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 40 (1956), pp. 213-54.

³ The formula 'God will render to every man according to his works' is found with slight variations in the following texts: Jer. 17:10, 32:19; Ps. 62:13; Prov. 24:12; Job 34:11; Sir. 16:12-14, 35:24; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 1 Pet. 1:17; Apoc. 2:23, 20:12-13, 22:12. It is applied solely to an individual or to a specific category in the following texts: 2 Sam. 3:39; Jer. 25:14; Zach. 1:6; Ps. 18:21, 28:4; Lam. 3:64; 2 Cor. 11:15; 2 Tim. 4:14; Apoc. 18:6. The same idea can also be found under slightly different forms in 1 Sam. 2:30, 26:23; Isaias 59:18; Jer. 50:15 and 29; Abd. 15; Ps. 18:26-7; Qoh. 12:14; Sir. 11:26 (G); John 5:29; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:5. It underlies countless affirmations of divine justice.

indications of a conviction that there is a providential justice for individuals, even in periods when the idea of collective retribution still predominated.¹

The references one could list are inevitably rather blurred in their outlines. They pass imperceptibly from statements of belief in collective justice to those which concern individual justice. For example, in certain cases in which punishment descends upon a guilty man and not upon the whole nation, there still remains the aftermath of collective retribution, since the clan is implicated in the fate of its chief; such was the case of Core, of Dathan and Abiron, or of Achan.²

During the period of exile, two prophets formulated explicitly what until then had been more or less clearly glimpsed. They asserted in the most formal way the individual character of God's sanctions. Jeremiah and Ezechiel protest against the proverb that passed from mouth to mouth among their contemporaries: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth have been set on edge' (Jer. 31:29; Ezech. 18:2). Both proclaim that in future each man will suffer only the penalty for his own sins. On the one hand this categoric teaching carries to its peak the opposition between the demands of justice and the fact of the solidarity for sin's burden from generation to generation. But, on the other hand, it allows it to be completely dissolved, since it defers to the future the recompense for each man's merits. Without denying the evidence of experience, it

¹ Abimelech pleads his good faith that he may not be punished by God for an unwitting offence (Gen. 20:4-7). Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom because of the just men it contains (Gen. 18:25). The plague of hail spares those Egyptians who listened to Moses (Ex. 9:19-21); Moses is spared in the threatened destruction of the people (Ex. 32:10; Num. 14:12; Deut. 9:14). The general punishment of the murmurers makes an exception of Caleb and Josuah (Num. 14:20-4, 30-1). The law provides that only the guilty should be put to death (Deut. 24:16). Rahab escapes the general condemnation of Jericho (Jos. 6:25). Abimelech dies because of his wickedness (Judges 9:56-7). Ruth is rewarded for her fidelity.

The sons of Heli are killed in battle by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:17). Saul loses the crown which is given to one more worthy (1 Sam. 15:28). David feels that he ought to be punished personally for his offence (2 Sam. 24:17). The young son of Jeroboam is the only one to be given a proper burial, because he is the only one in his family who is good (1 Kings 14:13). A foreigner, the widow of Sarepta, for her charity to Elias is saved from the famine, and she obtains the raising to life of her son (1 Kings 17:11-24). Josias, because he did penance once the law was discovered, is allowed to die before the national catastrophe (2 Kings 22:19-20). Joakim will have neither tomb nor successor on the throne, because of his hostility to Jeremiah (Jer. 36-30). The false prophet Hananias is struck down with premature death because he preached the revolt against Yahweh (Jer. 28:17).

² Num. 16:25-32; Jos. 7:24. Even in the cases noted above (n. 2) a similar mingling of collective and individual retribution can be seen. David chooses to allow his people to be decimated by plague and only then fully acknowledges that he should be punished personally (2 Sam. 24:12-17). Joakim is punished with his descendants and his people (Jer. 36:31).

maintains that this does not constitute the last word on the part of Providence.

It is illuminating to make a rapid survey of the vicissitudes of this reflection on the theme of retributive justice launched by the two prophets. Although neither of them disputed the truth of the fact expressed by the saying which they condemned (cf. Jer. 32:18; Ezech. 21:8), some thinkers believed it was possible to maintain that suffering was in every case the punishment of a previous personal sin. This stern theory was introduced into the Bible, only to be vigorously contested there in the book of Job or by Qoheleth: the evils suffered by the innocent are a tragic reality which cannot be dismissed by any *a priori* theory.

Eventually the disparity between each man's fate and his merits, which had long been a scandal to pious minds, was seen to be provisional. A psalmist, having described his painful astonishment at the situation, makes known the thought that ultimately appeased him: swift disaster is due to bring to nothing the arrogant triumph of the godless. Moreover the believer has the supreme happiness of being always with his God (Ps. 73)—and we may well wonder if this soaring phrase refers to the life to come or is restricted to the joy which the divine presence gives here below.¹ The fact remains that they prepared the ground for the teaching of the book of Wisdom, which assigns to the next life the retribution due from Providence.²

In the eyes of this late writer the evils which afflict the just—premature death or even violent death under persecution—are nothing by comparison with the eternal life promised to those who remain faithful: they are but the ordeal which singles out those who are worthy of God (Wis. 3:1-9). The anomaly created by the prosperity of thugs and the misery of their victims is of brief duration: death will come to redress the balance and take them into a world where Providence will carry out its plans for man.

Clearly the author is taking an extreme case, but one that is useful as an example. He wished to embody his idea in a concrete form, rather than argue from a statement of abstract principles. For him each man (even the just man who has the happiness of living to a ripe old age, a case he does not mention) must ultimately reap according to his works, not here below, but after death. This will be a simple

¹ For a recent discussion on this point, see R. Martin-Achard, *De la mort à la résurrection d'après l'Ancien Testament*, 1956, pp. 127-33. In this book can be found, in a general way, many complementary points on this subject, which has been briefly dealt with in this article. See especially pp. 165-70 on God's justice.

² Consult M. J. Lagrange, 'Le livre de la Sagesse. Sa doctrine des fins dernières,' in *Revue Biblique* (1907), pp. 85-104; R. Schuetz, *Les idées eschatologiques du livre de la Sagesse*, 1935.

summons for the just, who will enjoy the vision of God, but the beginning of terrifying unhappiness for the godless.¹

After the prolonged gropings of wise men, the latest among them brings a decisive light to bear by placing the realisation of individual retribution beyond our present earthly existence, whereas the two contemporary prophets of the exile, Jeremias and Ezechiel, had promised this retribution in an indefinite future. The principle that God will render to every man according to his works, which had been included from the beginning in Israel's creed, is still maintained, but freed from the naïve applications that had been made of it. The lessons of experience had compelled them to transfer the showing-forth of divine justice, promised by the prophets, to regions beyond the confines of experience. Wisdom showed a way of reconciling two *data* which until then had remained in an unresolved state of tension: it combined a daring hope with the recognition of injustice in this world.

Yet Wisdom did not diagnose the whole range of evil suffered by humanity, for it did not envisage explicitly an original and universal sin, a true separation from God, that is independent of the individual will. It simply furnishes a framework capable of containing, without detracting from the justice of Providence, a datum that will be brought into full light by St Paul.

The Christian can afford to be more pessimistic, in a way, than the author of Job or The Preacher. For, far from disputing the facts disclosed by the wise men of old, the Christian imputes to them a gravity almost unguessed at before. In his eyes every man, as a consequence of an offence he has not committed, has to undergo not only an impairing of his happiness but a real deterioration in his religious status. Physical or psychic sufferings, moral errors or difficulties are somehow linked with a sinful stain that truly defiles each one of us. The enduring consequence of this is a moral helplessness—at least in part—and often also a tormented conscience.

Such a doctrine provides a definite framework for a valid description and explanation of our miserable state; but it does not leave God's justice in the clear. For if the free-willed offence of the creature is put forward as the source of evil, then the scandal of a tainted inheritance being passed down from one generation to another takes on far greater proportions, since it is a question not merely of unhappiness but of sin. The sour grapes eaten by the fathers are seen to be infinitely

¹ Beside the essential contribution made by this book, which is the doctrine of everlasting life, may be found in passing the idea that divine justice takes everyone's personal status into account: 'to him that is little, mercy is granted: but the mighty shall be mightily tormented' (Wis. 6:7).

more harmful to their children than the contemporaries of Jeremias and Ezechiel suspected. The problem the two prophets had to face is made more painful. It has to be solved, along the lines of thought defined by them and extended to a future life by the book of Wisdom. It must be solved, not by the mentality that harks back to causes in the past, but by the hope of a just judgement that is to come.

The New Testament

Of all books of the Bible, there is none that presents all the refinements of divine justice in a brighter light than the book which resounds with the Good News of grace. In harmony with the teaching that culminated in the book of Wisdom, Jesus teaches that persecution, with its deadly perils, is not to be feared. It can have only limited effects: it can kill the body, but cannot reach the soul. In the midst of all dangers the hairs of our head are numbered.¹ What is beyond man's power to estimate does not escape God's precise knowledge and will be subject to an exacting judgement. Divine retaliation will deal out a faithful reckoning.² The Son of Man, the judge heralded by the prophet Daniel, is destined to come in his glory, to render to every man according to his works. He will give no credit for the artfulness by which one has contrived to keep alive in times of trouble, or for such apparent successes as the conquest of an empire.³

God reads hearts and it may well be, as in the case of the Pharisees, that what seems glorious in men's eyes is an abomination in God's eyes.⁴ But on the last day the sifting of values, impossible now for men to attempt, will be infallibly accomplished by the hands of angels.⁵ Jesus teaches that true guilt is contracted by the breaking of the commandments dictated by the heart's own choice, not by chance external contacts that are unavoidable.⁶ Furthermore, he teaches that transgressions themselves will by no means be judged from an abstract rule of morality, but from the concrete possibilities offered to each by the gifts he has in fact received. The judgement pronounced on Sodom, that typical example of pagan corruption, will be more lenient than the judgement falling upon those towns in Galilee which rejected the tidings of salvation in the days of Jesus.⁷ All that was lacking to convert Tyre and Sidon, as the Ninivites were converted by the threats of Jonas, was the working of the miracles that had been lavished on

¹ Matt. 10:28-30; Luke 12:4-7 (cf. 21:18)

² Matt. 10:32-3; Luke 12:8-9; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26 (cf. Matt. 7:1; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38)

³ Matt. 16:27 (cf. 25:31-46; Dan. 7:13-14)

⁴ Luke 16:15 (cf. Matt. 23:28)

⁵ This is the conclusion of the parable of the cockle (Matt. 13:41)

⁶ Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23

⁷ Matt. 10:15, 11:24; Luke 10:12

Bethsaida and Corozain : therefore the gentile towns will receive far greater clemency in the day of judgement.¹ Then, perhaps after long delays, 'the servant who knew his master's will, and did not make ready for him or act according to that will, will receive many strokes of the lash ; he who did not know of it, yet earned a beating by his conduct, will have only a few. Much will be asked of the man to whom much has been given ; more will be expected of him, because he was entrusted with more' (Luke 12:47-8). That is why each one will be judged according to his words—so that he may be justified or condemned according to what he knew of the divine law.²

At the time of the final reckoning of accounts, those who have put the same energies into increasing their capital, that differed originally according to individuals, will receive the same reward, according to the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:20-3). Those who originally received the same capital will receive a reward proportioned to the energy expended in increasing its value, according to the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:16-19). Idle inertia will be punished. Even when a gratuitous generosity seems to prevail, careful consideration will reveal a justice that is more exact than that of human payments, one which takes account of intentions. The proprietor of the vineyard will give the same wage to all his workers once evening comes. Those who, in spite of their good will, have found employment only at a late hour, will receive a *denarium* equally with those who have worked from early morning (Matt. 20:1-15).

These manifold parables suggest and finally establish the conception of a justice that is strict, meticulous, yet not niggardly. It is a justice which takes into account the initial conditioning of our free-willed activity by temperament, social background, by every kind of circumstance which allows or prevents access to the common economy of salvation.

St Paul This Gospel teaching finds an echo in St Paul. God is the just judge (2 Tim. 4:8), whose judgement is just towards both persecutors and their victims (2 Thess. 1:5-7). When judgement is delivered it is unerring against those who do evil (Rom. 2:2). God 'has no human preferences,' that is to say, he is not influenced by considerations of race³ or class.⁴ He renders to every man according to his works : a statement which at first sight gives the idea of external works, open to human observation (Rom. 2:6-8), an idea which must soon be modified. We must, in fact, take into consideration the

¹ Matt. 11:21-2 ; Luke 10:13-14

² Matt. 12:37 (cf. 25:26-7 ; Luke 19:22 ; John 5:45-6)

³ Rom. 2:11 ; Gal. 2:6

⁴ Eph. 6:9 ; Col. 3:25

varying knowledge of the law possessed by different individuals : ' those who have been sinners without regard to the law will be doomed without regard to the law ; those who have been sinners with the law for their rule will be judged with the law for their rule ' (Rom. 2:12). This personal equation is an essential element in the divine judgement, and Paul insists on the increased responsibility of one who claims to have the light : the consequence is that he condemns himself in approving of (Rom. 14:22) or in condemning another (Rom. 2:1). Paul himself had been a persecutor in former days ; but he was acting in ignorance, and had been able to obtain mercy (1 Tim. 1:13). ' Without the law sin is not imputed,' St Paul goes so far as to say (Rom. 5:13), in a formula which is oversimplified and calls for certain distinctions. For side by side with the external promulgation of the law of Moses there is the secret writing of his law made by God in the hearts of pagans (Rom. 2:14-15). The existence of this interior law, which is liable to wide variations in its certitude as well as in its practical applications, makes present judgement impossible : judgement is reserved for the future (Rom. 12:19). One day the Lord will make manifest the secret intentions which at present are still hidden in the hearts of each man.¹ For the time being the Christian cannot attempt to judge those outside the fold, Jews or pagans (1 Cor. 5:13), because whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law (Rom. 3:19), and we cannot make it bind univocally those who do not know it.

Side by side with this doctrine that judgement varies according to works, there are other doctrines which at first give a very different impression. As so often happens in the Bible, Paul sets out one after another seemingly divergent truths, without immediately reconciling them. So there are acts of God that are determined by prevenient grace and not by a concern for rendering justice to each one.

Among the people of Israel in Paul's day there were some who recognised in Jesus the Saviour heralded by the prophets ; just as in the days of Elias seven thousand men had remained faithful to the true God : ' So it is in our time : a remnant has remained true ; grace has chosen it. And if it is due to grace, then it is not due to observance of the law ; if it were, grace would be no grace at all ' (Rom. 11:5-6). And what is true of Israel is equally true of the pagans, among whom a certain number had been called to salvation in Christ : ' Yes, it was grace that saved you, with faith for its instrument ; it did not come from yourselves, it was God's gift, not from any action of yours, or there would be room for pride.' ²

¹ 1 Cor. 4:4-5 ; Rom. 2:16

² Eph. 2:8-9 (cf. Gal. 2:16 ; Rom. 3:28 ; Titus 3:5 ; 2 Tim. 1:9)

In these passages, when the Apostle rates so highly the action of divine grace that is independent of man's works, he is not treating of the judgement which will determine the lot of every man on the last day, but with the call to a privileged state: the possession of the Christian faith. The fact that some receive this gift and others do not does not depend on the greater or less perfection of works that have already been accomplished. The distinction is made solely by favour of God, who is not accountable to anyone. This fact is perfectly compatible with a final judgement that has for criterion the use that will be made of the gifts received. Paul goes on to make this very point, teaching that the faithful are 'created in Jesus Christ, pledged to such good actions as he has prepared beforehand to be the employment of our lives' (Eph. 2:10).

It is in this perspective that we must see the predilection and the hardening of heart discussed in the ninth chapter of Romans. Among Abraham's descendants, in the course of successive generations, grace again makes its own choice. The covenant is not automatically entailed to one family or race. God chose between Isaac and Ismael, between Jacob and Esau. He shows mercy to whom He will and He hardens His heart where He will, as is clear from the Scripture that tells of Moses and Pharaoh. He finds His glory in His opponents as well as in His servants. Nothing can resist His will. God is as free in His dealings with men as the potter is when he 'pulls' from the same clay, vessels that are intended for different uses. The thing made cannot question the decisions of the maker (Rom. 9:20-1). This was the classic metaphor among the Jews to express the creation of man by God¹ and especially God's sovereign liberty *vis-à-vis* His creatures.² It is worth noting, however, that Jeremias, when making use of this comparison, sought to emphasise something other than an independence that was not answerable to anyone. In his eyes, the clay that was malleable before being fired in the kiln represented the divine action that was always susceptible to modification according to human action. The divine 'repenting' corresponds to man's conversion and, contrariwise, the unfaithfulness of a nation entails the suppression of blessings that had already been granted.³ There is indeed a divine intention which often precedes man's decision, but this does not cancel the operation of a final just retribution.

Doubtless when Paul speaks of Moses and Pharaoh he has not the same end in view as Jeremias when he reflects on the work of the

¹ Gen. 2:7; Is. 64:7; Job 10:9, 33, 36

² Is. 29:16, 45:9. Paul takes the words of the first text according to the Septuagint literally, and draws inspiration from the second. cf. again Sir. 33:13; Wis. 15:7 (which is not applied to the divine operation); 2 Tim. 2:20.

³ Jer. 18:1-10 (cf. 26:13, 19; Zach. 1:3; Mal. 3:7)

potter. For the moment his attention is centred on the place allotted to each man in the visible economy of salvation. This is determined by the almighty will of the Lord ; but that does not prejudice the eternal destiny that is reserved to everyone in proportion to his conduct.¹ Paul clearly taught that the just judgement to come would be based on the free-willed use men made of the gifts they had received. He could have no difficulty therefore in distinguishing on these lines between a situation that was favourable or unfavourable according to the official regime of revelation and, on the other hand, the value of any human person in God's sight.² Earlier in the Epistle he had, in fact, contrasted the professed Jew, circumcised in his flesh, and the Jew-at-heart who is praised not by men but by God (Rom. 2:29). He has even expressly envisaged the paradoxical case in which a persecutor of the chosen people, such as Pharaoh, would be acting in good faith. He himself, one-time blasphemer and executioner of the first disciples, has obtained mercy because of his ignorance : an example of God's patience towards them that believe (1 Tim. 1:13-16). Hence election by grace and judgement according to works are not mutually exclusive, because they are not bound up with the same stages of salvation. We can even perceive sometimes how an election by grace rough hews, not of course the final judgement, but an approximate shaping of justice that holds promise for the future. Paul, in spite of his sinful past, was received into the life of grace, excused as he was by his ignorance. And Cornelius, the Roman centurion, won by his prayers and alms the grace of hearing the Gospel preaching (Acts 10:4, 31-5).

The divine novitiate Having indicated the Scriptural evidences that highlight the delicate precision of the divine judgement and its universal application, it is now as well to consider different ideas. In this way new points of view on the problem of the justice of Providence will emerge, which a systematic doctrine of original sin will

¹ M. J. Lagrange writes : ' He (Paul) is discussing God's call to a position that is privileged in the order of salvation. . . . We must not apply to the eternal moral destiny of an individual what is said of his action in history ' (*Épître aux Romains*, 1916, pp. 246-7). In the same way a Protestant commentator, E. Gaugler, writes : ' It concerns solely the role of the ruler in the history of salvation, it has nothing to do with this man's personal fate at the judgement ' (*Der Römerbrief*, II, 1952, p. 53 ; quoted by O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 1955, p. 209, n. 3).

² This is disputed by a recent commentator, O. Michel : ' It is difficult to maintain any distinction between the historic role to which God assigns any man and the eternal judgement that is passed on him ' (op. cit., p. 209). Unfortunately there is no evidence to support this denial. On the other hand the distinction in question is found in the words of our Lord on Sodom, Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 10:15, 11:21-4 ; Luke 10:13-15), and in the parable of the labourers at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20:1-16), not to mention Paul.

have to take into account. The Biblical writers, faced with the inexpressible mystery of God, liked to multiply understatements, without binding themselves to a single statement which might be considered exhaustive. It would therefore be imprudent to fasten on any principle, even one drawn from a large number of texts, without considering closely whether there may not be a complementary principle which compels us to tone down the application of the first. Side by side with the rather rough justice which is shown in this present life and side by side with the perfect justice which is promised in the future life, Scripture speaks of a divine intention to test men and to instruct them.

More than any other book in the Bible, Genesis strives to show how the consequences of an ancestor's conduct make themselves felt in his descendants.¹ There is a certain justice in this, which must not be denied, even if its collective character prevents it from being fully satisfying. The theology of original sin proceeds readily along this line of thought which sees the present determined by the past. However, in this same book of Genesis, which is continually dedicated to showing that suffering is the penalty for sin, we are offered the most striking illustration of the idea that is completely foreign to this dominant theme: the temptation of Abraham (Gen. 22). The excruciating obligation of immolating his beloved son that is imposed upon the patriarch is not connected with the expiation of a previous offence. It is a test to which God subjects His faithful servant before ratifying the promises which He had already made him.

This idea of a test reappears from time to time in the Biblical books.² It underlies the story of Job, although the word itself is never spoken. It offers a religious explanation of suffering that differs from the more usual one, which considers it to be the punishment for an offence. The book of Job sets out to contest the universal validity of this common theory. Sometimes this idea of a test is extended to a wider field. So a meditation on the vicissitudes of the sojourn in the desert after leaving Egypt (Deut. 8) sees in all the hardships undergone by Israel the effect of a fatherly solicitude: Yahweh intended both to test His people—that is, to see whether they would keep His commandments or not—and also to train them as a father trains his son. The privation imposed by circumstances taught them a lesson which they could not have learned otherwise, forcibly weaning them from a gratification that had become habitual, to give them a new and better

¹ The different peoples or tribes are usually connected with an ancestor from whom they take both their name and their distinctive character.

² Exod. 15:25, 16:4, 20:20; Deut. 13:4, 33:8; 2 Chron. 32:31; Pss. 17:3, 26:2, 66:10; Tob. 12:14; Sir. 2:1-6, 4:17; Wis. 3:5-6

gratification, thus increasing their confidence in a Providence so rich in resources.¹

This kind of suffering, which is both test and teaching in one, can be the result of sin : it is then, in addition, a punishment. These three themes are combined in the prologue to the book of Judges. The continuing existence of the ancient inhabitants of Canaan among the newly settled Israelites was at one and the same time (a) a punishment for neglecting to expel them, (b) a providential opportunity for testing the fidelity of the Chosen People and (c) a means of training the younger generation in warfare (Judges 2:20-3:6).

This combination, made in a particular case, cannot be given the value of a universal principle, in the sense that all suffering which serves as a test or a lesson must always stem from sin. Such a principle is not valid in the case of an isolated individual. It was rejected in the most categorical way by the book of Job and by The Preacher. Experience shows that any man may be faced with suffering without having deserved it through his own fault.

Even when we consider large groups or humanity taken as a whole, we cannot commit ourselves to a hard-and-fast generalisation. No doubt, by and large, a collective group considered during a certain period of time meets the fate it deserves more consistently than an individual : for in the long run chance events compensate one another. Yet even on this global scale there are exceptions : Ps. 44 denies that the current national crisis is the effect of national infidelity.

The Bible, then, looks to other ideas than that of the punishment of sin to explain suffering and does not always connect them with the idea of penal vindictive justice. From the very nature of our creatureliness we are undergoing a test in which our freedom may let us down, but in which hardship can become an occasion for progress. This must call for circumspection in any theology of original sin, or rather of original justice. To describe the state which preceded the fall, Genesis limits itself to a few very restrained suggestions. Their restraint appears much more marked by comparison with the wealth of detail furnished by the apochryphal writings at the beginning of the Christian era.² It is difficult to go further than the inspired book and to reconstruct a mental picture of the state of original innocence

¹ The metaphor of the crucible in which metals are purified expresses both the idea of a test and that of education, sometimes even the idea of punishment : Is. 48:10 ; Jer. 6:20-30, 9:6 ; Ezech. 22:17 ; Mal. 3:3 ; Zach. 13:9 ; Ps. 66:10 ; Prov. 17:3 ; Wis. 3:6 ; 1 Peter 1:7. The idea of a painful education is also found in Prov. 3:11-12 ; Ps. 119:71 ; Sir. 6:18-26.

² Details on this point may be found in F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin* (1903, ch.vi-x) or in J. Bonsirven, *Le judaïsme palestinien au temps de Jesus-Christ* (1935, II, pp. 12-18).

by removing the limitations and sufferings of our present state, as if they could only be the result of a primitive offence. For the Bible gives no authority for accepting such a principle.

If now we must sum up the conclusions which emerge from the analysis we have made so far, we can say that Scripture shows us divine justice being exercised at two different levels. First of all, in our present life a certain rough justice can be seen at work. Its reality can be more clearly felt in proportion as we consider a more important group and a longer period of time. It is from this reality that we are bound to deduce the existence of original sin : a state of separation from God, which causes in the whole race the act of separation freely committed by sinning. This limping justice is not, moreover, the sole principle which explains the facts of man's condition : alongside it room must be found for God's plan of testing and educating his creatures. After the present life retribution will be administered according to merits, a retribution no longer crude and irregular, but enjoying a perfect delicacy, subtlety and precision. No inspired author has made an explicit application of this latter principle to original sin.

A. M. DUBARLE, O.P.

Le Saulchoir

THE DATE OF THE LAST SUPPER

The date of the Last Supper is one of the most notorious difficulties in the New Testament. The synoptic gospels describe it as a Paschal meal, while John tells us that the Jews were to eat the Pasch the next day, the day Our Lord died—they refused to enter Pilate's court lest they be defiled and so debarred from eating the Pasch. Commentators have generally been content to opt for either John's date or that of the synoptics, and then to suggest explanations of how the other dating came about. Another solution, attempting to justify both methods of dating, was to suggest that there may have been two ways of reckoning the Pasch, and that Our Lord was following one, described by the synoptics, and the 'Jews' who put Our Lord to death were following another, and it is to this that St John refers. This theory would certainly be very convenient, if true ; but it sounds rather too convenient—as if, in fact, it were invented in order to solve the difficulty. Certainly the arguments hitherto used to support it have failed to carry conviction. Recently, however, new arguments