

# Sin and Creation



# Manichean Creation Myth

**Disciples:** "Saklas and his consort and their followers [the archons] shaped Adam and Eve — but how did they manage to copy the Ambassador's image onto them, given that they weren't even alive when the image was first revealed? They never saw it themselves. So how did they stamp it onto the bodies of Adam and Eve?"

**Mani:** "The sin that spurted out from the archons, which is Matter, shot up towards the image of the Ambassador [Jesus the Splendour]. It came down to the earth, from the firmaments. When it came down to the earth, it formed the tree. It was established within the wood and formed the fruits. And when the archons fell to the ground, to the earth... it assumed them and spoke in the ruler, their leader. He says to his companions: Come! Give me your light, and I will construct for you an image after the likeness of the exalted one. What he said, they did: they gave it to him, and he constructed... The sin that spurted out... which is the Matter that saw the image of the Ambassador and that formed the tree and was established in it; afterwards it came up in the fruits... It went in to the rulers... they formed Adam and Eve after the likeness of the exalted one. Through the energy of the sin that had seen the image of the Ambassador, it went into the (rulers) through the fruits. It assumed them and they too sculpted... they begat each of them according to his destiny."

# Augustine

"Faustus glibly defends himself by saying, "We speak not of two gods, but of God and Matter." But when you ask for the meaning of *Hyle*, you find that it is in fact another god. If the Manichæans gave the name of Matter, as the ancients did, to the unformed matter which is susceptible of bodily forms, we should not accuse them of making two gods. But it is pure folly and madness to give to matter the power of forming bodies, or to deny that what has this power is God. When you give to some other being the power which belongs to the true God of making the qualities and forms, by which bodies, elements, and animals exist, according to their respective modes, whatever name you choose to give to this being, you are chargeable with making another god. There are indeed two errors in this blasphemous doctrine. In the first place, you ascribe the act of God to a being whom you are ashamed to call god; though you must call him god as long as you make him do things which only God can do. In the second place, the good things done by a good God you call bad, and ascribe to an evil god, because you feel a childish horror of whatever shocks the frailty of fallen humanity, and a childish pleasure in the opposite. So you think snakes are made by an evil being; while you consider the sun so great a good, that you believe it to be not the creature of God, but an emission from His substance. You must know that the true God, in whom, alas, you have not yet come to believe, made both the snake along with the lower creatures, and the sun along with other exalted creatures. For your only idea of evil is from the disagreeableness of some things to the fleshly sense; and your only idea of good is from sensual gratification."

- Augustine, *Contra Faustus [the Manichean]* (ch. 1-2).

# Augustine

"The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal and truly immortal. All other good things are only from Him, not of Him. For what is of Him, is Himself. And consequently if He alone is unchangeable, all things that He has made, because He has made them out of nothing, are changeable... Because He is also just, He has not put those things that He has made out of nothing on an equality with that which He begat out of Himself. Because, therefore, no good things whether great or small, through whatever gradations of things, can exist except from God; but since every nature, so far as it is nature, is good, it follows that no nature can exist save from the most high and true God: because all things even not in the highest degree good, but related to the highest good, and again, because all good things, even those of most recent origin, which are far from the highest good, can have their existence only from the highest good. Therefore every spirit, though subject to change, and every corporeal entity, is from God, and all this, having been made, is nature... we Catholic Christians worship God, from whom are all good things whether great or small; from whom is all measure great or small; from whom is all form great or small; from whom is all order great or small."

- Augustine, *De Natura Boni* (ch. 1-2).

# Augustine

“While in that sixteenth year of my age, I resided with my parents, having holiday from school for a time, the thorns of lust grew rank over my head, and there was no hand to pluck them out. My father, seeing me at the baths, perceived that I was becoming a man, and was stirred with a restless youthfulness, he, as if from this anticipating future descendants, joyfully told it to my mother; rejoicing in that intoxication wherein the world so often forgets You, its Creator, and falls in love with Your creature instead of You. My mother warned me privately, with great solicitude, not to commit fornication; but above all things never to defile another man's wife. These appeared to me but womanish counsels, which I should blush to obey. And I rushed on headlong with such blindness, that among my equals I was ashamed to be less shameless, when I heard them pluming themselves upon their disgraceful acts, yea, and glorying all the more in proportion to the greatness of their baseness; and I took pleasure in doing it, not for the pleasure's sake only, but for the praise. There was a pear-tree close to our vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was tempting neither for its color nor its flavour. To shake and rob this some of us wanton young fellows went, late one night, and carried away great loads, not to eat ourselves, but to fling to the very swine, having only eaten some of them; and to do this pleased us all the more because it was not permitted. What was it, then, that I, miserable one, so doted on in you, you theft of mine, you deed of darkness? Those pears that we stole were fair to the sight, because they were Your creation, You fairest of all, Creator of all, You good God. But it was not for them that my miserable soul lusted, for I had abundance of better, but those I plucked simply that I might steal. For, having plucked them, I threw them away, my sole gratification in them being my own sin, which I was pleased to enjoy. Thus does the soul commit fornication when she turns away from You, and seeks without You what she cannot find pure and untainted until she returns to You. I loved to perish. I loved my own error — not that for which I erred, but the error itself. Could I like that which was unlawful only because it was unlawful? Yet by myself alone I would not have done it. I loved the companionship of my accomplices with whom I did it. But as my enjoyment was not in those pears, it was in the crime itself, which the company of my fellow-sinners produced. What shall I render unto the Lord, that while my memory recalls these things my soul is not appalled at them? I will love You, O Lord, and thank You, and confess unto Your name, because You have put away from me these so wicked and nefarious acts of mine. To Your grace I attribute it, and to Your mercy, that You have melted away my sin as it were ice. For whosoever, called by You, obeyed Your voice, and shunned those things which he reads me recalling and confessing of myself, let him not despise me, who, being sick, was healed by that same Physician by whose aid it was that he was not sick, or rather was less sick.”

- Augustine, *Confessions*.

# Pelagius

“Whenever I have to speak on the subject of moral instruction and the conduct of a holy life, it is my practice first to demonstrate the power and quality of human nature and to show what it is capable of achieving, and then to go on to encourage the mind of my listener to consider the idea of different kinds of virtues, in case it may be of little or no profit to him to be summoned to pursue ends which he has perhaps assumed hitherto to be beyond his reach; for we can never enter upon the path of virtue unless we have hope as our guide and companion and if every effort expended in seeking something is nullified in effect by despair of ever finding it.”

# Pelagius

“Free will we do so own, as to say that we always stand in need of God’s help; and that as well they are in an error who say with the Manicheans that a man cannot *avoid* sin, as are they who affirm (like Jovinian) that a man *cannot* sin; for both of these take away the freedom of the will. But we say that a man always is in a state that he may sin, or may not sin, so as to own ourselves always to be of a free will.”

- Pelagius, *Letter and Confession of Faith to Innocent I.*

# Augustine

"I fear that he [Pelagius] will chiefly help those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, who, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Now, what the righteousness of God is... [Pelagius] explains by writing: 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' This righteousness of God, therefore, lies not in the commandment of the law, which excites fear, but in the aid afforded by the grace of Christ, to which alone the fear of the law, as of a schoolmaster, usefully conducts. Now, the man who understands this understands why he is a Christian. For if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. If, however, He did not die in vain, in Him only is the ungodly man justified, and to him, on believing in Him who justifies the ungodly, faith is reckoned for righteousness. For all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His blood... Therefore the nature of the human race, generated from the flesh of the one transgressor, if it is self-sufficient for fulfilling the law and for perfecting righteousness, ought to be sure of its reward, that is, of everlasting life, even if in any nation or at any former time faith in the blood of Christ was unknown to it... if this could have been done, or can still be done, then for my part I have to say what the apostle said in regard to the law: 'Then Christ died in vain.' If, however, Christ did not die in vain, then human nature cannot by any means be justified and redeemed from God's most righteous wrath — in a word, from punishment — except by faith and the sacrament of the blood of Christ."

- Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*.

# Augustine

“Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For pride is the beginning of sin. And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself. This falling away is spontaneous; for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself, and so become frigid and benighted... The wicked deed — that is to say, the transgression of eating the forbidden fruit — was committed by persons who were already wicked. That evil fruit could be brought forth only by a corrupt tree. But that the tree was evil was not the result of nature; for certainly it could become so only by the vice of the will, and vice is contrary to nature... But man did not so fall away as to become absolutely nothing; but being turned towards himself, his being became more contracted than it was when he clave to Him who supremely is.”

- Augustine, *The City of God* (Book 14).

# Augustine

"Man's nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin; but that nature of man in which every one is born from Adam, now wants the Physician, because it is not sound. All good qualities, no doubt, which it still possesses in its make, life, senses, intellect, it has of the Most High God, its Creator and Maker. But the flaw, which darkens and weakens all those natural goods ... it has not contracted from its blameless Creator — but from that original sin, which it committed by free will. Accordingly, criminal nature has its part in most righteous punishment. ...

The grace, however, of Christ, without which neither infants nor adults can be saved, is not rendered for any merits, but is given gratis ... they, who are not liberated through grace ... are indeed justly condemned; because they are not without sin, either that which they have derived from their birth, or that which they have added from their own misconduct. ...

The entire mass, therefore, incurs penalty and if the deserved punishment of condemnation were rendered to all, it would without doubt be righteously rendered. They, therefore, who are delivered therefrom by grace are called, not vessels of their own merits, but 'vessels of mercy.' ... Who could be so madly insane as to fail to give ineffable thanks to the Mercy which liberates whom it would? The man who correctly appreciated the whole subject could not possibly blame the justice of God in wholly condemning all men whatsoever."

- Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*.

# Gustavo Gutierrez

"In the liberation approach sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality—asserted just enough to necessitate 'spiritual' redemption which does not challenge the order in which we live. Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of fellowship and love in relationships among persons, the breach of friendship with God and with other persons, and, therefore, an interior, personal fracture. When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered. This is the Biblical notion that Jose Maria Gonzalez Ruiz calls the 'hamartiosphere,' the sphere of sin: 'a kind of parameter or structure which objectively conditions the progress of human history itself.' Moreover, sin does not appear as an afterthought, something which one has to mention so as not to stray from tradition or leave oneself open to attack. Nor is this a matter of escape into a fleshless spiritualism. Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of humans by humans, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation. . . . It cannot be encountered in itself, but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations. It is impossible to understand the concrete manifestations without understanding the underlying basis and vice versa. Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation."

- Gustavo Gutierrez, *Liberation Theology*.

# Pope Francis

“The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth, to “till it and keep it”. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual. It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature...

Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for 'inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage', we are called to acknowledge 'our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation.' He has repeatedly stated this firmly and persuasively, challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation: 'For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins.' For 'to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.'"

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*.