

# Sin and Creation



# Gnosticism

“Wisdom (Sophia) began to think for herself. She used the thinking of the Invisible Spirit. She intended to create a being from herself. To do so without the consent of the Spirit, who did not approve. Without the knowledge of her partner She brought it into being. Sophia saw what her desire produced. It was a dragon with a lion’s head and eyes flashing lightning bolts. She cast him far from her, outside of the realm of the immortal beings So that they could not see him. Sophia surrounded him with a brilliant cloud, put a throne in the center part of the cloud so that no one would see it. She named him Yaldabaoth. Yaldabaoth is the chief ruler. He took great Power from his mother, left her, and moved away from his birthplace. He assumed, command, created realms for himself with a brilliant flame that continues to exist even now. This dim ruler is named Yaldabaoth. He is blasphemous through his thoughtlessness. He said “I am God, and there is no God but me!” since he didn’t know where his own Power originated. Yaldabaoth modeled his creation on the pattern of the original realms above him (not that he had ever seen the indestructible ones but, the power in him, deriving from his mother, made him aware of the pattern of the cosmos above). When he gazed upon his creation surrounding him He said to his host of demons: “I am a jealous God and there is no God but me!” His mother she had become aware that she now lacked light for her brightness had dimmed. When she saw the evil that had taken place and the theft of light that her son had committed she repented and was forgiven and was elevated above her son.”

- *Apocryphon of John* [c. 185].

# Gnosticism

That was how Adam was revealed with a shadow of the light from the mother Sophia. His mental abilities were far greater than those of his creators. They gazed upward and saw his exalted mental capability and they were afraid of him. The host of rulers plotted together, They mixed fire and earth and water together with four blazing winds and they melded them together in great turbulence. Adam was brought into the shadow of death. And they made him anew this time from Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, Matter, Darkness, Desire. This all became a tomb, a new kind of body. Those thieves bound the man in it, enchained him in forgetfulness, made him subject to dying.

The rulers took the man and put him into paradise. They told him to eat freely. Their food is bitter; their beauty is corrupt. Their food is deceit; their trees are ungodliness. Their fruit is poison. Their promise is death.

But the light was hidden in the tree of Knowledge. I appeared in the garden in the shape of an eagle. I bade them eat from the tree of knowledge!

- *Apocryphon of John* [c. 185].

# Irenaeus

“There is therefore one God, who by the Word and Wisdom created and arranged all things; but this is the Creator who has granted this world to the human race, and who, as regards His greatness, is indeed unknown to all who have been made by Him (for no man has searched out His height, either among the ancients who have gone to their rest, or any of those who are now alive); but as regards His love, He is always known through Him by whose means He ordained all things. Now this is His Word [Logos], our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times was made a man among men, that He might join the end to the beginning, that is, man to God. Wherefore the prophets, receiving the prophetic gift from the same Word, announced His advent according to the flesh, by which the blending and communion of God and man took place according to the good pleasure of the Father, the Word of God foretelling from the beginning that God should be seen by men, and hold converse with them upon earth, should confer with them, and should be present with His own creation, saving it, and becoming capable of being perceived by it, and freeing us from the hands of all that hate us, that is, from every spirit of wickedness; and causing us to serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days, in order that man, having embraced the Spirit of God, might pass into the glory of the Father.”

- *Against Heresies* [180].

# Irenaeus

“According to them, the Word did not originally become flesh. For they maintain that the Saviour assumed an animal body, formed in accordance with a special dispensation by an unspeakable providence, so as to become visible and palpable. But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God became.”

- *Against Heresies* [180].

# Irenaeus

“God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God. We do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God, whom also the apostle terms spiritual, they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual.”

- *Against Heresies* [180].



# Neo-Platonism

“And indeed if the divine did not exist, the transcendently beautiful, in a beauty beyond all thought, what could be lovelier than the things we see? Certainly no reproach can rightly be brought against this world save only that it is not That. Let us, then, make a mental picture of our universe: each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; yet all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity so that whatever comes into view shall show as if it were the surface of the orb over all, bringing immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the sun and of all the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe.”

- Plotinus, *Enneads*, IX [c. 260]

# Neo-Platonism

“The Good is Cause of the celestial movements in their commencements and terminations, of their not increasing, not diminishing, and completely changeless, course, and of the noiseless movements, if one may so speak, of the vast celestial transit, and of the astral orders, and the beauties and lights, and stabilities, and the progressive swift motion of certain stars, and of the periodical return of the two luminaries, which the Oracles call “great,” from the same to the same quarter, after which our days and nights being marked, and months and years being measured, mark and number and arrange and comprehend the circular movements of time and things temporal. But, what would any one say of the very ray of the sun? For the light is from the Good, and an image of the Goodness, wherefore also the Good is celebrated under the name of Light; as in a portrait the original is manifested. For, as the goodness of the Deity, beyond all, permeates from the highest and most honoured substances even to the lowest, and yet is above all, neither the foremost outstripping its superiority, nor the things below eluding its grasp, but it both enlightens all that are capable, and forms and enlivens, and grasps, and perfects, and is measure of things existing, and age, and number, and order, and grasp, and cause, and end; so, too, the brilliant likeness of the Divine Goodness, this our great sun, wholly bright and ever luminous, as a most distant echo of the Good, both enlightens whatever is capable of participating in it, and possesses the light in the highest degree of purity, unfolding to the visible universe, above and beneath, the splendours of its own rays, and if anything does not participate in them, this is not owing to the inertness or deficiency of its distribution of light, but is owing to the inaptitude for light-reception of the things which do not unfold themselves for the participation of light. No doubt the ray passing over many things in such condition, enlightens the things after them, and there is no visible thing which it does not reach, with the surpassing greatness of its own splendour. Further also, it contributes to the generation of sensible bodies, and moves them to life, and nourishes, and increases, and perfects, and purifies and renews.”

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* [c. 480 CE]



# 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*.

# 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

"Evil, then, which I sought whence it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance, and so a chief good, or a corruptible substance, which unless it were good it could not be corrupted. I perceived, therefore, and it was made clear to me, that Thou made all things good, nor is there any substance at all that was not made by You; and because all that You have made are not equal, therefore all things are; because individually they are good, and altogether very good, because our God made all things very good.."

- Augustine, *Confessions* (book 7).

How does Augustinian theology of Creation differ from Manichean?



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# Augustine

"The sin was a despising of the authority of God — who had created man; who had made him in His own image; who had set him above the other animals; who had placed him in Paradise; who had enriched him with abundance of every kind and of safety; who had laid upon him neither many, nor great, nor difficult commandments, but, in order to make a wholesome obedience easy to him, had given him a single very brief and very light precept by which He reminded that creature (whose service was to be free) that He was Lord."

- Augustine, *City of God*, 12.

# Augustine

"We have already stated in the preceding books that God, desiring not only that the human race might be able by their similarity of nature to associate with one another, but also that they might be bound together in harmony and peace by the ties of relationship, was pleased to derive all men from one individual, and created man with such a nature that the members of the race should not have died, had not the two first (of whom the one was created out of nothing, and the other out of him) merited this by their disobedience; for by them so great a sin was committed, that by it the human nature was altered for the worse, and was transmitted also to their posterity, liable to sin and subject to death. And the kingdom of death so reigned over men, that the deserved penalty of sin would have hurled all headlong even into the second death, of which there is no end, had not the undeserved grace of God saved some therefrom."

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# 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 for free ... 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.'."

- Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*.



# Augustine

"Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake."

- Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*.

Is *Amor Inordinatus* a good explanation for the current ecological crisis?



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# 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.”

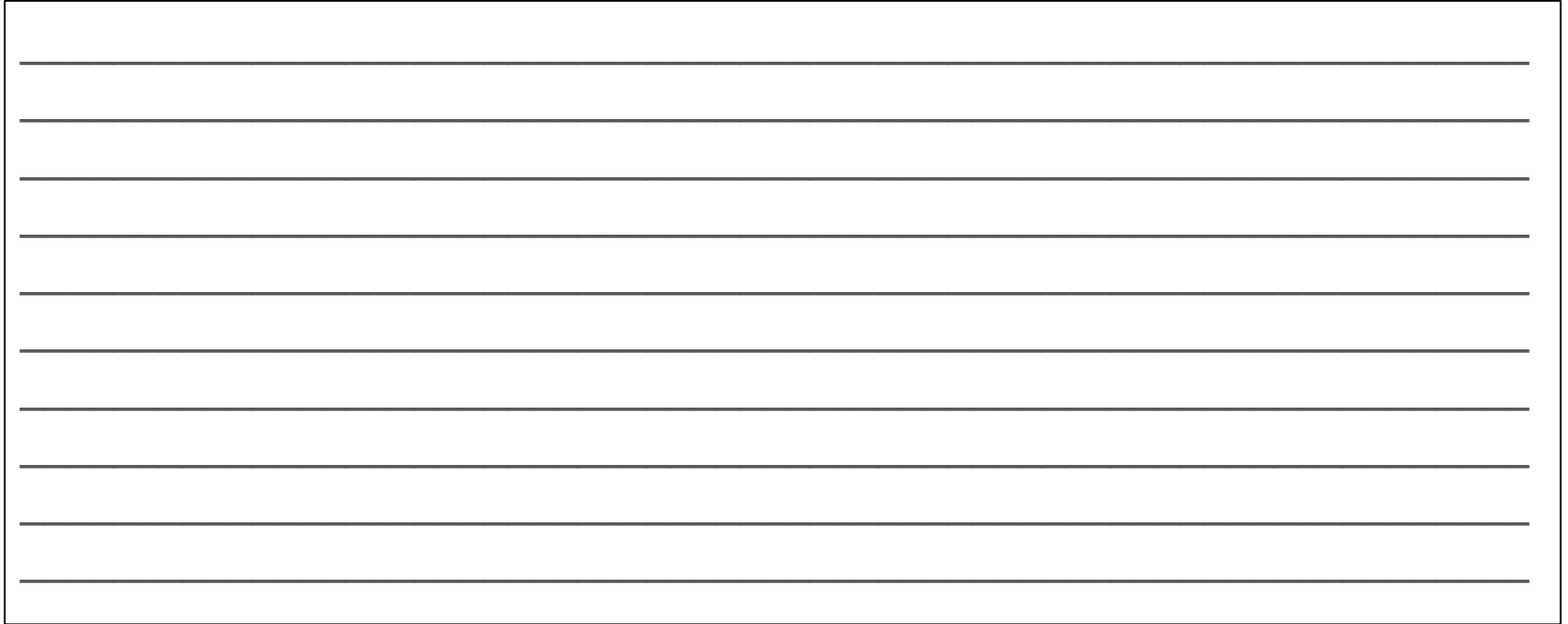
- Pelagius, *Letter and Confession of Faith to Innocent I.*

# 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... 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*.

How is Augustine's account of sin different from Pelagius?



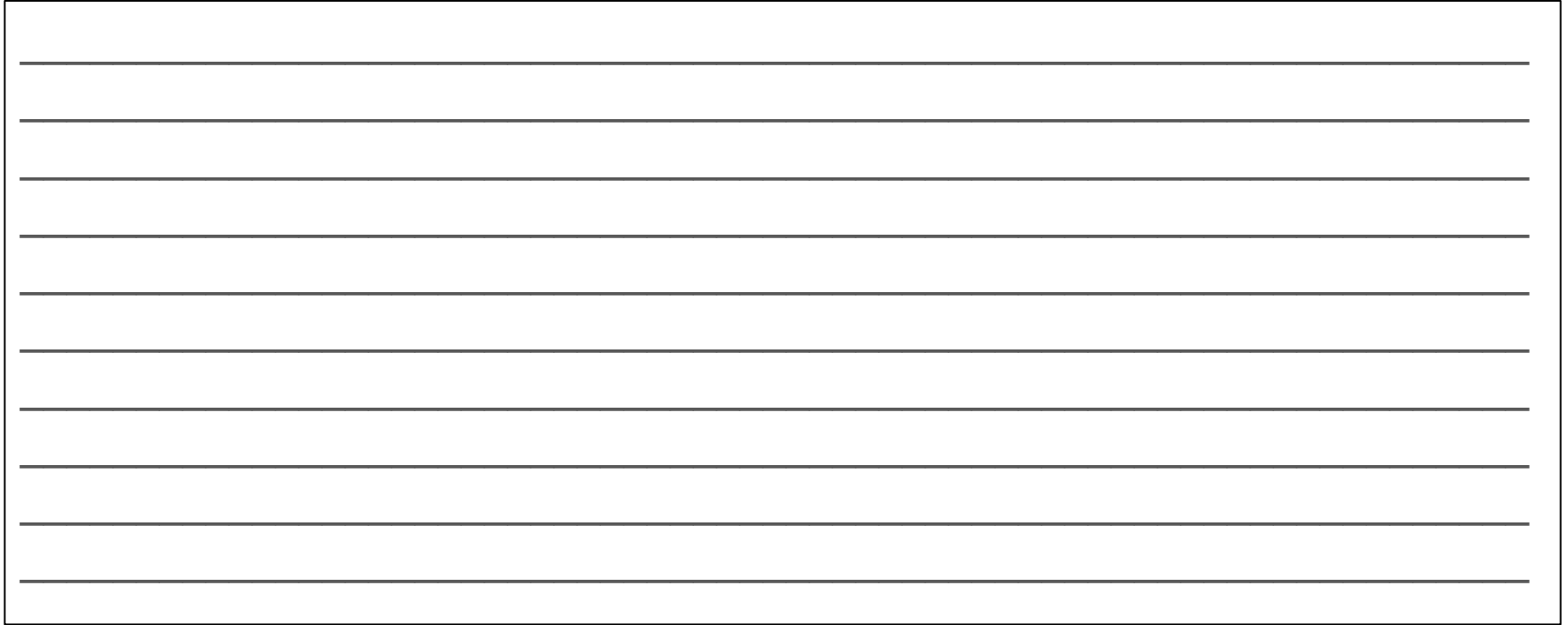
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# Gustavo Gutierrez

"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*.

What is 'social sin' and how does it build on Augustine's ideas?



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# 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'*.