

NOBODY TALKS ABOUT SIN ANYMORE*

In order to understand the general conception of the Christian religious system, and to apply it to our salvation, we cannot refrain from mentioning an essential chapter of this history of the objective and existential relationship between man and God; and this vast and tremendous chapter is entitled sin.

We cannot disregard this tragic fact, which starts from the initial ruin of mankind, original sin, and has its repercussions in the whole immense and successive network of human misfortunes and of our fatal responsibilities, which are our personal sins, if we wish to understand something of Christ's mission and of the economy of salvation he set up, and if we want to participate in it ourselves. We cannot enter the prayerful and sacramental sanctuary of the liturgy, especially when it celebrates not just the memory of the evangelical account of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord, but the fulfilment of the mystery of redemption, in which all mankind is interested, unless we have in our minds the antithesis of this drama, which is sin. Sin is the negative crux of this doctrine and this lasting salvific intervention, which makes us acclaim Christ liberator and makes us aware of our fate, miserable to begin with, and then blissful when we are associated with the paschal mystery.

Sin: today it is a word passed over in silence. The mentality of our times is loath not only to consider sin for what it is, but even to speak about it. This word seems to have gone out of use, as if it were unseemly, in bad taste. And it is understandable why. The notion of sin involves two other realities, with which modern man does not wish to concern himself.

The first one is a transcendent Reality, absolute, living, omnipresent, mysterious, but undeniable: God; God the creator, whose creatures we are. Whether we like it or not, "it is in him

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(God) we live and move and have our being", St. Paul says in his speech at the Areopagus (Acts 17:28). We owe God everything: being, life, freedom, conscience, and therefore our obedience, the condition of order, our dignity and our real welfare; God who is love, watching over us, immanent, inviting us to the paternal-filial conversation of his communion, his supernatural kingdom.

The second is a subjective reality, connected with our person, a metaphysico-moral reality; that is, the inalienable relationship of our actions with God, present, omniscient, and examining our free choice. Every free and conscious action of ours has this value of choice in conformity or not with the law, with the love of God, and our yes, or no is transcribed in Him, so to speak, is recorded in Him. This no is sin. It is suicide.

Since sin is not only a personal defect of ours, but an interpersonal offence, which begins with us and arrives at God, it is not merely a lack of legality in the human order, an offence against society, or against our inner moral logic; it is a fatal snapping of the vital, objective bond that unites us with the one supreme source of life, which is God. With this first deadly consequence: that we, who are capable, by virtue of the gift of freedom, which makes man "like unto God" (cf. Par. I. 105), of penetrating that offence, that break, and with such facility, are no longer capable of putting it right, by ourselves (cf. Jn. 15:5). We are capable of ruining ourselves, not of saving ourselves. This makes us meditate on the extent of our responsibility. The act becomes a state; a state of death.

It is terrible. Sin brings with us a curse, which would be an irreparable condemnation, if God Himself had not taken the initiative to help us, revealing his omnipotence in kindness and mercy. This is marvellous. This is redemption, the supreme liberation. A wonderful liturgico-theological prayer says: "Oh God, who manifest your omnipotence most of all with forgiveness and mercy..." (Collect on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, in the old Missal).

The idolatry of contemporary humanism, which denies, or neglects our relationship with God, denies or neglects the existence of sin. The result is a crazy ethics. Crazy with optimism, which tends to make everything permissible if it is pleasant or profitable, and crazy with pessimism, which takes from life its

deep significance, derived from the transcendent distinction between good and evil, and abases it in a final vision of anguish and desperate fatuousness.

Christianity on the contrary, which sharpens so much the awareness of sin, listening to the peerless lesson of the Divine Master (cf. the Sermon on the Mount), takes advantage of this to initiate man in the sense of perfection, and consoles him with the gift of spiritual energy, grace, which makes him capable of aiming at it and reaching it. But above all it carries out its inexhaustible miracle of God's forgiveness, that is, the remission of sins, which implies the resurrection of the soul in participation in the life and love of the kingdom of God.

Let us restore in ourselves the right awareness of sin, which is not frightening, or weakening, but manly and Christian. The awareness of good will grow in opposition to the awareness of evil. The sense of responsibility will grow, rising from inner moral judgement and widening to the sense of our duties, personal, social and religious. Our need of Christ will grow, Christ, the healer of our miseries, the Redeemer and the victim of our evil, the conqueror of sin and of death, he who made his pain and his cross the price of our redemption and our salvation.

With our Apostolic Blessing.

TRIBUTE TO MSGR. JOVELLANOS

"Fifty years ago, a young priest, Fr. Jose N. Jovellanos, came to Tondo to be its parish priest. It was a significant year, 1919, for it marked the beginning of Tondo's spiritual progress which earned for this earstwhile forsaken district the reputation of being the largest parish in the world. The name Jovellanos grew with Tondo. . . . And after fifty years of this mutual belongingness, we can now truly say that Jovellanos is Tondo, and Tondo is Jovellanos."

(Foreword, 50 Pastoral Years in Tondo)