



Elevation to the Supernatural Order & Original Sin

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 374-421.
Compendium of the Catechism of the
Catholic Church, 72-78.*

Before the Fall

The first man was created good & established in friendship with his Creator, in harmony with himself & with the creation around him.

Adam & Eve were in a state of

- **Holiness:** they had the possibility of sharing in God's divine life (the supernatural life) through the proper use of their freedom.
- **Original justice:** the inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man & woman, & finally the harmony between the first couple & all creation. As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die.
- The "mastery" over the world that God offered man from the beginning was realized above all within man himself: *self-mastery*. The first man was unimpaired & ordered in his whole being because he was free from the triple concupiscence that subjugates him to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, & self-assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason.

Adam and Eve were *elevated* to this state. It was a *gift* that was not a requirement of human nature, & unachievable by our natural powers alone.

From Creation humankind were intended to be elevated to the supernatural life. We were chosen in Christ '*before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy & blameless before him*' (Eph 1:4). The state of original justice is lost with the original sin.

These gifts were intended to be transmitted to their descendants.





The purpose for which humankind was created was friendship with God, but the first human couple rebelled & rejected communion with their Creator. This is "original sin," also called the "fall," because they had previously been elevated to intimacy with God. However, when they lost God's friendship, they were not reduced to nothingness, but continued to be human, created beings.

The Fall

God is infinitely good & all his works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: & above all to the question of moral evil.

Where does evil come from? "I sought whence evil comes & there was no solution." (St. Augustine)

The mystery of evil is clarified only in the light of the mystery of our religion. The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested the extent of evil & the superabundance of grace. We must approach the question of the origin of evil by fixing the eyes of our faith on him who alone is its conqueror. (CCC, 385).



The Temptation of Adam & Eve, Michelangelo, 1512.



Krieg Barrie

Sin: Rejection of God, Abuse of Freedom

Sin is present in human history; attempts to ignore it or call it something else are futile. To try to understand what sin is, one must first recognize the profound relation of man to God, for only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity.

Sin is humanity's rejection of God & opposition to him. (CCC, 386)

The light of divine Revelation clarifies the reality of sin. Without Revelation we cannot recognize sin clearly & are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure.

Knowing God's plan for man allows us to grasp that

sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another. (CCC, 387)

Original Sin: An Essential Truth of the Faith

The reality of sin is reflected in the Old Testament.

The People of God tried to understand the human condition in the light of the fall narrated in *Genesis*, but they could not grasp its ultimate meaning, which is revealed only in the death & Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin. Christ is the Redeemer.

The doctrine of original sin is the "reverse side" of the Good News that Jesus is the Saviour, that all need salvation & that salvation is offered to all through Christ. We cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.

How to read the account of the fall

The account of the fall in *Genesis* 3 uses figurative language to affirm a deed that took place at the beginning of human history. The whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents.



The Fall of the Angels

Behind the disobedient choice of Adam & Eve lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God. Scripture & the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil". The serpent represents Satan.

The devil & the other demons were created naturally good angels by God, but became evil by their own doing. Their "fall" was a free choice of these spirits, who radically & irrevocably rejected God & his reign. That rebellion is reflected in the tempter's words to our first parents: "You will be like God." The devil is "a liar & the father of lies" (*Jn 8:44*). (CCC, 391-392)

The irrevocable character of their choice, not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, makes the angels' sin unforgivable. There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death. (CCC, 393)

Scripture witnesses to the disastrous influence of the devil who even tried to turn Jesus from the mission received from his Father. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." The gravest of these works was the seduction that led man to disobey God. (CCC, 394)

Satan's power is not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although his power is not infinite, & is very inferior to God's power, it truly causes serious injuries to each person & to society.

Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God & his kingdom in Christ Jesus, & although his action may cause grave injuries - of a spiritual nature &, indirectly, even of a physical nature - to each man & to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength & gentleness guides human & cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him." (CCC, 395) The fact that God allows diabolical activity does not mean that it ceases to be a mystery.

The Fall of the Angels, Neapolitan, Ivory, 1700.



Original Sin: Freedom Put to the Test

- God created man in his image & established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can only live this friendship freely, & it involves recognizing who we are in relation to God.
- The prohibition against eating "of the tree of the knowledge of good & evil" spells this out: "for on the day that you eat of it, you shall die."
- The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" represents the fact that, as creatures, we are limited, something we must freely recognize & respect with trust. We are dependent on the Creator. (CCC, 396)



The First Sin

- With the story of man's disobeying the command not to eat fruit from the forbidden tree, Sacred Scripture teaches that, tempted by Satan, at the beginning of history our first parents rebelled against God, disobeying him and giving way to the temptation of wanting "to be like gods." In consequence, they received God's punishment, *losing* in great part the gifts with which they had been endowed, and they were expelled from paradise.
- Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God. All sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness. (CCC, 397)
- Man preferred himself to God and scorned him. He chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good. Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully "divinized" by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to "be like God", but "without God, before God, and not in accordance with God". (CCC, 398)



The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, Benjamin West, 1791.

Consequences of Original Sin

Adam & Eve lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image, that of a God jealous of his prerogatives. (CCC, 399)

Consequences: (Gn 3)

- Loss of the supernatural gifts (original holiness), loss of sanctifying grace, participation in the divine life (CCC, 398-399)
- Loss of the Preternatural gifts (original justice), gifts that perfect nature on a natural level (immortality, impassibility & self-mastery). (CCC, 376)
- Damage to human nature (*not* essential corruption).
- The harmony in which they had found themselves is now destroyed:
 - Harmony within themselves: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered
 - Harmony between themselves: the union of man & woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations marked by lust & domination
 - Harmony with creation: visible creation has become alien & hostile to man. Creation is now subject "to its bondage to decay".
 - Suffering & death enter the world (CCC, 399-400).

After the first sin, the world is virtually inundated by sin.

- There is Cain's murder of his brother Abel & the universal corruption which follows.
- Sin frequently manifests itself in the history of Israel, especially as infidelity to the God of the Covenant & as transgression of the Law of Moses
- Even after Christ's atonement, sin raises its head in countless ways among Christians. Scripture & the Tradition recall the presence & universality of sin. (CCC, 401).



The Transmission of Original Sin to Humankind

We are all born afflicted with original sin, 'the death of the soul'. This provides a context for understanding the misery which oppresses humankind & the inclination to evil, & death. This is why the Church baptizes children for the remission of sins even though they have not committed any personal sins. (CCC, 403)

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants?

The transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. We do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human beings. Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness & justice.

Original sin is called "sin" in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted", not "committed", a state, not an act. It is a *deprivation* of original holiness and justice. (CCC, 404-405)

Human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded: subject to ignorance, suffering & the dominion of death, & inclined to sin (concupiscence).

The universality of original sin is matched by the universality of salvation in Christ (CCC, 402) Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin & turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened & inclined to evil, persist & summon us to spiritual battle. (CCC, 405)



The Harrowing of Hell, Duccio, 1308-1311.



The Conversion of St. Augustine, Fra Angelico, c. 1430.

Two Errors about Original Sin

Pelagius: man could lead a morally good life by the natural power of free will & without the help of God's grace. This reduces the influence of Adam's fault to bad example.

Protestant Reformers: original sin has radically perverted man & destroyed his freedom: human nature is corrupted.

The Church clarified the meaning of Revelation on original sin especially at the Second Council of Orange (529) & the Council of Trent (1546).

A Hard Battle. . .



By our first parents' sin, the devil has acquired a certain domination over man, even though man remains free. (CCC, 407)

Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action & morals.

The consequences of original sin & of all personal sins put the world as a whole in the condition described by St. John's as "the sin of the world". This expression also refers to the negative influence exerted on people by communal situations & social structures that are the fruit of men's sins.

This dramatic situation of the whole world which is in the power of the devil makes man's life a battle:

The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, & it is at great cost to himself, & aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity. (CCC, 409)

"You Did Not Abandon Him to the Power of Death": The Protogospel

After the fall, man was not abandoned by God. God calls him & in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil & his restoration from his fall. This passage in Genesis is called the *Protoevangelium* ("first gospel"): the first announcement of the Messiah & Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent & the Woman, & of the final victory of a descendant of hers.

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3: 14-15)

Christian tradition sees in this passage an announcement of the "New Adam" who "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross", making amends superabundantly for the disobedience, of Adam.

Fathers & Doctors of the Church have seen the woman as Mary, the mother of Christ, the "new Eve". (CCC, 410-411)



“The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.” (St Irenaeus)



Why Didn't God Just Prevent Adam & Eve From Sinning?

St. Leo the Great:

Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away.

St. Thomas Aquinas:

There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good. Thus St. Paul says, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more'; and the Exsultet sings, 'O happy fault,. . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!'"





Some Practical Consequences

- Awareness of both the greatness of being children of God & the wretchedness of our sinful condition. This:
 - a) **Keeps us from falling into naïve optimism or hopeless pessimism.** Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action & morals (CCC, 407).
 - b) **Gives us serene trust in God,** who does not abandon those he has created, but always forgives & leads everything to goodness, even in the midst of adversities.
 - c) **Gives rise to an attitude of profound humility,** which leads us to acknowledge our own sins without surprise, & to be sorry for them because they are offences against God, rather than because they are defect in ourselves.
 - d) **Helps us to distinguish what is proper to human nature as such, from what is a consequence of the wound of sin in our nature.** After sin, not everything we experience as spontaneous is good. Human life entails a battle: we have to struggle in order to behave in a way that is both human and Christian (CCC, 409).

Christians who struggle to avoid sin do not lose anything that makes life good & beautiful. There is a widespread idea that it is necessary for people to do evil in order to experience their own autonomy, since a life without sin would be boring. In contrast, we see the figure of Mary who shows us that a life completely dedicated to God, far from being boring, becomes an adventure filled with infinite surprises.