

***What a Modern Catholic Believes about Sin.* John Shea. Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 197?.**

Chapter ONE: The Context of Sin

Two common presuppositions must be questioned:

1. That sin is real for people;
2. That sin and moral evil are identical concepts.

Sin is a religious symbol that finds its truth and meaning within the framework of the entire Christian story.

Sin is not the central concept.

Christian symbols must in some way reflect the prevailing cultural mood and embody the spirit of the age.

Adjunct: Neil Hamilton's '*convictional structure*' of a culture:

1. Who controls history?
2. Is reality fixed or in the process of becoming?
3. Where is primary reality?
4. Is man able to cope with his own situation?
5. What is the major consideration in the formation of ethics?

Humanism: the spirit of our age is a discovery of man.

Convictional structure: men today are seeking in their most profound experiences the inclinations and influences that unfold into the mystery of God.

The concern is with man and with God insofar as He enters man's experience.

The Christian symbolic vision of reality must respond to the spirit of our age.

The Christian story must once again serve man, become revelation for him, illuminate his existence, and mobilize him for action.

The religious reality of sin is part of this total task of reinterpretation.

Chapter TWO: God, Man, Sin

Mutuality and relatedness of God and man (Berdyayev: "Godmanhood").

1. Man draws from his ordinary experience the images that attempt to convey the God-experience.
2. The point of God's entry into the definition of man is the key to understanding man in his wholeness (a call to further hominization_.

The realization of man as 'Godmanhood' must precede the realization of the horror of sin.

The terror of sin is not that it is disobedience to a divine command but that it is a subtle form of *self-destruction*.

Model: not Prometheus, but *Narcissus*.

The God/man relationship is one of *call-response*: “The tension native to human existence between the transcendent God and unfinished man is the groundwork for understanding sin.”

1. The presence of God is a terrifying invitation to man’s freedom.

Freedom is both man’s dread and his dignity.

2. How God acts toward men is revealed in Jesus:

- ◆ Love;
- ◆ Dialogue;
- ◆ Truth.

SIN:

1. *Sidetracking* the call of God.

Why? – Because with freedom comes responsibility.

How? – Handing freedom over to custom and religion.

Cf. Kazantzakis, Kierkegaard.

2. *Contradicting* the call of God.

Human love (cf. Rollo May: sex, eros, friendship, agape).

- ◆ Contradiction love (agape) = *manipulation*.
- ◆ Contradicting dialogue = *domination*.
- ◆ Contradicting truth = *deception* (both of self and of others).

Man’s stolidity in manipulation, domination, and deceit is met by *God’s call* to love, dialogic power, and truth.

Deanness to call: pride / sloth.

- ◆ Pride: a man inconspicuously makes himself his prime concern.
- ◆ Sloth: indifference, routine.

“The humanistic spirit reveals God and man striving together for the humanization of the world. Sin is dehumanization, God is the transcendent call at the heart of human life to love, to dialogic power, and to truth. Sin dehumanizes by manipulating, dominating, or deceiving. The logic of uninterrupted sin is that man grows deaf to the call of God. Frozen in pride or sloth he ceases to struggle. He has lost contact with the source of his humanity. Sin has achieved its goal. Man is a thing.”

Chapter THREE: Guilt, Sin, Shame

The modern anxiety of meaninglessness (as Luther's anxiety of guilt) saps man's energy, frustrates his soul, convicts him of radical weakness.

"God is the power which affirms man in spite of his negativities and gives him the courage to be."

Lutheran tradition = God of transcendent acceptance.

The Catholic tradition arrived at an image of man in terms of weakness (fearful, dependent, guilty) by hedging him in with so many laws binding under sin that the atmosphere of guilt was as suffocating as in the Protestant tradition.

But any image of man that concentrates on his guilt fails to appreciate both the humanistic spirit of our age and dynamic of salvation which Jesus introduced.

With Jesus, guilt is taken up and surpassed in the forgiving and challenging relationship of God and man.

The guilt which confronts the Christian always unfolds into God's definitive affirmation of life in the resurrection of Jesus – guilt never stands alone; it must always confront hope.

True guilt is closely tied to a man's freedom and his sense of identity.

"Guilt is the special form of anxiety experienced by humans-in-society, the warning tension of life principles violated, of conditions of human social existence transgressed, of sociospiritual reality ignored or affronted, of God alienated, of self being destroyed" (Edward Stein).

Whereas guilt accompanies transgression, *shame* accompanies *failure*.

Overcoming guilt leads to moral righteousness.

Transcending shame brings self-awareness, freedom, a sense of identity.

"The modern Catholic is increasingly aware that he and God and other men are united in common definition and destiny. They share a common project. When a man sins and ruptures this unity, it concerns him as a whole person. He feels the failure to respond and act in unison with God and his neighbor. This is not 'outside' him or only in his 'spiritual' life. It violates the dialogic depths of who he is, shames him, and reveals to him the contours of his true existence. The overcoming of this shame is homecoming, reidentification, reunion."

Chapter FOUR: Evil, Freedom, Sin

The symbolism of the scapegoat cuts two ways and witnesses to a human dilemma:

1. Man yearns to be innocent and in his yearning he scapegoats.
2. Yet in the very act of scapegoating he incurs the guilt of burdening another with sins of his own.

Paradox: Man cannot live with evil, nor can he rid himself of it.

The problem of evil powerfully influences man's understanding of reality.

For the Hebrews, the drive to explain evil led to belief in a future world.

For many men today the consciousness of evil is so overwhelming that the only honest explanation is an absurd world.