

Bondage and Freedom

by Murala Marianus Jagadish, SJ

Have we ever reflected on original sin and salvation? It looks like we are guilty because Adam and Eve committed sin, and we are saved because Jesus died on the cross! According to the above statement there is no personal responsibility either in the original sin or in the salvation, whereas spiritual liberation is a *sādhana* (continued practice) by an individual through which s/he gains spiritual liberation or enlightenment. We too recite “bumper-sticker slogans” without deeper reflection and without applying ourselves to the faith. I have given some consideration to this to see whether my belief as a Catholic Christian is like that of the above statement. The whole reflection is the outcome of my reflection based on the scriptural narration of original sin and salvation in Jesus Christ.

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Original Sin, Bondage

In Galatians 5:1 we read “Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery.”¹ The whole spirituality of sin and salvation is based on two concepts, namely the “yoke of slavery” (“yoke of bondage” in the King James Version) and “freedom.” In other words, “sin” is bondage and “salvation” is freedom. We need to understand these concepts of bondage and freedom to consciously experience both.

How does sin become bondage? Do we experience this bondage in day-to-day life? These are some of the questions that arise. When Jesus said, “the truth shall make you free,” the Jews objected by saying, “We are free, not slaves”:

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: “If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered, “We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, ‘You will be set free?’” Jesus replied: “In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave.” (Jn 8:31-34).

In the light of this statement of Jesus that sin is slavery and his “word” (when it finds home within oneself) freedom, we shall reflect on sin in general and salvation. The bondage (slavery) is not by someone outside of us but by our own nature. To elucidate this point I recall the following anecdote which I read somewhere:

¹ All Biblical passages are from *The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) unless otherwise noted. Those indicating King James Version are from the Cambridge 1769 edition.

Once a king wanted to be free and requested the holy monk, who was present in his court, to show him the way. The monk went to a pillar and embracing it he began to cry “free me, free me.” All who were present in the court laughed and the king said, “O holy man, nobody is binding you; you free yourself.” The monk said, “That, precisely is my point, your majesty; nobody is binding you, free yourself.”²

The experience of bondage is within the self of everyone because it is our nature. This nature has been explained as “habit” of the soul by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Original Sin According to St. Thomas Aquinas

There are two kinds of habit:

Habit is twofold. The first is a habit whereby power is inclined to an act: thus science and virtue are called habits. In this way original sin is not a habit. The second kind of habit is the disposition of a complex nature, whereby that nature is well or ill-disposed to something, chiefly when such a disposition has become like a second nature, as in the case of sickness or health. In this sense original sin is a habit.³

“Habit” here means the inherent nature of the soul and its disposition. We are concerned with this “disposition” which is the outcome of original sin. This essay is an attempt to make that nature clear for us to understand the implications of the “story” of original sin.

Original Sin in the Bible

There are certain questions that can be answered by explanation and there are others that can be answered through experience. The question regarding ultimate truth is something to be understood by one with the experience. There is an anecdote regarding attaining truth:

“What is the way to attain the truth?” asked a disciple. “Through silence” the Master replied. After some thought he said, “The next best thing to attain truth is through a story.”

Original sin is the truth; everyone, irrespective of creed, feels two movements within oneself. One is towards the base, worldly, sensual pleasures, and the other is towards lofty, heavenly, spiritual joy. Both are towards happiness (pleasure); they may differ in degrees—one bodily and momentary, and the other an indefinable, lasting, inner experience. The awareness of these movements itself is liberative.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola calls these movements the movements of the spirits and gives certain “rules” to discern (distinguish between) the spirits. Discernment is useful for ascertaining spiritual joy by distinguishing the movement of the spirits. There are fourteen rules. Ignatius differentiates between sensual pleasure and inner joy and then describes “consolation” and “desolation” (roughly put, these terms mean happiness and sadness) and how the “spirits” inspire a person during moments of consolation and desolation. Ignatius gives us some similes to understand the ways of the spirits.⁴ It is told in a crude Telugu proverb, the meaning of which goes something like, “Even if you climb the palm tree your bottom will be facing the earth.” The “climbing up” part is one kind of spirit (urge within) which seeks the spiritual joy whereas the “facing down” indicates the earthly pleasures.

² Anecdotes in *italics* denote those that come from my memory and for which I have no citation.

³ “Questions 82. Original Sin, as to its Essence,” <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2082.htm>

⁴ George E. Ganss, SJ, trans., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 93-96.

The Bible tells us the story of the truth, namely, the two “pulls,” or two “natures.” According to the second creation story (Gn 2:4-25), God makes human beings from the earth (“soil” in the New Jerusalem Bible and “dust” in the King James Version)⁵ and breathes His Spirit into them. The “soil” part represents earthly desires and the “Spirit” heavenly or spiritual desires. These aspects represent the two pulls, the two spirits within us. This is made clear by St. Paul when he says,

I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate. While I am acting as I do not want to, I still acknowledge the Law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me. And really, I know of nothing good living in me—in my natural self, that is—for though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want—that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me. So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God’s law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body (Rom 7:15-23).

There are particular aspects of the truth with regard to human beings in the story of original sin. We shall examine them next.

Knowledge

The first aspect in original sin is knowledge. God created everything good. He created the entire universe in six days and six times He said it was good (cf. Gn 1:1-31). In the creation story, there is a special reference to two trees in the Garden of Eden: one is the life-giving tree and the second the knowledge-giving tree. God tells Adam and Eve that they can eat from any of the trees but should not eat from the knowledge-giving tree. This represents the temptation of human beings; they are prone to do the things that are forbidden. Human beings are attracted naturally towards the knowledge-giving tree precisely because it was forbidden. From the story, we might infer that Adam and Eve never thought of the life-giving tree! The Garden of Eden is a state of mind (or rather no mind, that is, without knowledge because knowledge represents the mind) where there is no knowledge. In this state there is joy that cannot be described but only experienced.

Regarding the mind, there are three types of persons called as *buddhus* (a Hindi word based on the Sanskrit root *bud* which means mind; the stupid, no knowledge), *buddhas* (a Sanskrit word for the “enlightened, those who have gone beyond mind,” that is, knowledge), and the *buddhi jīvas* (a Sanskrit phrase, “the knowledgeable, who are in the mind”). *Buddhus* and *buddhas* both enjoy life. However, the first type of people enjoy it but do not know (are unaware) that they are enjoying life, whereas the second type of individuals experience immense joy and are aware of it. The third type are in constant misery because of the knowledge!

What is this knowledge that the story of original sin speaks of? It is the knowledge that distinguishes the good from the bad (Gn 3:5). It is “discriminative” knowledge. Whenever we discriminate, categorize something as good or bad, we are falling into that sin. Whenever we judge something, we can judge only from our limited experience. In one way by judging someone we are judging ourselves. The following anecdote elucidates this point:

There was a talking parrot with a merchant who had a shop of scented oils. His business was flourishing because of the parrot which attracted the customers by its talk.

⁵ “Yahweh God shaped man from the soil of the ground...” (NJB); “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground...” (KJV).

One day she tipped a jar of very costly scented oil by accident. The merchant was very angry and he began to beat her with a small stick on her head. The poor parrot became unconscious. Taking pity on her the merchant nursed her back to consciousness. Because of the beating the parrot had lost the feathers on her head.

One day a bald man came to the shop. Seeing his bald head the parrot asked him, "Tell me, how many jars have you broken?"

Our judgment is exactly like that! The discrimination gives us the experience of happiness and sadness. Recurring happiness and sadness is the state of human misery. This is the experience of being "driven away from the Garden of Eden." The Garden represents the joy without the opposite experience. The "driven away" represents the "misery."

Attraction

From the knowledge of good and bad two types of attraction form in our mind. The first is the positive attraction towards "good" (which our discriminative knowledge considers as good), and the second is negative attraction or repulsion towards bad. Both are termed as "attraction" because both arise from the discriminative knowledge of good and bad. These two attractions (let us say affection and repulsion, in Sanskrit, *rāga* and *dveṣa*) generate passions in us. These passions are human misery. Notice that the passions do not cause misery, but whenever we are in the state of passions we are in misery.

The attraction is towards the attraction of the "other." This is the enticement that the evil one gives: "God knows in fact that the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be *like* gods, knowing good from evil" (Gn 3:5, emphasis added). This too is our day-to-day experience. Recall the times when you went to a hotel and ordered food. When your order came to your table, you looked around and thought that the "other" person was having better food than yours! This is the truth that original sin is telling us, that the attraction towards the other causes us suffering (misery).

There is a mythological story behind the celebration of *Sankranti* (which is celebrated on January 13, 14, and 15) and *Onam* (in Kerala).⁶ There was a demon king named Bali (or *Mahā Bali*, the great strength). He was a benevolent king. He defeated Indra (the king of gods) and usurped Indra's throne. Vishnu, in the form of a dwarf, punished him. What was his sin? To be the other (to become the king of gods) and not to be satisfied with himself (not realise one's own self).

The punishment is not given by someone outside of us. Taking the example of the food at the hotel, the punishment is non-enjoyment. When we consider the food at the other table as better than ours, a feeling of non-satisfaction arises within us. Then we can neither enjoy our food nor can we enjoy the other's food. That is the punishment of becoming attracted. It applies not only to food but also to other things, such as clothes or sandals.

Blaming

The experience of misery because of the original sin that is inherent to human beings is quite clear. The fruit of the original sin is told in the same story. Before committing the sin, when Eve was created, Adam said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" (Gn 2:23). But after committing the sin he said, "It was the *woman* you put with me; *she* gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gn 3:12, emphasis added). "The woman" and "You

⁶ These two festivals are related to agriculture. The paddy fields are reaped during this period and people celebrate the occasion as a festival.

put with me” are indications of blame. The aspect of blame is the result of original sin. This too tells us something that is within us. We tend to blame others for our condition/state of mind; whenever we say s/he is the cause for my sadness/happiness, for example, we are under the grip of original sin.

Blaming has deep spiritual implications. When we blame some people or some situation for our condition (happiness or sadness), we become dependent on those people or situations. This is slavery. The responsibility for our state of mind does not depend on us but on others. This dependency/slavery is being in misery. This is another aspect of the result of original sin.

The aspects of original sin are inherent to us. This is the meaning of original sin; the sin has its origin within our nature. It is not attributed to some external factor. This truth regarding our nature is told in the story of creation. In this way human nature seems to lean towards misery. All the above aspects are leading a person towards sadness and misery. The way out is to balance this tendency with the divinity within us. That divinity is diminished by our engrossment with “earthly” aspects and our forgetting the “spirit” aspects with which we are created. This forgotten nature is revealed to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us see how salvation comes to us through the person of Christ.

Salvation, Freedom

Salvation is described as freedom by St. Paul: “Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). What is the “yoke of slavery” from which we need to be freed? This is pronounced more clearly in Paul’s letter to the Romans:

So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin (Rom 6:4-6).

Death to the “self” is freedom. I heard an anecdote:

There was a bird from India encaged in an Arabian country. Once the minister of that country was going to India. So he asked the bird if she wanted to tell anything to her country cousins. The bird sang the sad story of her bondage. The minister went into the forest in India and sang the bird’s song. On hearing it a bird fell down dead! Shocked and saddened the minister returned and narrated what happened in India. When hearing of this incident the bird in the cage dropped dead. Feeling sorry, the minister opened the cage to remove the body and the bird flew away!

Dead bodies are not kept in bondage. Freedom means death, and that death is to the self. The self can be referred to as “ego.” Ego shows itself in many ways in our life; we want to “outdo” others. The moment we want to “prove” our mettle we are under the grip of the self and in bondage. When we let go of this self we become free. Paul compares our baptism as the baptism into Christ’s death. The teachings of Jesus about death (also “cross”) are significant in this regard (cf. Jn 12:24, 25—death of the wheat; Mt 16:25—saving, or losing life; Mt 16:24—“take up your cross”). The “cross” and Jesus’s death on the cross become the saving factor for all humanity when his teaching is understood.

Jesus Christ brings out the divine aspects within by his life, passion, death, and resurrection, which is called “Christ-event.” It is misleading when we say that Christ’s blood/cross/death on the cross saves humanity. The whole

Christ-event is significant in saving the human situation of the aspects of original sin, which was discussed above. The aspects of original sin are real from our own experience (not only for Christians but for all of humanity). Christ shows the way out of this inherent sinfulness within humanity by bringing out the aspects of divinity (spirit) within us. That spirit is “realized” when we die to our self. Let us see some of the spiritual aspects that appear in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Love

The foremost teaching of Christ that comes to mind when we think of him is love. His way of love is far beyond the earthly way of love. (I say “earthly” and “spiritual” because of the two aspects with which we are created according to the creation story in Genesis; it is not to denigrate the world or the “earthly.”) The summary of his teachings is seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). Let us consider the “love” that he has taught us.

The old form of love is to love one’s friends and hate one’s enemies: “You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy” (Mt 5:43). The new love is to love everybody equally: “But I say this to you, love your enemies...” (Mt 5:44). “Love your enemies” seems to be misleading because if there is love there is no “enemy.” It is a way of saying that one should love all. What happens if we love? Our burdens (of life’s toil) become light (cf. Mt 11:30). There is an anecdote to elucidate this point:

A woman who had divorced her husband and married another man was sweeping the house when she found a piece of paper on which her former husband had written the time-table for her, starting from getting up at certain time, sweeping, preparing coffee, etc. “Such a difficult time I had doing so much work,” she thought.

But actually what she is doing now is the same routine work. Only now she does not have a time-table written down by anybody. She does everything out of love and it is not difficult any more.

Our day-to-day experience also tells us that when we love and do something for the sake of the beloved it is not difficult/burdensome but a joy. Even our work at the office and a hobby that we love can be taken as an example. The work at the office, let us say some computer work, is burdensome, but when at home we are engaged with the computer for hours without any difficulty. Hobbies are those that we love to do and they are not burdensome but give us happiness. If we love what we do as work, then that work too becomes light. The love aspect is applied to the persons and the works.

There is a difference between “attraction” and “love.” Considering the two aspects of the creation story (earth and spirit), attraction is earthly and love is spirit. Attraction brings competition, tension, or fighting. Love brings peace and calmness. They are polar opposites, but both are intrinsic to us.

Why are we more prone towards “earthly” attraction than towards “spiritual” love? The question or answer to the question remains a mystery. We are naturally prone towards the earthly aspects within us like bodies having gravity. Levity, the opposite of gravity, is not natural to us. We need somebody to teach us, to show the way. Jesus becomes that “way” who taught us the hidden levity that is a part of us.

Nonviolence

It is more correct to say the “spirit of nonviolence” than nonviolence. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us of the “old” law and gives us the new law with regard to love and nonviolence: “But I say this to you, love your

enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Mt 5:44). Mahatma Gandhi takes up this spirit of nonviolence, not the “old” law of nonviolence.

The old law in India can be taken from the Mahabharata, “*ahimsā paramo dharmah, dharma himsā tathaiva ca.*” (Non-violence is the ultimate dharma. So too is violence in service of Dharma.⁷) The second part of the verse indicates the justification of violence for the sake of Dharma. The spirit of nonviolence in the teachings of Jesus is to fulfill this old law. Violence is not justified in any situation or for anything. It is not justified even in thinking, “You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court...” (Mt 5:21-22).

The mental part (thinking part of a person) reminds us of one of the ‘*angas*’ (limbs) of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* (Yoga with eight limbs),⁸ namely, *yama-niyama-āsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyahāra-dhāraṇa-dhyāna-samādhayoḥ-aṣṭāvangāni*. (The eight limbs of Union are self-restraint in actions, fixed observance, posture, regulation of energy, mind control in sense engagements, concentration, meditation, and realization—*Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, 2:29.) *Pratyāhāra* is the mind part (2.54). The relation between mind and sense organs is given in this *sutra*. Being “angry” is an indication of the mind.

The spirit of nonviolence means the three-fold way of nonviolence (*trikaraṇa śuddhi*), that is, in the mind (*manasā*), in words (*vācā*), and in actions (*karmanā*). Jesus gives no exceptions for nonviolence. “Just war” in the history of the Church is not according to this spirit but only a distortion of nonviolence as taught by Jesus. The spirit of nonviolence becomes the saving factor if we imbibe the spirit. This spirit is against the “blame” of the original sin.

Forgiveness

“Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours” (Mt 6:14). This saying of Jesus sounds like “you scratch my back, I scratch yours,” though it sounds strangely compatible with wickedness on the outset. But we need to go beyond the outer meaning of words, remembering that Jesus is a spiritual Master. The words of Spiritual Masters mean something deeper, related to the spirit. Anthony de Mello, SJ, puts it in anecdote form:

Said a disciple to a newcomer at the monastery, “I must warn you that you will not understand a word of what the Master says if you do not have the proper disposition.”

“What is the proper disposition?”

“Be like a student eager to learn a foreign language. The words he speaks sound familiar, but don’t be taken in; they have an altogether foreign meaning.”⁹

Let’s examine the spirit of forgiveness that Jesus practiced in his life even at the point of death: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). We often hear people say “forgive and forget.” Psychologists explicate the meaning of these words something like this: forgiveness is immediate and has outward consideration. I may say, “I forgive,” but it is not a deep-felt experience of forgiveness. Forgetting something is connected to our emotions. When somebody does something wrong towards us the immediate emotional level is high (anger,

⁷ Violence is justified in the case of a king or government to curb crime.

⁸ Patanjali, the propounder of *Yoga* philosophy, proposes eight kinds of practices. The eight kinds (in Sanskrit *aṣṭa*) are called the “limbs” (in Sanskrit *anga*). The term “limbs” indicates that Yoga cannot be practiced part by part, but that all eight parts must be practiced together.

⁹ Anthony de Mello, SJ, *One Minute Nonsense* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1992), 1.

rage etc.). As time passes the level of emotion abates. At some point in time we “remember” the incident without having any emotion attached to it. This is forgetting.

When we forget ourselves and become one with the emotion (emotion=“other”) we suffer under the grip of original sin. Getting out of this grip is forgiving the other.

The deeper meaning comes here: as long as we do not forgive others, our emotions are high; we identify ourselves with those emotions, and we are in suffering, misery. When we forgive and the emotions disappear, then we are in the state of happiness. It is not that somebody else is going to punish us but that our own emotions are the cause of our punishment, suffering. This is against the “attraction” towards the “other,” namely, becoming identified with the emotion, and it is a saving factor that is shown by Jesus with the example of his life.

There are still others saving factors in the teaching of Jesus. Only three have been highlighted because of the lack of space.

Conclusion

Looking at the concepts of original sin and salvation, there seems to be no personal responsibility at the outset. However, when we delve deep into the mysteries of these concepts, our responsibility is very clear. Original sin starts with the understanding of our nature (rather two natures within us). This understanding leads us towards salvation, and salvation is linked with the Christ-event.

Bondage is to be self-centered. The result of such self-centeredness is misery. The way out of this misery is death to the self and resurrection of the spirit within us. The spirit within us is to be awakened by the values taught by Jesus Christ. If we are awakened to these values we will be led from bondage to freedom.