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The Concept of Sin in the Old Testament

By ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

THE aim of the present study is to survey in a general way what the Old Testament teaches concerning sin. That the Old Testament presents an authentic historical account of the origin of sin has long been regarded as pre-eminently important by the Church. The realistic way in which the Old Testament depicts the tyrannical power of sin among men, and especially in the history of God's people, has also been recognized as an important phase of Old Testament revelation. In our circles, however, not much thought has been given to a systematic study of what the Old Testament as a whole has to say about sin. That is true despite the fact that the concept of sin is elucidated by many significant pictures and comparisons that are peculiar to the Old Testament. Therefore it is felt that such a study is not only desirable, but really necessary for a thorough understanding of the nature of sin. The Old Testament concept of sin will be considered in three sections. In the first section some of the outstanding characteristics of sin will be noted. Secondly, attention will be given to the various classes of sin that are described in the Old Testament. The third section will have to do with the cause of sin and its effect upon the life of man.

I

THE OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS OF SIN

The essence of sin according to the Old Testament is disobedience against the will of God. That fact is brought out with simplicity and clarity in the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. The

holy writers also use a number of expressive idioms to explain the idea of man's insubordination to God. Sin is regarded, for instance, as not walking in the way of the Lord.¹ The way of God is that path on which God wants men to walk; any deviation from that path constitutes a sin.² The Psalmist calls the man blessed who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, who does not stand in the way of sinners, who does not sit in the seat of the scorners.³ Jeremiah calls upon his contemporaries to inquire after the old ways, to find out which is the good way and to walk therein, so that they may find rest for their souls.⁴ The old ways, the good ways, are the ways on which God intended man to walk; man's failure and refusal to follow these paths is sin.

Sin is also designated as not hearkening unto the commands of the Lord.⁵ It is significant that the words for hearing and obeying are identical in Hebrew.⁶ When the Lord gives His commandments to men, He wants His creatures not only to listen to His words, but also listen with assent, to listen and then to respond immediately. Any failure thus to conform to the divine command is a sin. Samuel impressed this upon Saul when he said to him: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."⁷ Moses promised the people of Israel a blessing if they hearkened unto the commandments of the Lord, but warned them of the curse that would follow if they failed to obey the Lord's precepts.⁸

Not knowing the Lord⁹ is also regarded by the Old Testament as a basic element of sin. Isaiah reminded his people that they were not mindful of the Lord's goodness to them; he showed them that they were worse than the dumb beasts; he pointed out that the ox recognized his owner, and the ass was familiar with the crib of his master, but that the Israelites neither acknowledged nor even stopped to consider what the Lord had done for them.¹⁰ Hosea drew the unique picture of the Lord as a Father who looked

¹ *lo balakh bederekh yabweh.*

² Cf. Ernst Sellin, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Leipzig, 1933, p. 67.

³ Ps. 1:1.

⁶ *shama'.*

⁹ *lo yadd' yabweh.*

⁴ Jer. 6:16.

⁷ 1 Sam. 15:22.

¹⁰ Is. 1:3.

⁵ *lo shama'el mizwoth yabweh.*

⁸ Deut. 11:26-28.

upon Israel as His little boy and who devoted much kindness and affection to the task of teaching the boy to walk; but still the ungrateful child failed to recognize the Lord as his Healer.¹¹ A number of passages indicate that such a failure to recognize God amounts to practical atheism. The fools who are described in Psalm 14 not only say in their hearts that there is no God, but they also commit such abominable works and are guilty of such corruption that it is evident that God is no reality in their lives.¹² Amos threatens those people with death by the sword who defy the Lord to visit them with punishment and say: "The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us" and thus claim to dissociate their lives entirely from any contact with God.¹³

A phase of disobedience that is closely associated with not knowing God is the idea of forsaking the Lord.¹⁴ In the Song of Moses, Israel, who had experienced a rich measure of divine goodness, is charged with forsaking the God who made him and forgetting the God who gave him birth.¹⁵ The same accusation is included in the words of Hosea: "For Israel hath forgotten his maker."¹⁶ Jeremiah calls it a bitter thing that Israel forsakes the Lord his God and is without any fear of Him.¹⁷ Although the Lord took great interest in instructing His people, they turned their back to Him, and not their face.¹⁸

Thus, according to the Old Testament, disobedience involves not walking in the way of God, not hearkening unto the commands of God, not knowing God, forsaking God. Sellin contends that alongside this basic conception a more primitive idea of sin existed in the Old Testament, according to which a violation of the customs of the people, a participation in that which was not done in Israel, was construed as sin.¹⁹ But the references that are adduced in support of this view are not convincing. When Amnon made advances to his sister Tamar and she told him that such a thing ought not to be done in Israel, she was obviously referring to the suggested violation of the Sixth Commandment, and not merely to an infringement of the mores of the people.²⁰ The

¹¹ Hos. 11:3.

¹² Ps. 14:1.

¹³ Amos 9:10.

¹⁴ 'azav yahweh.

¹⁵ Deut. 32: 15, 18.

¹⁶ Hos. 8:14.

¹⁷ Jer. 2:19.

¹⁸ Jer. 32:33.

¹⁹ Sellin, l. c., p. 68.

²⁰ 2 Sam. 13:12.

brothers of Dinah were incensed against Shechem "because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done."²¹ Certainly Shechem's deed was not regarded merely as a social *faux pas*, but rather as a sin against the Moral Law, which was all the more serious at that time because Dinah was defiled by one who was uncircumcised. Laban's statement to Jacob that giving the younger daughter in marriage before the older daughter was something that was not done in his country, does not at all imply that such a procedure would have been sinful.²² It merely shows that the practice in Mesopotamia was to give the older daughter in marriage first, then the younger. In other words, the Old Testament regards a breach of social etiquette as a sin only if such a breach is also a violation of the Law of God.

Sin as disobedience to the will of God is also held by the Old Testament to be universally prevalent among men. In his famous dedicatory address Solomon makes the all-embracing confession that there is no man who does not sin.²³ The Preacher discloses the great ethical vacuum in man with the observation that "there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not."²⁴ The Penitential Psalms remind us that if God charged men's sins to their account, no man would be able to plead innocence, that in the sight of God no living person can claim to be just in his own right.²⁵ Job asks the searching question: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" and then answers categorically: "Not one!"²⁶ Proverbs makes a similar point with the emphatic rhetorical question: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"²⁷

Sin is known to the Old Testament not only as an evil that is universally prevalent, but also as a powerful force that dominates men.²⁸ In the Lord's warning to Cain, sin is pictured as a crouching beast²⁹ which is ready to spring upon its prey.³⁰ It is natural for sin to seek to dominate man; man is bidden to break sin's dominion by ruling over it. When Jeremiah speaks of the hard-

²¹ Gen. 34:7.

²² Gen. 29:26.

²³ 1 Kings 8:46.

²⁴ Eccl. 7:20.

²⁵ Pss. 130:3; 143:2.

²⁶ Job 14:4.

²⁷ Prov. 20:9.

²⁸ Cf. Sellin, l. c., p. 71.

²⁹ *robbez.*

³⁰ Gen. 4:7.

ened and uncircumcised hearts of the people of Israel, he has hearts in mind that are controlled and held in subjection by sin.³¹ Ezekiel also sees the dominance of sin reflected in hearts which he calls hearts of stone. But he knows that God will break the power of sin, that He will give His people hearts of flesh, hearts that live, hearts that will be able to rule over sin.³²

That sin is an inherited trait which is passed on from generation to generation is recognized in many passages of the Old Testament. At the time of the Flood man had become so corrupt that the Lord observed that "*every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart is *only* evil *continually*."³³ The *every*, *only*, and *continually* imply that there is no point in man's existence at which he is without sin; in other words, he comes into this world as a sinner. After the Flood the Lord determined not to afflict the world with another deluge, for, He said, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."³⁴ Other references indicate that the entrance of sin into man's life is traceable not merely to his childhood and youth, but to the very time of his birth. The Psalmist observes that "the wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born."³⁵ Job and his friend Eliphaz realize that an unclean person cannot produce a clean one, that anyone who is born of a woman cannot be righteous at his birth.³⁶ Isaiah calls his people's attention to the fact that their first father³⁷ sinned:³⁸ the Lord knew that Israel was called a rebel from the womb.³⁹ David is keenly aware of the fact that he has been sinful not only from the time of his birth, but even since the moment in which his mother conceived him.⁴⁰ Efforts have been made to show that this statement of David does not teach original sin, but rather stresses the fact that the sexual act is sinful. It is claimed that David's words mean: "My mother committed a sin when she conceived and bore me." This view, however, is untenable, because the Hebrew word which is translated "iniquity"⁴¹ always refers to a sinful state or condition, rather than to a sinful act. David was sinful because the mother who conceived him was in a sinful

³¹ Jer. 3:17; 9:26.

³² Ezek. 11:19; 36:26.

³³ Gen. 6:5.

³⁴ Gen. 8:21.

³⁵ Ps. 58:3.

³⁶ Job 14:4; 15:14.

³⁷ Adam, not Jacob.

³⁸ Is. 43:27.

³⁹ Is. 48:8.

⁴⁰ Ps. 51:5.

⁴¹ 'awon.

condition and because she transmitted that sinful condition to her offspring.

The Old Testament looks upon sin as an offense that is committed primarily against God. After the idolatrous incident of the golden calf the Lord said to Moses: "Whosoever hath sinned *against Me*, him will I blot out of My book."⁴² When Joseph was tempted to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife, he answered: "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin *against God*?"⁴³ Joseph was convinced that such a sin against the Sixth Commandment, though it included an offense against his master and mistress, was pre-eminently a sin against God. David committed a grievous sin against Uriah and Bathsheba; yet when Nathan called his attention to this, David's first thought was: "I have sinned *against the Lord*."⁴⁴ He was so conscious of the fact that his sin was primarily an offense against God that he spoke of it exclusively as such a sin against God and said: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."⁴⁵

All people, but especially the people of God, need to be reminded again and again of the manifold ways in which man's disobedience against God asserts itself. The Christian will do well to ask himself daily whether the way of life that he is following is the way outlined by God, or whether it is the devious way which his own flesh maps out for him. Is he heeding the commands of God in the sense that he both listens to the Lord and also obeys Him, or does his allegiance frequently restrict itself to a mere token reception of those precepts? Is he sometimes inclined to live his life without too much thought about God? Does he tend to revert to practical atheism by carrying on as if there were no God, or at least as if God had no reality for him in the daily routine of his life? Does he perhaps go through the outward motions of serving God, while inwardly he has forsaken the Lord and turned his back to Him? Sin has lost none of its typical characteristics since Old Testament times! It still prevails in every segment of the human race, it is still a dominant force that holds men with an iron grip, it is still passed on from generation to generation in an uninterrupted chain, it is still primarily and pre-eminently an offense against God, whether it be listed in the First

⁴² Ex. 32:33.

⁴³ Gen. 39:9.

⁴⁴ 2 Sam. 12:13.

⁴⁵ Ps. 51:4.

or the Second Table of the Law. Frank recognition of these truths will certainly move the Christian to repentance and will constrain him to cherish ever more highly the pardon and forgiveness which God accords him in Christ.

II

THE VARIOUS CLASSES OF SINS

It must be recognized that the Old Testament distinguishes a number of categories or grades of sins.⁴⁶ This does not imply, however, that in the eyes of God there are some sins which He tolerates while other sins evoke His wrath. Inasmuch as every sin is chiefly a sin against God, all sins are loathsome and culpable in His sight. But still the Old Testament does draw sharp lines between a number of types of sins. Deliberate, willful sins, for instance, are clearly distinguished from sins that were committed inadvertently, by mistake. According to the law of Moses, sins that were committed in ignorance or weakness⁴⁷ could be forgiven by bringing a sacrifice unto the Lord.⁴⁸ Such inadvertent sins were clearly distinguished from deliberate sins, from sins that were committed with uplifted hand.⁴⁹ To sin with uplifted hand was the equivalent of sinning willfully and presumptuously. Whoever became guilty of such a conscious transgression was to be cut off from God's people, his iniquity was to be upon him.⁵⁰ Apparently no provision was made in the law for an atonement of such deliberate sins through a sin offering⁵¹ or a trespass offering.⁵² Yet it is significant that the malicious sins of David were forgiven not via a sacrifice, but through the direct words of absolution that were spoken by the prophet Nathan. It is therefore evident that also sins "with uplifted hand" could be forgiven by the Lord.

The Old Testament also refers to a group of sins that are called concealed or hidden sins.⁵³ In Psalm 90 attention is called to the fact that even man's secret sins are made manifest to the Lord.⁵⁴ David pleads with the Lord in Psalm 19 to cleanse him from such secret sins.⁵⁵ The secret sins included not only those sins which were hidden from one's fellow men, but especially the sins

⁴⁶ Cf. Sellin, *l. c.*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ *bisbgagab*.

⁴⁸ Num. 15:24-25; 27-28.

⁴⁹ *beyad ramab*.

⁵⁰ Num. 15:30-31.

⁵¹ Cf. Leviticus 4.

⁵² Cf. Leviticus 5.

⁵³ *'alumim, nistaroth*.

⁵⁴ Ps. 90:8.

⁵⁵ Ps. 19:12.

of which the individual himself was not aware, and also those sins of which he might have thought that they could be hidden from God Himself.

References to the sins of youth in the Old Testament do not indicate that these are in any sense less grievous in the eyes of God than other sins. Humanly speaking, faults that are committed during the age of indiscretion may be excused on the ground that the individual has not developed full adult responsibility. In God's sight, however, also the sins of youth are offensive and punishable. Job laments that the Lord holds him responsible also for those iniquities of which he was guilty in his youth.⁵⁶ David pleads that the Lord may not hold the sins of his earlier years in remembrance.⁵⁷

Heinisch points out four sins in the Old Testament that cry to heaven for vengeance: murder, sodomy, oppression, and withholding of wages.⁵⁸ After the murder of Abel, the Lord reminded Cain that the voice of his brother's blood cried to the Lord in heaven from the ground on which it had been shed.⁵⁹ The iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah was so grievous that it cried unto heaven for punishment.⁶⁰ Moses warned against afflicting a widow or an orphan, stating that if the case of such afflicted ones were brought to the Lord's attention, He would certainly hear their cry.⁶¹ The great lawgiver also forbade depriving a poor laborer of his wages; if such an abused laborer cried unto the Lord, the Lord would hold the employer accountable for his sin.⁶²

The sins of insolence and pride, against which the Prophets inveighed, constituted an outright challenge of the Lord's authority over men.⁶³ Isaiah was especially vehement in his condemnation of the lofty looks, the pride and the haughtiness of men which, he warned, would be made low on the Lord's Day.⁶⁴ Job's friend Eliphaz upbraided the wicked people who did not merely lift up their hands against their fellow men, but actually stretched out their hands against God and behaved themselves proudly against

⁵⁶ Job 13:26.

⁵⁷ Ps. 25:7.

⁵⁸ Jaul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament*, English Edition by Rev. William Heidt, Collegeville, Minn. 1950, p. 234.

⁵⁹ Gen. 4:10.

⁶¹ Ex. 22:22-23.

⁶³ Cf. Sellin, *l. c.*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Gen. 18:20.

⁶² Deut. 24:14-15.

⁶⁴ Is. 2:11.

the Almighty.⁶⁵ The contemporaries of Malachi stated that it was vain to serve God and that there was no profit in keeping His charge.⁶⁶ Asaph complained of the wicked who spoke loftily and "set their mouth against the heavens and said, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"⁶⁷ Zephaniah predicted that the Lord would search Jerusalem with candles and would punish the men who were settled on their lees and said in their heart: "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil."⁶⁸

According to the Authorized Version, David says in Psalm 19: "I shall be innocent from the great transgression."⁶⁹ This expression cannot refer to the so-called sin against the Holy Ghost, the unpardonable sin of the New Testament. In the Hebrew the definite article is missing in the phrase "great transgression."⁷⁰ David merely says that he will be free from great transgression or much transgression. The Old Testament, however, is not without reference to such a sin of top magnitude which will not be forgiven. A passage in Isaiah speaks of such a sin very clearly. After the Lord had called upon His people to repent and to return to Him, the people responded by eating and drinking and making merry, with utter disregard of the Lord's summons. Therefore the Lord sent the Prophet Isaiah to them with the message: "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts."⁷¹ This passage confirms the purpose for which the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to the apostate majority of the people of Israel: By proclaiming the message of grace to them he was to harden and close and seal their hearts so completely that they would not be able to repent and believe and be saved.⁷²

The preceding review of Old Testament varieties of sin may serve as an index or a catalog which will help to identify sins in their various forms today. But to find in this survey an excuse for minimizing the gravity of the so-called lesser sins would be an abuse of it. The very fact that sins of inadvertence and weakness needed to be atoned by a sacrifice indicates that they, too, constituted a violation of God's command. The threatened expulsion from God's grace of those who deliberately and inten-

⁶⁵ Job 15:25.⁶⁶ Mal. 3:14.⁶⁷ Ps. 73:8, 9, 11.⁶⁸ Zeph. 1:12.⁶⁹ Ps. 19:13.⁷⁰ *pesha' rav*.⁷¹ Is. 22:14⁷² Is. 6:9-10.

tionally lifted up their hand to sin should serve as a curb on such gross transgressions also at the present time. Sins of which the author himself is not even aware or of which he was guilty during his younger, less responsible, years also need to be cleansed and forgiven. God still resists the arrogant, overbearing sinners who pit their puny selves against His authority and leadership. If they persist in their opposition and impenitence, theirs will be the lot of hardened Israel, which was irrevocably excluded from the Lord's grace.

III

THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECT OF SIN

A number of Old Testament references point to the fact that the roots of sin are to be found in pride. If the Prophets' denunciations of the kings of Babylon and Tyre may be applied typically to Satan, then their words clearly imply that pride was responsible for the devil's fall. Although Isaiah directed his words primarily to the king of Babylon, it is reasonable to assume that in retrospect he also had the devil in mind when he said: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star,⁷³ son of the morning! . . . Thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! . . . I will be like the Most High!"⁷⁴ The immediate object of the words of Ezekiel was no doubt the king of Tyre, yet in his denunciation this Prophet may also have been thinking ultimately of Satan when he said: "Thou wast in Eden, the garden of God! . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created till unrighteousness was found in thee! . . . Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty."⁷⁵ The serpent told Eve that by eating of the forbidden fruit her eyes would be opened and she would be like God.⁷⁶ That was an appeal to her pride, a tempting offer to advance to a better state than the one in which she had been created. The watchword of the tower builders of Babel was: "Let us make us a name!"⁷⁷ It was this boastful attitude which prompted the Lord to intervene and to disperse the entire company of builders. A similar attitude among the contemporaries of Isaiah constrained the Prophet to

⁷³ Authorized Version following Vulgate: Lucifer.

⁷⁴ Is. 14:12-14.

⁷⁶ Gen. 3:5.

⁷⁵ Ezek. 28:13, 15, 17.

⁷⁷ Gen. 11:4.

say: "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."⁷⁸

It is significant that in the Old Testament, sin is thought of as dwelling in man's heart⁷⁹ and his spirit,⁸⁰ rather than in his soul.⁸¹ All three of these terms are applied by the Old Testament to the nonphysical part of man's personality, and yet they are differentiated. The *nephesb* is that part of man's being to which such lower functions as hunger, thirst, various emotions, and the sexual instinct are attributed.⁸² Although both men and animals possess a *nephesb*, man alone was given a *nephesb* by the special inbreathing process of God. The *ruach* and the *lev*, on the other hand, are the seat of man's thinking and willing and of the moral and spiritual powers which are given him by God. These are also regarded as the seat of sin in man. David called upon the Lord to search his heart and its thoughts to find out if there were any wickedness in him.⁸³ He asked the Lord to create a new heart and to renew a constant spirit in him, because his old heart and spirit had become so corrupt by the indwelling of sin.⁸⁴ Jeremiah realized that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."⁸⁵ The Mosaic Law recognized that because of its sinfulness the foreskin of the human heart needed to be circumcized.⁸⁶ The Lord also saw that the corruption at the time of the Flood was the direct outgrowth of the evil imagination of man's heart."⁸⁷

It has been claimed that the Old Testament reverses its position as far as the responsibility for sin is concerned. In the Decalog, God threatens to visit "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me."⁸⁸ This implies that God also holds the children responsible for the sins of their wicked parents. Ezekiel, on the other hand, tells his people that they shall no longer have occasion to quote the proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."⁸⁹ He adds by way of explanation that the son (who repents) will not be held accountable for the iniquity of

78 Is. 2:17.

79 *lev*.80 *ruach*.81 *nephesb*.82 Cf. Sellin, *l. c.*, p. 59.

83 Ps. 139:23-24.

84 Ps. 51:10.

85 Jer. 17:9.

86 Deut. 10:16.

87 Gen. 6:5.

88 Ex. 20:5; 34:7.

89 Ezek. 18:2-3.

his father, that each individual will rather be responsible for his own sins.⁹⁰ This seems to imply that the earlier dictum of Moses in the Decalog has been modified and amended.⁹¹ But it is by no means to be granted that such a radical change took place in Old Testament theology between the time of Moses and Ezekiel. The situation that Ezekiel had to cope with during the Babylonian captivity was entirely different from the situation which confronted Moses. At the time of the Exile a pharisaical trend had become evident among the people; the captive Jews were unwilling to assume the blame themselves for the judgment which God had executed upon them. That is why they coined the proverb quoted by Ezekiel. They insisted that they were being punished innocently, that they had done nothing wrong, that God had delivered them into captivity because of the sins which their fathers had committed.⁹² To combat this self-righteous attitude, Ezekiel stressed the importance of individual responsibility. It is self-evident that such individual responsibility for sin was already implied in every commandment of the Decalog. But because this responsibility was not being assumed during the Exile, Ezekiel placed special emphasis upon it. He impressed upon his people that it was unfair to put all of the blame for their suffering on their fathers, that they themselves were also receiving the rewards of their own deeds. That godless children, on the other hand, were still being held responsible for the sins of their wicked fathers at the time of the Prophets is indicated in several passages. Isaiah told his people that the Lord would recompense their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers together.⁹³ He also spoke of preparing a slaughter for the children of the king of Babylon for the iniquity of their fathers that they might not rise up and possess the earth.⁹⁴

The Old Testament is familiar with the idea of guilt or blame that attaches itself to sin after it has been committed. The brothers of Joseph felt very keenly that God was aware of the guilt which they acquired when they sold Joseph into slavery.⁹⁵ In connection with the Golden Calf, Moses accused his brother Aaron and asked him what Israel had done to him that he brought so great a sin

⁹⁰ Ezek. 18:20.

⁹¹ Cf. Sellin, *J. c.*, pp. 88—89.

⁹² Cf. Heinisch, *J. c.*, p. 238.

⁹³ Is. 65:6-7.

⁹⁴ Is. 14:21.

⁹⁵ Gen. 44:16.

upon them.⁹⁶ A number of figures are used to explain this concept of blame or guilt. David described his guilt as a heavy burden which was too heavy for him, which had gone over his head.⁹⁷ The conscience of Cain also plagued him so severely that his guilt seemed to him like a burden that was more than he could bear.⁹⁸ Isaiah spoke of the people who committed sin and then dragged their guilt behind them, whose guilt constantly tugged at them from behind like a cart rope that held them back.⁹⁹ Isaiah also compared the people's guilt to a wall which separated them from their God, which caused them to be hidden from His face so that He could not hear them.¹⁰⁰ What present-day psychiatrists call a sense of guilt, or a guilt complex, is also clearly described in the Old Testament. The fact that David became aware of such a feeling of guilt after he had taken the census of his fighting men is indicated by the expression: "And David's heart smote him."¹⁰¹ David's conscience smote him in a similar way after he had cut off a portion of Saul's garment while the king slept.¹⁰² When David tried to suppress his sense of guilt, even his bones deteriorated through the inward roaring of his conscience; it seemed to him as if God were standing over him with a club, threatening him day and night; his body was completely dehydrated, deprived of its essential juices.¹⁰³ His guilt-stricken conscience made him groan to the point of exhaustion, his restless couch was thoroughly drenched with tears.¹⁰⁴ Moses also threatened those who violated the Lord's commandments with an intense sensation of guilt. He told them that their hearts would tremble, their lives would hang in doubt, they would be in terror day and night, so that their one wish in the morning would be for the evening to come and their one wish in the evening would be for the morning to come.¹⁰⁵

That death is the price which man has to pay for his sin is already stated clearly by the Lord in Paradise: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."¹⁰⁶ This grim truth is reiterated in the messages of the Prophets. Ezekiel taught that the

⁹⁶ Ex. 32:21.

⁹⁷ Ps. 38:4.

⁹⁸ Gen. 4:13.

⁹⁹ Is. 5:18.

¹⁰⁰ Is. 59:2.

¹⁰¹ 2 Sam. 24:10: *wayyakh lev david otbo.*

¹⁰² 1 Sam. 24:5.

¹⁰³ Ps. 32:3-4.

¹⁰⁴ Ps. 6:6.

¹⁰⁵ Deut. 28:65-67.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 2:17.

soul that is guilty of sinning must die.¹⁰⁷ Amos announced that all of the sinners of the Lord's people who thought that they would escape the Lord's judgment would die by the sword.¹⁰⁸ That this death sentence refers not merely to physical death, but also to that death which separates eternally from God, is indicated by the numerous passages in the Old Testament which speak of the sinner being blotted out of the book of the living. David expressed the wish that those who oppressed him might be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous.¹⁰⁹ Ezekiel announced that the prophets who were guilty of vanity and deception would not be written in the writing of the house of Israel.¹¹⁰ Moses even ventured to tell the Lord that if He were not willing to forgive Israel's sin, He should blot Moses out of His book which He had written.¹¹¹

Pride went before the fall of angels and men. Pride is still the very root of sin. Pride will arrogate a place for itself in man's heart until it is made low on the Lord's Day. It will therefore be readily understood why the Lord, when He told men what He required of them, gave such prominence to walking humbly with Him.¹¹² The familiar prayer of the Offertory may well be used not merely in Sunday's service of worship, but especially in daily communion with God, because men are in such constant need of having their heart and spirit, the seat of their sin, thoroughly purged by the Lord. Lest anyone deny personal responsibility for his sin on the ground that parental guilt was passed on to him, emphasis on both truths will ever be in place: children are responsible for the sins of their parents as well as for their own sins. A generation that is plagued by guilt complexes perhaps more than any other needs to be directed ever and anew to Him whose blood alone can purge away all guilt, Jesus Christ, the divine Savior. Because death is and always will remain the wages of sin, a dying world must be told the words of life: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."¹¹³

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¹⁰⁷ Ezek. 18:4.

¹⁰⁹ Ps. 69:28.

¹¹¹ Ex. 32:32.

¹¹³ Ezek. 33:11.

¹⁰⁸ Amos 9:10.

¹¹⁰ Ezek. 13:9.

¹¹² Micah 6:8.