Contemporary Challenges to the Doctrine of Sin[1]

David Phillips

Speaking at Spurgeon's College, London, in 1974 on the subject '*The idea of sin in twentieth-century theology*'[2] Bruce Milne commented that despite the obvious challenges faced to the doctrine of sin in the twentieth-century very little had been written directly about it. Milne's observation would appear to be equally true over 30 years later.

The aim of this article is to provide a survey of some of the different views of the doctrine of sin as articulated in recent debate and writing.

Milne alluded to the challenges to the doctrine of sin and explains these as twofold:

1. our understanding of ourselves, and
2. our understanding of human origins.

In what follows we will consider a number of challenges to the doctrine of sin under these two broad headings. However, in order to consider the contemporary challenges it is necessary to have some standard by which to measure them.

The Classical View

What follows will be referred to as 'the classical view', it is summarised from the work *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* by Michael Pomanzansky[3] a Russian Orthodox theologian.

- The work of creation took place in the recent past.[4]
- Sin began in the spiritual realms with the fall of the angels.
- Sin spread to mankind when Adam and Eve failed to resist the temptation of the devil.

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[1] Based on a talk given initially to *The Fellowship of Word and Spirit* conference 2007 under the heading 'The Doctrine of Sin in Contemporary Theology'.

[2] Bruce A Milne 'The Idea of Sin in Twentieth-Century Theology' *Tyndale Bulletin* vol 26 1975 p3

[3] Michael Pomanzansky *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press 2005) The 3rd Edition of this work is translated and edited by Seraphim Rose.

[4] Pomanzansky does not draw out this point. However, it is addressed by Seraphim Rose, the editor of Pomanzansky's work, in his substantial book *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press).

- Sin was first and foremost a breach of the commands of God.[5]
- However, there was also a breakdown of relationship between God and mankind, as well as between Adam and Eve, and their descendants.
- Death entered as a consequence of the fall.[6]
- The creation itself became corrupted and corruptible because of the sin of mankind.

The classical issue for the classical view was not about the origin of sin but about its effects, that is, how is it that sin is transmitted? Pelagius argued that nothing is transmitted, it is simply that people repeat the same mistakes as Adam (imitation). However, Augustine refuted the Pelagian view and ever since Orthodoxy, Catholicism and historic Protestantism have sided with Augustine insisting that something is transmitted (participation). There has been considerable disagreement about what exactly is transmitted; whether it is guilt, a corrupt nature or whatever. But there has been agreement on the underlying fact that something is transmitted. If an individual inherits something (whatever that might be) through the process of their coming to be human, then their physical descent matters and in particular it is important to the classical doctrine that all human beings are descended physically from Adam.

1. Our understanding of ourselves

Having set out the classical view it is now possible to consider the first swathe of challenges to it, these are challenges which arise from our understanding of ourselves, that is from the doctrine of man, or anthropology. In the intellectual arena (rather than what real people think) it is said that the challenge arose first from the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. But, with the passage of time, their views have infiltrated the popular mind.

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[5] 'The essence of evil consists in the violation of God's will, the commandments of God, and the moral law which is written in the human conscience. This violation is called sin.' Michael Pomanzansky Orthodox Dogmatic Theology (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press 2005 3rd Edition) p152.

[6] 'Man was created immortal in his soul, and he could have remained immortal also in his body if he had not fallen away from God'. Michael Pomanzansky Orthodox Dogmatic Theology (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press 2005 3rd Edition) p159.

1.1 Original goodness not original sin

For ordinary people the challenge is whether someone has a positive or a negative view of human nature. Do people believe in original sin, or original goodness? This question could be answered from anecdote and experience, not least from pastoral ministry, or from examining theological writings but perhaps a mixture of the two will be best.

An example of this is the 'creation-centred spirituality' of Matthew Fox. In his *Christian Theology* Rowan Williams reflects on how the view of creation has changed in modern understanding and asserts that such a view 'begins... with the theme of original blessing rather than original sin'.[7]

A similar assessment is made of the controversial book *The Lost Message of Jesus* by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann. In a review for the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Donald McLeod comments:

> But his most serious hang-ups relate to the doctrine of sin. Is Chalke a Pelagian? That, it seems to me, would be to put it mildly. He deplores the idea of Original Sin and notes contemptuously that while we have spent centuries poring over the Bible and huge theological tomes in an effort to prove the inherent sinfulness of all mankind, we have missed a startling point: 'Jesus believed in original goodness.' For Chalke it is as if the Fall never happened and we were still in Paradise, deserving the accolade 'very good'.[8]

This is a fair assessment not just of The Lost Message but of many other modern writers; they do not count sin to be as serious as does the classical doctrine. Michael Pomanzansky puts it starkly: *'*As for the newer sects of Protestantism... they have gone as far as the complete denial of original, inherited sin*'.*[9]

This abandonment of the seriousness of sin is serious in itself, because it is to deny something clearly taught in Scripture. But, the problems manifest themselves in the

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[7] Rowan Williams *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2000) p63
[8] Donald McLeod *Reformation21.org* (Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals) August 2005
[9] Michael Pomanzansky *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press 2005 3rd Edition) p165

doctrine of salvation, and therefore in the proclamation of the gospel. If sin is not as serious as the classical theory posits, then the need for the Son of God to be a sin bearer is also unnecessary and so quickly the Biblical teaching on the atonement is also undermined.

1.2 Sin as alienation

In classical theology sin is first and foremost the breach of the divine command. First and foremost there was a breach in the relationship between God and man demonstrated in the fact that Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden and the way of their return was barred [10]. Secondly there was a breach in the relationship between Adam and Eve themselves, and later between their first sons, and so on. The second challenge to the classical view shifts the focus of sin from being primarily about breach of divine command to being about breach of relationship.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) is attributed by many with the shift to the notion that sin is fundamentally a breach of relationship. Tillich argued that the plight of man (in a state of sin) is not best described in terms of immorality and evil but rather in terms of alienation and meaningless. 'In every soul there is a sense of aloneness and separation'.[11]

One of Tillich's concerns was to move away from the common misconception that sin is all about particular sins we commit. He rightly wished to stress that sin is much more than this. However, whereas in the classical doctrine sin is portrayed as a corrupt nature Tillich sought to argue that sin is at heart a breakdown of relationship between God and man, a state of alienation.

This view of sin has become very prominent. For example, Allister McGrath, in his brief survey of theology, gives a definition of sin in the terms 'sin is something that separates humankind from God'. He goes on to state that 'Salvation is the breaking down of the barrier of separation between humans and God on account of Christ'.[12]

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[10] Genesis 3.24

[11] Paul Tillich *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons 1955) p156

[12] Allister McGrath *Theology - The Basics* (Oxford: Blackwell 2007) p96

The idea of sin as breach of relationship is present in the classical doctrine, but it is not primary, it is a consequence. Part of the appeal in shifting the focus is that it makes it much easier to deal with the Genesis account. The fall of Adam and Eve can be taken as a picture or story of alienation, rather than as historical fact.

1.3 Victimhood

A third challenge arising from our understanding of ourselves is the notion of victimhood. This is related in part to the previous point. The sin of Adam and Eve led to a breach of relationship with God but also to a breach in their own relationship which came to fruition in their first offspring. If part of sin is that we therefore sin against one another then it is easy to argue that some are more sinned against than others. Some, like Abel, are the victims of sin, whilst others, like Cain, are its perpetrators.

This development of the idea of sin has proved particularly attractive to liberation theologians. Our alienation from one another is expressed clearly through those with power oppressing those without. There is no doubt that in his ministry the Lord Jesus shows a particular affinity with the outcast, the poor and downtrodden. It is argued therefore that Jesus deliberately identified with the victims.

The danger with this notion of sin is that it seems to assume that the weak and powerless are also sinless, or at least not as sinful as others. If this is the case then Jesus' identification with them seems to mean that they were more worthy than the rich and powerful, which is a denial of grace and turns on its head the fact that Jesus identified with sinners. If the powerful are the greater sinners, and Jesus was 'a friend of sinners', then he should have spent more time with them!

It is far better to say that human beings, having a sinful nature, will always find temptations to sin and that some, because of their position or power, have greater opportunity. It does not mean necessarily that some sin more than others, but rather that their sin has far greater impact on others.

Garry Williams has remarked that victimhood plays a major part in the theology of Rowan Williams, not least in his understanding of the cross; Christ was the victim of other people's sins. 'Repeatedly, Williams expresses the centrality of the victim for Christian theology'.[13]

1.4 Failure of potential

A further challenge under this general heading is related by Bruce Milne to Norman Pittenger and Process Theology. Milne summarised Pittenger's view as follows: *'*Sin consists in man's failure by free decision, whether his own or that of society in which he shares, to become really what in possibility he is made for'.*[14]*

Process Theology denied the omnipotence and hence the sovereignty of God. It can be considered as an attempt to re-work classical theology within an evolutionary framework. Thus, rather than creation following the purposes and plans of God, it is entirely open to change and affected by the free-will of man. Within this framework sin is considered to be the failure to achieve the full potential of what might be possible, it is a failure to be what we might be. The appeal of this view to those who believe in the development of human kind is obvious; those who hold society back from development are sinning.

This notion of sin seems to find echo in some feminist responses to the classical doctrine of sin.

1.5 A man thing

The beginning of the feminist challenge is sometimes attributed to an essay written by Valerie Saiving which first appeared in the 1960s but was largely unnoticed until Judith Plaskow picked up the theme in 1975. '*Saiving argued that the ideas of sin as pride, will to power and self-exaltation did not reflect women's experience'.*[15]

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[13] Gary Williams *The Theology of Rowan Williams* (Latimer Trust 2002) p25
[14] Bruce A Milne 'The Idea of Sin in Twentieth-Century Theology' *Tyndale Bulletin* vol 26 1975 p25
[15] Lucy Tatman 'Sin' *An AtoZ of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press 1996) p217

Plaskow argued that classical theology had been written by men. Its concept of sin thus reflected the way in which men perceive sin. Indeed the issue of sin lies at the very heart of feminist theology:

> Traditionally, women have been blamed for bringing sin into the world and for continually tempting men to sin. The refusal to accept the blame for any notion of 'original sin' and the refusal to accept responsibility for men's sins are foundational premises in most feminist theologians work, whether these refusals are stated explicitly or implicitly. [16]

The argument is that historically pride and lust have been seen as the chief forms of sin. These are both traced back to the Garden of Eden and to Eve. The feminist claim is that Eve's failure was not about pride or lust, but rather a failure to take responsibility for herself. This failure has been followed by the daughters of Eve ever since.

Saiving went further arguing that such things as self-sacrifice and losing oneself, which are seen in Scripture as virtues, are actually the day to day experiences of women. The sin of women, she argues, is that they do not rise above these experiences.

In all these various ways the classical doctrine of sin has been challenged and superseded by many contemporary theologians. There is a relationship between the different challenges in that they all centre around our understanding of ourselves, but they are also very diverse.

2. Our understanding of our origins

The second major area of challenge is in relation to understandings of human origins. Again there are different views but most people who have written on the subject of sin seem to recognise that the advent of Darwinian evolution has challenged the classical concept of sin and that theologians have responded to that challenge in different ways.

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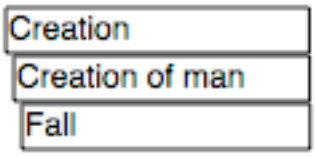
[16] Lucy Tatman 'Sin' *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press 1996) p218

In the classical view, which was pre-eminent amongst Christians at least up until the end of the 18th Century, the universe is fairly young, the fall happened very shortly after creation and was followed by the coming of death and the corruption of creation.



The theory of Darwinian evolution requires that the world be very old. If it is not old there has not been the time for all the myriad of small evolutionary steps needed to go from non-life to the incredibly complex life we witness today. All the views of sin which are considered below presuppose that the world is old.

If the universe is old, then when did sin begin?

2.1 Sin radically new

The first view is that sin had a very definite starting point. 'Sin is radically new, it has no roots in the evolutionary process'.[17]

It is clear that many people hold such a view, but it is quite difficult to find people who spell out exactly what they believe. People seem to confine themselves to generalities or to plead ignorance. Indeed there seem to be so many different views, and so little attention given to articulating them clearly that it is difficult to engage with them. Broadly however, there are two variations on the theme both seeing sin as a recent phenomenon.

2.1.1 Recent humans, recent sin

In the first variant, human beings themselves are relatively recent. Whilst human-like creatures may have been evolving for millions of years, man in the image of God has only recently arrived on the scene.

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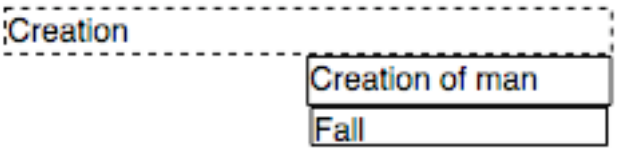
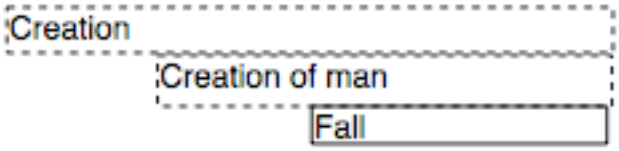
[17] Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly 'Science' *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007) p527



Either God made man by special creation, or God gave a soul to certain human-like creatures, thus making them human. Human beings, as creatures who are uniquely in the image of God, have a relatively recent origin. Therefore, sin also has a relatively recent origin.

2.1.2 Old humans, recent sin

In the second variant, human beings have been around for a long time, possibly millions of years, but sin, as sin, has only a recent past. At some point sin entered in.



This view of the origin of sin seems to be held by many conservative evangelicals, particularly Anglicans (non-conformist conservative evangelicals are more likely to believe in a young earth and thus hold the classical view). Robert White in a leaflet produced in 2006 by Reform stated '..at a specific point in time, God chose to breathe life into Adam and Eve, to make them into persons capable of loving, responsive relationship with himself'.[18] White's position would mean that prior to that point there were human-like creatures, but they were not human. *The Briefing*, likewise devoted an issue to creation and largely argued against the idea of a young earth. In one article Sandy Grant wrote that he and others are 'totally committed to the reality and historicity of Adam and Eve and the Fall'[19], but Grant does 'not feel compelled to affirm that the creation events happened within a 144-hour period only a few thousand years ago.' Grant appears to believe that sin is radically new because he accepts the 'reality and historicity of the Fall' but does not explain how the other aspects of the classical doctrine of sin fit into this framework.

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[18] Robert S White *Genesis and Creation* (Sheffield: Reform 2006) Reform is a network of conservative evangelicals within the Church of England.

[19] Sandy Grant 'The Design of Genesis' *The Briefing* Issue 337 October 2006 p12. The Briefing is produced by conservative evangelicals in the Diocese of Sydney.

How then do these idea differ from the classical view in relation to sin? All these variants require that there was death and destruction in the creation before the fall. Thus the corruption of creation is not a consequence of the fall of man. Death, natural disasters and so on are therefore good in some way.

In some of these variants men and women also lived and died before the fall. Therefore in the view of some physical death is not a consequence of the fall, but only spiritual death.

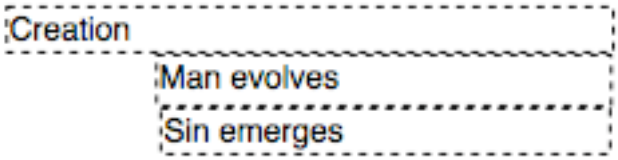
Also, in some variants, since people today are not physically descended from Adam and Eve, the notion of ancestral sin is changed, its transmission is not physical but by some other means.

What is most striking about all these variants is how little attention is given to the outworking of the theories. Usually people are content to plead ignorance.

2.2 Sin emerges.

This second view again assumes that the universe is old, much more than a few thousand years but, in contrast to the first view, also accepts that man has fully evolved within the natural world. There was no special creation or act of God to mark man out. Thus, 'sin emerges within human evolution'.[20]

What then is the place of sin? Here again there are multiple responses to this question and three will be considered. All of them represent a fundamental break with the classical doctrine of sin.



2.2.1 Sin and survival.

[20] Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly 'Science' *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007) p527

Charles Sherlock summarises this view as being that 'sin is the inevitable outcome of the struggle to survive'.[21] Sherlock calls this '*the pessimistic view'.* According to this understanding sin is entirely human, it has no real spiritual content; 'evolution, even death and extinction are good unequivocably'.[22]

We should rightly ask what this means about natural evil? Those who hold to this view are in effect asserting that natural evil is an illusion, we use it as a category of thought and language, but there is no such thing in reality.

This then is a radical departure from the classical doctrine of sin. There is no spiritual element to sin. Sin is neither about break of relationship nor of break of divine commands, it is just natural. Likewise, death and corruption are only to be expected. It is 'pessimistic' because sin cannot be avoided.

2.2.2 Leaving sin behind

An alternative view is summarised by Sherlock thus: *'Sin is a stage in human development out of which we will evolve and leave'.*[23] Sherlock calls this '*the optimistic view'.*

In other words sin has been part of the process of evolution, but now a point has been reached where human beings can understand this process and thus are able, in principle to rise above it. This view is optimistic because though at present we are shackled by our predicament, human beings may have the power to climb out of the evolutionary soup and chart a higher, greater way forward.

This particular view of sin resonates with process theology because both have as their backbone an evolutionary framework. However, it also seems to appeal to those most concerned with the survival of the eco-system and thus sin is often equated with doing those things that threaten most the survival of the environment and of mankind. Even here however there are intriguing dilemmas. Our forebears in

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[21] Charles Sherlock *The Doctrine of Humanity* (p63)

[22] Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly 'Science' *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007) p527

[23] Charles Sherlock *The Doctrine of Humanity* (Inter-Varsity Press) p63

the UK hunted to extinction animals such as bears and wolves, it was a case of them or us. Today in parts of the world there is a debate about whether some animals, killer sharks say, should likewise be hunted, or whether to do so would be to upset the delicate balance of the eco-system.

Regardless of the interesting conundrums, this view is again a fundamental departure from the classical view, because, although it keeps the idea of sin, it redefines it radically. Under this view the greatest sins are those things which seem to threaten our survival.

2.2.3 The sin myth

The third variation is provided by the revisionists. On the one hand are the popular revisionists like Jack Spong, former Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, whilst on the other hand are the intellectual revisionists like Don Cupitt of Cambridge.

According to the revisionists if sin is a necessary part of evolution, then there is nothing wrong with sin. Where then has the idea of sin come from? In their view it arose as a weapon of power. They consider the purpose of religion to be power, to keep people in their place and the doctrine of sin is a key part of this.

Spong for example accepts the Darwinian timescale without question, Adam and Eve did not exist, death happened long before the biblical time span and so on.

> The unravelling began with the realization that Adam and Eve were not the primeval human parents and that all life did not stem from these two. The theory of evolution made Adam and Eve legendary at best.[24]
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> The power of western religion has always rested on the ability of religious people to understand and to manipulate that sense of human inadequacy that expresses itself as guilt.[25]

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[24] John S Spong *Why Christianty Must Change or Die* (Harper San Francisco 1998) p95
[25] John S Spong *Why Christianty Must Change or Die* (Harper San Francisco 1998) p90

He goes on to argue that very quickly the early Christians interpreted the life and death of Jesus within this mind-set and that this is reflected in the New Testament. Commenting on how the doctrine of sin developed he says:

> Seldom did Christians pause to recognise the ogre into which they had turned God. A human father who would nail his son to a cross for any purpose would be arrested for child abuse.[26]

Cupitt goes further; 'at the very heart of traditional objective theism there is something utterly dreadful and horrible, the worst idea we poor humans have ever had'.[27]

Cupitt attacks liberals because they only ever talk about the how of religion, about morality and ethics, and never about the what - metaphysics.
He says of conservatives that: 'they are simply pagans. Because they have no philosophy, they do not understand how badly their own religion has deteriorated'.[28]
Cupitt does not even bother with the fundamentalists, he writes of fundamentalism: 'it entirely lacks intellectual content, and no notice need be taken of it here'.[29]

The same criticism has also come out of feminist theology where it has been argued that traditional religion has been used as an instrument of control and particularly as a means of controlling women. The language of sin within the classical view is a particular instance where it has been used to keep women subjective and in their place.

The problems with this view of sin are not so much in what it says - or doesn't say - about sin, but more in what it says about God. Cupitt and Spong are both idolaters. They do not like the picture of God presented by classical theology and therefore they take it as given that classical theology must be wrong. They have made themselves the arbiters of absolute truth - they are as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen 3.5).

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[26] John S Spong *Why Christianty Must Change or Die* (Harper San Francisco 1998) p95
[27] Don Cupitt *The Old Creed and the New* (London: SCM Press 2006) p11
[28] Don Cupitt *The Old Creed and the New* (London: SCM Press 2006) p33
[29] Don Cupitt *The Old Creed and the New* (London: SCM Press 2006) p2

3. Two case studies

Having surveyed the way in which the classical doctrine of sin has been challenged in contemporary theology we turn briefly to consider how the doctrine of sin is handled in two recent reports from the Church of England Doctrine Commission. We might reasonably expect that reports on the doctrine of man and the doctrine of salvation would give a thorough treatment of the doctrine of sin.

3.1 Being Human

Being Human was produced by the Doctrine Commission produced in 2003 and purports to be a treatment of the Christian understanding of personhood. The report illustrates well the accusation of Don Cupitt cited above that liberals deal with the how and not the what. The report is not, as it might have been, a statement of the Christian doctrine of man - that is the 'what'. Rather it looks at personhood in relation to four moral issues power, money, sex and time - that is the 'how'.[30]

The report mentions the classical view of man as fallen and free but then decides to focus on a different concept, 'wisdom', and then develops this theme. The report presupposes an evolutionary framework and within this assumes that the idea of wisdom has also evolved. There is no attempt to justify this presupposition or address how it might affect our translation of classical theological concepts. This evolutionary approach to doctrine is common in such reports because it allows the authors to quote Scripture freely as part of the evolutionary process and yet we are not required to feel bound by Scripture since we have now evolved beyond that point in our theological thinking. It is assumed that in some areas Scripture has been left behind.

The upshot of all this is that the report almost completely avoids the doctrine of sin. This is quite extraordinary since, in most classical treatments of the doctrine of man, the reality of sin featured prominently. Moreover, one thing that can be said to be a universal experience of human being is the fact that we do sin and we suffer the

[30] The Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England *Being Human* (London: Church House Publishing 2003)

consequences of sin. However, it appears from the report that sin has little place in a contemporary doctrine of man.

3.2 The Mystery of Salvation

The previous Doctrine Commission report was *The Mystery of Salvation*, published in 1995. Here again, as a report on salvation one might assume it would deal with the issue of sin. After all, in classical theology the idea of sin and salvation do tend to relate to one another; 'and you shall call His name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'. [31]

To be fair the report does cite some of the issues that have been raised in this paper. There is discussion on the feminist challenges to the idea of sin as pride or sin as self-responsibility and alongside this considers how the doctrine of sin has been shaped by the male dominated cultures in which it arose.

The Mystery of Salvation again assumes not just an evolutionary world-view but also an evolutionary framework. Thus it assumes that theological ideas also evolved in history and in particular argues that the doctrine of salvation came first, and that the doctrine of creation was worked backwards from it. This is one of the fruits of liberal scholarship. It is assumed that the Bible cannot be true, therefore some attempt has to be made to explain how it came to be. The assumption is that the people of Israel experienced the Exodus, or at least would have liked to have done so. Therefore, over time, they developed a way of giving background and credence to their experience, hence the book of Genesis. In the same way Christians experienced the cross, saw Jesus die, and from that worked backwards to the idea that Christ was an agent of God, which the gospels then fleshed out.

> One effect of this common biblical pattern of movement back from salvation to creation, from history to cosmology, is to make the Fall less pivotal for biblical theology as a whole than it was to become in later Christian thought. It is not contemplation of the human plight as such which gives rise to soteriology, but particular historical experiences of the saving power of God.[32]

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[31] Matthew 1.21

[32] The Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England *The Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House Publishing 1995) p86

This is a convenient methodology. It allows the authors to criticise the classical doctrine of sin and then move on to discuss the doctrine of man and the doctrine of salvation without any real reference to sin.

Summary

It is common view that sin is not preached or talked about in churches as much as it used to be. Whether or not this is true it does seem to be the case that the doctrine of sin is far less prominent in theological discussion than it once was. Curiously it is amongst feminists where sin still has some prominence. In classical theology sin played a fundamental role in explaining what it means to be human, and therefore in giving context to the doctrine of salvation. However, the understanding of what it means to be human, both in terms of self-understanding and human origin, has changed. These changes in understanding have led to a change in the doctrine of sin because the classical doctrine of sin cannot be separated from what it means to be human or how humans came to be.

At heart this change in the doctrine of sin is itself a consequence of sin. In the classical doctrine sin is first and foremost a breach of divine command, that is a failure to accept and live by the Word of God. 'When with his whole soul Adam believed the serpent and not God, then the Divine Grace which had rested on him stepped away from him, so that he became the enemy of God by reason of the unbelief which he had shown to His words.'[33] By the same token the reason for the change in the classical doctrine is an unwillingness to accept what God has revealed in Scripture; that is 'unbelief... to His words'.

David Phillips is General Secretary of Church Society

[33] St Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022AD) cited in Pomanzansky *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood 3rd edition 2005) p 158