

THE SHACKLES OF THE LATIN CAPTIVITY

OR

Your Sin Is Not So Original

Part One

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying: What mean ye that ye use this proverb... saying: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not use this proverb in Israel. Behold.. .the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die.

(Ezekiel 18:1-4)

Are we aware that the term "Original Sin" appears nowhere in the writings of the Holy Fathers? This is purely an Augustinian, and thereafter, exclusively Papal and Protestant concept. The Patristic term is *propatorikón amártima*, "the forefather's (i.e. Adam's) sin," "the ancestral sin." The implications of this term are very different — radically different — from those of the term "Original Sin." For as we know, the doctrine of "Original Sin" is precisely that we all inherit the *guilt* of Adam's sin. Before Augustine, this teaching was unknown to the Church of Christ. In contrast, the Fathers taught that we inherit the seed of sin, a proclivity for sin because of the corruption into which we are born. This weakness (like a tendency for diabetes that we might inherit from our parents) rules like "another law" in our members and "wars against the law" of our minds, bringing us "into captivity to the law of sin" which is in our members, as the blessed Paul writes to the Romans. Nowhere in the Scriptures or in the Fathers does it say that we inherit the guilt of Adam's transgression. I am responsible for and guilty of my own sins, not Adam's. Indeed, the Fathers say that we "inherit sin," by which however, they mean a weakness for sin, or, we are born into a sinful environment which encourages us to sin. And, lest anyone should be led astray and misinterpret this expression "inherit sin," the Fathers are careful to bring us back to "the thought of true religion" by pointing out the other aspect of our nature, which also is inherited. For, as Saint Basil notes,

Virtues exist in us also by nature, and the soul has affinity with them not by education, but by nature herself. We do not need lessons to hate illness, but by ourselves we repel what afflicts us; the soul has no need of an instructor to teach us to avoid vice.

(*Hexaemeron*, Homily IX: 4)

In his explanation of John 9:2, Saint Cyril of Alexandria dedicates a whole homily to the condemnation of the doctrine that one generation is responsible for or guilty of the sins of a former generation. He says that people who teach this "silly nonsense" do not fear "to mingle [pagan] Greek error with the doctrines of the Church." He writes:

By the mouth of Moses He published laws innumerable, and in many cases those living in bad habits were ordered to be punished, but nowhere is a command from Him to be found, that children should share the penalties incurred by their sinning fathers. . . .
nay, not even does He lay upon a descendant the faults of his ancestors like a burden.

(Homilies on St. John's Gospel, Book VI, chap. 1)

And again, he writes:

For it would have been in a manner absurd, that the sentence of condemnation should fall upon all men through one man, who was the first, I mean Adam; and that those who had not sinned at that time, that is, at which the founder of our race transgressed the commandment given unto him, should wear the dishonorable image of the earthy.

(Homilies on St. John's Gospel, Book II, chap. 17)

As Saint Cyril points out, if God actually did "lay upon a descendant the faults of his ancestors," He could surely not be considered merciful or long-suffering or forgiving, but spiteful, vengeful and unjust.

Like the Prophet Ezekiel, the holy Prophet Jeremias is also very clear about this:

In those days they shall say no more: The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his *own* iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, *his* teeth shall be set on edge.

(Jer. 38:29, Septuag.)

A Non-existent Problem

One wonders — since, as the Latin theologians say, one can inherit Adam's *guilt* — why, then, can he not also inherit the justification and forgiveness that Adam, our progenitor, received when Our Saviour descended into Hades? However, in view of the understanding that the Church Fathers had on this whole question of "Original Sin," a contemporary Orthodox theologian has rightly observed that the Latin doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is "a wrong solution to a nonexistent problem." Why is this so?

In order to rescue the Mother of God from inheriting the *guilt* of the "Original Sin," the Latin theologians had to invent yet *another* new doctrine — the doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception". That is, the Mother of God, say they, was conceived and born

"immaculately" *without the guilt* of Adam's sin (which, as we said, is itself a false doctrine).

That is why the Immaculate Conception is "a wrong solution to a non-existent problem."

Stay tuned. It gets better.*

* Of course, I speak in irony. In fact, it gets much, much worse.