

Scholia et Homiletica

**Eve's Answer to the Serpent:
An Alternative Paradigm for Sin and
Some Implications in Theology**

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The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Gen. 3:2-3)

Can we take these italicized words seriously, or must we dismiss them as the hasty additions of Eve's overactive imagination? Did God say or mean this when he instructed Adam in Genesis 2:16-17? I suggest that, not only did Eve speak accurately and insightfully in responding to the serpent but that her words hold a key to reevaluating the doctrine of original sin and especially the puzzles of alien guilt and the imputation of sin. In this article, I seek to reignite discussion on these topics by suggesting an alternative paradigm for discussing the doctrine of original sin and by applying that paradigm in a preliminary manner to various themes in theology, biblical interpretation, and Christian living. I seek not so much to answer questions as to evoke new ones that will jar us into a more productive path of theological explanation. I suggest that Eve's words indicate that the Bible structures the ideas that we recognize as original sin around the concept of uncleanness.

Scholarly Discussion of Eve's Words

Eve has very few complete defenders in the history of scholarship in Genesis.¹ Of those, only U. Cassuto explains why he is confident that Eve cor-

¹ Among all the literature, I could locate only four scholars willing to grant that Eve's words correctly describe God's will concerning the tree: Basil F. C. Atkins, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Henry E. Walter, 1954); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* trans. John C. Fletcher (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 69; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, part 1, trans. Israel Abraham (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1972), 145; Leon J. Wood, *Genesis: A Study Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

rectly stated God's will. After an analysis of the word meaning "to touch" (ng), he concludes, "Hence in the final analysis the clause *neither shall you touch it* is simply synonymous with the preceding clause."² If we accept Cassuto's argument, Eve's words represent little more than a stylistic variation by the writer. Robert Davidson openly adopts this position.³ Yet, the deviation so catches the eye (as evidenced by Eve's many detractors noted below) that one could justly wonder why the writer would insert such a variation here.

A second class of defenders accepts Eve's words as substantive variations, but deflects criticism of Eve. Nahum M. Sarna suggests the possibility that Eve "is quoting what her husband told her."⁴ But the lack of any textual support that the writer of Genesis intended this conclusion gives this the appearance of desperate speculation. John J. Scullion and Phyllis Tribble independently conclude that Eve "builds a 'fence around the Torah,' a procedure that her rabbinical successors developed fully to protect divine law and ensure obedience."⁵ But this would imply that the writer of these words lived in a context where his readers would be broadly familiar with such "rabbinical fencing," making these words impossibly late additions to Genesis.

Occasionally, commentators omit any comment on the words at all, evidently assuming that they are self-evident, as for example Walter Brueggeman.⁶ But the vast majority of commentators consider these words of Eve, at best, unfortunate mental or emotional slips, and, at worst, deliberate distortions. Writers as diverse as James Montgomery Boice, Nahamoh Liebowitz, Henry Morris, Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westerman, and George A. F. Knight populate this camp, indicating a broad tradition of commentary.⁷ All these join in cho-

² U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 145.

³ Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 40: "This addition to the prohibition as originally stated in 2:17 has led certain scholars to suggest that the woman herself is not beginning to overplay God's strictness. It may, however, be no more than a stylistic variation on the prohibition of eating."

⁴ Nahum M Sarna, *Genesis* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 24.

⁵ John J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 38: "The woman, in defense, builds a fence around it something God did not say." Phyllis Tribble, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies," *Christian Century* 99, no. 4 (1988) : 117: "If the tree is not touched, then its fruit cannot be eaten. Here the woman builds a 'fence around the Torah,' a procedure that her rabbinical successors developed fully to protect divine law and ensure obedience."

⁶ Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 135: "a correct (or at least mostly correct) reiteration." Nahamoh Liebowitz, *Studies in Bereshit* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1981), 30: "Moreover, to the prohibition of eating has been gratuitously added that of even touching." Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 111: "she both added to and subtracted from God's actual words." Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) : "a bit too far in her zeal." Howard Vos,

rus in proclaiming Eve's culpability. Some even go so far as to delve into Eve's psyche, finding resentment before the Fall.⁸ However, this tradition is fraught with difficulties for anyone who wishes to take seriously the logic of the narrative of Genesis 1-3.

The rabbis that Plant quotes are right in considering an "embroidery of the truth to be the opening wedge of sin."⁹ Indeed, the Bible consistently condemns any addition to God's Word as sin.¹⁰ Thus, if Eve presumptuously added to God's Word in her conversation with the serpent, she sinned, or began sinning, prior to taking the fruit and eating it.

Yet, the biblical narrative will not allow this. The effects of the Fall (the knowledge of transgression and the shame that drive them to hide first from each other and then from God) occur immediately after their consuming the fruit: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Gen. 3:7). The Fall is not a process, but a point of disobedience, after which original sin takes hold, and before which we can assume only innocence.

Some commentators have attempted to overcome this difficulty by moving Eve's motivation for the "addition" into her subconscious or emotions. They paint a picture of an Eve who has harbored discontent over God's strictness. However, emotions such as resentment or exasperation directed toward God,¹¹

Genesis (Moody Press: Chicago, 1982), 26: "she ... added `neither shall he touch it.'" Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1-II: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 239-40): "But while the command is being discussed, it is altered in the very act of defending it the narrator makes this know by means of a slight refinement that the woman introduces: 'Neither shall you touch it.' ... One who defends a command can already be on the way to breaking it."

⁸ George A. F. Knight, *Theology in Pictures: A Commentary on Genesis Chapters One to Eleven* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 36: "She shows her exasperation by adding that she and her husband are forbidden even to touch the fruit." Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 74: "[she said it] to temporize, to give expression to resentment against God's command by adding... 'neither shall you touch it.'" Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 78: "Is there, however, a touch of resentment lurking in the refinement that she adds to the original stipulation, namely that they may not even touch the forbidden fruit?" [italics original]

⁹ W. Gunther Plant, *Genesis: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 37.

¹⁰ Numbers 20:7-12; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:22; Proverbs 30:3-9; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 2:22-23; Revelation 22:18

¹¹ Robert S. Candlish, *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 62: "she dwells on the prohibition, amplifying it and magnifying it as an intolerable hardship." Knight, *Theology in Pictures*, 36: "She shows her exasperation by adding that she and her husband are forbidden even to touch the fruit." H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1942), 148: "By this insertion Eve betrays the course her thought have taken. She feels the prohibition was unduly sharp so unconsciously she sharpens it herself." C. H. MacIntosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy: Notes on the Pentateuch* (1880; reprint, Neptune, NJ.: Liozeaux Brothers, 1974), 28: "whether her misquotation proceeded from ignorance, or indifference, or a desire to represent God in an

or a hidden desire for the fruit that exists prior to the temptation,¹² imply a corruption or defect in Eve's character prior to the Fall; she harbored moral rebellion in her heart while still "unfallen" and was therefore created evil. Nor does it assist us to grant her clemency due to "alarm and foreboding" over the coniving of the serpent.¹³ Presumption driven by fear remains presumption.

The high commitment across theological lines to such a position suggests a deeper foundation. Gowan notes that there is a history of sexism in the interpretation of Genesis 3, in which commentators attempt to understand why Eve was the target of the Serpent's temptation. To do so, they call her either the weaker or stronger partner because of her gender.¹⁴ Perhaps a better explanation may simply be theological inertia. The denigration of Eve's person, motivation, and words in Genesis 3:2-3 has a long and venerable history, going back to the Reformation and before. But, to do justice to both the text and the logic of the text, we must accept Eve's words, "do not touch it" as significant, logical, and innocent. To accomplish this we can do no better than to pose, regarding Eve's words, the questions that Scullion poses regarding the Serpent:¹⁵

What is the function of the Story?

What did it symbolize in the ancient Near East?

What associations would it evoke in the minds of the people of Israel as they listened to the story?

What Was the Function of the Story

Most commentators on Genesis seem to read Eve's words as if no other revelation existed. If they refer to any other text at all, it is only Genesis 2:17 in which the original command from God is first rendered. But such a reading overlooks the way Genesis assumes the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan and how it uses the Sinai code.

arbitrary light, or from all three, it is plain that she was entirely of the true ground of simple confidence in, and subjugation to, God's holy Word." Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis*, 74: "To temporize, to give expression to resentment against God's command by adding ... 'neither shall you touch it.'" Vawter, *On Genesis*, 78: "Is there, however a touch of resentment lurking in the refinement that she adds to the original stipulation, namely that they may not even touch the forbidden fruit?" [italics original]

¹² John W. Willis. *Genesis* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing, 1979), 118: "The woman's hidden desire for the forbidden fruit is revealed in her overreaction to the serpent's question: 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die

¹³ Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 153: "It is more probable that the woman seized with alarm and foreboding of what the serpent was trying to persuade her to, sought by this addition to cut off any further allurements."

¹⁴ Donald E. Gowan, *Genesis 1-11: From Eden to Babel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 53.

¹⁵ Scullion, *Genesis*, 38.

Genesis was written to a redeemed people of God. Genesis, as received, contains an apologetic for the origins of Israel as a distinct nation and its claim on the land of Canaan. Chapters 1-11 place Israel in the context of a fallen and diverse humanity, culminating in the table of nations and the tower of Babel. In the table of nations, Genesis lays special emphasis on Egypt (Mizraim) and Canaan, the two principals in the exodus-conquest by detailing their genealogies most extensively (Gen. 10:13-19). The remainder of Genesis focuses on the selection of Abraham and his descendants as God's special people (Gen. 12:2-3; 13:16; 17:2, 4; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3, 14; 32:12; 35:11; 41:49; 46:3; 47:27; 48:4, 16, 19) and the land as God's promised possession (Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8; 23:18; 24:7; 28:13; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24). In the process, Genesis 15:12-21 provides a theodicy of sorts covering the entire experience of slavery-exodus-conquest. Genesis 9:25 effectively authorizes the subjugation of the Canaanites.

Thus, Genesis assumes the history of exodus-conquest, in the midst of which Israel received the law-code of Sinai.¹⁶ Traces of this law-code play important parts in the drama of Genesis. The story of Judah and Tamar assumes the levirate marriage of Deuteronomy 25:5-6. And the flood depends in part on a common understanding of clean and unclean animals and their respective appropriateness for sacrifice. While such concepts did predate the exodus,¹⁷ the post-exodus context of the first readers implies that these passages were intended to be read in the light of the law given at Sinai, including the cleanliness code found in Leviticus.

In this context, the story of the Fall functions as a pretext for the exodus-conquest. Genesis 3 identifies the sources of evil that have led to the suffering of slavery. It also justifies the conquest by expanding the division between the woman and the Serpent to an ongoing struggle between their descendants (Gen. 3:15).¹⁸ All of this relies on a separation from, and over against, the rest of the nations--the very separation identified in the Levitical code (Lev. 18:24-30; 20:22-27).

¹⁶ I happily count myself among those whom Walter Houston derides as "biblicistic scholars swallowing whole the Bible's own account of their [Israel's] origin." Walter Houston, *Purity and Monotheism* (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT Press, 1993), 120. I freely admit that I assume the validity of the scriptural history that depicts God's giving the laws found in Exodus through Deuteronomy prior to the entrance into the land. Such are the assumptions of faith, for which I make no apology, except to note that the assumptions of criticism which allow others to give these laws a postexilic (or at least Davidic) origin are equally grounded in presuppositional faith commitments.

¹⁷ G. C. Alders, *Genesis*, trans. William Heynen. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:167; 2:193.

¹⁸ Note that here the woman and her seed are identified with the side of holiness and godliness over against the evil of the Serpent. This should surely add more stature to Eve in her conversation with the Serpent.

Some will find this position naturally untenable. The hermeneutical descendants of Wellhusen may object that any uncleanness reference must arise from a late priestly source and therefore must be derivative of, not foundational to, Old Testament thought. Traditionally, critical scholars designate Genesis 2-3 as derived from the "J" or "Yahwist" document or source or tradition (commonly dated to the Davidic or Solomonic era), whereas they place the whole of Leviticus in the venue of the "P" or "Priestly" tradition (commonly proclaimed to be postexilic).¹⁹ Furthermore, they give J a purpose distinct from P (critiquing royal authority versus salvaging the traditions and identity of a despairing, postexilic community).²⁰ Whether this prevented some commentators from questioning the significance of Eve's words cannot be known because they remain universally silent on the issue of any supposed source for the phrase, "do not touch," separate from the rest of the text in which it sits.

Thomas Kuhn has noted that theoretical paradigms, such as the documentary hypothesis, serve not only to organize thought, but to set the boundaries for what a theorist can possibly perceive to exist.

Surveying the rich experimental literature from which these examples are drawn makes one suspect that something like a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself. What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon [what] his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see. In the absence of such training there can only be, in William James' phrase, "a bloomin' buzzin' confusion."²¹

Indeed, according to Kuhn's analysis, even major theoretical crises do not force theoreticians to spot evidence that runs counter to their paradigm.²²

This must surely condition the perception of those holding to the documentary hypothesis, for Genesis 3:2 lies at the heart of the theory. The docu-

¹⁹ Westerman, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 47-48.

²⁰ Bruggeman, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 14.

²¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 113.

²² *Ibid.*, 77: "Though they may begin to lose faith and then to consider alternatives, they do not renounce the paradigm that has led them into crisis. They do not, that is, treat anomalies as counter-instances, though in the vocabulary of philosophy of science that is what they are." Interestingly, such a crisis may be in the offing, heralded by the likes of Scullion, *Genesis*, 6-7, who notes Rendtorff's attempt to dispense with the documentary hypothesis as "tried in the fire, found wanting, and leading to an impasse." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 37: "In a book that is patently anonymous, and where all original texts have long since disappeared, it is most likely that a project to determine Genesis' authorship and mode of composition is doomed from the start." and Jay W. Marshall, Israel and the *Book of the Covenant: An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Law* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 25: regarding the hook of the covenant the notes that source criticism has ceased, form critics "have posited just about every imaginable origin and *Sitz im Leben*, but actually have offered little information about the cultural context," and neither history nor redaction studies "can offer much progress without accompanying knowledge of the relationship between law codes and legal procedures."

mentary hypothesis originated in part in a distinction between the use of the names Elohim and Yahweh in the text of the Pentateuch, such as found in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 and ascribing these to different eras and intentions. Universally, this hypothesis has assigned Genesis 1 completely to P and 2-3 completely to J.²³ Having made that theoretical commitment, one could easily overlook any connection between any phrase in the Yahwist chapters 2-3 and the Priestly book of Leviticus.

But even within the camp of criticism, room can be made to accept the validity of a Priestly insertion in this story. In reciting the basics of the Documentary Hypothesis, von Rad notes that even P "contains an abundance of ancient and very ancient material"²⁴ and allows for "minor insertions from the Priestly Document" throughout Genesis,²⁵ though he does not identify this as one. (This resonates with R. K. Harrison's criticism of dating P late: "Modern discoveries have always shown that priestly material from the Near East is always early rather than late in arising, and that priestly traditions are usually preserved in a meticulous manner."²⁶ Moreover, Van Seter has recently suggested that the Yahwist (J) is possibly later than earlier thought, perhaps in the early postexilic period.²⁷ Wenham further squeezes J and P together, noting that it is difficult to maintain a postexilic date for Leviticus "in the face of abundant quotations in Ezekiel and linguistic evidence that P's vocabulary does not resemble that of late biblical Hebrew."²⁸ Additionally, Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien declare that the Documentary Hypothesis applies only to narrative texts, and on that basis designate the uncleanness code of Leviticus as undated "non-source text."²⁹ Finally, though he holds to a late dating of Leviticus, Walter Houston notes, "that the biblical system of rules arose in a setting that was eminently compatible with it: it required no sharp changes in habitual dietary and cultic practices general in the land and its environs since the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age."³⁰ Such being the case, one can hardly exclude the possibility, even from within the structure of the Documentary Hypothesis, that Eve's statements might be original to the story and indicative of the story's dependence on the cleanness code found in Leviticus 11.

²³ Westerman, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 186: "The generally acknowledged conclusions that Gen.2-3 is to be attributed to a different literary source (J) from Gen. 1 (P) is assumed."

²⁴ von Rad, *Genesis*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 22.

²⁷ John Van Seter, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: John Knox, 1992), 21, 129.

²⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 13.

²⁹ Anthony F. Campbell and Mark O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 200 and 61 n. 26.

³⁰ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 177.

Given such a dependence, the phrase, "do not touch," functions to draw the readers' attention beyond the bounds of Genesis itself and into the cleanness code. As I will show shortly, it raises in the mind of the original reader many associations that enrich the meaning of the text and communicate more than our present tradition of commentary suggests.

What Did the Words of Eve Symbolize?

With this understanding, we may revisit the words of Eve to the Serpent. She specifies that "God did say ... you may not touch it [the fruit]" (Gen. 3:3). If we restrict the context of these words to Genesis, then we must admit that God did not say that (Gen. 2:17). But, if we allow that the writer of Genesis expected a basic familiarity with the law of Sinai, we must allow a broader context for this statement, including the Sinai laws found in the whole Pentateuch. In this broader context the words, "you may not touch," take on deeper significance.

We find parallels to Eve's words in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Leviticus 11 defines food that is lawful for Israelites to eat. Concerning unclean land animals, verse 8 states, "You must not *eat* their meat or *touch* their carcasses; they are unclean for you" (emphasis added). The vocabulary and sentence structure of this verse strongly parallel's Eve's words in Genesis 3:3: "You must not eat fruit ... and you must not touch it."

This parallel strengthens when we realize that this is a special prohibition against touching unclean (forbidden) food and is beyond the prohibition against touching dead clean animals given in Leviticus 11:39-40. Furthermore, this combined prohibition against eating *and* touching repeats throughout the chapter (with certain stylistic variations) in reference to various forbidden foods. Indeed, the prohibition against touching becomes a crescendo of emphasis as the chapter proceeds: unclean water creatures--"And since you are to detest them, you must not eat their meat and you must detest their carcasses" (v.11) ; flying creatures--"These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable [to you] ... whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening." (v 13, 24b); land animals (again!)--"whoever touches the carcasses of any of them will be unclean ... whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean until evening" (26b, 27b-28a).

Deuteronomy 14:8b repeats this pattern once, phrasing the prohibition identically to Leviticus 11:8a, the closest Leviticus parallel to Genesis 3:3. While it could be argued that Deuteronomy 14 was derived from Leviticus 11, such a derivation does not lessen the strength of the parallel to Genesis 3:3. The very choice of this phrase over others in Leviticus 11, whether by derivation or common source, points to it as a key phrase in teaching the prohibitions against unclean food.

Read in this light, the original readers of Genesis 3 would have understood Eve's words as a natural outgrowth of God's command in Genesis 2:17. The

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden food, and therefore unclean.

Obviously there are differences. Israel knew of no unclean plants or fruit. But then, Adam and Eve did not eat meat; fruit was the extent of the food granted (Gen. 2:16). Furthermore, the consequences of even touching the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was death (Gen. 3:3), while touching unclean food only made one unclean until evening (Lev. 11:24-28). Yet the consequences of even temporary uncleanness were severe. It required a sin offering for atonement (Lev. 5:2, 5-6), and cut one off from worship, requiring death for the unclean worshiper (Lev. 7:21 cf. Ex. 31:14 for the meaning of the phrase "cut off"). Following Meredith G. Kline, the Garden of Eden was a holy temple-garden,³¹ a thought reinforced by the garden motif found in the temple (1 Kings 6:23-35). Such an understanding would equate any unclean person in the Garden of Eden with an unclean person in the temple or even the Holy of Holies--a situation demanding death.³² But even if we ignore such a connection between the garden and temple, if an Israelite ate unclean food and did not cleanse himself, the ominous threat proclaimed "he will be held responsible" (Lev. 17:16). And eating unclean food was a sin that subjected the whole nation to exile (Lev. 20:22-26), an obvious parallel to the punishment of Adam and Eve.

Finally, we must reckon with the repeated emphasis on evening. Temporary uncleanness by touching demanded immediate cleansing and left one unclean until evening (Lev. 11:25, 28, 31, 32, 39, 40; 17:15). Could this be why Genesis 3:8 notes that God came walking in the "cool of the day," that is, after sunset? Does the narrative indicate that God is visiting them after the time when their uncleanness should have been cleansed, a time when the offense of uncleanness should normally have passed?

In light of all of this one can argue that the original readers of Eve's words would have understood the story in the context of God's commands concerning unclean foods, and would have understood that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was unclean food. This has consequences for both our reading of Genesis 3 and our understanding of original sin.

What Did Uncleanness Symbolize?

If we accept the connection between the words of Eve and the cleanness code of the Sinai laws, then we can move on to Scullion's second question:

³¹ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, vol. 1 (South Hamilton, Mass.: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1986), 37-38.

³² Note the careful preparation given the high priest for entering the temple in Leviticus 16, including the atonement for sin, the bathing to cleanse, and the covering with holy garments to cover any remaining uncleanness. Leviticus 16:2 makes death the outcome of any less careful handling of the high priest's presence before God.

"What did it symbolize in the ancient Near East?" Here we run onto rough roads. The exact nature of uncleanness continues to elude scholars. And, as an added impediment to the evangelical scholar, the present theories assume a secular, sociological stance. They assume that the dietary laws of Leviticus arose solely from the culture surrounding the Israelites, the product of priests or social consensus. This contrasts starkly with the evangelical church's confession that the Scriptures have divine origin and the implication that any interpretation take seriously the testimony of Scripture concerning the historical circumstances that God describes in this revelation.³³ Yet, these studies have shed light on the cultural context in which God gave these commands.

Following Walter Houston, we may divide most theories into etic and emic classes, or theories supposing that the meaning of cultural features arise to explain historically prior practices, as compared with those supposing that cultural features gain their meaning only in the context of currently held values and beliefs.³⁴ Without replicating his extensive review of the theories, a few comments can be made. First we should take seriously Houston's suggestion that we need not "take sides," that "historical, material, and symbolic considerations must all be taken into account" in seeking to understand the meaning of a cultural symbol.³⁵ As I stated earlier, and is evident from Houston's own expansive survey, cleanness codes were widespread throughout the times and cultures of biblical history.³⁶ Thus, God merely appropriated that historical phenomenon and utilized it to express his will in the Levitical code. The practice does, indeed, precede the explanation. The practice may even have some origins useful for understanding the distinction among clean, unclean, and holy animals.

However, the emic school must command preeminence. One can doubt that any religious practice, however old, can persist in the face of temptation if not reenforced by concurrent values and beliefs. And indeed, there must have been temptation to raise and eat pigs and other unclean animals in Israel, otherwise the prohibition is meaningless. Indeed, Houston well assesses the point when he states, "Whatever the source of social tension, attitudes of contempt [toward food] only develop into formal taboos when a religious factor intervenes."³⁷

³³ The Christian Reformed Synod of 1972 adopted the following pastoral advice which expresses this implication well: "Synod encourages the churches to see to it that biblical studies are carried on in a careful and disciplined way, submissively rethinking the thoughts of Scripture itself, and accordingly warns against the use of any method of interpretation which excludes or calls into question either the event-character or the revelational meaning of biblical history, thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God. Acts of Synod 1972 (Grand Rapids: CRC Board of Publications, 1972), 69.

³⁴ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 120-21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 176, 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

What is that religious factor? "The division into clean (edible) foods and unclean (inedible) foods corresponds to the division between holy Israel and the Gentile world."³⁸ Peter's vision in Acts 10 and his subsequent visit to Cornelius confirms this concept as apostolic, since overcoming the Levitical aversion to unclean foods becomes the symbol for overcoming the aversion to evangelizing the unclean (Gentile) people. But current theorists display subtle differences on how certain animals become associated with the unclean Gentiles. Douglas (and Wenham following Douglas) suggests that cleanness and holiness designate conformity to standards of "wholeness and normality," which the unclean fail to meet.³⁹ Douglas attributes the origin of this to an original division between pastoral and agricultural society, where pigs (of little use to pastoralists) would become abhorred as foreign animals and were therefore symbolic of foreign peoples.⁴⁰

Onto this original abhorrence, Douglas applies a deductive approach to the matter of cleanness. She begins with the general assumption (deduced from many cultural sources) that "uncleanness is a matter of place.... Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained."⁴¹ This she then superimposes on the biblical text to determine the pattern that uncleanness breaks. Viewed through this lens, she concludes that "all holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes not be confused."⁴² She settles on methods of locomotion as the criteria for the pattern, the frame into which various creatures must fit to be declared unclean: hopping, jumping, or walking for land animals; use of fins and scales for sea creatures.⁴³ However, she admits that she cannot explain by this method why some birds are unclean.⁴⁴

Scholars have heavily criticized Douglas' thesis, and excellent summaries of these criticisms may be found in the work of Firmage and Houston.⁴⁵ Without repeating their extensive analysis, we can note two basic defects in Douglas' theory. First, the criteria for uncleanness given in Leviticus does not limit itself to methods of locomotion. Chewing the cud (for land animals) and scales (for

³⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Unclean Food," *The Evangelical Quarterly* (January-March 1981): 11.

³⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 169.

⁴⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purify and Danger* (1966; reprint, New York: Praeger, 1970), 53-54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Edwin Firmage, "The Biblical Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton (New York: Brill, 1990), 177-81; Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 93-114

water creatures) have nothing to do with how a creature moves. (Note catfish who, without scales, move in a way indistinguishable from other fish.) This becomes especially apparent when discussing animals that swarm on the ground. "It is not convincing to suggest that there is anything in common between the modes of movement of a worm, a crab, a minnow, a butterfly, and a mouse. The conclusion must be that while in reference to creatures confined to the ground *seres* takes the place of *remes* and so has some connotation of movement, it does not in general define a group by their "mode of propulsion."⁴⁶

Second, Douglas assumes that societies build taxonomic systems and then apply them to their reality, thereby designating what is normal or clean or acceptable. But people build their taxonomic systems in reality, classifying everything that appears there in some place. It would be only when some alien animal would invade an area with an already established classification system that something might appear so different as to be declared abnormal or unclean. And even then, people are likely to push something into a known category or even make a new category.⁴⁷ Take, for instance, children's seeing a bat for the first time. They are likely to call it a bird until some closer examination challenges their decision; or perhaps even consider it a hairy bird until corrected. These two problems render Douglas' thesis on locomotion untenable. But that does not as such disqualify her theory that uncleanness itself is that which is out of place. It merely moves the grounds for that condemnation to a nontaxonomic system.

Edwin Firmage applies this separation from Gentiles via the temple cult. Israel was called to be holy as God is holy;⁴⁸ not simply clean, not simply free from impurity, but holy. They were to approximate the character of God. Therefore, their diet had to be restricted to only such animals as were suitable for sacrifice.⁴⁹ As with most theorists, he runs onto rough roads once he leaves the land animals behind and begins to explore swimmers and flyers. He finds an extension from the land to the sea by noting that forbidden sea creatures (such as eels and crabs) may resemble forbidden land animals (such as serpents and crawling insects).⁵⁰ Turning to flyers, he admits to the utter speculative nature of his reflections and lands on the theory that those forbidden birds fail to live up to the image of the dove, the paradigm temple bird.⁵¹ But he must

⁴⁶ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁸ Firmage, "The Biblical Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness," 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 189,200-201.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 190-91.

wiggle under the strain that locusts have never been sacrificial animals and therefore must represent some kind of concession to the poor.⁵²

Houston would take us another direction. He suggests that unclean animals, such as pigs, might have been associated with worship of the dead and of underworld deities.⁵³ In such worship the unclean animals may actually have been eaten. This would associate unclean animals with foreign deities and with death and evil. Eating such food would be an obvious offense to God.

Underlying this emic construction, Houston sees an etic division between wild and domestic animals. "Wild creatures refuse the dominion of humankind, they tend to be violent and dangerous, and their diet typically tends to include waste matter and blood."⁵⁴ Houston must quickly make exceptions for "those large herbivores that had always formed part of people's diet in this area ... certain wild beasts, because of their diet, behavior and mode of life, could be seen as domestic animals in an honorary senses, as it were."⁵⁵ In the end, the diet is decisive for Houston, who connects the division between clean and unclean to an ideal, nonviolent prefall vegetarianism that "stands for the order and peace of civil society over against the disorder and violence of the wild."⁵⁶

One might wonder what were the vegetarian fish to which the Levitical code referred and why cattle and those wild herbivores were not excluded because they will eat carrion and fecal matter. Indeed, if eating meat made an animal unclean, why did that criteria not apply to man, and, therefore, why was the vegetarian ideal not commanded explicitly? Yet, this seems to be an extension to the logic of his theory, an embellishment rather than a foundation.

If we delve to the core of each of these theories, we see some possible outlines to consider. Douglas would have us see the ground of uncleanness in disorder. Firmage would concentrate on the separateness of holiness located in the sacrificial "food of God." And Houston would have us understand a need for separation from foreign deities and demons. Of these, Houston's insights seem to promise the most fruitful interpretation of the forbidden fruit. But I will consider all of them when examining Genesis 3.

Implications of the Fruit as Unclean Food for Genesis 3

Houston's concept of unclean food as connected with forbidden foreign deities would paint the words of Eve in Genesis 3 in black and white. We can

⁵² Ibid., 192.

⁵³ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 168.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 258.

abandon the problematic idea that Eve added to God's command. Rather, with Bonhoeffer, we can proclaim, "Eve's answer still remains on the plane of ignorance [of evil]. She does not know or recognize evil and she can therefore do nothing but repeat the given commandment and put it correctly. This is a great deal, she remains true to the commandment."⁵⁷

In this framework, Eve's words signal a deeper, more troubling understanding of the situation. The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is unclean in a Levitical sense. All the implications derived from those commands can be applied to this passage.

First of all, the tree must be quite dangerous. It represents an embassy of impurity, a locale under the dominion of forces alienated from God. Following Houston, the tree takes on the darkest tones of an outpost of evil in the midst of God's dwelling. No one should be surprised to find the Serpent lurking there--the foreign deity-wanna-be, calling the faithful to transgress, to fall into the domain of death. The first readers, seeing the association of unclean food with underworld deities would find in the tree the gate to the grave. Thus the words of God, "when you eat of it you shall surely die," rang frighteningly true in their ears.

Second, eating or even touching the fruit made Adam and Eve unclean (Lev. 11:24-28). They had become disordered in creation (creatures striving to be "like God"). They had debased themselves with the food of foreigners. They had ingested the offerings of demons. Although the Scriptures only declare a temporary uncleanness for touching and eating such food ("till evening," Lev. 11:24-28), eating unclean food in conscious rebellion against God's command was grounds for being "cut off" from God (Lev. 20:22-26). Therefore, the death penalty would certainly be expected.⁵⁸ And, inevitably, God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, just as the Levitical law demanded (Lev. 20:22-26).

From Douglas' perspective, even temporary uncleanness would render them out of place in the garden, an offense forcing their removal. Firmage would find a human couple standing in the garden-temple of God, with alien food on their lips, unholy. From Houston's vantage, Adam and Eve had committed idolatry, worshiping the serpent and submitting to his rule. They had forfeited their rights as his servants and had to be removed from the promised land.

But, additionally, it becomes clear that Adam and Eve's uncleanness was not temporary. For they were transformed: "The eyes of both of them were opened,

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*,. 69.

⁵⁸ The garden certainly represented living in the presence of God. God commanded that the garden be symbolically worked into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (Cherubim guarding the entrance-Ex. 26:31 cf Gen. 3:24), which Solomon expanded or repeated in the construction of the temple (I Kings 6:29-35). Indeed, focus on the garden in Genesis 2-3 may have evoked a sense of humans living in the Most Holy Place.

and they realized they were naked" (Gen. 3:7 cf. 2:25). In her theory, Douglas displays to us Adam and Eve as deformed creatures with no proper place in God's world, warped away from God's creational standards. Firmage sees them as alienated from God--common less-than-holy people. Houston darkens this alienation, declaring them genetically aligned with foreign deities of darkness and death, permanent residents of the unclean world.

Uncleanness as a Paradigm for Original Sin

The "natural" uncleanness of Adam and Eve would naturally transmit to all their offspring. Unclean animals give birth, according to their kind, to unclean animals. Likewise, unclean humanity gives birth to unclean humanity.

It may amaze some to apply this logic to people, but Paul applies it in 1 Corinthians 7:14. There, in arguing against a believer's divorcing his or her unbelieving spouse, Paul notes that the unbelieving spouse has been sanctified (made not only clean, but holy, for God's purposes). And he gives as proof that the expected outcome of such a union would be unclean children but contends that the children of such a union are holy.

Thus, to answer Scullion's third question, in Eve's words, we mark the warning that eating the fruit will change the holy stewards of God's creation (and therefore all their descendants) into unclean creatures because of eating unclean food. Our parents ate, and we are unclean. Their uncleanness (viewed as deformity or alienation or both) becomes ours by birth. Uncleanness describes that which we call original sin.

At this point, I urge caution. I do not suggest that the Bible declares that the cultic uncleanness found in Leviticus 11 and echoed in Genesis 3:2 equals original sin. Rather, in communicating the Fall to his people, God utilized the concept of uncleanness (common to the cultures of the time), molded by his specific use of the concept in the Sinai code, and applied it to Adam and Eve as a way of communicating what original sin is like. God expounds the history of the Fall through the metaphor of uncleanness.

Note also that I do not suggest that the Fall became the primary picture through which God discussed that which we call original sin nor sin in general. The Fall narrative fades quickly from Scripture's discussion of sin, even inside Genesis, and does not arise again until Romans 5 and then only indirectly as a foil to Christ's role in salvation. Rather, I suggest that the fall narrative is built on the Levitical doctrine of uncleanness, a doctrine that is the primary paradigm for Scripture's discussion of original sin. This doctrine permeates the Old Testament, as one can show by any cursory review in an exhaustive concordance of the words unclean, clean, and holy. As I have begun to show and will show later, it plays significant roles in the New Testament as well.

Indeed, one step forward in the doctrine of original sin may be to simply view it as the doctrine of congenital spiritual uncleanness. N. Kiuchi has noted that in the view of Leviticus "sin [the Hebrew word *ht*'] is a kind of uncleanness,

produced on a dimension different from that of natural uncleanness, namely by breaking a divine prohibition."⁵⁹ Here, we can distinguish the biblical distinction between original sin, on the one hand, and rebellion/sin [*ht'*] described in the oft cited exemplars of sin in the Old Testament, including the golden calf incident of Exodus 32, Baal of Peor of Numbers 25, and the grumbling at Meribah of Numbers 20. These were used as symbols of active rebellion,⁶⁰ a category separate from natural uncleanness and related only indirectly to the innate sin-*fullness* understood by what we call original sin. Here the prominence of uncleanness stands unchallenged. Therefore, what the Bible declares about the nature and spread of cultic uncleanness in the Sinai code grants us insight into the nature and spread of original sin.

Cultic Uncleanness and the Imputation of Sin.

If this interpretation holds, the puzzle concerning the imputation of sin deserves a reinvestigation, for uncleanness points to a different biblical paradigm for addressing the issue. Uncleanness defines original sin as a culpable state of being. The unclean person was unclean not so much because of what they had done but because of what they were. And that uncleanness accrued to Israelites in situations beyond their control. If someone died suddenly in the presence of a Nazarite, the Nazarite became unclean and "sinned against the Lord by being in the presence of the dead body" (Num. 6:9-12). If, during the night, someone died in the tent in which another Israelite slept, the Israelite became unclean (Num. 19:14). Atonement required not only a sin offering (Lev. 4:1) but also the water of cleansing (Num. 19:11-12, 14). Failure to seek cleansing meant being "cut off" from God's people (Num. 19:13b).

Further, Israelite women became unclean every month during their period of menstruation (Lev. 15:19-23). Again, this required a sin offering (Lev. 19:28-30). And the penalty for ignoring this state of uncleanness meant sexually being cut off (Lev. 20:18). In addition, a descendant of a priest who had a physical defect was, in a sense, unclean (or at least incapable of holiness). Even though they could eat the holy food (Lev. 12:22),⁶¹ they could defile [*yihallel* from *hll*] the tabernacle or altar merely by their ministry at them (Lev. 21:23). Such defilement implies uncleanness, since this is what unclean food does to one who eats or touches it (Lev. 11:42-43).

When we view these examples of God's holding people culpable for a state of being over which they had no positive control, the question of alien guilt becomes more concrete. Rather than wrestling with it simply via the interfer-

⁵⁹ N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT Press, 1987), 65.

⁶⁰ See Joshua 22:17; Psalm 81:7; 95:8; 106:19, 26, 32.

⁶¹ I take this to be a concession by God to the deformed descendants of priests, since the) had no other means of subsistence.

ence of Romans 5:12-17, we are controlling it with a fully developed system of guilt by uncleanness that is tied into the Fall directly.

Furthermore, this system does not fit the theories of federalism, realism, or even mediate imputation. In opposition to Federalism, uncleanness declares that we are guilty at the point of conception due to our state of being, not through delegation of authority to Adam. Unlike Realism, uncleanness traces our guilt to our present culpable state of being, not to historical actual actions by us in Adam. And uncleanness eliminates the need to mediate guilt for Adam's sin through the accompanying depravity, since our guilt resides in us apart from Adam's actions because, by effect of Adam's actions, we are unclean of ourselves. But uncleanness still resounds with the reformation understanding of sin as "a corruption of all nature--an inherent depravity" (Belgic Confession, art. 15).

Alien Guilt

Having said all of this, I recognize that we still face the problem of alien guilt. Indeed, the reader's anxiety over alien guilt may have heightened as a result of these musings. In a context of Western jurisprudence, where one is considered innocent until it is proved that he did something wrong, the concept of being born in a state of culpability grates against our sense of justice.

First of all, we should note that the guilt is no longer truly alien. Using uncleanness as a paradigm for original sin, we note that the guilt is our guilt for our corruption. The source of the corruption is alien to God's original intent and act of creation, but even the corruption is "natural" and "normal" for us as descendants of Adam and Eve. Our discomfort has shifted from the source of the guilt to the reason for the guilt.

Second, we can note our own natural loathing of that which is grossly deformed or polluted. In our continued reflection of the image of God (however warped) we instinctively pull back from that which radically departs from normativity. In response to physical norms, we reflect God's judgment when (before compassion can take its course) we recoil at gross deformities in babies, the severely mutilated bodies of accident victims, or the festering wounds of lepers. In nature, the ratty remains of a cat-killed robin, the stench of a massive fish die-off from industrial waste, and the bloated body of a road-killed raccoon all repel us. We abhor the obvious moral degradation of physical torture, perverse sexual practices, and massive political corruption. There are also limits to our ability to accept ugliness in the place of beauty. (Even the most loving parent can be challenged by a fifth-grade band concert.) In all of these, and many more, we show that tolerance of the abnormal has its limits.

Finally, we can console ourselves by noting that even this is, at best, a proximate analogy to reality. Nothing can truly describe the offense of a finite creature against the infinite, holy God of the universe. The proportions will simply not

allow a balance that we can easily grasp. God talks down to us with uncleanness, and in the process must simplify things that lie beyond our comprehension. In such a context, we must not so much ask how this can be, as ask what we can do in response. The unclean person in Israel often could not help his uncleanness. But he could seek the cure in sacrifice and unction. Although guilt comes on us unbidden from our birth, a just God has provided release: the infusing righteousness of Christ and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The Imputation of Righteousness

As John Murray points out in his discussion of the Roman Catholic view of imputation of sin, the definition of imputation of sin affects the interpretation of imputation of Christ's righteousness in Romans 5.⁶² Here again, the Levitical doctrine of uncleanness illuminates the topic with a new light.

Often Christ came in contact with unclean people: lepers, the woman with the flow of blood, the dead daughter and son.⁶³ In each of these instances, contact with them should have made Christ unclean.⁶⁴ This would have implied separation from God and defilement of Christ's person. Instead, contact with Christ makes the unclean person clean (i.e., the cause of uncleanness is removed). Thus, the holiness of Christ reverses the common spiritual order where unclean things can contaminate, but holy things remain powerless to purify (cf. Hag. 2:12-13).

This, of course, reflects the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice: becoming sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). Indeed, our righteousness comes from being dead, resurrected, and ascended "in Christ" (Rom. 6:1-4; Eph. 2:4-9; Phil. 3:8-10). However one defines this,⁶⁵ this doctrine points to the assumption of Christ's identity in contact and communion with him. Does this make us contagious carriers of Christ's righteousness? Perhaps the apostle Paul attaches such significance in his argument against a Christian's divorcing his or her unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7:14, as mentioned earlier.

Romans 5:12-17

Applying these reflections to the classic passage on immediate imputation suggests the following interpretation. Adam's sin and "all sinned" in verse 12 may reflect the understanding of Adam's sin as the cause of the culpable state of being that we call the sin nature or original sin. This sin nature bore the con-

⁶² John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 16.

⁶³ Luke.5:12-14; 7:11-17; 8:43-48; 8:49-55.

⁶⁴ Leviticus 22:4-6; Haggai 2:12-13; and by implication Leviticus 13:45.

⁶⁵ For an overview of various concepts of being "in Christ" see Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ* (1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

sequences of death up to the time of Moses despite the absence of law (v. 14) because it was and/or is a transgression of being, not doing. As such, it constitutes sufficient grounds for condemnation without further transgression of the law. This reflects the Reformation understanding of original sin as "a corruption of all nature ... so vile and enormous in God's sight that it is enough to condemn the human race" (Belgic Confession, art.15). Due to Adam's transgression, this sin nature extends to all who descend from him, as does the consequent judgment, death, and condemnation (vv.15-18). Again, this accords with the Reformation understanding of original sin as an "inherited depravity" (Belgic Confession, art.15) spread "byway of the propagation of [man's] perverted nature" (Canons of Dordt, third and fourth main points, art.2).

In parallel, "by the grace of the one man" the "gift of righteousness ... through the one man" overflows to all who are in him. Christ's contagious righteousness mediated through union with him eliminates the uncleanness and brings redemption.

Other Possible Areas of Application

Moving beyond a purely theological understanding, uncleanness as a paradigm allows us to enter into cultural discussions of depravity and culpability. In response to the question, "Is alcoholism or any other addiction either sin or sickness?" the uncleanness theory responds, "Yes!" Sin resides not simply in the moral nature but in the whole being of a person. It should hardly surprise us that such depravity of being might manifest itself in physical defects leading to a vulnerability to addiction. Yet, the addict remains culpable for that deformed nature because that deformity, in itself, is an offense before God against which he must seek remedy, for which only Christ can atone, and from which only the Holy Spirit can liberate. Any form of physical deformity that affects moral decision making cannot not detract from our culpability before God.

Again, the uncleanness theory alters our understanding of being salt and light. If the righteousness of Christ is contagious in the relationship of marriage, it implies that other relationships may sanctify the partner for God's purposes. This calls us to reflect on how the presence of a Christian, living in Christ's holiness, sanctifies the unbelievers with whom they work so that the results of their collaborations become holy to God. Does the call by Paul not to be unevenly yoked identify distinct limits to the sanctifying effect of a Christian in relationship with an unbeliever, or is it a more practical exhortation on the dangers of freely entering into collaboration with someone who is unclean? And how does this affect the urgency of our witness in all forms of mission?

Homiletic Hooks

Of course, all of this will be sterile rambling if we cannot communicate the concept to the average believer. From the perspective of immediate imputa-

tion, the bridge was the "representative nature of Adam's headship." From there we could appeal to analogies of presidential or fatherly decisions that bear long-term consequences for those for whom they act. Uncleaness seems very alien to our culture and therefore will need massive translation. Several homiletic hooks can catch the imagination of the hearer and transform this concept into a useful doctrine.

To understand the offensiveness of our depravity we can again appeal to the image of God referred to above (see "Alien Guilt"). We, too, find gross abnormality offensive. But we can take it further. We are not merely objects out there but the personal creation of God. We, too, would be aggravated by a creation that refused to respond. For instance, suppose one of us invents a lawn mower. We engineer into it the finest in grass-cutting tooling. We pamper it with the finest of fuels, lubricants, and protectants. We store it carefully and keep the blade sharp. It runs efficiently, but cuts not grass. How would we respond?

The Gospels abound with imagery that may assist us. We can point to Jesus' responding to the offense of our unclean nature in cursing the fruitless fig tree in Mark 11:1-25 or in the parable of the unfruitful tree in Luke 13:6-9. These not only represent calls to repentance but question whether those addressed even have the ability (nature) to produce fruit. If not, they represent an offense to the maker/owner that calls down the curse of death. Indeed, Christ points in this direction when he notes that, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). John the Baptist, too, warns about the consequences of unfruitfulness (Luke 3:9).

A second bridge will be needed for the concept of being born in a culpable state of being. Our culture is inclined to think of infants as innocent until they do evil, and equally liable to consider infant acts as infantile rather than evil, born of ignorance and immaturity rather than depravity. Here we might cautiously borrow from interspecies comparisons. I have a personal theory on the difference between cat lovers and dog lovers. Dog lovers love dogs because they can represent (at their best) what we fantasize people might be at their best: loyal, friendly, loving, willing, teachable. As a cat lover, I accept an animal that more closely resembles fallen humanity: aloof, self-centered, irritable, unteachable. Such characterizations, of course, caricature reality. But no sensible person really expects a cat to achieve the personable nature of a dog. By nature, cats display behaviors we would find unacceptable in humans. And if they were people, they would offend our moral sense, pouncing and scratching and doing pretty much what they please from birth. Our first parents were created as dogs, but they became cats, and so we are born cats, with all the offense that this entails.

Again, the Bible supplies an opening in Paul's phrase, "We were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Our nature (who we are from birth, not what we do after birth) offends God to the point of judgment. Here, too, the image of circumcision from Genesis 17 comes into play. The infant male child, by

nature, has an aspect that must be cut away to be acceptable before God. Any child whose unclean foreskin is not removed, God rejects (Gen. 17:14). Finally, the concept of Christ's contagious righteousness steps us beyond the pedestrian evangelical shibboleths of salvation such as, "Jesus paid for my sins." The sacrifice of Jesus covers over our consistent offensiveness and, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, his presence works to decontaminate our nature. Lately, geneticists and doctors have increasingly discussed the potential of gene therapy for undoing latent genetic inclination to disease. What better analogy to the effect of the Spirit in our spiritual nature?

This transformation of being echoes in several passages. "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The concept of "new birth" (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:3) holds latent the concept of a renewed nature. Indeed, Paul's opening salvo regarding the life of gratitude in Romans 12:2 calls on us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Such transformation and renewal indicates that the nature-renewing power lies within us who are in Christ Jesus and in the Spirit.

The Bible supplies several analogies to this renewal's being contagious beyond us. Christ's claim that we are "the salt of the world" (Matt. 5:13) sets us firmly in the center of contagious renewal. Images of detergent and antibacterial soaps that, by nature, cleanse what they touch, might be modern equivalents. We might use this with Paul's discussion of Christ's contagious righteousness sanctifying the unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:14). The antiseptic flow of righteousness in the relationship cleanses (at least outwardly) the spouse of the offensive stench, making him or her suitable in the relationship and rendering the children clean before God.

Homiletic Pitfalls

Introducing a new paradigm also leaves us open to new dangers. We cannot allow our explanations to confuse the shadow for the reality of things that have come. In the uncleanness codes of the Pentateuch, many types of people are singled out for exclusion. The sick, the deformed, and the menstruating all found themselves excluded in various ways from fellowship with God and his people. In using these categories, we must guard against letting people think that the concept of "culpable state of being" implies that such obviously diseased and genetically distorted natures offend God greater than the rest or that such physical signs of human depravity indicate greater sin and condemnation. Such was the error of the disciples in John 9:2, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Although I have stated that physical genetic defects that affect moral behavior cannot detract from culpability, this does not imply that it adds to that culpability. And amoral defects, though emblematic of our inner culpable state, merely expose in some what all of our nature's resemble before God.

Similarly, we must guard against the sorts of theonomistic thinking that would resurrect the food regulations. Any use of these texts should clearly indicate the provisional and tutorial goal of these passages. A heavy emphasis on the vision of Peter (Acts 10) will clearly display that such are merely metaphors and have not enduring spiritual worth.

An easy triumphalism could creep into any exposition of Christ's contagious righteousness. We must always make explicit that in all our theology God "talks down" to us, describing a greater spiritual reality with limited human-scale metaphors. The image of Christ's instantly vanquishing diseased uncleanness and death cannot imply that every believer finds themselves instantly beyond depravity. Nor can we imply that those we "sanctify" by our alliance or marriage become less depraved. We must emphasize that the instantaneous healings and/or cleansings reveal the thoroughness of Christ's saving work but not its timetable. Sanctification still transforms our natures slowly and incompletely until death or Christ arrive.

Summary

The words of Eve in Genesis 3:2, "you shall not touch it," have been grossly misrepresented. They are not the expression of prefall apostasy or weak-mindedness on the part of the first woman. They communicate to God's redeemed people that the Fall and original sin can be understood through the metaphor of uncleanness. Thus, our guilt resides, not first of all in what we do, but in what we are. In the same light, our redemption does not reside, in what we do. It resides in who we become identified as in Christ Jesus and transformed into by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the uncleanness of depravity is contagious and spreading, so the righteousness of Christ to, in, and through us can contagiously roll back the sin of the world.

I have endeavored to raise questions in this article to spur us to further reflection on original sin and to suggest some ways of communicating this new paradigm homiletically. If I have accomplished nothing else but to generate renewed interest in the reality of sin and our culpability before God, I will be grateful.

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