



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 3 December 2008*

***Saint Paul (15):***

***The Apostle's teaching on the relation between Adam and Christ***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In today's Catechesis we shall reflect on the relations between Adam and Christ, defined by St Paul in the well-known passage of the Letter to the Romans (5: 12-21) in which he gives the Church the essential outline of the doctrine on original sin. Indeed, Paul had already introduced the comparison between our first progenitor and Christ while addressing faith in the Resurrection in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.... "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15: 22, 45). With Romans 5: 12-21, the comparison between Christ and Adam becomes more articulate and illuminating: Paul traces the history of salvation from Adam to the Law and from the latter to Christ. At the centre of the scene it is not so much Adam, with the consequences of his sin for humanity, who is found as much as it is Jesus Christ and the grace which was poured out on humanity in abundance through him. The repetition of the "all the more" with regard to Christ stresses that the gift received in him far surpasses Adam's sin and its consequent effects on humanity, so that Paul could reach his conclusion: "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rm 5: 20). The comparison that Paul draws between Adam and Christ therefore sheds light on the inferiority of the first man compared to the prevalence of the second.

On the other hand, it is precisely in order to highlight the immeasurable gift of grace in Christ that

Paul mentions Adam's sin. One could say that if it were not to demonstrate the centrality of grace, he would not have dwelt on the treatment of sin which "came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Rm 5: 12). For this reason, if, in the faith of the Church, an awareness of the dogma of original sin developed, it is because it is inseparably linked to another dogma, that of salvation and freedom in Christ. The consequence of this is that we must never treat the sin of Adam and of humanity separately from the salvific context, in other words, without understanding them within the horizon of justification in Christ.

However, as people of today we must ask ourselves: what is this original sin? What does St Paul teach, what does the Church teach? Is this doctrine still sustainable today? Many think that in light of the history of evolution, there is no longer room for the doctrine of a first sin that then would have permeated the whole of human history. And, as a result, the matter of Redemption and of the Redeemer would also lose its foundation. Therefore, does original sin exist or not? In order to respond, we must distinguish between two aspects of the doctrine on original sin. There exists an empirical aspect, that is, a reality that is concrete, visible, I would say tangible to all. And an aspect of mystery concerning the ontological foundation of this event. The empirical fact is that a contradiction exists in our being. On the one hand every person knows that he must do good and intimately wants to do it. Yet at the same time he also feels the other impulse to do the contrary, to follow the path of selfishness and violence, to do only what pleases him, while also knowing that in this way he is acting against the good, against God and against his neighbour. In his Letter to the Romans St Paul expressed this contradiction in our being in this way: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (7: 18-19). This inner contradiction of our being is not a theory. Each one of us experiences it every day. And above all we always see around us the prevalence of this second will. It is enough to think of the daily news of injustice, violence, falsehood and lust. We see it every day. It is a fact.

As a consequence of this evil power in our souls, a murky river developed in history which poisons the geography of human history. Blaise Pascal, the great French thinker, spoke of a "second nature", which superimposes our original, good nature. This "second nature" makes evil appear normal to man. Hence even the common expression "he's human" has a double meaning. "He's human", can mean: this man is good, he really acts as one should act. But "he's human", can also imply falsity: evil is normal, it is human. Evil seems to have become our second nature. This contradiction of the human being, of our history, must evoke, and still evokes today, the desire for redemption. And, in reality, the desire for the world to be changed and the promise that a world of justice, peace and good will be created exists everywhere. In politics, for example, everyone speaks of this need to change the world, to create a more just world. And this is precisely an expression of the longing for liberation from the contradiction we experience within us.

Thus, the existence of the power of evil in the human heart and in human history is an undeniable fact. The question is: how can this evil be explained? In the history of thought, Christian faith aside, there exists a key explanation of this duality, with different variations. This model says:

being in itself is contradictory, it bears within it both good and evil. In antiquity, this idea implied the opinion that two equally primal principles existed: a good principle and a bad principle. This duality would be insuperable; the two principles are at the same level, so this contradiction from the being's origin would always exist. The contradiction of our being would therefore only reflect the contrary nature of the two divine principles, so to speak. In the evolutionist, atheist version of the world the same vision returns in a new form. Although in this conception the vision of being is monist, it supposes that being as such bears within itself both evil and good from the outset. Being itself is not simply good, but open to good and to evil. Evil is equally primal with the good. And human history would develop only the model already present in all of the previous evolution. What Christians call original sin would in reality be merely the mixed nature of being, a mixture of good and evil which, according to atheist thought, belong to the same fabric of being. This is a fundamentally desperate view: if this is the case, evil is invincible. In the end all that counts is one's own interest. All progress would necessarily be paid for with a torrent of evil and those who wanted to serve progress would have to agree to pay this price. Politics is fundamentally structured on these premises and we see the effects of this. In the end, this modern way of thinking can create only sadness and cynicism.

And let us therefore ask again: what does faith witnessed to by St Paul tell us? As the first point, it confirms the reality of the competition between the two natures, the reality of this evil whose shadow weighs on the whole of Creation. We heard chapter seven of the Letter to the Romans, we shall add chapter eight. Quite simply, evil exists. As an explanation, in contrast with the dualism and monism that we have briefly considered and found distressing, faith tells us: there exist two mysteries, one of light and one of night, that is, however, enveloped by the mysteries of light. The first mystery of light is this: faith tells us that there are not two principles, one good and one evil, but there is only one single principle, God the Creator, and this principle is good, only good, without a shadow of evil. And therefore, being too is not a mixture of good and evil; being as such is good and therefore it is good to be, it is good to live. This is the good news of the faith: only one good source exists, the Creator. Therefore living is a good, it is a good thing to be a man or a woman life is good. Then follows a mystery of darkness, or night. Evil does not come from the source of being itself, it is not equally primal. Evil comes from a freedom created, from a freedom abused.

How was it possible, how did it happen? This remains obscure. Evil is not logical. Only God and good are logical, are light. Evil remains mysterious. It is presented as such in great images, as it is in chapter 3 of Genesis, with that scene of the two trees, of the serpent, of sinful man: a great image that makes us guess but cannot explain what is itself illogical. We may guess, not explain; nor may we recount it as one fact beside another, because it is a deeper reality. It remains a mystery of darkness, of night. But a mystery of light is immediately added. Evil comes from a subordinate source. God with his light is stronger. And therefore evil can be overcome. Thus the creature, man, can be healed. The dualist visions, including the monism of evolutionism, cannot say that man is curable; but if evil comes only from a subordinate source, it remains true that man

is healable. And the Book of Wisdom says: "he made the nations of the world curable" (1: 14 *Vulgate*). And finally, the last point: man is not only healable, but is healed de facto. God introduced healing. He entered into history in person. He set a source of pure good against the permanent source of evil. The Crucified and Risen Christ, the new Adam, counters the murky river of evil with a river of light. And this river is present in history: we see the Saints, the great Saints but also the humble saints, the simple faithful. We see that the stream of light which flows from Christ is present, is strong.

Brothers and sisters, it is the season of Advent. In the language of the Church the word Advent has two meanings: presence and anticipation. Presence: the light is present, Christ is the new Adam, he is with us and among us. His light is already shining and we must open the eyes of our hearts to see the light and to enter into the river of light. Above all we must be grateful for the fact that God himself entered history as a new source of good. But Advent also means anticipation. The dark night of evil is still strong. And therefore in Advent we pray with the ancient People of God: "*Rorate caeli desuper*". And we pray insistently: come Jesus; come, give power to light and to good; come where falsehood, ignorance of God, violence and injustice predominate. Come Lord Jesus, give power to the good in the world and help us to be bearers of your light, peacemakers, witnesses of the truth. Come, Lord Jesus!

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### To special groups

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Malta, Australia, South Korea and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke an abundance of joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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