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Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience

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STUDIES
THERE are several good ways to read holy Scripture and several ways to interpret it; but the first and fundamental reading should be, as far as possible, a simple grasping of the literal sense in all its obviousness. Such a reading in the light of faith, unclouded by any preconceived human interpretation, has this advantage: it brings to the fore the essential problems reason is called on to solve in its own domain without detriment to the spiritual and mystical sense. This sense depends on another light and presupposes, moreover, that natural reason has been sufficiently satisfied and that the mind is at peace.

The simple reading of the story of Abraham in Genesis cannot fail to raise, among many other problems, one that is especially great. Abraham's election to an exalted destiny is evident. His faith in the word of God is absolute, his generosity heroic. His high sanctity is proved abundantly in Scripture and has never been disputed within the Church. But how can the sanctity of this exemplary man, who is always in God's favor, be reconciled with certain of his actions, which even the Mosaic Law was to condemn; how can it be reconciled with others which we today must consider contrary to divine law, indeed, to simple human honesty?

1. On the several senses of holy Scripture, see St. Thomas, *Quaest. Quodlib. VII, 14 and 15.*
THE STATES OF HUMANITY

Let us reread the story of Abraham as it is told in Genesis. "Yahweh said to Abram: Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house, for the land which I will show you; I will make a great nation of you. I will bless you, and make your name great. . . . In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:1-3).

Here Abram was alone before God, before a command that over­turned his life, before promises hard to believe. God's bidding was direct; it was not a commandment written in a book, and there was as yet no Church, in the form of a social body, to set it forth or discern its spirit. Around Abram the paganism of Dr held sway; and Terah, his own father, so it seems, was a worshipper of the moon-god.

God's command and promises, then, reached Abram without any intermediary. In this spiritual solitude, taking on himself the entire responsibility, he accepted the command and believed the promises. His faith here did not bear on any universal truth. He obeyed like a servant who hears his master say, "Do this"—and he does it, "Go there"—and he goes.

Faith makes all the saints swift and faithful doers of the will of God; but when faith bears on a universal truth, it has, in the mind divinely illumined, supports also in a way universal. For Abram, however, it was a matter of recognizing the truth of a particular and personal command, a matter, above all, of not failing to recognize the voice he heard. Much later, the risen Lord will say to her who seeks Him all in tears and speaks to Him not knowing who He is, merely the one word, "Mariam." And at once she will reply, "Rabboni," knowing Him by His voice. Abram's heart too was attuned to the voice of his God. At once he obeyed, not hesitating to leave his country and his father's house. He was not stunned by the immensity of the promises; rather did he act in the simplicity of his heart, in the humility and grandeur of a predestined heart, of a heart chosen to be the type, the exemplar, of heroic faith. He received and kept the word of God, and between that word and his soul there was no gap: when God speaks, the soul's life is raised.

What simplicity, what extraordinary power there was in that divine inspiration acting as it did in the manner of a vital instinct! Abram obeyed God bidding him leave his life and journey like a servant who hears his master say, "Go there." That breath of God's breath fills the history of the world.

With his departure from Haran, Abram was to leave the "land of Moreh" (Gen 12:1) and go to Egypt. But "the Egyptians were afraid of the child, and they would not let him live" (Ex 2:21). Therefore, his mother, who had been a worshipper of the moon-god, raised him "in the house of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex 2:23). In time he became the leader of his people's race. Still, "as long as he lived he had no share in the land of Egypt" (Gen 15:13).

What are the lessons of our time for our children? They are not pent and by reason of fear, but the land was not at their disposal, and they were not troubled. It was not that "Sarai, who was rigorous..." (Gen 16:16-20). Later on, they will be pagans and Canaanites.

2. Some scholiasts say that "the true tree" is a tree of the succulent species.
3. "Abram took Sarai, his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions, and all the livestock which they had accumulated in Haran, to go to another land. They went out of Haran..." (Gen 13:1-5).
obeyed God as one obeys the deepest impulses of one's being. At God's bidding he broke his earthly attachments, setting out on a hazardous journey like an old ship that a storm has blown from port, like a vessel whose moorings have been broken by the mighty breath of Yahweh. That breath, that inspiration, sent Abram into new paths, where the history of the people of God began.

With his wife, his nephew Lot, his servants, and his herds, Abram left Haran, "and they came to the land of Canaan" (Gen 12:5). There Yahweh confirmed His promise: "To your descendants I will give this land" (Gen 12:7). And Abram built an altar in the place where Yahweh had appeared to him, at Shechem; "near the terebinth of Moreh" (Gen 12:6), Scripture adds by way of detail.

But "there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt." And how did he act there? He said to his wife: "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold. When the Egyptians see you, they will say: She is his wife; then they will kill me, but will spare you. Therefore, say you are my sister so that I may be treated well on your account, and my life may be spared for your sake." And indeed, "the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful." Pharaoh's princes praised her to Pharaoh, "and the woman was taken and led away to Pharaoh's house. He treated Abram well on her account" (Gen 12:10-16).

What are we to think of this? What does the conscience of a man of our time say to it? Will God's anger burst forth? Will Abram repent and by penance regain sanctity? No, God took no offense; He was not at all angry with Abram. And Abram's conscience was not troubled. It was and stayed perfectly clear, just as when he married Sarai, who was his half-sister—an incest which later the Mosaic Law was rigorously to forbid. Serenely, too, till the end of his life, he would...
keep concubines, and God would not reproach him in any way. "He
died in a blessed old age," says Genesis (25:8). Nor would Sarai
be reprimanded for having sent to him her servant Hagar: "Yahweh has
kept me from bearing. Go in to my maid, I pray you; perhaps I shall
get children through her" (Gen 16:2). All these things are done with
marvelous tranquillity and with no consciousness of doing wrong.

Of the lie Jacob told at his mother's behest, St. Augustine said: "It
is not a lie; it is a mystery." Let us have the courage to say: It is with­
out doubt a mystery, but it is also a lie.

The lives of the Old Testament saints are undoubtedly replete with
mysteries, but they are also marked by deeds for which neither God
nor their consciences reproached them, but which the teaching of
Christ and the Church forbids as faults and grievous sins. Thus lying,
guile, harshness, cruelty toward conquered enemies, concubinage, incest,
and polygamy are linked with eminent names. And divorce and polyg­
amy were to be permitted by Moses.

We are not speaking of faults which the times of Abraham and of
Moses already counted faults, faults of which certain saints of the Old
Testament were guilty, of which they repented, and for which they did
penance, as did David. Such faults, admitted and expiated, simply join
them to the multitude of sinners whom God's mercy has raised up and
made holy. What concerns us here is the coexistence of the unshaken
conscience of the just with ways today forbidden as offenses against
God.

Here we touch on great mysteries: on the mystery of conscience, and
on the mystery of the successive and characteristically different states
of mankind and of sanctity. Of the state of nature, the state of the Law,
the state of the grace of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit,
and of sanctity, the Church and the descent of the Holy Spirit. From the earthly paradise to the paradise of heaven through suffering and divine grace growing in us to bring forth its purest form.

THE STATE OF NATURE

The state of nature in the life of a man is present, enjoining what is
natural, or, to use a theological expression, innocence reduced to its nature
in the world; and God is sparingly giving some measure to human expen­
tion. He gives it as a grace and as a grace, to be an inspiring motion; and it
is true that nature, in being the source of all grace, is the source of
all inspiration.

The human conscience is present from the first day light is there, diffu­
sing the light of the sun like the lights in the firmament of heaven
(Gen 1:14) were not created until after Adam was created, still very close to the great elec­
tion and propagation of life, where there is once awakened an au­
torous are given to ruses, which

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THE STATE OF NATURE
The state of nature in the life of mankind can be compared with in-
infancy in the life of a man. Reason is present, and so is the will; God
is present, enjoining what is to be done. But reason, by the loss of in-
ocence reduced to its natural nakedness, is just beginning to discover
the world; and God is sparing in His demands, proportioning them in
some measure to human experience.

The human conscience is still in twilight, at its dawn. From the
first day light is there, diffused and uncertain—just as, according to
Genesis, it was in the universe from the first day of creation—but "the
lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate day from night"
(Gen I: 14) were not created till the fourth day. Human conscience is
still very close to the great elemental instincts—those for the conserva-
tion and propagation of life, for example—and to serve these instincts
there is at once awakened an innocent guile. Thus the great biblical fig-
ures are given to ruses, which are not imputed to them as sins.

Did not Abram make Sarai pass for his sister? It is true that she was

6. We speak here not of the state of pure nature, which has never existed in fact,
but, as we shall explain later, of the state which preceded the gift of the Law.
his half-sister as well as his wife, but in making her pass for his sister he surrendered her to those who lusted for her. Later on his son Isaac would act the same way. There is also the story of Lot's daughters. “The elder said to the younger: Our father is old, and there is no man in the land to marry us, as is the custom everywhere. Let us make our father wine to drink, then lie with him, that we may have offspring by our father” (Gen 19:31–32). Again, by their involved and premeditated lie, Rebekah and her favorite son Jacob stole the blessing with which Isaac wished to bless Esau. When Esau finally arrived with the meal he had prepared, and when he and his father discovered Rebekah’s subterfuge, “Isaac trembled with dread . . . Esau uttered a very loud and bitter cry, and he said to his father: Father, bless me too. But Isaac answered: Your brother came deceitfully and received your blessing” (Gen 27:33–36).

There is no need to multiply examples. In the days of the patriarchs, all the laws which have formed our conscience were not yet engraved either on stone or in hearts. The principle behind these laws, however, and moral conscience itself, exists in every man. It is part of our natural dowry: Do good, avoid evil! When you hear His voice, obey Him who speaks as one having authority, for He is the almighty Lord! It is thus that God made Himself known to the patriarchs. Later He was to reveal to Moses: “As God the Almighty, El Shaddai, I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But my name of Yahweh, He who is, I did not make known to them” (Ex 6:2–3).

In that age and among the peoples in whose midst Abraham lived, God went about the education of mankind by orders explicit, particular, and precise, as well as by impulse and inner inspiration. To the people whom Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to lead, however, there was revealed the existence and providence of the one God, Creator of heaven and earth, a revelation offered to its faith as a universal truth. The two great primal commandments which flow from this truth were also clearly known and affirmed: Adore the one true God! Obey Him! Further, the two sins most gravely condemned and punished in the state of nature were disobedi

7. God cared for this offspring even to the point of commanding Moses, who had wandered in the desert forty years and was about to pass through the land of Moab, that he should not attack the sons of Moab: “Do not show hostility or engage them in battle, for I will not give you possession of any of their land, since I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as their own” (Deut 2:9). Like care is shown for the Ammonites (Deut 2:9).

8. Here, as later, I use the purely literal observance with it is not a temptation of Jew and that conscience is present even in its worth, conscience edge of all the particular morality of our obedience observances which are mental disobediences which a

But this light of conscience growing to the full day of

Every soul is in vital order and that conscience is present even in its worth, conscience edge of all the particular morality of our obedience observances which are mental disobediences which a
state of nature were disobedience and idolatry, for faith and obedience were the first foundations of mankind’s education by God.

In a state of grace-given freedom and pure spirituality, in a state of intimate union with God, love makes man do spontaneously the very thing obedience would demand — and still more. But so long as mankind has not attained so perfect a state, the constraint of obedience is needed if we are to act aright. And even in that state of love and freedom which drives out our fear and constraint, the absence of the clear vision of subsisting Truth (a vision unattainable by anyone who has not passed through death) makes faith and obedience indispensable. Then obedience, it is true, becomes easy and light, save in extraordinary trials or missions; indeed, it blends with the elan and clear-sightedness of love. Still, obedience no less than faith continues to be needed in the education of saints, which must go on to their last day.

All mankind’s history up to now has not been, nor will it ever be, anything but the history of that difficult education. They started together, mankind and this divine education, at the mysterious frontier which separates man from simple animality. It was on the same “day,” according to Genesis, that the animals of the earth and man were made. A spiritual soul was given to perishable flesh, and it all began. Since then, God, the flesh, and the soul have been at work, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in discord. There is union, the most intimate sort of union, and there is the cruelest strife.

Every soul is in vital contact with God through moral conscience, and that conscience is present in every age of mankind. In its essence, even in its worth, conscience is not dependent on our explicit knowledge of all the particular moral laws which oblige us; and yet the very morality of our obedience is founded on it. This is why there are strict observances which are merely pharisaical, 8 and ignorances and apparent disobediences which are not contrary to holiness.

But this light of conscience is unequally distributed. It is capable of growing to the full day of eternity, but also of lessening, of darkening,
of dying, and it may even happen that it dies completely. Likewise, knowledge of the moral laws is not a resplendent array of stars, always present to every man, equally luminous to every soul, never brightening, never declining. Our own experience, after all, and mankind's present state more than prove this.

Let us not think of mankind's state of nature (as we have called it) as a state in which the natural moral laws were perfectly known and observed. Quite the contrary, knowledge of the natural moral laws is a slowly acquired and hard-earned light, excepting, of course, the initial knowledge that good is to be done and evil to be avoided. (This fundamental knowledge coexists with reason and intelligence.)

Is there anything surprising in this? Is it not evident that the laws that rule the whole of nature cannot be perfectly known save by the Author of nature? This is perhaps even truer of the commandments of the moral law than of physical laws. For moral laws do not depend only on the nature of the soul and on what the soul can know of its own nature: they are also a function of its eternal destiny. They are the living bonds which, in varying degrees, tie created nature to its uncreated end. Now, that which we can know only imperfectly and by the help of another admits of more and less; it can increase and decrease for a variety of causes.

For our knowledge of the moral laws we rely both on the lights reason has at its command and on divine revelation. Of course, all knowledge could have been given us from the beginning, given and preserved in each of us to the end. But that, it seems, is not the world God created; that is not the way He governs souls. Even toward man in the state of original justice, with all the privileges of innocence, God acts, we like to think, like a gardener who puts into the ground a seed, not a mature tree heavy with fruit. And the seed dies and lives, waxes strong in the soil, climbs toward the sun, knows the changes of season, flowers, and bears fruit. God acts like a father, like an educator. All human history shows this, and the inspired Scriptures tell it on every page.

THE PROGRESS OF MORAL CONSCIENCE

After the Fall, Adam perhaps resembled those men we call Primitives, although they enjoy some very great gifts, such as knowing the existence of a Master of all and the men after him, may who raise to God altars may the lamb of sacrifice and a fe atures that knew no ornament by instinctive hearts, by heart: those early or primitive bling, because of the nearness not yet unveiled the face of the wrapped itself is sensed to the naked souls.

The altars primitive Africa than those Abraham raised to the beth of Moreh and near the than theirs was his religious degrae. The more, the time of man's initial and the ingenuity of men had.

There is a strange inequality and moral conscience progresses, moves reason and will to the proceed from things visible of things created to the Creator, himself, through the deceptions of God Himself speaks. Through so long to travel or retravel thousands of causes. God makes Himself of all knowledge.

Everywhere God has chosen, providence, and traces of this of all peoples. But in no sake people whom God prepared f acing the spirit. God H that happened to them He shall continue. As St. Paul tells us: "A type" (1 Cor 10:11). This one which created the prophets, soul of the Jewish soul.

existence of a Master of all things and the duties of religion. Adam, and the men after him, may have been like those African primitives who raise to God altars marvelous in their simplicity, no more than the lamb of sacrifice and a few unhewn stones. The grandeur of those ages that knew no ornaments! God's invisible presence is clearly felt by instinctive hearts, by hearts into which objections have not yet entered. Those early or primitive times were the ages of fear and trembling, because of the nearness of Omnipotence. For Omnipotence had not yet unveiled the face of its love, and the darkness in which it wrapped itself is sensed to the point of terror by the spirit of these naked souls.

The altars primitive Africans erect against trees can be no simpler than those Abraham raised to God in the land of Canaan, near the terebinths of Moreh and near the terebinths of Mamre. But higher and surer than theirs was his religion. In him we are far from primitive or degraded mankind. The mercies of God already had a long history, from the time of man's initial sin, from the time of Noah and of Shem; and the ingenuity of men had already created several civilizations.

There is a strange inequality in the way art, the knowledge of God, and moral conscience progress. The initiative is necessarily God's, who moves reason and will to their first act. Without waiting for man to proceed from things visible to the knowledge of the invisible, from things created to the Creator, without waiting for him to recognize in himself, through the deceits of finite joys, the desire for perfect joy, God Himself speaks. Through grace He speaks to him who will take so long to travel or retravel the road from ignorance to the knowledge of causes. God makes Himself known as the first Cause and the Source of all knowledge.

Everywhere God has chosen notable witnesses to His presence and providence, and traces of this primal teaching are found in the history of all peoples. But in no sacred history is it so clear as in that of the people whom God prepared for Himself according to the flesh and according to the spirit. God Himself spoke to them, and in everything that happened to them He sketched the shape of spiritual events to come. As St. Paul tells us: "All these things happened to them as a type" (I Cor 10:11). This direct and continuous teaching by God, which created the prophets, seems to have absorbed the highest powers of the Jewish soul.
Elsewhere—in Asia, in Egypt, in Greece—it was art and philosophy that developed first. In these domains, all is relatively easy; all takes place in the visible, in the human realm; all serves the adornment of this world. Knowledge of things divine, however, remained elementary, obscure, and symbolic, until the gospel was preached.

The descendants of the patriarchs turned away from the exploration of science and art; all their poetic powers, which were far from small, worked together with divine inspiration. Intent on what forwarded its destiny, this people thrust its roots firmly into the earth; it was pastoral, it was prolific. All its laws and the science of its government it owed to God. Here religion held the first place in all respects, coming down from on high, clear and pure from the start, even though it was only progressively revealed.

An explicit moral conscience, however, is everywhere very slow in coming; it is the last thing acquired. Not as to its principles—in them it is contemporaneous with reason—not as to the sense of duty and obligation, but as to complete knowledge of the natural moral laws and of the laws that depend on positive divine law, for instance that of monogamy, which participates in both orders. The positive divine laws are known through a progressive revelation, the natural moral laws by slow acquisition.

Hence, full knowledge of all the moral laws and, consequently, a fully enlightened moral conscience, depend both on God's good pleasure and on experience, on full maturity of reason and on supernatural wisdom. These, clearly, are not to be found at the beginning of the history of mankind, and at that of a mankind fallen, but only at its end, when divine grace, molder and tutor, will have prevailed over the frailty of nature and the night of sin. Then a charity wholly divine, love and freedom of spirit, will at last have rendered useless the sway of law, legal rules, in which there remains at all times something of this world.

THE SANCTITY OF ABRAHAM

Whatever the various ages of mankind may be, and whatever the actual moral growth of this people or that person, at each moment the innocence of a man consists of his not sinning against the light present in his conscience. "Where there is no law, there is no transgression.

Not only innocence but sanctity, the way lighted up for us, the "twilight" conscience, is one aware that the obscurity in it and the darkening.

A perfectly upright conscience, a "twilight" conscience. In fact, conscience of Mary and the absolution of the conscience of all the saints, can be called twilight.

From the story of Abraham seems, is the picture of the moral evil, in the age of mankind in which we live. The sense of sin as such was not out the sin of idolatry, the sin of the other's wife; but the wife who had been captured was not brought between close relatives were not to be; Abram, for instance, Lot's daughters were not expressly offspring refused them. Again, the testament against Ammonites and Moabites, of an incestuous union may be admitted into the community forced; see, for instance, Ruth, the adoption against Ammonites and Moabites of an incestuous union may be admitted descendant of his even to the tenth ge
in his conscience. "Where there is no law there is no transgression," says St. Paul (Rom 4:15). Similarly, when the law is not known, there is no transgression.

Not only innocence but sanctity itself—the heroic perseverance in the way lighted up for us, the perfection of charity—is compatible with a conscience not fully illuminated. In brief, a very noble "theological" conscience, that is, one aware of the duties of faith, hope, and love, can go hand in hand with a still implicit moral conscience, provided that the obscurity in it and the ignorance are not due to any sinful darkening.

A perfectly upright conscience, then, can be in certain respects a "twilight" conscience. In fact, compared with the stainless light of the conscience of Mary and the absolute light of the conscience of Jesus, the conscience of all the saints, from the beginning to the end of time, can be called twilight.

From the story of Abraham and the witness of Scripture, this, it seems, is the picture of the morality, of the knowledge of good and evil, in the age of mankind in which the patriarchs lived.

The sense of sin as such was very profound. And God had pointed out the sin of idolatry, the sin against nature, the sin of taking another's wife; but the wife who had been surrendered to another or had been captured was not bound to resist. Not all kinds of marriage between close relatives were condemned as incestuous, as later they would be; Abram, for instance, married his half-sister Sarai, and even Lot's daughters were not expressly reproached nor was the blessing of offspring refused them. Again, polygamy and concubinage were recognized institutions.

Surely it need not be pointed out that Abraham's marriage to Sarah and the union of Lot's daughters with their father are not on a par. One was an accepted custom in patriarchal days, while the other—forbidden in that same period by the Code of Hammurabi (cf. Pritchard, op. cit., p. 172, no. 154)—is so clearly against the pudor naturalis that the daughters had to make their father drunk with wine. Though Moses had been commanded to keep peace with the descendants of Lot's daughters (see note 7), they had been hostile to the people of Israel on its way to the promised land. Remembering their hostility, the Law was later to command that no Ammonite or Moabite, "nor any descendant of theirs even to the tenth generation," be admitted into the community of the Lord (though this was not always enforced; see, for instance, Ruth, the ancestress of David). Significantly, the prohibition against Ammonites and Moabites is preceded by one which reads: "No child of an incestuous union may be admitted into the community of the Lord, nor any descendant of his even to the tenth generation" (Deut 23:3-5). The full horror of
But the existence of the Most High God, Creator and Judge of all the earth, was made known to all. The sense of equity and justice was very much alive; alive too was the sense of the importance of the just man. There was no doubt that the merit of justice could counterbalance many sins and appease God.

Never was God angry with Abraham. "God is with you in everything you do," Abimelech the king told him (Gen 21:22).

Abraham's story tells of the state of moral conscience in his times and shows too his own sublime theological conscience. His sanctity, the heroism of the theological virtues in his soul, his singular election, God's friendship for him, and the generosity of his love for God, are—if we have faith in Scripture—proclaimed therein aloud by the Holy Spirit Himself. Never does God cease to speak to Abraham, to guide him, to encourage him.

When Abram had returned from Egypt, he dwelt in the land of Canaan. His nephew Lot had been carried off into captivity, and in order to rescue him, Abram went off to do battle with king Chedorlaomer. Returning the victor, he received the blessing of the mysterious Melchizedek, "king of Salem and priest of El Elyon, of the Most High God" (Gen 14:18). Then, rapt in contemplation, he heard God say: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great" (Gen 15:1).

"O Lord God, what will you give me?" Abram replied. "I am childless. . . . You have given me no descendants; and a slave born in my house will be my heir" (Gen 15:2–3). For the first time Abram answered God, and it was with a poignant complaint, which revealed that a shadow of doubt had crept into his heart. It was so long since God had promised him abundant offspring; but how would this come about? He was still alone with his barren wife. Then God renewed His promise: "It is not he—that stranger—who will be your heir; your heir shall be one of your own flesh" (Gen 15:4).

"Abram believed in Yahweh, and Yahweh credited it to him as justice" (Gen 15:6). For God had given, and the basis of the just man lives by. . . . It was not yet circumcision; it did not oppose the ligament of the just man. Rather, in him as a superior man, God gave him a knowledge of natural conscience within him a new life, a life of faith in God as the Second Law of Grace. This, St. Paul points out, is the proper gift of faith and the seal of the justice of faith, not to be confused with the seal of the justice of works. And St. Paul, rapt in contemplation, added: "For the just shall live by his faith" (Rom 1:17).

It was Abraham who lived by the faith of his Father, "by the faith of Abraham our Father" (Rom 4:16). Abraham, now at peace with God, no longer wished to be the father of Ishmael but Sarai. He knew that Ishmael was the child of faith, but Sarai was born of the flesh. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Ishmael was twelve. He allowed Ishmael to remain in Egypt because the promise to Sarah was now about to be fulfilled: "And the Lord said to Abraham in the eighth day of his son Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, the eight day. And Abraham was ninety years old and seven, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his loins" (Gen 17:10–14). Abraham, now at peace with God, no longer wished to be the father of Ishmael but Sarai. He knew that Ishmael was the child of faith, but Sarah was the mother born of the flesh. Abraham knew that God's covenant was not to be confused with the covenants of the nations. "I do not cast out this covenant, promising you through the seed of Sarah" (Gen 17:18).

Abraham began to think: "How can this be? Am I old and she . . . a hundred years old? Shall I be a childbearer at one hundred years old? Shall I have offspring at one hundred years old? . . . Shall I have offspring, when he is an hundred years old?" (Gen 17:17–18). Delightfully, he sought God's reassurance.
Abram and the Ascent of Conscience

Abraham and Judge of all the earth... and justice was the importance of the just... could counterbalance... with you in every-thing (21:22).

Science in his time was science. His sanctity, his singular election, love for God, are... aloud by the Holy Spirit, to guide Abraham, to guide Abraham...

Abraham was the... Chedorlaomer, of the mysterious Elyon, of the Most High. From the ascension, he heard God... reward shall be very great.

He replied, "I am childless, and a slave born in my... first time Abram an-.. which revealed that it... actors. But... God renewed His promise.

I will bless her, and by her also I will give you a son" (Gen 17:16). By her also, for Hagar had already borne Ishmael.

Abraham began to laugh: "Shall a son be born to one who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety, bear a child?" Abraham laughed, and said to God: "Oh, that Ishmael may live in your favor!" (Gen 17:17-18). Descendants from the son of Hagar—surely that is all you meant to promise. Abraham's laughter shows the familiarity of this dialogue. It was the very opposite of a laugh of incredulity, for Abraham did not doubt the word of God. Rather did he laugh the way one does with a friend who holds out a marvelous hope: in laughing he sought God's reassurance of what He had promised. And God said:

tice" (Gen 15:6). Here the fulcrum of sanctifying grace is clearly given, and the basis of sanctity, for, as the prophet Habakkuk will say, the just man lives by faith (2:4). Abram did not know the Law, he was not yet circumcised; but he believed God who spoke to him. He did not oppose the light of faith which, through God's doing, was born in him as a superior wisdom; he did not set against it any natural knowledge of natural impossibilities. And by this capacity to welcome within him a new life, by this heroic faith, was he justified. It was after this, St. Paul points out, that "he received the sign of circumcision as the seal of the justice of faith which he had while uncircumcised, in order that he may be the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11). To say it again: Abram believed, he had faith in Yahweh, and Yahweh reckoned it to him as justice. This is one of the peaks of Scripture. It is higher than Sinai. It joins together the two Testaments. Already it reflects the light of Christ.

Abram, now at peace, lived on in faith and in the obscurity of faith. When he was ninety-nine years old, God spoke to him again, that He might seal with him His astonishing pact of friendship. "This is my covenant with you. . . . Your name shall be Abraham, for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. . . . Kings shall descend from you. I will establish my covenant between you and me... a perpetual covenant that I may be a God to you and to your descendants after you. . . . You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; it shall be a token of the covenant between you and me. . . . Sarai your wife you shall not call Sarai but Sarah" (Gen 17:1-15), that is to say, "princess," mother of a royal stock, mother of the chosen people. "I will bless her, and by her also I will give you a son" (Gen 17:16). By her also, for Hagar had already borne Ishmael.

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Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son. And you shall call him Isaac. . . . As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. . . . But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year" (Gen 17: 19–21).

Another sign of Abraham's high faith and of God's singular predilection for him is the trinitarian visit of the angels. "Yahweh appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. And when he raised his eyes, he saw three men standing at a distance from him . . ." (Gen 18: 1–2).

Throughout the narrative, the sacred writer alternates the singular of the divine unity and the plural of the trinity of persons. Does he, perhaps, suggest by so doing that divine inspiration poured this theological light into Abraham's heart? Needless to say, this is far from being the only possible interpretation, but it seems, to us at least, to be in accord with the exceptional graces in the theological order given to the father of the faithful.

"He saw three men standing at a distance from him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent door to meet them and bowed down to the earth, and said: My Lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. . . . They said to him: Where is Sarah, your wife? He answered: She is in the tent. I will surely return to you at this time next year, He (the Lord) said, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son" (Gen 18:9–10). Here the divine Trinity seems to be adumbrated; as, according to many of the Fathers, it is in the story of man's creation, when God said: "Let us make mankind in our image and likeness" (Gen. 1: 26); and as, without doubt, the Triune God clearly manifested Himself at the baptism of Christ.

As the trinitarian visit drew to its close, God's friendship too manifested itself in remarkable ways. "The men set out from there, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham walked with them to escort them on the way. Yahweh said: Can I keep from Abraham what I am about to do? For Abraham shall surely nation, and all the nations of the earth I have chosen him, that he may charge him to observe the way of Yah right. . . ."

Then it was that God revealed to Abraham his remaining steady in the presence and said: Will you destroy the good work of that wonderful dialogue, glowing with ship and faith, with Abraham's deep love—"Shall not the Judge of all the men who are innocent? he pleaded—awareness of the power of the saints. Few men would suffice for the saving of a thought so too. But the ten just who not be found, and "Yahweh departed a Abraham" (Gen 18:16–33).

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

"Yahweh did to Sarah as He had promised: a son in his old age. . . . A old when his son Isaac was born to him, had grown to boyhood, "God put preme event in Abraham's life!—was a man's creation, when God said: "Let us make mankind in our image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26); and as, without doubt, the Triune God clearly manifested Himself at the baptism of Christ.

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11. The alternation of singular and plural which runs throughout the narrative can be understood as the "I" of the divine word and the "we" of the conversation of creatures; and this, it would seem, is the literal meaning. The literal meaning, however, can contain the deeper meaning loved by some of the Fathers, St. Ambrose, for instance. In any case, in Matins of Quinquagesima Sunday, the Church sings of Abraham: "He saw three, and adored one."
you shall call him Isaac. I will bless him and make him fruitful;
But my covenant I will establish for him for the sake of Isaac.
I have chosen him, that he may charge his sons and his household after him to observe the way of Yahweh, doing what is good and right...

Then it was that God revealed to Abraham that He was going to punish Sodom. "They (two of the angels) went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing in the presence of Yahweh. He drew near and said: Will you destroy the good with the wicked?" Now unfolded that wonderful dialogue, glowing with the holy familiarity of friendship and faith, with Abraham's deep feeling for justice and brotherly love—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth act justly toward those in Sodom who are innocent? he pleaded—that dialogue glowing with his awareness of the power of the saints. For did he not think that ten just men would suffice for the saving of a city full of sinners? And God thought so too. But the ten just who would have saved Sodom could not be found, and "Yahweh departed after He had finished speaking to Abraham" (Gen 18:16–33).

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

"Yahweh did to Sarah as He had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age.... Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him" (Gen 21:1–5). When Isaac had grown to boyhood, "God put Abraham to the test." This—supreme event in Abraham's life!—was the most moving and marvelous sign of his election, the dazzling manifestation of his faith. "God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, Abraham! Abraham answered, Here I am. God said, Take Isaac your son, your only one, whom you love, and go into the land of Moriah, and there offer him as a holocaust on the hill which I shall point out to you" (Gen 22:1–2).

Without sparing, without preparation, the deadly command struck Abraham in the fullness of his joy. Isaac, the flowering of his trust, must be sacrificed: such was the incomunicable command, such the unique dialogue, such the lonely encounter with God. There was no escaping from mystery nor any help to hope for. For what God was demanding was something quite other than His usual demands: He demanded the impossible, and yet the impossible might not be refused Him. Even the slaying of a man is right and good when it is God who...
Raissa Maritain

ordains it,12 because God is the Master of life and of death. But has God ordained it in this or that specific instance? No one knows save him to whom God Himself has made it known. Abraham received the command to kill, and he obeyed.

Here is proof of his boundless faith: he recognized God's extraordinary will, not in extraordinary evidence, but in the darkness ordinary to faith. The heinousness of the sacrifice did not make him waver, when the very faith of a soul less mighty could have been laid low. Nothing could cloud his faith's ineffable light, not even his full-hearted attachment to the son of his old age.

Abraham's faith was exceptional, mark you, not only in its greatness but also in the object proposed to it. Abraham believed, as did all the faithful, in God, one, almighty, Creator and Lord of all things. But there were also presented to his faith commandments which were particular, personal, and incommunicable. In both respects Abraham's faith was theological and supernatural, in both heroic.

Because Abraham was chosen to be the father of all the faithful, it was of course fitting that he should exercise theological faith in all its forms. Thus his faith is the exemplar of divine faith as it bears on universal truths, and also as it receives particular commandments and works in an exceptional manner in those to whom there is offered an exceptional object of faith. So to Mary in the Annunciation; to St. Joseph in his dream; to the apostles, called one by one to believe in the mission of Christ; to Joan of Arc, charged with the temporal salvation of a people.13 In each instance, the act of faith is stripped of all visible assistance and is carried out in anguish of conscience.14

12. Because it is God who ordains it—man being nothing more than the instrument of the Lord of life and death—the act changes essentially in moral quality. Only the material deed remains. Cf. St. Thomas, Sum. Theol. 1-II, q. 94, a. 5, ad 2; and q. 100, a. 8, ad 3.

13. Since the coming of Christ, private revelations no longer have for their primary object the truth of mysteries hidden in God, but, says St. Thomas, only the direction of human acts (Sum. Theol. II-II, q. 174, a. 6). According to Thomists, therefore, such revelations do not belong to the domain of theological faith, but are a charism, fides gratis data. Still, charismatic faith and theological faith have in common faith's supreme motive, the veracity of God who reveals. (Cf. Salmanticenses, tract. 17 de Fide, disp. 1, dub. 4, no. 5. According to other theologians, such as Bellarmine and Suarez, charismatic faith springs from the very habit of theological faith.) Thus Joan of Arc knew well that her voices demanded of her an act of divine faith. If she were to say that God had not sent her, she declared, she would damn herself (cf. J. B. J. Ayroles, S.J., La Vraie Jeanne d'Arc, Paris: Gaume, 1890, I, 253).

14. Søren Kierkegaard has shown this admirably with regard to the sacrifice of Isaac. In his Fear and Trembling, devoted to God's exceptional demands on him. He believed, and in his faith he began to his abundant life according to the beauty. It is true that, even when faith is in divine matter how firmly it clings, the intelligence is such faith, it admits of a certain inquisitio, (q. 14, a. 1), something like an unrest of spiritual trials, this unrest does not have the source and the life of all his thought.

Abraham and the Ascent

Abraham's sanctity and the heroism to God's exceptional demands on him. His cruelty is well attested by God Him­

Abraham, take Isaac your only one whom you love and offer him as a "on the hill which I shall point out to you."
Abraham's sanctity and the heroism of his faith always responded to God's exceptional demands on him. Here the demand was cruel, and its cruelty is well attested by God Himself who insisted:

_Abraham, take Isaac your son,_
_your only one,_
_whom you love,_
_and offer him as a holocaust_on the hill which I shall point out to you._

(Gen 22:2)

All this happened at night, for next it is said that “early in the morning” Abraham arose. It was the night of his agony. The night in which the mere man in him died. The night of a transfiguration! Lo, Abraham becomes the image of the Father whose Son is crucified. The night of a new birth for the whole, perhaps, of mankind, and of the winning of a new fatherhood for Abraham, who, in sacrificing his dearest, his “only one,” joined to himself all the faithful.

The Abraham who went to bed in the evening was not the same Abraham who arose “early in the morning.” The evening before he was happy and prosperous, filled beyond measure with the greatest of gifts. God was with him in all he did; God’s blessing was on Ishmael and on Isaac. But in that night, Abraham came to know the exigent Master, the incomprehensible Master, the Master of life and of death.

He believed, and in his faith he began to die. He died to his happy life, to his abundant life according to the flesh. He died to the light of his simple thoughts, to his too natural thoughts, to his still too simple knowledge of good and evil. In that great darkness, his faith grew greater yet, and its roots struck ever deeper into his soul.

Isaac. In his _Fear and Trembling_, devoted entirely to Abraham, he considers Abraham's faith only as he was tried in the sacrifice of his son. He says nothing of the faith which adheres to universal divine truths, as if such faith did not exist for him or as if it ought to be identified in him with faith in particular and personal commandments. Here is a point of reproach in what is otherwise a book of exceptional beauty.

It is true that, even when faith is in divine truths universally proposed and no matter how firmly it clings, the intelligence is not fully satisfied. No matter how firm such faith, it admits of a certain _inquisitio_, as St. Thomas puts it in _De Veritate_ (q. 14, a. 1), something like an unrest of the intelligence. But, except in great spiritual trials, this unrest does not have the character of anguish as Kierkegaard understands it. One discerns in _Fear and Trembling_ that Kierkegaard himself passed through a very deep trial at once psychological and religious, and that here is the source and the life of all his thought.
Abraham did not tarry. "Early in the morning he arose, harnessed his ass, took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac, and cut wood for the holocaust. Then he set out on his journey for the place which God indicated to him" (Gen 22:3).

The road was long, longer still the trial. For three days the little group made its way, Abraham in the darkness of his secret, Isaac in the joy of his childhood. "On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place at a distance." Here he prophesied without knowing it—did not God say of him to Abimelech: "Restore that man's wife, for he is a prophet . . ." (Gen 20:7)? Or is it the theological virtue of hope which illumined his soul with a dawning light? Unknowingly, he prophesied: "Stay here with the ass while the boy and I go there to worship; then we shall come back to you" (Gen 22:5).

The two of them went together, Isaac carrying the wood, Abraham the fire and the knife. "My father, where is the sheep for the holocaust? God Himself will provide a sheep for the holocaust, my son . . . When they arrived at the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Then he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wood upon the altar. Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to kill his son . . ." (Gen 22:7-10).

Abraham, like those whom later the Christ would call His disciples, understood the absolute summons, the evangelic summons: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother, and wife and children . . . and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26). For each time we give to God our "only," we give all, we give infinitely, and it matters little if this our "only" is but a poor object, created, perishable, mortal. The life of our soul in this world, indeed our very life in this world, is our "only"; or our happiness in this life is our "only"; or the one we exclusively love is our "only." He who gives his "only"—his soul, his life, his beloved, or his happiness—gives infinitely. And with his son Isaac, Abraham gave to God the very soul of his life and of his joy; he consented to the destruction of all his hope.

Then the angel of God stopped Abraham's arm, and a ram was slaughtered in the place of Isaac. And Yahweh said to Abraham: "You have not withheld from me your son, your only one. . . . I swear by myself, since you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only one, I will indeed bless you, and will surely multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens. In your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because (Gen 22:12-18).

Such then was the glory and the sanctification of the few articles of explicit faith, and whose codified moral rules which would oblige the men of the Mosaic Law and the men who live in the (Gen 22:12-18).

THE ADAMIC STATE

The story of Abraham, that noble figure, led us to examine the height and extent of the moral laws in that age when God had not yet mediated of Moses and the ministry of Adam's. The same question should not be asked about and incomparably more mysterious—the second should like to offer some reflections on the origin of morality.

THE FIRST STEPS OF MANKIND

What idea, what picture can we construct of primitiveness? However conjectural such think them indispensable. True, the narrative on high all our philosophical and scientific, nonetheless to seek some understanding of our knowledge of man.16

Must one say that sin brought man from the heights of his intellectual faculties, of knowledge, the very borders of animality? And must we were making man fresh—but this time thet liberty and with the assistance, as it were, all over again from those utmost borders.

15. The presence of angels at Sinai, though varish tradition. In the New Testament, the ministry the Law is spoken of several times (Ac 7:53; Gal 3.

16. In the teaching of St. Thomas on Adam's it is proper, we think, to distinguish the formally influenced by the science of his day, with its ideas of past of man and the history of living species. Whi exist together with another anthropological concep-
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tions of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:12-18).

Such then was the glory and the sanctity of a man who knew but a few articles of explicit faith, and whose conduct violated several of the moral rules which would oblige the men who lived in the age of the Mosaic Law and the men who live in the Christian era.

THE ADAMIC STATE

The story of Abraham, that noble figure, has suggested to us the notion that there are various states of mankind and of sanctity, and has led us to examine the height and extent of the knowledge of the moral laws in that age when God had not yet given His Law through the mediation of Moses and the ministry of angels. It is impossible that the same question should not be asked about a state still more primitive and incomparably more mysterious—the Adamic state. Hence we should like to offer some reflections on the first steps of mankind and on the origin of morality.

THE FIRST STEPS OF MANKIND

What idea, what picture can we construct for ourselves of Adam’s primitiveness? However conjectural such considerations may be, we think them indispensable. True, the narrative of Genesis governs from on high all our philosophical and scientific conceptions; it is good nonetheless to seek some understanding of them from the perspective of our knowledge of man.

Must one say that sin brought man from the full original perfection of his intellectual faculties, of knowledge, and of beauty, down to the very borders of animality? And must one say that God, as if He were making man afresh—but this time with the cooperation of created liberty and with the assistance, as it were, of time—had to begin all over again from those utmost borders and from sin? Or may one

15. The presence of angels at Sinai, though variously interpreted, is ancient Jew-ish tradition. In the New Testament, the ministry of angels in the promulgation of the Law is spoken of several times (Ac 7:33; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:12).
16. In the teaching of St. Thomas on Adam’s condition in the state of integrity, it is proper, we think, to distinguish the formally theological from that which was influenced by the science of his day, with its ideas on nature and particularly on the past of man and the history of living species. What is formally theological can well exist together with another anthropological concept of the early periods of human-
also think that Adam’s state of innocence, so noble by reason of gratuitous gifts and of sanctity, was nonetheless that of a nature still imperfect in terms of development and experience; may one think that, in a peace towering above these imperfections, Adam preserved powers for progress, his immense, still undeveloped potentialities for the future? Nothing in the second chapter of Genesis seems to gainsay this conjecture. It shows us man as he is about to set out on his forward movement in the natural order and begin his education.

It was with work that man’s education began, work that as yet admitted of no pain, since man was set in an abode of delight. But even in this abode there was a shadow of threat, a mysterious commandment: to keep the garden of Eden. Is this garden in danger of being invaded, or of being lost? The second commandment, also very mysterious, is terrifyingly more explicit: “The day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you must die” (Gen 2:17). Do not these very simple commandments seem suited to a still very simple state of human intelligence? They may well have been given by inner inspiration to a man who did not yet have words, for only later, in our opinion, would language be invented.

Nothing prevents our imagining the body of that man as relatively close to primitive types, though free from any trace of degradation. In spite of the perhaps immense distance in time between them, and excluding from our picture of Adam the stigmas of degeneration which may mark the primitives, still his appearance may have been closer to the primitive types of prehistory and anthropology than to the evolved types which the artistic canon of the Egyptians and Greeks makes us accept as the models of the human body.17

Then there is intelligence. Because of the stable harmony and the perfect subordination of powers which, in the morning of its creation, human nature enjoyed by grace, one ought to think of Adam’s intelligence as incomparably strong in its living vigor and its forces for development, for no wound had yet impeded it. This virgin intellect was, as far as knowledge in the human mode goes, in an unimaginable state of simplicity and inexperience; yet its vast potentialities. In relation to what and joy of paradise and the spiritual power it is enough to remember that divine hindrance from the higher ranges of sensibility, was at every instant able to faculties. It was also able to infuse intelligence, disproportionate though it to such a light, a contemplation very of itself—and very different from the and initiated to reflection.

Free will was intact, turned naturally toward God. And the primitiveness peace and tranquility measure at all of the power of the ordered Adam’s full moral adherence decisions. For here was a man in whom its pristine vigor, and whose ease in, passed anything our present weaknesses.

How long did Adam live as solitaire? What desires, what needs at last? Did God regard that voice as a sign “It is not good that man is alone; I self” (Gen 2:18)? Then came a step. Scripture I am following throughout, not condense into a brief narrative text as well as of the historical, order.) Con mine whether the time had really pa tion, as it were; He tested the power.

"When Yahweh-Elohim had formed of the field and the birds of the air, I what he would call them; for that what would be its name. The man named air, and all the beasts of the field; but (Gen 2:19-20).

Here Scripture gives us clearly to tial difference between man and i
of simplicity and inexperience; yet its notions and ideas were rich with vast potentialities. In relation to what was needed to ensure the peace and joy of paradise and the spiritual privileges of the state of integrity, it is enough to remember that divine inspiration, descending without hindrance from the higher ranges of reason to the outer fringes of sensibility, was at every instant able to guide the work of the natural faculties. It was also able to infuse into Adam's noble and intuitive intelligence, disproportionate though its notional state was with respect to such a light, a contemplation very lofty but, so to speak, unaware of itself—and very different from that which arises in a spirit mature and initiated to reflection.

Free will was intact, turned naturally as well as supernaturally toward God. And the primitiveness peculiar to the state of concepts—no measure at all of the power or the nobility of freedom—in no way hindered Adam's full moral advertence and his full responsibility for decisions. For here was a man in whom the nature of the species had all its pristine vigor, and whose ease in, and mastery over, his actions surpassed anything our present weakness can imagine.

How long did Adam live as solitary guardian of the earthly paradise? What desires, what needs at last made their voice heard in him? Did God regard that voice as a sign of human growth when He said: "It is not good that man is alone; I will make him a helper like himself" (Gen 2:18)? Then came a strange test. (It is the letter of holy Scripture I am following throughout, without asking myself if it does not condense into a brief narrative teachings of the moral and spiritual, as well as of the historical, order.) God acted as if He wished to determine whether the time had really come to give man a human companion, a "companion like himself," whether the time had come for human society. And presently He made the first man pass an examination, as it were; He tested the power of his reason.

"When Yahweh-Elohim had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, He brought them to the man to see what he would call them; for that which the man called each of them would be its name. The man named all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field; but he found no helper like himself" (Gen 2:19-20).

Here Scripture gives us clearly to understand that there is an essential difference between man and all the other animals, and lets us
witness the early exercise of human intelligence through its experience of the things of nature. Rather, it lets us witness an enormous discovery, the invention of language—or at least the first use of it by man Scripture tells us—urged into being by man's intellectual faculties, which, we have no doubt, were closely guided by divine providence and inspiration. Man's faculties were guided by that inspiration which is granted the artist and the poet, guided by that providence which is the more visible and maternal the nearer it is to the origins of a being. And here we are at the beginnings of humanity.

"Yahweh-Elohim cast man into a deep sleep and, while he slept, took one of his ribs . . . and the rib which Yahweh-Elohim took from the man, He made into a woman, and brought her to him . . ." (Gen 2:21-22). Was that deep sleep an ecstatic sleep, as St. Thomas supposed? What dreams did God send Adam, and what are the essential and hidden truths in which God wished thus to instruct him under the veil of sensible images? What mystery did He let him sense, going to the very roots of being, concerning the union of man and woman, and their love? Behold, here is Eve, born of his own substance, as from the opened side of the crucified Christ there would one day be born another Spouse, she too mother of all the living.18

As we try to read word by word in Genesis about the progress of what is human, we observe that—whatever other interpretations may be possible—the woman skipped one step. She was not taken from the earth, she was not "formed out of the ground," as was man. Dust she was, through the medium of man's flesh, as man (so the natural sciences suggest, and revelation does not preclude) was dust by way of animal flesh; but she was made out of human flesh, she was created within paradise, while man did not enter it till after his creation. Thus, according to the Bible, woman's physical origin is nobler than man's. The price of this privilege is that the demands made on her by God and by men will be greater, and so will—dare one say it?—God's attentions. It was Eve who—by her fault, it is true, but also by the boldness of her decision, a boldness proper to an adult—took the initiative that, accepted by Adam, decided mankind's fate. And it was a woman who, without any human counsel and by the fullness of her faith, made up in some way for the fault of Eve and ascended toward the Saviour and toward privilege, God would permit that of themselves or under His direction of woman more abnegation and patience than would of man.

"Yahweh-Elohim made a woman, and brought her to Adam, saying, "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and fasten to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (Gen 2:24). Before his sin, Adam's primitive strength, not of weariness and old age, nor our day has a dreadful past which our children are boundless future. It is through accumulation of experience and the development of mighty faculties of which all the depths of being, the way gaged; this union without shadow of doubt, on sin 19—brings us face to face with birth is human. And it is given us in Genesis that of reason, of which man gave proof.

Before his sin, Adam's primitive strength, not of weariness and old age, nor our day has a dreadful past which our children are exempt from all suffering and death, this union, and the immortality over intelligence and weakened freedom started on its way again, having thenceforward.

Adam and Eve were naked and knew themselves. Their nakedness was a symbol of peace, this union, and the immortality 19. "To the woman He said, I will make your adversary the serpent, and you shall be your longing, though he have done
through its experience an enormous dissonance first use of it by man's intellectual faculties, divine providence and inspiration which is the origins of a being. And

and, while he slept, Yahweh-Elohim took sight to him . . ." aic sleep, as St. Thomas and what are the essences to instruct him under He let him sense, going in of man and woman, own substance, as from would one day be born ng.

is about the progress of other interpretations may not been from the," as was man. Dust she man (so the natural science) was dust by way of pin flesh, she was created after his creation. Thus, sin is nobler than man's. is made on her by God one say it?—God's at-tume, but also by the bold-adult—took the initiative date. And it was a woman illness of her faith, made Church from the heart of the pride, "De nativitate Ecclesiaeuber-December 1935), 488-

up in some way for the fault of Eve and led straying mankind to reascend toward the Saviour and toward God. By reason of the same privilege, God would permit that all the laws men were to make, whether of themselves or under His inspiration, would always exact of woman more abnegation and purity, more humanity, than they would of man.

"Yahweh-Elohim made a woman, and brought her to the man. Then the man said: She now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh . . . For this reason," adds the inspired writer, thus fixing the moment when marriage was instituted and giving the ontological reason for love, "for this reason a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh" (Gen 2:22–24). This conscious attachment, founded on the perfect likeness of her to him; this great love in which all the depths of being, the very life of flesh and bone, are engaged; this union without shadow of servitude—for servitude followed on sin
—brings us face to face with one of the greatest signs of what is human. And it is given us in Genesis right after another such sign, that of reason, of which man gave proof in the naming of the animals.

Before his sin, Adam’s primitiveness was that of youth and new strength, not of weariness and old age. Whereas the "primitive" of our day has a dreadful past which crushes and accuses him, in Adam mankind had a boundless future. Progress would undoubtedly come through accumulation of experience, but it would also come through the development of mighty faculties, of which we can hardly form any exact idea, since we cannot know just how far original sin was able to weaken them.

It is of faith that man was created in the state of grace, at peace with himself, in union with God. By a supernatural privilege, he was also exempt from all suffering and from death. Sin destroyed this peace, this union, and the immortality of the body; it cast its shadow over intelligence and weakened free will. Yet after this fall, mankind started on its way again, having sorrow and death as companions thenceforward.

Adam and Eve were naked and did not know yet how to clothe themselves. Their nakedness was at once of the body and of the soul. With the loss of grace, they were stripped of all protection. The sensi-

19. "To the woman He said, I will make great your distress . . . your husband shall be your longing, though he have dominion over you" (Gen 3:16).
tiveness of their bodies was no longer sheltered from the elements, but above all they felt degraded; used to God's truth, they had now been touched by falsehood. And as they sensed their sin, there was born in them shame, fear, and modesty. "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid," Adam admitted. "Then God said: Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten then of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat" (Gen 3:11).

The serpent only half deceived them. They would not know good and evil "like God," but they would learn to know good and evil the way sinners do, which of all ways of learning is the hardest and most painful.

ORIGIN OF MORALITY

Before their sin, what did Adam and Eve know of good and evil? They were saints, the moral virtues and the gifts of grace unfolding abundantly within their integral natures; their moral conscience was high and pure. But of the explicit, discursive knowledge of the code of good and evil, to which we here reserve the name of moral science (I use the term in the sense of an articulate or developed moral knowledge), they had before their sin only the initium, its very first beginnings. Such moral science could have developed in the state of innocence had it endured, but at that time they possessed only its first principle and a few positive laws. They were inclined to act aright; they knew they were to till and keep the garden of Eden and were not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. This does not amount to articulate knowledge, science; it is its merest start. And this very start of moral science Adam held from a divine revelation: You shall not eat of the fruit of that tree, he was bidden in a commandment that was from without and was of "positive" law.

Here we have the first restriction imposed on man. It was the test, necessary, so it would seem, for such a test was put alike to the angels and to man—necessary if a created spirit is to overcome the appeal of nothingness and to enter into the glory of God. (Nothingness has an appeal to any created spirit, since it is one of his origins, the other being the Creator's love.) This restriction, this test, is the gate which, shut and sure by obedience, protected paradise against attack by forces of outer darkness. Opened by sin, this gate lets mankind walk through the valley of tears, along the paths of blood and death, toward another Gate which opens another paradise.
The law given to Adam and Eve brought no servitude with it, however, for it was given to a nature still upright and without covetousness. Their will tended toward the good, and they were happy in obeying, for obedience, hard though it may be to a spiritual nature when the motive and purpose of the commandment remain obscure, implies no affliction if the soul is, by grace, already fully orientated toward the good that God desires. God made men right, says Ecclesiastes (7:30).

There was in the man of paradise no propensity to evil, no actual leaning to any disorder whatever.

Thus, as we understand it, Adam knew this about evil: that it was evil to eat of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But for the rest, how did he live? How did he do what is good, if he did not yet know, explicitly and precisely, all the particular precepts of the natural law, and if he did not yet have the science of good and evil—be it by the development that could have taken place in paradise, or by the experience of the fall?

He let himself be moved by the divine inspiration that guided his innocent nature step by step. He lived in a simple union with God and all creation, lived a wholly contemplative moral life, which was compatible, however, with the extreme primitiveness we have assumed of his notions and of his state in the whole order of the things—physical, intellectual, and moral—which develop by natural progress. Thus his acts, in so far as they grew out of that contemplation, had the Holy Spirit for their immediate guide. It was the initiative of the Holy Spirit he followed; and from his loving contemplation of God sprang acts harmonious with that love. All the first movements of his nature were then good. This is to say that he lived under the regime of contemplation. The regime of contemplation and of love embraces all good,20 and has no need of the experience of evil. The ways of innocent man were divine ways.

Of moral good in itself Adam had a knowledge, an ontological experience, which was like a "passion" of the divine unity where being,

20. That is, every good which does not suppose some evil. But there is also a good, indeed a very great good, which would not exist were it not for sin. Without sin, Christ would not have died for us and so shown us His immeasurable love. Without sin, we should not know the good of repentance and penance, of compunction and contrition, nor the good of giving all for the salvation of our neighbor. In a word, without sin we should not know anything linked with the redemption. Felix culpa, sings the Exultet of the Easter Vigil, "O happy fault, which made necessary a Redeemer so good and so great"
the good, and the beautiful dwell together. Nevertheless, even in the state of innocence, he must also have felt that pull of nothingness which is proper to the creature, and which is not yet either the experience of evil or the inclination to evil, but is its base and possibility. *Quae ex nihilo facta sunt, per se in nihilum tendunt.* "What is made from nothing tends, of itself, to return to nothing." 21

Had mankind—by way of hypothesis—forever kept living in the state of innocence, undoubtedly the gardens of paradise would gradually have spread, by the labor of men, over the whole earth; through revelation and experience, man would, little by little, have acquired ever greater knowledge of all that is good and right. He would have known evil as well, but in the light of the good, in a remote manner, and in a way entirely foreign to his own life. He would have learned of the existence of moral evil, by hearsay, perhaps. He would have known, for example, that Lucifer had preferred his own excellence to God. This would have been a knowledge of good and evil quite different in type from that from which you and I bear. Through an experience free of disquiet, men would have come to know from God the whole domain of the soul's good, as they would likewise have explored the whole domain of being, learning truth unceasingly.

But the devil precipitated matters and, by arousing curiosity in Adam and Eve, by tempting them through pride of knowledge, made them enter too soon into the paths of moral science, a moral science whose direction was henceforth out of gear, that is to say, linked with the experience of sin and the experience of servitude, whether to sin or to the law. For the moral science we have presupposes the experience of evil, and so is incompatible with the innocence of the first state. We have this science; Adam did not have it, and he was happy.

Neither did he have, as we have just remarked, that innocent moral science which could have developed later on in paradise. To tempt Eve, the serpent did not make use of a false vision but of something true: the world of moral realities waiting for discovery. Yet to wish to enter into the knowledge of that world at the price of disobedience to God and in order to be "like Him," in order to have, "like Him," the knowledge of things—this was man's sin. In what way will Adam and Eve henceforth be like God? In what way will they know these things? That is where they were deceived.

21. St. Thomas, *De Veritate,* q. 5, a. 2; citing St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa,* II, 27 (PG 94:960); I, 3 (PG 94:795).
It was by an ill and unhappy road that we entered into the knowledge of morality. Fallen man, heir of original sin, does good by the sweat of his brow, and knows evil by experience. The forbidden fruit was, no doubt, merely a fruit like the rest; the only thing that distinguished it was that it was forbidden. And it is all too true that eating it was enough to open the eyes to the science of morality.

Adam and Eve knew that it was evil to disobey God. How else would their fault have been a sin, and have had such a terrible consequence? But they knew it without having had the experience of evil and without being subject to the regime of constraints imposed by the Law on a weak and rebellious nature, the regime of morality, as it can be called. Mankind did not live under the regime of morality, did not learn morality, did not begin to acquire explicit knowledge of the particular rules of morality, did not begin to acquire the science of good and evil, until the day on which it had the experience of evil. In the days before their fault—were they many?—in the days of their innocent life, our first parents had experience only of the soul’s good. For us, the knowledge of good and evil is the fruit of that human experience which started out with sin, an experience in which mankind was not abandoned to itself, however, for the mercy of God sustained it, led it, and illumined it by progressive revelations.

Specifically moral experience waited on the test of obedience. The powerful desire to know what appeared to be reserved to God alone—the mysterious domain of good and evil—broke the bonds of union. That knowledge of good and evil we possess entered into the world with death; as a remedy for spiritual death, it is true, but a bitter remedy. "The prince of evil overcame Adam, made from the clay of the earth into the image of God, adorned with modesty, beautiful in temperance, clothed with charity," 22 and man entered into the experiential way of evil as well as of good. Hence the tree of the "knowledge of good and evil," which in its absolute significance is indeed the domain reserved to God alone, is for us the symbol of that moral science which is acquired through the experience of sin. And because of this stain upon its origin, it is not the best possible science of good and evil. It is visible above all as the system, or code, at once medicinal and penitential, at once divine and human, the system of laws, precepts, and servitudes which rule the conscience of fallen mankind.

Until the coming of the Christ and the New Law, the principal feature of moral science will be law which subdues a rebellious will and confines; even when law will have passed into second place, it will remain forever, to its least jot and tittle, and in a sense it will be made severer still. For the Christ has the secret of freeing us from law without abolishing it. Precepts fewer in number, but ever more precise and rigorous, because they reach to the innermost point of the soul—precepts needed for wounded consciences inclined to evil—will accompany mankind in all its paths that it may never be lost.

God, foreseeing sin, had announced to man that through disobedience he would come to know the conditions proper to human nature—pain, suffering, and death. What an unimaginable catastrophe was that fall into nature which unbalanced nature itself and cast it into disharmony! But God had foreseen it and had prepared, in the orders both of nature and of grace, incomparable ways of remedying and making up for it.

Among the ways thus prepared by God there surely must be counted the progressive teaching of the natural moral laws and the revelation of divine laws properly speaking, which bear upon our return to God. In the state of innocence—had it lasted—man would have been able to learn the good, to learn the natural and divine laws which tie the human conscience to its last end, to receive precepts—all without being condemned, without being oppressed, because, moved by the Holy Spirit, he would have run with heart opened wide, "in the way of His commandments" (Ps 118:32). But through sin, mankind has fallen from the regime of contemplation and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the regime of morality, where reason has the initiative; reason, slow to awaken and to lay aside phantoms, slow to understand and bound to a will hard put to maintain its rectitude.

From our first parents we have received the heritage of sin and of inclination to evil, but also the longing for a kind of knowledge of the good which was better than ours. There is in us the memory, obscure though it may be, of a state in which the relations between man and the universe, between man and God, were more right and more real. Here, undoubtedly, lies the origin of the very deep feeling that the Law ought to be transcended and that, whatever the cost, the pure fountains of love and of freedom must be found again. Pharisaism is odious, and though the Pharisee is a strict man, be Saul himself, he must for a time be made able to receive a better and to become the apostle Paul, vessel of election. Having known both the Mosaic Law and the love of God that embraces them in one love when he says to teach of the other: "The law is spiritual; the law is death of Christ."

The Old Law consisted chiefly of demands and prohibitions, which, of the revelation of sin and its condemnation, alike the whole of this morality, to assimilate the soul, and to bring it to the living spirit. Hence the very soul of the Law, indeed, that had been human and social, origin, is "I shall love the Lord your God..." Still, it is not the Law that gives chasing the Holy Spirit by whom "charity is pure. The Old Law consisted chiefly of demands and prohibitions, the New Law derives its pre-eminence from the Holy Spirit given inwardly to believers.24

24. Cf. St. Thomas, Sum. Theol. I-II, q. 26, a. 1, s. 2. Nor are the most spiritual! show that for St. Thomas, it is spiritual. Expounding St. Paul's "We know that you are wise in divine things, that the Lord gave to you the statutes, and the decrees you must teach of the other: "The law is spiritual, for it is concordant with the Law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the spirit. The New Law but the law of the Spirit, for not only the Holy Spirit Himself imprints it on the heart because it was given by the Holy Spirit, who is spiritual, for it is concordant with the spirit, for it is concordant with the spirit, for it is concordant with the spirit. Therefore it is written: "The Lord gave the law, and the law of the Spirit, for not only the Holy Spirit Himself imprints it on the heart of God." Hence the very soul of the Law, indeed, that had been human and social, origin, is "I shall love the Lord your God..."

25. In Deuteronomy (5:30-31), God is their tents. Then you wait here near me and the statutes, and the decrees you must teach: "Shema Israel, Hear, O Israel, Ye before you shall love Yahweh your God, with all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5).
Jew Law, the principal feature is a rebellious will and into second place, it will be made of freeing us from law without, but ever more precise and farther, but the permost point of the soul—inclined to evil—will 1ay never be lost.

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bequeathed the heritage of sin and of a kind of knowledge of the is in us the memory, obscure the relations between man and are more right and more real. very deep feeling that the Law after the cost, the pure fountains again. Pharissism^ is odious, and that though the Pharisee is a strict observer of the Law. Even if he be Saul himself, he must for a time be blinded and overthrown that he may be made able to receive a better light and a new life and to become the apostle Paul, vessel of election and Doctor of the Nations. Having known both the Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ, he embraces them in one love when he says of the first what all his letters teach of the other: "The law is spiritual" (Rom 7:14). "The New Law, however," says St. Thomas, "is maxime spiritualis, most spiritual," for the grace of the Holy Spirit is given more abundantly since the death of Christ.24

Under the regime of morality, the regime of the Mosaic Law, man was guided painfully to the accomplishment of the divine will by commands and prohibitions, which of themselves brought not grace but the revelation of sin and its condemnation. To integrate within oneself the whole of this morality, to assimilate it into the intimate life of the soul, and to bring it to the living springs of grace, much love is needed. Hence the very soul of the Law, indeed the mark of its divine, and not merely human and social, origin, is the commandment of love: "You shall love the Lord your God . . ." (Deut 6:5) 28

Still, it is not the Law that gives charity, St. Thomas teaches, but the Holy Spirit by whom "charity is poured out in our hearts" (Rom 5:5). The Old Law consisted chiefly of deeds, moral and sacramental, while the New Law derives its pre-eminence from the very grace of the Holy Spirit given inwardly to believers.26 With the New Law we enter into a

24. Cf. St. Thomas, Sum. Theol. I-II, q. 106, a. 3. The words "The New Law is most spiritual" show that for St. Thomas, no less than for St. Paul, the Old Law too is spiritual. Expounding St. Paul's "We know that the Law is spiritual" (Rom 7:14), St. Thomas writes in his Commentary to Romans (VII, 3): "We know, we who are wise in divine things, 'that the Law,' that is, the Old Law, 'is spiritual.' " Then he goes on to explain the Law's spiritual character in a twofold way. "It is spiritual, for it is concordant with the spirit of man, for the Psalmist says: 'The Law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul' (18:8). Again, the Law is spiritual because it was given by the Holy Spirit, who in Scripture is called the Finger of God, as when Christ says: 'If I cast out devils by the Finger of God . . .' (Lk 11:20). Therefore it is written: 'The Lord gave to Moses two stone tablets written by the Finger of God' (Ex 51:18). The New Law, however, is called not only a spiritual law but the law of the Spirit, for not only does it issue from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit Himself imprints it on the heart in which He makes His abode.'

25. In Deuteronomy (5:30-31), God says to Moses: 'Go, tell them to return to their tents. Then you wait here near me and I will give you all the commandments, the statutes, and the decrees you must teach them. . . .' And Moses says to the people: 'Shema Israel, Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. Therefore you shall love Yahweh your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength' (Deut 6:4-5; cf. Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25-27).

regime other than that which I have called here the regime of morality; rather a regime in which morality—not only safeguarded but made more interior, made deeper and more refined—is dependent on, and fastened to, Christ's redeeming love.

Hear me, you who follow after justice,  
You who seek Yahweh;  
Look upon the rock from which you were hewn  
And the pit from which you were dug.  
Look upon Abraham, your father,  
And upon Sara who bore you;  
For I called him when he was alone  
That I might bless him and multiply him.  
(Is 51:1–2)

Barnabas M. Ahern, O.F.M.  

THE EXODUS, THEN AND NOW

UPHEAVAL stirred the world of Israel ... vast migrations over the Fertile Crescent, a pool of a world that had died. Babylonia vaunted the boast, "I am rich and have abundance of nothing"; and all the while there were "wretched and miserable and poor" (Apoc 3:17). All flesh had corrupted itself on a pool full of death.

But life still throbbed at Haran, Abraham lived there, a newcomer, a history would flow from him; he... our father in the sight of the Lord at Haran, in the middle of the ninth century before our Lord, to the heart of this tribal chief (Gen 41:51) with a freshet of mercy, gushing free, as water that spread out in ever-widening fidelity until it covered the earth touching each generation perpetually touching each generation perpetually

The divine word promised a blessing, the elements or the time of its coming. But the blessing was not to return to Him empty, a water that spread out in ever-widening fidelity until it covered the earth touching each generation perpetually touching each generation perpetually

The history of fulfillment is of the same form as the history of the Abrahamic covenant: the history of the Abrahamic covenant: the

vital continuity binds fast the...