

THE ONE GREAT SIN

August Pieper

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Introduction to the Translation

The following is a translation of a German article from the 1916 *Theologische Quartalschrift*, volume 13, pages 234-255. *Theologische Quartalschrift* is the predecessor of today's *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. The author of the article is August Pieper, a professor and president of the Wisconsin Synod's seminary, located in Wauwatosa, then later in Mequon, Wisconsin.¹ This article, entitled "The One Great Sin" (*Die eine grosse Suende*), treats the subject of original sin. With this article, Professor Pieper addresses one of the fundamental questions in theology. What really is the defining characteristic of sin? What is the proper way to speak of sin from a biblical perspective? The article is a searing indictment of the self-centeredness of human nature. Since talk of sin has largely disappeared in modern circles, there is a certain value to understanding the underlying tone of sinful actions, even if one can no longer give it the proper label.

In view of the world situation at the time, it is not surprising that Professor Pieper makes reference to the American stance on the war in Europe. It is hard for us to appreciate those dark days for German Americans; yet, in many respects the events of the First World War forced the German Lutherans in the United States to become more fully American. We have left Pieper's personal observations concerning the many ways in which World War I manifested human sinfulness intact as he made them. They provide a striking example of how we must read theological writings in their historical setting. What would he say of America and Germany today?

In some cases, *italics* indicate emphasis found in the original German. Some longer paragraphs and sentences were broken down into

¹For a more detailed biography of August Pieper, visit the *Studium Excitare* website at <http://www.studiumexcitare.com/content/127>.

shorter paragraphs and sentences to aid the reader, but we have tried to preserve some of the Germanic flavor of the original.

It is the earnest hope and prayer of the translators that this translation is both academically beneficial and spiritually enlightening to the reader.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.—Hebrews 13:7

Soli Deo Gloria.

The One Great Sin

Here we want to follow up on the article about the one great thought of God (*Theologische Quartalschrift*, October 1915), which is being read here and there, not without benefit. Our plan includes a couple more articles along the same lines. Indeed, we begin this with an article about the one great sin. God willing, a third article about the one great working power of God should follow.

The gospel is the preaching of salvation, the rescue from sin. This preaching sets forth sin as the disaster and the corruption of men as a presupposition. So the gospel is a preaching that responds to sinful corruption. Without the presence of the power of sin, the gospel would make no sense and it would not even exist. The preaching about sin is one half of the revealed Word of God. The doctrine of sin must also constitute one half of our preaching. It must always establish the foundation of the proper preaching of the gospel and prepare the way for it. Therefore, the doctrine of sin is as important as the gospel itself, and an unclear, cursory, or completely false understanding of the nature, the roots, the power, the effects, and consequences of sin can do nothing other than to detract from the power of the gospel or completely paralyze it.

When we speak about the one great sin, we do not want to fall into the error which enumerates a list of sins from Scripture or experience, and then, through the weighing of one sin against the others, seeks to find out the objectively greatest sin. That would be superfluous and mechanical casuistry, as the Roman church enforces it in the confessional booth and sets forth an official payment of penance for the individual evil deeds. Sin, even a single sin, is not measured with a yardstick. There is no purely objective measurement. It must be evaluated in connection with the person, the person's whole condition, and its thousands of convoluted motives and connections. In the world "sin" has a different meaning than in the church.

In the world it is only injury and damage of the civil welfare, but here in the church it comes as violation of the holiness of God and as

exclusion from his community. Also, one cannot say that adultery is a worse sin than murder, that lying is a worse sin than stealing, or that perjury is worse than witchcraft. The state can say that because it gauges only the outward deed with the external degree of the damage done to the community, and for the state the motives come in second place. Before God, however, sin never stands as an isolated action in and of itself, but always in connection with its context, with its motives, and with the whole ethical manner of the perpetrator. God looks at the heart and gauges the deed according to the general condition of the heart with respect to the deed itself.

One indeed hears now and again in sermons, especially in a repentance and confession address how the pastor, in order to hit the consciences of his hearers, goes through all Ten Commandments and puts together a list of sins from each individual commandment. In and of itself that may not be criticized, but it easily leads to the outlook that the outward deed, the actual trespass of an individual commandment, the individual violation in thoughts, words, and deeds (also an outward thing!) are the great and only chief sins through which we incur God's anger and punishment. It disregards the common bitter root of all these sins. We become accustomed to speaking almost exclusively about sin in connection with the concept of "many sins," while the concept of "the sin," that is, sin as an entity, becomes strange and unfamiliar to us.

In Scripture this is not so. Often enough, Scripture clearly condemns individual sins and groups of sins, as circumstances make it necessary. But the Lord Christ himself and the prophets and apostles, who point the finger so clearly to certain sins, never disassociate those actual sins from the underlying evil of human hearts. Instead, they always have in view this underlying evil of human hearts as the actual chief damage or defect. To be sure, the Pharisees have a great array of crass individual sins on their consciences, but ultimately they are "the children of those who have killed the prophets, filling up the measure of their fathers," and are a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 23; 3:7ff). Paul names and condemns individual crass sins, but he names them together with works of the flesh (for example, Galatians 5) and traces them back to their great common root. No, it is not merely about sins, but about the sin, sin as an entity, that the Old as well as New Testament consistently speak. "But the Scripture has concluded that everything is under sin" (Galatians 3:22, but see especially chapters 5, 6, and 7 in Romans, which are classic references for these things).

It is equally undeniable that Scripture itself makes a distinction between greater and lesser sins. The Lord says to Pilate, "Therefore, he who has given me over to you has committed a greater sin." Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum have sinned worse than Tyre,

Sidon, and Sodom. "The servant who knows his master's will and has not readied himself will suffer many blows, but he who does not know—he has done something which deserves blows, but he will suffer few blows. For to whom much is given . . ." Scripture distinguishes between sins of weakness and sins of malice, between grieving the Holy Spirit, obduracy against the Holy Spirit, and a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, between sins leading to death and sins not leading to death.

But for our purposes, we lay aside this distinction between individual sins and kinds of sins. We do not even want to speak about the sin against the Holy Spirit, as one might assume from the title of this essay, but we include all sins together in one, and we handle them as one great power. There we come to its actual form and root—that sin, insofar as it is in man, adheres to his nature and controls him: *the original sinful corruption of the human nature*.

When we call the natural corruption of the human heart "the one great sin," we speak just as Luther and our confessions do. Since Paul, no man on earth has comprehended the nightmarish greatness and depth of the corruption of original sin as thoroughly as Luther—not even Augustine, who himself had traveled through practically the whole range of sin and had experienced it in his own person. Luther had come to understand the horrible power of sin, not by wallowing in gross depravity, but he learned it from the word of the revelation, that is, from the anger of God which crushed him body and soul. He recounted that he had lived through times of God's anger, which no living man can endure, even if he would experience it for only half an hour. And a great part of his deep insight into sin has also passed on to the church which bears his name.

The Greek Orthodox Church has no doctrine or insight about original sin. It was and is, up to this day, grossly Pelagian. Rome is stuck fast in semi-Pelagianism. From Tertullian on until the Scholastics and the Council of Trent, which formally defined the doctrine, original sin is "only a minor infirmity," a lack of something from the original man. It is not a loss of something that was an inherent part of man but it is only the loss of a *donum superadditum* of conferred righteousness and the presence of *concupiscentia*. According to this view a good piece of the free will has remained for man. Actually, man according to this view would not even have to concern himself about his inherited nature, which has been done away with through Christ and through baptism. The great challenge of man in the confessional booth, with the priest interceding between God and the sinner, is to procure forgiveness for his more or less fatal individual sins (which alone are real sins); that is, absolution of the divine punishment through the penance or satisfaction imposed on him by the priest.

From the Reformed sects there is not one thing mentioned in regard to the fully biblical viewpoint about the greatness of original sin's corruption. For the strict Calvinists, the right knowledge of this point was already handled with their supralapsarian predestination, which took the Fall and what followed as part of the preordination of God. On the other hand, the Arminians came near to the old humanist/rationalist viewpoint of the "naturalness" of original sin and remained in semi-Pelagianism or even in synergism. Articles VI and IX in the Westminster Confession read like Lutheran articles, but they almost never cross over into the awareness of the English-speaking Presbyterians. In this way then the decidedly external and worldly-minded character of the English people has no understanding of sin in its inner depth, but knows it only as a trespass of an outward law.

The old humanism, Socinianism, English Theism, and German rationalism almost completely eliminated the doctrine of original sin, and Schleiermacher² actually knows only a consciousness of sin, while to him original sin itself is only something ordained by God as a prevailing tendency necessary for human development. The modern negative theologians essentially have the same position.

The Lutheran church, with Luther, has recognized the corruption of original sin in its fullest. It has a special article about it in every one of its confessions, except in the catechism, where the doctrine is treated in other chapters instead of having a separate article. Yes, this doctrine more or less pervades the entire confession as the counterpart of the gospel. What our church teaches about original sin is essentially summarized in the second article of the Augsburg Confession and in the first article of the third part of the Smalcald Articles. They teach "that after Adam's Fall all men naturally born were born and conceived in sin, that is, that they all, from their mother's womb, are full of evil lusts and inclinations and by nature can have no true fear of God and no true faith in God. These confessions also teach that this same inherent plague and original sin is truly sin and condemns all who are under God's eternal wrath if they are not born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit." What Luther says about this in the Smalcald Articles is a complement to this. "Here we must profess, as Saint Paul does in Romans 5:11, that sin has come from Adam to the individual man, and through such disobedience all men have become sinners, subject to death and the devil. This is called the "original sin" or the "chief sin." . . . This original sin is such a complete, deep, evil corruption of man's nature that no one's reason recognizes it, but it must be believed

²Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), German theologian who attacked rationalism but based his own theology on inner consciousness rather than revelation. *Lutheran Cyclopedia* s.v. "Schleiermacher."

from the revelation of Scripture (cf. Psalm 51; Romans 5; Exodus 33; Genesis 3).” Melancthon speaks similarly in the Apology: “Therefore, when they [the Scholastics] speak about original sin, they leave out the greatest and most necessary part and completely ignore what is truly our greatest misery—namely, that all of us are born so that by nature we neither know, see, or pay attention to God or his work, so that by nature we despise God, we neither fear nor trust in God, and we are hostile to his law and decrees.”

It is of uncommon importance that we correctly recognize and be sure of this meaning of original sin, namely that it is the actual “chief sin,” *principale et capitale peccatum*, the one great sin whose natural “fruits are evil deeds,” and that it really is “such a complete, deep, evil corruption of human nature that reason does not at all recognize it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scripture.” What our time lacks is, above all, an awareness of sin. Christianity has been infected to a considerable degree by the polluted spirit of the world, which laughs at the idea of sin. Therefore our preaching takes hold so little among our people and in the world. But the proper awareness of sin is not called up by thundering against individual sins, but only through preaching about the sin, that is, sin as an entity, as a corruption of natural man along with its fruits.

First, a preliminary note. When Scripture preaches the total corruption of the human nature, it does not want to deny that a created and human goodness, yes, even a divine goodness, sticks in natural man. The natural fatherly and motherly love, the fondness of company, friendly loyalty, even good order, which man has in common with many animals, are very good things in and of themselves. A few remnants of the natural awareness³ of God and his law, which the heathen also have (according to Romans 1 and 2), namely the conscience and the impetus to do what is right, which mankind still exhibits, is something of a divine goodness. To want to deny this would not only be against Scripture, but must also in practice work out to be very detrimental. Indeed, man’s “rescue-ability” (capacity for salvation in a passive sense) depends directly on the existence and function of the conscience. On the one hand, it is not enough for a pious change and for salvation, but on the other hand the wickedness and fervor of original sin is so powerful that, as soon as it springs into action, it suffocates all natural motherly love and the like, and it suffocates even the conscience, and inexorably and indiscriminately tramples on these things and turns them into evil deeds.

³Or “knowledge of God,” which is a more common expression among WELS Lutherans.

The question about the essence of sin is as old as theology. From heathen philosophy, especially from oriental theosophy, the "gnosis idea" has been assumed and developed in different ways. This idea is that sin essentially sticks in the body, that is, in the corporeal and in the material. This is a thought which surfaces in different forms in today's theology. Scripture itself says nothing specific to us about this. But if we look closely at the description of the fall into sin and especially at what Scripture says about sin, then it adds up that the actual core of sin is selfishness. Only the formal (outward) side of the matter is looked at when one explains, on the basis of the question of the serpent in Genesis 3 ("Did God really say. . .?") that doubt in God and his Word, (that is, unbelief), was the actual essence of sin. With every question the serpent appealed to man's awareness of freedom and independence. God had made man in his image, made him to be ruler over the other creatures, and gave man everything available—except for the fruit of the one tree. Man's freedom was limited. Eve knows that and states it before the tempter with the assertion that the violation of this command would bring to them certain death. She knows that they are free, independent masters of the animals—but not absolutely free. God stands above them, and he has limited this freedom and dominion, and he did that with terrible punishment. With his question, the devil appealed to this awareness of the limitation of human freedom. "Should God really have limited you so? Not possible! That is an error. You are completely free and independent masters of the animals—and you should die!? That is a baseless concern. On the contrary, this is the tree whose fruit makes you perfect, makes you truly knowing, makes you like God." With this "equality with God" he baits the humans. They take the bait—and they fall.

Here we naturally don't want to answer the question of how the temptation was able to take root in the soul of the pure man. But about that, according to the account in Genesis 3, there can be no doubt that through the temptation Adam and Eve became more able to know "equality with God," emancipation from God's command, to be able to achieve divine freedom and independence. They also fell into the highest—yes, a downright insane—arrogance through the outward selfishness and presumption. That is fully affirmed through the rest of Scripture. With the temptation of Christ the tactic was essentially the same: "If you are God's Son, then speak . . . If you are the Son of God, then throw yourself down . . . All this—the dominion of the world—I will give to you." The Tempter calls Jesus' sonship into question in order to entice him to autonomous, absolute use of that sonship—which was limited through his mission of redeeming all people, as the Lord always emphasized—and he allured Jesus with divine dominion of the world at no cost.

John describes sin as *anomia*, that is, as lawlessness and insubordination. Man wants no law, he wants to suffer under no law of God, he wants to be absolutely free, he wants to be his own master, just as Adam and Eve wanted. The flesh, says Paul in Romans 8, is not submissive to God's law, nor is it able to submit. For within it and throughout it, the flesh wants to have its own absolutely free will—it wants to be its own free master.

And so in Scripture, we also now see sin in practice. Cain becomes a murderer of his brother because he allows the will of sin, the flesh, within him, and he cannot become master over it. Sin ruled in him. Among the Cainites, Lamech expressed defiance like the Titans⁴: "Adah and Zillah, hear what I say; you wives of Lamech, take note of my speech! I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times." That is genuine Nietzsche-esque *Herrenmoral*, where one acts as an absolute master and behaves like a god.⁵ When the "children of God," the Sethites, who till then had been pious, had let go of their fear of God, they took wives according to the longings of their hearts, "whomever they wanted," completely at will, without binding themselves to God's will or letting themselves be constrained. Man must be free! And then God said: "Mankind does not want to act in accordance with my spirit anymore, because they are flesh. That is the essence of the flesh, *Kern und Stern*."⁶

And so sin advances throughout the whole Scripture. Nimrod becomes a powerful lord on earth, and everybody resents him for it. At the tower of Babel the world wants to make for itself a great name on earth, and Ishmael is a man like an unruly "wild ass" whose hand is against everyone, and a brash mocker to boot. Pharaoh speaks as if he were a god on earth: "Who is the Lord, that I should listen to his voice?" And what is the actual, last, and always recurring sin of the elect people? Grumbling, revolt, disobedience, and revolt against the Lord, his commands, and his direction. These people cannot bend even once. "I know that you are a stiff-necked people." And what about King

⁴Greek gods who overthrew their parents Uranus (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth) and were in turn overthrown by Zeus.

⁵"The core of the 'Genealogy of Morals' is contained within a famous distinction, that between master and slave moralities . . . Master morality belongs to a dominant, warlike horde or race. It represents, first and foremost, their self-affirmation and joy in life. The 'good' is whatever they believe belongs to them and to their conquering instincts . . . The morality of the slave is in its essence resentment and hate, and it develops religions, Judaism and Christianity . . ." John Andrew Bernstein, *Nietzsche's Moral Philosophy*. Madison, Wisconsin: Associated University Presses, 1987, p. 65.

⁶The German phrase *Kern und Stern* literally means "core and star." It is similar in meaning to the English phrase, "through and through."

Saul, and later on the godless kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms up to Isaiah's time? Isaiah chapter one gives the answer, and in Isaiah 48:4 God gives his people the testimony, "I know that you are hard, that your neck is like iron and your forehead is bronze." And Isaiah 65:2, "All day long I stretch out my hands to a disobedient people who walk according to their own thoughts" (compare Romans 10:21). And, in order to cite only one example from the New Testament, when the Lord said of Jerusalem that it had killed and stoned the prophets and now was killing the son, the heir of the estate, he was tracing all this back to a statement in an earlier parable, "We don't want this man to be our king" (Luke 19:14, 27).

Certainly the selfishness, the self-deification, the desire to be a free and independent ruler has a different form and nomenclature now, and even more so in its narrowest meaning, depending on the angle from which one is looking at it. But whether one calls it arrogance, presumption, conceit, vanity, pride, imperiousness, disobedience, illegality, insubordination, contumacy, defiance, obstinacy, violation, ambition, glory-seeking, conceitedness, or any other similar term, it is ultimately always one and the same thing: the absolute desire to be independent or to be God, which is illustrated so drastically in the low-German myths about Ilsebill.⁷ Her final desire is that she become "as God," whereupon she collapses. This boundless selfishness is the sin of the human heart. It lies at the base of every sin as the actual root and force of sin.

This boundless selfishness controls man totally—according to body and soul and all his abilities. It permeates and rules every part of the human soul. In the end it can even conquer and squelch his created goodness and the remnant of the natural knowledge of God and the law. Its actual seat is in the center of the soul, in the heart, the mind, and the ambition of the soul. There is essentially no frame of mind, neither composure nor emotion, and no single affect which is not corrupted by this self-seeking inclination of man. We can be neither content nor disturbed, without self-complacency and self-service, we can be neither happy nor sad, admiring nor despising, neither angry nor appreciative, neither loving nor hating, neither bold nor cautious, neither excited nor apathetic—in short, we cannot experience a single stirring of the heart without feeling our thought, "I am in God's place," and without our idolatrousness forcing itself forward.

⁷Ilsebill was a main character in one of the fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers, "The Fisherman and His Wife." "Husband," said she, "if I can't order the sun and moon to rise, if I have to look on and see the sun and moon rising, I can't bear it. I shall not know what it is to have another happy hour, unless I can make them rise myself." Then she looked at him so terribly that a shudder ran over him, and she said, "Go at once. I wish to be like unto God."

Every natural appetite is backwards and irregular because of this selfishness. Under the dominion of this selfishness our need for nourishment becomes gobbling and guzzling. Our need for activity becomes stubbornness and outrage, and our sex drive becomes unchaste lust. We strive not merely after possessions, but we want to have the world to ourselves. We want not mere honor, but more empty glory; not mere knowledge, but impossible erudition; not mere happiness, but overwhelming rapture is also the involuntary goal of our striving.

And this sin, through increased experience with it, awakens in us a thousand more insatiable appetites. Goethe let his Faust be led by Mephistopheles through all areas of knowledge, erotic lust, social life, might and power, through the whole area of old and new fantasies, and finally in the end let him find momentary gratification, not lasting and full satisfaction—and then he lost his soul. Finally then, as a *deus ex machina*,⁸ the “Ewig-Weibliche”⁹ must deliver the poor wretch. Scripture calls that “the old man, which corrupts itself in error through its desires” (Ephesians 4:22). And the evil deeds themselves, crime, vice, and sinful habits—which are not recurring deeds in and of themselves, but only the outward fruits of the inner evil disposition, of the evil power and force, of the ego-driven motivation—in the occasions and motives of life they cultivate themselves into fatal appetites, to evil wants, efforts, and decisions. “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (James 1:15).

But the power to think, our intellect, is darkened and addled by this selfishness. Already in purely natural things that pertain to our nature as creatures, our thinking is neither all clear nor true. Not only is it limited as a created natural power, but it remains limited only to the surface of the thing, and it is not able, despite all analyses, to penetrate into the interior of the nature, into its actual essence. For also our mathematics and logic are full of puzzles and contradictions, which no human understanding breaks down. No, in the perception of the world it is not only about the enumeration of the manifold actions, but primarily about its interpretation, about the last questions, about the “from where?” and “to where?” The point at which sin has its beginning is that it will tolerate no God over itself, and it idolizes itself. Not only does it interpret all worldly evidences of God as false, but also it basically eliminates God, who is Lord over us and the

⁸“god from a machine”—refers to contrived endings of Greek plays in which a god was dropped down onto the stage to salvage a happy ending from the mess.

⁹“The Eternal Feminine.” This is a reference to the ending of Goethe’s monumental *Faust*, “Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan” (The Eternal-Feminine draws us upward), in which he suggests that the ineffable spiritual possibility inherent in woman to sense, welcome, and act on the highest within her can inspire other human beings to comprehend their divine birthright and potential.

world. Likewise, it teaches us to proclaim our own feeble knowledge, which knows basically nothing about the explanation of the world, as "wisdom", as "guaranteed results of natural science," that is, we abolish God and put ourselves in his place. Arrogance, conceit, and self-idolatry itself is what falsifies and frustrates all natural worldly thinking. "Because they believe themselves to be wise, they have become fools." Because they speak in their hearts, "there is no God," their eyes cannot behold him anywhere, despite the fact that they should be able to sense and find him from the works of creation.

This is completely similar to the moral judgment of natural man. There is still a piece of conscience left over from paradise. The law is still inscribed in human hearts. But the self-deifying, God-hating mind has blurred and darkened God's Scripture and consequently denied his authority, so that man's intellect no longer knows what is the voice of the law and what is the voice of the flesh in his heart, and it fabricates for itself criteria for right and wrong, which are ultimately always incorrect. How should a thoroughly selfish person be able to hold clearly the knowledge that self-denial for the sake of God and neighbor, that is, love, is the true morality? And when even now the knowledge of the true morality and its obligations, which illuminates sin and its outcome through the revealed law in man, does not become something truly deep, spiritual, and salutary until God finds for him a heart and eyes through the gospel. But to bow to this same knowledge and to implement it in one's deeds—man is not able to do so. The outcome can be only one of two things: despair or decay. In either case, the result is the death of the soul.

Sin as an entity is self-deification and unrestrained, immeasurable selfishness. As such, it draws every creature and every aspect of human life into its service. Looking at it from one viewpoint, it is worldly pleasure, and for that reason carnal-mindedness, serving the flesh. Selfishness seeks and strives after satisfaction and seizes it where it finds it. And selfishness finds satisfaction mainly in the realm of the material—in the area of sensual delights. This corruption does not dwell only in the soul. Soul and body are in unity. Sin begins in the soul and also permeates every member of the body and holds every member captive. So one notices sin mostly as sensuality, as excessive, distorted amusement of the senses, a stimulation of the senses, which searches for its gratification in external works. For this reason, the most commonly used name for this sin in Scripture is "flesh." Not as if this sin were mainly or originally and essentially carnal desire, but because this is its most manifest and most visible, its gross and hateful side. But the term also deals with every other aspect of sin—hostility toward God and hatred of brothers, yes, even the spiritual blindness of man itself. But above all, the term describes the car-

nal aspect—selfishness—that is the sensuality or physicality of mankind which is corrupted and controlled by sin. Man finds momentary joy, happiness, by tickling his senses. And now he becomes a glutton and drunkard, a lover of sweets and a lover of food, a sensualist, an obscene person, an unchaste person, a fornicator, an adulterer, a Sodomite. He seeks a feast for his eyes and ears in nature, art, and handicrafts. He becomes a civilized man and praises that as the greatest thing on earth. Now he aspires after the goods of this earth and becomes a curmudgeon, a covetous person, a person who is never satisfied, a gambler, a swindler, a cheat.

But the center and the heart of this fleshly aspect is always the core sin, the core uncleanness, as the most powerful force in natural man. It makes use of all other carnal desires. It is the sin of the flesh *par excellence*, the sin of natural man, the sin of the world, which controls the whole private, communal, artistic, scientific, and public/political life of the children of this time and which threatens the faithful life of the Christians like nothing else. It is written in the Scripture with red letters. The Cainites founded city life and developed culture, art, and handicrafts, driven by worldliness and sensuality. Lamech, the man who had the highest elevated opinion of himself, also became the first bigamist, the destroyer of the godly marriage arrangement, with wives whose names denote blatant sensuality. The godly lineage of Seth, the church of that time, degenerated through rampant sexual lust and became ripe for the judgment: "They are flesh." The lineage of Ham developed unchaste lust as its special possession through the sexual uncleanness of Canaan, and he became a slave to his brother for all time. The sexual lust of the Egyptians and Philistines often brought the mother of the promise into danger. Polygamy became so powerful a custom among the Semites, that it also procured for itself a place in the domestic law of Israel from the beginning. Sodom's sins were nameless, stinking to high heaven and bringing the entire region to physical destruction, but they are only characteristic types of the sin of the lineage of Canaan even if they developed early on. Already in the wilderness, Israel also became addicted to prostitution in large measure, and in the land itself idolatry plagued by the whoring spirit, the Baal and Ashtoreth cults of the original inhabitants and the nearby peoples, became the greatest offense and downfall. The gross sins of the flesh of individuals among Israel's people of renown stand described in history as great scandalous blemishes of the people of God: Zimri and Cozbi (Numbers 25), Samson, the man of Gibeah (Judges 19), the sons of Eli, David the man after the heart of God, his sons Amnon and Absalom, and Solomon's polygamy.

Yes, the fleshly lust is one of the great powers of corruption. It destroyed the northern and southern kingdoms alike, as it always did

in the history of all people and kingdoms of the world, from Egypt on till France and Belgium. It is a really horrible, but (in the history of people) a continually repeating picture of that sinful life which is worse than animals, which Paul in Romans 1 portrays for us in the heathenism of his time. That is the characteristic development and outcome of all purely human culture. How powerfully this aspect of sin had already developed itself also in the German people before the present war,¹⁰ especially in the great "cultural centers." The worldly newspapers of Germany often confessed this openly after the outbreak of the war—sadly, not in Christian penitence. And yet the land of our fathers in the development of this sin was significantly inferior to most of the other lands and great cities of Europe. How greatly the development of this sin eats away at our own people and especially rules the social life of the great population centers—the laws and the whoring spirit give unmistakable testimony to this. This whoring spirit rules the entire fiction literature, the "art" and especially in the theater and the nickel-show. Our Lord says: "What is born of the flesh is flesh." That is also true in the above scenario. How this sin, this ungodly selfishness, has disgraced that glorious image of God and degraded it, making it lower than the irrational animal!

Enmity against God is one aspect of this sin; the other aspect of this sin is sensuality, and the third is the hatred of brother. From the blood of Abel up to the murder of millions in the present war, the earth has been made red by the immeasurable streams of the shed blood of brothers. The first person whom we witness in sin is a brother-murderer! Yes, a brother-murderer, and the prototype of all of Adam's children born in sin! The history of the world is full of the actual murder of brother, father, mother, children, spouses, and relatives. And the farther we extend the concept of brother, the greater becomes the number of gross murderers on earth. No species of animal rages so murderously against one another as the human race. The history of humanity is essentially a history of war among people, races, tribes, clans, and families—a history of mutual war-making, feuds, and murders until the present day. "Peace on earth" is impossible, and it will not happen in the sense and way that the Reformed sects and dreamers (enthusiasts) misunderstand the Word. Also, nothing is going to come of the peace between nations, planned by the blood-drenched, brother-murderous England and her allies, built upon the destruction of Germany,¹¹ enforced with violence, even if not

¹⁰Pieper, writing this in 1916, is referring to World War I.

¹¹Pieper's words here seem almost prophetic. One cannot help but think of the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers in 1919. The terms of the treaty were quite harsh against Germany and provided Adolf Hitler with motivation to restore Germany to its former size and power.

only our country but all the peoples of the earth participate. The history of the world is going to continue in war and the shedding of blood. And if the war between nations ceases, then civil war, rebellion, and revolution will more certainly lift its head and shed human blood as if it were water, as in its time in France. Peace will then come when the murderous spirit has been ripped out of the human breast, when a lamb has been made out of the bloodthirsty tiger. For that we will have to wait until Judgment Day. Until then humanity remains a tribe of Cainites and murderers. The great mass will certainly remain "worldly" in the biblical sense. We are simply Lamechs by nature: "I destroy everyone who gets too close to me." England wants to destroy its most dangerous rivals in this war.

Oh no, we are not all gross murderers in deed. But the people of Israel were not that at Isaiah's time either. And yet the prophet Isaiah hurls the Word against them: "Your hands are full of blood!" (1:15), and in chapter 59:

For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace" (Compare Romans 3).

Therefore the attitude is identified which, born out of the most vile and despicable selfishness, out of pride and arrogance over against one's neighbors, considering them only as an object of exploitation for your own benefit, enjoyment, and glorification, rides ruthlessly over the bond of brother and with false heart and deed seeks to prepare a downfall for him.

We all have this attitude. There is no difference here. In associations of every sort we think first always of ourselves, of our well-being, our honor, position, gain, pleasure, and privilege. We cannot be satisfied just to be one in the crowd. We have to stand out, be something special, we want to be first, to shine, to lead, to rule, and to order. The others should recognize and respect our excellence. They should give themselves over to our service. We are god for our fellow human beings! As in the dream of Joseph, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars should bow before us. Whoever opposes our ambition has mor-

tally offended us—he must be pushed aside! Everybody thinks that way, and the result is envy, anger, dislike, hatred, strife, conflict, enmity, division, persecution, destruction—all the way up to murder.

And selfishness overreaches and exploits the brother. It damages, persecutes, destroys him in many other ways. Woe to him who blocks our path to carnal lust! David turned into a cold, brutal murderer because of lust. Lust and brutality are twin sisters. The murder for lust is the order for the day in the world. These two things are both chief themes of the theater, of films, of the romance novel: lust and murder, murder in service of lust, as revenge for seduction and adultery. The love of money, miserliness, daily turns into murder of the next person.

Our land defiles itself a thousand fold with the blood of German fighters through the delivery of munitions and money and murders, yes, murders in the grossest sense of the word, without stopping, and rejoices and prides itself in its “prosperity” gained through murder, and no statesman has pangs of conscience over it, not Wilson, not Bryan, and not Hughes,¹² while our raving Ajax isn’t satisfied with murder by a long shot.¹³ We do this out of “neutrality,” with a sense of justice, because international agreements do not forbid us to do that. They also express our willingness to help Germany kill in the same way, if it can obtain for itself our murder weapons! We make money through it, and that is our right! But in fact we murder out of hatred of brothers. England’s cause is our cause, our culture is English culture, the world must remain English and dare not become German—that is the true reason for our uninvited participation in the European war, of our murdering in the true sense of the word. So here stands the great majority of people, so here stands the government, so here stand the candidates for the presidential election on both sides, the one a little more, the other a little less.

National hate, murder of nations, selfishness—brotherly hatred has a thousand manifestations. The rich man and poor Lazarus! There is high society: frenzied luxuriousness, lavishness for arrogance, vanity, addiction to pleasure and lust for wealth, which is extorted or taken by swindling the worker, or the public, or the rich rival. From which attitude does all of this come? From the same attitude as with the rich man: I come first, then I come once more, then again and

¹²These names refer to the following men: Woodrow Wilson, the American president during World War I; William Jennings Bryan, the Secretary of State under Wilson; and Sam Hughes, Canada’s Minister of Militia and Defense or perhaps industrialist, Howard Hughes Sr.

¹³Ajax played an important role in Home’s *The Iliad*, an epic poem about the Trojan War. In the story, Ajax was a powerful warrior, portrayed as a vicious and fearless warrior.

again, and finally comes—my dogs. Poor Lazarus doesn't even come into consideration. All of this is only a gross example of the development of the core sin, which sticks all of us in the heart in the same measure—the total, despicable, inconsiderate, cold, brutal, brother-murdering selfishness.

No, the sin is not equally developed in all people; in the one less, in the other more. In the one it remains his whole life, yet shows itself only in occasional unchaste impulses, temptations, and desires. In the second the unclean lust already rules tongue and speech. The third falls once as David did into a gross sin of fornication and rises again. The fourth becomes a habitual fornicator; the fifth a Sodomite. The sin develops itself in various degrees under various circumstances, and its grossness increases with the development. But there is no one on earth who does not carry a similar unchaste germ in his heart and would bring it to a similar development under circumstances similar to those in which others are—unless the grace and Spirit of God intervene. "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Romans 2:1).

Sin develops a certain way in one person, but differently in another. The one becomes a lustful person (even a sex fiend), the other a covetous person, the third an ambitious and proud person, the fourth a spiteful person, the fifth a headstrong person, the sixth a liar and slanderer, etc. But those are only different colored doves, which descended from the one original gray-blue pair of doves—that is to say, variations of the one inherited core sin which lives in all people, which is full-blown egotism. And some color is specially developed for each person. "Each has his weak side," or as the vernacular lightly puts it, his "Achilles' heel."

And concerning the severity and greatness of the diverse evolution of sin God judges differently than we men do. We cringe at murder and turn away with disgust at the professional prostitute. The state hangs the petty thief and lets the big respectable thieves go, but essentially they steal and defraud a thousand times worse. But the respectable and charitable arrogant person and self-righteous person, the sanctimonious hypocrite, the "wise and intelligent," the unfaithful and ignorant despiser of God, the negative critic esteemed and praised in the world is before God a thousand times greater sinner than the murderer in a rage or the adulteress out of weakness of character. No sin has the Lord so deeply condemned as arrogance. "Whoever exalts himself, he should be humbled." No one had opposed God more vigorously, persecuted him more unmercifully—not Pilate, not the mob, not the barbarous soldiers—than the scribes and Pharisees, the "high"

council and “leaders” of the people. They are the big sinners. Why? Because the core sin itself, selfishness, which in itself is profane arrogance and self-elevation, has developed itself most powerfully in them. For that reason the Lord calls out against them in Matthew 23 eight terrible woes¹⁴ and calls them snakes and a brood of vipers who would not escape hellish damnation. Arrogance, self-righteousness, lifting yourself up against God and men, has on its conscience all the righteous blood “that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.” Self-exaltation is the fruitful mother of all sins of the earth, the one great sin before God.

Self-exaltation is not merely before God, but against God. Adam and Eve sinned initially not against one another, but rather with one another against God. Their self-exaltation is a revolt against the authority of God. They wanted to shake off his lordship and be like him in knowledge and power and happiness; that is, essentially they wanted to toss him from the throne and set themselves on it.

Sin in its basic form is enmity against God. That is what the Bible expressly says in Romans 8. We ourselves want to be God and don't want to tolerate anyone over us. If only we could, we would finish him off today—then in one stroke we would be free of all calamities. For God has brought all this upon us in the strength of his greater power: death and sickness, every toil and trouble on earth, and God never stops commanding and forbidding. Daily he threatens with hell. None of that would be if God would not exist. Then we would be free and do as we wished! That is the core attitude of the heart of every natural man, and we can't think otherwise, we can't reconcile ourselves to having a god over us, for it deals with our highest and only happiness, our complete freedom of action. He does not step down from his throne; therefore there must be a continual battle between us and him.

We wage this battle, in various ways, according to the circumstances. The usual form is conscious, deliberate unbelief. Most of the world adopts this way with its refined and learned leaders. The world intentionally puts God out of its mind. The world proves to itself that there is no God. The crowd hurls itself into the gathering of earthly possessions, gets drunk on sensual pleasure, diligently pushes culture and civilization, quibbles with one another, and forgets, intentionally forgets, that there is a God and it despises him. The others make a God for themselves in keeping with the thoughts and lusts of their own heart, but always in this manner, that this God is not a threat to them. In the end God is reconciled to man, with this or that

¹⁴Or seven woes depending on the textual variant. NIV has only seven.

concession to him and with occasional offerings and "good works." All heathen have done this, also the modern theology since humanism, rationalism, also Schleiermacher and his school, up to Ritschl and Adolf Harnack.¹⁵ "The dear God doesn't need reconciliation, he is a dear man. Don't be afraid, only believe!" That is old heathenism, only easier and cheaper. That is also the heart and center of all lodge religions.¹⁶ And thereby a person can rock himself into the illusion that one is very religious and God-fearing, while in truth it is nothing but a cover-up of the deadly enmity, which the self-deifying heart fosters in its innermost embrace against the true God, which nature and conscience and above all the revealed law and gospel preaches, that gospel with which the whole world must grapple since the time of Christ.

In this gospel, first the core sin, the excessive arrogance, the insane self-deification of the human heart, is completely revealed. The gospel is the saving hand of God, extended from heaven to earth, toward lost sinners. It is the extended loving arms of Christ: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened; I will revitalize you and I will give you rest for your souls." It is the complete and free salvation for all who sigh, moan, and cry. It counts no sins, it measures no wickedness, it reproaches no one with anything more, it announces and brings a gracious God, it works and creates in a heart true and eternal life, true knowledge, true God-likeness, and it is "godly power and godly wisdom". Surely man cannot be so evil, that he "wouldn't respect such holiness?" (Hebrews 2:3). Of course, he can! "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." How can a reasonable person, who has his sense and has not totally lost his understanding, accept this gospel? Is it not nonsense from beginning to end? The erstwhile governor of South Carolina, jurist and professor at Cornell University, Dan. H. Chamberlain, who is not well-known among us and died almost ten years ago, left behind a private journal, which was published in the *North American Review*, in which he put down on paper his religious views. In this he speaks of the gospel in the following manner:

¹⁵Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl (1822–1889) German theologian, who claimed to be evangelical but based his theology on the consciousness of the believer. To Ritschl there is no original sin. Sin is mistrust in God, and its punishment is the feeling of guilt. God regards it as ignorance. There is no wrath of God against sin and no vicarious atonement of Christ. *Lutheran Cyclopedia* s.v. "Ritschl."

Adolf Harnack was a German Lutheran theologian (1851–1930) who tended to view Christianity as a practical religion and not merely a system of theology. This led him to place a great deal of emphasis on the Social Gospel.

¹⁶A modern example of a "lodge religion" is the Freemasons.

The personality and influence of Jesus Christ, alleged God and man, son of a Judean peasant, yet son of God; put to death on the cross, yet one of the Trinity in Heaven—this *grotesque conception*, with all its concomitants, goes to the limbo of *impossible* beliefs. Aside from its fate when brought to the test of evolutionary truths, there was never offered to the human mind, as I think, a scheme of thought, or a conception called religious, so *unreasonable and preposterous* in all its main features as the so-called plan of salvation set forth and expounded in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. It is the marvel of marvels that it has won credence, still more, wide credence, among the most intelligent and cultivated nations of the modern world. For what is its plan? It presupposes that Sin so-called, has been permitted by God to come into the world, thereby etc. . . (emphasis in the original).

Next, he lays out the entire plan of salvation of the Scripture in a totally correct and complete manner and then continues:

I do not see how any intelligent person can, unbiased, consider this “plan” and not reject it as utterly impossible and as *the height of unreason*; and yet millions-to-one accept it, pin to it their hopes and faith, and live and die in unwavering belief in it (emphasis in the original).

Now he gets ready to prove the unreasonableness of the gospel, and because he has found no preacher of the gospel who has offered a proof for the truth of the same gospel he says: Emerson, many years ago, well called the Christian pulpit “the coward’s fort.” Throughout his writings this man gives the impression of being an honest seeker of the truth and a liberal, well-meaning, tolerant person. But look a bit closer and it becomes clear also in his case from where his rejection of the gospel comes. He writes:

From all my studies and reflections of so many years, my first clear resulting postulate was that *my own reason*, reasoning faculty, was the final guide and master which I must follow and obey in my search for truth and in fixing my opinion on all subjects. By this I do not mean my unaided reason, but reason *as fully informed and as largely aided as is possible; but that my own reason when so informed and aided must finally pass upon and decide all questions whatever. Of the validity of this position I have no shadow of doubt* (emphasis in the original).

This is the common position which declares the gospel to be foolishness. From this position flows all of the so-called science of today, together with all philosophy, especially also evolutionism championed by Emerson with sheer absolute candor. It is a presupposition, that reason, and to be sure reason “as fully informed as is possible,” as it is called, a reasoning faculty based on the present “scientific research and experience” on the “assured results of science”—this is the infal-

lible absolute standard of all, absolutely all truth. This is the most egregious pride of which the human heart is capable, the first lie¹⁷ of all science, which turns its entire structure, so far as it wishes to found a world view, into a lie and deception.

If the human heart were not possessed by inhuman conceit and unencumbered exaltation, if it had a true love for truth and examined it honorably, it would have to make a twofold confession: first, that our scientific "information" in its totality in comparison to what there really is to know is just a dot in a big picture. In other words, what we know today after all "scientific" research in solving the riddle of this world is as good as nothing. Also in the theory of evolution, there is no one fact that is actually fixed and determined. Not one single so-called law of nature is scientifically established. Every individual law rests on partial and incomplete observation and on conclusions from analogy, which are just not worth anything scientifically. And at the other end of this scientific certainty, the illusion, the untruthfulness, the hypocritical self-exaltation is still greater: setting up limited human reason, his "reason, reasoning faculty" as the measure of all truth! That little dram of human reason, which is confounded at the squaring of the circle, that doesn't know where it itself came from and what it is, which doesn't have the power to explain how a flea can jump or water is able to wet, that little dram of reason wants to venture authoritatively to determine what can be and what cannot be, if there is a God or not, if God's plan of salvation can be true or not true, and insolently proclaims it "the height of unreason." If reason only wanted to say, "God's way is unreasonable to reason," then it would be saying nothing new. The gospel itself says that—"foolishness to the Greeks," "foolishness" and "veiled to those who are perishing." But reason does not merely want to say that, but it wants to dictate that the "plan" of salvation ("plan" even in quotation marks!) really is the height of unreason, because there is no reason outside of itself or over it.

So the devil has blinded the senses of humans and robbed them of reason, not through reason itself—to some extent that has remained intact—but through the inexpressible arrogant self-deifying heart which acknowledges no reason and no higher superhuman reason over itself. This is the carnality of the human heart over against the gospel: the natural person receives nothing from the Spirit of God; he cannot acknowledge it, for it is spiritually judged. The natural man is carnal, sold into sin and pride. Then naturally he wonders how millions of the

¹⁷"First lie" is a translation of the Greek phrase *proton pseudos*. It can mean "first lie" in a chronological sense, which doesn't seem to fit here. It can also mean the "first lie" in rank, as in "the greatest lie." This second interpretation seems to fit better here.

most intelligent people can put their hope and trust in the gospel, and live and die happily in faith.

Basically, it is not reason itself but the haughty heart which is the enemy of the gospel. It is a stumbling-block to the Jews. Why? Because it makes one righteous, holy, and saved by grace, at no cost, without the addition of works, through a foreign righteousness, and for that reason it negates and condemns all one's own righteousness and makes men condemned sinners. Yes, it turns the best into a villain and the wisest it turns into a fool. Thereby it hits man in the heart, destroys his worth, and shocks him to death. Thereby all friendship ceases. Then there is no one under the sun who has not been blinded by the arrogant illusion that he has some worth before God and men, and that he has inalienable rights which must be acknowledged by God and by men. Every drunkard relies on his otherwise good heart, every murderer knows how to set forth good grounds for his deed. And the less one is blemished with gross vices and crimes, the more he busies himself with an honorable conduct, the more he gives himself over to the works of the law, that much greater is his self-righteousness, that much more demanding are his requirements for acknowledgment before God, that much greater is his arrogance. No character is so reprehensible that he doesn't strive to set up his own righteousness before God. For that reason no one is subject to the righteousness which avails before God. For the sins for which we must answer, for the evident weakness and mistakes of our character, yes, for all the self-inflicted pain and suffering which hangs around our neck, we know since our first parents how to shift the blame to others and finally on God himself. "The woman you gave to be with me!"—For that reason no person can become a friend of the gospel by nature. He can only despise it, hate it, and be its enemy. Indeed, he becomes an unreasonable madman against it if God does not work a miracle by grace in him. The one great core sin does all this, the sin which totally rules soul and body, the selfishness, the arrogance, the one who wants to be his own God. Thanks be to God that there is a power which is more powerful than all our sins!