

interpretation of the entire Old Testament. Yahweh granted the Old Testament canon to the covenant community of Israel, who were the recipients of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants while they were waiting for the coming Messiah as the mediator of the new covenant under the Davidic kingdom. In that regard, if we overlook the covenantal nature of the wisdom literature, then it is similar to bypassing something of great value. Despite this reservation, I strongly recommend Belcher's valuable book to missionaries, pastors, seminarians, and students of the Bible for God's wisdom for their lives and ministries in the present world.

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Henri Blocher. *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*. NSBT 5. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Nottingham: Apollos, 1997.

In *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, Henri Blocher proposes to illuminate the riddle the doctrine of original sin presents. The introduction points out that the phenomenon of human evil raises three questions: "First, why is the perception of human evil generally accompanied by feelings of indignation, guilt or shame?" "Secondly, if humans are capable of so much evil, how is it that they also reach heights of heroism, performing admirable deeds of selfless service and devotion to the truth?" "Thirdly," if the world owes its origin to a holy and wise Creator, "how can we face the apparent contradiction" resulting from "the presence and power of evil in human life?" (11–12).

The Christian doctrine of original sin responds to these questions raised by what Blocher labels elsewhere the "opaque" mystery of evil.¹ We need the light that this doctrine brings in order to understand the world in which we live—even though it has been put "under a bushel" for a few decades. *Original Sin* was written to remedy this lack, collecting from Scripture, recognized as the ruling norm (*norma normans*), the light we need. While sitting "on the shoulders of giants," Blocher does not cultivate a "servile adherence" to the various traditions of which they are the representatives but seeks the "grace to see even further and ever more clearly" (13).² We

¹ Henri Blocher, *Doctrine du péché et de la rédemption* (Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 2000), 25: "The enigma of evil is the only 'opaque' mystery of Scripture."

² "This enquiry ... draws on the work of many predecessors, among whom ... Augustine, François Turretin, Blaise Pascal, Jonathan Edwards, Soren Kierkegaard, John Murray and Paul Ricoeur, to whom I am indebted in various regards."

will examine the results of this approach from the perspective of Reformed theology.

As an evangelical theologian, Blocher's first concern is to know what the Bible teaches about original sin. He therefore devotes his first chapter to synthesizing the data of Scripture and shows, in broad terms, against ancient Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, the classical Augustinian doctrine of original sin to be valid. First, all humanity is affected by a sinful propensity, traditionally called "originated original sin," which is the root of actual sin, which is also itself sinful and makes man guilty before God (19–25). Second, man's propensity to sin "since his youth" (Gen 6:5) is "a corruption which is natural (and native) to us" without proceeding "authentically from nature" (25–30). It is the "dark paradox of unnatural nature,"³ of our "quasi-nature" that at the same time "remains truly our anti-nature" (30). Third, this natural propensity to sin is inherited (30–32). Because we are children of our parents, we are born sinners. Fourth, this inherited propensity to sin is a consequence of the fall of our first father Adam (32–35).

In his second chapter (37–62), Blocher enters into dialogue with modernist theologians who have abandoned the idea of a historical Adamic event that would be the initial root of our propensity to sin. He argues for "the affirmation of disobedience in Eden as a real event or occurrence at a specific moment in time" (37), which he calls in his French writings the "fundamental historicity"⁴ of Adam's transgression (traditionally called "originating original sin").

To that end he develops the following propositions. The arguments from current scientific theories are not insurmountable (39–48). Further, the conclusions of critical literary studies reducing the account of the fall of Adam to an etiological myth are not sufficiently well founded (48–56). Finally, the theological interpretations that seek to preserve the symbolic meaning of the Adamic event while denying that it actually occurred leads to the dead ends of "as if" theologies: by making evil an aspect of human nature, they throw a shadow on the divine goodness (56–62). As with *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*,⁵ Blocher defends a nuanced interpretation of Genesis 2–3: "The real issue when we try to interpret Genesis 2–3 is not whether we have a historical account of the fall, but whether or not we may read it as an account of a historical fall" (50).

³ Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 67–73: "historicité foncière."

⁵ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

In his third chapter, Blocher seeks to determine the nature of the link between Adam's fault and our propensity to sin. That is why he proceeds to examine the key text of Romans 5 (63–81). Not surprisingly, he dismisses from the outset interpretations that give Paul a mythological understanding of Adam's fault and its connection to our sinfulness: it is clear that Paul is referring here to a historical Adam. There are also interpretations that loosen the bond between Adam and Christ (which tend towards the position of Pelagius) and those that tighten this bond (which tend towards that of Augustine). The "looser interpretations of Romans 5" (65–70) that simply make Adam the source of our corruption are not satisfactory. Indeed, they do not explain Paul's emphasis in this passage on Adam's *one* transgression, do not show how Adam was the *type* of the one who was to come, and fail to explain how those who did not sin according to the similarity of Adam's transgression nevertheless died like him. As for the "tighter interpretations of Romans 5" (70–76) in the Augustinian lineage, they impute Adam's sin to men in the same way as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the elect. We must then choose between the realistic and the federal theses: either to strictly follow Augustine and admit that we were seminally in Adam when he sinned, or to accept the opinion of Protestant scholastic theologians, such as Francis Turretin, that Adam's sin was attributed to us because he was our covenant head and, as such, our representative. Blocher acknowledges that Augustinian interpretations, especially the Reformed federal interpretation, surpass other competing traditional interpretations. However, like G. C. Berkouwer,⁶ he finds neither realism nor federalism adequate, and the idea of alien culpability is a problem for him, as it does not seem to be well established biblically.⁷ The exegesis given by (federal) Reformed theologians, for instance, John Murray, on verses 13–14 is deemed rather unconvincing. According to Blocher, a new interpretation may be necessary.

The reason why these two approaches are not satisfactory is that the interpreters of the two tendencies have locked themselves into a dilemma: "either we are condemned for our own sins (and Adam's role is reduced to that of a remote fountainhead, losing much of its significance) or we are condemned for his sin (and the equity of that transfer is hard to see)" (77).

What if there were a third way? Blocher formulates the following hypothesis, which he acknowledges elsewhere as "paradoxical for a modern man": "the role of Adam and of his sin in Romans 5 is to *make possible the*

⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 461.

⁷ "It cannot be denied that the concept sits uneasily with our sense of personal responsibility" (74).

imputation, the judicial treatment, of human sins.”⁸ The role of Adam and his sin would, therefore, be to make it possible to impute our own sins to us (77–79)! With this hypothesis, Blocher thinks he is able both to take into account verses 13–14 (with the mention of the period from Adam to Moses) and to account for the whole pericope. The Apostle Paul’s purpose in comparing Adam and Christ becomes allegedly even clearer with this proposal: it is neither a question of giving the *modus operandi* of justification (*contra* Turretin and Murray), nor of showing the universal extent of the benefits obtained by Christ (*contra* Charles E. B. Cranfield), but of giving believers the assurance of salvation. Quoting approvingly Douglas Moo’s proposal (79), Blocher includes Romans 5:12–21 in a section that begins in Romans 5:12 and ends at the end of chapter 8: neither death (Rom 5:12–21), nor sin (Rom 6), nor the law (Rom 7), nor anything else can separate us from the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ our Savior (Rom 8:38–39). It is therefore not the doctrine of justification that is explained in this passage: that has already taken place in Romans 3–4. With this hypothesis, it is no longer necessary to maintain a strict parallel between the imputation of Adam’s sin to all human beings (which he rejects entirely) and the imputation of Christ’s justice to all chosen ones (which he defends). Blocher can thus abandon the idea of a *peccatum alienatum* (alien sin) for which we would be found guilty (but it would remain the original guilt of our sinful propensity discussed above) while maintaining the classical doctrine of justification by faith alone. The parallelism between Adam and Christ as heads of humanity is therefore not as complete as in Charles Hodge’s or Murray’s interpretation, but this does not seem to Blocher to be a disadvantage: Paul’s reasoning is argument *a fortiori* and not a symmetrically perfect reasoning, and the apostle Paul himself warns of the difference between Adam and Christ (80).⁹

Without conceding to Pelagian tendencies, Blocher in fact alters the federal thesis on three points (130). First, he abandons the idea of an alien fault transferred to us, considering such an idea repugnant and foreign to Scripture. Second, he emphasizes that the propensity to sin that is itself sinful and makes us sinners from conception is therefore not the penal consequence of Adam’s fault attributed to us, but a simple “fact” that is part of our relationship with Adam. Third, he argues that this last “fact” is because Adam is our covenant head and as such our representative, with

⁸ Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 91: “It is because of Adam’s sin (or through it) that we are punished for ours! This thought (a paradox for the modern) allows [us] to read verses 13 and 14 without difficulty.”

⁹ Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 90.

whom we are in solidarity and without whom there is no room for our individuality.¹⁰

What about Blocher's thesis? On the "shoulders of giants," does his new interpretation reach more biblical conclusions, better informed by Genesis 3 and Romans 5? Readers who claim to be part of the Reformed tradition will certainly have doubts, perhaps because of what Blocher might call their "servile adherence" to their beautiful tradition. As Reformed theologians, it is something good to be able to re-examine long-established interpretations, especially when new creative interpretations attempt to shed light on biblical texts, claiming to reflect them better, while not challenging nonnegotiable doctrines (such as that of God's sovereignty, penal substitution and justification by faith alone, by virtue of Christ's justice imputed to us). I thank Blocher for this, because, while proposing his "new interpretation" and altering the federal thesis, he does not fall into any new form of Pelagianism.

After examining our Reformed tradition in light of Blocher's criticisms and his "new interpretation," am I incited to join him? I think not. I acknowledge the particular difficulty presented by the text of Romans 5:12–21, and following Blocher's express request,¹¹ I will explain with charity why I finally cannot accept his interpretation.

I admit that Blocher's criticism of the federal position in the traditional treatment of Romans 5:13–14, represented by Murray, is entirely justified. His interpretation of these two verses seems *more* satisfactory than Murray's. The Reformed interpretation of these verses may need to be reworked in order to be more convincing. I believe, however, that Meredith Kline has already done this in his 1991 article "Gospel until the Law."¹² Like Blocher, Kline criticizes Murray's exegesis for not doing justice to the limitations mentioned in verse 13 ("until the Law") and 14 ("from Adam to Moses").¹³ Kline points out that these boundaries are not primarily temporal but point to turning points in the administration of the divine-human covenant. "Adam" stands for the end of the original order (the covenant of works) and the inauguration of the redemptive covenant. "Moses" stands for the end of the patriarchal period, during which the Abrahamic covenant was established, and for the inauguration of the old (i.e., Mosaic) covenant. Kline, therefore, agrees with Blocher to take these limits into account; but

¹⁰ Ibid., 94.

¹¹ "Theologians and exegetes, then, should not incur too severe a reprimand if they grope somewhat awkwardly for Paul's mind in Romans 5 (and indeed I myself beg for charity on the part of the reader)" (64).

¹² Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34.4 (1991): 433–46.

¹³ Ibid., 436.

his criticism goes further than Blocher's in affirming that commentators of all tendencies have interpreted this passage as describing a phenomenon affecting all of humanity (or at least pointing to an international reality). In doing so, they miss the inevitable consequence of the Mosaic law being considered by Paul as the *terminus ad quem* (endpoint) of this period: the subjects of verses 13–14 are specifically members of the covenant community. In these verses, as elsewhere in Romans, Paul contrasts the period of the Abrahamic covenant with that of the Adamic and Mosaic covenants.¹⁴ In light of these considerations, the idea that death reigned “even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam” must be understood to refer to people who did not live under the same type of covenant. Death reigned both over those who lived under the administration of the covenant of works that could be broken—and in which there was no provision for the forgiveness of sins—and over those who lived under the administration of the covenant of grace under which sins could be forgiven. Kline's assertion also clarifies the Pauline expression “sin is not imputed when there is no law.” This is not, as Blocher understands, a statement of a legal principle. The expression has a technical meaning: to speak of “non-imputation of sin” is to speak of sins as forgiven. The translation of the Pauline phrase “sin is not imputed when there is no law” into the language of covenant theology is therefore this: “under the covenant of grace, the forgiveness of sins is granted.” This translation renders the expression in Romans 4:15 better in a section that uses precisely the language of nonimputation as a synonym for the forgiveness of sins (cf. vv. 7–8). This is also found in 2 Corinthians 5:19 in a context that introduces a discussion on covenant administrations (2 Cor 3–5). The reference to the law in Romans 5:13–14 therefore does not refer to a commandment or set of precepts but a covenant governed at some point by the principle of works.¹⁵

I am aware that such an interpretation presents its share of difficulties.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 437–38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 438–44.

¹⁶ For instance, Thomas Schreiner criticizes Kline's thesis as follows: “Kline provides a creative and ingenious defense for traditional covenant theology in his interpretation of Rom. 5:13–14. Nonetheless, there is paltry evidence in vv. 13–14 to support the idea that Paul is restricting his focus to the covenant community. Nowhere does he even mention the Abrahamic covenant. The interval is broadly designated as that between Adam and Moses (v. 13). The covenant of grace figures large in Kline's interpretation, but one looks in vain for any reference to such a covenant in the text. Also, it is hardly clear that Paul focuses upon those who received grace; he says they died (v. 14). Death is the consequence of sin (Rom. 6:23). Thus, the fact that sin was not reckoned does not mean these people experienced grace. Finally, the most natural way to understand the time interval is to see a reference to all people who lived between Adam and Moses.” Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law*

However, it is the most convincing one I have encountered so far. It is the best way to take into account the chronological limits set by Paul and the intention of the text. In Romans 5:12–21, Paul first states a principle concerning the propagation of sin and death (v. 12), then makes a first digression to refine the contrast between the principle of the law and that of grace (vv. 13–14) before making a second digression that contrasts the consequences of Adam’s work with that of Christ (vv. 15–17), to finally fully establish the comparison between Adam’s transgression and Christ’s obedience (vv. 18–21). This competing interpretation leads us to make the following remarks concerning the substance of Blocher’s thesis.

A first significant remark concerns his understanding of the Apostle Paul’s way of reasoning in Romans 5. In his *In the Beginning*, Blocher expressed himself for the first time in this way: “While Adam provokes the de facto sanction (*krima*, *katakrima*), Christ’s grace reverses the situation (from *paraptōma* to *dikaiōma*): one can exclaim: *pollō mallon* [much more]!”¹⁷ (cf. Rom 5:16–17). Like Michel Johner, I am not convinced that such a reading really reflects Paul’s thinking.¹⁸ In particular, I have the impression that Blocher sees in this passage more of an *a contrario* (a “reversal of situation”) than an *a fortiori* reasoning as suggested by the key expression *pollō mallon*, which appears four times in the passage.

Moreover, I consider that Blocher’s thesis does not sufficiently account for the apostle’s insistence on Adam’s *one transgression*. For his thesis to work (“we are punished for our own sins because of our link with Adam under the Covenant of Creation”), the mere fact that we are a participant in the Adamic covenant and that Adam is our covenant head would be enough to make us responsible for our own sins in the covenant of works. I fail to see the precise role of Adam’s transgression in allowing the imputation to us of our own sins: the legal instrument that allows the imputation of our sins is not Adam’s fault, but our relationship to him. For this reason, the parallelism between Adam’s transgression and Christ’s obedience seems to us to be better highlighted if the classical thesis of imputation of Adam’s sin is maintained, and the typology is thus better preserved.

As far as form is concerned, I regret that Blocher gives little space in his book (6 pages) to explaining and defending his new interpretation. In

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 248–49. I think, however, that Kline anticipated and responded in his article to all of Schreiner’s objections.

¹⁷ Henri Blocher, *Révélation des origines: Le début de la Genèse*, 2nd ed. (Lausanne: Presses bibliques universitaires; Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Diffusion Ouverture, 1988), 105.

¹⁸ Michel Johner, “Imputation du péché originel et responsabilité personnelle: Perspectives bibliques et théologiques,” (MTh thesis, Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée, Aix-en-Provence, 1986), 141–43.

essence, he does not go into more detail than in his dogmatics manual on the doctrine of sin and redemption.¹⁹ This brevity makes it more difficult to understand his thesis.²⁰

That said, I recommend reading Blocher's work with particular attention to the wise and very relevant dogmatic consequences he draws in chapter 4 from the doctrine of original sin to explain human experience (83–103). His knowledge of Scripture and way of treating it with the respect it deserves can be set as a standard to be imitated, even when we disagree on a particular theological point.

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Gregory A. Boyd. *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017.

Gregory Boyd is a theologian and senior pastor in the Twin Cities. This book follows up on his epic two-volume *Crucifixion and the Warrior God*. While more accessible than the major work, its more concise presentation of the subject will be enough to satisfy most readers. As one might expect, the subject arises out of theological and hermeneutical engagement with the Old Testament narrative and pastoral concerns.

The scandal of the victims of human behavior has become a preoccupation of postmodernism. The question of religious violence is at the forefront because of the friction between different religious groups in a shrinking world. It is therefore hardly surprising that this work is another drop in an ocean of publications, both Christian and other, on the problem of violence. Add to this the rivers of literature on the question of hospitality and the gift from the stable of Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille and the ocean is overflowing.

The book is divided into four main sections. The issue is the old question of liberal theology as to how the violent tribal God of the Old Testament can be reconciled with the loving God of Jesus and the cross. In spite of the efforts of many Christian writers to address the problem, this is still the

¹⁹ Blocher, *Péché et rédemption*, 88–94.

²⁰ Cf. Daniel J. Treier, "Original Sin (NSBT)—Henri Blocher (Apollos, 1997): Review by Dr. Daniel J. Treier," *Trinity Journal NS* 21.2 (Fall 2000), reproduced at <http://beginningwith-moses.org/books/102/original-sin-nsbt/review>: "Competent theological associates and this reviewer took hours of verbal and written discussion to ferret out Blocher's claims and their exact significance compared to the tradition."