

16th September 2020

Sin

**“How shall I lose the sin, yet keep the sense,
And love th’ offender, yet detest th’ offence?”**

Alexander Pope, Eloisa and Abelard

An Am Dram Company once received a bad crit from the local paper, the show’s cast being roundly condemned. The show’s director was outraged, and his defence of his Company appeared in the paper the following week, concluding with these words of advice to a heavy-handed critic -

Let him who is without sin stone the cast first.

This clever riposte is, of course, a take on Jesus’ words to those who would have stoned an adulterous woman to death: “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”. But both the original and the parody contain a fundamental truth: it’s easy enough to condemn others for their sinful ways, but tolerance has to begin with a recognition of our own failings.

St Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” His starting point was an awareness of his own sin – before he began to judge anyone else.

St Augustine of Hippo in the 5th century famously defined sin using the Latin phrase, *incurvatus in se* – “being turned in on oneself”. Martin Luther further expounded on this in his *Lectures on Romans*:

Our nature [is] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them ... or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake ...

The best of us, like St Paul, look at ourselves and, recognising our own sin, are better placed to understand, and to forgive, the sins of others. But when we are turned in on ourselves, curved towards our own selfish nature, putting ourselves at the centre of God’s creation and bending God to our own purposes, nobody benefits. For we’re all sinners, after all ...

A prayer for today

God says to me: *“Judge not, that ye be not judged!”*

I say to God: *“Forgive us our sins, as we might forgive those who sin against us.”*

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>