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Frank Arundell III, 2009

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The question to which I refer is one that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ presents in his essay, *“Reflections on Original Sin,”* written in Paris, November 15, 1947. He noted “Reflections was offered for professional theological comment.” The essay was not published. Let’s look at the context surrounding the question.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

“It is no exaggeration to say that, in the form in which it is still commonly presented today, original sin is at the moment one of the chief obstacles that stand in the way of the intensive and extensive progress of Christian thought. (It must be kept in mind here that Fr.’s thoughts reflect the situation in the year 1947.) An embarrassment or a stumbling-block to the well-meaning but undecided, and at the same time a refuge for the narrow-minded, the story of the Fall, as we can see for ourselves, is nullifying the attempt to introduce, as is so essential, a fully human and humanizing Christian *Weltanschauung*. Almost every time I have had occasion publicly to defend the rightful claims and the superiority of a Christian optimism, I have been asked the same innocent or anxious question by the most well-disposed of my audience: ‘And original sin— what about that?’”

“This is obviously an unhealthy situation, and it is all the more annoying in that all that is needed to reverse it completely is the correction in our usual representations of the Fall of a simple error in perspective. What it amounts to is this: In its allegedly

traditional form, original sin is generally presented as a ‘serial’ event, linking up (with an earlier and a later) inside history. Yet, for the conclusive physical and theological reasons, surely we should treat it, on the contrary, as a reality which belongs to the trans-historic order, affecting (like a color or a dimension) the whole of our experiential vision of the world.”

“In this essay I hope to show that this is indeed so; and that once that correction has been made, the conflict between original sin and modern thought disappears so completely that a dogma, at present such an intellectual brake, is suddenly seen to allow us an inner freedom of flight.” (Teilhard de Chardin)

With his scientific acumen, and a fierce love for Jesus, regardless of the propriety of the Jesuits and the dogma of Original Sin held by the Church, Fr. was always in a bit of trouble with the Society as well as with “Rome.” He died on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955 at the age of 74. I do not, in the least, qualify as a professional theologian but, I believe that the subject must be addressed by the faithful as long as it’s done, hopefully, with a good conscience since it (is) a dogmatic issue.

What person who has had the opportunity to see a new-born soon after birth can possibly and fully understand how he or she could be, as they say, in “sin,” even though they are subject to degradation as is everyone else the moment they are conceived. Wouldn't it be better to call it "fate" rather than "sin;" that they have begun their passage to non-being. That little (person) considered to have “life” from the first moment of its conception is a child of God, who had as much or more to do with its creation than its biological parents. Has God given life, through the parents, to produce a creature with such dubious worth that its life is valueless without being joined with Jesus Christ, who is God, by the ritual of baptism? The

giver of life is the Spirit. Would the Spirit, God, give “life” and remain aloof from that life until water is poured and the words “I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” are spoken? If God, the Creator must wait for words to be spoken in his name, can he truly be the giver of life, or is it the “speaker” in his name? If there is a differentiation between physical life and spiritual life one could understand an absolute need; but if by faith we believe that souls are immediately created by God and body and soul are one, that "soul" must have an immediate worth having been thusly created, yet that soul from the first moment of its conception is said to be “in sin”; and that sin is not (its) sin, but the sin fastened to it by our original progenitors because of their disobedience to God’s command as stated in Genesis; or, as a reality of the “trans-historic” order suggested by Teilhard as a new perspective.

After Vatican II the concept of a new born being consigned to “limbo” having expired before being baptized was erased. Although punishment is due for sins whether the sins be “original or actual,” the dilemma with infants was difficult enough to have the liturgy : ”invite us to trust in God's mercy and to pray for their salvation.” (Catechism: 1283). It is my understanding that Baptism is the single most important sacrament that brings us within the friendship circle of God (The Church), through Christ, and makes us legitimate “heirs” of heaven.

“In all truth I tell you no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit.” (John: 3,5)

With these words Jesus made it plain that water and the Spirit, i.e., Baptism, is a necessity for humanity. Those who have never heard of Original Sin or of Baptism, and never have

known of Jesus or Christianity are said to have received a "baptism of desire, "if they seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will"; which is as much as saying, again, that we are all subject to the mercy of God, a fact, if we are believers, is everyone's ultimate hope, saints and sinners alike. The issue is not so much the symbolism of baptism, but that we are bound by the pronouncements of Jesus because he (is) God. If we cannot believe that, with whatever faith we can muster, we are not Christians in the truest sense, and the sins of our "first parents" or the realities of a "trans-historic order" have little or no meaning for us at all. We are then subject to our own interpretation and reasoning with regard to creation, freed, so to speak, of religion. Today, life processes are almost totally and completely understood by the biological sciences - to the point that (re) production can and is being manipulated in many different ways. The breakthrough in understanding RNA and DNA, though bringing with it moral and ethical questions, has been one of the most magnificent accomplishments of modern science. In this regard, one has to pause and ask: "is science creating life"? The answer always comes back: "neither science nor nature can create life." Life cascaded out of initial creation; (the) Creation attributed to God or some other unknown phenomenon.

Those who are "believers" and even those who are not, have an inborn human perception of the "beyond" from whence life originated; the Source from which the basic elements were exactly and precisely organized, the ultimate and infinite horizon from which all meaning is derived. Belief in the Omnipotent Spirit, the good God who is the giver of life (on faith) enlightens reason and will with a tacit understanding of life's origin as the primal act of love in Creation. The goodness of God is evident in his creations; specifically with the evolution of his creatures and their human development. In the

prelapsarian state we came from, what could be called sinful or evil in the innocent creatures who had no freedom in the truest sense? There must be the option of rejection of freedom in order for freedom to exist at all. So, as disintegration accompanies creation, rejection of freedom is its negation. Understanding (that) gives us the dimensional world we live in; the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the now and later, the good and the bad. That is the trans-historic condition Pere Teilhard called "Original Sin". Each individual's propensity for the good is accompanied by the freedom to reject the good, as we perceive the consequences of animal behavior— now without its innocence, with self consciousness.

One might ask “why do we seem to be stuck with the anomalies, the irregularities of being; the birth defects, the diseases, the unwanted genetic perplexities that cause so much sadness and pain among us?” Scientific determinists now know very well why these asymmetries occur; geologists know there's no riddle to earthquakes; meteorologists understand the causes of drought and hurricanes, Cosmologists observe the cataclysmic destruction of stars light years in the past. Are we saying: “God should have made everything flawless as he himself is?” Let us say: “If we were God, we would have made it all perfect!” There would be no reason to have reason, no necessity for caring or feeling, no argument, no proof, no motivation, no deliberation, no thinking, no sense, no mind, no meaning, no freedom; nothing but perfection. What a wonderful world! No need to love, no need to mate, no better to become; just static perfection.

Let us assume that God didn't exist; should we blame nature and the evolving universe for our troubles, not knowing for sure where nature is heading — even though we are part of her, made out of the same stuff? In fact, we know that, too.

We know by scientific and trans-historic thought that it will all end, and that the one thing that will be left is the Primal Cause. Fortunately our cognizance (our freedom) allows us to see beyond a limited material horizon. Basically we are spirits, like our Creator, as well as bodies. We know him (vaguely) as outside of our existence, and know him positively in faith having been revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, whom we call the Savior, because he explained our ultimate goal, died on our behalf, and was raised to prove it. The Word of God elaborated on “The Kingdom of God” for all “who have ears to hear”! He left a legacy of the sacraments from Baptism to the Eucharist as the source of grace open to all mankind.

If we are a-religious, the meaning attributed to life would be gauged by materialism, secular law, and our own ethical inculturation. The subject here, though, is a new or different perspective on “original sin,” one that should, in Teilhard's thinking, belong to a “trans-historical order.” In other words, one that would conform to his scientific views of evolution, which I am presuming he truly thought was the position to be taken on faith, not proven scientifically. The theory of evolution, even today, has not been proven empirically, but generally accepted as “true” in its processes. Since whatever evidence there is, could be considered all but irrefutable, the Church was prompted to say, in “*Humani Generis*” in 1950:

“The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from preexistent and living matter — for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are

immediately created by God. However this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure, and provided that all are prepared to submit to the judgment of the Church, to whom Christ has given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred, Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of the faithful. * Some however rashly transgress this liberty of discussion, when they act as if the origin of the human body from preexisting and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by reasoning on those facts, and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question.”

*(It must be said here that the Church’s dogma is set in the scientific understanding of the times. Too many times in the past certain churchmen have turned their backs on obvious scientific achievements and embarrassed the hierarchy of their day. The Church’s mandate is primarily from scripture and is spiritually oriented, contingent only on the words of Christ as understood over the centuries with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by men of faith, where true scientific understandings almost invariably augment religious beliefs)

In 1986 the then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is quoted as saying:

The encyclical *Humani Generis*, dated August 12, 1950, had left the question of the origin of individual living species to the competence of research in the natural sciences and had merely stated the anthropological proviso that man cannot be explained solely in terms of biological factors; as a living being endowed with a soul, each one is a new beginning that cannot be derived from biological precursors but points to the Creator. This truce,

of course, did not entirely smooth over the argument about man: soon afterward even theologians no longer knew what to do with the concept of “soul” and its direct creation by God. The classical anthropological model, in which the indispensability of faith was formulated, could not be easily reconciled with the completely different intellectual point of departure of evolutionary theory and its comprehensive explanatory claim, which was unwilling to stop short of man.

At about the same time a new vision became popular, in which Teilhard de Chardin attempted to unite the totality of the natural sciences and of their way of thinking with the totality of the theological view of man. No doubt many and various fruitful ideas came out of Teilhard's intuitions, which enriched the philosophical and theological dialogue with the natural sciences.

Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) continued:

To believe in creation means to understand, in faith, the world of becoming revealed by science as a (meaningful) world that comes from a creative mind.

But this already clearly delineates also the answer to the question about the creation of man, because now the foundational decision about the place of spirit and meaning in the world has been made: the recognition of the world of becoming as the self-actuation of a creative thought includes also its deprivation from the creativity of the spirit, from the Creator Spiritus. In the writings of Teilhard de Chardin we find the following ingenious comment on this question:

“What distinguishes a materialist from a spiritualist is no longer, by any means (as in philosophy, which establishes fixed

concepts) the fact that he admits a transition between the physical infrastructure and the psychic superstructure of things, but only the fact that he incorrectly sets the definitive point of equilibrium in the cosmic movement on the side of the infrastructure, that is, on the side of disintegration." Certainly one can debate the details in this formulation; yet the decisive point seems to me to be grasped quite accurately: the alternative: materialism or a spiritually defined world view, chance or meaning, is presented to us today in the form of the question of whether one regards spirit and life in its ascending forms as an incidental mold on the surface of the material world (that is, of the category of existing things that do not understand themselves), or whether one regards spirit as the goal of the process and, conversely, matter as the prehistory of the spirit. If one chooses, the second alternative, it is clear that spirit is not a random product of material developments, but rather that matter signifies a moment in the history of spirit. This, however, is just another way of saying that spirit is created and not the mere product of development, even though it comes to light by way of development."

It is pretty obvious here, that idea of becoming, which is "revealed by science as a meaningful world that comes from a creative mind," points directly to the hypothesis of "Intelligent Design," but also in the direction of "Natural Selection." Looking at Original Sin from this perspective leaves the problem as to just when the first hominids finally reached the plateau of cognition and reasoning. Teilhard, though, takes us out of the elements of time and place regarding Original Sin, and because of the laws of disintegration, places it as the "general condition affecting the whole of history." Teilhard says:

"It is the unanimous opinion of theologians (I believe) that the necessary and sufficient reagent for the existence of original sin

in the world is death* That is why, quite logically, the unhappy originators of retrogressive evolution try to date the Fall before any known fossil, that is to say in the Pre-Cambrian. Yet, if we are to get to the bottom, not, perhaps, of death, itself, in the strict sense of the word, but of its roots, should we not look much further back - infinitely further back, as far as the first origin of things? Consider a moment: Why do living beings die, if not in virtue of the tendency to disintegration essential to every corpuscular structure? Taken in the widest and most fundamental sense of the word, death (that is, disintegration) begins in truth to become apparent as early as the atom. Being built into the very physico-chemical nature of matter, all it does is to express in its own way the structural atomicity of the universe. It is impossible, therefore, to escape from the 'mortal' (and in consequence from the influence of domain of original sin) without escaping from the world itself. Located and tracked down in nature by its specific effect, death, original sin cannot therefore be assigned to any particular place or time. What it does do is to affect and infect the whole of time and space. If there is an original sin in the world, it can only be and have been everywhere in it and always, from the earliest of the nebulae to be formed as far as the most distant. This is what science tells us; and, by a most reassuring coincidence, this is what is even now being confirmed (if we carry them to their logical conclusion) by the most orthodox requirements of Christology.”

* “Man’s death, pre-eminently, of course; but in consequence all death - since, by the inexorable demands of physical homogeneity, man could not have been alone in a system of essentially mortal animals in escaping organic decomposition”. (Margin note by Pere Teilhard.)

What Teilhard is telling us is, that if disintegration is the “name of the game,” it is inherent in creation, and it is in fact (the) “original sin.” Now if God is all good, would he create, by evolution, a person with a built-in destruct mechanism; particularly if we are “made in his image”? The answer, not knowing the mind of God, appears to be yes, with the anticipation of the Incarnation, where God himself becomes man and suffers the same (albeit humiliating) death as everyone who has ever been born; after which, the "gates" of heaven are opened with the Resurrection of Christ - and the justification of creation, including its built-in destruct linkage, is itself overcome. Eternity with the Father, Son and Spirit, is available to all who have believed and have borne the “easy” yoke and “light” burden of the Savior, and having been baptized.

The search for God ends in “glory.” Life has had its “meaning” in the love of God and neighbor; scripture, with all its ambiguities, is vindicated as the prophetic book it is; the “Kingdom of God” becomes the bridge between heaven and earth until in the final days, when all that is of a material nature is annihilated, and we go to our ultimate “transformation,” whatever that may be, in the “bosom” of God; or by our own willingness, to be assigned to a place with the hypocrites where there will be “weeping and a gnashing of teeth,” (Matt. 24:51), and it surely won't be God's fault if we mis-use our freedom.

That seems to be the way it stands. Whether “original sin” is explained by Genesis, or whether modern science has moved us into a different understanding, those first people with mutated, larger brains, who started putting two and two together, could be called Adam and Eve. What we know about them we either get from scripture or from the difficult and sometimes painful reading of treatises (except for scientists), on anthropology, paleontology or microbiology, etc. Whether they themselves

sinned or whether original sin had been their peremptory condition is somewhat irrelevant. We need to know what we have been blest to know, in order to believe in things especially with regard to God— of whom we recognize the primal notion of his existence, and who seems to want our attention. With the total materialist, there is no meaning beyond what a thing is; there is no beyond to the graceful "why" where "Truth is a person." Let's go forward a bit in a discovery mode, and look a little deeper into this "original sin" involvement, and the alleged need for baptism.

Realizing, of course, we can't speak for God, or even suggest what might have been on his mind, if you believe he lit the fuse of the Big Bang, which included the down-side of disintegration, while at the same time, continuing to expand, increasing in speed. It appears that more "matter" is being created than is being dissipated. Actually, according to the law of the Conservation of Matter, matter is neither created or destroyed, but with the Second Law of Thermodynamics there is a continuous loss of a certain amount of energy.

Now, was it fair of Almighty God to thrust the Cosmos out of nothingness to something with the idea that it will eventually destroy itself? Should God have put the evolutionary spiral into effect with the contingency that it will fail because nothing of a material nature lasts forever? I mean, can that be "good"? Why would he bother creating anything if there was going to be a downside to it? (Why should Beethoven have written his symphonies while going deaf from syphilis?) If the Deity was Perfection before he pushed the plunger and created all that (is), why would he need any more than he already had, even if we can't conceive of what it was he had?

It doesn't take us long before we start thinking about what is in God's mind, while not in the least knowing what constitutes "mind" in ourselves. We're getting to know more and more about what matter is, but haven't got a clue as to what mind is except we're coming closer to understanding that it knows about "meaning."

In creation, all things have meaning. Very few things, if you think about it, are meaningless. The smallest weed has a flower, and that is its glory. It dies when winter comes, but is reborn in spring to produce its little symphony again and again; it has found a place to do that, it has a purpose while "knowing" nothing. It has no large brain with which to think as its observers do. It is a tiny, meaningful thing in itself, ask any bee.

Still, we can yank it out of the soil to make things neater for our eyes, to re-arrange our surroundings more to our liking; either way (that) has meaning for us. As a matter of fact we're the only ones who know what "meaning" is. Everything has meaning only in the minds of human beings. On an aesthetic scale we see beauty as having meaning, or truth and freedom. We're the ones who see meaning in all things, especially in grand principles. Love, if you understand it, and few really do, has supreme meaning. It has a generative nature, it's most appreciated by being given away. It has a need only in its subjective generosity, in its exchange. People, especially children, can be love starved or love "over-stuffed" depending on those who give or withhold love, honest love. It is true of life as well. Life, certainly, has the most "meaning" of all. Without life there is no love, the flower doesn't bloom for us. Non-being is the scary alternative. Aren't we fortunate to have life, and shouldn't it be considered a gift of love, somebody's love? Life, in its essence, could be thought of as

having been put in motion by the Big Bang, on “the day without yesterdays,” as Lemaitre put it. The essentials were on an evolutionary track in the process of becoming, and the human race, the thinking, meaning-prone creatures, up to now anyway, appear to be its flower, its glory— but, alas, all must eventually cease to be. How much meaning does that display with regard to origins? If you happen to think as a fatalist you would be tempted to say, “why bother, what does it matter?” If you've had the occasion to love, to give yourself away with “meaning,” you say: “thank God.” Whoever put this “whole shebang” in motion had to have “meaning” because that is what is reflected in us. Both the Intelligent Design folks as well as the Natural Selection people see that. The philosophers of “meaningless-ness,” on the other hand, must be a sad and angry lot; a loveless class, yet, are in turn loved by simply having the “good” fortune to be living, thinking, free human beings, a condition they know they did not create. They live in a world where only “man is the measure of all things.” But, isn't it so, that man inherited meaning, and the (meaning) in man is the measure of all things? The need to give away love is found in creation, and found again on Calvary, and that gift has had its reward with the Resurrection; itself the gift of eternity for those who love and have loved. What has this got to do with "original sin" and the saving grace of baptism? Let's see if we can find a way to clarify it; make it more meaningful, so to speak.

The computer term "default" has some use here, it helps us try to refine the issue of original sin. Since a default is programmed in by the manufacturer, it is a good analogy to use when one considers that the default of disintegration was programmed into God's meaning when he gave life by way of love, or even the essences of life at the Creation. Since God made what was to become “something” by progressive

evolution, in freedom, why would he want to put the end at the beginning? As the program moved on, the default was freely recognized by its users; understanding that it was part of the program. Once they became cognizant of its effects, that is, the consciousness of non-being, the users tried to find ways to re-program so as to resolve their awful anxiety of non-being. Their instincts for survival from a former animal state, still in play, was not entirely useful in a world of meaning. It had them try other methods to allay their fears and over-write the default. They invented religion. This explains God's seeming ambiguity by the composer of Genesis whose understanding of “creation” had been gleaned from many previous sources, while the meaning of God had its determinacy in the fabric of creation itself, finally fulfilled by the Incarnation.

Man was on the road to understanding himself and his relationship with “his” God by his struggle with a life of meaning-in-survival; of birth, toil and death, as stated dramatically in Genesis. It should also be noted that “Original Justice” was the condition existing before either God gave man his freedom by breathing “soul” into him, or by having him attain the use of reason through “natural selection”. In either case, God's “immediate creation” effected the “ape to man brain to mind” transition. For God, time exists outside of himself, and only he writes the timetable.

H₂O

H₂O is life support for every living thing. Without water, everything dies. The only people who hate water are those who guard their double-malt scotch from its contamination. Nowadays, everybody appears to be equipped with a water bottle so as not to dry up; personally, I'd rather have a beer. There is no room here to catalogue all the life-giving uses of

water from ancient times, like irrigation, mills, dams, etc. Needless to say, water is the most precious commodity on earth. What is interesting is how the waters of the Genesis story hook into geology's understanding of the forces of nature about 2,000 million years after the earth's crust formed. It rained for about 60,000 years. As time went on, this global ocean produced algae and bacteria. The earth's atmosphere was changed by the liberation of oxygen, which eventually formed an ozone layer protecting the life-forms coming into existence. "Creation" and water are inseparable, still, no one so far has been able either to understand or explain the originating cause. It's good to quote Genesis on this point: "Darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

I was strongly tempted simply to paraphrase a couple of paragraphs from Professor Mircea Eliade's, *The Sacred and the Profane, 1959 (ISBN 0-15-679201-x)* but it is so beautifully written and so concise that I thought I would present it here just as I read it years ago. Please don't get bogged down on a few professorial words, like "hylogenies": the evolutionary development of life in matter, etc. Eliade writes:

"The waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are fons et origo, 'spring and origin,' the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation. One of the paradigmatic images of creation is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the waves. On the other hand, immersion in water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. Emersion repeats the cosmogonic set of formal manifestation; immersion is equivalent to a

dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the waters implies both death and rebirth. Contact with water always brings a regeneration-on the one hand because dissolution is followed by a new birth, on the other because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential of life.”

“The aquatic cosmology has its counterpart-on the human level-in the hvlogenies, the beliefs according to which mankind was born of the waters. The Flood, or the periodical submersion of the continents (myths of the Atlantis type) have their counterpart, on the human level, in man's ‘second death’ (the ‘dampness’ and the leimon - the “humid field” of the Underworld, and so on) or in initiatory death through baptism. But both on the cosmological and the anthropological planes immersion in the waters is equivalent not to a final extinction but to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life, or a ‘new man,’ according to whether the moment involved is cosmic, biological, or soteriological. From the point of view of structure, the flood is comparable to baptism, and the funeral libation to the lustrations of the newborn or to the spring ritual baths that procure health and fertility.”

“In whatever religious complex we find them, the waters invariably retain their function; they disintegrate, abolish forms, ‘wash away sins’; they are at once purifying and regenerating. Their destiny is to precede the Creation and to reabsorb it, since they are incapable of transcending their own mode of being, incapable, that is, of manifesting themselves in forms. The waters cannot pass beyond the condition of the virtual, of germs and latencies. Everything that is form manifests itself above the waters, by detaching itself from the waters.”

“One point is essential here: both the sacrality of the waters and the structure of aquatic cosmogonies and apocalypses can be completely revealed only through aquatic symbolism, which is the only system capable of integrating all of the particular revelations of innumerable hierophanies. This law, moreover, holds for every symbolism; it is the symbolism as a whole that valorizes the various significations of hierophanies. The Waters of Death, for example, reveal their deeper meaning only to the extent to which the structure of aquatic symbolism is known.”

“Hierophanies”: various sacred mysteries or principles.

In the Encyclopedia Mythica, Rabbi Geoffrey Dennis writes:

"The Spirit of God hovers over the waters (Gen. 1:2)" From this passage Jewish esoteric tradition derives the belief that water is a key component in invoking and encountering divine power and in other paranormal experiences. Water is the force of chaos, and order only emerges as God drives back and delimits the watery abyss. Separating the waters into heavenly and earthly zones then permits the cosmos to appear. With the appearance of dry land, God traps the primordial waters under the earth and seals them in place with the Foundation Stone on Zion. According to the Talmud, all the water of the universe is divided between the female tellurian waters and the male celestial waters. Their joining together fructifies the earth (P. Ber. 14a). There is a similar gender distinction made between rain and dew.

It's hardly “paranormal” that water sustains life, all life. Fifty five to sixty-five percent of the human adult's body is water. We cannot simply deny the importance of water on a practical

(or) on an "aquatic-symbolic" basis. For millennia "the waters" have been known to be curative.

Many people involved in Church history believe that John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus, was? member of the Essene Sect at the Qumran community, and went off baptizing on his own in anticipation of the imminent arrival of the Messiah. These few words on the purity rituals at Qumran come from "Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls," by Alex P. [assen of the University of Minnesota:

"Several Qumran texts are preserved that contain detailed instructions for ritual immersion, which restores individuals to a state of purity (4Q284; 4Q414; 4Q512; see J. M. Baumgarten, 1992, 1999). Impure individuals would launder their clothes, undergo ritual immersion, and wait for sunset before being considered pure once again. The purification texts indicate that immersion was often accompanied by fixed liturgical pronouncements such as blessings. Excavations at Qumran have uncovered several (9~ 10) sealed water instillations fed by the main aqueduct system. Similarities with contemporaneous miqva'ot (ritual baths) throughout the land of Israel suggest that these structures were likewise miqva' ot employed for ritual immersion (Pfann 1999, 349 ~ 50; Reich 2000; Magness 2002). Ritual immersion, however, was not regarded as an automatic source of purification. If impurity occurred as the result of sin, the individual must resolve to abandon all sinful ways in order for the immersion to be effective: 'ceremonies of atonement cannot restore his innocence, neither cultic waters his purity . . . Through an upright and humble attitude his sin may be covered, and by humbling himself before God's laws his flesh can be made clean' (IQS 3:4~ 9)."

An interesting pericope from On: 5,2) which substantiates Jewish belief about the "waters" upon which the Spirit of God can be confronted for curative purposes:

“Now in Jerusalem next to the Sheep Pool there is a pool called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in that condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir,' replied the sick man, 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets down there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk around.' The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and started to walk around. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping mat.' He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me, Pick up your mat and walk around.' They asked, 'Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your mat and walk around?'' The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared, as the place was crowded. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, do not sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.' The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that the Jews began to harass Jesus. His answer to them was, 'My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too.' But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he spoke of God as his own Father and so made himself God's equal. To this Jesus replied; 'In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees the Father

doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son.”

Bible-history.com tells of the pool's discovery:

BETHES'DA Heb. “Beth Chesda” (house of mercy) Gk. From Aram. Beth hesda, “house of grace”). A spring-fed pool with five porches where invalids waited their turn to step into the mysteriously troubled waters that were supposed to possess healing virtue (John 5:2~4). The disturbance of the water by an angel, are placed in brackets in the NASB because there is not sufficient attestation by early texts. Here Jesus healed the man who was lame for thirty-eight years. The historicity of this site was once in question. Scholars like Dr. Alfred Loisy, claimed the detail of the five porticoes was invented. They said John made it up to represent the five books of Moses, which Jesus came to fulfill. But recent archaeological discoveries have once again confirmed the Biblical account. In 1956, digging at the ancient Biblical site of Bethesda, archaeologists unearthed a rectangular pool with a portico on each side and a fifth one dividing the pool into 2 separate compartments.

The place is now thought to be the pool found during the repairs in 1888 near St. Anne's Church in the Bezetha quarter of Jerusalem not far from the Sheep's Gate and Tower of Antonia. It is below the crypt of the ruined fourth-century church and has a five-arch portico with faded frescoes of the miracle of Christ's healing.

Going back to the text of (John 5), for a moment, the quote from Jesus: “My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too,” could possibly be a reference to the disturbance on the surface of the pool's water. Even if it were the “wind,” often referred to as the “Spirit,” one could make that determination

on the basis of its being the Father's "work." Still, it was Jesus, who cured this particular man.

All four gospels speak of John the Baptist's activities administering purification rites as an actual and symbolic act of repentance. (Matt. 3) tells the story; this version comes from the NJB (New Jerusalem Bible):

“In due course John the Baptist appeared; he proclaimed this message in the desert of Judaea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.’ This was the man spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said; A voice of one that cries in the desert, ‘Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.’ This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather loin-cloth round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptized by him in the River Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming retribution? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not presume to tell yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ because, I tell you God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe has been laid to the root of the trees, so that any tree failing to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptize you in water for repentance, but the one who comes after me is more powerful than I, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will bum in a fire that will never go out.’”

“Then Jesus appeared; he came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. John tried to dissuade him, with the words, ‘It is I who need baptism from you, and yet you come to me!’ But Jesus replied, ‘Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that uprightness demands.’ Then John gave in to him.”

“And when Jesus had been baptized he at once came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And suddenly there was a voice from heaven, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on him.’”

As it worked out, one might assume, Jesus, as the son of Mary, and Son of God, whom he called his Father, accepted baptism, i.e., “purification,” as a model, or in a symbolic way for the whole human family. The “sacrality” of water and its use in religion is quite clear, aside from its obvious track from hydrogen and oxygen to an absolute necessity in and for life itself.

The Scripture is full of attributions to the “miraculous” uses of water other than the necessary “living-water,” a direct connection to the grace of God. Again, in Jesus’ response to Nicodemus, (John, 3:5) he necessitates baptism: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Jesus sent his disciples saying: “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.” (John, 21).

In (Mk, 16:15), “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the gospel (good news) to all creation: whoever believes and is baptized will be saved ... “ In (Matt, 28:19), “Go, therefore,

make disciples of all nations. baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” ...

Today, the importance of the Sacrament of Baptism cannot be overestimated, particularly by those who would call themselves Christians.

One could go on about the profuse and pertinacious use of water all through scripture. The calming of the sea; the changing of water to wine; Living Water for the woman at the well; the washing of the feet; the water from Jesus' side having been pierced with a lance, and many others. But, the water of Baptism with which Jesus started his ministry for the forgiveness of sin, both original and actual, is the living-water of the grace of God for those who believe. The question, “And Original Sin - what about that?” can now be answered in more than one way. What the writer of Genesis wrote so beautifully explains the “default” in a wonderful poetic story-line, If any of us feel we should “have it all” without a downside, it could be that might just be the same as the so-called Original Sin of our progenitors, the desire to (be) God, with the excessive pride and arrogance that accompanies it; or, if you prefer a different perspective, “a reality which belongs to the trans, historic order, affecting (like a color, or a dimension) the whole of our experiential vision of the world.”

It is my understanding, at least, that the “default” which mankind finds a struggle, could only have been over-written by the Resurrection and one's faith in it; and by the love of God and others.

Man is rescued from his or her animal-nature by the merits of Jesus Christ. It is the truth, in that faith, that sets human-nature

free from the default of degradation, allowing man to return to his Creator, the source of all being.

“I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (John, 11:25)

“All things both reveal and conceal God. The ‘dissimilar similarity’ that constitutes every created manifestation of God is both a similarity to the necessary as an image, and impossible as a representation. It is only in and through the cataphatic moment however, that is, by immersion in the beauty of the universe, that we can dialectically attain the negation of representations necessary for discovering that God is always more than we can conceive.”

(Note: cataphatic, i.e., the belief that God can be known positively.)

BernardA. McGinn, "The Foundations of Mysticism," p. 174.