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# SARX AND SIN IN PAULINE THEOLOGY

Eugene J. COOPER

## A. VARIOUS APPROACHES TO A STUDY OF SIN IN THE PAULINE WRITINGS

WHEN looking for an understanding of sin or a Pauline<sup>1</sup> concept or consciousness of sin, several approaches are possible. One can begin with a study of the usages of the term *hamartia* and of other terms for sin in the Pauline Writings and continue with an extensive study of all passages which contain these terms. Or one can begin with a study of the passages which contain the well-known Pauline catalogues and lists of sins and vices (Rom. 1, 29-31; 1 Cor. 5, 10f.; 6, 9f.; 2 Cor. 12, 20; Gal. 5, 19-21; Eph. 5, 3; Col. 3, 5-8; 1 Tim. 1, 9; Tit. 3, 3; 2 Tim. 3, 2-5). The warning against the "works of the flesh", that those who commit them "shall not attain heaven" (Gal. 5, 19-22), "will not possess the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6, 9-10), could lead one to speak of so-called "serious" or "mortal" sins in the Pauline Writings, as did the Council of Trent.<sup>2</sup> Such a point of view, however, presents two dangers.

One danger consists in studying the Pauline Writings and other books of the Bible in order to find supporting evidence or "proofs" for the theological teaching on mortal and venial sin. These concepts are not to be found in the Bible, and an anachronistic viewpoint which studies the texts of the Scriptures in order to find the "beginnings" or a germinal form of the later theological teaching on the distinction between lighter and more serious, venial and mortal sins, can already prejudice the interpretation of what is actually written in the Bible.

The anachronistic approach to the Scriptures which expects to discover in them a less developed, but nevertheless a germ form of the teaching on mortal and venial sin,

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(Abbreviations according to *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*).

1. On the question of the authenticity and authorship of the Pauline Writings v. P. FEINE, J. BEHM, W. G. KÜMMEL, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (14th ed., Heidelberg, 1965), pp. 175-280; B. RIGAU, *Saint Paul et ses lettres* (Paris, 1962), pp. 139-161.
2. Cf. B. HARING, *The Law of Christ*, vol. I (Cork, 1960), p. 351 and p. 571 *ann.* No. 1; E. COOPER, "A Newer Look at the Theology of Sin", in *Louvain Studies*, 3 (1971), pp. 259-307.

presents a second danger, when one applies the criteria for the moral-theological distinction between mortal and venial sin, for example, the criterion of the *reatus poenae* or punishment for sin, to the texts of the Bible. This approach would be as follows: Moral theology teaches that one criterion for the distinction between mortal and venial sin is the punishment for sin, the *reatus poenae*. A sin that is punished with the loss of salvation and eternal damnation is a mortal sin; a sin that is punished with a temporal punishment is a venial sin. In the Pauline Writings there is mention of sins which are punished with eternal damnation, for the sinners "will not possess the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6, 9-10), "shall not attain heaven" (Gal. 5, 19-22). Therefore, Saint Paul speaks of what is actually mortal sin. Although the terminology "mortal" and "venial" is unknown to him, at least the content of these concepts is present in his writings.

It is at least questionable, whether such an approach to the Bible in general and to the Pauline Writings in particular is methodologically legitimate, for the a priori of the later theological distinction between mortal and venial sin as the point of departure for studying sin in the Scriptures already prejudices the interpretation of the texts to be studied.

A second reason for not taking the catalogues of sins and vices as a point of departure for the study of the concept of sin in the Pauline Writings is the nature of the usage of the term *hamartia* in these passages. The Pauline usage of the term *hamartia*, one of the principal terms for sin in the New Testament, is not restricted to a usage which refers only to single sinful actions, as is the case in the Pauline catalogues or lists of vices and sins. *Hamartia* is also used to refer to sin as a personal power and, in connection with some usages of the term *sarx* ('flesh'), to refer to a way of life or a basic, fundamental attitude towards God, salvation and faith, which is sinful. It is not the usages of the term *hamartia* for single sinful actions which are primary in the Pauline Writings, but these lists of single sinful actions are regarded by Paul as proceeding from a fundamental, interior disposition of a life "according to the flesh", as the source of the "works of the flesh".

For these reasons, the "works of the flesh" or the catalogues of sins and vices will not form the point of departure for a consideration of the understanding of sin in the Pauline Writings. Rather, certain principal *themes* in all of the Pauline Writings, such as *hamartia* ('sin'), *sarx* ('flesh'), on the one hand, and *pneuma* ('spirit'), on the other hand, will be briefly reviewed as they occur in the main epistles and according to the present-day understanding of these terms in the field of exegesis. The lists and catalogues of sins and vices will then be seen in connection with these fundamental Pauline themes as: a) Actions which are consequent to the condition and life of pre-Christian man, who lives solely and exclusively "in" and "according to the flesh", who lives in pre-pneumatic times, without the gift of the Spirit of God. This condition of pre-Christian man expressed itself with the Jews in the sins provoked by the Law and with the Pagans in their immoral excesses. b) Actions consequent to the life of post-Christian man who chooses to live without the Spirit (*pneuma*), as if the salvific redemption of Christ had never taken place. c) Actions consequent to the lives of those redeemed by Christ, who through faith and baptism have accepted this redemption and work of salvation, yet succumb to the demands and desires of their *sarx* ('flesh'),

who choose to act (= live, walk = *peripatein*) "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*) and not according to the Spirit of God, as has been made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, to be freely accepted through faith and baptism.

In brief, all the sins of pre-Christian man, Jew and Gentile alike, and all the sins of post-Christian man, of the non-believer and of the believer alike, are seen in the Pauline theology as the result of the personified power of "sin" (*hamartia*) which has its foothold in the *sarx* of all men and which, although overcome by Christ's victory on the cross, can still lead man, even the redeemed and baptized believer, into sin through a freely-chosen life "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*).

#### B. THE TERM HAMARTIA IN THE PAULINE WRITINGS<sup>3</sup>

According to G. Stählin, the term *hamartia* is employed in three principal ways in the New Testament: a) to mean a single sinful action; b) as a characteristic of human nature; c) as a personal power.<sup>4</sup> In the Pauline Writings, the use of the term *hamartia* to mean a single sinful action is usually a quotation taken over from the Old Testament, for example, in Romans 4, 7-8; Galatians 1, 4; Colossians 1, 14.<sup>5</sup> Examples of *hamartia* to mean an "anti-godly characteristic of sinful human nature" are: Romans 3, 20; 5, 13. 20; 6, 1; etc.). *Hamartia* as a demonical personal power is especially clear in the Epistle to the Romans, chapters five to seven.<sup>6</sup>

Paul uses the term *hamartia* to indicate single sinful actions, but in the background of the Pauline theology stands the teaching of the sinful condition of man and mankind, beginning with the sin of Adam. Sin is therefore secondly the sinful condition of man and mankind (without yet referring to "original sin"). Thirdly, sin in the Pauline theology refers to a cosmic power which entered the human race through the sin of Adam and which exercises its power over man through the weakness of the "flesh" (*sarx*).

1. *The first usage of the term hamartia.* The first of these three usages of the term *hamartia* — to refer to single sinful actions — is dependent upon the other two usages of the term. The lists of sins and vices which the Pauline theology uses to describe the sins of the Pagans, of the Jews and of various Christian communities, are all considered to be effects, results and manifestations of the sinful condition of man and mankind

3. J. B. BAUER, "Sünde", in BThWB, vol. II, pp. 1294-1309 (1303-1309); E. BEAUCAMP, E. DE PLACES, ST. LYONNET, "péché", in DBS, fasc. 37-38, cols. 407-567; W. GRUNDMANN, "Die Sünde im Neuen Testament," in ThW, vol. I, pp. 305-320 (311-317); ST. LYONNET, "péché," in X. Léon-Dufour, J. Duplacy, et al., *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1962), cols. 774-787 (785-787); G. STÄHLIN, "Sprachgebrauch und Sprachgeschichte von hamartano, hamartema und hamartia vor und im Neuen Testament," in ThW, vol. I, pp. 295-299; A. VÖGTLE, "Sünde im Neuen Testament," in LThK, vol. IX, vols. 1174-1177; E. COOPER, "Understanding Sin in the New Testament," in *Louvain Studies*, 1 (1967), pp. 298-311; cf. JOH. SCHNEIDER, "parabaino, parabasis," in ThW, vol. V, pp. 733-741.

4. "Man kann von *hamartia* im NT drei Hauptformen unterscheiden: Sünde a. als Einzeltat (= *hamartema*), b. als Wesensbestimmtheit des Menschen, c. als persönliche Macht." : *Art. cit.*, p. 297.

5. "Paulus gebraucht *hamartia* von der einzelnen Sündentat fast nur in Zitaten... und übernommenen Formeln...": *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 297-299.

(second usage of *hamartia*), as a result of the domination of man by the power of sin (third usage of *hamartia*).

2. *The second usage of the term hamartia.* The second usage of *hamartia* in the Pauline Writings — to refer to the sinful condition of man and mankind — needs to be distinguished: a) to refer to the nature of man, to his natural earthly condition as man, since the sin of Adam and until the coming of Christ, and b) in the later development of theological reflexion, this natural condition of man, made sinful through the sin of Adam, is referred to as the point of departure for the doctrine of “original sin”.

a) The use of the term *hamartia* to refer to the sinful nature of man refers to the fact that man is in the condition of the *sarx*, of the flesh, and is determined by the power of sin (*hamartia*) through his *sarx*. This is the condition of all men in the pre-Christian epoch, Pagans and Jews alike, as well as the condition of post-Christian man who chooses to remain in this condition, in that he rejects Christ.<sup>7</sup> It is also the condition of all Christians who return to or fall back into a life “according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*). Sin manifests itself in this condition as the “will to dispose of oneself for oneself and by oneself”, even and especially in opposition to the will of God.<sup>8</sup> The sin which manifests itself in this condition of man is the desire to determine for oneself what is good and evil, the determination to follow one’s own will as the sole criterion for one’s actions, in opposition to the will of God.<sup>9</sup> And one’s own will is influenced by the power of sin through the *sarx*. In this sense of being a law unto oneself, this sinful condition is connected to the sin of Adam, seen as disobedience to the will of God and desire to rule over oneself in opposition to the will of God.<sup>10</sup>

b) The universality of sin’s domination over all men as an aspect of the sinful condition of man, seen, as Paul’s anthropology views man and mankind, under the aspect of *Heilsgeschichte* (‘history of salvation’), has also been regarded by latter theologians as the foundation for the doctrine of “original sin”.<sup>11</sup> The Pauline theology considers all men since the time of the sin of Adam to be under the domination of sin and, therefore, worthy only of the wrath of God and unable to free

7. “Für Paulus besteht die Sünde nicht nur in der einzelnen Tat, sie ist ihm eine die Menschheit in ihrer Gesamtheit umfassende Zuständlichkeit, nicht eine individuelle, sondern eine universelle Angelegenheit. Der einzelne Mensch findet sich immer schon in einem sündigen Gesamtzustand vor und hat gar nicht mehr die jüdische Wahlfreiheit, die den jüdischen Sündenbegriff konstituierte... So besteht also ein unlöslicher Zusammenhang zwischen der Tat Adams, dem Todesschicksal der Menschheit und der allgemeinen sündigen Zuständlichkeit. In alledem ist keine Erbsündenlehre entwickelt, sondern ein Urteil ausgesprochen über die Menschen in ihrem Menschsein, ein Urteil, das sich wohl an der menschlichen Wirklichkeit bildet, aber möglich wurde erst von Christus her.”: W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, p. 313. Cf. J. GUILLET, *Thèmes bibliques* (2nd ed., Paris, 1954), pp. 100–116.

8. “Dieses ‘Selbst-verfügen-wollen des Menschen’ ist Widerstreben gegen Gottes Willen.”: W. GRUNDMANN, *ibid.*, p. 312.

9. “So ist die Sünde wesentlich darin zu sehen, dass der Mensch nicht mehr von Gott abhängig, sondern sein eigenes Lebensprinzip sein will, weil er nicht mehr anerkennt, dass er das, was er ist, von Gott ist und nicht von sich aus.”: J. B. BAUER, *art. cit.*, p. 1308.

10. W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, p. 314.

11. A.-M. DUBARLE, *Le péché originel dans l'Écriture* (Paris, 1958); J. GUILLET, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–116; H. HAAG, *Biblische Schöpfungslehre und kirchliche Erbsündenlehre* (Stuttgart, 1966); O. KUSS, *Der Römerbrief, Erste Lieferung* (2nd ed., Regensburg, 1963), pp. 241–275; P. SCHOONENBERG, *Man and Sin* (London, 1965).

themselves from the slavery to sin. From the point of view of the "history of salvation", the universality of sin's domination begins with Adam and continues in his descendants. Adam sinned, as did his descendants, beginning with his son, Cain, and continuing with following generations, to be punished with the deluge, the flood.

A new beginning and a new alliance are made with Noah and his family. But Noah's generation sins, symbolized by the Tower of Babel, and is punished with its destruction. A new beginning is made with the new covenant with Abraham, but the descendants of Abraham sin,<sup>12</sup> and when promised release from their slavery in Egypt, prefer to remain in the security of their life of slavery. God nevertheless sends his chosen people a leader in Moses, who leads them into the freedom of the Promised Land, to make again a new beginning. But already underway to the Promised Land, the people murmur in the desert.

This cycle of election and alliance, sin of the people, wrath and punishment of God and new beginning with a new alliance and new promises, is the familiar form of the deuteronomic narration of salvation history. Paul makes use of this concept of salvation history to emphasize the sinful condition of mankind since the time of Adam and the universality of sin's domination, which is to end with the coming of and redemption by the Second Adam, who is Christ. The sins of mankind are seen as a continuous progression throughout salvation history which culminate in a total hardness of heart<sup>13</sup> and refusal to hear Jesus in "this sinful and adulterous generation" (Matt. 12, 39; 16, 4; Mark 8, 38), which is the same as "this eon" (1 Cor. 1, 20; 2, 6-8; 3, 18; 2 Cor. 4, 4; Rom. 12, 2; etc.), which is the same as "this world" (1 Cor. 3, 19; 5, 10; 7, 31; Eph. 2, 2), in the same sense as Saint John uses the word:<sup>14</sup> as "*une collectivité qui fait bloc dans son hostilité à Dieu*".<sup>15</sup>

3. *The third usage of the term hamartia.* The third Pauline usage of *hamartia*, as a cosmic, personal power which dominates man through the *sarx*, is a usage of the singular form of *hamartia* to refer to sin as a principle or force. This power, however, is not to be confused with Satan himself, for *hamartia* as a power of sin is in man's interior<sup>16</sup>. This power of sin is not identical with the "flesh" of man (*sarx*), but the "fleshy" (*fleischlich*) condition of man is determined by sin, which has its foothold and bridgehead in man through the *sarx*.<sup>17</sup> In speaking of the "sinful condition of man" and the "condition of man in the *sarx*" in Pauline theology, however, the two come to mean the same thing: that sinful condition of man and mankind, that manner of living

12. The condition of "slaves in Egypt" is considered to represent a return to Pagan life, to a life of sin. Cf. J. GUILLET, *ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

13. "Endurcissement total": *Ibid.*, p. 114.

14. E. COOPER, "The Consciousness of Sin in 1 John", in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 28 (1972), 237-248.

15. J. GUILLET, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

16. ST. LYONNET, *art. cit.*, cols. 785-786. Cf. J. B. BAUER, *art. cit.*, p. 1303; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (2nd ed., München, 1962), p. 210.

17. "Die sarkische Wirklichkeit des Menschen ist seine sündige Wirklichkeit, nicht so, dass für Paulus Sünde und Fleisch identisch wären und mit der Leibhaftigkeit des Menschen seine Sündhaftigkeit konstituiert wäre, sondern so, dass er in seinem fleischlichen Sein durch die Sünde bestimmt ist und sie sich mit ihm fest verbunden hat. Diese Verbindung wird deutlich durch das Gesetz.": W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, p. 314.

“according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*) which existed from the first sin of Adam until the coming and work of redemption of the Redeemer, and which still continues to exist in that milieu, in those men who, although included in the universality of redeemed mankind, subjectively and freely choose to continue to live in the sinful condition “according to the flesh” and thereby reject Christ, his message, his promises and his work of salvation.

### C. THE TERM SARX IN THE PAULINE WRITINGS<sup>18</sup>

#### 1. Introduction.

Most authors (X. Léon-Dufour, St. Lyonnet, O. Kuss, A. Sand, J. Schmid, E. Schweizer) distinguish between: a) usages of the term *sarx* which are based on Old Testament usages of the term, or which can be easily seen to be further terminological developments of these usages and b) those usages of the term which can be considered to be “specifically Pauline”.

In a recent work, Egon Brandenburger presents the thesis that this second category of usages, thought to be specifically Pauline developments of the term, are not to be attributed to the originality of the author of the Pauline Writings, but to a school of theological thought, found in late Judaic literature and in extra-canonical writings (for example, Philo of Alexandria) which he calls the school of “dualistic wisdom” (*dualistische Weisheit*).<sup>19</sup> This new thesis of Brandenburger, however, is concerned with the *origins* of this second category of Pauline usages of the term *sarx*, but does not alter the fact of their existence in the Pauline Writings. Therefore, the larger, general division of the usages of the term *sarx* in the Pauline Writings into: a) those usages based on Old Testament usages of the term and b) usages which are considered “specifically Pauline” and Christian will be maintained for the purposes of this short study.

#### 2. Usages of the term *sarx* found in the Old Testament and in the Pauline Writings.

a) The term *sarx* can be used in a neutral, but never negative or pejorative sense<sup>20</sup> to mean “simply the substance flesh”,<sup>21</sup> but always in reference to “life-

18. E. BEAUCAMP, E. de PLACES, ST. LYONNET, *art. cit.*, cols. 502-503; K. G. KUHN, “Peirasmos — hamartia — sarx im Neuen Testament und die damit zusammenhängenden Vorstellungen,” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 49 (1952), pp. 200-222; O. KUSS, *Der Römerbrief*, Zweite Lieferung (2nd ed., Regensburg, 1963), pp. 506-540; X. LÉON-DUFOUR, “chair,” in X. LÉON-DUFOUR, J. Duplacy, *et al.*, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1962), cols. 112-117; A. SAND, *Der Begriff “Fleisch” in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen* (Regensburg, 1967); JOS. SCHMID, “sarx,” in *LThK*, vol. IX, cols. 335-339; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-215; E. SCHWEIZER, F. BAUMGARTEL, R. MEYER, “sarx, sarkikos, sarkinos,” in *ThW*, vol. VII, pp. 98-151, esp. E. SCHWEIZER, “sarx: Paulus,” pp. 124-138.

19. *Fleisch und Geist: Paulus und die dualistische Weisheit* (Wageningen, 1968).

20. “La Bible... ne considère jamais la chair comme intrinsèquement mauvaise.”: X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 113.

21. “Wie *basar* im Alten Testament und im Judentum kann *sarx* bei Paulus Bezeichnung der muskulösen Substanz des menschlichen Leibes sein.”: A. SAND, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

bearing flesh",<sup>22</sup> but not dead flesh,<sup>23</sup> for example, in regard to the varieties of living flesh in man and different animals (1 Cor. 15, 39);<sup>24</sup> in regard to the circumcision of the flesh (Rom. 2, 28; Gal. 6, 12, 13; Phil. 3, 3-4);<sup>25</sup> in regard to marriage: "The two shall become one flesh" (1 Cor. 6, 16b). The Old Testament expression "all flesh"<sup>26</sup> is also used by Paul (Rom. 3, 20; Gal. 2, 16; 1 Cor. 1, 29).<sup>27</sup>

The term "flesh" as used in the Old Testament and Pauline Writings can also mean the "body",<sup>28</sup> "the whole man",<sup>29</sup> or the "bodily existence",<sup>30</sup> the terrestrial condition of the creature man and his human person,<sup>31</sup> including all of his spiritual capacities and capabilities.<sup>32</sup> These usages of the term "flesh" are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Pauline Writings, the term *sarx* is not dualistically opposed to "soul" or "spirit" in the sense of matter to form, but is used to describe the *totality* of man and his person in his terrestrial condition. According to this usage of the term, man as "flesh" is a creature of God and therefore good, but also weak and not self-sufficient, especially regarding his own salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Examples of this are: Paul in the weakness of the flesh (Gal. 4, 13); the thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12, 7b); the fact that the flesh passes away, must die (2 Cor. 4, 7-12, 16; 11, 23-33; 4, 11).<sup>34</sup> Another nuance of this usage of the term "flesh" is the Old Testament formula "flesh and blood" (*sarx kai haima*),<sup>35</sup> used to emphasize the

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22. "belebtes Fleisch": O. KUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 506; "... denn wie im Alten Testament schliesst 'Fleisch' das Moment des Lebendigseins ein und bedeutet die verschiedenen, von Gott geschaffenen Lebewesen.": A. SAND, *ibid.*, p. 129.
23. For dead flesh Paul uses the term *kreas* (Rom. 14, 21; 1 Cor. 8, 13): O. KUSS, *ibid.*.
24. *Ibid.*; A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-130.
25. O. KUSS, *ibid.*; A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 131-134.
26. "'Alles Fleisch' (Gn 6, 17; 9, 11; Ps 136, 25; Sir 13, 16 v. 8) bezeichnet alle Lebewesen. Mensch und Tier, gewöhnlich aber die Menschheit. Ferner kann *basar* die Blutsverwandtschaft bezeichnen (Gn 37, 27; 29, 14; 2 Sam 19, 13ft), insbes. aber die Menschen in seiner Vergänglichkeit, Niedrigkeit und Ohnmacht im Gegensatz zum ewigen und allmächtigen Gott (Pss 56, 5; 78, 39; Is 40, 6; bes. Is 31, 3; Jr 17,5).": Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, 335.
27. *Ibid.*
28. "Körper": *Ibid.*
29. "den ganzen Menschen": *Ibid.*
30. "... die leibliche Existenz des Menschen in ihrer — neutral verstanden — 'fleischlichen' Eigenart, bzw. in ihrer Schwäche, Hinfälligkeit, Versuchbarkeit.": O. KUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 514.  
"Der *Sarx*-Begriff... meint... den ganzen Menschen in seiner Hinfälligkeit, Versuchlichkeit und Sündverfallenheit.": R. SCHNACKENBURG, *op. cit.*, p. 212.
31. "... la condition de créature... caractérisant la personne humaine en sa condition terrestre...": X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 113.
32. "*Sarx* schliesst also die geistigen Fähigkeiten nicht nur ein, sondern kann sie gelegentlich fast ausschliesst zum Inhalt haben...": E. SCHWEIZER, *art. cit.*, p. 125.
33. "An einer Reihe von Stellen bezeichnet 'Fleisch' die irdisch-leibliche Existenz der Glaubenden in ihrer Gebrechlichkeit, ihrer Gefährdetheit, ihrem Ausgesetztsein, ihrer Verwundbarkeit und Befleckbarkeit in verschiedener Hinsicht.": O. KUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 511. Cf. X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 114.
34. O. KUSS, *ibid.*, A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131 and 140-141.
35. O. KUSS, *ibid.*, pp. 507f.; A. SAND, *ibid.*, p. 128; Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 336; E. SCHWEIZER, *art. cit.*, pp. 128-129.



nothingness and weakness, the "only-human"-ness of man,<sup>36</sup> for example, in I Corinthians 15, 50 and in Galatians 1, 16.<sup>37</sup>

b) *Sarx* is also used in the Old Testament and by Paul to mean the worldly sphere as opposed to the heavenly, not in the sense of sinful, but in the sense of limited and temporary, determined by the relations of generations.<sup>38</sup> In this usage of the term as well, the *sarx* is in no way negatively judged,<sup>39</sup> but used neutrally, in the sense that salvation does not and can not come from the *sarx*, that the *sarx* is not the decisive element in human existence.<sup>40</sup>

Examples of this usage are: "Israel according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*: I Cor. 10, 18);<sup>41</sup> "our father Abraham according to the flesh" (Rom. 4, 1);<sup>42</sup> "children of the flesh" (Rom. 9, 3);<sup>43</sup> the texts: Galatians 4, 23-29; Romans 1, 14; 9, 8.<sup>44</sup> Another nuance of this usage of the term are the texts which speak of the cares and worries of fleshy existence, meaning the cares and worries of the whole man, not just of the body: unrest, anxieties and troubles (2 Cor. 7, 5); the "tribulations of the flesh" of married people (I Cor. 7, 28); etc.

c) These two usages of the term *sarx* (a and b) are also included when the term is used in regard to the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God became flesh (Rom. 1, 3; 9, 5b),<sup>45</sup> that the believers and Paul himself live "in the flesh" (*en sarki*: Gal. 2, 20;<sup>46</sup> Col. 2, 1), but are not to live "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*: 2 Cor. 10, 3).

### 3. The "specific Pauline usage" of the term *sarx*.<sup>47</sup>

a) *The sinful condition of the "old man"*. Paul knows of these usages of the term *sarx* in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition and also uses *sarx* himself in these

36. "Den ganzen Menschen in seiner 'Bloss-Menschlichkeit', seiner Bedingtheit, Hinfälligkeit meint auch die Formel 'Fleisch und Blut'... 'Fleisch und Blut' bezeichnet den Menschen also, insofern er nicht göttlich und schwach ist." O. KUSS, *ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*; A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-154; Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 336.

38. O. KUSS, *ibid.*, pp. 508-509; X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 114; A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 149-165; E. SCHWEIZER, *art. cit.*, p. 126.

39. A. SAND, *ibid.*, p. 167.

40. "Weil der Mensch einen Leib hat, 'Fleisch' ist, steht er unter den Bedingungen, die mit einem Fleischsdasein in diesem Äon verbunden sind... 'Fleisch' bezeichnet in diesem Sinne (as seen in relation to the sphere of the *pneuma*, Spirit) häufig die irdische Abstammung, insbesondere die Zugehörigkeit zu Israel, die für Paulus die Bezeichnung 'nur Fleisch' gewinnt." O. KUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 508. Cf. the commentary to the text I Corinthians 15, 50 and the section entitled: "Die leibliche Abstammung oder Zugehörigkeit zu Israel": A. SAND, *ibid.*, p. 152-164; E. SCHWEIZER, *art. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

41. O. KUSS, *ibid.*; A. SAND, *ibid.*, p. 160.

42. O. KUSS, *ibid.*; A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

43. O. KUSS, *ibid.*; A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

44. A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 154-159.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-164.

46. "En sarki... zur Bezeichnung der irdischen Verhältnisse, in denen der Mensch lebt... ohne dass darin ein ethisches Werturteil enthalten ist (Gal 2, 20; Phil 1, 22; 2 Kor 10, 3)." Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 337. Cf. A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 165-167.

47. *V. s. ann.* No. 18.

senses, as indicated above. A new element is to be found in other Pauline usages of the term *sarx*, in his use of the word to mean "the sinful condition of man".<sup>48</sup>

By "the sinful condition of man" Paul means firstly: that epoch of salvation history from the first sin of Adam to the coming of Christ, including the origins, the time of the patriarchs and the time of Moses and the Law, which in Pauline theology not only left the Jews under the domination of sin, but also provoked sin and was intended to reveal through its imperfection and weakness the need for the Messiah and the necessity of redemption.<sup>49</sup> The sinful condition of man refers not only to the Jews and their sinfulness in relying on the self-sufficiency of the Law and in their idolatry, but also to the Pagans, whose lack of recognition of the one true God through the natural powers given them, faced the consequences of their sinfulness in the sins of immorality.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, the "sinful condition of man" refers to the post-Christian man who, although given the opportunity and possibility to live in the Spirit, as a result of Christ's work of redemption of all mankind on the cross, nevertheless chooses to remain in a way of life which is characterized by the sinful condition of man from the time of the sin of Adam until the coming of Christ.

b) *Sarx and Spirit*. Paul's point of departure being the fact of the cross and the redemption from the power of sin which has its foothold in the *sarx* of man<sup>51</sup> and the consequent gift of the Spirit to those who believe and are baptized, the *sarx* then takes on the aspect of being an anti-godly attitude in man and an enemy power of the Spirit (*pneuma*).<sup>52</sup>

The "Spirit" (*to pneuma*)<sup>53</sup> in the Pauline Writings means first and foremost that eschatological gift of God in which the baptized believer lives and which also lives in him,<sup>54</sup> determining his whole life under every aspect, especially ethically.<sup>55</sup> Spirit is as

48. "la condition pécheresse de l'homme": X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 113.

49. A. DESCAMPS, "Le péché dans le Nouveau Testament," in Ph. Delhaye, J.C. Didier, P. Anciaux (eds.), *Théologie du péché* (Tournai, 1960), pp. 49-124 (esp. 105-208). "Neben mehr unbetonte Aussagen treten solche, in denen der Begriff 'Fleisch' den Menschen kennzeichnet, dessen Leben und Handeln vor und ohne Christus nur ein uneigentliches, dem Tode verfallenes Leben war.": A. SAND, *op. cit.*, p. 183; cf. p. 181; Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 337.

50. A. DESCAMPS, *ibid.* Cf. the commentaries to the passages Rom. 7, 5. 14. 18; 8, 5. 6. in A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 187-196.

51. Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 337.

52. "Von diesem mannigfach variierten Gebrauch unterscheidet sich recht deutlich jene — als spezifisch 'paulinisch' bezeichnete — Verwendung des Begriffes 'Fleisch' zur Charakterisierung der gottfeindlichen Verfasstheit des Menschen, so wie sie dem 'im Geiste', dem mit dem Pneuma Beschenkten sichtbar wird. . . der Begriff Sarx steht in diesen Zusammenhängen (He speaks here of Rom. 7 and 8 and Gal. 5) immer im Gegensatz zu dem Begriff Pneuma und muss aus diesem Gegensatz begriffen und definiert werden.": O. KUSS, *op. cit.*, pp. 514-515. "Die Sündenmacht wohnt in der sarx (Röm 7, 17ff), die darum geradezu Sündenfleisch genannt wird (Röm 8, 3; vgl. 6, 6 *soma tes hamartias*).": Jos. SCHMID, *ibid.*

53. L. CERFAUX, *Le Chrétien dans la théologie paulinienne* (Paris, 1962), pp. 219-286; J. GUILLET, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-255; H. KLEINKNECHT, F. BAUMGARTEL, W. BIEDER, E. SJÖBERG, E. SCHWEIZER, "pneuma, pneumatikos, pneo, ekpneo, theopneustos," in ThW, vol. VI, pp. 330-453, esp. E. SCHWEIZER, "pneuma: Paulus," pp. 413-436; O. KUSS, *ibid.*, pp. 540-595.

54. O. Kuss terms this relationship "Inexistenz": *Ibid.*, p. 563.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 545.

such the "source and power of the divine wonder, which the believer understands to be himself, and is thereby at the same time the guarantee, indeed the beginning of the coming completion".<sup>56</sup> The *pneuma* is possessed by every baptized believer, it transforms the believer and is the foundation for a new life; it "penetrates, fulfills and moves him",<sup>57</sup> is the norm for a new way of living (*peripatein*) and manifests itself in actions corresponding to the Spirit of God (Gal. 5, 22-23).<sup>58</sup> The baptized believer is not controlled as a marionette by the two "powers", *pneuma* and *sarx*. But, through the power of the Spirit of the new order he is freed from the slavery to sin through the *sarx*, which can now have power over him *only insofar as* he chooses to let sin have power over him through his free choice of a life "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*). On the other hand, in his freedom given him by the Spirit, the Christian now has the possibility to confirm the choice he made upon believing and being baptized into the Spirit of Christ by constantly choosing to live "in" and "according to" the Spirit. The Spirit gives life (*zoe*) now (Rom. 8, 10; 6, 4. 11. 13) and is at the same time a promise of future eternal life (2 Cor. 3, 6), finds its completion in the future (Gal. 6, 8; Rom. 1, 17; 2, 7; 5, 17. 18. 21).<sup>59</sup> The life "in" and "according to" the Spirit of Christ, in the possession of that same Spirit which rose up Christ from the dead (Rom. 8, 11a) represents and is the "new order", as the *sarx* and the life "according to the flesh" is and represents the "old order", the order of the "old (sinful) man", the man of pre-Christian times, a slave to sin through the *sarx* under the Law (*nomos*), unable to free himself from his slavery.<sup>60</sup>

From a comparison with the *pneuma* and life in the Spirit, Paul considers all those human beings before the time of Christ and those who, even after redemption from the power of sin, live without Christ, as if the redemption had never taken place, as determined by and under the power and domination of sin through the *sarx*.<sup>61</sup> *Sarx* becomes an anti-godly power which strives to keep man under its domination and to regain the redeemed, baptized believer into the realm of its domination.<sup>62</sup>

Christ has definitively overcome the flesh and sin on the cross for all of mankind and offers the individual the possibility, in his freed condition from the power of sin and flesh, to believe and be baptized and to order his life according to the Spirit (Rom. 8, 9; Gal. 5, 24). But even the redeemed Christian who believes and has been baptized in Christ and with Christ has crucified his own flesh, has died to sin and arisen to new life in the Spirit, has in his freedom the possibility of once again following the demands, call and will of the flesh, in which he still lives, and to cease to live according to the Spirit by returning to a life according to the flesh.<sup>63</sup>

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 568.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 561-562.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 562-564.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 514-515; Jos. SCHMID, *art. cit.*, col. 338.

62. Cf. the section entitled "Der erlöste Mensch steht noch in der Bedrohung, 'nach dem Fleische' zu leben", on the texts Gal. 5, 13. 16. 17. 19. 24; 6, 8 in A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-217. Cf. O. KUSS, *ibid.*, pp. 515-516.

63. O. KUSS, *ibid.*, p. 518; A. SAND, *ibid.*, pp. 202-208.

c) *To live "according to the flesh" (kata sarka)*. To live "according to the flesh" means first of all to place one's total confidence in the *sarx*, in the simply human. The sinfulness of this usage of the term "flesh" lies not in the bodily and spiritual-intellectual functions of the *sarx*, which are in themselves neutral, but in placing one's total confidence, dependence and life's meaning in the strictly human side of human life.<sup>64</sup> The neutral area and region of the *sarx*, which can well be used positively for good in union with the power of the Spirit, becomes a norm of action and a way of life, to the point where man becomes a criterion to himself. Man judges himself and his actions exclusively by the norm of the *sarx*, that is, according to the capacities of human, terrestrial, physical and spiritual-intellectual powers. To live *kata sarka* or to "walk in the flesh" (*en sarki peripatein*) "means simply: to exist on the earth, in the corporality of man".<sup>65</sup> When man directs his thoughts exclusively to the human and measures and judges all things, even Christ, by the standards of human nature, he lives *kata sarka* and ignores the will of God for himself.

The life *kata sarka* is not to be seen in a single action or in a series of individual sins and decisions but, seen in the light of the Spirit and the redemption of mankind by Christ and the consequent possibility for the individual to make the decision to live either according to the Spirit of God or according to the flesh, is to be considered a decision which determines the whole tenor and direction of one's life.<sup>66</sup> Confronted with the fact of the redemption of mankind by Christ, the individual must decide according to which criterion he is to order his life: according to the Spirit through faith and baptism into new life (Rom. 8, 4; 8, 12, 13),<sup>67</sup> or according to the simply human and, in light of the confrontation with the possibility of life in the Spirit, according to the anti-godly and anti-Christian *sarx*. This is the fundamental decision for life, which must be constantly renewed in everyday living and upon which depend all other individual decisions.<sup>68</sup>

d) *To live or walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit*. The difference in these two manners of living or walking (*peripatein*) either according to the old order, as the old man in Old Testament times did, according to the old Adam, or according to the new order, introduced by Christ, according to the "new man",

64. "La chair — cette condition de créature, en laquelle l'homme a mis sa confiance — finit par caractériser un monde où règne l'esprit du mal." X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *art. cit.*, col. 115. Cf. A. DESCAMPS, *art. cit.*, p. 107; E. SCHWEIZER, "sarx," p. 130.

65. "En sarki peripatein heisst einfach: auf Erden, in der Leiblichkeit eines Menschen existieren." : E. SCHWEIZER, *ibid.* Cf. the section entitled "Das Leben 'nach dem Fleische'" in A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–182. Sand comments on the text 1 Cor. 3, 3b: "V. 3b interpretiert in dem Sinne, dass 'fleischlich sein' gleichbedeutend ist mit *kata anthron peripatein*. Das Verstehen, Begreifen und Beurteilen der Korinther war nach Art von Menschen, die 'nur' Menschen sind, die ganz zu dieser Welt, zu diesem Äon gehören... Sie lebten 'dem Fleische nach', waren 'nur Menschen', die ihre weltliche Existenz zur Norm ihres Denkens und Handelns machten." : *Ibid.*, p. 174.

66. It is a "bewusste, geistige Ausrichtung des Lebens auf die rein irdische Sphäre" : E. SCHWEIZER, *ibid.*, p. 131.

67. A. SAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 202–208.

68. "... eine neue Seite der paulinischen Sicht... : die Entscheidung, sein Leben auf die *sarx* oder auf den Herrn, seine Verheissung und seinen Geist auszurichten, ist offenbar nicht nur eine momentane Einzelentscheidung, die der freien Wahl unterliegt, sondern eine grundsätzliche, die Gesamtheit eines Lebens bestimmende. Das zeigt sich auch R 8, 4, 12f, wo die Neuheit des Lebens als Absage an das *peripatein* oder *zen kata sarka* beschrieben ist." : E. SCHWEIZER, "sarx," p. 131.

redeemed, believing and baptized in Christ according to the Spirit of Christ, can best be seen in a series of texts taken from the Epistle to the Galatians.

In Galatians 5, 13 Paul warns the Galatians not to misuse their new freedom, in choosing to live "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*) but to serve each other in love. "Flesh" here refers to "the old sinful man"<sup>69</sup> of the old order, the former eon, in his self-righteousness regarding the Law, as compared to the demands of the New Law to serve and love one's neighbor.<sup>70</sup>

In Galatians 5, 17 Paul tells his readers to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, which means: not to fulfill, not to live in the behavior of sinful man.<sup>71</sup> "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." Paul emphasizes that living according to the Spirit or according to the flesh are two mutually exclusive ways of life, that the Christian who returns to a life *kata sarka* returns to the state of man before the coming of Christ.<sup>72</sup>

In Galatians 5, 19 Paul speaks of the "works of the flesh" (*ta erga tes sarkos*). Paul's catalogues of sins and vices are seen as results of the interior attitude of the whole man, resulting from his constant decision to live "according to the flesh", to live as the sinful man of pre-Christian times. He who does the "works of the flesh" lives as though Christ had not come. And he who with the knowledge of Christ's work of salvation, as a Christian, does the "works of the flesh" is in great danger of falling back into the sinful state of pre-Christian man... of his own free will.<sup>73</sup>

In Galatians 5, 24 Paul reminds believers that, belonging to Jesus, they "have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires". Here again, "flesh" refers to the old man, the man without the Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

"For he who sows in the flesh, from the flesh also will reap corruption. But he who sows in the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6, 8)<sup>75</sup>

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69. "der alte sündige Mensch": A. SAND, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

70. "Sarx kennzeichnet demnach den ganzen Menschen, der unter dem Gesetze steht... Die sarx ist kein 'metaphysisches Prinzip', keine 'Sphäre', in der sich der Mensch bewegt, sondern ist umfassende Bezeichnung der sündigen Existenz des der Sünde versklavten Menschen.": *Ibid.*, p. 210.

71. "Das 'Begehren, Verlangen' wird durch den Gen. *sarkos* negativ gewertet. Paulus meint das umfassende Verhalten des sündigen Menschen, der sich gegen das Pneuma und für die Sünde und den Tod entscheidet... Vielmehr spricht Paulus von dem ganzen Menschen, der jetzt in die Freiheit von Sünde und Tod versetzt ist, den er aber warnt vor der 'Möglichkeit', diese Freiheit zu missbrauchen und wieder der Herrschaft der Sünde zu verfallen... Erst wenn der Glaubende immer 'im Pneuma' wandelt und sich in seinem Sein vom Pneuma bestimmen lässt kann er das Begehren des 'Fleisches', des alten sündigen Menschen überwinden.": *Ibid.*, p. 211.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

73. According to Sand, this text concerns not so much the individual sins and vices as it does: "den Menschen... der — obwohl er 'im Pneuma wandelt' — noch weltlichen Versuchungen ausgeliefert ist, der bedroht ist, die Macht der Sünde in sich wieder aufleben zu lassen. Die Werke des 'Fleisches' sind demnach als Werke des alten, sündigen Menschen zu verstehen, dessen also, der nur 'Fleisch' ist, sündiger Mensch.": *Ibid.*, p. 214.

74. "'Fleisch' bezeichnet also nicht den natürlichen Menschen, noch weniger einen Teil des Menschen, sondern das 'Fleisch' ist der Mensch ohne das Pneuma, der Mensch in seiner gegen Gott gerichteten Existenz.": *Ibid.*, p. 215.

75. A. Sand explains: "Das 'Fleisch' kennzeichnet also das Sein und Verhalten eines Menschen, dessen Sinnen Feindschaft gegen Gott ist (Röm 8, 7), dessen 'Säen' ein Wandel auf den Tod hin, auf das (ewige) Verderben hin ist.": *Ibid.*, p. 216.

## D. SARX AND SIN: SUMMARY

Paul uses the term *sarx* in many neutral ways, in many Old Testament usages of the term. The term begins to take on a negative nuance when used to describe "this age", seen in relation to the promise of the new age, begun with the redemption and the life in the Spirit. Fully in the sense of Old Testament usages, the *sarx* is not sinful in itself, when used as a description of human existence, of the human condition. But sin enters in when man builds his life exclusively upon the *sarx*, upon the simply human, on human wisdom, human capacities, and places his total confidence and trust in the earthly, the humanly possible, at the same time forgetting God and his promises.

If the *sarx* as the norm for human life in the age before Christ's coming and work of salvation already begins to take on negative character, the sinfulness of living "according to the flesh" after Christ's coming and redemption becomes inexcusable. Man and mankind of the pre-Christian era had no choice, were slaves to the power of sin through the foothold of sin in man in his *sarx*, manifested in man's spiritual powers in a life *kata sarka* in regard to the Law, and manifested in man's bodily functions by a life *kata sarka* in the immorality of the Pagans. The man who lives in the new era since Christ's coming and redemption is confronted with the fact of the redemptive, salvific work of Christ and with the consequent freedom from the slavery to the power of sin and with the possibility now to direct and order his life according to the Spirit. He is, therefore, confronted with the decision to accept the redemption of Christ, to believe and be baptized and to live in the hope of the promises of God, in the Spirit, or to continue to live under the power of sin in a freely chosen life *kata sarka*.

The man who since the coming of Christ lives "according to the flesh" is fully responsible for his choice. In choosing to live according to the *sarx*, he directs his entire life according to the criterion of the *sarx* and remains enslaved under the power of sin. In doing this, he lives as pre-Christian man lived, but as a result of his own free decision and with the responsibility for his choice. In effect, this choice to remain in a life *kata sarka* is a denial of the existence, life and work of salvation of Christ, of his death for all on the cross and of his victory over sin and the promise and possibility of new life in the Spirit through faith and baptism. In effect, it is the great sin of *superbia* of the Old Testament in a graver form. It is the *denial of man's creatureliness*, of his dependence on God, as well as the desire for complete human independence from God and reliance on self in a believed self-sufficiency, in New Testament times carried to the point of the *denial of man's need for redemption* and of the fact of redemption through Christ. It is, finally, the *denial and rejection of Christ as the Messiah and Son of God* and, in the end, the denial of the existence of God himself. For, in making man and the human the principal and total criterion of life, man makes himself independent and subject to no one but himself, makes himself his own criterion, makes himself to God. And this is the capital sin according to Saint Paul: the non-recognition or refusal to recognize the true God, in the Old Testament, concretely, in the sin of idolatry, in the New Testament, in the refusal of the Messiah.<sup>76</sup>

76. A. DESCAMPS, *art. cit.*, pp. 106-107.