

In defense of sin

Joshua J. McElwee | Dec. 10, 2009 NCR Today

On Tuesday a friend and I had a discussion about original sin. Using the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which proclaims that the Virgin Mary was graced at the very first moment of her life with redemption from original sin, my friend proposed a thought experiment: What if, from that same moment, all of humanity was graced with a restoration to life without the stain of original sin?

The implications of such a notion are immense and beyond the limits of my knowledge to be able to fully consider. But the idea has spurred some thoughts for me.

My friend considered his experiment to allow for everyone to participate more fully in salvation history. If the Immaculate Conception somehow applies to all, then all are invited to be active in enjoying grace together in God's glory.

The experiment also fundamentally changes our understanding of Christ's death and resurrection. If, from the moment of Mary's conception we have all been saved from our race's first sin, then Christ's passion must no longer deal with that sin.

Rather, it seems Christ death would be more of a response to our ability to fall away from the grace we've already received. His death would be the result of our deliberate choice to reject grace and "go to the dark side" even though we've been blessed with such light and beauty.

In some sense it would mean our theology is backwards. In our current paradigm we have the choice to accept the grace of redemption. If we fail we can say that it's not completely our fault - it has something to do with the fact that we're fallen.

In such a new paradigm we would have the choice to reject the grace we've already received. There would be no fall-back plan, no scapegoat. The world we live in would be ours, completely. All injustices would stem from our deliberate rejection of a blessed life we've already received.

Such a world scares me to no end. It means the injustices we see and experience everyday, big and small, of are our own choosing.

I think I prefer the scapegoat.