In our day of quick changes, ideas are often outmoded more quickly than the traditional Easter bonnet. Amid this welter of conflicting and rapidly changing sets of ideas, Christianity attempts to stand firmly as it proclaims an unchanging truth, that man is a sinner and needs salvation. Surprisingly enough, this idea seems again to be in vogue. It has even been recognized by Bennett Cerf and included in his book entitled, *Out On A Limerick*. He offers this pithy summary of that ancient event, The Fall, and its significance and meaning for modern man.

God's plan made a hopeful beginning
But Man spoiled his chances by sinning.
We trust that the story
Will end in God's glory
But, at present, the other side's winning.¹

The recognition of the fact that "the other side's winning" has perhaps contributed more to the resurgence of the idea of original sin than any theological argument advanced by important theologians. The resurgence and "popularity" of original sin stem largely from the bitter reaction of the theological and sociological liberal when they learned that education was not the means of salvation. In an attempt to understand why mankind should persist in brutality when it knew better, the discarded idea of original sin was picked off the trash heap, dusted off a bit, and after a bit of rejuvenation put back to work. Once again the universality of sin and evil was reasserted and various solutions to the problem of evil were posed. It is our purpose to examine the approaches of various significant contemporary writers outside the strictly theological field, and to contrast these with the solution offered by Christianity.

"Whether one is ready to acknowledge the homelessness of man as a fact of his being or not, he must acknowledge that there is no theme in literature so universal as that of a Fall (or a disinheritance) and of a Journey. Tragedy, the noblest form of drama and the most universal, is the symphony in a minor key, of man's fall; epic poetry, the noblest form of verse, is most frequently concerned with a symbolic journey.

Almost every folklore has its dim memory of some kind of existence better than the present one, and of having been, in the words of Cardinal Newman, ‘implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity.’  

The theme of evil comes out very strongly in the writing of John Steinbeck. He writes as a naturalist and realist who places man on an animal level, greatly emphasizing his physical functions. To present his idea of evil, I have limited myself to his short novel, The Pearl. The plot is the story of a poor Mexican family which finds a valuable pearl that involves them in all manner of evil. The themes and moods of the book are developed by the use of songs.

In these songs, which are used as symbols, we see a constant struggle between the "Song of the Family," which symbolizes goodness and the "Song of Evil," which gradually gains more power. At first the "Song of the Pearl" is beautiful and supplements the "Song of the Family," but it becomes twisted and corrupted and a part of the "Song of Evil."

Steinbeck asserts that man has a basically evil nature. All things, even such apparently perfect things as the beautiful pearl, become cankerous and evil when used by man. The battle between good and evil will always be fought with good constantly losing ground because of the evil nature of man. Steinbeck paints man as a beast, but retains a wistful element in his naturalism. There is the hope that somehow man will overcome this evil, but no means of overcoming it is broached. In common with Christianity he recognizes the sinful plight of man, but unlike Christianity, he offers no savior or other means of salvation.

Dreiser is another author who sees vividly the plight of modern man, but offers no means of salvation. He sees life as meaningless and individuals as cogs in a machine. Because he poses the problems and does not supply the answers, he has often been rejected by the orthodox. After reading Dreiser's masterpiece, An American Tragedy, one pious young girl described it as "not morally uplifting," and was therefore disappointed. She failed to recognize that such was Dreiser's purpose. Dreiser rejects Christianity's answer to evil in the embarrassment which Clyde Griffith, the main character in An American Tragedy, feels for his street evangelist parents. As quickly as possible he leaves them and goes to work in his uncle's mill, where he becomes involved with a girl. After she becomes pregnant, he murders her because his relationship with her now endangers his relationship with a socialite debutante who will help him to rise socially. The crime is depicted as against society rather than God, and as amoral rather than immoral. There is no ray of hope and no chance that man will resolve his struggle with all engulfing evil.

The book is not morally uplifting because Dreiser cannot discern a force capable of moral uplifting.

Another prominent contemporary writer, Ernest Hemingway, also adopts a type of naturalism where people are the pawns of circumstance. He seems to go a half step farther than the other naturalists in offering nature as a healing force, a kind of balm for the soul and a semi-salvation.

We have mentioned the theological and sociological liberal and the bitter disillusionment of both. The ideology of the literary romantic was very similar to this, and his disillusionment was equally great. This is particularly true in our own South where, as J. B. Priestley writes, romanticism has become overripe and has gone rotten. It is from this South that William Faulkner writes. Priestley, however, has not completely abandoned his own optimism. He hesitates to admit that all of our society is symbolized in Faulkner, but prefers to think of the sordid picture of life which Faulkner draws as strictly a local situation. But Randall Stewart, in his book, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine*, has this to say regarding Faulkner and the people who provincialize him:

Faulkner is still, I fear, a much misunderstood author. He is still read by some as a sociologist. But he is not a sociologist at all. He is, rather, a great imaginative, symbolical writer, a moral allegorist. We do not read Faulkner to learn about Mississippi in a sociological sense, anymore than we read Hawthorne to learn about Massachusetts, or Melville to learn about maritime practices, or Shakespeare to discover economic and social conditions in sixteenth century England. Let not the Mississippians suppose that Faulkner is writing about them in an exclusive sense, and let not the New Englanders or the Middle Westerners or the Californians, even, suppose that he is not writing about them, because he is. Faulkner is not reporting on "conditions;" he is reporting on the human condition. He is reporting on Original Sin, which is — there are good reasons to believe — in widest commonalty spread.

Faulkner is an elemental writer, like Melville and Shakespeare. He writes in his own powerful idiom; he is not concerned with surface pleasantries; he is not a "polite" author; he is concerned with profundities; he is concerned with the soul of man laid bare. To the prudish objection which one critic has made to *The Sound and the Fury*, that it is about ugly people in an ugly land, the answer might well be, so is *King Lear*. The *London Times Literary Supplement* (in that historic number devoted to American writing today) had this to say about Faulkner: Faulkner is all true — he is poetically the

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most accurate man alive; he has looked straight into the heart of the matter, and got it down for good. The matter which he has looked straight into the heart of, we may be sure, is not peculiar to Mississippi. It is peculiar only to the human race.

Faulkner said in the Stockholm speech, I believe that man will prevail. A writer for one of the magazines professed to be puzzled by the word *prevail*, and decided that it is vague and meaningless. I would suggest, however, that it might be helpful to look up the word in Cruden’s *Concordance* to the Bible, and then read the passages (there are sixty-five) in which it occurs. In general, *prevail* occurs in contexts where a victory is won with God’s help. *Prevail*, as Faulkner uses it, has nothing to do with modern technology. It is a Biblical word, and has a religious connotation.4

Stewart goes on to describe Faulkner as one of the most profoundly Christian writers in our time. Everywhere in his writings we have the basic premise of original sin and man’s conflict. "Man in Faulkner is a heroic, tragic figure. He may on occasion rise to spiritual greatness. The greatness is measured by the distance between the heights he attains and the depths to which he descends, or, but for the grace of God, might have descended."5 Here, then, we have a class of modern writers of which Faulkner is but a representative, one which can be classified as neo-Calvinistic. They not only sense man’s plight, but see the need of God’s assistance.

In their search for a meaning in life and in death, not all modern writers have found God. Many of them try desperately, but are unable. Albert Camus has been engaged in just such a vain quest for God. He wants something to cling to. “After abandoning the philosophy of absurdity, he sought to discover a foundation on which he could build a secure body of humanistic values. For he had never been a thorough-going nihilist. Though he was aware of the nothingness that hems man in, he nevertheless insisted that each individual owes an obligation to his fellow-man, that the human race is knitted together by the community born of suffering and the knowledge that death comes to all. *The Fall* [a novel by Camus] attempts, within the framework of fiction, to affirm those values that men must perforce live by if their life is to have any meaning at all. Thus we get the paradoxical spectacle of a nihilist who proclaims values that are essentially religious in spirit. Like the Christian mystics of the past, Camus recognized the pervasiveness of evil; he por-


trayed with compelling imaginative insight the absolutism of the ego, the satanic lure of selfishness, the universality of guilt."

In all his writing he continually reasserts the universality of guilt. The only salvation he can see is that which comes in avoiding judgment. His "religion" is created on the basis of the universality of guilt. Every man, even Christ, is guilty. Camus is a curious paradox in that he repudiates dogmatic Christianity and yet says many things which are re-assertions of Christianity. His novel entitled, The Fall, states "What Christianity long ago proclaimed; namely, that we are members of one another and that we must all bear the guilt for the sins and crimes of the collectivity."

"The key terms Camus employs in his philosophical essays and in his novels are different from those that are part of the theological debate, yet he is one with theologians in his concern with what are fundamentally religious problems; the absence of God, the relationship of a God who is all-powerful and all-knowing to the evil and the suffering that exist on earth, the contrast between the routine and boredom of life and the crisis of being lost and alone and doomed that the Existentialist hero experiences, the disruption of familiar, human reality by the knowledge of the inevitability and imminence of death, the search for the authentic life on his journey to the end of night."

There is yet one more author whom we must consider, D. H. Lawrence. Randall Stewart labels him a "pagan Puritan." I assume he arrives at this label by considering Lawrence's Puritan approach to man's damned or hopeless condition and his pagan gospel of salvation. Lawrence views sex as the power which can either save or destroy mankind. His ideal is lovers who are completely independent. An eminent professor of literature has described Lady Chatterley as a tract rather than a novel. He sees it as preaching the gospel that physical love-making tests and proves the capacity of the soul. Even if we were to grant, as Lawrence suggests, that physical love-making at its best may well redeem and unify the personality and can either be a symbol of spiritual health or a symbol of corruption, this is hardly a sufficient gospel.

Yet, strangely enough, the gospel which proclaims sex as the power unto salvation comes very close to the solution offered by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Creation and Fall. He sees unrestrained sex as an insane acceleration of the fall and the means one person uses to destroy another. Although he does not explicitly state it, there seems to be a hint that sex,

7Ibid., p. 220.
8Ibid., p. 222.
which can be such a lethal force, may also be beneficial. While Lawrence emphasizes the positive benefits of sex, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the negative.

However, unlike Lawrence, Bonhoeffer does not limit himself to this, but once again asserts Christianity's basic doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is through Christ alone that as Bonhoeffer writes,

He [God] unlocks again the door
Of paradise today:
The angel guards the gate no more,
To God our thanks we pay.⁹

This, it seems to me, must be our message in the world today. We have seen that there is a recognition of original sin among our contemporaries. But a recognition of original sin alone is insufficient and fails to create a meaningful religion. We cannot make a religion out of universal guilt, as Camus suggests we do. The recognition of original sin must always be accompanied by a means of salvation. As Christians, our one answer to the quest for a means of salvation must be Jesus Christ and his atoning death on the cross. But simply to parrot these pious phrases is not enough. Modern man has rejected dogmatic orthodoxy because it has not spoken to his problems. The Christian message must be made relevant. As the writer of a new book on homiletics puts it so vividly, far too often the Church has scratched were the people don't itch. We, as men who are to be Christian preachers in the twentieth century, face the great challenge of filling the spiritual vacuum which arises where there is a recognition of universal guilt, original sin, or perpetual evil, and no doctrine of salvation. We must make meaningful the cross of Jesus Christ and its pardoning and saving power. We must renew the message taught in Genesis and culminated on Calvary, that God comes to man and therein is salvation.