Words from the second chapter of Genesis: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...'"

You know the outcome of this story. Thanks to the wiles of the serpent, Lady Eve plucked some fruit from the forbidden tree, enticed her husband to take a bite too, and things haven't been the same since. There is a charming quality to this old story.

But you and I who live in the twentieth century aren't much impressed by charming stories. We have too many problems on our minds to give time to fancy. Many of us are finding it increasingly difficult to make sense out of the daily world in which we live. Our society is shaking at the foundations; juvenile crime and the spread of alcoholism are evidence of this. And to top it all off, a mushroom cloud seems to be looming on our horizon.

Quite understandably, we desire fact, not fancy. We have little patience with bed-time stories, even religious bed-time stories. We want the truth. Yet when we by-pass the Adam and Eve story, we unknowingly by-pass truth, a radical kind of truth for which our world cries. Here we have a story which is more than a story. It is the clue for understanding the world of the twentieth century, the world in which we lead our daily lives.

Let us be clear on this matter: the Adam and Eve story is a story. It is not a historical record of two human beings who lived once upon a time in a place called Eden. The writer of the story never meant it to be so. He recorded the story of Adam and Eve in the way in which he did in order to write a drama of the whole human race, not a historical description of two particular people.

The word Adam is the Hebrew word for "man." The word Eve is the Hebrew word for "mother of the living." The use of these names is not a coincidence. The writer chose these names because he wanted to write about man -- as he is in all times and all places. The story of Adam and Eve is in fact the drama of man. It is the drama of each one of us, living today, in the twentieth century. And as we look at this drama, it naturally divides itself into three acts.

I.

Act One depicts God's action on man's behalf. Man participates in Act One, but only as he is related to God's action. You and I participate in Act One, as we are related to God's action.

Says the writer of the story, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden..." You and I are put in the garden in the sense that we are creatures of God. He has put us here, where we are; we are not here by chance. The means by which God has accomplished this action are hidden to us. But we know that God has put us where we are. We are His creatures.

But more than this, we are creatures with special responsibilities. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden... to till it and keep it." God has delegated specific responsibilities to us. We are to take care of His creation, tilling it and keeping it. This means that we are to rear our children in love and live in wholesome peace with our brothers, we are to fashion our steel into plowshares and use our legs to move here and there maintaining justice and order. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden... to till it and keep it."

God's action in putting us in His garden also includes His gift of freedom. This is expressed in the poetic understanding that God put man over creation. God says to Adam: "you may freely eat of every tree in the garden." The trees

of the garden represent the environment in which man lives. A basic fact of this environment is the fact of freedom.

You and I are more than rocks or trees; they cannot move. We are more than insects or animals in the field; they are bound to predetermined patterns of life. As the philosopher Spinoza once said, you really can't blame a tiger for eating people! Can you? Tigers and the rest of the animals are not free beings. A tiger cannot decide to change his diet because it might be causing hardships to others. Man can do just that. You and I are free. God has given us freedom, a freedom to order our lives as we see fit.

But the freedom which you and I have been given is not an absolute freedom. Only God enjoys absolute freedom. Only He who is Creator is completely self-sufficient. Only God exists without depending on anyone or anything else. God alone is absolutely free.

What God gives to man the creature, then, is a dependent freedom. The whole of our lives is based on this relationship of dependence. For our food, water, and air we must depend on the constant giving of the Creator. For our very being we must depend on God's continued support. If God were to withdraw from us and our world, we would disappear into nothing, much as a card-house tumbles when the table is removed.

You and I enjoy freedom, to be sure. This sets us over the whole of creation. But ours is a dependent freedom, a creaturely freedom, granted to us as a gift by God the Creator.

This is the significance of the command to Adam: you may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. The words "good and evil" are used to denote the thought of totality. By the phrase, "the knowledge of good and evil," the writer means the totality of all possible knowledge — or absolute freedom. Only God has this. For this reason man is commanded to keep to the realm of his own creaturely freedom. Otherwise the way would be open for man to claim that somehow he is Lord and Creator. "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." "You may freely move throughout the whole of creation, but as you go about, you shall not attempt to go beyond your dependent, creaturely freedom."

Act One ends with the command by God. The main theme has been God's action on man's behalf. God acts to create us and to put us where we are. He gives us definite responsibilities and he sets us over the whole of creation by giving us freedom, a freedom which is rooted in dependence on Him.

II.

Whereas God is the central figure in Act One of the drama of man, man himself moves to the center of attention in Act Two. In Act Two the writer describes man's response to God's action. We see how each one of us behaves in response to God's giving.

No sooner does man move to the center of the stage than the plot takes a sudden twist. Adam and Eve decide against leading lives of dependence on God. Instead of using their freedom to lead responsible creaturely lives as God had intended, they use their freedom to reject their dependence on God. They try to become like the Creator, completely self-sufficient, Lord of all. They reach out for the forbidden fruit. They try to go beyond the limits of their dependent freedom. This story has repeated itself with a monotonous regularity throughout human history. We know the big names, Alexander, Napoleon, Hitler. But we forget that the little names have played their part well also.

Think of the years at the beginning of our own century in this country. Here a whole society played the role of Adam and Eve. America at the turn of the century was a place where material prosperity fell like a long-awaited thunderstorm. At the same time the new sciences came into their own, showing promises of unlimited growth. Man was glorified as he had rarely been glorified before. What was left of the praise-full stance of the Pilgrim fathers was lost. The Lord God was deliberately pushed out of the picture. Man became Lord — or so he thought. He concluded that he was absolutely free, that he was absolutely independent. One poet of the time put this question about man:

> ...who shall place
> A limit to the giant's untrained strength
> Or curb his swiftness in the forward race?

The poet expected the resounding answer, "No one!" For man had asserted himself. Man had claimed independence from God. He had claimed absolute freedom.

But we know the answer to the poet's question much better than he ever did. We know what happens in the drama of man when he rejects his dependence on God. Adam and Eve transgress their dependent freedom. They try to become self-sufficient like God. And what happens in the drama is familiar to all. Contrary to what they expect, Adam and Eve do not become self-sufficient like the Creator, but they fall. By rejecting their dependence on God, they themselves are rejected. They are thrust out of the garden.

Consider the typical Adam of the late 19th century in America. He asserted his self-sufficiency. He rejected his dependence on God. He made himself Lord -- at least in his own mind. And what happened? The very age which spoke of man's "swiftness in the forward race" ran so fast that it fell flat on its face in the crash of 1929.

As it works itself out through the course of history, the drama of man becomes a continually recurring crash. Man asserts his self-sufficiency against God and as a result he finds himself excluded from the garden. God's creation is still all around him, but all man can see is a wilderness.

A few summers ago I had the good fortune of being able to visit some of our National Parks in the far West. In one of them a planned hike of my party had to be canceled. The guide told us it was because the trail had to be kept open for a rescue party. It seems that one young man had tried to venture out on a glacier by himself, even though he had been warned against doing so. Fortunately he was not killed; and the crevasse into which he fell was accesible to a rescue party.

So it's been in the history of mankind. For his own good man has been warned not to venture out beyond the limits of his dependent freedom. But in arrogance he has not heeded the warning. He has constantly tried to assert his Lordship. And contrary to his expectations, he has not become Lord of all, but he has fallen.

This is the thought which lies behind the notion of Original Sin. Original Sin is not a sexual transgression. The writer of Genesis made it clear that his interest was not in depicting sexual transgression, but rather arrogance on the part of man. Nor is Original Sin a once-upon-a-time occurence. It is not something committed by two people early in the world's history.

You and I are engulfed by Original Sin just as much as any man at the end of the 19th century, or just as much as any man living in an early time in the world's history. We too venture out arrogantly seeking self-sufficiency. Our whole society is oriented about this quest. The man who thinks for himself has become a kind of patron saint. We don't want to be dependent on anyone,

least of all God. We don't want to recognize God as Lord. We want to be lord. All most people want from the Lord God is an occasional dose of peace of mind. Then they put Him back into the medicine cabinet until they get new headaches. We are Americans. We are self-sufficient -- or so we think.

The story of Adam is the drama of man. Again and again in history we see the same response by man to God's action on his behalf. Instead of using his freedom to lead a responsible creaturely life, man uses his freedom to try to rob God of His throne. He tries to set himself up in God's place.

III.

In Act Three things do not get better as we might hope, they get worse. Act Three features the results of man's arrogance. Here we see displayed before our eyes just what man's self-assertion does to his world.

"Where are you?" God says to man. Arrogant man now appears like an animal running for cover. The woman blames her transgression on the serpent. The man blames his transgression on the woman. They refuse to accept responsibility for their arrogance. The woman is then condemned to great pain in childbirth. The man is condemned to burdensome labor all the days of his life. This is a poetic way of depicting the loss of wholesome peace in the world. This is a profound way of describing man's alienation from His Creator, from his fellow man, and from the rest of creation.

This becomes clear when the plot takes its ugliest twist. After Adam and Eve bring sons into the world, their transgression -- and ours -- is revealed for what it is. The story of Cain and Able also belongs to the drama of man. This is a fact which once and for all removes the Genesis story from the catagory of charming fancy.

Cain kills Able. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he asks. Here we see the results of Original Sin and we learn why the world is as it is. When you reject your dependence on God, you cannot help but find it easy to reject your creaturely responsibility also -- as Cain did. You no longer live in wholesome peace with your brother. You find it a matter of course affair to be completely indifferent about your brother's well-being. You become like the tiger who only gives heed to his own diet.

We should remember that the story of Cain is our story too. For we too find it a matter of course affair to be completely indifferent about the well-being of our brothers. Hitler was not the only one in the second World War who used a policy of bombing civilians. Our own noble country decided that military targets were not enough, that it would be good to slaughter thousands of civilians. When we were through with Europe, we turned our greatest fury on the Japanese. And however people might try to rationalize the bomb, the fact remains that we put thousands and thousands of our brothers to the nuclear torch.

Listen to the sophisticated words of twentieth century man as they come from the lips of the author Sommerset Maughan: "I am not my brother's keeper. I can-bring myself to judge my fellows. I am content to observe them." So we send sociologists into the stinking slums to observe our brothers living there like cattle -- and then we oppose slum clearance as being, "fiscally unrealistic." The drama of man includes the story of Cain. Your life story and my life story also includes the story of Cain.

We have now reached what is apparently the end of the drama. At least now we are a little better prepared to understand the world in which we live. We see that the world is a frigid wilderness because of man's own continued arrogance.

You and I are Adam. You and I are also Cain.

But is there no hope? Are we trapped in the crevasse of our sin forever? Or is there some rescue party on the way? Is it possible that soon a rope will be thrown to us for our salvation?

It is not so simple. Indeed it is quite different. We need not wait for our salvation, our salvation is already here. The rescuing party has already come! Jesus Christ has come into the world to save fallen men. He came into the crevasse with us. In doing so He gave His life for us. God raised Him up and now He is with us and with the whole world. He is the hope of the world.

But the drama of man has yet to be concluded. One part of Adam's sons will turn to Him who brings the salvation. The other part will reject Him. In Christ some will lead lives of wholesome peace, loving their brothers. Apart from Christ the rest will continue in their arrogance, not knowing that they have rejected their only hope.

Which part will you choose?