

Here I intend to interact with five chapters [134 pages] of Robert Pyne's *Humanity & Sin: The Creation, Fall, and Redemption of Humanity*. Whereas the first half of this book – dealing with man's origins and nature – was often a survey of evangelical thought for each issue, the second half – dealing with man's sinfulness – was a straight forward teaching of the evangelical position on sin and the fall. Characteristically, Pyne did explore implications of the teaching, including the right responses to our own sinfulness through confession, compassion, faithfulness, prayer, and acceptance of the gospel for salvation [188-191].

There were several passages that interested me. Pyne's concluding chapter provided an overview of God's plan for deliverance throughout history [245-271], which was a useful refresher and summary. Within that chapter, Pyne referred to Ezekiel when discussing God's glory departing from Israel during the exile [252], which I knew had happened but for which I could not have provided a biblical reference. Pyne's chapter about how our sinfulness is manifested in society [215-244] was interesting, especially in considering how smaller segments of that society also act out the sinfulness. Characteristically, Pyne did not point fingers, but his illustrations did readily bring to mind various governments, political action committees, or other organizations.

I ran into a couple of issues I could not resolve satisfactorily. Pyne points out that Asaph and Peter both came to realize that the problem of injustice would be resolved in God's time, and that his waiting is an act of mercy [197], for he is patient, “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet.3:9) [196]. I don't understand that. If God was waiting within one generation's lifetime, then it would make sense to me. As my life goes on, I have the opportunity not only to embrace the gospel myself, but to share it with all whom I meet. But if God waits over two thousand years, then – sure more people accept the gospel – but how many more are born and reach death without accepting! It seems to me it would have been more merciful to end things before those people were born, particularly since God knows ahead of time that they will not accept the gospel.

This is related to my struggle with the concept of predestination. I came to accept that doctrine because omniscience makes it moot: logically, if God knows ahead of time whether a person to be born will accept Christ, and God creates that person regardless, then it is the same as if he predestined it. This issue takes on more poignancy when considering loved ones who do not believe. Why would God create a person whom he knew would not accept Christ? This question, as I say, is logically equivalent to asking why God would predestine someone to go to Hell. I struggle with that.

I liked Pyne's description of sin as “unfaith,” “whenever we attempt to solve our problems or satisfy our desires apart from God's directives (Num. 20:12)” [140]. I agree that this is an act of pride that not only follows Satan's original sin, but also makes us “a part of Satan's cosmic mutiny against the creator...” [141-142]. I liked Pyne's discussion of the contrast between humble contentment with God's provision and prideful coveting, and that we must realize this comes from within [141-146]. I also agreed that our attempts at self-justification will lead to rationalization of what we have done [147-150].

I thought Pyne was especially insightful in seeing this prideful self justification [both self-righteousness and defensiveness] in the calls for tolerance that are not about tolerance but about defending self-determinism [149]. I got excited when Pyne carried the argument to its end, that our acts of self-justification hurt others by eventually leading to denial of the gospel, denial of the life of love, and thus denial of hope [152], all of which sounds an awful lot like what Satan would want.

I understood some of the consequences of sin. I understand that we are all born outside of the garden, and that this means we will have difficulties that were not evident before the Fall [156-160]. I understand that because we are born outside of the garden, we are cut off from the tree of life, and so we will all die a physical death [162]. I understand that we have lost our chance at sovereignty on Earth, with Satan supplanting us [170]. I can accept that we are born in a state of “spiritual death,” lacking the vital relationship with God that we must later receive in grace through faith [163]. I understand that being in spiritual death, we have a tendency toward sinfulness [175]. What I struggle with is that we are born in guilt [164].

This seems unfair to me. That I suffer for Adam’s sin seems reasonable, because it changed the nature of the relationship of God with mankind, but that I am considered guilty, condemned, even in the womb, that seems unreasonable. I am not denying that this is so, just confessing that I have a hard time understanding this aspect of God’s will. That I will inevitably sin when given the chance and thus will be guilty, ok, maybe, but that I am declared guilty before given the chance, not nice. I don’t really care for either the realism or federalism views on this [165-169], though I understand better the federalism view, and appreciated Pyne’s explanation contrasting the imputation of Adam’s guilt with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness [167]. This relates to the questions I have about election. It is not sufficient to me to say we would have sinned anyway [168-169] [we are born into this corrupted nature too, not of our own fault] or that questioning this system is sinful in itself [169]. I admit that I did find it amusing when Pyne pointed out that our sinfulness “demonstrates that we are more comfortable with his [Adam’s] leadership than we confess” [169].