



There are many scholars today, both Catholic and Protestant, who think that the doctrine of original sin should be jettisoned in light of modern science.

In this essay, I respond to these theologians by arguing that the doctrine of original sin is an integral part of divine revelation that not only emerges from our understanding that God is good but also explains our lived experience of human brokenness. Moreover, it is a doctrine that is not incompatible with an evolutionary account of the human species.

What is the doctrine of original sin? It is an explanation from divine revelation of the lived experience of our brokenness. As my students at Providence College will quickly acknowledge, human beings are broken. We do things that we know will hurt us in the long run, and we do not do things that we know will make us happy, again in the long run. They echo the Apostle Paul, who declared: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15). Why is this?

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, our God who is goodness Himself created everything good. He created all things flawless so that they would reflect His infinite wisdom and goodness (see CCC, no. 339). For the same reason, our original parents were not only created good, they were also established in friendship with their Creator and in harmony within themselves and with each other and with creation around them. (see CCC, no. 374). Theologians call this original state of harmony, the state of original justice. It is a state of original goodness that was given to our first parents by a God who is good.

God gave our first parents who were in the state of original justice the sanctifying grace that justified them and made them righteous. Our human parents were friends of God. God’s supernatural gift of sanctifying grace, according to St. Thomas, was also accompanied by three other gifts, called the preternatural gifts, that were given to our first parents to perfect them by remedying their natural weaknesses.

The Historicity of Adam and Eve / Part II: The Doctrine of Original Sin

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First, human beings by their very nature as creatures made of spirit and matter are inherently corruptible. In other words, because we are made of two things, spirit and matter, we naturally are prone to their separation. There is nothing inherent to spirit and to matter that would keep them together forever. This separation of spirit and matter is called death. The gift of immortality was given to the human beings in the state of original justice to overcome this inherent corruptibility so that they would live forever.

Second, human beings by their very nature are prone to interior disarray because what we are inclined to know, what we are inclined to choose, and what we are inclined to desire often do not coincide. The gift of integrity was given to our first parents to overcome this interior disorder so that they would be more apt to act well in grace to attain their holiness. This preternatural gift orders persons so that their reason is subject to God, their desires are subject to their reason, and their bodies are subject to their souls.

Third, we human beings are by our very nature inherently limited in our knowledge because we know things through contingent realities and we learn about them in a gradual fashion. In St. Thom-

as's view, the gift of infused knowledge was given to our first parents to remedy this weakness.

Finally, because they had the gifts of immortality, of integrity, and of infused knowledge, the original human beings, according to St. Thomas, were also impassable. In other words, they were not able to experience bodily or spiritual suffering.

Building upon this Thomistic theological account, I have elsewhere proposed that it would also have been fitting for God to have given the first human beings several gifts that I call the preteradaptive gifts. These would have been given as soon as the original humans evolved, to perfect them not only as persons made of body and soul but also as persons who evolved from non-personal primate ancestors.¹

These preteradaptive gifts include the strength to counter the evolved adaptations we inherited from our primate ancestors, *i.e.*, to infidelity, to violence, and to biased and false knowledge. These gifts would have given the first human beings the capacity to love faithfully, to maintain peace, and to know the truth.

And yet, we are broken! We are inclined to actions and to inactions that hinder us from attaining the happiness that God had intended to give us from the very beginning. Why is this?

According to the *Catechism*, our existential brokenness can be explained by positing a historical event in the distant past when our first parents rejected God and all of His gifts. The Bible reveals that the original human beings were put to a test, a test that they failed through an act of disobedience. This was the original sin.

When our first parents disobeyed God in the original sin, they rejected Him and with Him, all of His supernatural gifts. Without the preternatural and the preteradaptive gifts, these fallen human beings thereafter became subject to death, to suffering, to error-filled knowledge, to weakness of will, and to disordered desire. In

other words, they became subject to the interior struggle that is the source of our brokenness.

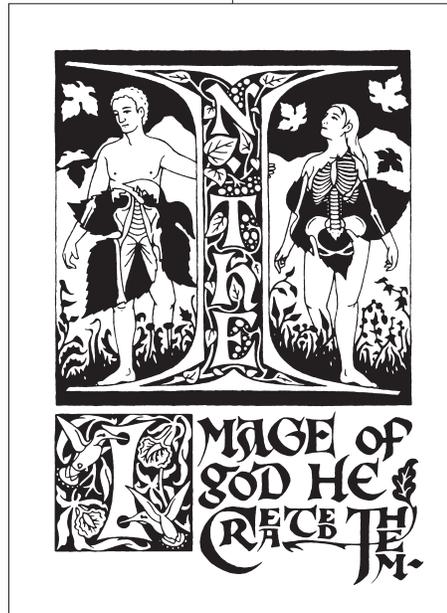
Significantly, the Catholic Church teaches, as St. Thomas Aquinas explained, that God intended our first parents to give their descendants the blessings of original justice. When they lost the gifts, however, they could not give them to their posterity. Thus, the Council of Trent (1546) teaches that original sin is transmitted by propagation and not imitation.

Now, some may read this statement by the Council of Trent—that original sin is transmitted by propagation and not by imitation—as a claim that original sin is transmitted biologically. However, the consequences of original sin are privations in the soul of the human

being. Because of the original sin, his soul lacks grace and the preternatural gifts. Thus, when the Council of Trent teaches that the consequences of the original sin are transmitted by propagation and not by imitation, we should understand this as a metaphysical and not a biological claim. As an immaterial spirit, our soul and its properties are not determined by our genes. Instead, when God creates our souls when we are conceived, He creates them without the graces and gifts that we should have inherited from our original parents.

In conclusion, the doctrine of original sin explains why we are broken without attributing that brokenness to God's creative will. It is also the grounds for our salvation because "after his fall, man was not abandoned by God" (see CCC, no. 410). Thus, it should not be surprising that the *Catechism* concludes: "The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ" (CCC, no. 389).  E

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¹ Nicanor Austriaco, O.P., "A Theological Fittingness Argument for the Historicity of the Fall of *Homo Sapiens*," *Nova et vetera*, in press.