

# *The Magisterium and Human Origins*

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There has been relatively little explicitly taught by the magisterium of the Catholic Church on the subject of human origins as this is understood scientifically. One finds considerably more on the topics of creation itself, human nature, and original sin. The primary concern has been to resist any sort of reductionism of these realities which would undermine the Christian understanding of the Creator God or of human responsibility before God. The questions raised by various theories of evolution are of recent vintage and have been addressed in detail only once, in the encyclical *Humani generis* presented to the Church by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Even here, Pius XII's primary interest was in the broader current of secularist philosophies and the accommodations sought by various theologians and biblical exegetes to modernity.

Pope John Paul II, in his address to the plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1996, on the point in question, cites no other magisterial document. The primary addition made by the latter document to the teaching of Pius XII was to acknowledge that “new knowledge leads to recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis.”<sup>1</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* simply

<sup>1</sup>“C'est avec un grand plaisir,” in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 89 (1997): 186–190; and found in English translation as “Magisterium and Evolution,” *The Pope Speaks* 42.2 (1997): 118–121. The latter erroneously gives the date of November 22, 1996, for the allocution; it was given on October 22, 1996. Also, “Magisterium Is Concerned with Question of Evolution, for It Involves Conception of Man,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (English), October 30, 1996, 3, 7.

takes the Genesis stories at face value and sets out the positive teaching contained therein without raising the question of the historicity of the narratives.

Given this state of affairs, it would make greatest sense in this article to look first at *Humani generis* to clarify what it does and does not say, then to examine some of the broader concerns of the magisterium expressed in a variety of documents. This will provide the basis for a few concluding remarks suggesting how the doctrine promulgated in these documents may be reconciled with contemporary understandings of the morphological development of the human species.

### *Humani Generis*

The first reference to evolution in *Humani generis* (HG) is largely negative: “Some imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution, which has not been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences, explains the origin of all things, and audaciously support the monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual evolution.”<sup>2</sup> The Pope goes on to single out Communism in this regard and, in this, echoes the sentiments expressed by Pius XI in his encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* (DR):

The doctrine of modern Communism, which is often concealed under the most seductive trappings, is in substance based on the principles of dialectical and historical materialism previously advocated by Marx, of which the theoreticians of bolshevism claim to possess the only genuine interpretation. According to this doctrine there is in the world only one reality, matter, the blind forces of which evolve into plant, animal, and man. Even human society is nothing but a phenomenon and form of matter, evolving in the same way.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear, two lines down, that the reason for the Pope’s concern was the unavoidable undermining of crucial convictions necessary to the faith: “In such a doctrine, as is evident, there is no room for the idea of God; there is no difference between matter and spirit, between soul and body; there is neither survival of the soul after death nor any hope in a future life.” Pius XII had similar concerns. It is because of this involvement with essential elements of the faith that the Church would presume to pronounce on the results of scientific inquiry at all (HG, n. 35).

Pius XII then goes on to specify what is at issue very narrowly. What is not intended is any pronouncement on the theory of evolution itself:

the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from preexistent and living matter. (HG, n. 36)

<sup>2</sup>Pope Pius XII, encyclical letter Concerning Some False Opinions Which Threaten to Undermine Catholic Doctrine, *Humani generis*, in AAS 52 (1950), n. 5. [[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p\\_xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p_xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html)] (July 12, 2003).

<sup>3</sup>Pope Pius XI, encyclical letter *Divini Redemptoris*, in AAS 29 (1937), n. 9. [[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19031937\\_divini-redemptoris\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19031937_divini-redemptoris_en.html)] (June 20, 2003).

What is mandated by the faith is “to hold that souls are immediately created by God.” The Pope makes clear that, because the Church has been “given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of faith,” ultimate judgment on a given theory of evolution resides with the Church. We will need to come back to this claim given its “audacious” character. The thing to note here and now is that the focal point remains on the authentic faith of the Church which is not completely separable from purported “results” of the positive sciences and that the Pope has judged that there is no inherent or, in any event, obvious contradiction between the faith and at least some theories of evolution.

He is more skeptical with regard to polygenism, but even here his concern is expressed quite narrowly: “it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin” (HG, n. 37). He does not close the door to the possibility that polygenism can be reconciled to the faith; it is clear that there are grave problems.

A view of evolution that ends with the production of an original pair at the head of the human family creates no problems for the faith as long as the direct creation of the human soul by God is held. What I would propose to do is to examine the more difficult case of polygenism, which, in point of fact, is the current prevailing view of paleontologists. Before doing this, however, it will be important to set out the faith concerns of the Church in this matter.

### **Doctrinal Concerns**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) provides an important hermeneutical key with regard to the first three chapters in Genesis, which is also applicable to the question of the reconciliation of the results of research into evolution to the faith. These texts express a variety of truths about creation, “its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation.”<sup>4</sup> This establishes the relevance of human origins to the faith. The next line provides the hermeneutical key: “Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principle source for catechesis on the mysteries of the ‘beginning’: creation, fall, and promise of salvation.” If creation is the foundation of salvation history that finds its summit in Christ, it is also true that “the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’: from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ” (CCC, n. 280). The *Catechism* makes an oblique reference to the theory of evolution in the paragraphs between these two texts. What is of true importance is not simply “when and how the universe arose physically, or when man appeared, but rather of discovering the meaning of such an origin” (CCC, n. 284).

<sup>4</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 289.

This christological focus can be seen from another complementary perspective. It is certainly true that “the world was created for the glory of God, ... not to increase his glory but to show it forth and to communicate it” (CCC, n. 293). This self-communication of God’s glory requires someone who is able to receive it and respond to it. For this reason the entire visible universe was created for man’s sake (CCC, n. 358) because “of all visible creatures only man is ‘able to know and love his Creator’ he is ‘the only creature willed by God for its own sake,’ and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life.”<sup>5</sup> “God made us ‘to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will’” (CCC, n. 294). Thus, “it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.”<sup>6</sup> The *Catechism*, in setting out its christological principle, cites John Chrysostom who himself cites 1 Corinthians 15:45—“Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam a life-giving spirit.” Chrysostom goes on to say that “the first Adam was made by the last Adam, from whom he also received his soul, to give him life.” The first Adam is stamped with the image of the second. He goes on to, in some sense, identify the second Adam with the first based on Christ’s words, “I am the first and the last.” It follows that the interpretation of Genesis 1–3 as well as acceptable versions of the theory of evolution will have to conform to this christological intention of the Creator God. This will have important consequences, as will be set out below.

John Paul II, picking up on the theme of the breath of life, provides his own formulation of this christological principle in his general audience of May 27, 1998.

The mystery of the Incarnation, seen from the perspective of the Holy Spirit who brought it about, also sheds light on the mystery of man.

If in fact the Spirit works in a unique way in the mystery of the Incarnation, He is also present at the origin of every human being. Our being is a “received being,” a reality thought of, loved, and given. Evolution does not suffice to explain the origin of the human race, just as the biological causality of the parents alone cannot explain a baby’s birth. Even in the transcendence of his action, God is ever respectful of “secondary causes” and creates the spiritual soul of a new human being by communicating the breath of life to him (see Gn 2:7) through his Spirit who is “the giver of life.” Thus every child should be seen and accepted as a gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

There is a convergence and parallelism in the divine activity in the coming into existence of the individual human being, in the coming into existence of the entire human race, and in the conception of the Christ in Mary’s womb.

After noting this christological and adamic principle, the *Catechism* argues to the unity of the human species from the common origin in God and the common

<sup>5</sup>CCC, n. 356. Quoting Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes* (GS), nn. 12, 24.

<sup>6</sup>CCC, n. 359. Quoting GS, n. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Pope John Paul II, general audience (May 27, 1998), “Spirit Enables Us to Share in Divine Nature,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (English), June 3, 1998, n. 5. [[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_27051998\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_27051998_en.html)] (July 13, 2003).

origin from one ancestor.<sup>8</sup> This echoes the sentiment of Pius XII in his encyclical *Summi pontificatus*, written in 1939:

The Apostle of the Gentiles later on makes himself the herald of this truth which associates men as brothers in one great family, when he proclaims to the Greek world that God “hath made of one, all mankind, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth” (Acts 17:26, 27).

A marvelous vision, which makes us see the human race in the unity of one common origin in God “one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in us all” (Eph 4:6); in the unity of nature which in every man is equally composed of material body and spiritual, immortal soul; in the unity of the immediate end and mission in the world; in the unity of dwelling place, the earth, ... in the unity of the supernatural end, God Himself, to Whom all should tend; in the unity of means to secure that end.

It is the same Apostle who portrays for us mankind in the unity of its relations with the Son of God, image of the invisible God, in Whom all things have been created: “In Him were all things created” (Col 1:16); in the unity of its ransom, effected for all by Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Christ is able to save humankind because He is in solidarity with humanity through his conception and birth through Mary. Clearly, if humanity is not in fleshy solidarity with itself because of a descent from a common ancestor, then Christ’s fleshy solidarity with *all of humanity* is rendered problematic. Thus, Pius XII informs us, “the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains either that after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents” (HG, n. 37).

The Pope does not, at this point, refer to the issue of solidarity in Christ but rather to human solidarity in original sin “which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which through generation is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own” (HG, n. 37). The *Catechism* again appeals to the Pauline Christ-Adam imagery in Romans 5:12, 18–19:

All men are implicated in Adam’s sin, as St. Paul affirms: ‘By one man’s disobedience many [that is, all men] were made sinners’: ‘sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.’ The Apostle contrasts the universality of sin and death with the universality of salvation in Christ. ‘Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.’ (CCC, n. 402)

There are several points that need to be considered here. First, there is the claim by Christian faith that human misery and the inclination toward evil and, indeed, death

<sup>8</sup>CCC, n. 360. See also Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, n. 1; *Lumen Gentium*, n. 13, in Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, *Trent—Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup>Pope Pius XII, encyclical letter, *Summi pontificatus*, in AAS 31 (1939), nn. 37–39. [[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_20101939\\_summi-pontificatus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20101939_summi-pontificatus_en.html)] (June 19, 2003).

itself have their origin not in any cosmological structures operative in the universe, but rather, in deliberately chosen sin (CCC, n. 403). Creation in itself is good, indeed, very good. One cannot point to some entropic or other principle of disorder locatable in material reality to explain the human situation. We did it to ourselves.

Second, that it was a sin as such which was involved means that there was a moral agent involved. Moral agents are locatable in individual human beings rather than in processes or generalized groups. This is why the attempt to understand “Adam” as a primitive human community will not work. It was a moral agent, an individual, who introduced sin and misery and death into the human community, not some “messy” (read “disordered” or “evil”) process, not some “messy” generalized group. Sin is introduced into a group by an individual (or individuals).

Third, salvation in Christ is universal, which means that there have never been any “innocent” human individuals (the cases of Mary and Christ himself are special exceptions—Christ, because He is the source of salvation; Mary, by special grace, because there is no Christ unless He be born into the world); the universality of salvation parallels the universality of sin (CCC, n. 402). There were no branches of the human race which maintained a primordial innocence. Sin, when it entered the world, involved the entire human race. Such universal involvement of the human race in sin by a moral agent, an individual, points to a first human ancestor who sinned.

The insistence that this original sin is passed on in the process of generation is an ancient conviction of the Church. It was explicitly promulgated in the fifth session of the Council of Trent in the decree on original sin. This decree has six points of varying degrees of relevance to the present discussion. The first point is that Adam immediately lost the original holiness and justice in which he had been created and incurred death. The second is that Adam’s sin damaged not only himself but his descendants *which include the whole human race*. The third, which is of considerable interest, “asserts that this sin of Adam which, one by origin and passed on to all by propagation and not by imitation, inheres in everyone as something proper to each”—cannot be removed by natural or any other remedy except through the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The next point insists that even the newly born babies of Christian parents need to be baptized. “For, according to the rule of faith transmitted from the apostles, even small children, who could not yet of themselves have committed any kind of sin, are truly baptized for the remission of sins *in order that what they contracted by generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration.*” The fifth point affirms that sin is truly removed in baptism even if concupiscence is not. The sixth point notes the exception presented by Mary, the immaculate virgin.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>These first three points are derived from the decrees of the Council of Orange in 529 (H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [DH], ed. Peter Hünemann, 37th ed. [Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany: Herder, 1991], nn. 371–372), and have Pelagianism primarily in view. The fifth point, in particular, is directed at the Protestants who tended to identify concupiscence with sin and understood the effect of baptism in terms of a juridical rather than a real cleansing. Some Protestants had also attacked the practice of infant baptism but this rather involved their understanding of the sacraments rather than of original sin.

<sup>11</sup>Tanner, *Trent—Vatican II*, 665–667. Also DH, nn. 1510–1516.

The *Catechism*, while affirming the twin solidarity in sin and salvation in Christ, frankly admits that how this transmission takes place remains a mystery that is not fully understood. It nonetheless affirms, with Trent, a transmission by propagation to all mankind “of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice.” It is a state rather than an act (CCC, n. 404). Some consideration will need to be given to this transmission of sin since it creates numerous problems, especially in the modern context. For the moment it suffices to say that the need for an original moral agent, an individual, to introduce sin in the world, and the conviction of the Church that the state created by that sin was passed on by propagation, rather than by imitation, requires the origination of the human species from a single ancestor.

What has been discussed up to this point has been the various facets of the teaching that the human race forms a unity, in its origins, in its sinful state, in its salvation. A second teaching that recurs in magisterial teaching through the centuries is that the human person “is a being at once corporeal and spiritual” which takes Genesis 2:7, Yahweh breathing into the man formed of dust, as a paradigmatic text.<sup>12</sup> Pius XI, in the text cited above, had already warned against views that hold that there is “only one reality, matter, the blind forces of which evolve into plant, animal, and man.”<sup>13</sup> Pius XII insisted that one must distinguish the soul directly created by God from the body that may emerge from “preexistent and living matter” (HG, n. 36). John Paul II echoed this teaching in his 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Some of the more philosophical issues are treated in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* (nn. 83, 88), which cautions against reducing human reality to the merely empirical. His general audience of May 27, 1998, cited above, sets out the corporeal and spiritual nature of humans in an incarnational perspective, explicitly noting the inadequacy of a purely evolutionary development to explain the human phenomenon. *Gaudium et spes* had earlier reaffirmed the traditional teaching that humans are a union of body and soul with an interior life which “far exceeds the totality of things.”<sup>14</sup> The references to this teaching in magisterial documents can

<sup>12</sup>Notable is Vatican I, the dogmatic constitution *De fide catholica*, Tanner, *Trent—Vatican II*, ch. 1, *De Deo rerum omnium creatore*, 805–806. Chapter 2 and the attached canons of the preparatory schema were much more explicit. The spirit breathed into Adam was identified as the soul “created from nothing, immaterial, incorruptible, immortal, and gifted with intelligence and free will.” It went on to enunciate the christological principle—“If this teaching of faith is denied, the dogma of the sin that was transmitted to all men by one first parent is weakened as is the dogma of the universal redemption by one mediator, Jesus.” The proposed canons anathematize those who say the soul “is not different from the body, not spiritual, not immortal”; those who claim there is another soul distinct from the rational soul; those who deny the oneness of the nature of man; those who say that the “human race did not take its origin from one original parent, Adam.” John F. Clarkson, S.J., et al., trans. and ed., *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1973), 150–151. See also the Fourth Lateran Council, constitution one, *De fide catholica*, in DH, nn. 800–801.

<sup>13</sup>DR, n. 9. Vatican I also condemned materialism in the second canon of chapter 1, *De Deo rerum omnium creatore*, of the dogmatic constitution *De fide catholica*, in Tanner, *Trent—Vatican II*, 810.

<sup>14</sup>Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, in Tanner, *Trent—Vatican II*, n. 14.

be multiplied and is summarized in the *Catechism* (nn. 362–368). It began to be explicitly taught by the Church in the context of the christological controversies in the early Church when it was realized that the affirmation of the full humanity of Christ required the affirmation that He had a human soul.

### Polygenism

This much is what the Church has positively taught on the subject of evolution and human origins. Even from what the Church has explicitly taught, it is clear that there is no fundamental opposition between the faith of the Church and the theory of evolution insofar as this latter is understood, monogenetically, to provide an account of the development of the body of the first true human, Adam, from whom all subsequent humans have descended. More problematic, as noted above, is a polygenetic view of evolution. Can this be reconciled with the faith of the Church as set out above?<sup>15</sup>

One of the keys to recognizing a possibility here is the Catholic doctrine of the direct creation of the human soul by God. If evolution of the body has taken place and one presumes this is the mechanism that God has chosen to use, then one has to contend with the situation that, with “Adam,” we have a creature that (who) was substantially distinct from his “parents” and from his “siblings.”<sup>16</sup> What was involved here was not, as such, a further biological evolution. This new creature was, with regard to DNA or bodily morphology, of the same species as the animals which generated him. The difference was this creature was now endowed with an immortal soul. For that matter, it is not even necessary that this infusion of a soul took place at conception.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the claim that the creation and infusion of the first human soul *must* have corresponded to a comparable biological evolution runs perilously close to implying that the distinctively human spirit is identifiable with that evolutionary step.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>I have already set out the substance of this suggestion in my contribution to the annual workshop of the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science & Technology (ITEST) which has been published as “Toward a Theology of the Human Body,” in *Christianity and the Human Body: A Theology of the Human Body*, Proceedings of the ITEST Workshop, October 20–22, 2000 (St. Louis, MO: ITEST Faith/Science Press, 2001), 73–104.

<sup>16</sup>“Only from a man could there proceed another man who would call him father and progenitor.” Pope Pius XII, allocution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (1941), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XXXIII (1941), 506. Quoted in Cyril Vollert, S.J., “Evolution of the Human Body: Scientific *Status Quo* and Theological Implications,” *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Association of America*, June 25–27, 1951 (n.p.: Catholic Theological Association of America, n.d.), 129.

<sup>17</sup>Indeed, Aquinas, for instance, presumed that the infusion of the soul took place at some time after conception. In this he was following Aristotle. *Summa theologiae* (ST), I, Q. 76.3, reply 3.

<sup>18</sup>It was for this that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., ran into trouble with Rome. In *The Phenomenon of Man* he had developed a notion of thresholds where a modest increase in complexity leads to a substantial difference in “interiority.” He had described a “within” and a “without” which characterized all matter and described a process in which there is a “gradual dominance of the *within* in comparison to the *without* of things.” This kind of

There has been an unspoken tendency to consider the species (identifiable with *Homo sapiens*?) as coextensive with true humanity, i.e., whose every member was and is possessed of an immortal soul.<sup>19</sup> This is certainly the stance one must take with regard to the present-day species; it does not follow that the same would be true of the species which served as the receptacle for the first human soul. Nor does it follow that true humans first appeared with the emergence of *homo sapiens*. The discovery of funerary practices (and art?) among the Neanderthals raises the specter that there was a parallel race of “true humans” (presumably also fallen through original sin) that died out.<sup>20</sup>

Cyril Vollert, S.J., following up on a suggestion made by Michel Labourdette, O.P., notes Aquinas’s conviction that there were a succession of souls or forms in the development of the human embryo. Aquinas had “thought that some preparation was needed, in the ordinary course of divine providence, for so great an effect as the infusion of the spiritual soul.”<sup>21</sup> Vollert, and Labourdette before him, thought that the same analysis could “be transferred to the history of life ... in the progressive advance of animal organisms to higher morphological perfection we could discern a gradual preparation for the reception of the human soul.”<sup>22</sup> This idea can be extended. The magisterium of the Church, in point of fact, has pushed the creation and infusion of the human soul back to the first moment of conception.<sup>23</sup> There are a whole host of morphological transformations that take place, and in a certain sense recapping prior evolutionary stages, before the child achieves a final human shape. The thing to note is that there is no incompatibility with the faith in imagining the human soul being infused into a creature whose body is not the final human shape, indeed, whose body in some or many respects is unfit to receive the

description easily leads one to conclude that the human soul is simply a further development of a process ingredient in the material world. Teilhard reiterated that he was only examining and describing the phenomenon, not offering explanations and that he had had no intention of denying the direct creation of the soul by God which was an ontological claim rather than an empirical observation. See *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 58–61, 164–183 and esp. 169, at note 1.

<sup>19</sup>See Vollert, “Evolution,” 32.

<sup>20</sup>See *ibid.*, 135–137; also Teilhard, *Phenomenon*, 197–203.

<sup>21</sup>See ST, I, Q. 118.2, reply 2.

<sup>22</sup>Vollert, “Evolution,” 132; see also, Michel Labourdette, O.P., “Le péché originel et les origines de l’homme,” *Revue Thomiste* 50 (1950): 502ff.

<sup>23</sup>The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, defined by Pius IX in the bull, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854), gives eloquent testimony to this. The reason Thomas did not hold the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was because, except in the case of Christ, he held that the infusion of the soul took place sometime after conception. He could not maintain that position in the case of Christ. See note 21 above, as well as ST, III, Q.27.2 (on Mary’s embryonic life) as compared to ST, III, Q. 6.4 or 33.1–3 (on Christ’s embryonic life). Pushing Mary’s sanctification (which requires a rational soul) back to the moment of her conception pushes the infusion of the human soul into the developing body back to the moment of conception for all humans.

soul.<sup>24</sup> The first true human, i.e., possessed of a human soul, need not have been evolutionarily a finished product.

Nor does it follow that this first human creature mated with another true human. The Genesis story of the creation of the woman is a testimony to divine providence in the creation of the marriage relationship. It affirms that the gendered character of human existence is willed by God and not simply an accident of evolutionary process. It is clear in the Old Testament itself, however, that the monogamous ideal set out by Jesus was only gradually realized in human history. At the very origins of the human race there was either mating with nonhuman creatures or massive incest, neither of which would be acceptable at the present time in human history. It is not necessary to decide which was the case; both positions can be understood as an accommodation to the concrete circumstances of human existence at a particular time. The former would be the situation one would expect in a polygenetic process of bodily formation, the latter what one would expect in a monogenetic process.

What one would have to affirm in faith in the polygenetic case is that the creature first endowed with a divinely created immortal soul bred true, however much there may have been continued mating with other nonhuman primates to produce the final human bodily form. *This* creature's offspring were likewise true humans who shared the fallen state of their progenitor as were their offspring in turn. In the course of time this line diverged more and more from other primate groups until fertile mating was no longer possible and the obvious superiority of this line of development became clear.

Early on in this process that superiority would not have been very apparent, certainly from the distance of hundreds of thousands of years. Much of the "culture" of human rationality is cumulative, and if one is dealing with a pre-*Homo sapiens* primatial group, slowed by the incomplete development of the brain found in these earlier primates. Very quickly, however, at least on the evolutionary scale, that superiority manifested itself, and the manifest difference between true humans and their closest primatial "relatives" intensified and widened. In terms of the phenomenon it will be impossible scientifically to isolate the "first moment" of true human existence.<sup>25</sup> Looking over the sweep of human history, however, it is clear that something singular has occurred. Christian faith tells us that the decisive difference at this point was not biological development, however much this was a necessary

<sup>24</sup>The zygote, for instance, has no brain structure allowing for the concrete manifestation of human rationality. It nonetheless has a human soul. Some have taken the twinning phenomenon as suggesting that this is not so since biological individuation has not definitively taken place. See for example, Norman M. Ford, S.D.B., *When Did I Begin? Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy, and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). What this overlooks is that every such twin is an individual even if it subsequently dies and has its body absorbed by the other twin back into a single reality.

<sup>25</sup>Teilhard spoke of the automatic destruction of the peduncle of the phylum, or, as one of my professors translated, "they will never find the bones" of Adam. See for instance, Teilhard, *Phenomenon*, 195.

preparation, but the action of the Creator God who made for Himself a creature, a race, after his own image, loved and able to love in return.

### **The Transmission of Original Sin**

The *Catechism*, as noted above, describes the transmission of original sin as a mystery difficult to understand. It is not possible here to deal with all of the relevant issues adequately, but a few comments are in order. The problem with this notion of transmission through generation, as opposed to an understanding of original sin as fundamentally a matter of imitation, is how to locate this transmission. As sin it would seem to be located in the soul. But the soul is directly created by God at the moment of conception. Has God created something that is “not good”? On the other hand, if one locates the transmission simply in the element provided by the parents, i.e., the body, then are we to understand sin as something fundamentally physical? Or that the body or matter is something intrinsically corrupt (what would it mean to say that matter is even accidentally corrupt)? Neither alternative is acceptable. But, of course, we are human; while we may be tempted to throw up our hands and declare the matter a mystery, we are not really satisfied by such a solution. Genuine mystery transcends our attempts to explain, it does not stop those attempts.

The attempt to locate the transmission of original sin on the level of the component parts of our humanity fails. This suggests that the solution, or rather the mystery, lies on the level of the composite reality, on the level of personhood itself. Ever since Boethius it has been customary, at least in the West, to understand the human person as “an individual substance of rational nature.”<sup>26</sup> There is some continuity between this definition and the modern notion of a person as an autonomous rationality. With such an understanding of human personhood the problem of the transmission of original sin is intractable. It is no accident that the Enlightenment tended to reduce the salvific work of Christ to that of providing a good example that was to be imitated. This is the mode of influence of autonomous rationalities. What the faith of the Church requires is a different notion of human personhood if, as Trent demands, the transmission of original sin is to be understood as something more than imitation.

There is an alternative notion available in Christian tradition—personhood as subsistent relationality. This alternative notion was forced by the Arian crisis and this solution was developed, perhaps independently, East and West. How does one predicate fatherhood of God? The Aristotelian form of the dilemma was developed by Augustine. Is fatherhood affirmed of God according to substance or according to accident? If it is affirmed by substance then the Son cannot be God, if by accident then one effectively claims that God changes, which is blasphemous. Augustine responded by arguing that there is a third mode of predication (unknown, it must be said, by Aristotle) by way of unchanging relation, or, as one might paraphrase, a relation which reaches to the level of substance, a subsistent relationality.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Boethius, *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, n. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.5.6. Gregory of Nazianzus had earlier set out a more Platonic and characteristically Eastern version of the dilemma in his *Third Theological Oration* concerning the Son, n. 16: “They say that the Father is a name of substance or action....

The problem is that the two approaches to personhood have been largely isolated from one another in the Christian theological and philosophical tradition. One really cannot directly apply Boethius's definition to God since God is concretely one, indeed rational of nature, but is tripersonal, not an individual person. His definition suffices for a monistic or modalistic God; it is incomplete for the Triune God. The move to subsistent relationality in Trinitarian thought is a clever move and it does work, but it has tended to be confined to the doctrine of the Trinity and isolated from theological anthropology. As noted, there is some considerable continuity between Boethius's definition and modernity's notion of personhood as autonomous rationality. The problem becomes critical when one turns to Christology and to the One who is at once human and divine.

Christ's (the Son's) relationship to the rest of humanity is an instance of a broader relationship of God to the world. It is this which makes manifest a difficulty in the traditional Thomistic approach to the whole question. For Aquinas there is no real relationship between God and the world (even if there is one between the world and God). There are several reasons why Aquinas holds this position. To name just two, there is 1) the difference in ontological level between God and the world; and 2) the divine simplicity, which leaves such a relation with no distinct foundation in God. Aquinas quite consistently holds that Jesus did not have a real relationship with his mother, Mary (ST, III, Q. 35.5). The principle that Aquinas uses to ground this conclusion is that "every relation which is predicated of God from time does not put something real in the eternal God, but only something according to our way of thinking." There is the further problem that Aquinas does not explicitly advert to here that, since real relations multiply persons in God, to affirm that Jesus, the divine Son, had a real relation to Mary would carry with it the implication that she was a divine person.<sup>28</sup>

Aquinas is aware of the awkwardness of saying that this human Son does not have a real relationship with his mother—such an affirmation threatens a docetic understanding of Christ, threatens the solidarity that is necessary for Christ to have with humanity if He is to be the Mediator between God and men, if He is to undo the sin of Adam. He tries to work around the problem:

God is called Lord by a relation which is implied in the real relation by which the creature is subject to God. And although lordship is not a real relation in

Even I myself would exceedingly fear your division if it was necessary to accept one or the other of the two and not rather to escape the two to state a third more true, that the Father is a name neither of a substance, O most clever ones, nor of an action, but that the Father is the name of the relation in which the Father is to the Son or the Son to the Father." William G. Rusch, trans. and ed., *The Trinitarian Controversy*, Sources of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 142.

<sup>28</sup>Such a line of thought is not completely erroneous. The grace that Christ brings us is divine life itself. The East has spoken of our divinization in this; the West has rather emphasized our adoption. However one understands this, we become "divine" persons with this difference from the Three. They are divine by nature; we are "divine" through a freely given gift. The problem addressed in the text involves the crossing of these two levels.

God, yet is He really Lord through the real subjection of the creature to Him. In the same way Christ is really the Son of the Virgin Mother through the real relation of her motherhood to Christ.

I suggest elsewhere that one can understand Christ as having a real relation to Mary (and therefore, in principle, with the rest of humanity) without positing any change in God, but to do so one must, in effect, “piggyback” that relationship on the eternal relationship.<sup>29</sup>

This way of thinking about Christ, however, forces a rethinking on the level of anthropology. James F. Anderson, a somewhat representative classical Thomist, in considering various sorts of analogy, concluded that the analogy of proportionality is more fundamental than the analogy of attribution because “it is not true that this relation of dependence is that which *primarily* distinguishes these two orders of being. The *relation* itself does not constitute the very nature or being of the creature.”<sup>30</sup> He cites Aquinas, wrongly I think, in support of this, observing that “it is simply a question of pointing out that being is ontologically prior to relation: things are things before they are *related* things.”<sup>31</sup> While this is true of many relations, it is awkwardly understood of the relation of the creature to God. Let us provide concrete specifications to Anderson’s general principle: “[created] things are things before they are *related* [to God] things.” However, absent the relation to God, the thing does not exist at all. *This* particular relation goes to the level of substance; it is simultaneous with substance.<sup>32</sup> There is an analogous relation between the child and its parents. Absent the parental relation the child does not exist at all. This, too, is a relation that goes to the level of substance. This relation does not touch on the soul, as such. The soul is created directly by God; it is not generated, as such, by the parents. But they have generated the concrete individual, composed of body and

<sup>29</sup>See my “Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Aquinas’s Understanding of God’s Relation to the World,” *Theological Studies* 56.4 (December 1995): 673–695. See also my *Trinity and Marriage in Paul: The Establishment of a Communitarian Analogy of the Trinity Grounded in the Theological Shape of Pauline Thought*, American University Studies (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 317–334, for the interplay between our analogical knowledge of God and our relation to him.

<sup>30</sup>James F. Anderson, *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1949), 111.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>32</sup>It seems to me that this is the point of Aquinas’s response in ST, I, Q 44.1, to the objection that “the relation of the thing caused to its cause does not appear to be essential to beings, for some beings can be understood without it,” which Anderson cites in support of his position. Aquinas replies that “though the relation to its cause is not part of the definition of a thing caused, still it follows, as a consequence, on what belongs to its essence; because from the fact that a thing has being by participation, it follows that it is caused.” ST, I, Q. 44.1, reply 1. He goes on to say that “since to be caused does not enter into the essence of being as such, therefore is it possible for us to find a being uncaused.” There is one uncaused being—God; therefore being caused, as such, is not part of the definition of essence, as such. Every other being, however, has, as part of its essence, creaturehood.

soul, that is their child. They are the parents *of this person*. Human personhood is, at its root, subsistent relationality.

Original sin is transmitted from generating person to generated person, from complete composite entity to complete composite entity, not, as such, body to body or soul to soul—body and soul as created by God are good, indeed, very good. This transmission happens because persons are essentially, substantially in relation, and if the relation is poisoned because one of the terms of the relation, the progenitor, is corrupted by sin, the other term, the child, cannot but be affected. Any number of analogies and examples are possible. If one end of a thin rod is distorted the distortion will pass all the way to the other end of the rod. If we were intended by God to be transparent to grace passing through us for the sake of the other, then choosing to be opaque to grace can only damage the other. This is not simply a mechanism of imitation. This is a relationality that reaches down to the level of substance. The descendants of Adam were *distorted* because Adam chose to distort himself who was their source.

Why does this distortion not affect Christ, who is Son of Mary, Son of Adam? The universe was created through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He Himself is Adam's source. The source cannot be distorted by what happens subsequent to that sourcing. That the Son of God chose to enter into the substantial relationality that is the human race does mean that He chose to accept those elements of the distortion that could be taken on by the source—suffering and death, the punishment for sin, but not sin itself. But because He has chosen to enter into the substantial relationality that is the human race, He brings into the human race, on the level of the distortion itself (person to person), the remedy for the distortion. And so the Spirit wars against the flesh even to this day; the pure water of life fights back the pollution of sin. And because Christ is the source of the universe itself, the grace He brings is available throughout the universe by his divine power. Why does this distortion not affect Mary, who is the daughter of Adam? By special grace related to her immediate proximity to the source of salvation, the distortion introduced by Adam did not reach her. God said "Let there be light," and Adam said "No," but Mary said "Yes," and so there was light.

### **The Sin of Reductionism**

Adam, in being created, was created a subsistent relationality, in the first instance in his relation to his Creator, which determined who and what he was. In rejecting God and the life God offered, he could not but reject himself as he really was and reject himself in his offspring. God could have started over at that moment. All it would have taken was a handy saber-toothed tiger (or whatever). God let the creature who rebelled against him live, let him generate offspring, even if offspring distorted by his sinfulness. Adam may have rejected the relationship to God offered to him; God, for his part, did not reject it. He would be the source of life for humanity regardless of Adam's rejection of the proffered gift (and, in Adam, humanity's rejection—not simply because we could only be generated in a distorted state, but because we have all made Adam's sin our own through our own sinful choices). To withdraw the sting of the rejection, He took it upon Himself in the form of the cross

and transformed that very rejection into *the* source of salvation. And God chose to do this even as Adam sinned.

The transmission of original sin through generation brings us back to the human solidarity that we have in Adam and that we have in Christ. It is, on the one hand, a function of our having been created in the image of a God who is eternal relationality and of a relationality to each other that goes to the core of our being. That there is a human race at all, particularly in the face of human sinfulness from the beginning, flows from the divine choice to remain faithful to his creature and to reconstitute all things in Christ through whom all things were made. The christological principle enunciated at the beginning of the doctrinal section above is pivotal to everything.

Any account of evolution, be it monogenetic or polygenetic, which attempts to “reduce” the origins of man to what can merely be empirically observed is itself a manifestation of the distortion introduced into the world by the sin of Adam. This reduction may take any number of forms. It may reduce human personhood to a merely material reality. It may understand personhood as an utterly autonomous rationality incapable of a relationality that goes to the level of substance. It may deny the unity of true humanity, a unity that can only be vouchsafed by God who makes humanity to be true. The Church has always resisted these reductions by insisting on the direct creation of the human soul, by insisting on the unity of the human race in Christ and in its origins, by insisting on the generative transmission of original sin, which is a necessity of the relational character of human existence.