

Original Sin Revisited: A Recent Proposal on Thomas Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution

REINHARD HÜTTER
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

“For some years now, the theological layman has been surprised to note that in Catholic preaching, as well as in the theological literature that comes to his attention, there is either hardly any mention of the peccatum originale, or that this doctrine is even explicitly dismissed—with suppression of the canons of the Council of Trent—as an erroneous path inspired by Augustine.”

—Robert Spaemann¹

Original Sin *Passé*—“after” Original Sin?

The doctrine and later dogma of original sin had been a central topic of Catholic dogmatic theology up to the Second Vatican Council.² One only has to consult the exhaustive bibliographies in the respective volumes *Urstand, Fall und Erbsünde* (in three parts) of the *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*.³

¹ Christoph Schönborn, Albert Görres, Robert Spaemann, *Zur kirchlichen Erbsündenlehre: Stellungnahmen zu einer brennenden Frage*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1994), 39 (my translation).

² For an informative introduction to and lucid overview of this complex topic, see Nicolas E. Lombardo, O.P., “Evil, Suffering, and Original Sin,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Lewis Ayres, Medi Ann Volpe, and Thomas L. Humphries Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 138–50.

³ Leo Scheffczyk, *Urstand, Fall und Erbsünde: Von der Schrift bis Augustin*, vol. 2/3a of *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981); Heinrich Köster, *Urstand, Fall und Erbsünde: In der Scholastik*, vol. 2/3b of *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*

Still echoing this long-standing, abiding preoccupation—researched during the Council and published in 1967—is the important *tour d’horizon* and noteworthy working hypothesis advanced by Henri Rondet, S.J., *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*.⁴ Soon after Vatican II a quite unexpected “sign of the time” found its way into Catholic theology—a widespread allergy to the theological topics of sin in general and of original sin in particular began to affect the post-conciliar mood, an unwillingness to acknowledge sin precisely as sin, let alone original sin and the concomitant original guilt. In polite and enlightened post-Vatican II Catholic theological society, one best ignored what was now seen as an unbecoming topic, unless the intention was, of course, to revise, that is, to “de-dogmatize,” the received understanding of the Tridentine dogma of original sin, be it along Schleiermacherian lines (original sin as the sin of the world)⁵ or along Hegelian lines (the Fall and original sin as the unavoidable entailments of human finitude and freedom)⁶ or along Heideggerian lines (the co-conditionedness of the fundamental human existential situation of transcendental freedom by the historical facticity of collective human guilt since the inception of human history).⁷ Other post-conciliar progressive theologians took it upon themselves to go further than that and to “de-mythologize” the Catholic faith as a whole, and thus bring it up to date to the new standards of an

(Freiburg: Herder, 1979); Köster, *Urstand, Fall und Erbsünde: Von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 2/3c of *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982).

⁴ Henri Rondet, S.J., *Le péché originel dans la tradition patristique et théologique* (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 1967). The English translation by Cajetan Finegan, O.P., appeared first in Ireland: *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background* (Shannon: Ecclesia, 1972).

⁵ Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin: A Theological View*, trans. Joseph Donceel, S.J. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965).

⁶ For a close re-reading of Hegel’s radical re-interpretation of original sin within his dynamic system of the necessary unfolding self-realization of the Absolute (negative freedom as necessary negation yet as simultaneous achievement of autonomy—freedom from a purely extrinsic law—to be sublated into the synthesis of mature, reflective, and communal ethical freedom realized in socio-political institutions, the surpassing integration of law and freedom) and the proposed reception of original sin as necessary developmental moment toward a deeper realization of moral-ethical maturity, a proposal purportedly relevant for the Church in the twentieth century, faced with an allegedly all-encompassing, dynamic account of univocal reason, see Bernard Pottier, S.J., *Le péché originel selon Hegel: Commentaire et synthèse critique* (Namur, Belgium: Culture et Vérité, 1990).

⁷ For the theoretically most sophisticated account of this interpretation, see Karl Rahner, S.J., *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1976), 113–21.

enlightened and increasingly secularized age: original sin, mortal sin, last judgment, hell, and eternal damnation all had to go in one or the other way together with angels, demons, and the evil one—at least the personhood (some sundry metaphysical principle of evil, possibly rooted in God, was, maybe, permissible; a person of a created, purely spiritual subsistence, definitely not)—into the dustbin of bygone theological notions, now thanks to a dynamic progressively transformative development of the understanding of faith, suddenly “untruths,” or at best mythological remnants of a bygone pre-scientific age.⁸ Consequently, from the self-secularizing view of what took itself to be progressive Catholic theology, embracing the normative horizon of the immanent frame together with its immanent transcendence of perpetual human progress, the hamartiological and eschatological horizon brightened up considerably, especially in Germany, Holland, and Belgium, looking increasingly like the non-transcendent, historically immanent eschatology of Immanuel Kant’s *The End of all Things* (1794)—a gradual vertical asymptotic approximation of human cultural and social progress to the ideal of the “kingdom of God.” The problems that evolutionary theory and historical-critical exegesis of Genesis 1–3 might have posed for a de facto (salvation-)historical state of original justice became serendipitously immaterial, since the object of contention had been preemptively removed. A radically reinterpreted or simply dismissed doctrine of original sin made any concerns about a historical state of original justice and a historical fall immaterial.

With original sin transposed by revisionist systematic theologians and mortal sin abolished by proportionalist moral theologians, it became increasingly unclear what Jesus Christ came to save humanity from, really, besides

⁸ For two not at all untypical post-Vatican II instantiations of such a rationalizing tendency, see French Dominican Christian Duquoc, O.P., “Symbole ou réalité (Satan)?,” *Lumière et Vie* 78 (1966): 99–105, and the German-Swiss Catholic Old Testament scholar Herbert Haag, *Abschied vom Teufel: Vom christlichen Umgang mit dem Bösen* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1969); see also and most extensively Eugen Drewermann’s three-volume Paderborn *Habilitationsschrift* (1976–1978), *Strukturen des Bösen*, 6th ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988). For three nuanced theological reflections of leading post-Vatican II German theologians that submit this rationalizing tendency of evil in sundry strands of post-Vatican II Catholic theology to a thoroughgoing theological critique, see: Joseph Ratzinger, “Abschied vom Teufel?,” in *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich: Wewel, 1973), 225–34; Walter Kasper, “Das theologische Problem des Bösen,” in *Teufel–Dämonen–Besessenheit: Zur Wirklichkeit des Bösen*, ed. Walter Kasper and Karl Lehmann (Mainz: Grünewald, 1978), 41–69; Karl Lehmann, “Der Teufel—ein personales Wesen?,” in Kasper and Lehmann, *Teufel–Dämonen–Besessenheit*, 71–98.

offering the *gnosis* of the sublime all-embracing dynamic of an irresistible universal divine embrace, an unqualified transcendent acceptance and indeed affirmation of the very goodness of de facto human nature (“God accepts and affirms us exactly as we are” as the operative foundational quasi-dogma applying the essential characteristic of modernity to theological anthropology: the human being *makes* himself or herself the measure of all things—including, of course, ultimately also of God,)⁹ and a guaranteed divine affiliation of human nature as such, a *gnosis* that would only touch tangentially and at best symbolically on human history, a history on its inexorable march toward an ever brighter future.¹⁰

Not all Catholic theologians found this theological scenario attractive, to say the least. In 1989, then-Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, organized a symposium on the doctrine of original sin.¹¹ Three participants of this symposium—Dominican dogmatic theologian Christoph Graf von Schönborn (1945–), later cardinal-archbishop of Vienna, the eminent German Catholic philosopher Robert Spaemann (1927–2018), and the German Catholic psychoanalyst and psychotherapist Albert Görres (1918–1996), co-founder with Ratzinger, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and others of the theological journal *Communio*—published their contributions in a small but weighty volume, *Zur kirchlichen Erbsündenlehre: Stellungnahmen zu einer brennenden Frage*.¹² In 1993 the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

⁹ See Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, 5th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 16–44.

¹⁰ Revisionary theology based on normatively interpreted evolutionary evidence within an immanent framework of relative emergentist and gradualist transcendence (a teleology of the purpose of the cosmos) arrived in American Catholic theology with a certain delay. Among others, see especially John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), and Jack Mahoney, S.J., *Christianity in Evolution: An Exploration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

¹¹ It becomes evident in light of Matthew J. Ramage’s instructive study *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022) that, since the very beginning of his teaching career as a seminary professor in Freising in the 1950s, Joseph Ratzinger had thought intensely about these matters and had advanced theological proposals still worthy of serious consideration today. In light of Ramage’s study, it also becomes evident why Cardinal Ratzinger would deem it urgent to convene a theological seminar on the question of original sin in the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith.

¹² Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 1991 (2nd ed. 1994). According to a correspondence between Christoph Cardinal Graf von Schönborn, O.P., and Nicholas Lombardo, O.P., all contributions to this seminar are kept in the Vatican archives.

(CCC) was published, and in light of its careful treatment of original sin, it became retrospectively obvious that Cardinal Ratzinger's seminar on original sin was part of the preparation for the presentation of this complex topic in the CCC (§§388–405). Three features of the Catechism's teaching on original sin stand out: (1) the teaching on original sin belongs properly within a Christological context; hence, the former is always a function of and subordinate to the latter, the doctrine of redemption (§§388–89); (2) original sin is a privation and is sin in an analogous sense only (§§404–5); and last, but not least, (3) the mercy of God permits the hope for the salvation of unbaptized infants (§1261).

The immediate academic echo, first to the seminar and a bit later to the CCC's teaching on original sin, was minimal, to say the least. Two laudable exceptions that come to mind are the circumspect treatment of original sin by José Antonio Sayés, *Antropología del hombre caído: El pecado original*,¹³ and a bit later the substantive treatment in the four-volume *Histoire des Dogmes*, authored by Vittorino Grossi, Luis-F. Ladaria, Philippe Lécrivain, and Bernard Sesboüé.¹⁴ While questions of human evolution and historical-critical problematizations of Genesis 1–3 made the already complex topic of originating original sin, the sin of the first parents, even more difficult, it might not be all too temerarious a conjecture to hazard that, wherever Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropology had turned into a theological monoculture, and with it the anthropological turn of theology *tout court*, the doctrine of originated original sin, that is, of original sin in the narrow sense, was at best marginalized, if not reinterpreted in a religio-existential key, and there bracketed and neutralized, if not de facto substituted, by the theological hypothesis of the "supernatural existential," the latter being treated by many post-conciliar theologians not as a theological proposal, a hypothesis at best, but as an established theological doctrine.

Yet the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s are long gone and the general mood in the Western culture has changed considerably from the utopian arrival of the putative end of history with the collapse of the Soviet bloc to a dystopian arrival of an all too apocalyptic history in all its unpredictability and potency for catastrophe. War and plague have returned; economic exploitation turns out to have never really disappeared, but only camouflaged for a while under the screen of the "economic development" of the then

¹³ Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1991.

¹⁴ The second volume, *L'homme et son salut* (Paris: Desclée, 1995), contains a treatment of original sin in two chapters, the first chapter from Augustine through the Middle Ages (152–220), the second chapter from the Council of Trent to the present (221–267). Both chapters are co-authored by Vittorino Grossi and Bernard Sesboüé.

so-called “third world countries”; the human-induced global climate change seems to be, after all, indeed a scientifically warranted fact and not some leftist propaganda scheme or, alternatively, a sinister concoction of the “deep state”; and the Catholic Church is faced with the appalling radical evil of the frequent and widespread abuse of the most vulnerable and its systemic cover-up by members of her own ordained ranks and within her own walls, all this while some Catholic theologians flirt with the new cultural role of being religious affirmers of all variations of the self-realization that the sovereign self sovereignly declares and that the advanced bio-technology of a late-capitalist society can deliver, while others flirt with neo-Marxist social and economic models fueled by an all too Blochian hope and while again others rediscover and reclaim a religio-political integralism that was *en vogue* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in certain European Catholic circles before the condemnation of the Action Française by Pope Pius XI on December 29, 1926. To put it with the opening words of Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the mood has shifted from an arguably all too facilely optimistic joy and hope (*gaudium et spes*) to a very real anguish and struggle (*angor et luctor*) *intra et extra muros ecclesiae*. Unsurprisingly, with a new awareness of the all too tangible reality of human sinfulness—indeed, unmitigated wickedness *intra et extra muros ecclesiae*, individual and systemic—the question of original sin also has made a comeback.

About one generation after Cardinal Ratzinger held his 1989 symposium on original sin and quite unrelated to it, Daniel W. Houck, a young American Protestant theologian from the Baptist tradition stepped up and offered a salutary constructive challenge to contemporary Catholic theology by claiming not only that the doctrine of original sin is indispensable for a proper undiminished presentation of the Gospel of salvation in Christ but also that the key for a contemporary articulation and defense of the doctrine of original sin is to be found in the thought of—Thomas Aquinas!¹⁵

Aquinas on Original Justice, the Fall, and Original Sin

Before entering deeper into the discussion of Houck’s book, I shall at this point adumbrate the account of original justice, the Fall, and original sin that Aquinas developed during his second Parisian regency (1268/69–1272) in his later works, primarily the *Summa theologiae* and the *De malo*, that

¹⁵ Daniel W. Houck, *Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

is, after having studied during his time in Orvieto at the papal court and with access to the papal library, the writings of the late Augustine on grace, and possibly also the canons of the Second Council of Orange (529), texts not available at the University of Paris at that time. It is in light of this encounter, I take it, that his mature position develops, without, perhaps, having been brought to a complete and definitive articulation. What I present here in outline represents what I understand to be the most accurate interpretation of Thomas's mature position and at the same time the most successful synthesis of earlier Thomist interpretations of Thomas's account. This interpretation and my evaluation of it are, of course, open to challenge, as Houck demonstrates in his work.¹⁶

Original Justice

It is significant that at the heart of Aquinas's theological anthropology—to use an anachronistic term—stands his account of “how it was in the beginning,” his account of the state of original justice, which is the precondition for the sin of the first parents, the Fall. The Fall Thomas takes to be a salvation-historical event, not unlike the calling of Abraham, Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt and wandering the desert for forty years, the calling of the prophets, and the birth of Christ. There might be quite a considerable distance of time between all these events, but that distance is a matter of quantity, not of quality. The unique quality of the event of the Fall is fully revealed only by the significance of the salvation-historical event of the birth, Passion, and death of Christ. Only the latter reveals the nature of the former. The Adam–Christ typology of Romans 5 unlocks the significance of Genesis 3. Yet the entailment of the typology—and this is the central characteristic of biblical typology—is that type and antetype both refer to salvation-historical events. Because the whole divine economy of salvation as conveyed by divine revelation presupposes it, Aquinas considers carefully the original state of the first human beings. He takes it for granted that this original state, as well as its loss and all that this loss entails and finally what the overcoming of this loss, human redemption, means and entails, can be known about only by way of divine revelation and its inspired record, the canon of the Holy Scriptures. The fact (*an sit*) is established by the authority of divine revelation and hence a given of the Catholic faith that is affirmed as true. The theologian's task is now to advance reasons that account for

¹⁶ The most recent articulation of this consensus position can be found in Jacob W. Wood, “From Pure Nature to Wounded Nature: Aquinas on the Effects of Original Sin,” *The Thomist* 86 (2022): 173–217.

how (*quomodo*) what divine revelation states can be true, in other words, to establish what it can possibly mean.¹⁷

Aquinas takes original justice to denote a state marked by full harmony and right order in relationship to God, to creation, to the other, and to oneself. The first human couple received from God as the substantial form of their body a rational soul, that is, an incorruptible spiritual substance that distinguishes them from all other animals, including from what later theologians would have called “pre-Adamites” and what now might be called pre-human ancestors, that is, from all hominids; simultaneously their nature was rightly ordered to God, that is, subject to God and open to God’s promptings; within the original human being, the different powers of the lower soul (the sensitive powers which pertain to sensation and the emotions) were subject to the rule of reason—they obeyed the rule of reason) and reason was subject to God. According to Ecclesiastes 7:30, “God made man right” (“Deus fecit hominem rectum”). “Order of justice” denotes the right balance of all powers internally and in subordination to God; this balance was gratuitously bestowed by God so that the human being would be from the first moment on of its individual and personal creation in right relationship with God; this right relationship with God, that is the subordination of reason to God, effectively causes the proper balance of powers within the complex human constitution. As Thomas emphasizes in his account in the *Summa theologiae*, original justice is not a property *inherent* to human nature, but is rather gratuitous, an *additional divine gift* freely bestowed by God on created *human nature* as a whole (and *not* individually on the first human being *qua person*). In *ST* I, q. 100, a. 1, Aquinas puts the matter quite explicitly: “Original justice, in the rectitude of which the first [human being] was made, was an accident belonging to the nature of the species—not in the sense that it was caused by the principles of the species, but in the sense that it was a special gift given by God to the nature as a whole.” And later in *ST* I-II, q. 81, a. 2, Aquinas states that “original justice was a particular gift of grace divinely bestowed upon all human nature in the first parent.” Hence, according to Aquinas, original justice is not something owed by God to the constitution of human nature itself; original justice is emphatically not to be understood as a property belonging to human nature as such, so that its loss would cripple human nature in such an irreversibly detrimental way that, bereft of original justice, human nature would become inherently deficient, and its powers intrinsically skewed. Rather, original justice is a pure gratuity, an “accident” given to human nature that perfects it

¹⁷ Aquinas states this task succinctly in his *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* IV, q. 9, a. 3.

on its natural level, a help (*auxilium*), granted by God to human nature to set its highest power, reason, in right relation to God, and thereby to overcome the defects connatural to human nature as composed of body and rational soul. In *ST I*, q. 97, a. 1, Aquinas argues that the indissolubility of the body of original humanity was not due to some intrinsic vigor of immortality that the body had (unlike the resurrection body), “but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God.”

The central characteristic of original justice is that the human reason, mind and will, is subject to God. Yet for human reason to be rightly subject to God it must be rightly ordered to God; and for this to obtain, the central activity of the mind and the will must somehow reach God as the terminative object of their respective acts. For this to happen, human nature must receive some form of supernatural elevation that would make the actions of the mind and the will able to reach an end completely disproportionate to human nature—God, and that is precisely what sanctifying grace does according to Aquinas.¹⁸ Hence, Aquinas takes sanctifying grace to be the root (*radix*) of original justice. Aquinas states in his late *De malo* that “original justice includes grace which makes [the human being] pleasing to God” (q. 4, a. 2, ad 1 of the third set of objections). To put it differently: for the submission of intellect and will to God to be a genuine personal and human submission involving the exercise of free will, there must be an ontologically prior proportioning of human nature to the supernatural end. Sanctifying grace achieves this proportioning by way of an elevation of human nature *in the individual person*, that is, not in human nature as such, but in the person who has a human nature. The rational soul of the person receives in its core a supernatural elevation and, with it, principles of operation proportionate to the supernatural end, God. This supernatural elevation is the root of original justice, the supernatural submission of reason to God by way of ordering and in a certain way already uniting mind and will with God in faith, hope, and charity—the friendship with God.

Because the first human being was instantaneously created in original justice—*God made man right* (Eccl 7:30)—the very root of original justice, that is sanctifying grace, must have been given to the human person from the first moment of existence on—this is the position that Aquinas develops over the course of his teaching career against a majority of theologians

¹⁸ See the definitive study by Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, *La gracia como participacion de la naturaleza divina según Santo Tomas de Aquino* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1979).

that taught that the first human was created in original justice but received sanctifying grace at some later point before the first sin. Sanctifying grace is a gift to the person elevating the individual nature of this person and not a gift to human nature in general.

"Integral nature" denotes human nature from its very beginning in the state of original justice and refers to the total natural and preternatural equipment in its integral order intrinsically and especially toward God that the first parents received, *yet abstracting from sanctifying grace*. Original justice would have been passed on by the first parents to their progeny. Sanctifying grace would have been given by God directly and individually to the first parents' progeny qua persons immediately with the direct creation of the rational soul:

Since the root of original [justice], which conferred [rectitude] on the first [human being] when he was made, consists in the supernatural subjection of the reason to God, which subjection results from sanctifying grace, . . . we must conclude that if children were born in original [justice], they would also have been born in grace; thus we have said above that the first [human being] was created in grace. This grace, however, would not have been natural, for it would not have been transfused by virtue of the semen; but would have been conferred on [the human being] immediately on his receiving a rational soul. In the same way the rational soul, which is not transmitted by the parent, is infused by God as soon as the human body is apt to receive it. (*ST* I, q. 100, a. 1, ad 2)

Sanctifying grace would enable the first parents' progeny in the state of original justice to share in God's own life by a love which directs all human thinking and willing toward God above all.¹⁹

¹⁹ An apt summary of Aquinas's account of original justice and its loss may be found in his commentary on Rom 5:12 ("Wherefor as by one man sin entered into the world and by sin death and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned"): "Then [St. Paul] touches on the entry of death into this world when he says, *and by sin death entered this world: ungodliness purchases death* (Wis 1:12). However, it seems that death does not arise from sin but from nature, being due to the presence of matter. For the human body is composed of contrary elements and, therefore, is corruptible of its very nature. The answer is that human nature can be considered in two ways: in one way according to its structural principles, and then death is natural. Hence Seneca says that death is natural, not penal, for man. In another way man's nature can be considered in the light of what divine providence had supplied it through original justice. This justice was a state in which man's mind was under God, the lower powers of the

Yet what exactly is the relationship between sanctifying grace and original justice? It is complex, to say the least. Aquinas has not been fully explicit about this relationship, and so it has given rise to elaborate discussions among students and interpreters of Aquinas. It seems to me that Conan Gallagher has advanced a convincing interpretation that in the following I shall make my own.²⁰ Transcending the competing Thomist positions of *essentialism* (sanctifying grace and original justice are adequately distinct) and *formalism* (sanctifying grace and original justice are only inadequately distinct), Gallagher interprets—in my eyes accurately—Aquinas’s mature position as one in which the relationship between sanctifying grace and original justice is conceived as a paradigmatic case of the mutual form–matter causality with God being directly the efficient cause of both sanctifying grace and original justice. Since Gallagher’s excellent study is not easy to access, I shall indulge the reader’s patience by citing a crucial passage at length:

Sanctifying grace, since it is a created participation in the divine nature and exceeds the order of nature, is something extraneous to human nature. In fact, it raises human nature to a higher order, i.e., the order of the supernatural. As such it necessarily is an endowment of an individual nature, i.e., of the person. Sanctifying grace, since it

soul under the mind, the body under the soul, and all external things under man, with the result that as long as man’s mind remained under God, the lower powers would remain subject to reason, and the body to the soul by receiving life from it without interruption, and external things to man in the sense that all things would serve man, who would never experience any harm from them. Divine providence planned this for man on account of the worth of the rational soul, which, being incorruptible, deserved an incorruptible body. But because the body, which is composed of contrary elements, served as an instrument for the senses, and such a body could not in virtue of its nature be incorruptible, the divine power furnished which was lacking to human nature by giving the soul the power to maintain the body incorruptible, just as a worker in metal might give the iron, from which he makes a sword, the power never to become rusty. Thus, therefore, after man’s mind was turned from God through sin, he lost the strength to control the lower powers as well as the body and external things. Consequently, he became subject to death from intrinsic sources and to violence from external sources” (*Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., and ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcon [Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012], 140–41 [Marietti no. 416]).

²⁰ Conan Gallagher, “Original Sin: The Privation of Original Justice” (STD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966). Surprisingly, this important work that convincingly addresses a number of the conundrums Houck is wrestling with in his interpretation of Aquinas is not referenced in the otherwise extensive bibliography of Houck’s work.

is extraneous to human nature, cannot be given to the nature considered in itself. The specific, generic, and common nature could not receive such a perfection without this perfection entailing a change in the species. Human nature is simply and absolutely incapable of receiving a perfection of this type and still remain human nature. Only the nature as subsistent (i.e., the person) is capable of receiving such a perfection.

Sanctifying grace, as an accident of the person, acts [formally] on the total supposit causing man to be *homo supernaturalis*. As such it elevates and qualifies the supposit and all the supposit contains. Thus the natural rectitude of nature which was preternaturalized through the reception of original justice is now supernaturalized by reason of the *personal* reception of sanctifying grace. The natural rectitude has been subsumed into the preternatural; and the preternatural rectitude or condition has now been subsumed into the supernatural order. Grace does not destroy nature, rather, it perfects it. . . . Or as expressed in *De malo*: "The rectitude of grace cannot be without the rectitude of nature" (*De malo*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 1, third series of replies). On the basis of the extraneous nature of sanctifying grace, then, we must exclude it from inhering in the specific or common nature and maintain that it inheres in the person, as in its proper subject, and by doing so, qualifies the entire supposit. (161–62)

Original justice, though a preternatural good, is nothing more or nothing less than integrity of nature. As such, original justice excludes from its essential composition sanctifying grace. Looked at essentially, original justice is original justice considered in itself independently of grace. Sanctifying grace is not the formal determining element of original justice accounting for its being. But . . . sanctifying grace is related to original justice as a formal cause. Certainly not in the sense of an intrinsic determining element establishing the essence of original justice. Rather, it adds something to original justice through the medium of the person. The result of this addition of sanctifying grace to the person (supposit) is that the natural (preternatural) rectitude of nature is supernaturalized. Reason and will now possess a supernatural orientation to God. (164)

St. Thomas refers to sanctifying grace as the *radix* of original justice. He also states that grace is so necessary for original justice that it cannot be form without it, in fact, it cannot exist without grace. The

reason for this is that sanctifying grace and original justice are related as form to disposition. Original justice is a material dispositive cause for the reception of grace in the soul of man. It cannot exist without grace, as St. Thomas says, because it is caused by grace and demands grace. The interrelation is such that the one depends upon the other for its existence. This is nothing else than the reciprocal causality which obtains between formal and material causes. (167)

Existentially considered, the preternatural rectitude of the nature was a disposition for the personal reception of sanctifying grace (*De malo*, q. 5, a. 1, corp. “dispositio quaedam”). From this it is clear that St. Thomas relates preternatural rectitude (integrity) to sanctifying grace in the actually existing supernaturalized person of Adam as matter and form (or as lower integrations relate to higher integrations; or as presuppositions relate to their final perfection). The union of both produced supernatural original justice. (169)²¹

²¹ Gallagher, “Original Sin,” 161–69. The mutual form–matter causality is lucidly articulated by P. De Letter, S.J., in his noteworthy article “Reciprocal Causality: Some Applications in Theology,” *The Thomist* 25, no. 3 (1962): 382–418. Because De Letter’s subtle analysis has been largely forgotten, I shall offer the central passages in full: “The proper locus, then, of mutual causality or reciprocal causal influence and priority, is found wherever act and potency, form and matter; are components of a happening or a reality, whenever two component principles of being form a unit per se and stand to each other in the relation of perfective and perfectible element. In every such case the perfective principle, call it act or form, is prior to the perfectible principle, call it potency or matter, in the line of formal causality and posterior to it or in a position of dependence in the line of dispositive or material causality. The perfectible principle, in its turn, potency or matter, is prior to the perfective principle, act or form, in the line of dispositive causality (unless it provides the required disposition, the perfective principle would be unable to exert its proper causality), but it is posterior to or dependent on it in the line of formal causality (it can exert its proper causality only because the perfective principle by its own causality enables it to do so)” (392–93); “*The two, sanctifying grace and preternatural gifts, were cause of one another, not in the line of efficient causality—God Himself was the efficient cause of both. He both infusing [sic] sanctifying grace and the disposition of Adam’s nature for sanctifying grace. But as intrinsic causes of original justice they caused one another by being what they are. Sanctifying grace by being the divinizing gift in Adam, fountainhead of mankind, caused, by way of perfecting or formal element, the preternatural gifts; and these in turn ‘caused’ sanctifying grace by being its support or nature’s disposition for grace. They were prior to and cause of sanctifying grace in the line of dispositive and material causality. The two were of necessity together in the supernaturalization of the fountainhead of mankind; neither of the two could exist without the other if Adam was to be fountainhead of both nature and grace for all his posterity.* This necessary connection is, in St. Thomas’ theology of original justice, the hinge of its

As persuasively argued by Gallagher and as robustly corroborated by P. De Letter, Aquinas interprets the relationship between sanctifying grace and original justice as a paradigmatic case of the mutual form–matter causality and priority.

organic structure both *in facto esse* and *in fieri* or in its transmission. The transmission was to be a complex happening (actually, it never did take place). Adam could not have transmitted sanctifying grace which is God's personal gift to each person. He could only and would have passed on together with nature nature's disposition for grace, that is, the preternatural gifts which properly speaking were the specific accident of nature. But because these gifts cannot exist without sanctifying grace, their transmission could not have happened without God infusing sanctifying grace at the same moment. Similarly, the transmission of human nature itself is a complex happening. The parents transmit only the matter disposed for the infusion of the soul which is created by God, while this disposition itself depends on or is caused by the soul (in the line of formal causality). Accordingly, as in the order of natural generation, the causality of the human parents and that of the First Cause, the Creator, are inseparably linked and, in their respective effects, condition one another—God's transcendency being perfectly safeguarded; so also in the transmission of original justice, the causality of Adam transmitting a nature disposed for grace, and that of God infusing sanctifying grace, are inseparably linked in their respective effects. God infuses sanctifying grace because the nature transmitted by Adam is disposed for it, and this nature is disposed for grace because God infuses grace. The paradox of mutual causality and priority! Thus in the genesis of original justice in Adam's children, the presence of the preternatural gifts in the nature which Adam transmits is prior to and cause of the presence of sanctifying grace in the line of dispositive or material causality; and in the line of formal causality, the infusion of sanctifying grace by God is prior to and cause of the preternatural gifts as nature's last disposition for grace. *The two exist simultaneously and are together of necessity. Neither of these causalities is efficient causality. They presuppose a twofold efficient causality: that of Adam providing the material part of a nature disposed for grace by the preternatural gifts; that of God infusing grace. But the mutual causality does not exist between these two (though they cannot exist without one another), but between their effects.* Form, end and agent, St. Thomas says, coincide in the form and disposition produced, and it is the form and the disposition that enter into mutual causality with one another. *In the line of formal and material causality the presence of grace and that of the preternatural gifts in Adam's posterity are cause of one another. That is what should have been, and would have been but for Adam's sin. Actually the fallen Adam passes on to his posterity original sin which is the privation of original justice.* Here also we could and should distinguish the privation of the formal element of original justice or of sanctifying grace, and the privation of its material element or of the preternatural gifts which is the indisposition of nature for grace. Adam now transmits a nature deprived of the preternatural gifts and so indisposed for grace; this indisposition makes it impossible for God, in keeping with His free ordinance concerning our supernatural elevation to infuse sanctifying grace. The privation of the preternatural gifts and that of sanctifying grace in Adam's posterity condition each other. Because nature is indisposed for grace, grace is not infused;

The Fall, Its Consequence, Original Sin, and the Effects of Original Sin

Aquinas characterizes the first parents' sin as a quintessential act of the vice of pride—coveting God's likeness *inordinately* by way of gaining God-like knowledge in direct contradiction of God's explicit command (*ST* II-II, q. 163). This sin was most grave on account of the perfection of the state of the first parents (a. 3). The first parents' sin betrayed the life of love toward God by abandoning reason's submission to God, and thus destroyed the *habitus* of original justice and issued in the loss of sanctifying grace. Instead of the destroyed *habitus* of original justice, now a *habitus* contrary to original justice took hold of human nature: *the habitus of original sin*.²² Original sin denotes first and foremost a reference to origin: "In this or in that individual it is nothing else but the sin which through his origin comes to him from the first parent" (*De malo*, q. 4, a. 2). "Original sin . . . is a kind of derivation from the first parents" (*ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 1, ad 2). The gift of original justice was given to human nature as an entitative *habitus* and was meant to be passed on with human nature; what is passed on now is the very deprivation of this entitative *habitus*, a disordered disposition arising from the dissolution of that harmony in which original justice consisted. Hence, original sin does not denote the mere absence of some contingent and inconsequential attribute of human nature, but rather the privation of an original gift that God intended from the beginning as an inheritable characteristic of human nature—a set of specific attributes—a gift that made

and because grace is not infused, nature is indisposed for it. We have here the negative print of what was to happen in the transmission of original justice. As there is question only of privations, we can hardly speak of mutual causality, when there is no positive causality; there is only a mutual priority of nature (not of time, evidently) between the privation of the preternatural gifts which is nature's indisposition for grace, and the privation of sanctifying grace which is the reason for nature's indisposition" (399–402; my emphasis). While Houck references another important essay by De Letter, surprisingly this crucial article is also missing from his otherwise extensive bibliography.

²² In his answer to the question of whether original sin is a *habitus*, Aquinas draws upon the distinction between an operative *habitus* and an entitative *habitus*: "[*Habitus*] is twofold. The first is a [*habitus* or disposition] whereby power is inclined to an act [this would be an operative *habitus*]: thus science and virtue are called habits. In this way original sin is not a *habitus*. The second kind of *habitus* is the disposition of a complex nature, whereby that nature is well- or ill-disposed to something, chiefly when such a disposition has become like a second nature, as in the case of sickness or health. In this sense original sin is a habit. For it is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice, even as bodily sickness is an inordinate disposition of the body, by reason of the destruction of that equilibrium which is essential to health. Hence it is that original sin is called the 'languor of nature' [cf. Augustine, *In Ps.* 118, serm. iii] (*ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 1).

the human composite nature an *integral nature* and ordered it in a stable way (entitative *habitus*) to its supernatural end. Original sin is therefore a disordered disposition *contrary* to original justice. Because original sin is the effect of a free act of the first human couple, the deprivation of the original gift is not simply a neutral absence. Insofar as this absence has its origin in a culpable failure of those whose nature we inherit and in virtue of whose nature we act and insofar as original sin is a remote cause of our actual sins, original sin is, rather, a culpable absence. And so original sin entails original guilt. Yet being a *sin of nature* and not a sin of the acting person, original sin and original guilt are sin and guilt only in an analogous sense.

Yet what actually is original sin “essentially,” what is its definition? Aquinas received two competing proposals for a definition of original sin that dominated the discussion among his theological predecessors that he integrated into a single definition. One is to be found in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1100–1160), where original sin is identified with concupiscence.²³ The other is advanced by Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34–1109), who takes original sin to be the lack of original justice given to the first parents for them to preserve and pass on to their progeny (*iustitia debita*).²⁴ Thomas integrates the two proposals by relating them respectively to the will and to the passions: When the will is turned away from God, all other powers of the soul become inordinate—hence the privation of original justice is the formal element of original sin. The inordinateness of the other powers of the soul (concupiscence), that is, their turning inordinately to mutable good, is the material element. In short, the privation of original justice is the form of original sin, and concupiscence is its matter.²⁵

In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas does not directly address the question of the *effects of original sin*. Rather, in his consideration of the effects of sin in general in *ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 3, he discusses the “wounds of nature” effected

²³ Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, dist. 30, ch. 8.1: “Original sin is called the incentive [*fomes*] to sin, namely, concupiscence” (*The Sentences: Book 2: On Creation*, trans. Guido Silano [Toronto: PIMS, 2008], 149; *Petri Lombardi Libri IV Sententiarum*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. [Ad Claras Aquas: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1916], 464 [no. 274]: “Quid igitur originale peccatum dicitur? Fomes peccati, scilicet concupiscentia vel concupiscibilitas, quae dicitur lex membrorum, sive languor naturae, sive tyrannus, qui est in membris nostris, sive lex carnis”).

²⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, “On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 39–40; *Opera Omnia*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, O.S.B. (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1940–1961), 1:141–42.

²⁵ See *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 3, corp.

by the first parents' sin. By having lost the intellect's submission to God and the interior order of the human powers, human nature has lost a gratuitous entitative strength, stability, and health and finds itself in a state of instability resulting in the manifold disorders of the moral faculties. These faculties are now beset by the wound of ignorance (affecting practical reason), the wound of malice (affecting the will), and the wounds of weakness and concupiscence (affecting the sense appetites). Reason, will, and the sense appetites are wounded in the sense of being deprived of original justice, that is, of the original order and consequent harmony among them under the rule of reason and reason's proper subjection to God. This moral infirmity characterizes the fallen state of humanity and sets up the stage for the necessity of grace, first and foremost, of healing grace (*gratia sanans*). Grace heals the effects caused by the absence of original justice and the effects of actual sins. In *ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 1, Aquinas asks whether sin can diminish the good of nature—and here he means original as well as actual sin:

The good of human nature is threefold. *First*, there are the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul, and so forth. *Secondly*, since man has from nature an inclination to virtue, as stated above (q. 60, a. 1; q. 63, a. 1), this inclination to virtue is a good of nature. *Thirdly*, the gift of original justice, conferred on the whole of human nature in the person of the first [human being], may be called a good of nature. Accordingly, the first-mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. The third good of nature was entirely destroyed through the sin of our first parent. But *the second good of nature, viz. the natural inclination to virtue*, is diminished by sin. Because human acts produce an inclination to like acts, as stated above (q. 50, a. 1). Now from the very fact that a thing becomes inclined to one of two contraries, its inclination to the other contrary must needs be diminished. Wherefore as sin is opposed to virtue, from the very fact that a [human person] sins, there results a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue.

The gratuitous gift of original justice preserved the first human couple from those connatural defects that arise from the complex composition of human nature (a rational soul, being in itself a spiritual substance, yet created to serve essentially as the substantial form of an animal body). Deprived of the gratuitous protection that the entitative *habitus* of original justice afforded, original sin denotes the very privation that accounts for the innate

defectibility of the human moral powers, the remote cause of the actual sins that in turn diminish the second good of human nature, the natural inclination to virtue.

Houck's Case

Houck advances a trenchantly argued and passionately pursued case, impressively executed at a commendably rigorous scholarly standard—a case that neither Thomists nor other contemporary Catholic theologians can afford to ignore. The primary aim of Houck's book is to propose and defend a new Thomist theory of (originated) original sin, that is, original sin in the narrow proper sense (*Erbsünde*), which he takes to be logically separable from originating original sin, that is, the sin of the first parents (*Ursünde*); related to this goal is his further argument that the “new Thomist view of original sin” is compatible with a “new Thomist view of the fall” that does not contradict, but is rather compatible with mainstream evolutionary theory.

Houck's ambitious argument comprises eight tightly argued chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion—all together on no more than 260 pages. In chapter 1, drawing heavily on the work of Odon Lottin, O.S.B. (1880–1965), *Psychologie et morale aux 12e et 13e siècles*,²⁶ and J.-B. Kors, O.P., *La justice primitive et le péché originel d'après S. Thomas*,²⁷ Houck lays out in a selective exemplary way the historical context for Aquinas's account of original sin: Augustine, who develops the first extensive theological account of original sin in the Latin West, and subsequently the complex Latin medieval reception and engagement of Augustine's theology by Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34–1109), Peter Abelard (1079–1142), and Peter Lombard (1100–1160), who in dialogue with and reaction to Augustine's account of original sin advance different theories—physical, legal, and metaphysical—for what they take to be the central claim of the doctrine of original sin, the unity between Adam and his posterity. The “realist theory” (Anselm) articulates this connection in metaphysical terms: original sin means for Adam's progeny to be “in Adam's fall” and original guilt consists in the continuation of the willing characteristic of Adam's originating original sin in his progeny. The “legal theory” (Abelard) accounts for the connection in legal terms: original sin is simply an absence of original justice in Adam's progeny, but God imputes this absence as guilt. And the “disease theory” (Lombard) does so in physical terms: original sin is passed

²⁶ Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1942–1960 (6 vols.).

²⁷ Paris: Vrin, 1930.

on in the procreative act to Adam's progeny. Houck rightly stresses that to understand these three models is the *conditio sine qua non* of comprehending the various elements of Aquinas's complex synthesis and modification of these explanatory accounts.

Chapters 2 and 3 form the center of the Houck's constructive argument—the new Thomist theory of original sin. The central claim he establishes in these two chapters is based on a purportedly unresolved tension between the early account of original sin in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas's commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, and his later account advanced in the *Summa theologiae* I and I-II. In a nutshell, according to Houck, in the *Scriptum* Aquinas maintains a sharp distinction between the rectitude of the human will in the state of original justice—a preternatural gift that rightly orders and submits the human mind to God—and the distinctly supernatural gift of sanctifying grace, the gift of an incipient participation in the life of God. Had the first couple not fallen, this preternatural gift of original justice would have been passed on to their progeny. Yet by the mid-1260s, when Aquinas composed the *prima pars* of his *Summa theologiae*, he implies in his response of article 1 in question 95 that the formal cause of original justice is sanctifying grace; that is, human *nature* cannot be in a state of original justice without the ontologically prior gift of sanctifying grace to the human *person*. Yet at the same time Aquinas holds (1) that Adam should have been the principal cause of original justice in his posterity and (2) that no creature can be the principal cause of sanctifying grace. Hence, according to Houck, Thomas's mature view implies that the disposition to original justice in Adam's posterity never could have been passed on through the procreative act, since its formal cause, sanctifying grace, could not have been passed on either. Here is the issue according to Houck: On the one hand, Adam's failure to transmit the disposition to original justice turned the lack of original justice sinful in his posterity. Yet on the other hand, if Adam would have been unable to do this, how could his posterity have original sin?

In chapter 3 Houck argues that the cause for the tension in Aquinas's account is his begun but unfinished reconfiguration of the relationship between original sin and human nature. Augustine, due to his integrative concept of nature (encompassing the gift of grace as something interior to the original gift of a nature in a state of original justice), holds that human nature, losing an integral part, was unavoidably corrupted by the Fall. In contrast, by drawing upon Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas argues that, as Houck puts it, human nature "survives" the Fall. Corruption signifies the loss of the good of human nature—original justice in an incipient communion and friendship with God. Yet the principles and properties of human

nature—including its fundamental orientation to God—remain intact. It is the clear distinction between these two aspects of human nature that allows Thomas to argue that children who die unbaptized will know and love God, mediated through created realities, in limbo without an awareness of loss, though they will never enjoy the beatific vision.

In chapter 4 Houck engages Thomas's account of original guilt, with a special focus on newborn unbaptized infants. According to Aquinas, infants are guilty only in an analogical sense; the infant stands in a middle position between mortal sin and sanctifying grace. In order to account for this analogical sense of the newborn infant's original guilt, Aquinas in his *Scriptum* draws on the disease theory, but later in the *Summa* on the analogy of the homicidal hand that participates in the agent's guilt because it instrumentally participates in the homicide. Houck submits both analogies to an unremitting critique. Both analogies ultimately fail to account for original guilt, Houck argues, because of the principle that receiving the effect of another's sinful act cannot constitute or increase one's own guilt. We will return to this point later.

In chapter 5 Houck examines five modern theological accounts of original sin and original guilt that do not depend on maintaining the historicity of the Fall. They provide a test case for Houck: Is it possible without theological loss to regard a historical fall from original justice to be theologically inconsequential, and hence re-interpret it as a purely aetiological myth? Differently put, can we jettison original justice and the Fall as facts of (salvation) history and still maintain a coherent theological account of original sin without loss? That this is possible is the shared supposition of the five accounts Houck examines. It is in virtue of this common assumption that Houck characterizes them as distinctly modern, in contradistinction from straightforward theological denials of original sin *tout court* or from secularized metamorphoses of the Fall as we find them advanced by thinkers like Rousseau, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein.²⁸ Houck offers crisp and perceptive analyses of Kant's account of "radical evil" in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, of Reformed theologian Karl Barth's account in his *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, of Reformed theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher's account in his *The Christian Faith*, of Dutch Catholic theologian Piet Schoonenberg's account in his *Man and Sin*, and of American Lutheran theologian Ian McFarland's account in his *In Adam's*

²⁸ For a brilliant analysis of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein under this aspect, see Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2007.

Fall. According to Houck, the test fails. He shows, quite persuasively to this reader, that each of these five accounts entails a crucial and ultimately detrimental theological inconsistency, precisely because of the absence of an account of a state of original justice and a subsequent fall from it. It is for this very reason that, according to Houck, there is indeed an ongoing need to retrieve Thomas's account of original sin, which includes as an essential component a (salvation-)historical state of original justice and a fall from it. The argument of this chapter is primarily negative, five times an instantiation of the *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

Yet how to defend this theological consensus and how to conceive of the state of original justice precisely as a fact of salvation history and to prevent it from being reinterpreted as an aetiological myth has run into a major roadblock—evolutionary theory.

In Chapter 6 Houck articulates and assesses this obstacle—the challenge that contemporary evolutionary theory poses to any account of a historical Fall, and with it to any traditional account of original sin. This challenge is, according to Houck, threefold: first, the position that the gradual nature of evolutionary change makes it difficult, if not impossible, to understand how one volitional act could have corrupted human nature; second, that what seems to follow from evolutionary history are evolved dispositions to sinful forms of behavior (there could not have been a fall from original justice of human dispositions if they were primordially disordered); third, the hypothesis that the human population never dipped below six thousand individuals, with the subsequent dilemma that some human beings were created in sin or that a lot more human beings than one original couple were created in the state of original justice. Houck wants to show that a compatibility between evolutionary theory and the biblical narrative of Genesis 3 is, in principle, possible on the presupposition that the biblical account is understood as a revealed narrative that conveys a fact of salvation history that can be interpreted theologically according to its literal intention while compatibly entertaining various hypotheses about the historical events within the exigencies of a still unfolding evolutionary account.

Chapter 7 constitutes the constructive payoff of the book: Houck's new Thomist theory (NTT) of original sin as warranted scripturally by way of a brief exegesis of Romans 5, St. Paul's typological correlation of Adam and Christ. While the focus on Romans 5 makes eminent sense and is absolutely central, it is surprisingly selective (a broader interpretation of the canon of Scripture, esp. Gen 1–3, is absent), as is the choice of exegetes to back Houck's interpretation of Romans 5. This twofold selectivity has primarily practical reasons, of course; it would, however, be not too difficult to find

contemporary and recent exegetes whose interpretation of Romans 5 would strongly tend into an Augustinian, Lutheran, or even Jansenist direction, and thus possibly undermine Houck's exegesis.

The central supposition of Houck's NTT is that originated original sin in infants (*Erbsünde*) is logically separable from originating original sin in Adam (*Ursünde*). Originated original sin is simply the lack of sanctifying grace. According to Houck's NTT, the human being with original sin retains the principles of human nature and its fundamental orientation to God. Human nature "survives" the Fall unwounded, yet now is *de facto* mortal and, absent the integral nature, has habitually disordered desires. The human person lacking sanctifying grace cannot have friendship with God in this life or the beatific vision in the next. Original sin is not a participation in an action before the infant is born; it is not partially voluntary, and it is not transmitted by the procreative act. Insofar as God judges original sin, original guilt is imputed to the infant—it simply is the divine recognition that the infant is without sanctifying grace. Hence, while, in the case of the sin of the first parents, sin in the strict sense (*peccatum*) and guilt in the strict sense (*culpa*) obtained and still obtain for all mortal and venial sins committed by their progeny (that is, by *persons* who have reached the age of reason), original sin as found in the human nature of unbaptized children before the age of reason is the one instance where there is sin (*peccatum*) present in only a weak analogical sense, *peccatum* denoting the mere absence of sanctifying grace, a sin of *nature* and not of the *person*, and where there is hence no guilt (*culpa*) at all in the proper strict sense, but, if at all, only in a weak analogical sense. Houck puts it thus: "On the new Thomist view [of original guilt], infants begin a sinful act of being [*actus essendi*] in the first moment of their existence, but they have not chosen to disobey God. They are condemned for this sin, insofar as God sees that they will perish and be justly excluded from his presence forever if they do not come to love Jesus Christ. . . . But one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all, Paul says explicitly. It is difficult—to say the least—to reconcile this with the affirmation of the actual damnation of human beings irrespective of their personal sin" (219). At the end of chapter 7, the NTT is clearly articulated and established, and with it the book effectively ends. The final chapter, in which Houck wades into the interminable Augustinian debates past and present, will be considered separately.

The Driving Theological Question: What Is the Fate of Unbaptized Children Who Die before the Age of Reason?

Against the expectations that the title of the book creates, the real weight of Houck's NTT does not fall onto an evolution-compatible account of the state of original justice understood as a fact of (salvation) history. Rather, the theological question that de facto drives Houck's book is the possibility of a non-sacramental mediation of sanctifying grace ("the grace of the Gospel," as Houck puts it) and especially the question of the fate of the unbaptized infant who dies before the age of reason. Furthermore, the one figure, briefly looming large at the very beginning of the book, but indirectly presiding in the background over the whole discourse, is Augustine with his (in)famous position, articulated extensively in his *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum* (411/412), that unbaptized children who die before the age of reason are not saved but condemned (albeit only suffering the mildest punishment of all the condemned), a theological tenet shared by all forms of radical Augustinianism, be they of Lutheran, Calvinist, or Jansenist provenance. Throughout his book, Houck implicitly asks the question that Augustine, in a letter to Jerome, asks explicitly:

With what justice on the part of the creator are they made subject to the sin of another when they are inserted in mortal members propagated from him so that condemnation overtakes them unless they are helped by the Church, since it is not in their power to be able to be helped by the grace of baptism? With what justice are so many thousands of souls condemned which, in the deaths of infants, leave their bodies without the pardon of the Christian sacrament, if individual new souls created without any preceding sin of their own, but by the will of the creator, are united to newborn babies? After all, he created them and gave them to animate those babies, though he, of course, knew that each of them was going to leave its body with no sin of its own but without the baptism of Christ. (Epistle 166, no. 10)²⁹

As far as we know, Jerome never responded to Augustine's question, or his answer is lost to posterity. The NTT can be understood as Houck's sustained response to Augustine's question, and in principle, it is a defensible

²⁹ Augustine, *Epistulae: Letters 156–210*, trans. Roland Teske, S.J., Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century II/3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2004), 84.

alternative to Augustine's position on the fate of unbaptized infants who die before the age of reason, a position never formally affirmed, after all, by the Catholic Church. Houck's emphasis on this theological question makes good sense in light of the fact that his proposal is geared primarily to a Protestant theological audience, an audience that is divided between (1) a liberal Protestant camp that takes its inspiration still largely from Schleiermacher, (2) an ethically antinomian and consequentialist camp with orthodox dogmatic commitments (in a Protestant sense of orthodoxy) that takes its inspiration largely from Karl Barth, and (3) traditional Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Evangelicals that take their inspiration from the various Augustinianisms of Luther, Calvin, Martin Bucer, Jonathan Edwards, and sundry Anglican divines. After having dismissed the viability of (1) and (2), Houck is intent to insert the NTT as a new proposal first and foremost into this theological context with a special focus on (3).

On the Catholic side of things, his primary if not sole opponent, if it still existed, would be Jansenism and what Houck might regard as strict Augustinian interpreters of the Council of Trent's teaching on original sin. It might have been his focus on a primarily Protestant audience that made Houck miss important points of contact for and convergence with his NTT in the Catholic tradition. For one, certain aspects of his proposal are not quite that new. Blessed Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797–1855) advanced a similar proposal in his *Le nozioni di peccato e di colpa illustrate* (1841), a work that, for the subsequent generation, unleashed a bitter controversy in Italian Catholic theological circles: original sin has the *ratio* of *peccatum*; it is sin, but not the sin of a person, and hence no *culpa* is imputed.³⁰ Hence, unbaptized children before the age of reason are not imputed a personal guilt. It is, secondly, surprising that Houck did not connect to the lively discussion in twentieth-century Catholic theology about the fate of unbaptized children who die before the age of reason. This topic has been carefully considered before Vatican II by two Thomist theologians, Albert Michel (1877–1972) in his *Enfants morts sans baptême: Étude doctrinale et documentaire*³¹ and Cardinal Charles Journet (1891–1975) in his *La volonté divine salvifique sur les petits enfants*,³² as well as in the posthumously published work *From Limbo to Heaven: An Essay of the Economy of Redemption*³³ by Vincent

³⁰ For a more extensive articulation and defense of his position, see Antonio Rosmini, *Opuscoli Morali I: Dottrina del Peccato Originale*, ed. R. Bessero Belti (Padua: CEDAM, 1965).

³¹ Paris: Téqui, 1954.

³² Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958.

³³ New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961.

Wilkin, S.J. (1896–1960), chaplain to the Catholic students at Liverpool University, and while Vatican II was in session, by Mundelein Seminary theologian George J. Dyer (1927–2017) in his *Limbo: Unsettled Questions*,³⁴ and then after Vatican II by Dom Edmond Boissard (1878–1979), Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes, in his *Réflexions sur le sort des enfants morts sans baptême*,³⁵ a remarkable set of searching considerations that reached their culmination first in the 1993 CCC affirming that God's mercy gives the grounds of hope for the salvation of unbaptized infants (§1261), and subsequently in the 2007 document of the International Theological Commission (ITC), *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without being Baptized*, arguing the same point more extensively and in greater depth. Since then, Dom Jean Pateau (1966–), Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Fontgombault, in his substantive study *Le salut des enfants morts sans baptême: D'après saint Thomas d'Aquin. Où est Abel, mon frère?*,³⁶ pushes beyond the self-imposed theological limits of the modus of hope endorsed by the 2007 ITC document and, in fact, encourages the ITC to formulate a new document that would go further and embrace a stronger positive theological answer to the question.

Houck is too deeply committed to the comprehensive witness of the Holy Scriptures to follow the dominant theological *Zeitgeist* and embrace a presently popular, but all too facile universalism. It is precisely the selfsame biblical witness of the surpassing love and mercy of the Triune God that funds his deep conviction that Augustine's position regarding the fate of unbaptized children who die before the age of reason is unacceptable. He would have found considerable theological support in the searching strand of this Catholic theological discussion spanning almost seventy years.

Treating Original Sin Theologically: Catholic Reflections on Theological Methodology

The Mystery of Faith and Its Analogical Elucidation

In Houck's critical treatment of the analogies Aquinas adduces in order to elucidate original guilt, an important question of theological method surfaces. Houck's critique is guided by the commonsense principle of just accountability for moral acts: receiving the effect of another's sinful act cannot constitute or increase one's own guilt. Houck's critique entails the

³⁴ New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964.

³⁵ Paris: Éditions de la Source, 1974.

³⁶ Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 2017.

universal applicability of this principle to all rational agents, including God. It is somewhat surprising that Houck does not consider the possibility that Thomas was quite aware of this commonsense principle, yet that it did not carry through for him because he understood the doctrine of original sin as communicated by the inspired Scriptures—as interpreted according to the rule of faith and the Church’s doctrinal teaching—to be a mystery of the faith that does not lend itself to a straightforward resolution in light of this commonsense principle. It is, rather, the latter, the commonsense principle, that comes to be theologically situated within this particular mystery of the faith. Hence, the analogies Aquinas advances offer no more than an interpretive approximation to the mystery of the faith that maintains at its core the fundamental solidarity of humanity qua human nature in the sin of Adam, the latter being the principle of human nature. In his appeal to the commonsense principle and his subsequent critique of Aquinas’s analogies Houck does not take sufficiently into account that, according to Aquinas, *sacra doctrina* receives this mystery on the authority of the inspired Sacred Scriptures as one of the principles of revelation that is to be elucidated by way of analogies, yet not critiqued and reinterpreted in light of what seems to be a universal principle of reason. To do the latter is a characteristic of modern rationalizing theology; to do the former is the characteristic of the theology of the Fathers that, precisely as a Scholastic, Thomas emulates here.

Moreover, Thomas’s mature position on original sin and original guilt, as we encounter it in the *prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* and in the *De malo*, reflects his encounter with Augustine’s very late writings against what was much later, during the Protestant Reformation, called “Semi-Pelagianism.” Houck acknowledges this encounter but significantly downplays what one might legitimately call the Augustinian turn in the mature Aquinas on the question of original sin and grace, especially in the *initium fidei*. Understanding for the first time fully Augustine’s position in this conflict had a tangible effect on Thomas’s teaching on sin and grace, among other things, by integrating Anselm’s understanding of original sin as a privation of original justice with the medieval Augustinian understanding that original sin wounds human nature and brings about a tendency toward sin. Absent original justice, original sin is like a *habitus*, a stable and hard to remove disposition, in the essence of the soul, an inchoate privation of rectitude entailing a tendency toward a complete privation of rectitude, the latter occurring through acts of personal sin. This privative *habitus* can only be inherited; that is, it must be referred back to the principle of human nature, Adam. God cannot be its cause in the coming about of a human being in the course of the ensoulment. For Aquinas, this is *de fide*,

something to be held by the Catholic faith, hence a mystery of the faith that remains ultimately irreducible to a complete rational analysis. Here Houck's recurring rationalistic tendency of taking mysteries of the faith for challenges to analytic reason comes to the fore quite tangibly. The analogies Aquinas probes are approximations to a mystery that remains irreducible to the kind of intellectual problem or puzzle that lends itself to rational analysis with the eventual result of a coherent resolution without remainder. It is this latter that seems to count for Houck as a successful theoretical account of a Christian doctrine.

Scripture, Tradition, and Typological/Salvation-Historical Exegesis

Behind the *reductio* argument of chapter 6 stands the fundamental theological conviction that all Protestants hold who regard the canon of the Holy Scriptures of both Testaments to be inspired and that, I would submit, Catholic theologians cannot afford to jettison, though some latter-day Catholic theologians have thought and still think they can do so. The fundamental conviction entails seven core elements: (1) As "the only one that knows, revelation"³⁷ conveys, through the inspired Scriptures (here specifically Gen 1–3), by way of the literary genres used in their respective composition, what can be known in a theologically decisive and definitive way about the human origin and the human destiny. (2) Biblical typology—here specifically the Adam–Christ typology of Romans 5—discloses the theological significance of correlated figures and events of salvation history. It seems to be an inescapable entailment of literal sense of Romans 5 that the Adam referred to is as much a fact of salvation history as the Christ that is referred to is. An exclusive reading of "Adam" as the collective personality representing humanity as a whole, or Israel in particular, would open the legitimate question of why such an exclusive collective reading should not obtain also for "Christ" as the collective personality of the "new Adam" representing the new humanity as a whole gathered as the ecclesial body of Christ—*totus Adam* and *totus Christus*. It is difficult if not impossible to sustain such an interpretation without gravely distorting, if not simply undercutting, the overall Christology and soteriology that governs the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans. While the Adam–Christ typology can arguably be *also* read with an inclusive meaning, connoting in each case *also* a collective personality, such an inclusive meaning (in order not to hang in thin air on

³⁷ Romano Guardini, *Der Anfang aller Dinge: Meditationen über Genesis I–III* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1961): "Vom reinen 'Ersten' redet nur die allein Wissende, die Offenbarung" (19).

its own, and hence unavoidably take on a striking similarity to the Platonic myths, that is, literary construals that are to convey a complex meaning) has to presuppose the historicity, facticity, and unique salvation-historical role of each pole of the typology, Adam as well as Christ, each as the principal cause of and reference for denoting *also* an inclusive meaning.³⁸ (3) By implication of the interior logic of the Adam–Christ typology, the Fall is to be understood as a salvation-historical event and not as a mere aetiological myth conveying a salvation-historical meaning *sans* salvation-historical event. The latter, a salvation-historical meaning without a salvation-historical event, would be analogous to the lingering smile of the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, a smile hanging around suspended in the air after the cat has disappeared. It is far from impossible for the salvation-historical event *also* to serve an aetiological function, but it is from the former, the salvation-historical event with universal impact for the entire human family, that the latter arises. It is hard to see how one can save the latter while dispensing with the former. (4) The mytho-poetical narrative of the sin of the first parents, however construed in detail, presupposes necessarily an antecedent state superior to the post-Fall state, some gratuitous state of proximate perfection of human existence—short of the beatific vision—spiritually, intellectually, volitionally, and physically. Since the Fall is primarily an estrangement from

³⁸ For the dialectical counter-position to the argument sketched in (2), see the *Habilitationsschrift* of the German Catholic theologian Peter Lengsfeld, *Adam und Christus: Die Adam-Christus-Typologie im Neuen Testament und ihre dogmatische Verwendung bei M.J. Scheeben und K. Barth* (Essen: Ludgerus-Verlag Hubert Wingen KG, 1965). Retrospectively, it is by now obvious that the exegetical approach on which Lengsfeld builds his whole argument rests overall and quite uncritically and unilaterally on the methodological assumptions and correlated theological positions advanced by the German Protestant New Testament scholar Willi Marxsen. This set of assumptions and positions guides not only Lengsfeld's exegesis of Paul but also his assessment of Matthias Joseph Scheeben's and Karl Barth's uses of the Adam–Christ typology in their respective dogmatic theologies. Though in Lengsfeld's comparison of Scheeben with Barth, the latter emerges as an example for Catholic theologians to emulate, Lengsfeld fails to understand and to emulate in his own approach Barth's critical theological stance toward a theologically uncritical normative embrace of the historical-critical method, its philosophical presuppositions, and its quasi-theological entailments. Barth would have regarded Lengsfeld's whole approach and especially his exegesis of Paul—all largely from Marxsen—as theologically all too uncritical, indeed, theologically naive, and all too dogmatic in the wrong sense of treating the philosophical presuppositions of historicism as a quasi-dogmatic truth determining the Scriptural witness. Nothing could be further from Barth's mind (and for that matter, Scheeben's); but this rather obvious non-sequitur leaves Lengsfeld strangely undisturbed, while it de facto considerably compromises his whole argument.

God, the prior state has to be conceived as a state characterized by a right relation with God, indeed, by a friendship with God—in short, as a state of “original justice,” but also, by necessary entailment of the former, a state of original happiness and bliss.³⁹ (5) Hence, the state of original justice, happiness, and bliss is to be taken as a necessary precondition of the Fall, without which the latter becomes meaningless as fact as well as aetiological myth, and the theological nature of the event of the Fall is definitively revealed through the universally salvific nature of the Incarnation, the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, as articulated in Romans 5 and echoed in many other parts of the New Testament: “But from the beginning it was not so” (Matt 19:8; RSV). (6) A proper canonical reading of the Holy Scriptures, as paradigmatically executed already by the Fathers of the Church reads Genesis 3 in light of Romans 5. The latter provides the Christological key for the definitive theological understanding of the former as a salvation-historical

³⁹ There might be compelling exegetical and theological reasons to interpret the Gen 1–3 in an existentialist-personalist key, based on a spiritual-liturgical reading (Adam=Israel=every human being), as Ratzinger does in a nuanced and complex way across his large theological oeuvre. This is for a variety of reasons not only attractive but indeed compelling; however, as soon as the biblical text’s intention to refer to some historical event involving a first couple is weakened or even bracketed, with it also disappears the facticity of the state of original justice, of the gift of original harmony, friendship, and bliss in an original communion with God. And this eclipse, it seems, does not come without significant theological consequences: Christ becomes the archetypal human being and everything must be understood eschatologically, in light of and from the end, creation’s eschatological transfiguration. The state of original justice denotes a divine intention that will be realized only eschatologically; it never obtained so far for the historically existing human being (with the exception of Christ and the Blessed Virgin). See Joseph Ratzinger, *Schöpfungslehre* (1964), as cited in Ramage, *From the Dust of the Earth*, 196: “The purpose (*Sinn*) of the original state is not to recount a piece of empirical history (*ein Stück empirischer Geschichte*) and thus to expand our knowledge of history into the prehistoric, but to express the difference between the God-willed meaning of the creature man and the historically existing being man.” It is very hard not to see the smile of the Cheshire cat lurking in the background. Ratzinger wants to avoid what he sees as a central conundrum in the Adam–Christ theology of Scheeben (a problem pointed out by his student, Lengersfeld, who composed his *Habilitationsschrift* during the time Ratzinger delivered his lectures on the doctrine of creation), but one wonders whether the theological price paid for this alternative construal might not be too high. It is also interesting to realize that, from Ratzinger’s perspective, an undertaking as William Lane Craig’s *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021) must constitute one great category mistake by attempting to correlate empirical history and theological meaning. In *From the Dust of the Earth*, Ramage provides an instructive case study, *malgré lui-même*, so to speak, of the interior tension in Ratzinger’s theology on precisely this point.

event with universal significance. (7) Hence, the state of original justice is a necessary presupposition of the salvation through Christ that effects a surpassing eschatological restitution of the original happiness and bliss in the beatific vision as authoritatively communicated by the apostles and the inspired canonical witness of the New Testament as a whole.

There is a fundamental agreement on these seven points among Thomas Aquinas (one might want to consult his *De commendatione et partitione Sacrae Scripturae*, a text discovered only in the twentieth century and arguably, for some debatably, authentic), the reformers of the magisterial Protestant Reformation (Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed), and contemporary Evangelicals, including Houck. The literal sense, broadly understood as including typology and genre specification, of Genesis 3 and Romans 5 is implicitly corroborated in §§38–39 of the 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*, implied in §§11–13 of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, and presupposed in St. John Paul II's Wednesday homilies, collected and edited first in 1985 under the title, *Uomo e donna lo creò: Catechesi sull'amore umano (Man and Woman He Created Him: Catechesis on Human Love)*.⁴⁰ On this broad theological consensus, Genesis 3 is understood to convey, by way of its characteristic literary genre, a mytho-poetic narrative, the theological significance of a salvation-historical fact, a theological significance fully disclosed only retrospectively in light of the redemption wrought by Christ in his Passion and death on the Cross, as articulated by the apostle Paul, especially in Romans 5.

It is a full canonical exegesis—the rule of faith, the exegesis of the Church Fathers, and the conciliar tradition—that corroborates any individual exegesis and protects it from being a mere exercise of the exegete's private judgment that is bent by one's own personal predilections and pre-judgments or by the plausibility structures that the historicist immanent frame imposes on the methodology and the particular judgments of historical-critical exegesis.⁴¹ This is not so much a critique as it is simply the observation that

⁴⁰ Turin and Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1985. It is, however, important to recognize the more complex position Pope Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* takes regarding Scripture's literal sense. For an instructive discussion of this intricate matter, see Mark Reasoner, "Dei Verbum and the Twentieth-Century Drama of Scripture's Literal Sense," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 1 (2017): 219–54.

⁴¹ The implicit and tacit presuppositions that constitute the historicist immanent frame operative in the methodology of historical-critical exegesis are articulated with instructive clarity by Ernst Troeltsch in his 1898 "On the Historical and Dogmatic Methods in Theology" (thestairview.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Troeltsch-On-the-Historical-and-Dogmatic-Methods.pdf). One of the most insightful and lucid analyses of the implicit and tacit presuppositions of historical-critical exegesis remains Ratzinger's

methodologically Houck's NTT is first and foremost a Protestant theological reconstruction of Aquinas's understanding of original sin based on the implicit Protestant presupposition that neither the exegesis of the Church Fathers, nor Orange II as received by Trent (1545–1563), nor any other dogmatic specifications are normatively relevant for a contemporaneous retrieval and construal of Thomas's account of original sin as long as one can warrant the latter by way of what one takes to be an exemplary exegesis of what is seen to be the one single, but decisive part of the witness of Scripture.

The implicit methodology of advancing a biblical warrant makes it clear that with his NTT Houck appeals primarily to a theologically sophisticated Evangelical audience with strong Baptist sympathies. This intended audience makes it understandably desirable that the NTT be compatible with a variety of Protestant theological positions that differ from Catholic theology on central topics like justification, sanctification, church, sacraments, and so on. What is acceptable in a broadly Protestant theological framework, what is defensible in light of contemporary evolutionary theory, and last but not least what is intelligible as well as acceptable to contemporary moral sensibility is an account of original sin that has more to do with, as Houck puts it, "a lack of a tight relation to the Triune God" than with the inheritance of original guilt or even wounds of original sin. According to Houck, the account of original sin primarily advanced by the early Thomas of the *Scriptum*—before his discovery of the writings of the late Augustine—remains contemporaneously relevant because this account seems to offer the essential elements of such a new theory without the forfeiture of a historical Fall.

Erasmus Lecture, "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict," in *God's Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office*, ed. Peter Hünemann and Thomas Söding, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 91–126. For an account of why an analysis like Ratzinger's will very likely not be received by those Catholic exegetes who remain uncritically beholden by or unreflectively committed to a purportedly presuppositionless *practice* of historical-critical exegesis and a de facto tacit commitment to a "double-truth-theory" (the deliveries of historicist exegesis on the one side and the deliveries of the Catholic faith on the other side), see Michael Waldstein, "The Self-critique of the Historical-Critical Method: Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (2012): 732–47. I shall explicitly note that there *are* Catholic biblical scholars who have developed a theologically informed and hermeneutically reflective practice of historical exegesis. For a critique of the presuppositions of the historical-critical method advanced by highly competent New Testament scholars, see from the Catholic Klaus Berger, *Die Bibelfälscher* (Munich: Pattloch, 2013), and from the Lutheran Ulrich Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Historische Kritik der historisch-kritischen Exegese* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

*The State of Original Justice and the Fall—Salvation-Historical
Facts and the Theory of Evolution*

Instead of retreating to the trans-historical line of defense of understanding the biblical account exclusively as an aetiological myth conveying an allegedly indispensable theological truth, as all typically modern accounts of original sin do, Houck bites the bullet and affirms what the biblical texts intend to convey and what at least the tradition of the Catholic Church has affirmed for the longest. Here Houck puts out the framework for a constructive challenge to contemporary Catholic theologians—to think through original justice and the Fall as salvation-historical facts within the exigencies of the biblical witness and the doctrinal and dogmatic tradition on the one hand, and the exigencies of evolutionary theory on the other hand. One of the desiderata that need to be thought through at a deeper level are the unavoidable epistemological limits and methodological strictures of all empirical, genetic, and broadly paleo-studies, not in order to secure a place for the “god of the gaps,” but rather in order to understand precisely the epistemological status of the hypotheses on which paleo-studies rests its *doxa* (the considered opinion based on a genetically and empirically funded hypothesis), or at best its *doxa alethēs* (the considered opinion based on a genetically and empirically funded hypothesis that, based on cumulative evidence, receives broadest scientific support.) The latter is a condition for the possibility of dogmatic theology to consider the deliveries of evolutionary theory in a methodologically reflective and sound way, in short, in the proper *wissenschaftliche* modus and not as the deliveries of a by-now-dominant universal explanatory scheme with the pseudo-religious arrogation to quasi-revelatory truth characteristic of evolutionary scientism. Mary Midgley in her *Evolution as Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*,⁴² Conor Cunningham in his *Darwin’s Pious Idea*,⁴³ Michael Hanby in his *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology*,⁴⁴ and the authors of *Thomistic Evolution*⁴⁵ have made important contributions in this regard, beginning to sort out these complex matters without committing the error of taking the scientistic or fundamentalist shortcut to the desired, putatively “objective picture.” At the same time, Catholic theology has very good reasons to maintain what one might call *a theological monogenism within a phylogenetist dynamism of*

⁴² London and New York: Methuen, 1985.

⁴³ Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

⁴⁴ Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

⁴⁵ Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., James Brent, O.P., Thomas Davenport, O.P., John Baptist Ku, O.P., *Thomistic Evolution: A Catholic Approach to Understanding Evolution in the Light of Faith* (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2016).

hominid evolution.⁴⁶ After all, if the inspired Scriptures do not convey more than aetiological myths (David Friedrich Strauss, in his 1872 *The Old and the New Faith*, held the same about the Gospels), emerging religious surmises of equally emerging semitic desert tribes (borrowing liberally in their concoctions from the elaborate myths of the vastly superior cultures of Egypt and Babylonia), and later sundry views of some marginal Jews dressed in the religious imagery of the day, they are a form of precious religious literature that belongs into the museum of religious artifacts of the past, monuments of the greatness and subtleness of the emerging human mind, texts that need appropriate curators, such as historical-critical exegesis provides them on the highest level of technical achievement. This is however not how *Dei Verbum* §§11–13 seems to understand the inspired Scriptures. If the inspired Scriptures convey in literary genres characteristic of the times of their composition the good news of beginning and end, of origin and telos (as well as terminus), that are in principle inaccessible to any form of knowledge available to unaided human reason, then Catholic theology will always find itself entrusted with the deliveries of salvation-historical facts that are ultimately deliveries of revelation—always in principle compatible with the authentic evidences of science, but never to become themselves empirically evident by scientific means that circumvent the givens of revelation. Cumulative genetic and paleo-archaeological evidence within the methodological framework of a materialistic emergentist theory of evolution is one thing; access to a remote historical particularity of events in a salvation-historical context with universal impact is quite another thing. It is important, however, that the theological interpretation of the salvation-historical facts is compatible with the cumulative empirical and genetic evidence of evolutionary science.⁴⁷

Interminable Augustinian Debates up to the Present

In the concluding chapter 8, Houck anticipates a range of potential objections to the NTT and advances responses to them, responses that are meant to preempt these objections. Houck attempts to protect his NTT from being misunderstood in the context of two very different but internally

⁴⁶ See Kenneth W. Kemp, "Science, Theology, and Monogenism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2011): 217–36; Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., "A Theological Fittingness Argument for the Historicity of the Fall of Homo sapiens," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 13, no. 3 (2015): 651–67. See also the previous footnote.

⁴⁷ For a noteworthy recent effort to just do precisely this, see William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

complex theological discussions. There is, first, the internal debate in Catholic theology, on the one side, with what Houck calls “a recrudescence” of “two-tier-Thomism” or simply of contemporaneous “baroque Thomism” (an amusing anachronism that can occur and have appeal only in a context far removed from anything remotely baroque) of which the *doctor eximius*, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), would be a historical prime example, if there is one. Yet, according to Houck, the selfsame Suárez, being a “survivalist,” is one of the few baroque Thomists, if not the only, who purportedly got Aquinas right on human nature after the Fall—in contradistinction from the Dominican Thomists who, after Trent, purportedly gave in to some sinister Augustinian turn (Domingo Báñez, Jean Baptiste Gonet, et al.). On the other side of this intra-Catholic debate stands the Lubacian nature–grace position, with which Houck wants to associate himself (yet without making a substantial case about how this indeed is compatible with his NTT, for which Suárez is indeed a much more fitting ally than Henri de Lubac). It is de Lubac, who in his *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1965) distances himself clearly from Suárez’s position that “the human being in the state of fallen nature is no less able to think, act, and form judgments about what is to be done well than he would be in a state of pure nature, had he been created in it,” as Suárez states in the prolegomena of his *De gratia Dei*.⁴⁸ If there is a “survivalist” hero in the post-Tridentine Catholic tradition in Houck’s terms, it is Suárez. Yet more than any Dominican Thomist of the period, he endorses a clearly extrinsicist two-tier model of nature and grace, emulated by his Jesuit confrere Louis Billot (1846–1931). It is hard to see how Houck can coherently endorse a strict “survivalist” interpretation of Aquinas in the spirit of Suárez and at the same time embrace de Lubac’s nature–grace proposal. He seems to want to have the cake and eat it too, and his arguments to the contrary are ultimately not persuasive.

The other complex discussion Houck enters in his final chapter by anticipating and responding to objections is the discourse internal to the varieties of Protestantism with traditional Lutheran and Calvinist accounts of original sin looming on one side (not to forget the Gnesio-Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus [1520–1575], who held that after the Fall original sin is

⁴⁸ See Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, with introduction by David L. Schindler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967; repr. New York: Crossroad, 1998), 69. This important passage is regularly referred to in critical reference by Thomist theologians who, pace Suárez, rightly insist that, after the Fall, human nature is wounded and that this is Aquinas’s mature position. The latest reference to this passage, and from which I quote it, occurs in Wood, “From Pure Nature to Wounded Nature,” 174.

the substance of the human being, that human nature has become identical with sin, and that in conversion a new substance is created by God) and Arminian, Socinian, and liberal Protestant accounts standing on the other side (not to forget Huldrych Zwingli [1484–1531], who held original sin to be a merely natural defect causing a preponderancy toward sinning, denied original guilt of which baptism would be the means of remission, and thus prepared the way for the Arminian and Socinian opinions). Considering these double-layered fields of contention, it is not surprising that Houck is worried that his NTT might be criticized by some as falling into Manichaeism, by others into Jansenism, by others into “baroque Thomism,” and by others again into Pelagianism or at least semi-Pelagianism. The NTT seems to be surrounded on all sides by enemies and potential detractors (including the representatives of the strictly modern accounts of original sin). It remains doubtful that the various responses to the imagined objections would indeed satisfy those who might be preoccupied by such worries. Yet it seems obvious that these multiple engagements reflect the fact that the NTT comes to sit between many—arguably too many—theological front lines, possibly because Houck is too eager to demonstrate that the NTT is maximally compatible with a wide range of theological proposals, Catholic and, primarily, Protestant, that hold significant theological differences among each other in these matters.

What Houck regards as the greatest strength of the NTT is also its greatest weakness: it is meant to be excisable from Thomas’s overall theology and doctrinal commitments in particular and from the Catholic dogmatic tradition in general and insertable into and combinable with a variety of Protestant theological construals. The NTT is intentionally minimalist. It does not commit Houck to Thomas’s precise understanding of justification, healing grace, and sanctifying grace as a participation in the life of God, of the nature of the seven sacraments and their proper efficacy, of the nature of *sacra doctrina* itself, and of the role that the rule of faith, dogma, and the magisterium play for it. The NTT, Houck admits, might be incompatible with the notion that God creates and infuses the human soul directly, and that God cannot be causally involved in the transmission of sin. While this way of putting to use what Houck takes to be a particular attractive theoretical proposal advanced by Aquinas is not per se illegitimate, it nevertheless turns the NTT into a rather free-floating item of theological consideration between, on the one hand, the witness of Scripture, as construed by Houck according to a particular selection of exegetes whose readings support the NTT, and on the other hand, a sundry array of theological issues and

concerns in Protestant theology combined with the developing exigencies of evolutionary theory.

Conclusion

Irrespective of the above concerns of a methodological, interpretive, and substantive nature that a Catholic theologian might have to register, Houck's book is a considerable achievement and, indeed, a remarkable and commendable instantiation of contemporary Protestant systematic theology. Precisely because of the above registered reservations, Houck's NTT deserves serious consideration, deep probing, and extended reflection by Catholic theologians. For contemporary Catholic theology, this work is a welcome invitation and challenge to aim at an articulation of the dogma of original sin in light of carefully assessed "givens" of evolution theory, paleo-genetics, and paleo-anthropology, in a theologically discerning dialogue with historical-critical exegesis, and in faithfulness to the exigencies of revelation as conveyed by the biblical witness, the rule of faith, and the dogmatic tradition as a whole, but of the Council of Trent in particular, in short, an appropriate update and development of the carefully argued study by Marie-Michel Labourdette, O.P. (1908–1990), *Le péché originel et les origines de l'homme*.⁴⁹ Houck has put the bar high to meet the challenge of his NTT critically as well as constructively. It is this high bar that might help prevent some latter-day Catholic theologians from giving in to the temptation of dialoguing away Catholic dogmas and doctrines by way of a hermeneutics of revision called "creative development" that ultimately aims at the precise opposite of the former teaching yet calls it an authentic development. Rupture and revision declared as authentic development of doctrine applied to the dogma of original sin would simply mean a return to what was begun immediately after Vatican II, embracing anew the new aversion against sin and especially against original sin, in short, an aversion

⁴⁹ Paris: Alsatia, 1953. The dialectical counter-position to Labourdette's book would be Alfred Vanneste, S.J., *The Dogma of Original Sin*, trans. Edward P. Callens, S.S.CC. (Louvain: Vander, 1972), whose intention is "to demythologize the theology of original sin as radically as possible, that is to say, to free it as much as possible from all anthropomorphic representations, without in the least depriving it of its deep meaning" (167). In light of Vanneste's claim, it is difficult, if not impossible, not to be reminded of the Cheshire Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*. As already mentioned above, one distinguishing feature of the Cheshire Cat involves a periodic gradual disappearance of its body, leaving only one last visible trace: its iconic grin. The narrative representation gradually disappears, but its meaning continues to hang in air, simply by itself—the only question remains for how long before it also disappears.

against anything that stands in the way of embracing without restraint the imaginary of the sovereign self with all its narcissistic entailments. The dogma of original sin is the “negative” of which Christ, the incarnate Lord and his salvific Passion, death, and resurrection are the infinitely surpassing, disclosive, and definitive “positive.” The concrete “positive” presupposes, however, salvation-historically, the “negative,” and the “negative” presupposes an anterior, original “positive,” the human being from the beginning made right by God, created in a state of original justice, originally endowed with sanctifying grace issuing in an original, supernatural happiness and bliss, perfective freedom in friendship with God on the path to deification, in short, *the homo supernaturalis*. Enlightenment modernity’s principled rejection of the primordial, original “positive” together with the “negative” of the Fall and the unforgivable offense, the impertinent affront that original sin and original guilt inflict upon the self-declared quasi-divine dignity of the sovereign self, making itself the measure of all things, thereby seeking *inordinately* the likeness of God (arguably the constitutive feature of Enlightenment modernity), has as its unavoidable correlate the rejection of the “positive,” Christ, the incarnate Lord, as the Savior of all humanity. The denial of original justice as well as of original sin and original guilt goes hand in hand with the rejection of Christ.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ It would be wrong to assume that with modernity’s fundamental dismissal of the dogma of original sin it would disappear from modernity’s new immanent frame. On the contrary, by way of more or less distortive and hence ultimately harmful philosophical metamorphoses, the ghost of the dogma of original sin haunts modern secular thought. It might, indeed, not be too temerarious a claim to state that the distortive metamorphoses of the dogma of original sin are nothing less than constitutive of the aporetic self-constitution of modernity, as well as of its equally aporetic postmodern de-construction. First, within a revised narrative of humanity’s original state, “originating original sin,” that is, the Fall turns out to be the necessary, albeit ambiguous, step to freedom, the fall from an animal-like innocence into the complexities of communal and socio-cultural existence, a thesis developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), a thesis that made a veritable career in the thought of Hegel, Schelling, and even still echoes in Kierkegaard’s thought, and furthermore had a deep influence on Karl Marx’ philosophy of history. Second, under the notion of “*Dasein*’s fallenness” (*Verfallenheit*) in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, “originated original sin,” the consequence of the Fall reappears in the metamorphosis of the inveterate and arguably irredeemable inauthenticity of *Dasein*’s ontological structure, a notion that has haunted much of twentieth-century existentialist thought and made its way from there into literature, movies, and other cultural constructions, especially by way of Jean-Paul Sartre’s integration in his *Being and Nothingness* of both poles of the modern metamorphoses of original sin—taking the latter, thrownness into existence, that is, inauthenticity and estrangement, as the original condition, and the former, the act of self-determination, the fundamental act

Despite the high bar that Houck's book sets, it is noteworthy that the NTT is driven by an ever so subtle yet sustained theodist motive that in turn is fueled by a strong preconception of the inherent intelligibility of divine justice, a prejudgment held as a theologically unquestioned conviction combined with a considerable rationalist commitment to the ideals of conceptual clarity and transparency in theological discourse and theory-formation, convictions and ideals that might have benefited from being somewhat tempered by a Pascalian purification. Every Christian theologian thinking and writing about original sin, and this includes the writer of these lines, is well-advised always to keep in front of his or her mind what Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) observes in his posthumously published *Pensées* (which does not entail that one has to underwrite the details of Pascal's interpretation of original sin, an interpretation that is, to say the least, not completely free from Jansenist leanings):

It is . . . astonishing that the mystery most distant from our knowledge, that of the transmission of sin, should be a thing without which we cannot have knowledge of ourselves. . . . Certainly nothing shocks us more harshly than this doctrine. And yet without this most incomprehensible of all mysteries, we are incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition takes its twists and turns in this abyss, so that man is more unintelligible without this mystery than this mystery is unintelligible to man. Thus, it seems that God, wanting to reserve for himself alone the right to teach us about ourselves and to render the difficulty of our existence unintelligible to ourselves, has concealed the knot so high—or rather we should say so low—that we were quite incapable of reaching it. As a result, it is not through the proud exertions of our reason, but through its simple submission, that we can truly know ourselves.⁵¹

of freedom, as the achievement of authenticity, and by way of it, of identity. With the appropriate feminist, postcolonial, and posthumanist modifications taken into account, Sartre's integration of both poles still provides the fundamental matrix for virtually all of the contemporary identity discourse. All of these metamorphoses in their aporetic contradictoriness give indirect witness to the truth of the dogma of original sin, a truth to which the key is the rejected cornerstone, the God-man Jesus Christ, a key given by way of revelation and received in faith and a key jettisoned programmatically since the Enlightenment by a self-sufficient rationality, contracted into the immanent frame, and *curvatus in semetipsum*, yet from its own vantage point its self-constitution as a sovereign subject.

⁵¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Sellier edition), ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), 164. On the complex relationship of Pascal's thought to Jansenism, see

This is obviously not Houck's NTT, but might be the explicit articulation of an intuition tangibly albeit only tacitly present in the analogies advanced by Thomas during his second Parisian regency in his *De malo*, analogies that presuppose the fundamental solidarity between Adam and his progeny in the sin of Adam, a given of revelation that is *de fide*, and as such does *per se* transcend the capacity of our intellect to fully grasp, yet that even in its analogical approximation our all too human preconception of divine justice (a preconception always at least partially clouded by the wound of original sin affecting the human intellect) fails to apprehend, let alone appreciate: "Original sin is related to the whole of human nature propagated from Adam as actual sin is related to an individual human person, as if all human beings as descendants of the one Adam should be one human being whose different bodily members are different persons" (*De malo*, q. 4, a. 6, corp.).⁵²

Abstaining from defining the essence of original sin, the primary intention of Trent arguably was to defend the Catholic faith against erroneous innovations. Against these, the fathers of the Council confirmed the sinful nature of the fault inherited from the first parents and, furthermore, the efficacy of baptism in remitting it. Original sin remains a mystery of revelation, and hence is held and received most appropriately as a dogma of the faith the conceptual articulation of which, including the analogies chosen for elucidating it, remains at best an analogical approximation. And neither the substance nor the form of this Catholic dogma is something that Houck seems to be able or willing to integrate and accommodate into the framework of his NTT. The proposal, however, has other features that are worthy of a serious and sustained consideration by Catholic theologians. One of these features of the NTT is its response to the question of the salvation of unbaptized children who die before the age of reason. In this regard, there obtains a strong constructive convergence between the NTT and the above-mentioned line of inquiry of Catholic theologians, many pursuing this question from within a broadly conceived Thomist tradition. The doctrine of original sin is a necessary entailment of salvation in Christ and has been elevated to the status of a dogma regarding certain central aspects of it. To advance a theological interpretation of original sin that is faithful to the givens of revelation, tradition, and dogma and accounts as well for the exigencies of contemporary evolutionary theory remains an ongoing challenge for Catholic theology in general and for Thomists in particular. We

Maurice Blondel, "Le jansénisme et l'anti-jansénisme de Pascal," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 30, no. 2 (1923): 129–63.

⁵² The translation is from *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard Regan, ed. Brian Davies with introduction and notes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 377.

are indebted to Houck's achievement of drawing heavily on Thomas Aquinas for advancing a theory of original sin that strives to be compatible with the biblical witness as conceived within an Evangelical Protestant framework of reference, as well as the contemporary scientific plausibility structures. His book has set a commendably high bar for reconsidering original sin. Yet more work remains to be done to chart a safe passage between the Scylla of the radical Augustinianism and its unremitting logic, on the one side, and on the other side, the Charybdis of a twofold "evacuation" of salvation history, protologically by accommodation to the immanent frame of an Enlightenment hermeneutics according to which the biblical narrative of the Fall serves as an exclusively aetiological myth disclosing a perennial fallenness of the human animal, tragic and natural at the same time, and eschatologically by endorsing a quite compatible universalism bereft of salvation history, of a recently popular neo-Gnosticism in which Christ is one of the many signs offered by multiple religions that gesture to the inescapable union of all rational beings on the other side of death with the One that transcends all being, life, understanding, and predication. Yet the authoritative *εὐαγγέλιον* has been announced and received: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father" (John 1: 1, 14). It is on this truth, the self-testification of the incarnate Word and the apostolic witness, that the Catholic theology on original sin turns. Only in his revealing himself and in offering the one and only remedy—himself the incarnate Lord on the Cross for the salvation of the world—do the dimensions of the disease and the fault come into light. The key for a reform of our unconverted, all too human preconception of divine justice may be found in the *Exultet* of the Paschal Vigil Mass, which expresses with surpassing simplicity and beauty the unity of light and darkness in the mystery of sin and salvation: "O felix culpa quae talem et tantum meruit habere redemptorem"—"O happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer."