

QUESTION 81

Man as a Cause of Sin: The Transmission of Original Sin

Next we have to consider the cause of sin on the part of man. Even though a man, just like the devil, is a cause of sin for another man by way of exterior suggestion, man also has a special way of causing sin in another *by way of origin*. Hence, we must talk about *original sin* (questions 81-83). On this topic there are three things that have to be considered: first, the transmission of original sin (question 81); second, the essence of original sin (question 82); and, third, the subject of original sin (question 83).

On the first topic there are five questions: (1) Is [the first] man's first sin transmitted by way of origin (*direvetur per originem*) to his descendants? (2) Are all the other sins of the first parent, or even of other parents, transmitted by way of origin to their descendants? (3) Is original sin transmitted to all those who are generated from Adam through by way of his semen? (4) Would it be transmitted to someone who was formed miraculously from some part of the human body? (5) If the [first] woman had sinned without the [first] man sinning, would original sin have been passed down?

Article 1

Is the first sin of the first parent transmitted to the others by way of origin?

It seems that the first sin of the first parent is not transmitted to the others by way of origin (*primum peccatum primi parentis non traducatur ad alios per originem*):

Objection 1: Ezechiel 18:20 says, "The son will not bear the iniquity of the father." However, he would be bearing the iniquity of his father if he contracted it from him (*si ab eo iniquitatem traheret*). Therefore, no one contracts any sin from any parent by way of origin.

Objection 2: An accident is not transmitted by way of origin unless its subject is likewise transmitted, since an accident does not pass from one subject to another. But as was shown in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 118, a. 2), the rational soul, which is the subject of sin (*subiectum culpae*), is not transmitted by way of origin. Therefore, neither can any sin be transmitted by way of origin.

Objection 3: Everything that is transmitted by way of human origin is caused by the semen. But the semen cannot be a cause of sin, since it lacks the rational part of the soul, which alone can be a cause of sin. Therefore, no sin can be transmitted by way of origin.

Objection 4: What is more perfect in nature is more powerful in acting. But perfected flesh cannot infect the soul united to it; otherwise, the soul would not be able to be washed clean of original sin while it was united to the flesh. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the semen cannot infect the soul.

Objection 5: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, "No one blames those who are ugly by nature, but instead blames those who are ugly because of slothfulness and negligence." Therefore, nothing that comes by way of origin is blameworthy or a sin (*nihil quod est per originem est increpabile neque peccatum*).

But contrary to this: In Romans 5:12 the Apostle says, "Through one man sin entered into this world." This cannot be understood to be by way of imitation, because of what is said in Wisdom 2:24, "By the devil's envy death entered into the world." Therefore, it follows that it is by way of origin from the first man that sin entered into the world.

I respond: According to the Catholic Faith it must be held that the first sin of the first man passes by way of origin to his descendants (*primum peccatum primi hominis originaliter transit in posteros*). This is why even children are taken to be baptized soon after their birth, so as to be cleansed of the infection of sin. And as is clear from Augustine in several of his books, the contrary view is the heresy of Pelagius.

However, in investigating how it is that the sin of the first parent can pass by way of origin to his

descendants, different authors have proceeded in different ways.

Some, taking into account that the subject of sin is the rational soul, claimed that the rational soul is transmitted with the semen, so that in this way souls that are infected seem to be derived from an infected soul.

By contrast, others, repudiating this view as erroneous, tried to show how, even if the soul is not transmitted, the guilt of the parent's soul is transmitted to the child by the fact that bodily defects are transmitted by the parent to the child, in the way that a leper generates a leper and someone with gout generates someone with gout—and this because of certain corruptions of the semen, even though the semen's corruption is not itself called leprosy or gout. Now since the body is proportioned to the soul, and since the defects of the soul likewise run over into the body, and vice versa, in a similar way they claim that the soul's culpable defect (*culpabilis defectus animae*) flows by transmission into the child, even though the semen is not itself the subject of sin or guilt.

However, these ways of responding are all inadequate. For granted that, because of the body's defective condition, certain corporeal defects—and, as a result, even some defects of the soul—pass from parent to child by way of origin, in the way that the mentally slow are sometimes generated by the mentally slow (*sicut interdum ex fatuis fatui generantur*), still, the very nature of having a defect by way of origin seems to exclude the character of sin or guilt, which is voluntary by its nature (*hoc ipsum quod est ex origine aliquem defectum habere videtur excludere rationem culpae, de cuius ratione est quod sit voluntaria*). Hence, even if one claimed that the rational soul is transmitted [with the semen], by the very fact that the infection of the child's soul would not be in his will, it would lose the character of guilt deserving of punishment. For as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 3, “No one reproaches a man born blind; one instead takes pity on him.”

And so we have to proceed in a different way, by claiming that all men who are born of Adam can be thought of as a single man (*possunt considerari ut unus homo*) insofar as they agree in the nature that they receive from the first parent—in the way that, in civil matters, all those who belong to a single community are thought of as a single body and the whole community is thought of as a single man. Porphyry likewise says, “By participation in the species, many men are one man.” So, then, the many men descended from Adam are, as it were, many members of one body. But the act of one corporeal member—for example, the hand—is voluntary not by the will of the hand itself, but by the soul's will, which moves the members in the first place. Hence, a homicide committed by the hand is not imputed to as a sin to the hand if the hand is thought of in its own right as divided off from the body; rather, it is imputed to the hand insofar as the hand is something belonging to the man which is moved by the man's first moving principle. So, then, the disorder that exists in *this* man, who has been generated from Adam, is voluntary not by his own will, but by the will of the first parent, who moves, by a motion of generation, all those who are derived by origin from him (*qui ex eius origine derivantur*), in the way that the soul's will moves all the members to their acts.

This is why the sin that is transmitted from the first parent to his descendants is called *original sin*, just as the sin that is transmitted from the soul to the members of the body is called *actual sin*. And just as an actual sin that is committed by means of a bodily member is a sin of that member only insofar as that member is something which belongs to the man himself and because of which the sin is called *human*, so, too, original sin is a sin of *this* person only insofar as *this* person receives his nature from the first parent; hence, it is called a *sin of the nature*—this according to Ephesians 2:3 (“We were by nature children of wrath”).

Reply to objection 1: The son is said not to bear his father's sin, since he is not punished for the father's sin unless he shares in the guilt (*nisi sit particeps culpae*). And this is the way it is in the case under discussion. For the guilt is transmitted *by way of origin* (*per originem*) from the father to the son, just as actual sin is transmitted *by way of imitation* (*per imitatione*).

Reply to objection 2: Even though the soul is not transmitted, given that the semen's power is

unable to cause a rational soul, the semen nonetheless effects a disposition toward the soul (*movet tamen ad ipsam dispositivè*). Hence, the human nature—and, along with the nature, the nature's infection—is transmitted from the parent to the child through the semen's power. For the one who is born comes to share in the guilt of the first parent (*fit iste qui nascitur consors culpae primi parentis*) by virtue of the fact that he receives the nature from him through a certain generative motion.

Reply to objection 3: Even though the guilt does not exist in actuality in the semen, the human nature, which is concomitant with this guilt, exists virtually in the semen.

Reply to objection 4: The semen is a principle of the act of generating, which is an act that is proper to *the nature* and serves to propagate it (*est proprius actus naturae eius propagationi deserviens*). And so the soul is infected more by the semen than by already perfected flesh, which is already determined to *the person*.

Reply to objection 5: What exists by way of origin is not blameworthy if the one who is born is considered in his own right. However, if he is considered as being related to some principle, then he can be blameworthy, just as someone who is born suffers the ignominy of a family caused by the sin of one of his ancestors.

Article 2

Are other sins of the first parent himself or of close ancestors likewise transmitted to their descendants?

It seems that other sins of the first parent himself or of close ancestors are likewise transmitted to their descendants (*videtur quod etiam alia peccata vel ipsius primi parentis vel proximorum parentum traducantur in posteros*):

Objection 1: Punishment is never due except for sin. But some are punished by God's judgment for the sin of their close ancestors—this according to Exodus 20:5 (“I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers on the sons, unto the third and fourth generation”). Even with human judgment, in the case of the crime of treason (*in crimine laesae maiestatis*), the children are disinherited for the sin of their parents. Therefore, the sin of close ancestors passes to their descendants.

Objection 2: A thing is better able to transmit to another what it has from itself than what it has from another; for instance, fire is better able to effect heat than is heated water. But a man transmits to his child by way of origin the sin that he has from Adam. Therefore, *a fortiori*, he is able to transmit by way of origin a sin that he himself has committed.

Objection 3: We contract original sin from the first parent because we existed in him as in a principle of our nature, which he has corrupted. But we likewise existed in our close ancestors as in certain principles of our nature, which, even if it has been corrupted, is able to be corrupted still more by sin—this according to Apocalypse 22:11 (“Let him who is sordid become yet more sordid”). Therefore, the children contract the sins of their close ancestors by way of origin, just like the sins of the first parent.

But contrary to this: Good is more diffusive of itself than evil is. But the merits of our close ancestors are not transmitted to their descendants. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the sins are not, either.

I respond: Augustine poses this question in *Enchiridion* and leaves it unresolved. But if one thinks carefully about the matter, it is impossible that any of the sins of close ancestors, or even the sins of the first parent besides the first sin, should be transmitted by way of origin.

The reason for this is that a man generates what is the same *in species* as himself, but not what is the same *individual* as himself. And so things that pertain directly to the individual, such as his personal acts and what belongs to them, are not passed on by parents to their children. For instance, a grammarian does not pass on to his son the science of grammar, which he has acquired by his own study. On the

other hand, what belongs to the nature of the species *is* passed on from the parents to their children, unless it is a defect of nature. For instance, someone with sight generates someone with sight, unless the nature is defective. And if the nature is strong, then even some of the individual accidents that pertain to the nature's disposition—for instance, bodily swiftness, mental acuteness, and other traits of this sort (*velocitas corporis, bonitas ingenii, et alia huiusmodi*)—are propagated in the children, though not in any way, as has been explained, those accidents that are purely personal (*nullo autem modo ea quae sunt pure personalia*).

Now just as some things belong to a *person* in his own right (*per seipsam*) and some things from the gift of grace (*ex dono gratiae*), so, too, some things can belong to the *nature* in its own right, viz., what is caused by its the nature's own principles, and some things from the gift of grace. And in this sense, as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 100, a. 1), original justice was a certain gift of grace given by God to the whole of human nature in the first parent. It was precisely this gift that the first man lost through the first sin. Hence, just as this original justice would have been transmitted to the first parent's descendants along with the nature, so the same thing holds for the opposite disorder. By contrast, other actual sins, whether of the first parent or of others, do not corrupt the nature with respect to what belongs to the *nature*; rather, they corrupt the nature only with respect to what belongs to the *person*, i.e., his proneness to act. Hence, the other sins are not handed down.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine explains in *Epistola ad Avitum*, the children are never punished with *spiritual* punishments in place of their parents if they do not share in their guilt, either by way of origin or by way of imitation, since, as Ezekiel 18:4 says, every soul belongs immediately to God. On the other hand, by divine or human judgment the children are sometimes punished with bodily punishments in place of their parents, insofar as the child is something belonging to the father with respect to his body.

Reply to objection 2: What someone has from himself he is better able to pass down, as long as it is able to be passed down. But the actual sins of one's close ancestors are not able to be passed down; for, as has been explained, they are purely personal.

Reply to objection 3: The first sin corrupts human nature by a corruption that belongs to the *nature*, whereas other sins corrupt it by a corruption that belongs to the *person alone*.

Article 3

Does the sin of the first parent pass by way of origin to all men?

It seems that the sin of the first parent does not pass by way of origin to all men:

Objection 1: Death is a punishment that follows from original sin. But not all those who proceed from Adam by way of his semen die; for instance, those who will be found alive at the Lord's coming will not die, as is evident from what is said in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 ("We who are alive will not take precedence at the Lord's coming over those who have fallen asleep"). Therefore, these men do not contract original sin.

Objection 2: No one gives to another what he himself does not have. But a baptized man does not have original sin. Therefore, he does not pass it on to his offspring.

Objection 3: As the Apostle says in Romans 5:15, Christ's gift is greater than Adam's sin. But Christ's gift does not pass into all men. Therefore, neither does Adam's sin.

But contrary to this: In Romans 5:12, "Death passed into all men; in him all have sinned."

I respond: According to the Catholic Faith one must steadfastly hold that all men who are derived from Adam, which the sole exception of Christ, contract original sin. Otherwise, not all would need the redemption that comes through Christ—which is erroneous.

The reason for this can be taken from what was explained above (a. 1), viz., that original sin is passed down from the sin of the first parent to his posterity in the same way that actual sin is passed down from the soul's will, by way of its moving the members (*per motionem membrorum*), to the members of the body. But it is clear that actual sin can be passed down to all the members that are naturally moved by the will. Thus, original sin is likewise passed down to all those who are moved by Adam by way of the motion of generation.

Reply to objection 1: It is more commonly held, and with more probability, that all those who will found alive at the Lord's coming will die and then rise after a short time; this will be explained more fully in the Third Part.

However, if what others claim is true, viz., that they will never die (in accord with Jerome's narration of the opinions of different writers in a letter to Minerius on the resurrection of the flesh), then the reply to the objection should be that (a) even if the men in question do not die, they still deserve to die (*est tamen in eis reatus mortis*), but that (b) this punishment is remitted by God, who is likewise able to remit the punishments for actual sins.

Reply to objection 2: Original sin is remitted, with respect to its deserved punishment, through baptism (*peccatum originale per baptismum aufertur reatu*), insofar as the soul recovers grace with respect to its mind. However, original sin remains actual with respect to the stimulant to sin (*quantum ad fomitem*), which is a disorder on the part of the lower powers of the soul and of the body itself; and it is in accord with these that a man generates, and not in accord with the mind. And it is for this reason that those who are baptized hand down original sin; for they generate not insofar as they have been renewed through baptism, but rather insofar as they still retain something of the oldness of the first sin (*inquantum retinent adhuc aliquid de vetustate primi peccati*).

Reply to objection 3: Just as Adam's sin is passed down to all who are generated corporeally from Adam, so Christ's grace is passed down to all are generated spiritually from Him through faith and baptism—not only with respect to removing the sin of the first parent, but also with respect to removing actual sins and with respect to being led to glory.

Article 4

Would someone who was miraculously formed out of human flesh contract original sin?

It seems that someone who was miraculously formed out of human flesh would contract original sin:

Objection 1: A Gloss on Genesis 4:1 says, "Adam's whole posterity was corrupted in his loins, because it was separated from him not beforehand in the place of life, but afterwards in the place of exile." But if a man were formed in the way under discussion, then his flesh would be separated from Adam in the place of exile. Therefore, he would contract original sin.

Objection 2: Original sin is caused in us insofar as the soul is infected by the flesh. But the totality of a man's flesh has been infected. Therefore, no matter which part of the flesh a man might be formed from, his soul would be infected by the infection of original sin.

Objection 3: Original sin comes to everyone from the first parent insofar as everyone has sinned in him. But those who were to be formed from human flesh would have existed in Adam. Therefore, they would contract original sin.

But contrary to this: As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 10, such men would not have existed in Adam "with respect to his seminal nature" (*secundum seminalem rationem*), which is alone a cause of the transmission of original sin.

I respond: As has already been explained (aa. 1 and 3), original sin passes from the first parent to

his descendants insofar as they are moved by him through generation, in the way that the members are moved by the soul through actual sin. However, there is no motion with respect to generation except through the active power in generation. Hence, the only ones who contract original sin are those who descend from Adam through the active power in generation that is derived originally from Adam. For the ‘seminal nature’ (*ratio seminalis*) is nothing other than the active power in generation.

Now if someone is formed by God’s power from human flesh, then it is clear that the active power is not derived from Adam. Hence, that man would not contract original sin, just as the act of the hand would not belong to a human sin if the hand were moved by some extrinsic mover and not by the man’s will.

Reply to objection 1: Adam lived in the place of exile only after the sin. Hence, it is not because of the place of exile, but rather because of the sin that original sin is passed down to those whom his active generation reaches.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, the flesh infects the soul only insofar as it an active principle in generation.

Reply to objection 3: One who was formed from human flesh would have existed in Adam with respect to his corpulent substance, but not, as has been explained, with respect to the seminal nature. And so he would not contract original sin.

Article 5

If Adam had not sinned after Eve sinned, would their children have contracted original sin?

It seems that if Adam had not sinned after Eve sinned, their children would have contracted original sin:

Objection 1: We contract original sin from our parents insofar as we existed in them—this according to the Apostle in Romans 5:12 (“In him all have sinned”). But just as a man pre-exists in his father, so too he pre-exists in his mother. Therefore, a man would contract original sin by his mother’s sin as well as by his father’s sin.

Objection 2: If Eve had sinned without Adam sinning, passible and mortal children would have been born, since, as the Philosopher explains in *De Generatione Animalium 2*, the mother contributes the matter in generation. Now death, along with every sort of passibility, comes from a necessity on the part of the matter. But passibility and the necessity of dying are the punishment for original sin. Therefore, if Eve had sinned without Adam sinning, the children would have contracted original sin.

Objection 3: In *De Fide Orthodoxa 3* Damascene says, “The Holy Spirit came upon the virgin,” of whom Christ was to be born without original sin, “and cleansed her.” But this cleansing would not have been necessary if the infection of original sin were not going to be contracted from His mother. Therefore, the infection of original sin is contracted from the mother. And so because Eve sinned, her children were going to contract original sin, even if Adam had not sinned.

But contrary to this: In Romans 5:12 the Apostle says, “Through one man sin entered into this world.” If the woman were going to transmit original sin to her offspring, he should rather have said, “Through the two of them sin entered into the world, since both sinned,” or even, “Through the mother sin entered the world, since she sinned first.” Therefore, original sin is transmitted to the children by the father and not by the mother.

I respond: The resolution of this difficulty is clear from what has already been said. For it was explained above (a. 1) that original sin is passed down by the first parent insofar he himself contributes to the generation of those who are born (*inquantum ipse movet ad generationem natorum*); thus, it was

claimed (a. 4) that if someone were generated merely materially from human flesh, then he would not contract original sin.

Now it is clear that according to the teaching of the philosophers, the active principle in generation is from the father, whereas the mother contributes the matter (*materiam autem mater ministrat*). Hence, original sin is contracted from the father and not from the mother. Accordingly, if Eve had sinned without Adam sinning, then the children would not have contracted original sin. But the opposite would have held if Adam had sinned without Eve sinning.

Reply to objection 1: The child pre-exists in the father as in an active principle, whereas he pre-exists in the mother as in a material and passive principle. Hence, the two cases are not parallel.

Reply to objection 2: It has seemed to some that if Adam had not sinned after Eve sinned, then the children would have been immune from sin but would nonetheless have been susceptible to the necessity of dying, along with the other types of passibility stemming from the necessity of the matter, which the mother provides—so that they would have been susceptible to these things not by way of punishment but as certain natural defects (*non sub ratione poenae sed sicut quosdam naturales defectus*).

However, this does not seem plausible. For as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 97, a. 1), the immortality and impassibility of the original state did not stem from the condition of the matter; instead, they stemmed from original justice, through which the body was subject to the soul as long as the soul was subject to God. But the lack of original justice is original sin. Therefore, if, given that Adam had not sinned, original sin would not be transmitted to his descendants because of Eve's sin, it is clear that the children would not have a lack of original justice. Hence, they would not have passibility or the necessity of dying.

Reply to objection 3: The cleansing that occurred antecedently in the Blessed Virgin was required not in order to prevent the transmission of original sin (*non ad auferendum transfusionem originalis peccati*), but because it was necessary for the mother of God to shine with the greatest purity. For nothing is a worthy receptacle for God unless it is clean—this according to Psalm 92:5 (“Holiness is fitting for your house, O Lord”).