

Response to some objections in the 04/09/21 IIS Conference (Paraphrased)

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Some objections to our presentations raised during the discussion remained unanswered because lack of time. We answer them below to stimulate further reflection.

These answers reflect the views only of the authors.

Sam H:

- 1. Why could human beings (in the image of God) not have evolved over a period of time, instead of ‘popping’ into being? (I.e. Could humans “God likeness” have evolved alongside biological evolution?).**

Response:

One can accept gradualism for biology and even religion. However, the call of God that orders humans to share in God’s love and eternal life is instantaneous (an event in time).

This view fits well to the teaching of Pius XII in *Humani generis*, 26, where this Pope supports that God can “create intelligent beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.” In other words, one should not identify “being rational” and “being in the image of God and ordered to the beatific vision”. Intelligent or rational life could very well have evolved over a certain time. Nonetheless such “intelligent creatures” were not ordered to eternal life: they were not aware of being accountable toward God, and accordingly could not sin.

God’s call to share divine life is what defines a *Homo sapiens* creature as human being “in the image of God”. Before this call *Homo sapiens* is a merely-biological *indistinct* category. Without this call *Homo sapiens* refers to merely-biological creatures that are not ordered to eternal life and therefore cannot sin.

At the **moment** when God makes *Homo sapiens* in his own image, *Homo sapiens* becomes a community called to eternal life and ordered to live respecting each other’s rights.

After this **moment** the very sign revealing the status of a human person is the belonging to the species *Homo sapiens*, and therefore it is necessary that God provided an observable discontinuity (fertilization) allowing us to ascertain when a human person comes into existence.

By contrast, **before** this **moment**, *Homo sapiens* creatures were not called to live respecting each other’s rights (at this point, they had no rights, as they were not aware of accountability relationship). Evolutionary gradualism is not a problem, as far as there are no human persons. Once human persons appear on earth, then it is crucial that all *Homo sapiens* creatures living together are persons, for granting the sanctity of marriage and assigning rights coherently. For this reason, the authors of this paper assume that at the end of the flood, at the moment referred to in Genesis 9:3,5-6, God makes a global call, whereby all hominids become human persons. In this passage God declares that the reason for the prohibition of homicide is that God made humankind in the image of God.

On the other hand, the cultural and technological background described in the Genesis 4-11 narratives corresponds to that of the Neolithic. In particular, the prohibition of homicide as moral rule justified by the religious belief in a High God is considered an achievement of the Neolithic, and necessary for the development of settlements, cities, and civilizations (Robin Dunbar).

There are other definitions of what it means to be human “in the image of God”, related to visible signs appearing time before the Neolithic, such as possessing “advanced reasoning”, producing tools, animistic religious beliefs, burying the dead, performing art.

However, one can consider that these achievements are steps in God’s project to make humankind in the image of God. God fulfils this call at the Neolithic, at the dawn of civilisation, by engraving on the human heart the “Golden rule” and the prohibition of homicide. The subsequent explosion of civilisations all over the world would be a visible consequence of this spiritual event.

Discussions about definitions of “being in the image of God” are welcomed in future events.

Joe Evans:

2. Clarify distinction between “homo sapiens” and “humans” – as if humans were a later stage than Homo sapiens.

Response:

The relationship between the ensemble of creatures referred to by the biological taxonomic term *Homo sapiens* and the ensemble of creatures referred to by the biblical category “humankind in the image of God” can be described in the three main following points:

1. Today, each *Homo sapiens* individual is a human being in the image of God, called to share God’s love and reach eternal life. This situation, where “humankind in the image of God” matches *Homo sapiens*, we call it the “*current situation*”.
2. If we go back in time, then we reach a moment when the situation is not “the current situation”, and the biblical “humankind in the image of God” does not apply to the species which today’s *Homo sapiens* is evolved from.
3. On the other hand, before the end of the Pleistocene (around 12,000 BP) the “ancestors of today’s *Homo sapiens*” involve an ensemble of **subdivided populations across Africa**, so that it is *taxonomically* not clear when and where to set the beginning of today’s *Homo sapiens* (see [this article](#)).

On the basis of the preceding points 1-3, we propose to set the beginning of “the current situation” (in point 1) at a time in the Neolithic when *Homo sapiens* is a well-defined *taxonomic* term.

3. Antoine’s idea of creating sinful humans after the flood theologically is problematic. Nowadays there is human involvement in creating fallen humans, but there is no human involvement in creating fallen humans after the flood via the same mechanism as Adam was created (i.e. by turning *Homo sapiens* creatures into humans in the image of God). Somehow, therefore, God creates evil.

Response:

Firstly:

The idea is better understood in the light of Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), Point 404:

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? **the whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man".²⁹³ By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice.** Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state.²⁹⁴ It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature **deprived of original holiness and justice.** and that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: **it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act.**

According to this point, all human beings are implicated in Adam's sin because of the "unity of the human race", which is in Adam "as one body of one man". This means that a human being is implicated in Adam's sin in the very moment it comes into existence because it belongs to the human race, and not because Adam is his genetic ancestor. In a similar way as a human being is implicated in Christ's justice by the very fact of belonging to the human race, and not because Christ is her/his genetic ancestor. In other words, the fact that "the whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'" is not bound to **genetic ancestry from Adam.**

Although the CCC does not *explicitly* define the concept of "human race", its teaching is most relevant to understanding the origins of humanity and thereby evolution: " 'In reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear'. St. Paul tells us that the human race takes its origin from two men: Adam [the first Adam] and Christ [the last Adam]." The first Adam was made by the last Adam, as the last Adam stamped his image on the first Adam when he created him. So that "the last Adam is indeed the first; as he himself says: 'I am the first and the last'." (see CCC, 359).

Christ is indeed the common ancestor of all humans, to whom the words apply: "from one ancestor (God) made all nations to inhabit the whole earth". The teaching of St. Paul is basically about **theological ancestry!** Genetic ancestry makes sense only in the light of theological ancestry. If you keep to genetic ancestry alone, then your distant grandfather is a fish. If you keep to theological ancestry, then the common ancestor of all humans in the image of God is Jesus Christ. The human race forms a unity, because of its common origin in Christ. (see CCC 360). This is the corporate meaning of humanity.

Additionally, it is clear from the context that the CCC means humankind "in the current situation", where *Homo sapiens* is clearly distinct from all other extant animal species and "humankind in the image of God" matches *Homo sapiens*. As discussed in the preceding Point 2, this "current situation" may have started at the end of the flood, at some *time* in the Neolithic, when *Homo sapiens* was already a *large population*. On the other hand, our model assumes that God made a number of human beings in the image of God and ordered them to eternal life already before the flood. Among these prediluvian "image bearers" one may have been the first one, the biblical person Adam. In this sense, Adam (along with Jesus Christ) can be considered **the theological ancestor** of all human beings, even if he is not their genetic ancestor.

In summary, what makes us part of “the human race” is primarily and directly the theological ancestry from Jesus Christ and Adam, and secondly and indirectly the genetic ancestry from the primeval population of human beings in the image of God created before and at the end of the flood.

Accordingly:

- a) If some human person, say King David, perpetrates a sin at a time after Adam’s sin, all the genetic descendants of David are not in David as “one body of one man” and, therefore, are not implicated in David’s sin.
- b) If some human person comes into existence after Adam’s sin without having Adam as genetic ancestor, she/he is in Adam as “one body of one man” and is in principle implicated in Adam’s sin.

From b) it follows that human persons who come into existence after Adam’s sin and do NOT have Adam as genetic ancestor “contract” the state of original sin by the very same reason as those who have Adam as genetic ancestor, i.e.: the whole human race is in Adam as “one body of one man”. Why this is so, is a mystery, and thus the transmission of the fallen state remains a mystery whether or not Adam is the genetic ancestor of all persons sharing in the state of original sin.

Secondly:

Nowadays, “the human involvement” in “creating fallen humans” reduces to provide sperm and egg, i.e.: *Homo sapiens*’ flesh.

This is the same kind of flesh that is involved in the creation of humans in the state of “original sin” after the flood via the same mechanism as Adam was created.

Therefore, all that “the human involvement in creating fallen humans” nowadays adds to the act of creation, was already present in the flesh God used to create Adam and other persons after the flood.

The difference between Adam and the other human persons created after Adam’s sin is that God endowed Adam with “original grace” and thereby the *capability* of mastering the evolved selfish tendencies and other evolutionary mechanisms like illness and death, while the other persons come into existence lacking this capability.

God did and does not create “souls with sin” but “souls deprived of the original grace”, which become “stained” by the evolved selfish tendencies when they have to animate *Homo sapiens*’ flesh. Notice that these “Darwinian genetic encoded tendencies” cannot be considered sinful in animals, as these are not ordered by God to share divine life. By contrast they can be called “sinful” (concupiscence) when they are encoded in human bodies, that are ordered to eternal life.

Thirdly:

The teaching regarding the immaculate conception of the Mother of God confirms that it is possible in principle that a child of Adam does not have “original sin”, provided God considers this to be **convenient** for the sake of Redemption. Thus, if after the first sin God renounces to create the human persons in the same state of “original grace” he created Adam, it means that God **does not consider convenient** for the sake of redemption to maintain living together sinners in need of redemption and sinless people in state of original righteousness, as St. Paul suggests in Romans 11:32. Why “this is not convenient” might be part of the “transmission’s mystery”, and surely deserves further study.

Fourthly:

The proposed explanation is very much in line with the idea of “Relational damage” proposed by [Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI](#):

Ratzinger’s main tenet is that original sin consists in a relational damage affecting every person at the moment he or she begins human existence. In the German original Ratzinger questions the term “Erbsünde”, which is supposed to mean a sin inherited by “biological reproduction”, as a “certainly misleading and imprecise term”. By stressing the “relational” nature of “original sin” Ratzinger suggests a different form of propagation.

when the network of human relationships is damaged from the very beginning, then every human being enters into a world that is marked by relational damage. At the very moment that a person begins human existence, which is a good, he or she is confronted by a sin-damaged world. Each of us enters into a situation in which relationality has been hurt. Consequently, each person is, from the very start, damaged in relationships and does not engage in them as he or she ought. Sin pursues the human being, and he or she capitulates to it.

However, a problem with “relational damage” may be this: Since all sins are essentially “damage of relationality”, each person’s sin should add some damage to everybody (unless one assumes that the “first damage” was absolute), and therefore becomes transmitted to all other human persons in the same way as the original sin.

The explanation we propose avoids this problem: The state of original sin is not transmitted to *already existing* innocent human persons who are in the state of original holiness and justice, but the state of original sin is transmitted because the human persons come into existence “deprived of original holiness and justice”, and therefore in the state of original sin.

In summary:

God is not creating sin. The sin was caused by Adam and becomes transmitted because God in His mercy allows the sinners to remain on earth in order to give them opportunity to repent and reach salvation.

The state of original sin is an evil with relation to the state of original justice. But it is good with relation to the state of damnation (“Felix culpa”). What is good in the state of original sin, the possibility of being redeemed, comes from God. What is bad, the lack of original justice, comes from the first sinners.

God would only be creating evil, if fallen human lives (the state we exist today) were intrinsically evil. But that is not the case, we are good but broken (as Ratzinger suggests).

“Relational damage” highlights that the transmission of original sin can happen even if Adam (“the first sinner”) is not the genetic ancestor of all human persons. The explanation we propose completes and improves “relational damage” with the idea that “the whole human race is in Adam as ‘the body of one man’”. Trying to understand better this idea, may be a way to approach the mystery of the “transmission” more in depth.

4. Should have biblical experts/scholars especially for Genesis.

Response:

Agreed, that would be useful. They may also function as an impartial and knowledgeable 3rd party to guide the discussion periods and question speakers too.

Notice however, that in previous meetings we have had experts like Paul O’Callaghan and Denis Alexander as speakers. And we say and write nothing on the subject without carefully checking and referring to the [Word Biblical Commentary of Genesis 1-15, by Gordon Wenham](#), and other specific studies about the meaning and relevance of Genesis' flood.

We are thankful in advance for any further suggestion in this respect.

5. Theo’s use of 1 Peter3:19 is problematic. That text is mysterious and is not just about Noah. It is also about Christ going to visit the souls in prison. We should avoid picking out proof texts without considering the wider/intended/full message.

Response:

Text given was 2 Peter 2:5-9 but the point remains of ensuring that biblical passages are not taken and used out of context. However, we hope this is not such an instance.

Firstly, Noah is mentioned only 5 times in the New Testament, and it seems all 5 instances imply (or at the very least are consistent with) the same conclusion – that Noah and the Flood were parts of history.

Secondly, the context of 2 Peter 2:5-9 is of “False teachers and their destruction”, where Peter argues that we should trust that “false teachers” will receive their punishment and every single soul that resists false-teachings and temptations will be saved. To evidence this, Peter uses examples such as Lot, Noah, and fallen angels. Such examples have no evidential power unless they really happened. This shows that a divinely inspired Peter believed in the reality of the Noah, Lot, and angels.

To disagree with this, one must assume that Peter’s belief in the historical reality is wrong and thus that Peter’s argument for God’s justice is ungrounded/unmotivated, or that Peter believes that the Second Coming and ultimate justice is merely poetic/hypothetical. Neither of these is an option fitting with the divinely inspired nature of Peter’s Letters.

Regarding 1 Peter 3:19-20:

¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

This passage reinforces the argument for the actuality of Noah and the Flood, as these are used by Peter to highlight the truth that “Christ descended into Hell”, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

CCC 632: The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was "raised from the dead" presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection.⁴⁷⁸ This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ's descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there.⁴⁷⁹ [Cf. 1 Pet 3:18-19].

6. Cain Gen 4:14 “everyone who sees me will kill me”. This biblical data apparently supports the existence of other humans on earth at the time, humans whom Cain is aware of. Did they have Original Sin? I guess it depends on who/what they are? As various people have also said, there is the possibility that they are hominids and that Cain confuses them for spiritual soul humans. It's also possible that Cain has in mind humans to come. And then of course there's the possibility of Adam and Eve representing a group of people, which I think you favour but which at present does not seem compatible with Magisterial teaching.

Response:

Genesis 4:17 (“Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.”) rather suggests that these “other humans” (who did not descend from Adam) were actually contemporaries of Cain: From them came Cain’s wife and those who may have co-worked with Cain to build a city.

If these hominins were such that Cain “confuses them for spiritual soul humans”, this means that as soon as these hominins came to live together with Cain, they became really “spiritual soul humans” in the image of God, otherwise God would be allowing a situation that conflicts with the sanctity of marriage and the coherent assignment of rights. And since this transformation did happen after the first sin by Adam and Eve, these new human persons in the image of God began their existence within a sin-damaged humanity, and thus came into existence in a fallen state.

The declaration that brings the original sin in relation with the issue of “polygenism” is formulated by Pope Pius XII in his Letter Encyclical *Humani generis*:

When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own [Cfr. Rom., V, 12–19; Conc. Trid., sess, V, can. 1–4]. (Pius XII, 1950)

In this declaration the exclusion of “polygenism” is formulated very carefully under the condition that there is no way of reconciling “such an opinion” with the Teaching of the Church regarding original sin. If this condition is not fulfilled, then doors remain open. This was stressed by Joseph Ratzinger in his Münster Lectures 1964: “With this text a door is in principle quite clearly opened”; what is important for the Church is not the claim of the

hominization in one couple but the claim that all human beings became guilty in their original state; “monogenism is assumed only in function of this theological statement” (see references [in this article](#)).

Notice that in the explanation we propose, the state of original sin proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual person (the first sinner in human history) and is passed on to all human persons at the moment when they come into existence (at their generation) and is in everyone as his own: “it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act”.

Before the arrival of evolution, the species were considered as being created by God as they are today, and the human species was defined as the ensemble of people descending biologically from a single original couple. In this view the descent from a single couple (“biological monogenism”) was primarily important to define the belonging to “human race”, and thereby it was (unnecessarily) also assumed to establish to whom “original sin” is transmitted. If the belonging to humankind does not necessarily require the genetic descent from a single couple (as evolution is helping us to understand), then the transmission of original sin does not require such a descent either. Thus, the idea that the “transmission of original sin” can only happen if Adam is the genetic ancestor of all human persons may be a prejudice originating from a pre-evolutionary conception of the origin of the species, and the fact that neither the dogmatic Declaration of the Council of Trent nor the posterior Magisterial teaching has ever definitely endorsed “biological monogenism” may be considered an “experimental proof” of the assistance of the Holy Spirit.