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7. Augustine's Changed Interpretation of Romans 7 and His Doctrine of Inherited Sin

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Abstract

During Augustine's first decade of commenting on the Pauline literature, he regularly used the mortality consequent upon the failure of the first humans in the paradise and the desires that arose from this weakened bodily condition in their offspring to account for the universality of personal failure and sin that he found affirmed in Paul's letter to the Romans. During his preaching in the first decade of the fifth century, following the *Confessiones*, Augustine began to change his interpretation of both the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12) and the status of those living in Christ's church (Romans 7:14-25). Without denying the earlier application of the latter text to persons attempting and failing to fulfill the recently learned moral law, he began to apply it to Christians living by the guidance of the moral law and under the influence of grace. Even the faithful were unable to accomplish all that the moral law required of them. At the same time, Augustine began to shift his understanding of

the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve from the inheritance of mortality to sharing the guilt of that sin as well as its punishment.

At the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine's attention was focused on the implications of the church's practice of baptizing infants. In considering the relationship of sin, guilt, mortality, and evil desires, he brought together the understanding of the limits of voluntary self-control and self-determination in both infants and adults. This resulted in a new theory of the transmission of evil desires through generation that involved both guilt and evil desires that could be resisted but not prevented or eliminated by personal efforts. Thus, he elaborated an explanation of evil desire and original guilt that depended on bodily influences and was independent of any particular explanation of the origin of the human soul.

Keywords: Christ, Adam, original sin, mortality, infant baptism, concupiscence

Introduction

Throughout his preaching and writing, Augustine presented the bodily mortality derived from the first parents of humanity as the source of many of the religious and moral disabilities experienced by humans born in the line of Adam and Eve. From the first stages of earthly existence, the resources necessary to maintain the health and life of a mortal human body – food and drink, clothing and shelter – became the focus of a person's attention and efforts, thereby increasing the urgency and power of the appetites and desires that filled those needs. Under these pressures arising from mortality, habits or customs were established that narrowed the range of a person's interest and desires (*Qu.* 70; *Exp. Gal.* 46). Thus, even after the powers of understanding and judging gradually began to function, the spiritual and heavenly goods that a person then could discern and pursue were neglected and assigned a subordinate role in decisions and actions (*Qu.* 66.5-6; *Exp. prop Rm.* 45-46, 50; *Exp. Gal.* 46, 48; *Simpl.* 1.1.10,11). As a result, a person became gradually – and voluntarily – locked into a slavery to the satisfaction of bodily needs and appetites at the expense of the moral and eternal goods proper to an intellectual being. Justice proved ineffective in controlling the demands of hunger and thirst; a commitment to equity could not withstand challenges to bodily security. What Paul called the law of sin in the bodily members arose from the mortal condition and thereby was derived from Adam's sin (Romans 5:12; 7:22-25); that disorder characterized this type of human existence as “natural” human living before the coming of the divinely revealed moral law (*Exp. prop. Rm.* 45-46).

In the sermons he preached to Christian congregations on the texts of Romans 7:14-25 and the parallel in Galatians 5:16-17, Augustine attended to the limits of the efficacy of the help that God provided to faithful Christians for overcoming the obstacles to the fulfillment of the moral law. As a result, he modified his interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 so that the text represented the situation of Paul himself and his fellow Christians living under Christ's grace in their continuing struggles against the evil desires arising from mortality. In sermons preached during the first decade of the fifth century, he began to assert the inheritance not only of mortality but of a sin that was present already in infants and was forgiven in their baptism. These two developments were continued and intensified during the Pelagian controversy, in which Augustine challenged the assumptions that human beings were responsible personally and individually for their moral standing and that the Creator had provided for them all the resources necessary for fulfilling the moral law. As the conflict with

Pelagius and his supporters reached its climax, Augustine brought together the two issues – inborn evil desires and inherited guilt – in a unified understanding of conflicting desires deriving from Adam that were prior and foundational to individual exercise of choice and beyond human power to initiate or extinguish. Baptism could remove guilt and empower a Christian to resist the desires inherited from Adam but full liberation would be attained only by sharing in the resurrection of the body of Christ.

Explaining the Fall of Adam and Eve

The understanding of the original condition of humanity and the consequences of its failure developed gradually in Augustine's early analyses of the narrative of the temptation and fall in Genesis 3. In his first commentary, *On Genesis against the Manichees*, Augustine explained the original temptation not as a desire for sensual pleasure but as a movement toward autonomy or self-governance. Rather than obeying God, the humans trusted their own minds in assessing and assenting to a demonic suggestion originating in the sense faculty (*Gn. adv. Man.* 2.14.20-15.22). He described the initial consequence or punishment of that sin as the turn of the mind's attention toward its sense faculties. As a result of the mind's occupation with sense knowledge, truth became more difficult to discern and perverse suggestions arising from the senses continued to distract the mind. Through the person's turning over the mind to the senses, the human body fell from a higher condition and participated in the mortality of the beasts (*Gn. adv. Man.* 2.4.5-5.6; 2.18.28-21.31).

In characterizing the first sin as mental self-determination or pride rather than a sensual or bodily action, Augustine may have acted under the influence of a Neo-Platonic doctrine to reject the Manichean errors about the influence of the bodily desires on the higher human powers. The mental powers, he insisted, had instigated their fall into sensuality rather than having been seduced and captured by bodily emotions and appetites. This interpretative focus on a mental failure that opened the path to a bodily one would play a role in all of Augustine's subsequent analysis of the temptation and fall of humanity. He would continue to teach as well that the original fall entailed a weakening of human nature and an increased tendency to sin. In this first interpretation, however, he associated the vulnerability to subsequent failures with the turn toward the sense faculties of the mind itself rather than the consequent mortality of the body.

A few years later, in the third book of his treatise *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine undertook a new consideration of the original status and the consequences of the failure of the first humans. He explained that initially equal intelligent creatures had acted differently in their original condition and distinguished themselves by the consequences of different types of choices (*Lib. arb.* 3.9.25-12.35; 3.5.14-15). Some souls remained faithful and acted in submission to divine inspiration; these became angels that were stable in their goodness and charged with acting as God's agents in governing the bodily universe. Other souls sinned spontaneously, without any temptation, through a pride or self-aggrandizement in which they rejected divine governance and cultivated their own power. These became demons, fixed forever in their rebellion. They were assigned to lower offices, including harassment of other types of sinners (*Lib. arb.* 3.9.28-10.29; see also 3.5.15; 3.25.74-76). A third group of rational creatures succumbed to a temptation by the demons and joined their revolt. Unlike the demons who had sinned spontaneously, these human souls were not fixed in their evil willing

and could be corrected through contrary persuasion – by Christ. In preparation for such repentance, they were assigned mortal bodies, so that a fear of bodily death might curb the pride that might resist divine mercy and help them restrain evil desires (*Lib. arb.* 3.5.14-15; 3.9.28-10.31; 3.11.34). In their fallen condition, these human souls were both weaker in themselves and weighed down by their mortal limbs. Ever attentive to the Manichees and the Neo-Platonic hierarchy of beings, Augustine insisted that these souls were responsible for the mental weakness that made them susceptible to the influence – for better or worse – of mortal, bodily natures (*Lib. arb.* 3.11-34; 3.14.39).

In a discussion in this same treatise, *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine considered the transmission through human generation of the consequences of the original sin (see O’Connell: 17-72). Children began life in the condition to which the first parents had fallen rather than that in which they had been created originally. The offspring were born mortal, ignorant of what they ought to do, and subject to carnal desires that hampered their good performance. This natal condition was neither culpable nor insuperable, he insisted. Guilt arose only from an individual’s failure to make moral progress by seeking and cooperating with the assistance God was ready to provide (*Lib. arb.* 3.19.53-20.55). Turning to four already standard explanations of the origin of human souls, Augustine then showed that this assessment of personal responsibility was valid no matter how the souls of the children were related to those of their parents. The offspring would be held guilty initially only if their souls had been present and active in the first parents at the time of the sin and subsequently derived from the souls of those sinful parents. Individually created souls would not have sinned in and with their parents; they would be born innocent, though burdened by the disabilities of bodily mortality that were legitimately consequent upon the prior sin of their parents. Such an innocent soul would be weighed down and its operations hampered by a mortal body – in which it was created, which it was sent to govern, or which it chose to inhabit (*Lib. arb.* 3.20.56-58).¹ In all instances, Augustine insisted that guilt was incurred only through personal choices of action or omission either in sinning or in failing to progress beyond initial disabilities (*Lib. arb.* 3.22.63-64). In response to a question about infants who died before they had the opportunity to make any personal decisions for good or evil, Augustine suggested that God could provide for them an eternal condition that involved neither reward nor punishment. Infants baptized in anticipation of death – according to church practice – gained a reward by the good willing of those who presented them for the sacrament (*Lib. arb.* 3.23.66-67). In debate with the Pelagians, he would later reject the first and confirm the second judgment.²

Even in his consideration of the divine differentiation of Jacob from Esau in *To Simplician*, Augustine explained that human sinfulness was universal as a consequence of bodily mortality and disordered desires; it justified the divine condemnation of Esau and displayed the gratuity of the divine mercy lavished on Jacob (*Simpl.* 1.2.17, 20; as adults, both deserved the condemnation that Esau received). God may have preferred one to the other before either

¹ Augustine would later argue that a person could not inherit punishment without the guilt that merited it (*En. Pr.* 50.10); see also below at note 10.

² *Pecc. mer.* 1.26.39; 1.28.45, 55-57; 1.30.60 are examples from the beginning of the Pelagian controversy. He would later note that some died even in the womb before birth and were therefore incapable of either good or evil according to Romans 9:11 (*S.* 165.7, 9).

had been born or done anything good or evil, as Paul argued, but both were already adult sinners when God made one serve the other (Romans 9:10-13).

The drive for self-determination or autonomy appeared again in Augustine's story of his own sin as an adolescent, the stealing of pears in *Confessiones*. He carefully set aside all forms of sensual pleasure as the temptation leading to his own primary sin; the account of the carnal temptations and sins of his life in Carthage then followed immediately in his narrative (*Conf.* 2.4.9-6.14; 3.1.1). In describing his failure to maintain good resolutions, he analyzed the process by which bodily appetites produced illicit desires that gradually grew into habits of sinning and then chained a person to evil decisions and practices (*Conf.* 8.5.10).

In this series of considerations of the Genesis narrative of the fall of humanity and its consequences culminating in *Confessiones*, Augustine discerned two distinct forms of sinning: a mental revolt against divine governance that was followed by a bodily punishment or consequences that resulted in universal sinfulness. The transgression of a divine mandate was not as clearly distinguished from the initial sin of pride as it later would be. An orientation of the mind toward the sense faculties and a tendency toward sensual sin was the consequence of the mortality of the body. The resulting transgressions, however, could display the disorder and weakness of the person, thereby serving to curb or undercut the prior and foundational sin of pride. Although that sin of pride continued to occur in the offspring of Adam and Eve, inherited mortality and its associated disabilities accounted for the universality of sinfulness in humans once they were capable of individual choice. Augustine suggested the participation of his offspring in Adam's original guilt only in his consideration of the derivation of their souls from those of their parents, the first of four explanations of the origin of the human soul. In the other three explanations of the origin of the human soul, individuals were born innocent but subject to disabilities consequent upon the original parents' sin.³

Mortality and Sin

In his commentaries on Pauline letters that were contemporary with the extended composition of *De libero arbitrio* (388-396 CE), Augustine used the inheritance of mortality consequent upon the transgression of Adam and Eve to explain the moral condition of their offspring and their need for divine assistance. He showed that the dependence of human life on the satisfaction of bodily appetites, the dominance of the sense faculties in guiding the development of a child's affective life, and the delayed emergence of intellectual knowledge and reasoned decisions resulted in patterns of personal choice that were misaligned with the moral responsibilities and eternal destiny of human beings. By the time a person was capable of appreciating the mental or spiritual goods of justice and equity, customs of carnal desire and action had been established that militated against the standards of the moral law (*Q.* 66.5-6; 70; *Exp. prop. Rm.* 45-46, 50; *Exp. Gal.* 46, 48; *Simpl.* 1.1.10, 11).

Augustine also explained that the revealed moral code – the Decalogue of the Mosaic Law – displayed their inability to humans who attempted to fulfill it. Although they retained

³ The author recognizes that this interpretation of Augustine's early work is not accepted universally in contemporary scholarship. Rather than continuing the debate of those texts, the thesis is here set in a broader context of Augustine's development, in the hope of shifting the terms of debate (for a similar approach, please see Burns 2002).

the capacity to recognize that the precepts and prohibitions of that law were right and just, they found themselves already oriented to behaviors that were contrary to these norms. They could not redirect their lives and bring their behavior into line with the revealed and acknowledged standards. Instead, attempts to follow the legal norms were opposed, with regular success, by the carnal desires that had been strengthened by habitual practice. To the evil of their perverted willing, sinners then added the guilt of transgressing the divine law (*Q.* 66.1; *Exp. prop. Rm.* 38, 44, 47; *Simpl.* 1.1.2; 1.1.6). The few – observant Israelites and philosophical Greeks – who did succeed in controlling their sensual appetites and conforming their behavior to the revealed law or discovered standards of justice usually fell into the sins of pride and self-righteousness by failing to acknowledge the divine assistance that supported their performance (*Q.* 66.5, *Exp. prop. Rm.* 52). The functioning of that desire for autonomy that had originally manifested itself in Adam and Eve’s disobeying the divine command in the paradise could be glimpsed in their offspring: prohibitions increased the attractiveness of the forbidden object (*Exp. prop. Rm.* 24.3, 37, 39, 40; *Q.* 66.1, 70) and the few who successfully controlled their behavior credited themselves with having acquired justice by their own efforts (*Exp. prop. Rm.* 24.2; *Q.* 66.1; *Exp. Gal.* 25.1, 9; *Simpl.* 1.1.14).

In these early writings, Augustine did not argue that the heritage of Adam and Eve included sin and guilt but that its bodily mortality would lead, inevitably, to distorted willing and actions that were evil. In this way, he explained the meaning of Romans 5:12: Adam sinned and death entered him; death passed to his offspring and they all sinned. The first sin brought bodily death that occasioned sinning in those to whom it was passed by generation.

To break this chain of death and sin, humans needed a delight in good performance that could offset the urgency of sensual pleasure and pain rooted in the needs of mortal flesh. They required a love of justice and equity for their own sake rather than for their utility in securing the goods necessary for bodily life. Humans could understand the good and its justice but they could not move themselves to delight in it. Augustine’s observation in *Confessiones* that human hearts were moved and carried to action by their loves gave graphic expression to his insight into the role of delight in human choice and action (*amor meus pondus meum; eo feror quocumque feror*; *Conf.* 13.9.10). That attractive love, however, was no longer a human endowment with which humans were created and born. It was a divine gift to which Adam’s offspring had no claim, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart that Augustine named charity (*Q.* 66.5-6; *Exp. prop. Rm.* 41, 44-46, 48, 52; *Exp. Gal.* 49; *Simpl.* 1.1.7).

Augustine found this situation of the offspring of Adam and Eve well expressed in the seventh chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. There Paul laid out the person’s learning of the commands of the divine law, the recognition that this law was right and just, the wish to comply in order to avoid its threatened punishment, and the experience of being unable to accomplish what it commanded and avoid what it forbade. When he pleaded to be liberated from slavery to “the body of this death,” Paul spoke in the voice or person of a Gentile in process of conversion to Christ (*Exp. prop. Rm.* 44, 47; *Simpl.* 1.1.1; 1.1.4; 1.1.8-9 on Romans 7:15).

Sin and the Faithful Christian

As Augustine preached to his congregation in the first decade of the fifth century, after the writing of his early commentaries on Paul’s letters to the Galatians and Romans, he began

to change his understanding of Romans 5:12 and 7:14-25. First, he found a meaning in the text of Romans 7 that fit the condition of baptized, graced Christians – parallel to the text of Galatians 5:16-17 that Paul had addressed to such people (*Exp. Gal.* 47; *C. lit. Pet.* 2.68.154). He realized that even after receiving in baptism both forgiveness of their past sins and the gift of charity to resist future sinning, Christians still found themselves unable to fulfill the moral law and the exhortations of Christ.⁴ They remained, to some degree, in servitude to the appetites of the mortal body. Second, he began to change his understanding of the heritage of Adam and Eve. He asserted occasionally that humans inherited not only mortality and a consequent tendency to will and do evil but actual guilt that, in the absence of baptismal forgiveness, would result in their condemnation even if they had not consented to and acted upon their evil desires.

The first point of change was Augustine's realization that baptized Christians continued to struggle with the evil desires that had become customary through satisfying bodily desires and appetites. This shift could be explained through Augustine's attention to the continued presence of mortality in humans and his concern about the tendency to self-righteousness that was a danger for every intelligent and voluntary creature. He had rooted the conflict between fleshly and spiritual desires in the mortality of the body and affirmed that it would be eradicated only in the resurrection. The satisfaction of bodily appetites would continue to draw human approval and effort throughout earthly life. The gift of the Holy Spirit empowered Christians to oppose their evil desires and prevent their breaking out into action. He recognized in preaching what he had written in *Confessiones* (10.29.40-35.54): despite the divine assistance, evil desires were very hard to contain and often slipped out into performance. He concluded that Christians still had to confess that they often did what they preferred not to do and failed to accomplish what they knew they should do and actually wished to do. Adapting interpretations of Galatians 5:17 and Romans 8:19-23 (see *Exp. Gal.* 46-47; *Exp. prop. Rm.* 53; *Q.* 67), he would identify Romans 7:24 as a plea for liberation from the disabilities of mortality and asserted that this remained a prayer of the baptized Christian striving for salvation (*En. Ps.* 35.6; 83.9-10; 140.14-16; 146.6).

Inherited guilt, the second point of change in the early fifth century, was not so broadly treated in Augustine's sermons and treatises. He introduced it four times in his preached commentary of the Gospel of John and once in his homilies on John's letter (406-407 CE; on the dating, see La Bonnardière: 19-62). In most cases, the assertion was based on a comparison of Adam to Christ, in which the teaching on the savior served to define the role of the sinner. In the first of these discussions, Augustine used 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 to contrast the law given through Moses to the grace and truth that came through Christ (John 1:17). In discussing the resurrection of Christ, Paul contrasted him as the author of life for humans to Adam as the source of their death. Augustine applied the text not to bodily mortality and immortality but to the soul's death and life by sin and grace. All those generated from Adam were sinners born with sin, save only Christ who was born without the heritage of sin. He then linked that inherited sin, without elaboration or specification, to the concupiscence of the flesh (*Io. eu. tr.* 3.12). The second discussion compared Christ to John the Baptist: one shared the heritage of Adam and the other did not. Unlike John, Christ was "conceived not from mortality but from

⁴ This insight was illustrated in the review of his own Christian living in *Conf.* 10.28.39-41.66.

faith;” he took human flesh from Adam but not the iniquity in which all others were conceived and nurtured (*Io. eu. tr.* 4.10).⁵ Next, in commenting on Christ’s cleansing of the temple and the ensuing comparison of the renovated Jerusalem temple to Christ’s own body, Augustine explained again that Christ had received – from Adam but through Mary – the bodily temple of his flesh but not the iniquity that had to be cast out of it (*Io. eu. tr.* 10.11-12). On a fourth occasion, Augustine linked the descent of the wrath of God upon humanity to the sin of Adam. That sin resulted in Adam’s becoming mortal and all his children being born subject to death and divine condemnation (*Io. eu. tr.* 14.13). Finally, Augustine contrasted carnal birth in the line of Adam to baptismal birth in Christ. Birth from Adam brought both concupiscence and condemnation that preceded any personal sin; birth from Christ freed from both that inherited sin and all personal sin added to it. As proof of the forgiveness of Adamic sin in birth from Christ, he offered the church’s practice of baptizing infants (*Ep. Io. tr.* 4.11-12).

Four points are to be noted in this set of interpretations of the Johannine literature. Unlike the preceding discussions that used mortality to account for personal sin, it was significant in these texts primarily as a mode of generation that transmitted lust and sin to John but not to Jesus. Because Christ himself had assumed mortal flesh, Augustine did not assert that mortality necessarily involved sin. Instead, Augustine began to imply, but not yet to explain, that it transmitted the inheritance of guilt and condemnation that had first fallen on Adam. Perhaps most important in these texts was the introduction of the Pauline contrast between Christ and Adam, by adapting 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 to the life and death of the soul. This would serve as the doctrinal basis of Augustine’s teaching on inherited guilt, supported by the practice of infant baptism.

In the sermons preached during the first decade of the fifth century, Augustine introduced significant new elements to his teaching on the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve. These would be developed soon after, at the beginning of the Pelagian controversy. The commentaries on the gospel and letter of John provided the occasion for introducing Christological considerations that led to the assertion that sin and condemnation were transmitted through generation. This change moved Augustine – for the first time – beyond the common teaching of the Christian church of his time. The second change, in his interpretation of Romans 7:14-24, would provide the means of explaining the transmission of sin through sexual generation. The Augustinian doctrine of inherited guilt would be developed on these Christological, ecclesiological, and anthropological foundations.⁶

⁵ “Ecce agnus dei [Io 1,29]. Si agnus innocens, et Iohannes agnus. An non et ipse innocens? Sed quis innocens? quantum innocens? Omnes ex illa traduce ueniunt et ex illa propagine, de qua cantat gemens Daudid: ego in iniquitate conceptus sum, et in peccatis mater mea in utero me aluit [Ps 50,7]. Solus ergo ille agnus, qui non sic uenit. Non enim in iniquitate conceptus est, quia non de mortalitate conceptus est; nec eum in peccatis mater eius in utero aluit, quem uirgo concepit, uirgo peperit; quia fide concepit, et fide suscepit. Ergo ecce agnus dei [Io 1,29]. Non habet iste traducem de Adam; carnem tantum sumsit de Adam, peccatum non assumsit. qui non assumsit de nostra massa peccatum, ipse est qui tollit nostrum peccatum. Ecce agnus dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi [Io 1,29].”

⁶ The abrupt advance in these Johannine commentaries, especially *Ep. Io. tr.* 4.11, must raise questions about their dating in December 406 through mid-summer 407, prior to any parallels.

Inherited Sin in the Pelagian Controversy

In his preaching on the question of inherited guilt in the early years of the Pelagian controversy (410-415 CE), Augustine continued to focus on the relationship between Christ and Adam as sources of life and death that was articulated by Paul as well as that between inherited mortality and the conflict between spirit and flesh. In 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, Adam had introduced death and Christ resurrection; in Romans 5:12, sin and then death had entered the world through Adam and thereby spread to all. The most comprehensive treatment of this issue in any of Augustine's sermons was preached on June 27, 413 in Carthage. Three days earlier, Augustine had stumbled into the question of inherited guilt while preaching at the celebration of the birth of John the Baptist (on dating, see Hombert: 385-86, with his reference to Perler and Maier: 318-19). In that sermon, he wanted to show that Christ, unlike John, took away sin from the world because he alone was free of all sin. John had been born, he contended, subject to the guilt of Adam.

To establish his point about John, Augustine appealed to the texts of Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Through the one Adam, sin and death had entered the world and spread to all humans; Christ alone freed from that death and sin. Augustine illustrated the texts by appeal to the practice of presenting children for baptism. He argued briefly that the baptismal ritual of incorporation into Christ as Savior from sin (Matthew 1:21) freed infants from guilt and conferred the promise of eternal life upon them. John the Baptizer had confessed rightly that he ought to be baptized by Christ, burdened as he was with the sin derived from Adam (*S.* 293.8-12). Having established this distinction between Christ and John, Augustine ended the sermon but not the controversy that had been continuing in Carthage since the trial and condemnation of Pelagius's associate Caelestius in late 411 (*Ep.* 157.3.22; *Gest. Pel.* 11.23).

Three days later and in response to the urging of Aurelius (see *Gest. Pel.* 11.25), the bishop of Carthage, Augustine was prepared to discuss fully the question of inherited guilt and the necessity of infant baptism. The gospel reading was taken from the third chapter of John, the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus of rebirth through water and the spirit (*S.* 294.13.14). The first half of this long sermon, more than 5,000 words in the surviving transcript, was dedicated to a refutation of the thesis, advanced a couple of years earlier, that their native innocence would guarantee eternal life to dying infants but that baptism was necessary to provide them entrance into the kingdom of God.⁷ Augustine argued that the description of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 made abundantly clear that the kingdom of Christ and the fire prepared for the fallen angels were the only eternal assignments available for humans. Blessed life could be enjoyed only within the kingdom. The foundational text for this discussion was John 3:5, "Only a person who has been born again of water and the Spirit can enter the kingdom of God." When interpreted in the context of the full discussion between Christ and Nicodemus, it established that a person could ascend into heaven only through baptismal incorporation into the ecclesial body of Christ (John 3:13). Those not joined to Christ, Augustine concluded, would be consigned to share the fires originally prepared for the devil (*S.* 294.1.1-10.10).

⁷ This was reported to Augustine from Sicily (*Ep.* 156, 157.3.11-22; see *Gest. Pel.* 11.23). Augustine recounted his dealing with this and other statements in *Gest. Pel.* 11.25.

In this refutation, Augustine began to develop the exposition – that he had initiated in the earlier tractates on John’s Gospel – of his own doctrine of a sin that had entered humanity through Adam, spread to all his offspring, and was removed from some by Christ. He turned in earnest to that question in the second half of the sermon. In Adam, the failure had been personal rather than innate. It had, however, modified human nature itself and through its effect in the process of generation, the defect was transmitted to and inborn in all of Adam’s offspring (*S.* 294.13.14-14.14; see also *S.* 90.7; *S. Guelf.* 31[335B].1; *En. Ps.* 61.7; 70.1.2). Augustine argued that the process of carnal generation required that the entire race be present in Adam as its parent and root. In a sermon preached about the same time, he pointed out that all of humanity was concentrated in the formation of Adam, since even Eve was drawn later from him. Adam, as a sinner, generated the whole of humanity, unto sin and death (*S.* 90.7, see also *S. Guelf.* 31[335B].1 [415-20 CE]; *Pecc. mer.* 3.3.5; 3.4.7; 3.7.14). In its origin, then, humanity had been poisoned and the damage had spread from that source through sexual propagation. By typological contrast, regeneration in Christ explained the condemnation by generation from Adam (*S.* 294.15.15; see also *Pecc. mer.* 1.26.39; 1.28.45, 55-57; 1.30.60). Through baptism, the humans united in and derived from Adam could be incorporated into Christ and liberated from their inbred guilt and its punishment. Christian baptismal sponsors, joined to children in the Holy Spirit’s gift of love, could make for them the profession of faith required of believers in Christ. The helpless infants were thereby freed from the wrath of God that had descended upon them in Adam and were promised eternal life (*S.* 294.19.17; see also *Pecc. mer.* 2.9.11; 2.23.37-24.38; 2.27.44-28.45; 3.2.2; 3.9.17).

This second sermon summarized the work Augustine had done in his contemporary treatises written to Flavius Marcellinus, whom he was attempting to save from execution by coming to Carthage in the summer of 413, when the sermons were preached (see, e.g., *Pecc. mer.* 1.26.39-31.60; 1.37.68-39.70; 2.23.37-24.38; 2.33.53-34.54; 3.2.2-4.7). These same scriptural texts from Romans and 1 Corinthians were used in other sermons of the Pelagian period to make the same points: that a heritage of sin and death descended to humans from the first parents (*En. Ps.* 50.10; 70.1.2; *S.* 115.4; 153.14; 174.7,9; 176.1; 181.1; 183.8.12; *Io. eu. tr.* 49.12). The doctrine of inherited guilt was being elaborated on this Christological foundation.

The question of guilt by imitation of Adam rather than propagation from him received greater attention in a sermon preached as the controversy drew to a head some three years later. Augustine considered an interpretation of the text of Romans 5:12 that made death a punishment for guilt that was earned individually rather than by all humans united together in Adam.⁸ He responded by directing attention to infants who died shortly after birth, without having had even the opportunity to sin personally and individually. He strengthened the argument by adding those who die in the womb before birth. In Romans 9:11, he argued, Paul had taught that the unborn, Esau and Jacob being the case in point, could do neither good nor evil. For good measure, Augustine excluded Origen’s solution: that souls might be sent or fall into mortal bodies as a punishment for or consequence of some sin committed in a higher, heavenly state (*S.* 165.7, 9). The suffering of death as a punishment for sin that was asserted

⁸ It should be noted that this was not the position advanced by the Pelagians, who argued that death was natural to humans rather than a penalty for sin.

by Romans 5:12, he concluded, required that all human beings be guilty of a common sin prior to any they incurred individually and personally. That sin, as Paul taught, was committed in Adam and, Augustine argued, was transmitted through propagation. Humans were born with both the guilt of sin and the mortality that was its punishment (*S.* 299.8; 361.17.16).⁹

The Transmission of Sin and Guilt

Augustine's understanding of the generational transmission of the guilt from Adam to his offspring can be discerned indirectly by examining his explanations of the freedom of Christ from this defect and disability, which would have disqualified him from serving as the savior of humanity. In his understanding of Paul's teaching, as has been noted, death was both a consequence and a cause of sin. In a commentary on Psalm 50:7 preached on a trip to Carthage in September 413, three months after the sermons associated with the birth of John the Baptist, he asserted that mortality was an indicator of sin: a person could not inherit the punishment without the guilt that merited it (*En. Ps.* 50.10).¹⁰ He also had begun to develop his related understanding of Christ's redemptive work through the destruction of sin that was symbolized by his bodily mortality (*Io. eu. tr.* 12.9-11; *S.* 294.11.13-14.14 [6/413 CE]; 134.3.4-4.5 [could be 413 CE]; see also *Pecc. mer.* 1.32.61). Christ alone had taken the mortal flesh of humanity gratuitously, rather than bearing it as a punishment for sin.¹¹ To make this theory coherent, Augustine had to explain how Christ bore mortality but not sin in the flesh he derived from Adam through Mary. That answer was to be found in the mode of Christ's human generation. To do this, he identified those aspects of sexual generation that made all other humans subject to sin.

Augustine argued that the process of human generation was accomplished by powers that were not directly affected by baptismal regeneration. Thus, even Christians generated children by faculties that belonged to their "oldness" in Adam rather than their "newness" in Christ. In the long Carthage sermon in June 413, he explained that because sexual intercourse used the "body of death" derived from Adam, parents generated their children as sinners. When those same parents later exercised their faith and charity in presenting their children for baptism, Christ's Spirit of Life in them regenerated their children as faithful. They acted first as unregenerate and then as regenerate (*S.* 294.16.16-19.17). Upon his return to Carthage a few months later in September, Augustine clarified this argument for the same congregation in an exposition of Psalm 50. Sexual generation itself did not cause a moral defect in the offspring. Nor was sexual intercourse between chaste Christians a sinful act. Mortality remained in their flesh as a punishment for inherited sin, however, even though the guilt of that sin had been removed from their spirit by baptismal regeneration. The operation of that penal mortality in their bodily members bound in sin the children they generated. This,

⁹ This explanation was incompatible with that he had offered two decades earlier in *Lib. arb.* 3.23.66-67.

¹⁰ In *Pecc. mer.* 1.37.68-38.69; 3.2.2-2.3, he argued that the suffering of children presented the same problems for human theories of justice that the inheritance of guilt would. He implied that the suffering should be understood as a punishment for an inherited sin.

¹¹ The efficacy of his death in destroying sin depended on his being free of any obligation to undergo it.

Augustine explained, was the meaning of the verse of the psalm (Psalm 51:5), “I was conceived in iniquity and my mother nourished me in sins in her womb” (*En. Ps.* 50.10).¹²

In his exposition of Psalm 50, then, Augustine asserted that penal mortality, which remained even in regenerated Christians and would be removed only in the resurrection of the flesh, caused the transmission of bodily life that was subject to the death and sin it bore (*En. Ps.* 50.10). Christ’s virginal conception allowed him to derive mortal but not sinful flesh from Adam through his mother. Because she did not conceive and nurture him through her human powers of generation, she did not bind him to penal mortality and thus did not transmit the death and sin of Adam to him. Christ, then, had assumed from Mary true flesh that was mortal but not penal and subject to sin (*En. Ps.* 50.10; see also *Pecc. mer.* 2.24.38). Augustine had earlier explained that the mortality caused sin to emerge in a person by disrupting the proper subordination of the vegetative and sensitive to the intellective faculties. In response to the Pelagian challenge, he asserted that generation by flesh subject to penal mortality transmitted the death and guilt from which it could be separated only by the power of Christ’s innocent but mortal flesh.

In these sermonic treatments of Christ’s freedom from sin in June and September 413, Augustine focused on the operation of penal mortality and the bond of lustful desire in the process of propagation that derived from Adam. He described Christ’s conception as free of sexual intercourse and the operation of carnal lust (*S.* 294.10.11). Mary had conceived Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than the operation of a human male (*En. Ps.* 50.10; later he would contrast faith to lust). Christ’s mortality, as Augustine would elsewhere explain, gave him the capacity to die but did not impose the necessity of dying. Like Adam in the paradise protected from actual death, Christ was capable of dying but not bound or condemned to die.¹³ Unlike the mortality imposed on the other descendants of Adam as a penalty for sin, Christ’s mortality was graciously assumed and his death was voluntary. The penal mortality of Adamic flesh indicated or displayed the sin to which it was subject. Because the mortality of Christic flesh symbolized but did not realize sin, he was in the likeness but not the reality of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3). He, then, would condemn and destroy sin symbolically in the sacrificial death of his body (*Pecc. mer.* 2.29.48-30.49; for a fuller discussion, see Burns 2010). In this, he fulfilled the type and significance of that bronze serpent that cured the Israelites from the venom of real snakes (*S.* 294.12.13; *Pecc. mer.* 1.32.61).

In *Letter* 98, which was contemporary to these Carthage sermons (Hombert: 161, n. 329), Augustine offered much the same arguments: humans existed in solidarity with Adam at the time of the sin; they were generated through carnal desire and could be regenerated through spiritual intention. As the ritual of incorporation into Christ, baptism liberated from the Adamic condemnation even if a child died before being able to make any personal choices (*Ep.* 98.1). These same arguments were repeated in the treatises directed against Pelagius and his disciples (*Pecc. mer.* 1.37.68-39.70; 2.4.4; 2.7.9; 2.28.45; 2.33.53-34.54). The “flesh of sin” in parents passed harm to their children; the “body of death” in Adam generated as sinners those

¹² For dating of the sermon, see Hombert: 163, n. 332; the same argument was made in *Pecc. mer.* 2.9.11; 2.23.37-24.38; 2.27.44-28.45; 3.9.17.

¹³ *Pecc. mer.* 2.21.35 explains the symbolism of the tree of life.

whom the Spirit of Life in Christ then regenerated as believers (*Pecc. mer.* 2.23.37-24.38; 3.2.2; *Gr. et pecc. or.* 38.43-39.44).

In the initial stages of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine held to his understanding of Romans 5:12 that made the transmission of mortality, as the punishment for the sin of Adam, the central element in humanity's need for salvation by Christ. He added that the penal mortality operative in and transmitted by sexual generation in Adam's line bound humans by the guilt of Adam's sin.

Reconsideration of the Creation and Fall in *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*

Augustine worked out much of the theory he was employing in these sermons and treatises in sections of his major commentary on Genesis, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, that were written about the same time as the sermons were being preached and debates raging in Carthage. The extended analysis of the Genesis narrative may have followed and supported the advances made in these works. It carried beyond them, however, and laid the foundation for other developments during the Pelagian controversy (Hombert: 141-88).

In this analysis of the creation of humans in the ninth and tenth books of the treatise on Genesis, for example, Augustine worked to exclude any denigration of human sexual differentiation and generation. He affirmed that the original divine plan for human propagation was sexual. He also recognized that sexual generation required that humans be created mortal. In their innocent state, however, humans had been protected from actual death and their sexual intercourse originally was (or would have been) free of the lust resulting from their transgression. Through their sin, however, Adam, Eve and their line were subjected to a mortality marked by its origin in, and derivation from sin (*Gn. litt.* 9.3.5-4.8; 9.9.14; 9.10.16-17; see also *Pecc. mer.* 2.21.35-23.37).

The consideration of the temptation and sin of humans in the eleventh book developed the distinction Augustine had always used between the initial sin of pride or autonomy and the second sin of transgression of the divine command (*Gn. litt.* 11.5.7; 11.30.39; 11.35.47). The first sin weakened the soul and provided the occasion for the temptation and the acceptance of the demon's suggestion that the punishment God had threatened would not really happen (*Gn. litt.* 11.30.39; 11.31.41; *Pecc. mer.* 2.19.33).

Augustine then focused on that penal death and the changes it effected (*Gn. litt.* 11.31.41-32.42). Before the sin, the fruit of the tree of life protected human flesh from the death of which it was naturally capable. That flesh was not bound to die; it was also capable of being transformed, without passing through death, into a stable spiritual condition that shared the blessedness of the angels. As the initial sin of pride had deprived their minds of wisdom, the transgression deprived their bodies of the protection against aging, sickness, and death. Through the transgression, it became a body of death, subject not only to illness and dissolution but to the appetites that preserve the beasts from extinction by replacing themselves. In humans, however, that lust for copulation was not only a means of reproduction but a punishment, a law in the bodily members that opposed the guidance of the mind and rebuked its rebellion against God (*Gn. litt.* 11.1.3; 11.31.40; *Pecc. mer.* 2.22.36-23.37). The eye-opening emergence of lust was surprising and embarrassing to Adam and Eve not only because it was in a part of their bodies that had been quiet until then but because it arose

from their transgression (*Gn. litt.* 11.32.42). This fit its purpose of humbling the sinners and helping them to return to God (*Gn. litt.* 11.5.7; 11.30.39). As their attempts to shift blame for their transgression showed, it failed (*Gn. litt.* 11.35.47-48).

The analysis of the creation and failure of humanity in *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* made significant advances over the earlier commentaries. In it, Augustine continued to treat death as the punishment of the transgression but he made bodily lust a component of that mortality rather than its eventual consequence. That rebellion of the flesh against spirit characterized the penal mortality following the sins of pride and transgression. It also distinguished this penal death from the natural mortality that belonged to sexually differentiated and generated beings, from which the fruit of the tree of life had protected humans. In the Pelagian controversy, the lust would be assigned a more significant role, as the law of sin.

Sin and Death

Penal mortality continued to occupy a central position in the explanation of the transmission of guilt and weakness from Adam to his offspring as the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius developed through a series of controversial writings by each author. Augustine's position on the relationship between sin and mortality became more complex, as became evident in his interpretation of the text of 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 that identified sin as the sting of death.

One interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 followed the pattern established prior to the Pelagian controversy: death stung humans with sin by giving urgency to carnal appetites and desires and thereby promoting personal sinning and evil habits (*En. Ps.* 84.10; 127.16; 143.9; see also *Io. eu. tr.* 12.11). A divinely inspired delight in God, justice, and the values enshrined in the moral law could initiate and support a person's efforts to resist and restrain the desires that were rooted in mortality. The conflict between spiritual and fleshly desires could be brought to an end, however, only by the suffering and overcoming of death through the gift of bodily immortality in the resurrection. When the body was freed from penal death, the carnal desires would cease to oppose the good desires of the spirit and the blessed would be at peace (*En. Ps.* 148.4; *S.* 128.8.10; 131.7; 151.3.3; 8.8; 154.6.8; 155.2.2; 163.9.9; 351.3.6).

The continuing influence of this understanding of mortality as the stimulus for sin was evident in Augustine's continued use of Wisdom 9:15: *the corruptible body weighs down the soul*. He linked the condemnation to bodily death to the sin of Adam (*Io. eu. tr.* 21.1) and penal mortality planted the law of sin in the bodily members (Romans 7:23), which in turn led a person captive to sin (*En. Ps.* 70.1.5; 75.4; *S.* 131.7). Going beyond its moral implications, he explained that bodily mortality also hampered humans' capacity for sustained thought, flooded their minds with multiple ideas and concerns, distracted from their praise of God, and even contributed to errors in speech (*S.* 52.2.3; 284.4; *En. Ps.* 38.3; 145.6). Although mortality was located in the body, its influence over bodily appetites and desires disrupted the operations of the spirit.

Augustine introduced a different interpretation of sin as the stimulus of death at the beginning of the Pelagian controversy. It appeared first in the third book of the treatise *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, where Augustine addressed a series of questions posed by Flavius Marcellinus. There he explained that *the stimulus of death* referred not to the sin death caused

but to the sin that caused bodily death: humans died because they sinned. He supported this new interpretation by appeal to regular scriptural usage: the tree of life had given life to humans; a cup of death was a poisoned beverage that killed. In the same way, the sin named the sting of death was the one that caused death for humans. That death-dealing sin he identified as the one that all humans had committed in Adam. Following Paul's contrast of Adam to Christ, he argued that Christ had overcome the sin that was the sting of death by a gratuitous justification and reversed the death it caused by initiating resurrection to immortal life. This new interpretation linked 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 directly to Romans 5:12: sin entered and caused the death that followed (*Pecc. mer.* 3.11.20). This reading also explained the real but limited effects Augustine attributed to baptism: it forgave the guilt but did not remove the sin and its effects in the body; it conferred the gift of the Holy Spirit so that the continuing effects of the sin could be resisted; it promised but did not inaugurate the reality of bodily immortality. This new interpretation of the relation of death to sin supplemented rather than contradicted his earlier teaching that penal mortality contributed to personal sinning. The common sin preceded and caused death, through which it then fostered individual sinning.

Some five years later, when preaching on the joint feast of Peter and Paul on June 29, 418, Augustine affirmed his earlier interpretation, that mortality occasioned conflict and sin (*S.* 299.9). He then continued with his newer explanation: that the sting of death caused death. In the same way that a poisoned cup was referred to as a cup of death, sin was called the sting of death because it had caused death. The purpose of this observation was to show that the destruction of sin in the execution of Christ removed the cause of death and thereby opened access to immortal life in the resurrection. Having made this point, Augustine then explained once again the delay in time between the destruction of sin in the death of Christ and the removal of death from the Christian. He suggested that Christ did not provide immortality to Christians immediately after baptism because their faith had to be tested and proven (*S.* 299.10).

About the same time, in the first of a series of sermons on Romans 7, the new interpretation of the sting of death was used a third time. It was preceded, as had long been customary, with the statement that the removal of death would put an end to lust and the resistance of the flesh to the spirit that Christians experienced (*S.* 151.3.3). Later, he once again asserted that the sin identified as the sting of death caused mortality in humans rather than being caused or occasioned by mortality. Death itself, he concluded, could not be removed without the destruction of the sin from which it derived (*S.* 151.7.7-8.8).

In introducing this new interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 and Romans 5:12, Augustine asserted explicitly that it was intended to focus on the Adamic sin that had brought mortality upon humanity. The presence of penal mortality in each of his descendants indicated that the processes of procreation in mortal flesh transmitted Adamic sin to his descendants. As is evident from the continued use of his earlier interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 and his appeal to Wisdom 9:15, Augustine affirmed that this Adamic sin and mortality then fostered evil desires and occasioned personal sin in them. As has also been seen, this shift enabled Augustine to explain how Christ's mode of generation had exempted him from the transmission of Adamic sin; he had freely assumed a mortality that was not penal and did not foster sin in him.

This new interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 reflected Augustine's gradual move away from mortality as an explanation of the spread of guilt to humans generated in line from Adam. Instead, he affirmed that the sin and its guilt were directly transmitted through generation; that sin then brought mortality as its punishment. At the same time, he distinguished the inbred lust that characterized penal mortality from the acquired habits and customs that were occasioned by a mortal body's dependence on food, drink, shelter, and rest. That law of sin – the conflict of flesh against spirit – had been imposed along with mortality as punishment for the transgression of the divine command (*S.* 151.5.5). Penal morality and its inbred lust accounted for both the inheritance of Adamic sin and the universality of personal sin.

Inherited Guilt and the Body of this Death

In a series of sermons on Romans 7 during the climax of the controversy with Pelagius in 417-418, Augustine taught that the carnal desires that arose in Adam and Eve as a punishment for their transgression and were transmitted by sexual propagation made their offspring guilty of sin. These desires were operative in parental generation and were thereby transmitted to their offspring. Their guilt could be forgiven by baptism but the evil desires remained and would be removed only by death and resurrection to immortal life in Christ. In those sinful desires, Augustine found a means of explaining the inheritance of Adamic guilt. His challenge was to establish that the desires inbred in bodies subject to penal mortality and thereby prior to any individual, personal choice were not only disordered but sinful and should be attributed to the individual.

In the sermons, Augustine linked his distinction of the two stages in the original failure – a hidden sin of pride and a manifest transgression – to his exposition of Romans 7. He used the Pauline explanation of the Mosaic law's prohibition of lusting as exposing hidden sin to direct his listeners' attention to the vulnerability of the original humans that required God to arm them against temptation by an explicit prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge. In the paradise and at Sinai, the very law given as a protection provided the occasion for sin to overcome the person. In both cases, humans trusted in their own power rather than the help of God; sin then killed them by the very weapon God provided to protect them.

In the paradise, Augustine explained, the existing sin of pride drew its power from the prohibition and worked death in the first humans though their eating of the tree (*S.* 153.9.11). A mind that was itself insubordinate to God suffered rebellion from its fleshly servant (*S.* 151.5.5; 152.5; see also *En. Ps.* 70.2.1; 75.4). The punishment of their transgression manifested itself first in the sexual organs because this penal disorder would be transmitted through sexual generation to their offspring (*S.* 151.5.5, 8.8). The lust then turned the human body into a body of death and made it subject to the law of sin. Thus, sin entered the world through the first human sinners; it subverted the moral law and used it as a weapon to provoke a transgression whose punishment was lust; through that lust, sin and death passed into all their offspring (*S.* 153.11.14; see also *S.* 155.14.15; 156.2.2). In God's providential plan, that same power of sin over humans also served as a rebuke to their pride and self-reliance that had prepared the way for the transgression (*S.* 155.3.3).

In Augustine's interpretation, these initial sins of pride and rebellion against God and their punishment by inbred lust caused the sin whose power over humans was displayed by

the moral law handed down through Moses, with its prohibition of lust. Like the first sin of Adam and Eve, their offspring's sin of lust was hidden and unrecognized as evil until it was explicitly forbidden. Once again, however, humans relied on their own resources to fulfill the command and establish their justice before God. Through the provocation of the moral law, the foundational human sin of pride was again laid bare. The drama of Romans 7, in Augustine's interpretation of Paul, was the success of this second law in exposing human moral impotence, attacking the underlying sin of pride, and thereby opening the hearts of sinners to repentance and turning them toward God, in Christ, for liberation and salvation.¹⁴

Augustine's objective in the sermons on Romans 7 was an interpretative integration of the Pauline meditation on the roles of Adam and Christ through the Genesis narrative of fall, the giving of the Law at Sinai, and the liberation accomplished by the death of Christ and his sending of the Holy Spirit. He accomplished this by using the consequences of the original sin to explain humanity's need for the liberating grace of Christ. By the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, he had affirmed already that all humans were born as sinners and already condemned to eternal death even before making any personal decision. His interpretative advance depended on arguing that the carnal lust transmitted through sexual generation was not only evil but sinful and that it belonged to the person apart from and even in spite of personal desire and willing (see, e.g., *S.* 151.5.5).

Augustine offered different arguments to prove that the lust transmitted by sexual generation was sinful. It violated the first and greatest commandment: that the whole of human desire should be directed toward God rather than stopping at created realities (*S.* 151.3.3, 8.8). As preceding and independent of a person's voluntary direction, it was an evil reversal of proper order. This autonomy of carnal desire was sometimes displayed, Augustine asserted and his congregation recognized, in taking over control of bodily action when a person was asleep (*S.* 151.8.8). Moreover, the Mosaic Law explicitly forbade lust: Augustine often summarized the whole Decalogue in the one command, "You shall not lust." Because that law was just and good, the desires it prohibited must have been evil and sinful. When that prohibition became known to an individual, the evil desires became transgressions as well (*S.* 152.5-6; 153.4.5, 5.7). The lust could also be called sin because it arose from sin and punished sin: the mind that had refused obedience to God suffered the revolt of its own servant (*S.* 152.5; 155.1.1; 128.4.6-6.8). This same point was made in treatises against the Pelagians that preceded these sermons (*Nat. et gr.* 56.66, 62.72). Independently of individual consent, then, inbred lust was not only disordered and evil but sinful and transgressive of divine law.

Augustine identified this sinful lust as the evil that Paul did even against his own wishes; its eradication was the good he willed but could not accomplish (Romans 7:15-20) (*S.* 151.6.6; 152.2; 154.3.3, 6.8-7.10).¹⁵ Although these desires derived from another person and seemed alien to the embattled Christian who longed to be free of them, Augustine insisted that like the flesh itself, its desires belonged to the person. Paul distinguished the law in his members

¹⁴ This interpretation of Romans 7 as detailing the moral law's manifestation of human impotence and turning sinners toward Christ for liberation runs through the sermon series. See, for example, *S.* 153.2.3-10.13 for an exposition of the system.

¹⁵ The interpretation was introduced in other works of the Pelagian controversy (see *Ep.* 157.2.6; *Gest. Pel.* 7.20).

from that of his spirit; he insisted that he hated what was happening in him; still, however, he recognized that the desires were his, that he was lusting even when he refused to act on the desires (Romans 7:15, 19; *S.* 151.6.6; 154.6.8, 7.10, 9.13-10.15; *S. Morin* 4[154A].2). Thus Augustine concluded that the inbred lust was not only evil but sinful and made the offspring of Adam and Eve sinners.

Augustine explained that baptismal regeneration for both children and adults removed the guilt associated with these inbred desires (*S.* 151.5.5; 152.3, 5; 155.9.9; *Serm. Guelf.* 33[77A].2). That guilt had rested upon Christians prior to baptism and remained upon the unbaptized. Not unlike the penal mortality with which humans were born, the desires themselves continued in baptized children and adults. Although these affections constantly solicited a Christian to sin, they made baptized persons sinful only by eliciting their consent and especially by satisfying themselves in action – when they reigned in the bodily members (Galatians 5:16-17; Romans 6:12-13; *S.* 152.3; 155.2.2; 155.9.9; see also *S.* 30.6-7; 128.10.12; 163.6.6). The application of this teaching to Christian marriage is well known: the sinful lust operative in sexual intercourse was forgiven through the charity also active in marital fidelity (*B. coniug.* 9.9; *S.* 51.13.22; *S. Dolbeau* 12[354A].3–9; *Adult. coniug.* 1.4.4; 24.30; *En. Ps.* 121.10). Through discipline, a Christian might lessen the strength and influence of these desires but could not prevent them. They would be removed and extinguished only by the transformation of sinful flesh into a spiritual body in the resurrection (*S.* 151.5.5; *S. Morin* 4[154A].4). Augustine compared the conflict between spirit and flesh in a Christian to a married couple quarrelling within a single house (*S.* 152.4; *S. Morin* 4[154A].4).

The primary scriptural witness to this condition was to be found, Augustine decided, in Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:16-17. Paul, like every other Christian, remained a sinner violating the Decalogue's prohibition of lust and failing to fulfill the first and greatest of the commandments to love God with all one's power. Yet Paul resisted and longed to expunge the evil desire within him; he strained to fulfill the good of loving God. He did lust but he refused to consent to fulfilling those desires. He was at once a sinner and an aspiring saint. Such was the lot of every Christian not yet delivered from the body of the death that punished the sin of humanity in Adam and Eve (see esp. *S.* 154, which is dedicated to Paul's personal condition and status). In this sense, the prayer for deliverance in Romans 7:24 belonged to the church living in the world (*En. Ps.* 70.1.6).¹⁶

In the Pelagian controversy, then, Augustine brought together the Genesis narrative of the fall and the Pauline description of the human situation. The inbred desires that resisted human control were not only the punishment for the mind's revolt against God but also a continuation of that very sin. Guided by Paul, Christians should recognize in themselves that shame and confusion that had surprised Adam and Eve as they swallowed the forbidden fruit.

Once Again, the Creation and Fall in Genesis

In his scriptural commentaries on Romans 7 at the height of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine made explicit the connection that he had been developing between the Pauline

¹⁶ Pelagius would later accuse Jerome of offering a similar interpretation (see Augustine, *Gr. et pecc. or.* 1.39.43, and Jerome, *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* 2.1-4).

description of the role of the Mosaic Law and the paradisaic law that forbade eating of the tree of knowledge. In Romans 7, Paul focused on the lust that was operative but not yet recognized as sinful. The Decalogue's prohibition brought it to recognition, so that it could be opposed and repented. Similarly, in the paradise, the hidden sin of pride or self-reliance was revealed by the prohibition of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In both cases, the law that might have armed humans against their existing sin occasioned its transgression. In God's gracious care, this transgression was used to provoke confession of sin and repentance (see, e.g., *S.* 152.5-6; 153.9.11-11.14).

This understanding of the role of the prohibitions was reflected in the discussion of the temptation, sin, and punishment of humans concentrated in books 13 and 14 of *On the City of God*. Augustine presented the entire human race concentrated in Adam and Eve; when they failed to remain faithful to God, they dragged down their progeny with them. Their children were born in the sinful condition of their generators: they experienced the rebellious disobedience in their bodies and the weakness that would lead to aging and death (*Civ.* 13.3, 14).¹⁷ As in the analysis in *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, Augustine focused the consequences of the two-step failure on the transgression of the divine precept regarding the tree of knowledge. The sinners were confused by the rebellion in their bodily members that followed immediately upon their souls' disobedience toward God's command. This bodily movement punished the soul's withdrawal from God and signaled the loss of divine grace. In the first parents, humanity was subjected to the bodily death in which the soul deserted the body and condemned it to the second, eternal death in which God deserted the soul. Only Christ could liberate from these two punishments (*Civ.* 13.3, 13-15).

Adam and Eve, Augustine concluded, had lost the divine operation that sustained their well-being by enlightening their minds and inspiring their wills to understand and love God and created goods for themselves rather than their usefulness. In the absence of that grace, the internal coherence of their affections failed. The conflict between body and mind was now interpreted by Augustine not as a consequence of bodily death but as a symbol or sign of the mind's rejection of God and of God's withdrawal. It was the sinful situation within the person indicating the alienation from God (*Civ.* 13.15).

Augustine's two-stage interpretation of the fall of humanity in the paradise was connected to the Pauline understanding of the work of the Mosaic Law provided in Romans 7. The Decalogue was imposed upon humans already sinful but failing to recognize their sin. It revealed their hidden sin by provoking a transgression of explicit precepts and prohibitions.¹⁸ The same pattern, Augustine explained, had been played out in the paradise. The prohibition of the use of the tree of knowledge was imposed to maintain humans in obedience to God or to manifest their rebellion. The transgression of this command revealed a sin of pride that was hidden from them. It also brought the imposition of an interior conflict between flesh and

¹⁷ He did not speculate on the benefits that the unrealized success of Adam and Eve might have bestowed on their progeny.

¹⁸ This interpretation of the role of the Mosaic Law had been in use since the Pauline commentaries (*Exp. prop. Rom.* 13-18; 24.2, 36; *Q.* 66.1; *Exp. Gal.* 9; 25.1; *Simpl.* 1.1.2, 14). It was repeated in *S.* 151-56 preached about the same time at the composition of these books of *Civ.*

spirit that was displayed immediately in the movement of the genital organs. The punishment of mortality was also associated with this second sin, rather than the first sin of pride (*Gn. litt.* 8.5-6, 13-15; 11.5, 27, 30-31; *Civ.* 13.20-21; 14.10-13).¹⁹

Defending the Doctrine

On May 1, 418, a plenary council of the Catholic bishops of Africa asserted that infants draw original sin from Adam and must be liberated through Christian baptism (*Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis excerpta* 110). Almost immediately, Augustine began writing to influential Christians who had supported Pelagius. In the following years, he answered questions, offered arguments and recognized the difficulties inherent in the teaching on the transmission of guilt through the heritage of Adam and Eve.

In the second book of his treatise addressed to Albina, Pinian, and Melania, Roman aristocrats active in support of the African church, Augustine attempted to broaden the discussion. He insisted that the doctrine was based upon the foundational Christian belief that no person can be set free from sin and justified by the grace of God without faith in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. As Paul taught, Adam had brought sin and death upon the whole of humanity and Christ alone redeemed from sin and brought humans to eternal life. Pelagius was simply wrong, he insisted, in assuming that humans had lived righteously by the power of nature alone before Moses and by the guidance of the law until the birth of Christ. All had died in Adam and could be restored only in Christ (*Gr. et pecc. or.* 24.28-27.32).²⁰ This dogma did not except infants, as the Jewish law of circumcision clearly attested. Infants could not be held personally responsible for the condemnation under which they were born; it had to be attributed to their belonging to the mass of perdition and sharing the debt of Adam's sin (*Gr. et pecc. or.* 30.35-32.37). He then argued that the carnal concupiscence that punished Adam and Eve's transgression provided the best explanation for the transmission their guilt (*Gr. et pecc. or.* 39.44-40.45).

Later in 418, when Augustine was taking part in a mission for Zozimus of Rome to resolve a problem in Mauretania, he responded to the request of a bishop from either further west in Africa or Spain, for clarification of the question of the origin of the human soul (for a plausible identification of the bishop, see Lancel: 353-54). Augustine responded with a letter to the bishop and a treatise, *de anima et eius origine*, in four parts addressed to the other participants in the discussion. He treated the question from the perspective of the transmission of Adamic guilt and insisted on three points: God is just and does not create souls sinful; souls do not sin before entering bodies; children must be baptized into Christ to enter eternal life and/or the kingdom of God (*An. et or.* 1.13.16, 19.34). He defined two possible solutions: that the human soul might be created and infused into (sinful) flesh generated from parents or that it might be generated, as the body was, from human parents. The first would seem to imply that God alone was responsible for the sinfulness and condemnation of infants who died before making any personal decision. The second would make infants guilty of a sin properly, though not

¹⁹ Augustine did not push the sin of Adam back to pride in *Gn. litt.* 11.42; he did in *Civ.* 13-14 that were written 417-20.

²⁰ His New Testament dossier included John 3:8; 4:34; 5:30; Acts 4:12; 15:10-11; 17:31; Romans 3:20; 5:5, 14; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:21-22; 1 Timothy 2:5.

individually or personally, their own.²¹ He considered the scriptural evidence advanced for and against both options and demonstrated at length that it was inadequate to decide the question.

These two treatments of the transmission of guilt from Adam and Eve to their descendants indicate that the foundation of the doctrine was Christological and, at least in the period after the death and resurrection of Christ, ecclesiological.

Summary

The first temptation of humanity was to autonomy or self-governance. In Augustine's early explanations, this resulted in a turn of the mind toward its sense faculties and a weakening of the body, so that it participated in the mortality of the beasts.

Augustine's second explanation of the fall was that humans had been persuaded to participate in the prideful revolt of the demons. They were assigned mortal bodies as punishment and preparation for repentance. They were weaker as a consequence in discerning and performing what is good. As a result of this failure, human infants were born mortal and morally weaker. They became guilty of sin through failing to progress from this condition, with divine aid. They were guilty of sin only if they had been united with the first parents in their sin.

The mortality and mental weakness resulting from the fall resulted in universal sinfulness. Bodily needs and appetites oriented the person toward those goods; gradual development of intellectual knowledge and reasoned judgment resulted in customs that were not properly aligned with the eternal destiny of humans. Romans 7 taught that the moral law revealed in the Decalogue displayed humans' tendency to pride and addiction to carnal satisfactions. Christians accepted the divine offer of assistance, in the form of a delight in justice and equity, that empowered them to fulfill the demands of the moral law.

In his preaching during the first decade of the fifth century, Augustine realized that even faithful Christians continued to struggle with the consequences of mortality and failed to fulfill the standards of the divine law and the exhortations of Christ. Further reflection on the Pauline comparison of Adam and Christ led him toward the judgment that humans inherited sin and guilt through the carnal generation, from which they could be liberated by baptismal regeneration.

In the early years of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine developed the doctrine of inherited guilt and anchored it in the belief that humans could be saved only through sacramental incorporation into the body of Christ. Using the virginal conception of Christ as the explanation for his freedom from all sin and guilt, Augustine argued that the operation of lust in sexual generation transmitted a penal mortality – one characterized by carnal lust – to all the other offspring of Adam and Eve.

In his contemporary reconsiderations of the Genesis narrative of the temptation and sin of humanity, Augustine introduced a clear distinction between an initial sin of pride or rebellion that made humans vulnerable to the temptation to transgress the divine command against eating from the tree of knowledge. He assigned the inherited punishment of mortality

²¹ Augustine recognized the difficulty throughout the exposition; see *An. et or.* 1.8.8; 1.11.13-14.18; 2.9.13; 2.13.18.

and lust to the second sin. That penal mortality, he began to assert, was the effect rather than the cause or occasion of an inherited guilt.

In the reconsideration of Romans 7 at the height of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine argued that the lust which punished the transgression of Adam and Eve and was transmitted by sexual generation was sinful and made their offspring guilty of their sin. Although baptismal regeneration in Christ liberated from its guilt, the evil activity of lusting continued to draw Christians to sin. Paul's plea in Romans 7:23-24 was for the eradication of the evil desires he resisted but could not eliminate. This could be accomplished only in the resurrection.

In his last analysis of the Genesis narrative of temptation and fall, Augustine integrated the sequence of unprovoked sin of pride, imposition of a prohibition, transgression of the divine law, and bodily punishment that would lead to repentance with the Pauline analysis in Romans 7.

Augustine failed to develop an inheritance of Adamic guilt that he could show was compatible with divine justice (*C. Iul. imp.* 3.12-38.1, 66) and the explanation of the origin of the human soul (*C. Iul.* 5.4.17, 15.53; *C. Iul. imp.* 2.25, 28, 33, 61). He judged the doctrine firmly based in the Pauline teaching of the roles of Adam and Christ; he continued to affirm and to use the doctrine in his debates with Pelagius and discussions with fellow Catholics.

Conclusion

Augustine's doctrine of the consequences of the sins of Adam and Eve for their human heritage began in a form that was not significantly different from the teaching of his predecessors and contemporaries. Humans began their individual lives burdened not with a guilt that would result in their condemnation but with a weakness and a proclivity toward rebellion that would occasion and result in universal sinfulness. This doctrine survived through the writing of *Confessiones* but by the beginning of the Pelagian controversy barely a decade later, it was already changed. Advances in the dating of Augustine's sermons and commentaries on the Psalms allow the identification of two developments in the first decade of the fifth century: a contrast of Christ and Adam as sources of spiritual as well as bodily death; and a shift in the interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 that attributed the plea for liberation to Paul, speaking as or for Christians.

The doctrine itself was based upon an appreciation of the role of Christ as Savior and head of a new humanity. The doctrine of human solidarity in Adam and the shared or inherited guilt of his sin and transgression were the shadow side of that appreciation of Christ. As such, the doctrine was independent of any one explanation of its sharing or transmission.

No later than 418, Augustine had provided a theory of the transmission of guilt from Adam and Eve through sexual generation that was built upon that new interpretation of Romans 7. The lust that was visited upon the first parents as punishment for their transgression was itself sinful, even though it was imposed upon them and their descendants without ever being voluntarily and deliberately chosen. It was a form of human affection that preceded and survived the exercise of their free choice. Although its guilt could be removed in baptismal rebirth, the lusting itself survived in and propagated itself through the faculties and operations that remained untouched by divine grace even in Christians. The lust could be

resisted and contained but it could be eradicated only by death and transformative resurrection.

The great difficulty of this explanation of the transmission of the original sinning and its guilt lay in its apparent incompatibility with the available explanations of the origin of the souls of human beings generated in the line of Adam and Eve. By the time Augustine developed the theory of the inheritance of sinful lust, he had excluded the existence and operation of human souls prior to their presence in earthly bodies. If souls were individually created and infused into bodies sexually generated by parents, they would become guilty of the lusting in those bodies, with which they were personally identified. That solution, however, would require the condemnation of infants who died before they were capable of any personal decision. One possibility remained: the transmission of guilt with the soul itself. All humans might have been present and operative, body and soul, in their first parents. They sinned collectively in them and were generated, body and soul, from them, drawing their common guilt with their lives.

What Augustine did set up by this explanation of the transmission of sinful lusting was an identifiable and even experiential – at least for his congregants – moral condition of the Christian that was outside the person’s control. Carnal desires were a negative power in the person that was present at birth and continued through death: they were evil and sinful but neither a sin that the person had committed personally and individually nor the punishment for such a sin. Its identification with inbred lust was congruent with the inherited sin and religiously plausible.

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