Check for updates

PRO ECCLESIA

Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology
2020, Vol. 29(4) 449–471
© The Author(s) 2020
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1063851220952319
journals.sagepub.com/home/pre

Imago diaboli? Luther's Anthropological Holism

Mickey L. Mattox
Marquette University, USA

Abstract

The Flacian controversy in mid-16th century Lutheranism turned on the question whether as a consequence of original sin the image of God in humankind has been lost and replaced by the image of the devil. Is the fallen human being evil per se? Examining Martin Luther's comments on the story of creation and fall in his *Genesis Lectures* (1535-1545), I argue that Luther's insistence on the loss of the *imago dei* results in an anthropology closer to that of Thomas Aquinas than to Luther's uncompromising disciple, Matthias Flacius Illyricus. For both Thomas and Luther, original sin is a holistic term that reflects the absence of original righteousness in the essence of the soul. Luther rejects any substantial reading of original sin that would ontologize it as the very substance of the human being. His anthropological holism means that sin has a deleterious effect on the whole human being, including all the powers of body and soul. Sin is privative, a spiritual leprosy that corrupts the whole human being.

Keywords

Divinization, essence of the soul, formal substance, Genesis 1-3, image of the devil, Martin Luther, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, original righteousness, original sin, sin as privation

In the years immediately after Martin Luther's death in 1546, the Lutheran reformers heard shouts of heresy all around them. Of course, Catholic polemicists loudly accused them of departing from the orthodox faith on such important issues as justification, the mass, good works, papal authority, and more.

Corresponding author:
Mickey L. Mattox, Department of Theology, Marquette University, 1217 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881, USA.
Email: mickey.mattox@marquette.edu

Even before Luther's death, however, Lutherans were divided among themselves, as one sees, for example, in the antinomian controversies, in frequent criticisms of Philip Melanchthon's teaching regarding free will and salvation, and in many other issues. In the aftermath of the Catholic victory in the Schmalkaldic War in 1547, these squabbles metastasized into outright conflict. The Catholic victors moved swiftly to impose an interim religious arrangement on the Lutherans, and so to facilitate their eventual return to the Catholic fold. The first proposed postwar arrangement, the so-called Augsburg Interim, made some significant concessions to the Lutherans—clerical marriage and communion in both kinds, for example. But it also re-instituted Catholic rites and obedience to Rome with the intent of fully reintegrating the evangelical churches into the Catholic Church.[1]

Arguing about how far one could licitly cooperate with such an imposed religious regime, Luther's heirs were soon polarized. Strict adherents to the Reformer's doctrine resisted the Interim. They were soon labeled the gnesio- *or genuine Lutherans.* Their somewhat less strict Lutheran opponents, the Philippist party, adopted a more flexible approach. They generally followed the lead of Philip Melanchthon, who had agreed to a second and even more conciliatory arrangement, the so-called Leipzig Interim. Seeking to preserve the most meaningful changes brought about by the Reformation, Melanchthon made the common-sense argument that not every theological hill was worth dying on. Compromises could be made, he thought, on indifferent matters, *adiaphora*, for example, the form of confirmation, vestments, candles, and the like. Melanchthon's critics vehemently disagreed. Charges and counter-charges of heresy flew.

In the case of the fiery Croatian theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus, a leading figure among the gnesio-Lutherans, the charge of heresy stuck.[2] Seeking to remain scrupulously faithful to what he believed he had learned from Luther, Flacius made arguments that seemed to implicate him in heresy regarding the doctrine of original sin. Following very closely Luther's

1. For the theology and history of the intra-Lutheran controversies between Luther's death and the signing of the Formula of Concord, see Friedrich Bente, "Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books," in *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 1–256; for a more balanced recounting of the theological ins and outs of the Flacian controversy, see Robert J. Christman, *Doctrinal Controversy and Lay Religiosity in Late Reformation Germany: The Case of Mansfeld* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), ch. 2.
2. The most recent study of Flacius is Luka Ilić, *Theologian of Sin and Grace: The Process of Radicalization in the Theology of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). See also Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2011).

teaching as he understood it, Flacius insisted that the fall had a disastrous effect. In fallen humankind, he argued, the image of God was lost and, more importantly, *transformed* into the image of the devil. When he stated this position in public debate, Flacius was forced to answer a standard Aristotelian question:[3] should sin be understood as the very substance of the fallen human being or merely as an accident? If the question must be framed in Aristotelian categories, Flacius replied, then yes, sin is the "formal substance" of the fallen human being. If one interprets this claim within a hylomorphic framework, as nearly everyone did back then, it seems to suggest that the human soul itself is evil *per se*. More than that, it implies that the devil is a creator, one who can transmute a good creature made by God into a creature that is evil *per se*. Flacius' detractors pounced upon him immediately. They argued that he had fallen into the error of the Manichaeans. After nearly two decades of controversy, Flacius' teaching was rejected in the *Book of Concord* (1577, 1580), in which the Lutheran tradition adopted the teaching that if Aristotelian terms must be used, then original sin is an accident rather than the very substance of the fallen person.[4]

Nevertheless, nearly everyone could see that Flacius had a point. Dr Luther had spoken of fallen humankind as bereft of the image of God and, yes, as stamped by the image of the devil.[5] On occasion, Luther had even spoken of sin as the "essence" of the fallen human being. What did he mean by that? Had Luther ontologized original sin, offering a substantialized account of what we might call, somewhat perversely to be sure, the "real presence" of evil in the fallen human person? In his own hyperbolic efforts to underscore the hopelessness of the sinner apart from grace and faith, did Luther shout himself out of catholic orthodoxy?

---

3. Aristotle's constructive role in Luther's thought, particularly his natural philosophy, is frequently underestimated. Aristotle also continued to play a prominent role in Lutheran theology throughout the Reformation and into the period of confessional orthodoxy. On "institutional Aristotelianism" and Aristotle in Luther's theology, see Theodor Dieter, "Scholasticisms," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, 3 vols., ed. Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); here, vol. 3, 334-346. Cited hereafter as OEML, with volume and page numbers. For more detail, see Theodor Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Historisch-systematische Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001).
4. For the Lutheran resolutions regarding original sin, see *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000): Epitome, Art. 1 (487-491); Solid Declaration, Art. 1 (531-542), hereafter BC.
5. For a summary and review of the literature on Luther's understanding of sin, see L'Ubomír Batka, "Sin," OEML 3, 346-360.

Attempting to answer lingering questions such as these regarding Luther's theological anthropology, in what follows I turn first to St Thomas Aquinas in search of a textbook medieval catholic response to the question of the impact of original sin on the image of God in humankind. Are fallen humans still in the image of God? As we shall see, Thomas offers a subtle yes and no response. On Thomas' account, sin is "present" in the sinner as the absence of original justice and sanctifying grace. This absence in turn gives rise to palpable consequences; privation results in depravity. With some helpful elements of Thomas' teaching in hand, I turn to Luther's late Genesis lectures to examine crucial textual evidence that could be taken to implicate him in Flacius' heresy. What did the old warhorse Martin Luther have to say about original sin and the image of God in the classroom?

The point of this exercise is not to argue for Thomas' influence on Luther,[6] still less to judge which of these men was nearer the truth of the matter. Instead, I want to assess the catholicity of Luther's teaching by trying to discern to what extent it leans back in the direction of St Thomas or forward toward Flacius. On Luther's account, as we shall see, the sin of Adam and Eve was indeed an unqualified disaster. Examining the question of the image of God, however, Luther repeatedly and explicitly refuses to offer an ontological account of original sin. Instead, he develops an integral understanding of the human being, that is, a narrative anthropological holism that stresses the consequences of original sin in the broadest terms.[7] As a biblical humanist, Luther wants to draw his understanding of the human creature out of the creation story.[8] Reading Genesis 1-3, he concludes that the fall impacts the whole person, including the powers of the soul. It does not follow, however, that

6. The standard study for the question of Luther's reliance on Thomas has been Denis R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989). More recently, however, see the critical investigation in Stefan von Gradl, "Inspektor Columbo Irrt: Kriminalistische Überlegungen," *Luther*, 77, 2006, 83-99. The classic work on theological convergences between Luther and Thomas is Otto Hermann Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin: Versuch eines Systematisch-Theologischen Dialogs* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1967). Pesch, however, does not try to demonstrate Thomas' influence on Luther.
7. I use "holism" here to designate Luther's claim for the intrinsic unity of the human being, in which every distinguishable human power or aptitude is related to every other power or aptitude in such a way that each has an impact on all.
8. Timothy J. Wengert emphasizes the humanist commitments of the Wittenberg faculty, including Martin Luther, in his "Melanchthon, Luther, and their Wittenberg Colleagues," OEML, 2, 518-541. For a fascinating window onto Luther as a biblical humanist in dialogue with both Italian and transalpine humanism, see William Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), ch. 2-3.

everything good in the human being has been lost. Luther's version of "total depravity," I will argue, cannot be understood to mean that the human creature is evil *per se*. To that extent, it leans in the direction of Thomas rather than Flacius.

The comparative procedure attempted here requires discernment. Luther and Thomas were quite dissimilar men. Furthermore, the primary sources drawn on below, Luther's Genesis lectures and Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, are very different kinds of texts. Attempting to understand Luther fairly, we should keep in mind that the oral event in which the Genesis lectures originated eventually yielded a published text not neatly comparable to systematic works such as Thomas' *Summa*. Luther, moreover, was a Renaissance(-ish) biblical humanist who taught and sought to exemplify the distinction between dialectic (argument) and rhetoric (adornment) in the classroom. To express this difference in 16th-century terms, Luther's lectures combined dialectical theological analyses with the hortatory rhetorical flourishes that gave his classroom performances their power to move hearts and minds. Luther was teaching young Protestant evangelical students with an intent to inspire them for faithfulness and service.[9] His sometimes-hyperbolic statements, perhaps especially in the matter of original sin, must be understood through that lens.

Thomas' Privative Account of Original Sin and the *Imago Dei*

Our inquiry into Thomas begins with the observation that the doctrine of creation was central for Thomas' work. Indeed, as Josef Pieper has observed, creation is the often-unrecognized *Notenschlüssel* to Thomas' theology as a whole, the clef that unlocks the melody of his thought so that we can hear it played aright.[10]

God's Creation

Working through the doctrine of creation, Thomas considers the relation of the creation to the Creator. He suggests a theological point of departure. What if one begins by thinking about the Word of God, that is, the eternal Son of the

9. Broadly to the question of Luther's classroom purposes, one may consult John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008).
10. Josef Pieper, *Unaustrinkbares Licht: Das negative Element in der Weltansicht des Thomas von Aquin* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1963), 16f. Cited in David Berger, "Schöpfungslehre," in *Thomas Handbuch*, ed. Volker Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 338–47, at 339.

eternal Father? This only-begotten Son, he notes, is understood as the "interior Word" of the Father, in such a way that he remains within the Father even as he is begotten from Him. Pondering the mystery of the Word of God, therefore, attention is drawn to an *ad intra* relation within the Godhead that is both internal and eternal. As an irreducible relational reality within the one God, the Word of God is a Person, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the personally subsistent emanation of the divine Mind.[11] Examining the eternal divine relation between this Word and its Speaker, Thomas senses a hint of the possibility of a further relation, one that extends, so to speak, outside the Godhead. Thus, a new question arises: "Does the name Word import relation to creatures?" Thomas answers, "because God by one act understands Himself and all things, His one Word is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creatures."[12] Enclosed within the relational identity of the Word, one discovers a hint of God's relations *ad extra*, with everything, that is, outside of God.

Thomas next puts to work a distinction between expression and operation. *Ad intra*—so Thomas—the Word is the expression of the mind of the Father; *ad extra*, however, the Word both expresses and operates. The Word expresses creatures as they are found in the eternal divine act of knowing and works them up into being. Here a further question arises. Given that the Son or Word of God is understood as an eternal Person within the Godhead, is the creation expressed through the Word also eternal? The question of eternal creation, which seems to be the position of Aristotle, was alive and well in the Paris of Thomas' day. Robert Pasnau explains,

> Bonaventure had argued that . . . Creation *ex nihilo* necessarily implies a temporal beginning. According to Aquinas, on the other hand, creation from nothing means that things are caused by God in their complete being. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the creation had a temporal beginning. A cause does not necessarily precede its effect in duration [time], but can be simultaneous with the effect.[13]

Therefore, one cannot rule out philosophically the possibility of an eternal creation. Absent philosophical demonstration, one can know that the world began in time only by divine revelation.[14] To this, we must add the following. God for Thomas is named as the Creator both in reference to His being the

11. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (hereafter ST) I, Q. 34, A. 2. I use here and in what follows the Aquinas Institute's online Latin-English parallel text, <https://aqiunas.cc/la/en/~ST.I>.
12. ST I, Q. 34, A. 3.
13. See Robert Pasnau, "Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford Handbooks Online, accessed 14 March 2019. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0027.
14. He makes this argument in *De aeternitate mundi*.

initial cause of the creation's existence and for his continuing conservation of it. Creation and conservation are logically distinct, but they name a single continuous act. God was and is the Creator.

Adam: Immortal and Undeceivable

In the unspoiled paradise of the original creation, Thomas' Adam was in a very good place, and so he had many good reasons to be grateful. According to Thomas, Adam was immortal before sin. Death had no place, for "by sin death came into the world."[15] In the garden of paradise, Adam also experienced the blessing of knowing God. Thomas considers this knowledge good but imperfect. The imperfection derives from the fact that the creature's knowledge of the infinite Creator can never be complete. No created thing can comprehend God entirely. Nevertheless, Adam knew God, and the power of the soul by means of which he did so was the intellect. Rational creatures, both angelic and human, participate in God more deeply than non-rational ones.

Before his fall, Adam knew God through the same senses through which he knew the natural world. This natural knowledge of God, however, was limited. It offered only a foretaste of the kind of knowledge of God that transcends natural means. The vision of God in his essence, beatitude properly so called, was not included in Adam's original powers. If Adam already possessed that vision, Thomas reckons, he could not have turned away from God and fallen into sin.[16] Therefore, the unfallen Adam enjoyed the knowledge of God as mediated to him by the creation but had not yet been granted the beatific vision.

This is not necessarily to say that Adam in the original creation lacked any direct knowledge of God. Thomas allows one other possible route through which Adam before the fall may have known God, this one based on a surmise Augustine made in his literal commentary on Genesis. Thomas quotes Augustine thus:

> Perhaps God used to speak the truth to the first man as He speaks to the angels; by shedding on his mind a ray of the unchangeable truth, yet without bestowing on him the experience of which the angels are capable in the participation of the Divine Essence.[17]

Adam's knowledge of God thus surpassed our own. It came to him by means of the creation itself, and perhaps also through an inner word that served as a

15. ST I, Q. 97, A. 1. Citing Romans 5:12, Thomas says that man was made immortal.
16. ST I, Q. 94, A. 1.
17. ST I, Q. 94, A.1.

foretaste of the blessedness to come. In his original integrity, moreover, Thomas believes that Adam could not be deceived. In the state of original innocence, "it was impossible for the human intellect to consent to falsehood."[18] Adam's first sin, therefore, began not in the intellect, but in the will.

What Is Original Sin?

What does original sin mean for Thomas? In short, that everyone loses. By his sin, Adam lost the gifts of sanctifying grace and original justice with which he had been created. Before sin, Adam had these gifts in the "essence of the soul" (i.e. the principle of the soul's unity; that which allows one to say "I see you" rather than "my power of vision sees you"). The essence of the soul denotes the form of the body. It is the integrating principle of the human being. A twofold order characterized Adam at his creation: sanctifying grace ordered his will and intellect in submission to God, whereas original justice ordered his appetites in submission to reason.[19] The ordered wholeness of the human depended vitally upon the interconnection of sanctifying grace and original justice with the human intellect, will, and appetites. But these gifts were lost, for Adam and his progeny, through original sin.

Original sin, therefore, is formally present in the soul of every son or daughter of Adam as this absence. How does that work? In the *Prima Secundae*, Thomas considers the question "Whether original sin is in the essence of the soul [*in essentia animae*] rather than in the powers." He answers that "Original sin is called the sin of nature [*peccatum naturale*] . . . Therefore, the soul is the subject of original sin chiefly in respect to its essence [*principaliter secundum suam essentiam*]."[20] Original sin, in short, is privative, depriving the human soul of the original grace that ordered it to God as highest good.

This privation, however, has palpable consequences. Lacking the gifts of sanctifying grace and original justice, the faculties of the soul become disordered. Whereas in the rightly ordered person the intellect rules over the will and the lower appetitive powers, in the fallen person disorder dis-integrates her. Original sin corrupts the created integrity of the human being. Privation understood as a formal absence thus yields material consequences. The privation of original sin manifests itself in "disordered dispositions." Thus, Thomas can say that original sin "is more than mere privation. It is a corrupt habit."[21] Original sin is in the essence of the soul as a privation. In the powers of the

18. ST I, Q. 94, A.4.
19. ST I.II, Q. 82.
20. ST I.II, Q. 83, A. 2.
21. ST I.II, Q. 82, A. 1.

soul, however, it is an inclination to act in disobedience to God's law. Such disobedience begins with the will, which is the seat of the human inclination to act. The human soul, therefore, as to both its essence and its powers, is fallen. Although he or she is still in possession of intellect, will, and so on, everything in the fallen person is touched by original sin.

The complex of corrupt habits in fallen humankind has a name: disordered concupiscence. It is crucial in this connection to note that for Thomas concupiscence in its proper denotation is simply the name for the soul's powers of attraction to the good. The concupiscent powers of the soul are gifts of God, natural goods. Bodily desires, whether for food or for sex, for example, are consistent with Adam's original justice. Thus, Adam in his original condition was a rational animal with a spiritual destiny: animal insofar as he was an animated and embodied creature, rational by capacities given in his creation, and able to keep himself in order and to know and love his Maker by means of the special divine gifts of original righteousness and sanctifying grace. After the fall, however, the soul's concupiscible powers have become disordered. The tangible external consequences of fallen humankind's internal disorder constitute the material effects of the fall on ourselves and our world.

Thomas also considers the question what happens to sin in the sacrament of baptism. The answer is that baptism remits original and actual sin, both as to guilt and as to punishment. In the usual case of the baptized infant, however, only original sin is remitted, since infants do not yet have actual sin. Thomas also makes a useful distinction between *peccatum originale originans*—that is, the one originating sin of Adam in terms of its effect on the historical Adam and Eve—and *peccatum originale originatum*—that is, the originated original sin, which affects their progeny.[22] In the case of infants who die having only that originated sin and no actual sin, their sin does not merit damnation. Instead, it merits only the loss of the beatific vision of God. In the afterlife, therefore, they occupy a sort of permanent middle ground between damnation and beatitude. This middle place, where the dead neither suffer nor enjoy the beatific vision, is referred to as the "limbo of infants."[23] With that we come to the question of the image of God.

22. ST I.II, Q. 82. This notion originates in a letter of Innocent III written in 1201: "Poena originalis peccati est carentia visionis Dei, actualis vero poena peccati est gehennae perpetuae cruciatus" (The penalty of original sin is the loss of the vision of God, whereas the penalty of actual sin is everlasting torture in hell). The text of this letter is provided in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. 32 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1963), no. 780 (p. 251). Thomas seems to have assumed this as an authoritative teaching.
23. ST Supplementum, Q. 69-71.

A Lost Image?

So, lacking the gifts of sanctifying grace and original justice, are fallen human beings still made in the image of God? For Thomas, yes and no. First the yes. Thomas often speaks of the image of God as located in the mind, the intellect. While there are traces of the Trinity in the human body, as in all other bodies, the concrete location of the image of God is the intellectual soul. The human intellect images God first insofar as its own acts of knowledge echo the internal dynamism of the Holy Trinity.[24] Thomas writes,

> Now the Divine Persons are distinct from each other by reason of the procession of the Word from the Speaker, and the procession of Love connecting Both. But in our soul word "cannot exist without actual thought," as Augustine says (De Trin. xiv, 7). Therefore, first and chiefly, the image of the Trinity is to be found in the acts of the soul, that is, inasmuch as from the knowledge which we possess, by actual thought we form an internal word; and thence break forth into love.[25]

Here, the divine Speaker corresponds to the human capacity for knowledge, the divine Word to what happens when that knowledge comes forth as thought, and the divine Love to the way human love comes to be through the exercise of the will. Knowledge, thought, and love: these three logically parallel moments constitute the image of the Trinity in the human being. The human relation to God thus has a call-and-response character. The human intellectual trinity of mind, word, and love reflects and is elevated by grace to participate in the Mind, Word, and Love that is the Holy Trinity. To this extent, the image of God is intact.

For Thomas, fallen humans remain the image of God in another sense as well.[26] In Adam's fall, the natural human inclination to the good was diminished but not destroyed. People still have this inclination, although it exists only in the jumble of internal contradictions that sinners experience as a consequence of disordered concupiscence. The fallen offspring of Adam, in other words, retain an innate sense of true moral first principles, what Thomas elsewhere characterized as practical reason. For example, humans innately know that "evil is to be avoided" and that "nothing illicit is to be done."[27] Here, too,

24. I lean here on the works of Ian P. McFarland, "When Time Is of the Essence: Aquinas and the *Imago Dei*," *New Blackfriars*, 82(963), 2001, 208-223, and Montague Brown, "*Imago Dei* in Thomas Aquinas," *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 10(1), 2014, 1-11.
25. ST I, Q. 93, A.7.
26. ST I.II, Q. 85, A. 2.
27. To this, see Tobias Hoffman, "Conscience and *Synderesis*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0020.

humankind remains the image of God, even if amid the confusions of life in a fallen world this image has been tarnished. In what sense, then, is it proper to say that the image of God has been lost? Solely in the loss of the supernatural gifts given to Adam: sanctifying grace and original justice. In Thomas' careful reading of the ins and outs of creation and fall, therefore, humankind after Adam's sin both is and is not the image of God. Human beings are fallen, and their innate goodness is corrupted by actual sin. Nevertheless, they are not evil *per se*.

A Holistic Anthropology

Luther's Rationalism: An Appropriation of Scholastic Tradition

The elder Luther's reading of the creation story repeats much of what he knew from patristic and medieval tradition, including a good deal of what we have noted from Thomas, above. Unlike Thomas' step-by-careful-step analysis, however, Luther's quasi-extemporaneous lectures reflect the professor's penchant for selectivity, digression, and repetition. He sometimes raises a question, for example, but declines to pursue it. Elsewhere he briefly digresses on an issue, as in his mention of the anthropomorphites, with whom he expresses a certain sympathy because Scripture itself so often portrays God in human terms. But he takes the matter no further. Reading Luther's interpretation of Genesis, one also finds that he is dependent upon the antecedent traditions of theology and exegesis, but that he adds twists and turns that seem very much his own.[28]

Consider Luther's insistence on God's moment-by-moment engagement in the creation. Creation, he thinks, is not a past fact separable from a subsequent *concursus dei generalis*. Instead, it is a present reality, a *creatio continua*.[29]

---

28. For a study of traditional and distinctive elements in Luther's Genesis exegesis, see Mickey L. Mattox, *"Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs:" Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the* Enarrationes in Genesin *1535-1545* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). I cite Luther here from the American Edition, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. plus 20 vols. Continuation Edition (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House, 1955), and from the Weimar critical edition, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883). Hereafter cited as LW (volume and page numbers) and WA (with volume, page, and line numbers). For a provocative study that underscores the singularity of Luther's approach to the Genesis text, see Rafael Magarik, "Free Indirect Revelation: Luther's Moses and the Narration of Genesis," *Reformation*, 24(1), 2019, 3-23.
29. The still-unsurpassed study of Luther's doctrine of creation is David Löfgren, *Die Theologie der Schöpfung bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960). Also of importance is Johannes Schwanke, *Creatio ex nihilo: Luthers Lehre von der Schöpfung aus dem Nichts in der Großen Genesisvorlesung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004). For Luther's

God's Word remains present in its power and effect not only in extraordinary events but even more in the everyday wonders that surround us. For Luther, this is highly personal. God has created not only Adam and Eve but also you and me. The Word that spoke humankind into existence remains present today in all its original power and effect. Thus, Luther focuses on the everyday miracles people tend to take for granted—for example, that the sun runs through the sky along a regular path; that the heavier land reposes atop the lighter water; and that mice spontaneously generate from the dust bunnies left behind by the lazy housemaid![30] Better to focus on the wonders that surround us each day, Luther seems to suggest, than to seek new portents in the skies. Having given the back of his hand to the would-be science of astrology, he nevertheless draws attention to the many opportunities God provides for humans to wonder at the beauty of the creation and *ipso facto* the goodness of its Creator. Indeed, Luther sees divine design everywhere he looks; nature stands ever at the ready to provide stirring witness to God's ongoing work. He praises astronomy and rehearses for his students the fundamentals of Ptolemaic cosmology. All this, he says, "we approve" and find "most worthy of praise." The findings of cosmological studies should be recognized as a "great benefit," he says, for astronomy provides the "first principles of the most noble arts."[31]

Given this praise for the human capacity to know, it is doubly significant that Luther also affirms the traditional exegetical finding that the breath of God mentioned in Genesis 2 denotes not the infusion of the divine Spirit but the gift of the intellectual soul. Indeed, Luther offers a ringing endorsement of this traditional reading. We glimpse his rationalist side in his unequivocal praise for the gift of the intellect. The following quote neatly mitigates against any too-easy dismissal of Luther as a fideist and reminds us that he respected the work of his colleagues in the arts faculty (teachers of, for example, mathematics, grammar and logic, astronomy, music). In his remarks on the creation of the heavenly bodies on day 4 of the Genesis account, he says:

> . . . the intellect . . . does not exist in other earthly creatures. With the support of the mathematical disciplines—which no one can deny were divinely revealed—the human being, in his mind, soars high above the earth; and leaving behind those

understanding of ontology in relation to the *creatio continua*, see Sammeli Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics: What Is the Structure of Being According to Luther?" in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 129-160.

30. LW 1.51-2; WA 42.38.25-39.14.
31. My translation. See WA 42.21.15, "quia principia pulcherrimarum artium ex verisimilibus rationibus collecta continent."

> things that are on the earth he concerns himself with heavenly things and explores them. Cows, pigs, and other beasts do not do this; it is man alone who does it. Therefore, man is a creature made to inhabit the celestial regions and to live an eternal life when, after a while, he has left the earth. For this is the meaning of the fact that he can not only speak and form judgments (things which belong to dialectics and rhetoric) but also learns all the sciences thoroughly. Now, therefore, from this fourth day our glory begins to be revealed: that God gives thought to making a creature which may understand the motion of the bodies created on the fourth day and may take delight in that knowledge which is *proper* to his nature.[32]

Importantly, Luther's praise of the intellect here parallels the distinctive language in which he describes God's act of creation. As God in his Word speaks, so the human being in the intellect understands. Moreover, when Moses reports the words of God on each of the days of creation, these words are to be understood as real divine speech, even if, to be sure, Luther does not think they were produced by breath. Indeed, the power of these words of creation provides the paradigm for divine speech more broadly in Luther's thought. Luther says,

> God calls into existence things which do not exist. He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God [*vocabula dei*], in fact only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation.[33]

Similarly, Luther will sometimes say the announcement of the Good News of God's forgiveness by grace and for Christ's sake takes the nothing of the sinner and creates it anew. The point is not that sinners are *nihil* full stop, nor that grace must destroy nature in order to do its work. Instead, he means only that the fallen sinner lacks the internal resources to forgive and restore himself to the grace and favor of God. In this sense, justification is an act of divine re-creation. *Vocabula dei* are words or letters spoken by God. All creatures are such *vocabula*. Human beings, however, are both spoken words of God and creatures who possess a divinely given aptitude for the intellectual apprehension of God's words.

For Luther, the sound of the words of creation has not diminished since they were first spoken. As he states in the Small Catechism, God's act of creation

32. LW 1.46; WA 42.34.37-35.11. I have emended the LW translation slightly. For the last sentence here the LW has "delight in that knowledge as part of his nature." The Latin text is: "quae *propria* sit suae naturae." Emphasis added.
33. LW 1.21-2; WA 42.17.18-20.

should be understood not only cosmically but also personally and subjectively: "I believe that God has created me and all things that exist."[34] He also clarifies that these words are to be understood as spoken by God's own eternal Word:

> The created word is made by the uncreated Word. What else is the entire creation than the Word of God uttered by God, or extended to the outside? But the uncreated Word of God is a divine thought [*divina cogitatio*], an internal order [*iussio interna*], abiding within God, and the same with God, and nevertheless a distinct Person.[35]

This logo-centric reading of the act of creation should not at all be seen as an innovation, but instead as borrowed in its essentials from the antecedent Christian tradition. Indeed, Luther closely parallels what we noted above in Thomas' doctrine of creation: the recognition of the Word of God as the internal expression of the Mind of God almost "imports" the external expression of the Word in the form of the creation. This is not a matter about which Luther speculates further. To be sure, his emphasis on the Word's role here in no way diminishes his conviction that the creation is the work of the undivided Holy Trinity.[36] But he seems to recognize a certain fittingness, if you will, in the agency appropriated to the Word in God's creation. Thus, the divine decision to create, on Luther's reading, seems to be grounded more in what God is than, say, in an impenetrable act of the divine will.

Wondering at the seemingly incomprehensible display of the stars in the heavens, which might seem to have been flung into their places willy-nilly, Luther raises the question whether God is indeed a God of order. Though the heavens are vast, he assures his listeners, within them "there is the highest order [*summus ordo*], established by the wisest mind [*sapientissima mente*]."[37] The wisdom of God is on display in the creation, and the human creature herself is uniquely endowed with an intellect to recognize and know it. This human aptitude for knowledge applies both to the creation itself and to the Creator. Indeed, these two kinds of knowledge are inextricably intertwined. For Luther, unfallen humankind knew the creation not only for what it is in itself but also for its first and final causes. As noted above, moreover, knowledge of the creation and its Creator is proper (*propria*) to the human being as made by God.[38]

34. BC, 354. On the first article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Emphasis mine.
35. LW 1. 22; WA 42.17.24-8. Translation slightly emended.
36. On this issue, one may consult my "Faith in Creation: God in Martin Luther's Sermons on Genesis 1," *Trinity Journal*, 39NS(2), 2018, 199-219.
37. Cf. LW 1.32-3 (translation altered); WA 42.24.41-2: "Et tamen summus est ordo, ex sapientissima mente constitutus."
38. Further to this twofold knowledge, see my "Cosmology," OEML 1, 296-313, esp. 306-309.

Thus, when Luther turns to consider Adam and Eve's created minds, he emphasizes their capacity to know both their world and their wise Creator. Insight, he figures, was necessary for Adam and Eve to fulfill their divinely given mandate to "have dominion." In this connection, he can even speak in the most superlative terms of the noetic capacities of our first parents as divine. Indeed, lamenting the loss of the dominion the primal couple once exercised over the creation, Luther clearly divinizes humankind's royal first parents:

> Here the rule [*regnum*] is assigned to that most beautiful creature, who knows God and is the image of God, in whom the similitude of the divine nature shines forth through his enlightened reason [*rationem illuminatum*], though his justice and his wisdom. Adam and Eve were made the rulers [*rectores*] of the earth, the sea, and the air . . . Even this small part [*particulam*] of the divine image we have lost, so much so that we do not even have insight [*intelligamus*] into that fullness of joy and bliss which Adam derived from his contemplation of all the animal creatures. All our faculties today are leprous, indeed dull and utterly dead. Who today can conceive of that share of the divine nature [*portionem divinae naturae*],[39] that Adam and Eve had insight into all the dispositions of all animals, into their characters and all their powers?[40]

Luther also insists that the gift of insight was bestowed equally upon the woman, who was to rule with her husband over all the earth:

> If . . . we are looking for an outstanding philosopher, let us not overlook our first parents while they were still free from sin. They had a most perfect knowledge of God . . . [and] the most dependable knowledge of the stars and of the whole of astronomy. Eve had these mental gifts in the same degree as Adam . . .[41]

Sharing in the divine nature, the unfallen Adam and Eve were co-rulers over the creation. For that reason, God gave them everything they would need, including insight into the nature and characteristics of the creation.

---

39. This is an allusion to 2 Pet. 1:4: "that by these [promises of God] *you may become partakers of the divine nature*." In the revision of the Vulgate Bible published by the Wittenberg reformers in 1520, the italicized phrase is translated as "fiatis consortes divinae naturae." *WA, Deutsche Bibel* 5.774.33.
40. LW 1.66; WA 42.49. Translation emended. Luther's mention here of a "small particle" should not be taken to mean that the first humans had only a particle of the image. He means that the dominion they exercised was itself only one small aspect of that image.
41. LW 1.66; WA 42.50.6: "Haec fuerunt in Haeva aeque atque in Adamo." Cf. Thomas's similar remarks at ST I, Q. 93, A. 4: "The image of God with regard to that in which it primarily consists, namely the intellectual nature, is as much in the woman as in the man."

Man the Microcosm: More on the Trinity in Humankind

As embodied creatures endowed with the gift of the intellect and the image of God, humankind stands somehow in the middle of the creation. Commenting on Genesis 1:27, Luther says,

> Other animals are called the footprints [*vestigia*] of God, but only humankind is the image of God, just as one finds in the *Sentences*. For in the other animals God is known as it were in the footprints. However, in the human being, especially in Adam, He is truly known, because in him there is such wisdom, justice, and knowledge of all things that he is rightly called a microcosm. For he understands heaven, earth, and the whole creation.[42]

In this section of the lectures, Luther also offers an extensive rehearsal of the Augustinian tradition of the Trinity in man, briefly exploring its different possible referents: mind, memory, and will; faith, hope, and love; and power, wisdom, and justice.[43] All this he broadly affirms.

However, he frets about it. Why? "There is also added," he notes, "an argument concerning free will [*disuptatio de libero arbitrio*], which has its origin in that image."[44] Some argue, Luther claims, that just as God is free, so also the man made in God's image is free, and precisely in terms of his memory, his mind, and, crucially, his will.[45] From this argument, Luther complains, the erroneous conclusion has been drawn that the human free will remains unimpaired after the fall and that it functions as the first and efficient cause of salvation. Thus, he accepts and agrees with the traditional idea that the *imago dei* can be meaningfully understood as the Trinity in man. But he thinks this goes terribly wrong when it informs a scheme of self-salvation based on the free exercise of the unimpaired free will. The powers of the

42. WA 42.51. Translation mine. As the mention of the *Sentences* makes clear, Luther is here following Peter Lombard. Both the Seitz edition of 1544 and the Weimar critical edition give the term "microcosm" in Greek.
43. LW 1.60; WA 42.45.1-23. Cf. Thomas, ST I, Q. 93, A. 6: "While in all creatures there is some kind of likeness to God, in the rational creature alone we find a likeness to God by way of the image [*similitudo Dei per modum imaginis*] . . . whereas in other creatures we find a likeness by way of a trace [*per modum vestigii*]."
44. LW 1.61; WA 42.45.26-7. Translation emended. The LW translates *disputatio* here as "discussion."
45. The most prominent target of this criticism is likely Gabriel Biel, the Tübingen nominalist theologian whose writings the young Luther studied carefully. Perhaps Biel also influenced Luther to view Thomas Aquinas in a similar fashion. See John Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988).

soul, important though they surely are, cannot tell the full story of the image of God. After all, he reasons, the devil, too, has memory, intellect, and will. Is Satan, therefore, also the image of God? As an aside, we might note here that Thomas had recognized that angels, precisely as intellectual creatures, also bear the divine image. Thomas thought that in some ways the angels are more perfectly in the image, while in other ways humans are.[46] As a fallen angel, it would seem correct on Thomas' account to recognize the devil as created in the image of God.

For his part, Luther does not explain to what extent he thinks the devil lacks the image of God. He turns instead to the divine image in humankind, which, he argues, consisted of much more than faculties alone. Think, he admonishes his students, of the tranquility with which the first humans carried the clearest intellect, the best memory, the rightest will. He exhorts them to take note of the congruence between these internal faculties of the soul and the "superb qualities" of their bodies. Behold Adam and Eve in shameless embrace, unembarrassed before God. And now consider us fallen humans. All the powers, all the tranquility, all the god-like attributes stand corrupted. In one sense, therefore, sin works on the *imago dei* like a leprosy, gradually eroding it away. But in a deeper sense, Luther thinks, it affects the whole person, as one can see when one is fearful or ashamed, guilty or unloving. In such instances, one is not fearful, ashamed, guilty, or unloving only in some part of himself, say, in the will, the mind, or the emotions. Such matters as fear and shame necessarily involve the whole person. One is not fallen in one part and upright in another. For Luther, one's whole person is fallen, even if the good gifts that belong to human nature are in some sense intact. All the particular capacities of the human being are touched somehow by our estrangement from God, where the specter of death looms ever over us.[47]

In his reading of Genesis 3:7, Luther reflects on the "glories" of the state of original innocence. Fearlessness and a heart full of love for God were unmistakable markers of the human being's original condition. Nakedness, too. "What could be a greater corruption," he asks rhetorically, "than that nakedness, which beforehand was a glory, is turned into the utmost disgrace?" Answering his own question, Luther returns to a version of the Trinity in the human being. Here once again, the shame fallen people associate with nakedness signals a deep internal corruption. Luther says,

46. ST I, Q. 93, A. 3.
47. Holism of this sort is reflected in Luther's early Romans lectures as well. In his comments on Rom. 7:17, for example, he remarks that concupiscence, "the flesh," is an infirmity of the whole person. See LW 25.340-41; WA 56.350-1.

> How much greater is the disgrace in this [i.e., the fall], that the will [*voluntas*] is impaired, the intellect [*intellectus*] corrupted, and reason [*ratio*] completely faulty and even morphed into something altogether different [*in aliud mutata est*].[48]

This text once again underscores Luther's anthropological holism. Vestiges of the Trinity remain in the fallen human, but all of them are marred by sin. Original righteousness, he thinks, is just another name for the whole uncorrupted human being: upright, fearless, gloriously naked, and saturated with the love and knowledge of God. All this—so Luther—has been lost.

By comparison, the unfallen Adam, blessed with the *imago dei*, was upright before God; he and Eve lived completely without fear. Why? No death. They had the image of the living God and possessed with that a reflexive confidence in their immortality. But how different is the human situation after the fall, when to live in the image of God is "something unknown" (*re incognita*).[49] Instead, we palpably experience not only the privation of this image but also all the evils that follow in its wake: loss of dominion, sinful lusts, out-of-control passions, inordinate emotions, fear of death and every other danger, bodies degraded in every way, and nature virtually opaque to our gaze, its inner workings unknown:

> Who is there who could understand what it means to be in a life free from fear, without terrors and dangers, and to be wise, upright, good, and free from all disasters, spiritual as well as physical? However, it is greater even than these things that Adam was capable of eternal life [*capax aeternae vitae*].[50]

The gap between the lived experience, albeit brief, of the unfallen Adam and Eve and that of all their progeny could hardly be wider. Luther's conclusion? "These and similar evils are the image of the devil, who stamped them on us."[51]

Imago diaboli?

Recall now that for Thomas original sin meant that Adam had lost original justice and sanctifying grace. Original sin is privative; it entails a loss. Materially,

---

48. LW 1.166; WA 42.124.29-31. Considerable advances have been made recently on Luther's view of reason. See for example, Theodor Dieter, "Martin Luther's Understanding of 'Reason'," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XXV, 2011, 249-278; Hans-Peter Grosshans, "Reason and Philosophy," OEML, 3, 221-239. See also Bruce D. Marshall, "Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Luther and Aquinas on Deciding What's True," *The Thomist*, 63, 1999, 1-48.
49. LW 1.63; WA 42.47.31.
50. WA 42.49.1-4.
51. LW 1.63; WA 42.47.22: "Haec et similia mala sunt imago Diaboli, qui ea nobis impressit."

however, the absence of original justice and sanctifying grace results in disordered dispositions, corrupt habits. Therefore, the human being remains the image of God insofar as the stamp of the Trinity abides, that is, so long as one remains in possession of the intellectual soul, with mind, memory, and will. To what extent does Luther's language of the *imago diaboli* in fallen humankind contradict the position taken by Aquinas, that humans retain the image even if it sits amid the ruins of disorder and corruption?

Luther's mention of the *imago diaboli* may seem to imply a real contradiction. It is customary to acquit Luther of any such charge by appealing to the subject matter under discussion. Luther's concerns, it is said, were soteriological rather than ontological. Christman, for example, says that "when Luther addressed the issue of original sin, most often he spoke in terms of its impact on the relationship between God and humanity, not on its effect on substance humanity [sic] and the quality of that substance."[52] Instead, so it has been argued, Luther's point has to do with the sinner's mimetic response to the devil's lead.[53] As the devil rebelled against God and sought to establish his own way, his own good and evil, so human beings do also when they follow his lead. The devil, on this account, is the original version of which the fallen human person's *imitatio* is merely a ghostly reflection. From what we have seen above, it seems that one could also say that for Luther there is a real difference between the *imago dei* and the *imago diaboli*, namely, that the former includes a real *portio* or sharing in the divine nature. Although Luther's claim for the inversion of the *imago dei* into the *imago diaboli* may seem to suggest a neat pair of opposites, there is instead a crucial disproportion. Human beings in the image of God reflect God, share in his rule over the creation, and participate in the divine nature. Human beings who imitate the devil reflect him, but they neither share his rule nor find their being in him. Indeed, they lose themselves through corruption and privation.

Thus, Luther's account of original sin includes the fundamentally catholic conviction that sin undoes the sinner. It affects an incremental *decreation*. Indeed, the language in which Luther's understanding of sin is always couched—the *loss* of original gifts, a *leprosy* on the powers of the soul, a *corruption* of the integrity of nature—shows that it is privative, and therefore not, so to speak, additive. If that is so, then Luther does not ontologize sin. To put it in the terms that would later be used by Flacius, original sin is not the "formal substance" that shapes the matter that is the human being. Original sin,

52. *Doctrinal Controversy*, cited above, p. 59.
53. To this point, see Phil Anderas, *Renovatio: Martin Luther's Augustinian Theology of Sin, Grace and Holiness* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 46-49.

moreover, does not change or mutate the human being into something else, as Flacius believed. His critics saw both those ideas as heretical, and on those grounds polemicized against him as a "Manichaean," that is, one who ontologizes evil and in doing so perversely turns the devil into a creator. Surely Luther did not do either of those things.

Luther on Original Sin and the "essentia hominis"

Or did he? In his study of the Flacian controversy, Christman notes that the Lutheran Cyriakus Spangenberg, a supporter of Flacius, claimed that in the Genesis lectures Luther asserted that "sin is of the substance of man" (*peccatum esse de substantia hominis*). "Spangenberg," Christman writes, "insisted that Luther meant that the very essence of postlapsarian man is sin."[54] Christman also notes that he was unable to find such a text in the Genesis lectures. Nor have I.

However, there is a text that says something quite like it. To understand it aright, one needs to have recourse to the original Latin text. Published in eight hefty volumes, the LW translation of the Genesis lectures is a marvelous tool and we are all deeply in debt to those who provided it for us. On occasion, however, when for some reason one turns to the Latin text, difficulties or insufficiencies become apparent. As noted above, some texts that suggest a human participation in God along the lines of divinization were translated in ways that obscure their meaning. Likewise with the question of original sin and its impact on the essence of the human being.

As we have seen, instead of dismantling the human being into constituent components among which either original righteousness or original sin might be seen as a "part," Luther offers a holistic interpretation. The LW translation, as noted above, sometimes obscures this, too. In one case, it also seems to lend credence to Spangenberg's otherwise unsubstantiated claim regarding the Genesis lectures. In this case, Luther's talk about the impact of original sin is translated with the phrases "part of nature" and "part of the essence."[55] Taking a closer look, we find Luther busy treating the original sin itself, at Genesis 3:7. Here there is mention of an essence, but not of a "part" (*pars*). Concerned to show just what an unmitigated disaster the first sin truly was, Luther takes as his point of departure the opinion that original justice was not natural but a superadded gift. As we shall see, he does not agree:

> But just look what follows from that opinion, that is, if we say that original righteousness was not natural but a gift somehow superfluous to it, "superadded."

54. *Doctrinal Controversy*, p. 66.
55. LW 1.166.

> If you set down that righteousness was not from the essence of the human being [*de essentia hominis*], does it not follow that the sin that comes after it was also not of the essence of the human being [*de essentia hominis*]? And does this not defeat the purpose of sending Christ our Redeemer, since therefore original righteousness, like something alien to our nature, has been lost while our natural endowments remain whole? What more unworthy thing can be said by a theologian!?[56]

The language here is crucial. It should first be noted that Luther affirms that Adam is created with grace, which situates him once again within medieval tradition and on Thomas' side of it.[57] Next, observe that Luther does not say "sin is the essence of the human being" (*peccatum essentia hominis est*). Nor does he say that sin is "part of the essence." Instead, he says simply that "sin is of the essence of the human being." This is a decisive difference. Sin pertains to the essence. The parallel Luther appeals to between the gift of original righteousness and the corruption of original sin is revelatory, moreover, particularly now that we have discovered the holistic terms in which Luther wants to speak of the human being.

Recall as well that the *doctor communis* himself had defined original sin as "in the essence of the soul" (*in essentia animae*). With Thomas' language in mind, it seems unlikely that Luther's language of original sin *de essentia hominis* would have been perceived as daring, much less as alarmingly uncatholic. The *de essentia*, moreover, does not at all bring Luther into proximity with Flacius' *substantia formalis*. On the most plausible reading, Luther's claim that sin is *de essentia hominis* means not that sin *qua* sin is what forms the fallen human being as a creature, but only that sin has an impact on the whole person, from the soul's essence up to and including its powers. Sin or evil impacts the essence of the human being, but it is not that essence. Similarly,

56. WA 42.124.32-8. Cf. LW 1.166. On Genesis 3:7. The LW editors suggest that this passage in the Weimar edition, particularly Luther's explanation of original sin and the *essentia hominis*, may reflect not Luther's *ipsissima verba* but rather a later redaction occasioned by the Flacian controversy. This is unlikely. The text printed by Peter Seitz in Wittenberg in 1544 with Luther's own preface reads exactly as does the Weimar critical edition. Given, moreover, that the Flacian controversy did not begin until 1559, it seems impossible to ascribe the words attributed to Luther here to his editors. For one effort to sort out some of the critical questions related to the editing of the Genesis lectures, see Mattox, "*Defender*," 259-276. The classic and deeply problematic study is Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Gütersloh, 1932).
57. For the medieval discussion of whether Adam was created with grace or without, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 125-129. See esp. p. 126 on Thomas' affirmation of the belief that Adam was created with grace.

original righteousness does not denote the ontological quiddity of prelapsarian humankind. Instead, just as original sin leaves one fallen and fearful, so original righteousness and grace made every aspect of our first parents' life an uncompromised experience of joy and delight. For Luther, both original righteousness and original sin are holistic terms that pertain to the whole person. First the one and then the other was "of the essence" of Adam and Eve.

Conclusion

This episode in the history of theology reminds us that one of the Lutheran tradition's central problems after Luther's death was to make sense and impose systematic order on his vast and varied *oeuvre*. As Peter once said of Paul, so one might say of Luther that "he writes many things that are hard to understand."[58] The evangelical Lutheran movement was born in a moment of extreme crisis and one that made Luther himself the most famous man in Europe. Upon his return in 1522 to his university professorship after his months of exile in the Wartburg Castle, Luther's students attended to everything he said. Everything. The "table talks," the sermons, the disputations, the classroom lectures. All of it was taken down, and nearly all of it was eventually published in the monumental Weimar edition of 120-plus volumes. The Genesis lectures (volumes 42-44) briefly examined above are an especially illustrative example of the difficulties one faces, and indeed that the Lutheran reformers themselves faced, in attempting to distill clear and coherent arguments out of these various works. Indeed, for all who work on Luther today, the difficult task of interpretation continues.

In the present confusing case, we have seen that when Luther's recorded words are examined with care, it becomes clear that although he sought to underscore the deep impact of sin, like Thomas he also refused to ontologize it as a substance rather than an absence. Unlike Thomas' texts, however, Luther's lectures were not calm and deliberate. Indeed, he was highly rhetorical, at times bombastic, hyperbolic, and often frustratingly imprecise. Clearing away the confusion this creates concerning original sin, one can see that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Thomas and Luther responded to a similar set of questions regarding original sin and came to similar conclusions.

In recovering Luther's anthropological holism, moreover, we also discover a surprising systematic consistency in his thought. Consider sinful Adam on the one hand and the purified Christian saint on the other. Sin for Luther means

58. 2 Pet. 3:16.

fear and death, while holiness brings joy and life. Fear is the mechanism by which original sin ruins everything. It is the obverse of the spontaneous gladness (2 Cor. 9:6-7) proper to the unfallen human creature before God. When the saints' healing from sin is at last complete, this lost gladness will be restored. Inebriated with the love of God—so Luther—the offspring of Adam and Eve will take up where their first parents left off.

Author Biography

Mickey L. Mattox (Ph.D., Duke University) is Professor of Historical Theology at Marquette University, where he directs the graduate program in Luther Studies in a Catholic Context. He formerly served as Research Professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research (Strasbourg). His books include: *Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs* (Brill, 2003), *Changing Churches* (Eerdmans, 2012), and *Johannes Oecolampadius* (Marquette University Press, 2013).