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Lust: the human person as affected by disordered desires

Anthony N. S. Lane

Tony Lane is Director of Research and Professor of Historical Theology at London School of Theology, as well as being one of the editors of the Evangelical Quarterly

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Why this topic?

Why should there be a chapter on lust in a series on Personhood? Discussions of personhood often have a rarified character divorced from reality. The proverbial visitor from Mars reading about the topic might learn quite a bit about our species while remaining blissfully ignorant of the fact that human beings are sinners. This neglect of the doctrine of sin is entirely in line with current tendencies. Some secular thought explains sin away on social, psychological, genetic or other grounds.[1] At the same time the concept (not the practice) of sin has been de-emphasised both in church life and in theology. A range of churches, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, have revised their liturgies to play down the emphasis on sin and repentance.[2] Modern evangelical choruses lay heavy stress on glory and power with little mention of sin, the cross or repentance.

Kierkegaard observed with uncanny foresight, 'Take away the alarmed conscience and you may close the Churches and turn them into dancing-halls'.[3] Playing down the doctrine of sin may bring some short-term popularity, but it is not in the interests either of the Church or of her clientele. Calvin commented that what we need is not an advocate to spring to our defence but a doctor to cure us.[4] Ezekiel saw the problem as so serious as to demand no less than a heart

1 Obviously these factors are important and relevant, but they should not be taken to eliminate all human free will and responsibility. For a protest against the marginalization of sin, cf. K. Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1973).

2 R. H. Richens, 'The Close of the Gregorian Era,' *Ampleforth Journal* 76 (1971), 55-65, draws attention to the manner in which the revisers of the Roman liturgy sought to eliminate 'negative themes'. These themes 'turn out to be allusion to sin, human frailty, human dependence upon God, divine disapprobation, the presence of evil in the world, conversion, penitence, mortification, prayer, meditation, moralising and polemic' (59). For the Anglican Church, a comparison of the General Confession said at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer with its successors in recent liturgies illustrates the point.

3 Cited by H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Fontana, 1964 edition), 229.

4 *Institutes*. [hereafter *Inst.*] 2:5:18.

transplant (Ezek. 36:26f.). Jesus proposed an equally radical diagnosis: 'It is what comes out of a person that makes them unclean. For from within, out of the human heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly' (Mark 7:20-22).[5]

But is sin a proper topic for a series on *Personhood*? The question of Personhood was until recently discussed in terms of the *imago dei*. Genesis 1:26 reads 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,...' As is well known, some of the Early Church fathers, missing the element of Hebrew parallelism, distinguished between image and likeness.[6] The image of God is inalienable and is part of what it means to be a human being; the likeness to God has been lost by human sin and needs to be restored. Exegetically this interpretation is now universally recognised to be mistaken.[7] But, as so often happens, it is sound theologically although incorrect exegetically. That is, the interpretation that is wrongly read into *this* passage is true to the teaching of Scripture as a whole. The image remains and the death penalty is laid down on the grounds that God has made us in his image (Gen. 9:6; cf. Jas. 3:9). But at the same time Christ needed to come in order to restore the image (Col. 3:10; cf. Rom. 8:29). For this reason, until modern times at least, even those who most emphasised human sinfulness did not claim that the image had been completely lost. Calvin is not generally known for his rosy picture of fallen human nature, but he took care not to teach the total loss of the *imago*:

> Now God's image is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection, but was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden. Therefore in some part it is now manifest in the elect, in so far as they have been reborn in the Spirit; but it will attain its full splendor in heaven.[8]

A full discussion of the *imago dei* must, therefore, take into account the extent to which it has been lost by sin and needs to be recovered through Christ.[9] The focus of this paper will be the effects of sin. I make no pretence that the doctrine of sin is *the* key to our understanding of personhood or that it provides *the* perspective or vantage point from which it should be viewed – both because this is manifestly untrue and because I am deeply suspicious of all such imperialistic

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5 For similar Pauline lists, cf. Rom. 1:21-32; 1 Cor. 6:9f.; Gal. 5:19-21.

6 E.g. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:6:1, 5:16:2. Elsewhere he seems to imply that Adam lost the image too (3:18:1, cf. 5:2:1). Origen, *First Principles* 3:6:1.

7 C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), 148f.

8 *Inst.* 1:15:4 (J. T. McNeill (ed.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: SCM and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 190, with 'Spirit' in place of 'spirit'.

9 Christoph Schwöbel, 'Human Being as Relational Being' in C. Schwöbel & C. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 144f., affirms the continuing validity of 'the traditional distinction between human existence *in statu integritatis* as well as in *statu corruptionis* and in *statu gratiae*' for a contemporary Christian anthropology.

claims that there is one normative approach. My thesis is far more modest – that discussions of personhood should not ignore the fact that sin is an important part of what it means to be a human in the present age.

Theology, just like ladies' hemlines, is considerably influenced by fashion. Being a non-conformist by nature, I will make every effort to discuss the topic without invoking either the doctrine of the Trinity or the concept of relationship. One way of viewing sin, doubtless a very fruitful one, is to see it as a broken relationship with God. But this insight certainly does not exhaust the biblical teaching of sin, not all of which can be reduced to it. The focus of this paper will lie more on sin as lust or disordered desire.

It is widely recognised that the order of being and the order of knowing are reversed, a principle enunciated among others by Moltmann,[10] who attributes it to Aristotle. It also underlies Thomas Aquinas's idea that it is by analogy that we speak of God.[11] In the present context this means that while in the order of being (ontologically) God's personhood is prior to ours, in the order of knowing (epistemologically) we move from understanding our own personhood to understanding God's. I shall, therefore, make no attempt to base conclusions about human personhood on affirmations about the inner life of the Trinity – on the grounds that such affirmations are usually highly speculative and that what few can be based on Scripture are not there used in this way.[12] I do, however, agree with Calvin that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are intimately joined together.[13] As he observes, when in the annals of Scripture people are confronted by God they are overwhelmed by a sense of their own lowly and sinful state.[14] While Scripture has very little to say about the inner relationships of the Trinity[15] and does not base on them our knowledge of ourselves, it is from start to finish about God's role as our Saviour and the implications of this for our knowledge of ourselves.

This paper will focus on human sin and, in particular, on the phenomenon of lust or disordered desire. We shall explore this by studying the teaching of Augustine especially. In the present context he is significant as the one who first developed a full-blown doctrine of original sin – *not* as the one who 'invented' the doctrine since he based it on Scripture and since many of his predecessors referred to it without discussing it at length.[16]

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10 *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1981), 152f.; *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990), 77.

11 *Summa Theologiae* Ia. q. 13. a. 6.

12 As Lesslie Newbigin astutely observed, 'the doctrine of the Trinity was not developed in response to the human need for participatory democracy!' ('The Trinity as Public Truth' in K. J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 7).

13 *Inst.* 1:1:1.

14 *Inst.* 1:1:3.

15 On my reading, one of the few things that it does enable us to state with confidence is that these relationships are *not* based on a non-hierarchical egalitarianism.

16 Augustine cites passages from his predecessors in *Against Julian* 1:3:5-1:7:35.

Augustine's doctrine of concupiscence

First, a brief survey of Augustine's doctrine.[17] Adam was created good. Before the Fall, Adam did not need to sin – he was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) but he also had the capacity to sin (*posse peccare*).[18] He was created with free choice of the will and was able to exercise this for or against God, though as he was good the former came more naturally to him. In the garden he was on trial or probation and he fell of his own free choice. In this event not only Adam fell but also, in him, every human being.[19] Augustine bases this on the Old Latin translation of Romans 5:12. Where Paul states that all die ἐφ᾽ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον, the Old Latin version translates it as 'in quo [Adam] omnes peccaverunt'.[20] As a *translation* this is probably mistaken, though it still has its advocates today; as an *interpretation* of Romans 5:12-21 it has a lot going for it.[21] Augustine did not invent this interpretation, which goes back at least as far as Irenaeus[22] and which he probably learned from Ambrose.[23] Augustine therefore held that all human beings share in the guilt of Adam's fall and in themselves deserve damnation. Humanity is, as a result of the Fall, enslaved to sin. God's punishment for Adam's sin is the imposition upon the human race of concupiscence.[24]

This is not the place to discuss Augustine's interpretation of the Fall. For the record, let me state that I believe that the human race, created without sin, chose early in its history to turn away from God. Also that both Genesis 3 and the scientific data favour Irenaeus's portrayal of the Fall as a wrong turning taken by moral children rather than the Augustinian picture of a fall from a great height by moral giants. Also that I find Irenaeus's and Augustine's idea that we all sinned in Adam ultimately more coherent than the alternative theories that we inherit from Adam the corruption of a sin of which we are not ourselves responsible

17 Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A. & C. Black, 1977 - 5th edition) 361-66; E. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 258-66, 316-19.

18 E.g. *Continence* 16.

19 E.g. *The Merits and Remission of Sins* 1:10:11, 3:7:14; *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2:2:3, 2:3:8, 2:5:15, 2:8:20, 2:11:24, 2:22:37, 2:26:42, 2:27:45-28:47; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4:4:7.

20 E.g. *Marriage and Concupiscence* 1:1:1.

21 Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 274-79; P. L. Quinn, 'Disputing the Augustinian Legacy: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Romans 5:12-19' in G. B. Matthews (ed.), *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 233-50.

22 Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 171f.

23 In *Against Julian* 1:3:10 Augustine cites passages from Ambrose's exposition of Luke where he states that all sinned in Adam.

24 *The Merits and Remission of Sins* 2:22:36; *Nature and Grace* 3:3, 21:23-22:24. 24:27-25:28, 67:81; *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2:31:53; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1:15:31, 1:17:35; *The Gift of Perseverance* 12:30.

(Calvin),[25] that we sin because God made us that way (which means that he is responsible for it) or that human sinfulness is simply the coincidental independent choice made by billions of autonomous individual persons. Instead there are two points on which I do wish to focus: first, Augustine's view of concupiscence and whether it makes sense of our human experience; secondly, the question of why God should choose to punish sin by making further sin inevitable.

Concupiscence translates the Latin term *concupiscentia*, but is not a word that is often found outside theological discourse.[26] Much better is the good old four-letter Anglo-Saxon word – lust. Sexual lust is the supreme example of *concupiscentia*, but the term is wider in its meaning, as with the English word lust. Some idea of its meaning can be derived from examining its use in Jerome's Vulgate translation, roughly contemporaneous with Augustine. Words from the *concup-* root come nineteen times in the Old Testament. It translates the word 'covet' in the Tenth Commandment (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). This meaning is also found in the prohibition against coveting silver and gold (Deut. 7:25), in Achan's falling into that sin (Josh. 7:21) and for the coveting of stolen goods (Ps. 62:10 (LXX)) or fields (Mic. 2:2). It is used of the Israelites' craving for meat in the desert and the Hebrew name Kibroth Hattaavah derived from it (Num. 11:34, 33:16f.; Deut. 9:22; Ps. 106:13 [LXX]). More generally it is used for the lust of the eyes in the context of Israel's adulterous relationship with Babylon (Ezek. 23:16). It also, in the translation of the Septuagint version of the Psalms, has a positive sense of yearning or longing for the Temple courts (84:2), for God's laws or precepts (119:20, 40) and for his salvation (119:174). Finally, more neutrally, the king is enthralled by his bride's beauty (Ps. 45:11). So in the Old Testament the emphasis is on lusting or craving after illegitimate material things, though in the Psalms there is also the positive sense of yearning and longing for the things of God. Lust or covetousness has a range of objects though if there is any special focus it would be on property rather than sex.

In the New Testament the words from the *concup-* root appear twenty-six times. Just three times there is a positive sense (Gal. 5:17; Jas. 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:2). Four times it refers to the Tenth Commandment (Rom. 7:7f., 13:9) and the same idea comes in Acts 20:33. The most common New Testament use is to refer in general to evil desires (Mark 4:19; Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 10:6; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:5; Jas 1:14f., 4:1; 2 Pet. 1:4, 2:10, 3:3; 1 John 2:16f.). The flesh lusts against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17) and

25 As Augustine put it, 'if we die because [Adam] died, but he died because he sinned,' it follows that 'the punishment passed without the guilt, and that innocent infants are punished with an unjust penalty by deriving death without the deserts of death' (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4:4:6 (NPNF 5:419)).

26 *Concupiscentia* 'is a christian technical word, generally translating the Greek ἐπιθυμία' (G. Bonner, '*Concupiscentia*' in C. Mayer (ed.), *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1986-94), col. 1114). In the Vulgate, the Greek noun is also twenty-four times translated as *desiderium*. The verb ἐπιθυμέω is translated as *concupisco* (7 times), *cupio* (4 times) and *desidero* (5 times).

more specifically there is reference to property (Mark 4:19; Acts 20:33) and to sex (Matt. 5:28). Finally, in James there is a more neutral reference to wants and pleasures (4:2f.).

For Augustine likewise, following both the Latin Bible and his African predecessors Tertullian and Cyprian, concupiscence was 'a quality which might be good or evil, but which was normally employed in an unfavourable sense' and was to be understood negatively unless the context indicated otherwise.[27] It is essentially a sin of the heart and the will which may (or may not) give birth to outward sins.[28] Because of concupiscence we turn from God and seek satisfaction in material things. The effect of concupiscence is that the harmony of body and soul is lost and the soul no longer has full control over the body.[29] This loss of control is seen especially in the area of sexual desire.[30] Augustine said of *libido*, the classical word for lust, that it 'may have many objects, yet when no object is specified, the word lust usually suggests to the mind the lustful excitement of the organs of generation', which yields a pleasure which is 'the greatest of all bodily pleasures'.[31] He also notes that an effect of the Fall was shame at nakedness and that human beings seek privacy even for the legitimate intercourse that takes place in marriage. 'Rather will a man endure a crowd of witnesses when he is unjustly venting his anger on someone, than the eye of one man when he innocently copulates with his wife.'[32] As the Scottish novelist and dramatist Ian Hay put it, 'marriage is a ghastly public confession of a strictly private intention'.[33] But it is important to note that for Augustine marriage itself was and remains good. Without the Fall procreation would still have been through sexual intercourse – but without the lust. He gives an account of how reproduction might have oc-

27 Bonner, '*Concupiscentia*,' 1114f.

28 *Continence* 2-5, 19; *The City of God* 14:2f.

29 *The Merits and Remission of Sins* 2:22:36; *Nature and Grace* 25:28.

30 *The Merits and Remission of Sins* 2:22:36; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1:15:31.
Kelly goes too far in claiming that Augustine effectively identifies concupiscence with sexual desire: 'In Augustine's vocabulary concupiscence stands, in a general way, for every inclination making man turn from God to find satisfaction in material things which are intrinsically evanescent. Far the most violent, persistent and widespread use of these, however, is in his opinion sexual desire, and for practical purposes he identifies concupiscence with it.' (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 364f.) Perhaps TeSelle states it more judicially: 'Concupiscence, though it consists chiefly of sexual desire, is not that alone, for there are many other ways in which the animal aspects of the soul can escape rational control and tempt man' (*Augustine the Theologian*, 317).

31 *The City of God* 14:16 (NPNF 2:275).

32 *The City of God* 14:17-19, quotation at 19 (NPNF 2:277).

33 N. Bentley and E. Esar (eds.), *The Treasury of Humorous Quotations* (London: J. M. Dent, 1962), 91.

curred without the evils of concupiscence.[34]

Because of this corruption of human nature, instead of being able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) we are now unable to avoid sin (*non posse non peccare*).[35] There are two opposite ways in which this could be misunderstood. It might mean that we cannot avoid from time to time committing a sin, which would not be denied by anyone who accepts the universality of sin. But Augustine meant much more than that. He meant that fallen human beings can never at any time avoid sin. On the other hand, he did not suggest that we can never resist specific temptations. We are all tempted by different things. A letter to the *Radio Times*, complaining about the feminist branding of all men as rapists, pointed out that some men no more want to sleep with another man's wife than to clean their teeth with his toothbrush. These men are, of course, attracted by other sins. Again, those who are tempted to a particular sin do not necessarily succumb every time. The alcoholic may be unable to avoid drink, but can say no on some occasions.

Nor did Augustine mean that everyone at every moment is being totally evil. He meant rather that all of the deeds of fallen humanity are tainted by sin: by pride and by lack of love for God. A good pagan may perform what by human standards is a selfless act, but when we look at the intentions of the heart we see that it is tainted by impurity. Any such act is tainted by sin, even though it may not be sinful in the same sense as, for example, an act of murder. Unless we hold that fallen people can love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, that they can love their neighbours as themselves and that they can be free of all trace of pride, etc., we must surely agree with Augustine. It is noteworthy that John Wesley, the father of evangelical Arminianism and the propagator of the doctrine of 'Christian perfection', was a good Augustinian when it came to original sin and even stated that anyone denying the doctrine was 'but an Heathen still'.[36] It should also be pointed out that as this paper focuses on original sin rather than on the workings of grace, there is no reason why a traditional Arminian should find cause to dissent.

As a result of the Fall we are ruled by concupiscence. Fallen humanity is, as Augustine put it, under a 'cruel necessity of sinning'.[37] We cannot but sin. But we

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34 He suggests that procreation without lust might be as much or more in control of the will and the reason as is urinating (*Marriage and Concupiscence* 2:31:53). The generative organs would have been 'moved by the will, not excited by lust'. He observes how different people have differing control over their bodies, some having 'such command of their bowels, that they can break wind continuously at pleasure, so as to produce the effect of singing' (*The City of God* 14:23f., 26, quotation at 24 (NPNF 2:280))!

35 Cf. *Rebuke and Grace* 12:33.

36 C. W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, (London: Epworth, 1969), 47.

37 *The Perfection of Human Righteousness* 4:9, as quoted by Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 365.

have not lost our free will. We sin inevitably not because we are coerced against our will, but because of what we are. Free will is not to be confused with moral indeterminacy: the *possibilitas utriusque partis.* Adam was to a certain extent morally undetermined before the Fall. That is, a statistician in the Garden of Eden could not have foretold with any certainty which way Adam would go. Indeed it can be argued that granted all that God had provided for Adam, the statistician would conclude that he was unlikely to rebel against God. But such a forecast would have been wrong.

The situation is different with fallen humanity. Statistically there is no question as to whether or not a child will grow up a sinner. When a child is expected, we may speculate about whether it will be a boy or a girl, about the colour of its hair and other such matters – but we do not ask whether or not it will grow up to be a sinner. Since the Fall, we are not born morally indeterminate. We are slaves of sin. But moral indeterminacy is not the only, nor the most important definition of free will. God is not morally indeterminate. He is inevitably good, but no less free. In the age to come we will be good beyond the possibility of further falling, but no less free.[38] Adam did not lose free will. Fallen humanity sins freely, voluntarily, spontaneously, not under coercion from outside. If we seek an analogy it is not the puppet or the man with a gun in his back, but the drug addict – enslaved yes, but by his own lust. Our problem is that we are free to will what we want, but not free to will what we ought. Augustine maintained that fallen humanity retains free will. One of his last works was entitled *Grace AND Free Choice.* While he ceased to believe in the moral indeterminacy of fallen humanity, Augustine continued vigorously to defend the freedom of the will.

Finally, Augustine held that original sin is passed on by the lust involved in procreation.[39] This explains the need for the Virgin Birth. Christ came 'begotten and conceived... without any indulgence of carnal lust, and therefore bringing with him no original sin'.[40] Here (as so often) he is misrepresented. He did not hold, as Elaine Pagels claims, that original sin 'is transmitted actually genetically... through semen'.[41] Also, this idea was not invented by him but inherited from others before him (but by imitation, not by the process of procreation).[42] Augustine's views on the mechanics of the transmission of original sin are not integral to his doctrine of original sin and the former can be abandoned without

38 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Grace and Free Choice* 4:9 & 10:35, appeals to the examples of God, the good and bad angels and humanity in its final state to show that freewill need not imply moral indeterminacy.

39 *The Merits and Remission of Sins* 2:11:11; *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2:21:36.

40 *Enchiridion* 41 (NPNF 3:251).

41 In the television series *Two Thousand Years*, on the fifth century. For the same idea, without the mention of genetics, cf. E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 109. TeSelle comments that 'original sin is not biological for Augustine. It does not affect the genetic makeup of man; rather it is a kind of malfunction in the development of the personality' (*Augustine the Theologian*, 318).

42 Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 363.

prejudicing the latter. It is a pity that Augustine was not right as we would otherwise now have a way to abolish original sin, namely IVF (In Vitro Fertilization).

As has already been stated, Augustine is the one who developed this doctrine, but not its inventor. Athanasius, an Eastern theologian who died in 373, thirteen years before Augustine's conversion, held that God created human beings out of nothing and 'like all irrational animals on the earth', but with an added extra. The human race was given the 'added grace' of being made in God's own image and having 'a share in the power of his own Word'. This added grace was spoilt by Adam's sin.[43] Adam and Eve turned from the contemplation of God to selfish desires. The result was that 'they imprisoned in the pleasures of the body their souls which had become disordered and defiled by all kinds of desires'.[44] Augustine's idea of concupiscence is essentially there in Athanasius, although the latter is not as careful as the former to distinguish between created desire and desire that has become disordered.

Modern rejection of Augustine

The doctrine of original sin has had its ups and downs. It received little prominence in the Early Church until the time of Augustine. In the medieval west Augustine's doctrine was modified in various ways, but these can all be seen as different forms of Augustinianism. There were different schools of thought, but the differences between them were minor by comparison with what united them and they were all broadly variants of Augustinianism. The Reformers reemphasized Augustine's teaching, perhaps strengthening it slightly. The Catholic Reformation reacted against this, but we are still talking of debates within Augustinianism.

It was the Enlightenment that seriously challenged the idea of original sin. An 'optimistic' view of human nature, that dispensed with the idea of original sin, emerged in the eighteenth century. Jean Jacques Rousseau was an early exponent of this and through him it made its mark upon modern educational theory. Education was seen as a way of nurturing the goodness inherent in human nature rather than curbing the evil.[45] Marxism had a clear doctrine of a fall but located this in political and economic structures, affirming the inherent goodness of human nature. Once these structures are put right, the evil in society will vanish. Thirty years ago we were told that this had almost happened in China.[46] Later we were told that original sin was in fact rearing its ugly head in the form of the Gang of Four.

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43 *The Incarnation* 3 (*Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (ed., R. W. Thomson) (Oxford: O.U.P., 1971), 140-43).

44 *Against the Pagans* 2f. (ibid., 6-9).

45 Very few people have ever seen education as *totally* one or other of these but the emphasis has often lain very heavily on one side or the other.

46 See, for example, J. Chen, *A Year in Upper Felicity. Life in a Chinese Village During the Cultural Revolution* (London: Harrap, 1973).

Nineteenth-century liberal theology also had little concept of the inherent sinfulness of fallen human nature. These denials of original sin were of course strengthened by the rise of Darwinianism, which offered an alternative explanation for the evil in the world. But nineteenth-century optimism took a hammering in the twentieth century. Indeed it has been said, with pardonable exaggeration: 'Our grandfathers in their simplicity found it hard, if not impossible, to believe in Original sin; it is not so with us; perhaps among the traditional dogmas this one alone can now be accepted as almost self-evident.'[47]

After the First World War liberal theology was largely superseded by Neo-Orthodoxy. Theologians such as Barth, Brunner and Niebuhr vigorously restated the Christian doctrine of original sin, which they saw in terms of the paradox between freewill and bondage to sin, between personal choice and universal sinfulness. All three of them stressed human sinfulness. They were highly critical of naive liberal optimism. There were of course differences between them – e.g. the famous debate between Barth and Brunner concerning the permanence or otherwise of the *imago dei* in humanity. But they were agreed about the radical sinfulness of humanity and saw this especially in human pride and attempted independence from God. Reinhold Niebuhr spelt this out most perceptively in terms of its effects on all human civilization and culture. Each civilization sees itself as free from prejudice while in fact it is dominated by an ideology that in fact furthers the interests of one particular group, whether the nobility, the middle class or the *aparatchiks*. Each civilization sees itself as final but each in turn is brought down because of the corruption in the human heart.[48] This last theme was developed by Herbert Butterfield in his *Christianity and History*.[49] It was brilliantly popularized in the works of D. R. Davies, under whose fiery preaching I sat as a young boy.[50] This is an area where evangelicals can learn from the Neo-Orthodox. We know how to write about individual sin but we have produced less on the corporate and social dimensions of original sin.

Despite the protests of the Neo-Orthodox and others the doctrine of original sin receives short shrift in our society. The United States *Declaration of Independence* states that, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'. In modern society happiness is pursued by the gratification of our desires, which in general are assumed to be good or at least neutral. The market economy has the role of gratifying these desires.

A few years ago a police advert claimed that crime was merely the conse-

47 A. G. Smith writing in 1954, quoted by J. H. Walgrave in T. F. Torrance (ed.), *The Incarnation* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 153.

48 E.g. R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* (London: Nisbet, 1938), ch.2; *The Nature and Destiny of Man* vol.1 (London: Nisbet, 1941), 221-42.

49 H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London & Glasgow: Collins, 1957), ch.2.

50 E.g. D. R. Davies, *The Sin of our Age* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1947).

quence of ignorance and poverty. It would be hard to deny that these factors bear any relation to crime, but it is naive to suppose that their elimination will lead to the end of either sin or crime. During the 1930s there was mass unemployment with only a tiny fraction of the welfare provisions available today and yet crime figures were miniscule compared to today. Still, it is reassuring to know that now corporal punishment has gone, children are no longer being taught that violence is legitimate and the rate of violent crime amongst the youth is falling to record low levels.[51] Once the older generation (who were taught the legitimacy of violence by being subjected to corporal punishment) have died off there will presumably be an era of unprecedented non-violence.

Lust

Because of concupiscence we turn from God and seek satisfaction in material things. Augustine may have written over 1500 years ago, but a cursory glance at contemporary society (e.g. the adverts on television) would suggest that his analysis might not be lacking in abiding relevance. Augustine's doctrine of the enslaved will is true both to Scripture and to human experience. He locates the problem in our bondage to sinful lusts. These are to be seen primarily as inordinate and disordered desires.

It is vital to distinguish between natural desires and lusts or inordinate desires. The desire for and enjoyment of food is a good gift of God's creation; gluttony is a perversion of this into an inordinate desire. The desire for and enjoyment of sleep is a good gift of God's creation; sloth is a perversion of this into an inordinate desire. The desire for and enjoyment of sex is a good gift of God's creation; sexual immorality/paedophilia is the perversion of this into an inordinate/disordered desire. Without these natural desires we would be in danger of starving, dying of exhaustion or failing to propagate ourselves. But in our sinful human condition these desires become inordinate and disordered. Calvin, in his commentary on Psalm 4:7 contrasts the inordinate lusts of the ungodly with the manner in which the godly may seek the same things. 'Although the faithful also desire and seek after their worldly comforts, yet they do not pursue them with immoderate and irregular ardour; but can patiently bear to be deprived of them, provided they know themselves to be objects of the divine care.'[52] One might say that our desires become inordinate and lustful when we seek ultimate satisfaction outside of God.

Perhaps the factor that has most caused people to dismiss Augustine's doc-

51 I am objecting both to the idea that children learn to be violent only because of violent punishments and also to the idea that the latter somehow legitimate violence. If the use of corporal punishment legitimates violence, presumably prisons legitimate kidnap and taxes and fines legitimate theft.

52 J. Anderson (tr.), *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 49.

trine is his view of sex. Augustine's basic objection to sexual desire, the loss of rational control, appears especially quaint today, as do his suggestions of non-lustful procreation as it might have taken place without the Fall. Underlying this is his Platonism and also the asceticism which leads him to suggest that a world with no pleasures might be better.[53] We must beware of following the contemporary fashion of blaming all of this onto Augustine. He was hardly the first or the most zealous Platonist in the Early Church and his asceticism was downright lukewarm compared with most eastern and some western monks. In a television programme to mark the new millennium Christopher Kelly stated: 'With St. Augustine we move away from the celebration of the body [so central to classical culture]... moving from a culture of celebration to a culture of shame.'[54] It is hard to see this culture of celebration in the Egyptian hermits or the Syrian pillar saints.

Augustine has often been ridiculed for his statement that husbands can illegitimately lust after their wives. Rowan Williams interprets Augustine's position sympathetically as the claim that sex is positive in marriage but always corrupted by greed.[55] While one might today query the 'always', recent developments like the acknowledgement that rape is possible within marriage ought to prevent us from dismissing Augustine out of hand. To suggest that a wedding ring removes all sin from sexual activity is somewhat naive.

It is not necessary to accept all that Augustine says about sex in order to hold to his basic diagnosis of human bondage to lust. Few Christians today will want to follow the Platonist approach of the Early Church which saw little positive value in sex outside of its employment (in as unpassionate a fashion as possible) solely for the purpose of procreation. But while it is easy to find fault with the more extreme statements of the Fathers in general and Augustine in particular, can we really deny that sex is one area where the forces of lust are particularly potent? Sexual desire leads people who are not otherwise especially evil to acts of betrayal, cruelty and injustice, while simultaneously persuading them that they are acting out of 'love'. The conventions and taboos of almost all societies demonstrate that sexual temptation is considered to be more potent than temptation to other sins such as gluttony.

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53 *Contra Iulianum* 4:72. Augustine likewise suggests that one should eat only for health, not for pleasure (*Confessions* 10:31:44). One does not need to follow him there in order to accept the basic idea that our problem is disordered desires. To accept that eating for pleasure is legitimate is not to deny that gluttony and ensuing health problems are an issue for vast numbers of folk in the affluent West.

54 In the television series *Two Thousand Years*, on the fifth century. Melvin Bragg in the same programme stated that: 'The classical world had revered the beauty of the human body. Eroticism was natural and celebrated. Now, following Augustine, Christianity would connect sex with sin, guilt and damnation, the body with corruption.' Such statements imply a fundamental ignorance or a wilful ignoring of the nature of early Christianity before Augustine.

55 In the television series *Two Thousand Years*, on the fifth century.

Sexual lust is, for Augustine, only the most blatant instance of concupiscence, not the essence of it. If we add to sex the sins of materialism (towards which the church has been so much more tolerant) and the lust for power (which church leaders, from popes to independent ministers, have so often demonstrated) we have the classic trio of money, sex and power, the areas where disordered lust is rampant. A glance at the hoardings will show that the advertisers, who understand original sin better than most ivory-tower theologians, are fully aware of the potential of these areas of human weakness. Not everyone, of course, is prone to temptation in each of these areas, but these are the lusts which have made such a great impact on the human race as a whole. In the Catholic tradition there are those who voluntarily embrace poverty, celibacy and obedience, thus renouncing these three objects of lust.

My thesis is simple. God created us with natural desires but sin has twisted these into inordinate and disordered desires. This fact is an important part of what it means to be a human person in the present age. Failure to distinguish between natural and inordinate desires leads to a seriously distorted view of the Christian life in which God's role is to satisfy me by gratifying my desires rather than help me to grow as a Christian by saying No to myself daily (Luke 9:23) and putting to death sinful desires (Col. 3:5). Or in the other direction it can lead to an unhealthy asceticism which rejects natural together with inordinate desires and is suspicious about the enjoyment of creation – like Antony the first monk who (according to Athanasius) ate in private because he was ashamed that he needed to eat.[56]

Lust or concupiscence is accidental to humanity. It is not part of human nature as originally created and will not be part of human nature in the Age to Come. In other words, it is not part of the definition of humanity in itself. But it is an integral part of human nature as we know it today and to ignore it is to fail fully to understand what it *now* means to be a human person. Lust is accidental to humanity, but not in the same sense as, for example, happiness, sporting prowess or good health, which are found in some but not others and may be lost and gained in this life. Lust is as inherent to our current condition as is mortality.

The punishment of sin?

Augustine portrays the imposition of concupiscence as God's punishment for the sin of Adam. At first sight this appears to be an odd procedure. There are four main components to contemporary theories of punishment: retribution, rehabilitation, prevention and deterrence. Augustine clearly sees this punishment as *retributive* and this makes sense so long as one grants that the responsibility for the sin is a corporate human responsibility rather than merely Adam's own private sin. But the imposition of concupiscence far from enabling *rehabilitation* serves to exclude the very possibility, except by the costly intervention of

56 Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 45.

God's grace.[57] Again, far from *preventing* further sin the imposition of concupiscence actually guarantees continued sin. Finally, while the example of Adam's punishment might conceivably have some *deterrent* effect,[58] this is more that cancelled out by the fact that concupiscence makes it not possible not to sin. In short, given that God does not approve of sin, the punishment of Adam's sin by imposing a bondage to sin appears distinctly odd. Yet before we abandon our attempt to make sense of it we should remember the fact that Augustine's account does square rather well with the empirical reality of humanity as it now is and as Scripture describes it and also that if we accept the goodness of God's original creation the reason for this present state must be traced back to human sin.

At first sight it may seem odd to state that the punishment for sin is more sin. Pelagius thought so and attacked Augustine at this point. The latter responded by showing that this is a scriptural principle, pointing to Romans 1:21-32[59] and to other examples such as the hardening of Pharaoh.[60] The process described in Romans chapter 1 is not without empirical verification in human history, so rather than reject the idea of sin as the punishment for sin we should seek to make sense of it.

There are two ways of interpreting Augustine's claim. Retreating armies routinely sabotage equipment that they have to leave behind. Should we think of the legacy of the Fall in these terms? Should we think of Adam and Eve as independent creatures who in themselves had a moral perfection which God deliberately spoiled as a punishment for their sin? That is to misread the Genesis account. There it is precisely a state of moral autonomy, being like God knowing good and evil, that the serpent offers to Eve and Adam (3:5) and that God confirms that they received (3:22).[61] There is another way of interpreting Augustine's claim. Adam and Eve lived a holy life not by virtue of an inherent perfection but in dependence upon the Spirit of God. By turning away from God, by ceasing to trust him and setting themselves up as their own moral arbiters, they *by definition* ceased to live in dependence upon God. Irenaeus portrays Adam as stating that 'I have by disobedience lost that robe of sanctity which I had from

57 Augustine was well aware of the reformative effect of punishment in general (e.g. *Nature and Grace* 24:27). In particular it was this awareness that led him to support the use of coercion against heretics. For him, of course, punishment as rehabilitation did not mean sending violent teenagers on overseas holidays but referred to the salutary influence of retributive punishment where it serves to bring the offender to their senses. I can vouch, from my schoolboy experiences, for the accuracy of his claim.

58 Augustine was well aware of the deterrent effect of punishment and also (like the Reformers) spent some time arguing that an outward obedience based on fear of punishment does not establish true righteousness before God (e.g. *The Spirit and the Letter* 14:26)

59 *Nature and Grace* 22:24.

60 *Grace and Free Choice* 20:41.

61 On this, cf. H. Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 125-33.

the Spirit'.[62] Again, he remarks that it is those who reject the Spirit's counsel that become enslaved to carnal lusts.[63] If the essence of the Fall, and of human sin in general,[64] is to live as autonomous moral agents rather than in dependence upon the Spirit of God, then *by definition* its consequence must be the loss of the moral integration that is the consequence of turning away from God.

If this account be accepted then the consequence of human sin is not to be seen as an arbitrarily imposed penalty, like a judge imposing a fine for drunk driving, but rather as an inevitable outworking of the implications of sin. It would be very odd for a judge to punish drunk driving by forcing the offender to continue to get drunk on a regular basis; it is not odd for the consequence of substance abuse to be addiction to that substance. This is not to adopt a Deist approach in which God is reduced to a spectator who merely observes the inevitable outworking of certain moral laws. Genesis 3:14-19 clearly portrays God as the one who *actively* imposes penalties. But in the case of concupiscence God, like the Mikado, lets the punishment fit the crime.[65] The effects of the Fall upon human nature can be seen both as the judgement of God and as the outworking of the choice that was made.

Abstract

This article defends two ideas. First, Augustine's teaching that we are born as slaves of sin, in bondage to lust, makes good sense of our experience. This lust can be seen especially in terms of disordered desires. God created us with natural desires but sin has twisted these into inordinate and disordered desires. This is an important part of what it means to be a human person in the present age. Secondly, this plight can rightly be seen both as the consequence of and as God's punishment of the primeval sin.

62 *Against Heresies* 3:23:5 (ANF 1:457).

63 *Against Heresies* 5:8:2.

64 I assume that Genesis 3 is to be read *both* as an account of the first sin/the introduction of sin into human history *and* as a paradigmatic account (showing us the nature of human sin in general).

65 Cf. *The City of God* 14:15: 'What but disobedience was the punishment of disobedience in [Adam's] sin? For what else is man's misery but his disobedience to himself, so that in consequence of his not being willing to do what he could do, he now wills to do what he cannot? ... By the just retribution of the sovereign God whom we refused to be subject to and serve, our flesh, which was subjected to us, now torments us by insubordination.' (NPNF 2:275)