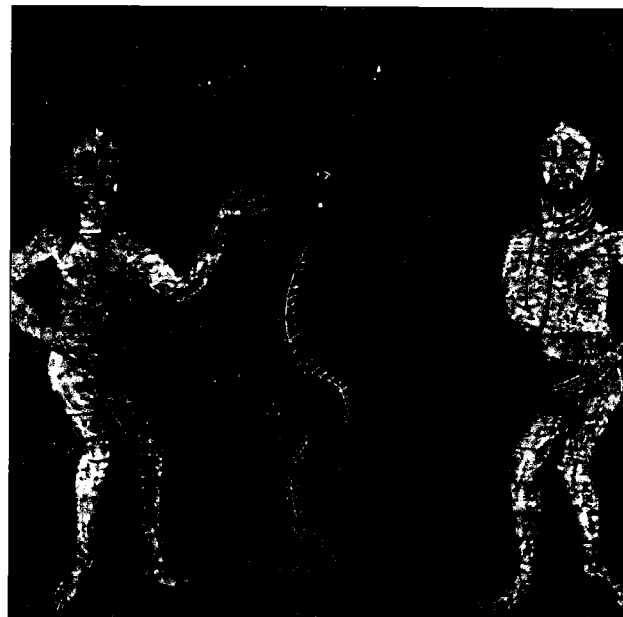


The closer a person is to God, the closer he is to people. We see this in Mary. The fact that she is totally with God is the reason why she is so close to human beings.²⁹

Mary is our sign of hope that the cycle of sin can be broken and our humanity made complete. She is the object of our hope only as one who points to her Son, who is the perfect answer to the dilemma of our sinfulness and the tendencies toward it we have by nature. In his life, Death, and Resurrection, Jesus moved the dividing line between good and evil out of the human heart, leaving only the good. We will focus on this shortly, but first we must tackle a dilemma that modern science seems to create for the idea of a sin committed by our "first parents." The story of Adam and Eve and their disobedience is one that is often assumed by believers to be a factual account. Who are Adam and Eve, and what role do they play in the tragic history of humanity? Were they the only first humans? If not, then in what way can we understand the biblical account of human origins such that its deepest and most fundamental truth remains and shines forth?

1. The Theology of Human Origins



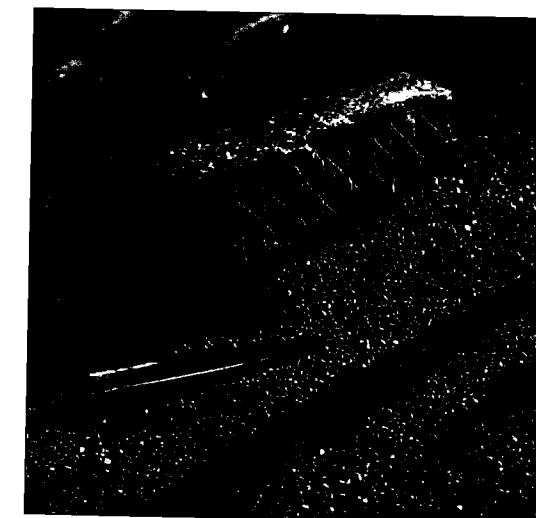
THE BIBLICAL STORY THAT COMPLETES the Second Creation Account, Genesis 3, tells of a man and a woman, the first humans and parents of all human beings to come, being tempted by a serpent to eat fruit from a tree which God had forbidden them to eat after creating them. Their disobedience changes their perspective of themselves and each other; they realize their nakedness, and hide their bodies from each other with leaves. They also try to elude God when he walks through the garden, hiding themselves "among the trees." God punishes them for their rebellion; it results in their being expelled from the garden. Henceforth, they both will be subject to death, the man to fruitless and wearying toil, the woman to agony in childbirth.

Modern literary analysis identifies this story as a symbolic narrative, more about the meaning of life than the beginning of human history. As **St. John Paul II** once noted, Genesis 2-3 uses "mythical language" to express a "deeper content."³⁰ However, **St. Augustine** believed this account to be actual history.³¹ Following him, much of the western Christian tradition assumed the same: human history began with only one man and one woman, who both sinned.³² *Monogenism* is the theological idea that "the whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve."³³ For centuries monogenism, based upon a particular interpretation of Genesis 3, was assumed to accurately describe the beginning of human history. It now seems quite unlikely, perhaps genetically impossible, that monogenism is an accurate account. Evolution works through changes within populations, not through the sudden appearance of two individuals. Also, the genetic diversity that we encounter today among modern humans, despite our very close genetic unity, seems to require thousands of human beings at the beginning of human history, a doctrine theologians refer to as *polygenism*.

So where does that leave Adam and Eve? In 1950 **Venerable Pius XII**, responding to the evolutionary science of his day, warned the faithful against embracing polygenism in his encyclical *Humani Generis*. He was very careful in his wording. He said that it "is not apparent" how polygenism can be squared with the doctrine of Original Sin.³⁴ He could have said, "It cannot be reconciled" with definitive Catholic teaching, but he did not. He was clearly being cautious and leaving the door open for possible scientific discoveries that might generate some theory of polygenism that could be harmonized with what we know by faith: that Original Sin is passed on to all human beings due to a real human sin committed at the dawn of human history.

Since that time, the paradigm of human origins has shifted significantly. The prevailing hypothesis in 1950 was the *Multi-Regional Model*. According to this model, the various ethnic groups had all evolved independently of each other: "Native Africans evolved from archaic non-humans in Africa, native Europeans evolved from archaic non-humans in Europe, native Asians evolved from archaic non-humans in Asia," etc. Each race had its own distinct origin.³⁵ To **Ven. Pius XII**, who had opened his pontificate in 1939 with an encyclical denouncing "the forgetfulness of that law of human solidarity and charity which is dictated and imposed by our common origin and by the equality of rational nature in all men,"³⁶ the Multi-Regional Model would have seemed a step backwards toward the diabolical ideas that had fueled the murderous Nazi regime. For, if there is no unity to the human family, then it can also be argued that some people only *seem* human or have an inferior form of humanity and are, thus, not equal in dignity and rights.

The magisterium of the Church has not given any specific guidance on the monogenism/polygenism issue since the rapid advances in our understanding of human origins from the last several decades. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that **Ven. Pius XII's** warning about embracing polygenism



Blombos Cave in South Africa has yielded the oldest artifacts that give evidence of symbolic thought, datable to around 75,000 YA.

has not been repeated by any Pope since the 1980s. In 2004, the International Theological Commission left the issue open. In *Communion and Stewardship*, the ITC recognized that the scientific evidence points to a population, not to two individuals, and refers to the emergence of the first humans as involving either "individuals" or "populations."³⁷ Here we see the principle of "faith and science together" discussed in Chapter Five; the Church allows science to inform its understanding of what God has revealed and remains open to new scientific discoveries.

Thanks to modern genetics we now know that the Multi-Regional Model is incorrect, having been replaced by the *Out of Africa Model*. As discussed in Chapter Nine, there is firm evidence that anatomically modern humans evolved in Africa around 300,000 YA and migrated out of Africa around 60,000 YA. Genetic studies indicate that there were about 10,000 breeding individuals at the time of our anatomical origins, although the number of behaviorally modern humans, truly rational animals, may have been quite smaller and certainly emerged much later. Blombos Cave in South Africa has yielded the oldest artifacts that give evidence of symbolic thought, datable to around 75,000 YA. However, such artifacts have only been found there and at another nearby site with artifacts datable to about the same time.³⁸ So the current evidence seems to indicate that the human difference may have come about within a few groups at a specific time and place, over 200,000 years after our modern anatomical features evolved.

It is interesting to reconsider polygenism in light of the Out of Africa Model. It does not seem to be a wild leap, in light of the most recent discoveries, to consider Adam and Eve as symbolic of a community, the first community to make the breakthrough to rationality and freedom. Perhaps the genetic and neurological changes that made us capable of being rational animals remained latent for some time, spreading through the population before these uniquely human powers were actualized. Perhaps the first of our kind to make the breakthrough from potential to actual symbolic thought, language, and reason also turned quickly away from the goodness being offered by God, in a manner similar to that which was envisioned by St. Maximus the Confessor, and then drew the others into a way of being human marked by "relational damage," into a community characterized by sin.

Of course this all remains at the level of speculation, but speculation is essential to all human thought. Much like scientists, theologians oftentimes find themselves having to go back to the



The Blessed Virgin Mary asked the angel Gabriel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34).

data and challenge their assumptions. This is not a threat to faith, in which we entrust ourselves to God despite the limits of our understanding. In fact, it refines and purifies faith to find itself faced with new questions, and it is through such faithful theological reflection that our understanding of divine truth moves forward.³⁹ The Blessed Virgin Mary, who asked the angel Gabriel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" regarding his announcement that she would "conceive... and bear a son" (Lk 1:28-35), is the model for all theological speculation. Questions are not bad; faith is not blind.

It is, furthermore, worth noting that what is being reconsidered here is not the question of *whether* an Original Sin occurred and fundamentally altered the manner in which all human beings henceforth live and experience their humanity, finding themselves in need

of a divine savior and redeemer. Rather, what is being reconsidered here in light of the progress of modern science is how we ought to interpret *the context in which* this Original Sin took place. The substance of the faith itself is not what is at issue, only our understanding of how we ought to best understand and articulate it in a reasonable and responsible manner.

In the end, however sin entered the world and however many first parents were involved, there can be no doubt that it affected humanity in a universal way. Br. Guy Consolmagno, S.J., recognizing the new frontier that evolutionary science has opened for theological reflection, points to the reality of Original Sin as it touches the universal experience of humanity:

There can be no doubt that the source of human evil, the urge that people have to choose to do things they know are wrong, has been a part of our human experience since before the beginning of recorded history. Original sin is a fact. But explaining it in light of what we now know of human origins is going to be a lot trickier than the theologians would have guessed a hundred years ago.

And that's OK. More power to them.

Meanwhile... I don't need to know the instant or the process when human beings first became capable of making free choices. It's enough for me, today, to know that I do have the power (and responsibility) to make free choices myself and that for whatever historical reasons, I can't depend on my own power to make the

right choice every time. In a practical sense that's what the doctrine of Original Sin is all about. And that's true, regardless of how it came to be.⁴⁰

More important than how sin entered the world and how many humans were involved is how its destructive power is overcome. As noted above, Jesus Christ has pushed the line dividing between good and evil out of the human heart. And it is to his Heart that we now turn.

~~D. The Sacred Heart of Jesus~~

IN ITS CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD, the Second Vatican Council identified Christ as the "final Adam," the one who "fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Continuing this line of thought, it points to Christ as the perfect human:

He Who is "the Image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward... For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with *every human being*. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and *loved with a human heart*. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly *been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.*⁴¹



Jesus Christ, the final Adam. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, sin and moral evil are met with mercy and a loving power that draws good out of evil.

In this short summary of the mystery of the Incarnation, we see the solution to the dark riddle of human existence when it is only considered from the biological and philosophical perspectives. Christ answers the ambiguity of our moral fragility and inclinations toward evil with perfect love, living out an ordinary human existence in an extraordinary way. He did not take up human nature as it existed before sin damaged human life, endowed with preternatural gifts. Instead, he assumed our *fallen* human nature in order to redeem it, purifying it through the abundance of his love and his perfect obedience to the will of the Father.

The key phrase in this important text from Vatican II is its assertion that Jesus "loved with a human heart." In biblical symbolism, the heart represents the center of thinking, willing, and acting. With this in mind, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a reminder of the pure love with which Jesus loved all human beings and united himself to us totally and irrevocably. The Son-Logos, the Mind through whom the universe was made, has now become the Savior through whom it has been redeemed. In Chapter Three we recognized that the love by which God creates the universe is a love springing from mercy, which causes goodness where goodness is absent. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, even the "holes in being" created by sin and moral evil are met with mercy and a loving power that draws good out of evil.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews captures this beautifully. Christ, he tells us, has become our "merciful and faithful high priest" precisely by loving us in the midst of his own human suffering and temptations: "Because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to