

## Darwinism and Original Sin: Frederick R. Tennant's Integration of Darwinian Worldviews into Christian Thought in the Nineteenth Century

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### Abstract

Interdisciplinary research to integrate science into Christian thought needs the historical perspective of theological attempts when the science was emerging. It seemed that Darwin's explanation negated Augustinian views of a historical Adam and Eve, a pre-existing paradise, the Fall and original sin. Frederick R. Tennant, in his Hulsean Lecture, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin* (1902), explained original sin in light of Darwinism without diminishing soteriological concerns; he did this by positioning original sin as inherited propensities for self-survival, not as inherited guilt. These propensities became sinful only when consciousness was developed to recognize moral law. He had three arguments to dismiss Augustinian views of original sin: 1) there was no literal, historical Fall, 2) there is no human bias toward sin until consciousness develops, and 3) "inheritance" of sin should be located only in the *material* of sin, not (IN?) guilt. Tennant's work allows integration of Darwin to support an Irenaen sense of original sin.

### Abstrakt

Die interdisziplinäre Forschung, zum von von Wissenschaft in christlichen Gedanken zu integrieren benötigt die historische Perspektive von theological Versuchen, als die Wissenschaft auftauchte. Es schien daß verneinte Ansichten Augustinian Darwins Erklärung von einem historischem Adam und von Vorabend, ein pre-existing Paradies, der Fall und ursprüngliche Sünde. Frederick R. Tennant, in seinem Hulsean Vortrag, der Ursprung und Ausbreitung von Sin (1902), erklärte ursprüngliche Sünde im Licht Darwinism, ohne soteriological Interessen zu vermindern; er tat dies, indem er ursprüngliche Sünde als übernommene Neigungen für Selbst-Überleben, nicht als übernommene Schuld in Position brachte. Diese Neigungen wurden sinful, nur als Bewußtsein entwickelt wurde, um moralisches Gesetz zu erkennen. Er hatte drei Argumente, zum der Augustinian Ansichten der ursprünglichen Sünde zu entlassen: 1) dort war kein wörtlicher, historischer Fall, ist 2) dort keine menschliche Vorspannung in Richtung zur Sünde, bis Bewußtsein sich entwickelt, und 3) "sollte Erbschaft" der Sünde nur im Material der Sünde, nicht Schuld sich befinden. Arbeit Tennants läßt Integration von Darwin eine Irenaen Richtung der ursprünglichen Sünde stützen.

## I. Introduction

How do Augustinian ideas of Original Sin change when the evolutionary story provides no historical Adam and Eve, no paradise, and no fall?<sup>1</sup> Evolutionary anthropology addresses the questions of human origins and behavior in ways that seem capable of replacing traditional formulations with more likely explanations. Can the Church integrate these discoveries into a theological anthropology that does not negate soteriology? In the late nineteenth century, Frederick R. Tennant explored how evolutionary biology and psychology inform the Church's understanding of original sin. His integration helps restore an Irenaen meaning of salvation in Christ.

### A. Tennant's Background

A theologian himself, Tennant started his academic career grounded in science. At Caius College, Cambridge (1885-89), he studied mathematics, physics, biology, and chemistry. Tennant was twenty-three when he first heard the 1889 Huxley lectures.<sup>2</sup> Huxley's lectures were most likely his first major exposure to the perceived conflict between Darwinian thought and the doctrines of Anglican theology.<sup>3</sup> Tennant

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<sup>1</sup>See [http://resources.theology.ox.ac.uk/examreps.phtml?school\\_code=pre&paper\\_ID=Pre1&paper\\_num=1](http://resources.theology.ox.ac.uk/examreps.phtml?school_code=pre&paper_ID=Pre1&paper_num=1). How evolution affects *Western* conceptions of the fall and of original sin is often neglected in Christian thought. In the course "The Christian Doctrine of Creation" at Oxford, an objective is to "Explore the issues raised for a doctrine of Creation by advances in the natural sciences, with particular reference to Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection". Students completely avoided integrating evolutionary perspectives into fall doctrine. Western Christian thinking seems canalized on this doctrine.

<sup>2</sup> Two brief biographies about Tennant are available: a forward written by Mary Frances Thelen in the 1968 edition of Tennant's 1903 book, *The Sources of Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (Schoken: New York) and an introduction by Delton L. Scudder in his 1940 book, *Tennant's Philosophical Theology* (Yale University Press: New Haven; Humphrey Milford: London; Oxford University Press: Oxford). Also, see the website: [http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/t/tennant\\_f\\_r.shtml](http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/t/tennant_f_r.shtml).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/guide16.html>. Regarding the 1889 lectures, Thomas Henry Huxley wrote to Hyde Clarke on 14 September 1890 that he wished to have people who regarded the Genesis

assimilated much of Huxley's 1893 Romanes lecture on *Evolution and Ethics* by presenting the Hulsean Lecture entitled *Origin and Propagation of Sin* where he integrated evolutionary ideas into a Christian synthesis.<sup>4</sup> In light of modern evolutionary theory, Tennant's views have a taste of Victorian progress and would have to be modified on that account. Still, his views coincide well with the neo-Darwinian modern synthesis. Given the tenor of his writings on sin, it is apparent that his primary motive was to analyze the doctrines of the fall and original sin by integrating Huxley's claims about evolution rather than considering them in conflict with religion.

Tennant's interest in religion grew in the 1890's leading him to prepare for ordination in the Church of England. In 1891, he married Canstance Yates. From 1891-95, he continued teaching science at his old high school, Newcastle-under-Lyme, while continuing both his theological and scientific studies. He earned the B.Sc. at the University of London and his M.A. at Cambridge in 1896. From 1894-97 he served as Curate of St. Matthew's, Walsall; soon after, he was placed at Cambridge as Chaplain of Caius College. He then

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stories as historical fact "to understand that they are fools". In his lecture, *The Lights of the Church and the Light of Science*, (see <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE4/Lights.html>) Huxley wrote, "Now, not only do I hold it to be proven that the story of the Deluge is a pure fiction; but I have no hesitation in affirming the same thing of the story of the Creation. Between these two lies the story of the creation of man and woman and their fall from primitive innocence, which is even more monstrously improbable than either of the other two, though, from the nature of the case, it is not so easily capable of direct refutation". He never refuted the fall. Perhaps this omission was Tennant's motivation to focus on it a decade later.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick R. Tennant. 1906. *The Origin and Propagation of Sin: Being the Hulsean lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge in 1901-2.* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Tennant is best known for his books: *Philosophical Theology* (1928) where he analyzes the German sources of Huxley's statements about scripture (Walter Baur and Friedrich Strauss), upon whose Higher Criticism many of Huxley's statements were based; *Philosophy of the Sciences* (1932) where he shows his vast knowledge of science; *The Concept of Sin* (1912) and *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (1903/1968 Shocken Edition) demonstrates a mastery of theology. Least known is his contribution to the Hulsean lecture.

became Curate of St. Mary the Great and began studying philosophy at Gonville and Caius College under James Ward, Professor of Philosophy and Psychology. From 1899-1902 he focused on the history and development of the doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin. Ward's naturalistic agnosticism influenced Tennant as he turned to psychology to understand epistemology. Cambridge awarded Tennant a B.D. in 1904, a D.D. in 1906, and appointed him University Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in 1907. He served as Rector of Hockwold from 1905-13. From 1913 to his retirement in 1938, he was Lecturer in Theology at Trinity College.

Due to his educational background, Tennant approached problems from the scientific worldview, but informed with the reasoned temper of a logician.<sup>5</sup> Scudder wrote that his "controlling ideals have always been fact, logic, clarity, and precision, an intense hostility for rhetoric which is the befuddlement of thought and for mysticism which escapes exact definitions and sharply drawn inferences".<sup>6</sup> Given this approach, it should be no surprise that Tennant's integration of Darwinian thought into a reformulation of original sin was better received by his academic colleagues than it was by the orthodox theologians of the day. A restored awareness of Tennant's thinking is needed to enable our integration of Darwinian ideas into theology in order to encourage dialogue between science and religion.

## B. Statement of the Problem

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<sup>5</sup> Delton L. Scudder. 1940. *Tennant's Philosophical Theology* (Yale University Press: New Haven; Humphrey Milford: London; Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 2. Scudder wrote that in addition to mastering Ward's teaching, Tennant turned to "Johnson, the logician, to work out his philosophical and theological convictions in interaction with a circle of tough-minded Cambridge teachers (McTaggart, Russell, Hobson, Barnes, Broad, and others)".

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Original sin has slippery definitions.<sup>7</sup> Original sin that is considered inherited guilt is attributed to Augustine; this Latin doctrine includes the eternal damnation of unbaptized infants and hereditary guilt as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience (e.g. Original Sin/Inherited Guilt or simply, OS/IG). The other type of original sin claims we have *propensities* toward sin (once law is in place), but that we are untainted with sin at birth (e.g. Original Sin/Propensity for Sin, OS/PS).<sup>8</sup> This Greek doctrine allows the human soul to develop in Christ as it becomes freed from earthly desires to become united with God (a 'fall forward' in the Irenaen sense).

A key objection to OS/IG is the issue that it fails to exonerate God as the cause of evil. A prelapsarian Adam and Eve, in Augustine's theory, would be morally and intellectually perfect, without suffering and death, and in perfect communion with God. A perfect will would will to do good (by definition). The only way they could 'fall' from this paradise is if God created their wills or their intellect with an inherent capacity to choose the evil of eating food that made them wise (even though they were already intellectually perfect).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Edward T. Oakes. 1998. Original Sin: A Disputation. *First Things* 87: 16-24. An example of multiple meaning seems to have crept into the Roman Catholic Church's *Catechism* (#404) which recognizes original sin as 'merely analogous' to committed sins since it is contracted but not committed. In this sense, it is not strictly inherited sin as Augustine proposed. Oates thinks this mere analogy to sin would have surprised Augustine with his physical and biological understanding of the inheritance of a 'first sin'.

<sup>8</sup> This could also be called Propensity for Selfish behavior or Propensity for Self-survival. See the forward in J. Patout Burns, SJ. 1981 *Theological Anthropology*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis. Standardly, this is called Inherited Depravity; this terminology elevates self-serving behaviors beyond what is needed.

<sup>9</sup> F. LeRon Shults. 2003. *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*. Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, p.210-211. If they were perfectly wise, why were they misled? If they were created foolish (and since folly is the greatest of the vices), why is God the author of vice? We can counter that it was Satan who tempted them (as did Augustine), but this still does not get our conception of God off the hook. It just pushes the objection back a step or postulates that God pre-destined Satan's sinful act and Adam's disobedience; or we become victim to Manichean thought. Augustine, like so many others, begs the question with the claim that it is an incomprehensible mystery.

Modern theologians, like F. LeRon Shults, present a relational theology to resolve the issues.<sup>10</sup> Shults does not develop the evolutionary story well. That process is better met, though incompletely, by Williams and by Korsmeyer.<sup>11</sup> Tennant, over one hundred years prior, resolved the issue best. His thinking, while not completely forgotten, needs to be restored to re-integrate Darwinian thought into theology and to enhance the Irenaen sense of original sin.<sup>12</sup>

## II. Reformation in Light of Darwin

Darwin's explanation causes us to reject the claims made by a 'plain-sense' reading of the first eleven chapters of Genesis:<sup>13</sup> a) a first couple coming into existence in a state of perfection ten thousand years ago;<sup>14</sup> b) a perfect paradise

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<sup>10</sup> Shults 2003,p.212-216.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Williams. 2001. *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis; Jerry D. Korsmeyer. 1998. *Evolution and Eden: Balancing Original Sin and Contemporary Science* Paulist Press: Mahwah, NJ.

<sup>12</sup> See Christina M. Gschwandtner. 2001. "Threads of Fallenness according to the Fathers of the First Four Centuries", *European Explorations in Christian Holiness*, Summer:19-40. Irenaen thought considers Adam as a child who was deceived and beguiled by Satan. Thus Adam was not responsible for disobedience since he did not have free choice since such that ability was not yet developed. Consequently, Adam did not commit the first sin, Cain did. Instead, Adam was enslaved to death by Satan as a result of being fooled; Christ comes to set us free from that enslavement. So, the Fall is a blessing in disguise to make us more grateful for the gift of immortality in Christ.

<sup>13</sup> For a social and cultural analysis of the epistemic anxiety and cognitive dissonance that young-earth creationists (and their modern day counterparts, intelligent design creationists) go through, see Ronald Numbers. 1993. *The Creationists*. University of California Press: Berkeley. Or see his recent *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design, Expanded Edition*. Harvard University Press: Harvard (2006) which updates intelligent design creationism's activity in the 1990's.

<sup>14</sup> J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. 1998. *Duet or Duel? Theology and Science in a Postmodern World*. Trinity Press International: Harrisburg; Kenneth Miller. 1999. *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. HarperCollins: New York; Loyal D. Rue and Edward Osborne Wilson. 1999. *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution*. SUNY Press: Albany.

without death and suffering . . . but which was lost;<sup>15</sup> and c) transmission of a sinful nature from an original pair.<sup>16</sup> The idea of a 'good' creation being a perfect paradise which man destroyed by disobedience allows one to rectify the pronouncement that God 'saw that it was good', and to place the blame for evil in the hands of man. This rectification is short-sighted, however. Ultimately, it makes God responsible for the entry of evil into the world since he made humans with the ability to disobey.

Tennant assimilated Darwinian thought into a doctrine of creation by showing that human nature evolved from animal tendencies of "impulse and emotion". These tendencies, prior to free will and consciousness of law (natural or divine), were ethically "neutral, indifferent and non-moral . . . the product of the ordinary course of Nature".<sup>17</sup> He does not commit the naturalistic fallacy; once awareness arises, the natural tendencies must still be subjugated. But, *prior* to the appearance of will and conscience in the evolution from pre-hominid to human, such tendencies should not be moralized or considered sin.<sup>18</sup> As our

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<sup>15</sup> Korsmeyer, J. 1998. *Evolution and Eden*. Paulist Press: New Jersey; Arthur Peacocke. 1993. *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming – Natural, Divine, and Human*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

<sup>16</sup> Ayala, Francisco. 1998. "Human Nature: One Evolutionist's View" in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (eds. W. S. Brown et. al.) Fortress Press: Minneapolis, p. 35-36; Williams, P. A. 2001. *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

<sup>17</sup> F.R. Tennant. 1906. *The Origin and Propagation of Sin: Being the Hulsean lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge in 1901-2*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 117. Subsequent references to this work will be designated *O&PS*.

We do not claim a usurping male lion is guilty of infanticide when he kills all the offspring of the prior male's pride. The lion is not guilty of murder. There is no consciousness of a moral law in the lion. He is merely maximizing his own reproductive success by not raising another's offspring. Humans, on the other hand, have developed into creatures with sanctions against such behavior as a result of our heritage of cooperation. This ability to recognize self-serving behavior, and choose actions that are not self-seeking, is what we might call the image and likeness of the Creator.

<sup>18</sup> *O&PS* p.118. Tennant also claimed that fully-developed humans will always find "an internal conflict between nature and nurture, natural desire and moral end . . . the inevitable condition of human life and the expression of God's purpose". The antagonism between evolutionary processes and our

ideals of moral behavior reach their apex (e.g. self-effacement), they require divine grace to be realized. Our natural animal bias is constantly at war with our acquired human conscience.

Tennant's argument first recognizes the fact that St. Paul resolves sin into the flesh and into law. Second, Tennant accepts the premise that humans are a product of development, both as a species and as individuals. Based on these two premises, he rejects the troubling question of how sin arose in human life if unity and harmony are historically assumed. The error of this question, Tennant claims, is the assumption of a Paradise with a perfect couple in perfect sinless harmony with God and only a single food prohibition. "Empirical science asserts that the discord in us is not sin until we make it so, and unity and harmony, in the sense of freedom from effort to avoid evil, never has had actual existence. . . . Man was born to trouble: to the arduous task of subjugating and annexing his organic to his rational and moral 'nature'".<sup>19</sup> The phrase 'until we make it so' is our awareness of an ideal of behavior – the divine Law. This Law was perfected in the impossible demands of Jesus Christ's ideal to completely reject all forms of behavior that have a self-serving nature.<sup>20</sup> Was Tennant's synthesis sufficient? What were the objections?

### **A. Tennant's Work at Integrating the Darwinian Views**

In a pioneering work of integrating Darwinian thought into Christian theology, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*, Tennant presents three arguments to dismiss the Augustinian concept of OS/IG.<sup>21</sup> He claimed that a) there was no literal,

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moral principles and desire for purpose was discussed by Huxley in his Romanes Lecture of 1893. He realized that physical processes which characterized the earliest stages of human evolution were prerequisite for conscience and moral freedom, even ethical development in humans. The *natural* was a prerequisite for the *spiritual*.

<sup>19</sup> *O&PS* p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> Meisinger, Hubert. 2000. Christian Love and Biological Altruism. *Zygon Journal of Religion and Science* 35: 745-782.

<sup>21</sup> Tennant's Hulsean Lecture (1901-2) may be the first books to actually use Darwinism to reform a theology of original sin. His book *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin*, published shortly thereafter, continued to integrate evolutionary thinking into theology. Perhaps one could make a case of primacy for Henry Drummond, (1890, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 29<sup>th</sup>

historical fall, b) there is no human bias toward sin, and c) racial solidarity, or 'inheritance' of sin, should be located in the material of sin, not in sin itself. For Tennant, conscience and morality were derived from a *social* environment in which humans evolved as a species and in which each individual develops. He presents these ideas without diverting us into a moral relativity. He reminds us of the Pauline pronouncements of our not being aware of sin until we are aware of law (Romans 7:7-9). He recognizes that sin, thus explained, is not explained away: he does not commit the naturalistic fallacy.

In the first chapter, Tennant shows why the "Original Guilt" of Augustine's formulation has to be abandoned in light of evolution. He shows how traducianism held more promise than it could deliver in the light of its unscientific claim for physical heredity of guilt. This sets the stage for his treatment of the origin and propagation of sin in philosophical speculation in chapter two.<sup>22</sup> But it is chapter three that provides the climax where Tennant analyzes the problem of the origin and propagation of sin in light of empirical science. His consilient argument focuses on how a developing conscience both in humans as a species via evolution and in the development of conscience in each individual from infancy is analogous. He sees our propensities toward "evil" as derived from non-moral and neutral activities by relying on the

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ed.). Drummond emphasized spiritual phenomena in terms of evolution. He discussed biogenesis, degeneration, growth and death, eternal life and environment in terms of 'natural law' and thought that a Christian was one who furthered the evolution of the world according to the purpose of Jesus Christ. Drummond's homiletics maintained that, if one began at the natural laws (evolution), they ended in spiritual law. Later, Drummond focused on placing altruism and ethics as an outcome of evolutionary processes in his 1904, *The Ascent of Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd). Nevertheless, he declined the integrative challenge that Tennant accepted of relating evolution to the Fall and to the Pauline doctrine of redemption.

<sup>22</sup> Tennant first gives a history of the problem in the Cartesian school and its treatment by Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Julius Müller. From there, he outlines Coleridge's theory of Radical Evil and the Schelling/Schopenhauer response. He finishes the philosophical analysis by summarizing the problem of sin as viewed by Hegel, Lotze, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl.

Pauline position that moral evil is non-existent before awareness of the Law.

Tennant illustrated his position by using an analogous argument when he writes that the “. . . moral development of the child recapitulates the history of the race. There is a time when the infant is purely ‘organic,’ and his parasitic self-centeredness during that period is not sinful nor moral at all but is merely necessary to his survival and healthy growth. . . . Not until he has acquired a ‘new self’ which responds to law – first the will of his parents and later something obeyed by his parents as well – not until he has a conscience, has he risen to the state in which it is possible to sin”.<sup>23</sup> Tennant then relies on Canon Wilson’s claim that the fall was changed by the evolutionary story.<sup>24</sup> Tennant claimed that “. . . man’s performance lags behind his aspiration is attributed, not to a defection from a sinless yet moral state, but to the fact that he is rising in moral culture, which makes great demands upon his organic nature, whilst his inherited psychical constitution is making no corresponding or adaptive change, no evolutionary progress”.<sup>25</sup>

Mary Frances Thelen, in the introduction of a reprint of Tennant’s *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* over sixty years later, stated that Tennant’s incorporation of evolutionary science allowed “us to recover the true facts, which are that, instead of having fallen, man has actually risen from a lower form of existence, and that the origin of sin is to be found in the conflict

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<sup>23</sup> *O&PS*, p. 96-7; p. 107-9. Expanding his analogous argument, Tennant contends “That the human infant is at first an absolutely non-moral being, that it possesses no conscience, no power to discriminate right and wrong”. To explain why a child displays either a bent toward pursuing impulses and appetites for gratification or instead pursues what we typically call higher-level moral qualities for praise, does not require one to postulate impulses any more mysterious than the continuance of the capacity to feel pleasure in their satisfaction. He also applied this thinking to what he called “savages” or “primitive man” in the nineteenth century even though some ethical standards would be recognized by him within his particular group but that those standards in their particulars might differ from group to group.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.114-15. Canon Wilson stated, “Man fell, according to science, when he first became conscious of the conflict of freedom and conscience. To the evolutionist sin is not an innovation, but is the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies that were incidental to an earlier stage in development, whether of the individual or the race, and were not originally sinful but were actually useful. Their sinfulness lies in their anachronism; in their resistance to the evolutionary and Divine force that makes for moral development and righteousness”.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 28.

between animal impulse and the conscience, which is formed only later".<sup>26</sup> Unlike the Western Church's fall doctrine, Thelen thought that phrases like 'corruption of the will' and 'bias toward evil' were incorrect.<sup>27</sup> What we call 'sin' is not necessarily an "original bias . . . habits that exist[ed] before the emergence of conscience and knowledge of the moral laws, would not be a bias toward right or wrong, and so would not be original sin".<sup>28</sup> Such biases are behaviors that promoted survival and reproduction to fulfill God's command/blessing to all creatures to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But these behaviors would not be sin prior to acquisition of conscience. Humans inherit the *material* of sin, but not its guilt.<sup>29</sup>

Thelen claimed that Tennant wished to reconcile Pelagius and Augustine by showing that inheritance affects and shapes our disposition but it does not control the will itself, which is free to choose.<sup>30</sup> Both individuals missed the points held by

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<sup>26</sup> Thelen, Mary Francis. 1968. "Frederick R. Tennant: The treatment of man and sin in religious liberalism" in Frederick R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, First Schocken ed., New York [original first published 1903]. p. ii – iii. She further described Tennant's position: "The doctrine of a historical Fall from a state of original righteousness is shown by modern science to be false. Original human nature – which means the nature man had when he emerged as a species, and the nature the baby possesses at birth – was without conscience, and man has only gradually risen to the status of a moral subject".

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. iv. "The universality of actual sin is sufficiently accounted for by calling attention to the difficulty of sinlessness, without resorting to a theory of the *a priori* necessity of sin . . . the mere fact that our passions subject us to solicitation to evil does not make us sinners".

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. v. emphases in original. Postulating a bias toward evil to explain our tendency to succumb to temptation could be offset by postulating a bias toward good when we resist temptation. Consequently postulating such biases seemed illogical. Sin means consent of the will to temptation; presumably to a temptation that causes harm to others in some manner or breaking a communally-agreed upon set of laws for the operation of that community.

<sup>29</sup> *O&PS*, p. 15. Tennant notes that the Pelagian controversy points out "the one great difficulty which had always beset the problem of human sin . . . that of reconciling the fact of its race-wide prevalence with the idea of guilt, which attaches with propriety only to the individual person".

<sup>30</sup> Thelen, p. v-vi. in *Sources*. Pelagius erred on one side of truth: rights and responsibilities of personality. Augustine erred by focusing on sin's race-wide prevalence. The latter view resulted in a fruitful theological

the other. Augustine missed the moral accountability of the individual by emphasizing that racial solidarity in sin implied inheritance of guilt. Pelagius missed the impossibility of humans, without grace, to overcome our sinfulness. The human will for righteousness (e.g. self-denial) cannot be developed without the grace of Christ. Consequently, 'sin' is disobedience to that moral law which the sinner comprehends and is morally accountable of. Seeing sin in this light recognizes the imperfection that results from a disjunction between our actual behavior and our idealization of perfect behavior, an ideal that cannot be attained without the grace of Christ. We become sinners when we actively contribute to that imperfection by our free volition whenever we reject the grace to overcome it.

Tennant insisted on identifying sin with accountability because a) it agreed best with Christian tradition; b) it was demanded by our ethical sense, and c) no other alternative existed, since an ideal of human nature cannot be achieved.<sup>31</sup> Claiming that Romans 5 set the stage for OS/IG fails to account for Paul's insistence that "knowledge of the law [is] a prerequisite for sin and prior to God's condemnation of the sinner".<sup>32</sup> With respect to the second item regarding ethics, Tennant notes that we do not hold someone liable if they are incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. Furthermore, man "is a 'becoming' being rather than a stable and constant being; in a state of flux, not the same throughout his history . . . all 'concepts' of man except as a zoological genius are arbitrary, and all *a priori* anthropology deduced from man's essence or concept, instead of from empirical knowledge of his course of development, is futile".<sup>33</sup>

In providing this meaning for sin, Tennant claimed that the key was accountability. He saw sin as imperfect

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tradition by emphasizing sin as habit coupled with an inability to overcome no matter how desirous our will to do so was. The former seemed to rest on human ability without grace but it did encourage striving toward oneness in Christ to reach holiness.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, p. vii. Thelen claims the moral ideal "is indefinable and has been rendered so by the discovery of evolution . . . man is in process of development [making] meaningless the concept of an 'original' [e.g. perfect] human nature from which man has 'fallen.'"

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p. viii-ix.

<sup>33</sup> *O&PS*, p. 175-76.

compliance resulting from volitional activities or character developing from those activities (to eventually destroy one's freedom to do right) but as perceived only by God so that one's culpability is known only to God. Thus, if the individual is able to apprehend the ideal of behavior but chooses not to, he sins in that moment and over time he becomes guilty of forming a sinful character. Sin becomes an ethical, not just a religious, concept where accountability alone is the critical essence of sinful misdeeds.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to Herbert Spencer's attempt to turn evolution into a philosophical system, Tennant would not agree that evolution implies sin is *merely* the result of necessary appetites or habits to allow survival or that the state of sin is a temporary phase of evolution that eventually will eventually be out-grown.<sup>35</sup> The grace of Christ and the Church are needed to create humans who are completely self-sacrificial after the manner of God Incarnate: Christ.

Tennant's final chapter is on theodicy. Here, he concludes that while God may be responsible for the possibility, man is responsible for the actuality of sin. In this formulation, he discusses the ontology of Christian theodicy, the separateness of human from Divine will, the limits to Divine Immanence and self-limitation of Omnipotence, and he makes a case for evil not being teleological. Instead, he claims that divine permission of evil was necessary for a moral order and self-revelation to take place. He finishes with an exegesis of Genesis 3 and Romans 5 in light of the theory of evolution, notes that theology must be continuously done in light of new findings about nature, and concludes that the doctrine of the fall is not a part of the Christian Revelation but an accident of history.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Thelen p. ix-xi in *Sources*. 'Universality of Sin' then is an empirical generalization where all have sinned not because they were inherently hostile or defiant toward God but because of lapses inconsistent with their ordinary moral life.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. xii.

<sup>36</sup> Tennant develops this thesis more fully in his 1903 *The Sources of Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*. His exegetical work is summarized in my subsequent article in preparation entitled *Darwinism and Original Sin: Frederick R. Tennant's analysis of the Church Fathers' understanding of Original Sin and an exegesis of St. Paul*.

## B. Reaction to Tennant and His Responses

Tennant's work on integrating evolutionary theory into a revamping of original sin and an understanding of the fall were not without criticism. In his Bampton Lectures of 1924, N. P. Williams takes up several issues against Tennant. Tennant was criticized for affecting the doctrines of Grace and Atonement with his evolutionary view. However, he did not feel that these were endangered, "because they have their sufficient basis in the fact of universal actual sinfulness, and are independent of theories as to how sin takes its rise".<sup>37</sup> Most of N.P. Williams' appeals to "partial determinism" and "inherited infirmity" with an ultimate fall which he calls "pre-cosmic vitiation" of a "Life-Force of the world" is in stark contrast to Tennant's own "scientific and abstruse, scrupulous . . . use of language, reveling in fine and sometimes meticulous distinctions, above all tenacious of the actual, mistrustful of predilections for the visionary and the supersensible, and uncompromising in his intolerance of any slurring of the difference between thoughts and things".<sup>38</sup> Tennant's approach, in contrast to N. P. Williams', was governed by this clarity of thought. As Renowden states, "[Tennant] reminds us that an adequate doctrine of sin requires expression in clear and precise language and, at the same time, it must take full account of modern knowledge and the demands of the enlightened moral consciousness. Above all, it must not do violence to man's true stature as a moral personality".<sup>39</sup>

A few reviews of his work misinterpreted what was meant. These, Tennant summarily dismissed.<sup>40</sup> He responded to other substantive critiques.<sup>41</sup> Arthur Boutwood objected to Tennant's position that heredity of spirit from parents was impossible. Tennant responded by showing that no facts of human reproduction or psychology could be used to support

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<sup>37</sup> *O&PS* p. xiv.

<sup>38</sup> Scudder 1940, p.2.

<sup>39</sup> Renowden, C.R. 1962. F.R. Tennant and the Concept of Sin. *Church Quarterly Review* **163**: 179-188.

<sup>40</sup> "The lengthy review of my two books dealing with Original Sin contributed to *The Expository Times*, May, 1904, by the Rev. W. Mackintosh Mackay, BD, is, I fear, of no service to me because its criticism belongs almost entirely to one or the other of these classes". p. xiv of *O&PS* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>41</sup> Gayford, S.C. 1903. *Journal of Theological Studies* **4**:470-3; Mason, A.J. 1904. *Journal of Theological Studies* **5**:481-498; Boutwood, A. 1903. *Hibbert Journal* **2**:830.

such a traducianist claim: “if the soul is an entity it is hard to conceive it as endowed with a reproductive mechanism. . . I am far from recognizing mechanical theories of heredity . . . as [being] of metaphysical validity”.<sup>42</sup> In response to A. J. Mason’s criticism that he merely re-formulated a naturalistic account of man, Tennant responded that his scientific account used “the language neither of philosophy nor of theology because [it must be] indifferent to the principles of both” yet he placed this scientific language within the context of Revelation to man from God since “it matters little, when we are scientifically describing the process, whether we speak of it as God’s revealing of Himself to man or as man’s becoming sensible of God’s influence and truth. . . [Even] if our language resembles that of naturalism, our mind is [still] that of theism and teleology”.<sup>43</sup>

S. C. Gayford’s criticism was that Tennant’s naturalistic account of the origin of sin without a hereditary sinful bias was inadequate because it claimed our animal heritage provided merely the *neutral* desire for pursuing self-centered sin. The critics wanted that heritage to be *inordinate* and lead to the invention of sin with humans pursuing extremes of carnality.<sup>44</sup> Gayford thought Tennant evaded this issue by thinking the will was also neutral when it clearly succumbed to the lower impulses. Tennant thought this charge was a non-issue: “What attitude the will takes towards our inborn propensities in the pre-moral stage of our development, is not for me an ethical problem: it has nothing to do with the origin of sin . . . from the dawning of his knowledge of what he ought to do, every human being has failed always to avoid doing what he has known he ought not to do”.<sup>45</sup> Regardless, sinful bias should not be characterized as “radical evil,” according to Tennant. To do so is “unnecessary and

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<sup>42</sup> *O&PS* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. note 1 on p. xv Today, with all the data accumulated as a result of the re-discovery of Mendel’s genetics in the 1930’s, the 1953 discovery of the structure of DNA, and the subsequent discoveries of genes and their manipulations in the twenty-first century, we still have no genes for “soul” or “spirit” and should not even dare to postulate such metaphysical entities in physical terms like nucleotide triplets coding for proteins.

<sup>43</sup> *O&PS* p. 144. Tennant adds in a footnote on this page, that when “describing the *how* of things it is often expedient, for purposes of method, to ignore the *why*”.

<sup>44</sup> Gayford 1903 *JTS* 4:470-3.

<sup>45</sup> *O&PS* p. xviii.

improbable, if not impossible . . . purely gratuitous, and could never have presented itself, perhaps, but for the dominion over men's minds of the doctrine of Original Righteousness".<sup>46</sup> The only item that Tennant did not address was at what point this "dawning of conscience" arose in human evolution.

Other criticisms focused on four main themes, which Tennant expanded upon in the second edition of *Origin and Propagation of Sin*:

### **1. Sin requires development of consciousness and awareness of Law**

Tennant claimed that the theory of man's evolution provided sufficient facts that one could logically claim a bias for good to explain when we moved toward morality at least as much as we could claim a bias to evil to explain when we did not. Today's research on altruism would bear out this contention.<sup>47</sup> Postulating 'something deeper' is unnecessary. The sinfulness of sin is much greater if one is personally responsible for failures. Tennant's key points were:<sup>48</sup> a) humans inherit the natural and instinctive impulses from animal progenitors; these impulses are non-moral rather than abnormal or sinful at this stage of development (referring to a time *prior* to law, or rules of behavior, being consciously understood); b) voluntary action in humans occurs before consciousness of right or wrong, during both the evolution of the species or in the development of the individual – this behavior is innocent prior to moral sanctions and the conscience developing either in the species or the individual, "So far, sin has not emerged at all," Tennant writes; c) moral sentiment develops and sanctions are constructed where action begins to be regarded as wrong and constitutes sin – this first awareness might be referred to as the dawning of natural law (especially if we consider that such sentiments develop within the context of community with some of our first natural laws being those that re-enforced group cohesion,

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<sup>46</sup> *O&PS* p. xix.

<sup>47</sup> Brannan, D. K. and C. Gillet. 2005. Evolutionary Explanation and the Ideal of Altruism: the Incommensurability of the Christian Love Command. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 1:11-25.

<sup>48</sup> *O&PS* p.xx-xxii.

unfortunately at the expense of other groups); d) the earliest sanctions were crudely ethical ones based on tit-for-tat, eye-for-eye, with a step forward to love neighbors and then finally refined into the highly developed morality of holiness – love even your enemies, the impossible love command of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>

Tennant's phrase quoted in item b) above was pounced upon by critics. Those who complained did not see a difference in kind between an infant's unchecked 'greedy' demands for food and cuddling, and an adult's yielding to the allurements of the flesh. Tennant saw the two as completely different. He saw both the actions by the infant and the 'savage' as *not* being sin at all; his detractors saw them as both sinful, differing only in degree. They held that absolute standards must exist and must be met regardless of the state in which one finds herself. Anything less is to 'say that sin is not sin,' according to the detractors. Instead, Tennant claimed that what is *commonly* called sin is not sin and that, in the cases seen above, "what is commonly called sin is not *rightly* called sin [my emphasis]".<sup>50</sup>

In order to nuance his conception of sin better, Tennant re-directs us to make the theologically-vague use of the word 'sin' concrete. Sinfulness starts with the single act of sin, which Tennant defines, referring to Kant and Lotze, as "an activity of the will, expressed in thought, word or deed, contrary to the individual's conscience, to his notion of what is good or right, his knowledge of the moral law or the will of God".<sup>51</sup> This definition then requires

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<sup>49</sup> Meisinger, H. 2000. *Zygon Journal of Religion and Science* 35:745-782.

<sup>50</sup> *O&PS* p. xxiii. Today, we have evolutionary biologists showing how some behaviors have strong genetic determinants, especially those that provide for evolutionary ('ultimate') outcomes of reproductive success. Even Dawkins attributes a degree of evil to genes by calling them 'selfish,' an odd value-laden term for a chunk of nucleic acid. Such 'selfish' gene behaviors cannot be seen as 'sinful' in animals since, if not performed, would lead to extinction. Those same behaviors in human pre-history may have allowed the human animal to survive but would become, in the context of complex society, sinful since they harm group functioning.

<sup>51</sup> *O&PS* p. 163. This comes from a 'Note B' to the second edition of *Origin and Propagation of Sin* claiming that this note perhaps "is the most important portion of this volume".

Tennant to be clear about his meaning of 'activity of the will.'<sup>52</sup> According to Tennant, free will is "the outflow of a frame of mind which is not simply knowledge of a command but also agreement with it . . . a case of compliance where non-compliance was possible . . . a possibility of disobedience . . . which it opposes to the worth of the command".<sup>53</sup>

The use of the word 'sin' must include this conception of volitional and voluntary action stemming from motives and habits. Sin, in this *primary* sense, "deals with that aspect of the sinful act which associates it with the moral responsibility and guilt of its doer, it is a transgression of the law in the sense of *his law*, what is known and recognized by him individually as constituting a moral sanction".<sup>54</sup> This, at first glance, seems to be a form of situation ethics and thus was criticized by those holding that sin and sinfulness are absolute standards differing only in degree. Tennant responds that we must see a person's act as 'sin' only if "it is contrary to the general moral conscience of mankind or Christendom, though from the subjective point of view of its doer who, as a heathen, perhaps, knows no law on the matter, it is no sin at all".<sup>55</sup> The 'sinful' in 'sinful nature' does not refer to the primary disposition or temperament (inherited qualities) but to the character (an outcome of volition). For Tennant, unless the word is applied solely to volition, then its meaning is vague.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dennett, D. 2003. *Freedom Evolves*, Penguin Books: London. pp. 13-21. Dennett, however, postulates that free will is a concept we have invented rather like Dumbo's magic feather which he thinks makes him able to fly. Such straw man arguments hardly carry the day.

<sup>53</sup> *O&PS* p. 163-4. Tennant derives these ideas from Kantian ethics. He further observed that "Apart from the conscious volition of a person there is no such thing as moral goodness or badness". Tennant further clarifies matters by stating that only those who are sensitive to such matters can judge if sin has occurred; one cannot, therefore, pass moral judgment regarding sin on those without such sensibilities. One cannot claim the female chimp and daughter who forcibly take an infant from another female, then kill and eat it, are being sinful. Neither can we claim hominid progenitors are guilty of sin, regardless of heinous behavior, *until* they have developed conscience and free will as *Homo sapiens* (wise man).

<sup>54</sup> *O&PS* p. 164 (emphases in the original)

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*; to work this claim out further requires a full knowledge of anthropology and common mores across all human cultures in order to know what behaviors are "a law unto themselves".

<sup>56</sup> *O&PS*, p. 166. Tennant considered those who use the word in this loose manner as muddled in their thinking by believing in "the dominion of

## **2. If Jesus' human nature was not 'inherently' sinful, neither is ours**

For Tennant, our impulses and desires (e.g. concupiscence) are neutral survival mechanisms: "the term 'sinful' is inapplicable to our nature, its impulses and passions".<sup>57</sup> His main support for this claim comes from his premise of Jesus being fully human as well as being fully God. He claims that if our nature (the material for sin) were deemed sinful for supplying us with temptations, then Christ being fully human had a nature that was also sinful. If we claim His nature was sinless implying it was not a temptation for him, then He was not truly human. It would make more sense, therefore, to see the non-moral material of sin (our natural tendencies for survival and reproduction) as non-sinful in and of themselves. It is only the actions consciously engaged in as a result of those impulses that are sin.<sup>58</sup> The other sense in which sinfulness is inappropriately blamed on our nature and its animal propensities, Tennant claims, is when the term 'sinful' is used synonymously for 'fallen' (or deranged, corrupted, abnormal). Even if one's habits strengthen the passion or animal impulse beyond what it was intended by God, this induced state is still individualized. Even in the case of the individual, such a state calls for a greater grace rather than for more condemnation.<sup>59</sup>

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hypostatized abstract conceptions, as if they were actual entities, and a tendency to crystallize rhetoric into dogma".

<sup>57</sup> *O&PS*, p. 167. "Our impulses and passions can therefore no more be called 'sinful,' in the strict sense, than alcohol or dynamite; and such use of language should be banished from what professes to be exact theology. It is easy to see how such an expression as 'sinful flesh' or 'sinful passions,' used by an Apostle, arose. The only 'activity' concerned in temptation and sin is that of the tempted will deliberating as to how it shall deal with the impulse present in consciousness, and eventually issuing in action. . . . But the 'material' of sin is not the cause of sin; the only cause of sin is will. Our passions or 'flesh' or 'nature' cannot therefore be called sinful. . . ."

<sup>58</sup> *O&PS*, p. 168. Tennant accuses those who claim that propensities of material bodies are sinful (rather than just non-moral tendencies which have aided evolutionary survival and reproduction) of reviving Manichaeism and Gnosticism.

<sup>59</sup> *O&PS* p. 169. Tennant's formulation was a rather radical departure from the Anglican church's own construction in Article IX of the doctrine of

Tennant's evolutionary view of human nature and sinfulness, coupled with proper exegesis of scripture and sound philosophy, led him then to hypothesize "that there can be no difference between our Lord's 'nature' and ours".<sup>60</sup>

The beauty of Tennant's analysis is that it cleans up the language use considerably. Expressions like 'bias toward evil,' 'tendency to sin,' 'capacity for self-will,' and even well-meant statements like 'sin does not belong to our true, God-intended nature,' are all based on conceptions that "read back into the perfectly non-moral antecedents of sin, the material out of which sin is made by the will, the sinfulness which attaches exclusively to the consent of the will itself".<sup>61</sup> Tennant rightly points out that such

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Original Sin. The Article blames man's corrupted nature and concupiscence for his departure from righteousness rather than his sanctioned actions that result from non-moral desires for basic survival and reproduction. The Anglicans are effectively identical with the Roman Catholics but they reject the theory of Adam's loss of an original righteousness (*donum superadditum* taken away). Tennant is so bold as to call the language used in the article "extremely regrettable".

<sup>60</sup> *O&PS* p. 171. Tennant's analysis requires that we think of our own nature differently than past formulations of Original Sin: a) our nature is a natural product of evolution with an ultimate cause grounded in God; b) our inborn faculties were not a result of a fall from perfection; c) only our character is marred by sin, never our nature. Our 'nature' had its origin in non-moral survival and reproduction strategies. With this formulation, Tennant claims, "there is no reason to distinguish the endowments of His Body and Soul, in so far as those endowments were human, from those which we inherit". Christ's sinlessness was not due to an absence of the concupiscence of human nature. He felt sexual desire, anger, jealousy, envy identical to every human; and such desires were just as non-moral and neutral. "Without such impulses, He could neither have been tempted nor have lived a moral human life. But His will never consented to such impulses when consent would have involved departure from the ideal of holiness".

<sup>61</sup>*O&PS* p. 173. These expressions would also include: 'sin as a power within us,' 'principle of evil,' 'sin entering or reigning.' Tennant strongly believed that "These expressions . . . are tainted with the pernicious consequences of hypostatizing concepts derived by abstraction from the concrete particulars of experience, a process which makes entities out of non-entity". Tennant cautions with, "We cannot make metaphysics out of such expressions. Abstract nouns are but conceptual shorthand useful for economy of word and thought; but it is not only in the case of mediaeval realism that the concepts they denote have been the bane of exact thinking on account of the readiness with which they are personified into actual existences". Of course, so is Dawkins' language use of 'selfish genes' and

metaphorical language is vague and obscures truth. He applies his same analysis to his own use of the term “nature”. He limits its use to refer only to a person’s “congenital endowments as distinguished from what is afterwards bestowed upon him, or acquired by him, from his surroundings and his education and experience”.<sup>62</sup> Tennant recognizes that this is an ontological process continuously in a state of flux rather than a static starting point. He also believes that instead of futilely developing ideas of man based on *á priori* anthropology of “man’s essence or concept,”<sup>63</sup> one should focus on empiricism. The problem of sin has been based far too long on ‘concepts’ of man, and from metaphysical ethics rather than on empirically based data.

### **3. Sin should be limited to actions not potentialities**

Tennant concluded that his detractors (e.g. those who claimed his synthesis declared sin not to be sin) must first refute his restriction of the use of the term ‘sin’ to apply only to one’s actions in thought or deed, rather than to one’s non-moral urges; that is until they justify their application of the terms ‘sinful’ and ‘guilty’ to behavior “which either *could not* have been other than it was, or at least *knew no moral reason* why it should have been other than it was”. Tennant’s argument rests on the fact

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religion as a ‘virus of the mind.’ We are prone to doing this. Tennant tries to keep us on our toes.

<sup>62</sup> *O&PS* p. 175. Tennant adds “The word chiefly refers therefore to man’s animal and sensuous organization, his instincts and inborn springs of impulse, his undeveloped mental faculties”.

<sup>63</sup> *O&PS* p. 176. The time was ripe for such empiricism but its development came much later. For example, Tennant wishes the comments by A.E. Taylor in *Problem of Conduct*, p. 42 were true: “Thus a consideration of the general character of rational activity seems to warrant the conclusion that ethics, unless it is to consist of mere barren tautologies, must be based not on general principles of metaphysics, but upon the study of human nature in its concrete empirical entirety, as it reveals itself to the student of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Only from such an empirical study of human nature, as it actually is, can we deduce such a knowledge of human needs and aspirations as will enable us to give a definite answer to the questions, what type of life is the ideal, and along what lines is progress to be made towards its realisation?”

Tennant and Taylor would have to wait seventy-five years for E.O. Wilson and others to establish fields to do just that: sociobiology, evolutionary psychology and evolutionary anthropology.

that using the word 'sin' to apply to non-moral urges is incorrect in that it postulates a moral law that holds dominion over non-moral agents.<sup>64</sup> He concludes, "If sin is to be imputed in any degree where there is no law, *i.e.* no consciousness of a restraining moral sanction, there is no logical halting-place in the world of organic and inorganic 'agents' at which we may cease to impute sin".<sup>65</sup> Tennant sees that sin must be more than merely a "transgression of law;" it must be a "transgression of law by a moral agent". Tennant is so insistent that a clear distinction be made, he calls for ridding our thought of such contradictions as

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<sup>64</sup> *O&PS* p. xxiii – xxiv. In Tennant's mind, to apply ethical standards of, say Christianity, to a non-moral agent not yet aware of those standards would be purely arbitrary. For example, we would not consider it selfishness for an infant to be demanding of affection and sustenance; yet such infantile behavior in an adult would. Similarly, our conduct in the primitive man's environment could be considered unethical (wasting food or considering personal property ownership a right) but the tribe would excuse us for that affront (for a while). Tennant does a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to demonstrate that we do not apply ethical standards to non-moral agents such as a cat playing with a captured mouse. The cruelty seen is not considered sinful anymore than we consider the demands of a greedy infant. With this type of mindset, we would have to consider rocks falling from cliffs and killing the man below as guilty of murder.

Few natural law theorists hold that all human beings share a set of ethical norms that are universally held with the exception of a few basic patterns of ethical behavior: 1) moral norms exist that are generally intelligible, 2) tit-for-tat fairness is preferred, 3) bad actions rarely if ever justify good outcomes, and there are generally 4) shared norms against lying, stealing, and killing innocents (see Carl F. H. Henry. 1995. *Natural Law and a Nihilistic Culture. First Things* 49:55-60). James Q Wilson (in *The Moral Sense* 1993; Simon and Schuster: New York) similarly sees commonalities in cultures with respect to self-control, fairness, sympathy, and duty. For a pragmatic approach, see Crigger NJ, Holcomb L, Weiss J. 2001; *Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Problems of Conducting Research with Populations in Developing Nations; Nursing Ethics* 8:459-468. Ethical standards applied homogeneously across all cultures are debatable. Fundamentalism claims that ethical principles are universal; the other, more anthropologically-based model (multiculturalism) claims they are culturally bound. A moderate position (ethical multiculturalism) is the position offered by Crigger et.al.

<sup>65</sup> *O&PS* p. xxv It is the *attitude of the will* towards the moral code which should determine the degree of guilt in the sin was acknowledged by Tennant. Thus if a sanction of a primitive culture is violated because the person has no respect for the sanction, but still knows the value that the culture has for that sanction, it would be a sinful act.

“unconscious sin” and the thinking that ‘stock tendencies’ in and of themselves are sinful without the willful action of a moral agent.<sup>66</sup>

#### **4. Scriptural basis for determining what is sin**

Tennant thought he could still find a scripturally-based doctrine of human nature that would require Christ’s sacrifice without interpreting the Genesis narrative as claiming a Fall, as defined in traditional Western Church doctrine. He thought we must define divine inspiration carefully. Tennant is bold at this point: inspiration must be defined “in the light of an inquiry as to whether that which the narrative asserts is positive fact, rather than assume its assertions to be facts because they occur within the pages of a book which we regard as inspired. It is with the conception of man’s origin and nature, not with the more obvious elements of Semitic folklore, which the third chapter of Genesis presents, that modern knowledge conflicts; and to adhere to the traditional teaching based upon this chapter while admitting the legendary or allegorical nature of its contents is, I believe, to adopt a position which is quite untenable”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *O&PS* pp xxvi-xxvii Tennant contrasts his view with that of Bethune-Baker in the *Cambridge Theological Essays* p. 559 (1902). Tennant saw the need for a clear distinction to be made between a primitive who unknowingly falls short of some absolute moral standard compared to a person who ‘knows better.’ Bethune-Baker thought the evolutionary view of the origin of sin was incompatible with Christian doctrine because it exempted the individual whose moral state allowed him to recognize authority without the need to follow it. The example given by Bethune-Baker clearly indicated that he did not grasp Tennant’s idea; he thought it was similar to Augustine praying ‘not yet. But Tennant was describing the evolutionary point before mankind had the ability to even say ‘not yet’ to some moral sanction. Others claimed that evolutionary theories of man’s behavior ‘explained away’ sin or provided only defective and inadequate views of sin making no proper doctrine of *sin* possible at all (e.g. Professor Orr in *God’s Image in Man*). Tennant was of the opinion that these claims were based on the fear that no value judgment of what constituted sin would be possible using an evolutionary theory of sin – that one could not proclaim when ‘sin is *actually* sin.’ Tennant does not believe that his position should arouse such a fear. Tennant exemplifies his position instead as being able to proclaim when ‘not-sin is *actually* not sin.’ Acts ‘without law’ are not-sin. Prior to conscience dawning in man (including awareness of natural law), such acts are not-sin.

<sup>67</sup> *O&PS* p. xxix – xxx. With respect to the claim that St. Paul also had a “Fall understanding” of Adam in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians,

#### IV. Restoration of Atonement in Light of Darwin

In Western theology, a persistent set of questions exists: whether human nature is tainted with sin and whether an individual is guilty for having a sinful nature or is responsible only for those actual sins resulting from one's volitional and intellectual abilities. These hamartiological questions can be resolved in terms of relationality.<sup>68</sup> But knowledge from evolutionary biology aids in re-defining original sin in terms of this relationality. Theologians today<sup>69</sup> are attempting to engage 21<sup>st</sup> century science to integrate it into a reformed theological anthropology just as Augustine tried to do with the 5<sup>th</sup> century science.<sup>70</sup>

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Romans and Timothy, Tennant notes that the primary ideas for Paul's perception come from the Jewish pseudepigraphic writings and that the claim for an infallible guarantee for the truth of his teaching borrowed from such sources is not proven. He asks, "Are we to regard as inspired, or, as I would prefer to say, beyond question, every element of doctrine which he derived from the literature of his time? Again, inspiration must be defined in terms of ascertained facts, not facts ascertained by the assumption of perhaps much too full and definite a meaning for inspiration".

<sup>68</sup> Shults, 2003, p.191.

<sup>69</sup> van Huyssteen, J.W. 1998. *Duet or Duel? Theology and Science in a Postmodern World*. Trinity Press International: Harrisburg; Miller, K. 1999. *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. HarperCollins: New York; Rue, L. and E. O. Wilson. 2000. *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution*. SUNY Press: Albany; Korsmeyer, J. 1998. *Evolution and Eden*. Paulist Press: New York; Peacocke, A. 1993. *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming – Natural, Divine, and Human*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis. Ayala, F. 1998. "Human Nature: One Evolutionist's View" in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (eds. W. S. Brown et. al.) Fortress Press: Minneapolis, p. 35-36; Williams, P. A. 2001. *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

<sup>70</sup> Those with a "plain-sense" *sola scriptura* reading still insist on using medieval and 5<sup>th</sup> century science to inform their views. They are doing irresponsible theology that leads others to reject "the [scriptures] in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason". This is from Augustine's famous quote is *Literal meaning of Genesis* I.19, 43. Giving science a primacy in interpreting Scripture allows us to convert others to the more important matters of the Gospel, especially when that knowledge of how the physical world works (science) is widely

### A. Recent Discoveries of Human Nature and Behavioral Biology

Integrating the evolutionary account supports the moderate OS/PS where 'original sin' results in our acting at the detriment of others. This propensity is 'inherited' as a result of the evolutionary process that rewarded those who could *maximize reproductive success* (a 'scientific' way of saying the poetic 'be fruitful and multiply').<sup>71</sup> Self-preserving animalistic urges enabled proliferation at a cost to others. Yet this same process eventually produced 'wise' humans (*Homo sapiens*) complete with their propensity for moral good.<sup>72</sup> Evolutionary law, upheld by God's constancy, culminates in a moral agent with an identity . . . an identity that results in human praxis in contrast and in concert with that of other creatures. Our desires tend toward *ideals* of behavior in contrast with mere survival. These behaviors have "an ambiguous orientation toward

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accepted by authorities who know how the world works in the light of reason. Today, the light of reason is being worked out in the theory of evolution, which, as Pope John Paul II says, is "more than a hypothesis".

<sup>71</sup> See Donald H. Wacome. 2003. "Evolutionary Psychology" in *Science and the Soul* (ed. Scott Vander Stoep, Univ Press of America:New York). Also see Margaret Miles. 2005. "Sex and the City (of God): Is Sex Forfeited or Fulfilled in Augustine's Resurrection of Body?" *Journal American Academy of Religion*. 73:307-327. Dawkins may have provided theologians an unintended favor by postulating 'selfish genes' to revive original sin in this sense. But to think of it as a *seminal transmission of guilt* from a couple who violated a dietary restriction, as Augustine did, is unnecessary with today's modern understandings.

<sup>72</sup> See David S. Wilson. 2003. *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society*. University Of Chicago Press: Chicago and Richard Dawkins. 1979. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Moral good arising as a result of cooperation may seem at odds with survival in a competitive world; however, these (and other) proposals support its materialistic occurrence without compromising Darwinian explanations. These two authors would call for us to overcome our genetic heritage of selfish genes in a plea that borders on substance dualism, a call for mind over matter. This is an odd development for reductionists, but at least they recognize the naturalistic fallacy. Humans have the ability to idealize ways of behavior that cause them to revolt against their 'selfish' genetic heritage; it seems that these authors give little thought to whether this ability to idealize the good is a genetic propensity, an emergent quality, or intended by a divine agent who upholds laws of nature in hopes that such will arise.

desiring and doing what is right . . . to long for goodness, to desire to secure one's relation to objects that are loved".<sup>73</sup> So, we have the genetic programming that gives us the propensity for self-survival which in itself is not sin until we become aware of the law that convicts us that these propensities are sinful. But we also have a brain architecture which, derived from that same set of selective processes, is capable of idealizing behavior which drives us to actions of extreme self-sacrifice. Original sin as a propensity for sin (OS/PS) seems much more reasonable given this understanding.

### **B. Original sin rethought: assimilating evolution in Christian theology**

Adopting an allegorical view of the fall and human nature's proclivity toward sin, we see the story of Adam and Eve as a metaphor representing all of human-kind and the tree of knowledge of good and evil as representing the dawning of conscience and awareness of death. Therefore, the message of the incarnation and Christ's resurrection is not harmed. Instead, rejecting the Paradise Lost view of the Genesis story allows us to see it as symbolic of the universal human experience of being alienated from a perfection to be grasped sometime in evolutionary, and eschatological, future.<sup>74</sup> This

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<sup>73</sup> Shults 2003, p. 191. Shults calls this ambiguous relation to goodness and to the objects of love 'ethical anxiety.' One recognizes the need for self-preservation, but the need to do the right thing for the object of concern occasionally overrides the primal need for survival. Humans sometimes act in self-destructive ways in order to achieve an ideal of behavior that some see as a greater common good.

<sup>74</sup> Today, we might claim "Adam" is a representation of a hominid population that evolved in an environment of evolutionary adaptiveness where genes for maximizing proliferation occurred. Such a struggle would produce selfish individuals in order to survive the vagaries of such environments. Later, as consciousness developed and with it a conception of death, awareness of selfish behavior was recognized as such once group living became more pronounced. The concupiscence of Augustine is replaced by the 'selfish' genes of Dawkins. Such genes for survival are passed on genetically (perhaps analogous to the ancient term, *seminally*) from that original 'Adamic' population. But they carry no guilt. Thus, a developmental process was used evolutionarily to derive the conscience of the human mind. That conscience and the ability to imagine ourselves outside of our own bodies and 'observing' ourselves is what one might call

alienation happens to each of us developmentally as we become aware of our own death.<sup>75</sup> The eating of the fruit was not the entry of evil (qua death and pain) into Paradise; instead, it was our awareness of what always existed. Paradise Lost occurs for each of us when awareness of our own mortality occurs, our innocence is destroyed. Ignorance of death is indeed a blissful paradise. Every child as she becomes aware of death reenacts that dawning of consciousness in human evolution.

But original sin is also a systematic turning away from any hope that God provides.<sup>76</sup> Either we strive to attain immortality on our own by becoming God (perhaps by acquiring knowledge rather than wisdom) or we seek to overcome mortality by behaving as animals, involved only in satisfying our sensual selves.<sup>77</sup> Haught feels “it is theologically inappropriate to identify original sin simply with the instincts of aggression or selfishness that we may have inherited from our

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‘soul.’ In a sense, we see a singular resurrection of this thinking in Dawkins’ claim that our frontal lobe conscience is capable of ‘rebellious’ against our ‘selfish’ genes. The Christian would add that such a rebellion is possible only through the grace of Christ who demonstrated how such resistance could be accomplished: through denial of self-preserving action.

<sup>75</sup> See Allen R. Dyer. *The Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Keynote Address of the Royal Australia New Zealand Congress of Psychiatry; Hobart, Tasmania. May 14, 2003.

[http://faculty.etsu.edu/dyer/lectures/Knowledge\\_of\\_Good\\_and\\_Evil/knowledge\\_of\\_good\\_and\\_evil.htm](http://faculty.etsu.edu/dyer/lectures/Knowledge_of_Good_and_Evil/knowledge_of_good_and_evil.htm). He writes, “Adam and Eve . . . are symbolic of the developmental path of Everyman and Everywoman, every boy and girl. The Fall . . . represents [what] every child must experience when it becomes aware that it must leave the Eden of primary narcissism, the bliss of being the center of the parents’ world . . . where their every need is met . . . a time in development and in history when things were different, better, more idealized, and then cast this story as a universal event in human experience”.

<sup>76</sup> John F. Haught. 1999. *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Westview Press: Boulder, CO. p.138.

<sup>77</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr. 1941, *Nature and Destiny of Man: Vol 1 Human Nature*. Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York. In Niebuhr’s Gifford Lecture of 1939 he pointed out our need to accumulate goods, have multiple sexual exploits, consume too much food, and compete with others for selfish desires as our conscious or sub-conscious effort to cheat death: a hope of maximizing survival and reproduction.

nonhuman evolutionary ancestry”.<sup>78</sup> We must develop a sense of the “ideal” way to act. Original sin is transformed into “. . . the fact that each of us is born into a world where the accumulated effects of despair and sin have diminished and destroyed what is good and have restricted what is possible”.<sup>79</sup> The Christian plan is to provide a savior who once-and-for-all (*ephapax*) rids us of the need for continual expiation either in sacrificial violence or in self-abhorring penance (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:2, 10:10, 1 Peter 3:18, Romans 6:10). Within the Christian plan the Darwinian perspective places paradise realized in the eschatological future as a result of a co-suffering God who draws all things toward Him and in a Creation that “. . . waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:19)”<sup>80</sup>

The entire process, as we evolved from hominoid to hominid and eventually to a *Homo* with a conscience (*H. sapiens*), gradually attained a moral status to sanction as wrong what were once non-moral behaviors for survival and reproductive success. Our first definition of what was wrongful behavior (e.g. sin), were those behaviors that allowed only a few to flourish while causing harm to the group as a whole. As moral sensibility continued to emerge, passing from

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<sup>78</sup> Haight, 139-140. Modern writers like Haight point out that the Garden of Eden is an idealized dream-world. He represents it as “metaphysics of the future . . . the enlivening new creation yet to come . . . the Absolute Future that seeks always to transform and renew the world”. By doing this, Haight renders “the notion of original sin completely compatible with evolutionary science [and] give[s] significance to cosmic evolution”. Ultimately, we trust God for immortality to accrue but we no longer have to regret paradise lost. Creation is not completed; it was never created ‘perfect’ in the sense of being without death and struggle. Therefore, it did not become ‘evil’ as a result of an original couple’s transgression. What we see as nature in travail is a cosmos still in the process of becoming as it is lured toward God and ultimate fulfillment in the eschaton.

<sup>79</sup> Haight, p. 143.

<sup>80</sup> Haight, p. 144. Haight states: “Setting the ancient hierarchy on its side, as it were, and introducing a processive leitmotiv into it, we can picture our emergent universe as being lured forward toward the transcendence of an indeterminate and inexhaustibly resourceful but never static future. The ‘ultimate’ dimension in this eschatologically restructured hierarchy remains hidden and unavailable, as before. But we may understand God, the Absolute Future, as the source of new being, that is, as the source of the destabilizing and always surprising ‘informational input’ that slips into each present”.

generation to generation via learning, an ethical ideal developed through an ever more refined 'social' heredity. Wrong behavior could now be defined as sin against an ideal – not just if it caused harm to the group. Finally, ideals of self-sacrificial behavior for the good of others developed. But these behaviors were so impossible to achieve that a rare practitioner, if any, could only be seen as possessing otherworldly abilities – such a being would transcend the human proclivity for self-survival. Such rare behaviors can only be understood as divinely derived. Historically, this transcendence only occurred in Christ Jesus.

In summary, humans rose from a lower form of existence, with the origin of sin centered in the conflict between animal impulse, and a developed conscience. Original human nature – the nature we had as we were emerging into a sapient species and the nature the baby possesses at birth – is without conscience; we rose to the status of a moral subject once conscience developed. We 'fell forward' when we first became aware of the conflict of freedom and conscience. We have inherited animal biases for behaviors that existed before the emergence of conscience and knowledge of moral law. With the acquisition of conscience, we can conceptualize ideals of behavior (the image of God). With Tennant's perspective, the illuminative force of evolutionary theory maintains the heart of original sin (in the sense of OS/PS). Yet, we do so in such a way that all humanity must still seek out the saving grace of Jesus Christ in order to share in this righteous ideal. By doing this, we remain in relationship with the Church and minister to the world to share in bringing the whole cosmos into Divine Oneness with the Creator within the context of an eschatological future.

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