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# Traducianism? Creationism? What Has An Ancient Debate To Do With The Modern Debate over Abortion?

*Ted Nelson*

The goal of this project is to explore the debates within the church fathers to get a better understanding of a conflict that still plagues us today, namely, the debate over whether or not abortion should be allowed, whether it constitutes murder of a person. How do we determine when someone becomes a living soul -- at conception? with the third trimester? at birth? The reason it is important to go to the church fathers is because much of this battle has been waged in the name of religion and as an expression of Church/Christian doctrine and morality. A survey of important Church fathers suggests that the history of the doctrines regarding the nature of humanity is more complex than usually assumed. The focus of this research is on George Williams' *Religious Residues and Presuppositions In The American Debate On Abortion*, to supplement my own conclusions on the understanding of abortion today.

Despite the Supreme Court's establishment of the constitutionality of a woman's right to choose abortion (at least before the third trimester of pregnancy) in *Roe v. Wade*, and despite the principle of the separation of church and state, the battle between Pro-Choice and Pro-Life has continued to this day principally in state legislatures and the courts. Opponents of *Roe v. Wade* have sought to limit its effect by limiting access to abortion providers and by defining personhood as being confirmed at increasingly earlier stages of pregnancy, back to conception, and limiting access to birth control. These issues are usually connected by religious people as expressions of Christian thought and tradition. In the past, there was no separation of the political and the religious spheres in Christendom and therefore political agendas were heavily influenced by the religious standards in which they operated. Although in our system the church and state are separated and a secular understanding of the world influences the current political times, the political conflict over abortion and conception have become a battle between religion and irreligion.

Because religion, and especially claims of Christian authority, fuel the controversies over abortion and conception, it is well to look back over the Christian tradition to understand the theological discussions regarding the origin of the human soul – that is, when does human personhood begin and when does the death

of the biological organism constitute murder that must be prohibited and punished by the state?

In this work, I will focus on Early and Medieval Church Fathers whose influence has marked the development of church doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I will first introduce Origen's conceptions of the pre-existence of the soul because he was the most important of the third century theologians, and he set the stage for the debate. Then I will turn to the two principal traditions regarding the origin of the soul, namely, Creationism-- often spelled Creatianism to distinguish this perspective from that opposed to Evolution and which teaches that each human soul is a creation of God-- and Traducianism-- which teaches that each person inherits the human soul from his or her parents at conception. While the history of Christian thought has not (and cannot) settle the dispute over these issues, current Christian opposition to abortion and birth control seems predicated on the assumption that the Christian position is Traducianism.

### **Pre-existence**

Origen was a Christian theologian born in Alexandria, Egypt in 184/5 C.E. and the dominant philosopher/theologian in the Third Century. During his lifetime, Origen proposed creative theologies regarding the nature of God and the nature of Christ, and one of his most distinctive and controversial notions concerned the origin of the human soul and how this related to humankind's redemption. One of his first theories is the idea of pre-existence.<sup>2</sup> Pre-existence is the notion that all human souls exist before conception and then the soul enters or God places it into the body prior to birth. The significance of this action is that the soul is never created by God, but seems to have always existed and is co-eternal with God. Origen's position at the beginning of the early church gave him considerable influence, and many agreed with his assessment of the soul. Such followers were usually of Eastern theological tendencies as Origen's pre-existence ties in with concepts of "transmigration of the soul" or as many refer to it as "reincarnation." The idea is that the finite number of souls that are co-eternal with God return to the existence outside the body until their return to the body.

Origen draws inspiration from Romans 9:11-14, "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have

1 I find a great deal of direction in this regard from George Hunston Williams, "Religious Residues and Presuppositions in the American Debate On Abortion," *Theological Studies* (1968): 10-75.

2 Williams, 14.

I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."<sup>3</sup> This concept of having ill will or favor towards a being not yet born influences Origen's idea that God knows the inclination of the soul, because the soul already exists before the individual is born. Origen also uses Jeremiah as further proof of his claim: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."<sup>4</sup> Origen interprets this passage as an understanding that, in the soul's interaction with God, God knows individuals before they are born and knows the path they will follow in life. Such an understanding also influences the "transmigration of souls", because it can be understood that the actions of a previous life-experience is another indicator of God knowing them before they are born.<sup>5</sup>

In later years after Origen's life, many attributed to him the concept of *apokatastesis*, or Universal Reconciliation. The concept of universal reconciliation is that in the end through God's grace and mercy, all souls will find salvation.<sup>6</sup> This universalism seems to stand in opposition to Christian particularism – that not all are redeemed through Christ – and to Christian teaching about Hell-- if all are to be reconciled why is there a hell, and what does one's life choices and acceptance of God have to do with it. The reason that Origen expresses positive attention towards Universal Reconciliation is because of his understanding that human souls have always already existed: it only makes sense that the souls would return to their original state of being co-eternal with God. Origen's association of his ideas about the human soul and his understanding of salvation is crucial to the debate on the origin of the human soul because, in later years, the two concepts become interdependent and the more pressing debate over salvation leads Church fathers to commit to a particular understanding of the human soul.

Origen's theologies were greatly influential after his death, but as more theologians were pressed to define Imperial orthodoxy, councils formed to decide what was truth and what was heretical. While Origen's theological genius remained important in the early church, some of his theories were declared heretical at the Second Council of Constantinople (553 C.E.). While the condemnation of Origen's theologies on the pre-existence of the human soul occurred long after his life, other Church fathers had to address the question of the origin of the human soul. Despite the fact that the Church collectively agreed to abandon and even condemn Origen's theologies on the human soul, his influence had a far more

3 William Hunter, "Milton on the Incarnation: Some More Heresies", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21, No. 3 (1960): 352.

4 Jeremiah 1:5.

5 L.D. Arnet, "The Soul: A Study of Past and Present Beliefs," *The American Journal of Psychology*, 15, No. 2 (1904): 142.

6 Ferdinand Prat, "Origen and Origenism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Com., 1922): 128.

reaching effect. His explanation of the pre-existence of human souls created a counter argument that began the debate within the church about where human souls originate and when they are placed within the body. The two principal alternative views to Origen's pre-existence are "Traducianism" and "Creationism."

### **Creationism**

Simply defined, Creationism is the belief that God creates a soul for each body that is created. Before a modern implication of debate over abortion and conception can be fully understood, the roots of this belief must first be explored. Creationism is a response to two other theories, the first being Origen's understanding of pre-existence, and the other being traducianism. For the sake of understanding creationism it is helpful to recall the teaching of Traducianism, that is, the belief that the human soul is propagated through human procreation and that the soul is generated in the fetus just as the body is generated.

Supporters of creationism have shifted over time as new arguments are made for and against it. Many of the supporters of creationism originated within Eastern Christianity and supporters of traducianism dominated in the Western Church. The debate between the two is intensified by different worldviews or perspectives of Eastern and Western Church and the growing tensions between Western and Eastern Christianity. For example, the council of Nicaea intensified these tensions with the addition of the filioque statement. The Eastern Fathers tended to teach that God was the sole creator and origin of everything, including both the Son and the Holy Spirit. This meant that only the Holy Spirit could "proceed" from God. By contrast, the Western fathers taught that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father "and Son"—filioque. What was true regarding the Trinity-- according to Eastern Fathers, that all things (including Son and Holy Spirit) proceeded from God the Father-- helped predispose Eastern theologians to the understandings of creationism (that the human soul likewise came from a creative act of God). Having God be the sole creator of everything would imply that the creation of souls falls under that same blanket statement. This debate regarding the Trinity helps us to understand why many of the Eastern Church fathers wrote in support of creationism.

However, at the time of the great theological disputes and the Ecumenical Councils of the Fourth Century the Western and Eastern churches were not yet divided on the issues of Creationism and Traducianism. Some of creationism's greatest advocates were the leading Western fathers.

The majority of the Greek Fathers taught creationism as a whole and one of the most important fathers of the Western Church himself emerged from the East-

ern Church and schooling. St. Jerome was born in 347 C.E. in the eastern region of the Balkans and lived and studied variously in Rome, Gaul (France), Antioch (Syria), Constantinople (the Imperial Seat in the East) and Alexandria (Egypt, the center of Eastern thinking). Jerome died in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, a center of Eastern thought. That is, his life-thought was informed by both Western and Eastern influences having lived in both halves of the Empire. While acknowledged by both wings of the Church as a leading scholar and theologian, however, he is usually considered a principal Father of the Western Church, having translated the Bible into Latin, giving Roman Catholicism its authoritative Vulgate Bible. Jerome is considered a saint both in the Roman Catholic Church as well as in Eastern Orthodoxy.

Jerome was very close to the other and greatest father of the Western Church in Late Antiquity, St. Augustine of Hippo. The two would often discuss different elements of doctrine in regards to what was being considered heretical and orthodox. Jerome's advocacy for creationism stems from his discussions with Augustine and one such instance can be found in the letter that Augustine sent to Jerome titled, "A Treatise on the Origin of the Human Soul." At one point Augustine makes mention of Jerome's belief when he states accordingly, "To avoid prolixity, therefore, let me refer to the opinion which you, I believe entertain, viz. that God even now makes each soul for each individual at the time of birth."<sup>7</sup> Later in the letter, Augustine makes note of all three theories on the origins of the soul and proceeds to speak to the implications that each theory would have when dealing with infancy and pre-infancy death. It seems that Augustine is wrestling with what happens to the soul of a fetus if it dies before birth, if it already has inherited one from the parents at conception. His thoughts in the letter point to the fact that he may be trying to reconcile traducianism and creationism with one another because in a consistent traducianism these "little ones," with souls inherited from parents but without conscious will have no opportunity to follow the grace of Christ and will then be subjected to an even greater suffering and torment.<sup>8</sup> The conclusion, which Augustine reaches in the letter, is the admission that he is ignorant of the complexities of the workings of God and that if they are to adhere to the Holy Church it would mean that these infants are doomed to suffer. However, he also recognizes that the Scripture talks of the body returning to the earth when it dies, and he uses the same logic with the spirit. If the spirit dies it is not able to return to Adam, if that is where it originates, but must return to its creator. Augustine puts

7 Augustine, "Letter CLXVI.4.8: 'A Treatise on the Origin of the Human Soul,'" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff, Series I (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 525.

8 Augustine, "Letter CLXVI.4.10".

this question to Jerome. While Jerome's response cannot be inferred from this letter, it is clear that Jerome maintained his path towards creationism and believed that a new soul is given to the body because it allows for the understanding that if an infant dies before birth it is not condemned to suffer in separation from God because one cannot know when the soul is affixed to the body. Also, Augustine recognizes that in the passage from Genesis about God resting on the seventh day, one understands that God has already created everything that there will be. In other words, by creating birds, plants and animals everything that already exists is used. The same logic is used for humans because after creating Adam and Eve, God had created the material in which to create such creatures, thus new humans are made through procreation. If the human soul is created new for each body it is being created from the essence of God because it is in his image. The affixing of a "new" soul to the body can be described as a sort of baptism, and this doctrine might help to quell the fears of those who fear that children not yet born suffer for something for which they are not culpable.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear, then, from an analysis of this correspondence with Jerome, that Augustine was another proponent of creationism, but was less settled in his thought than Jerome. Augustine constantly struggled with the issue. In his early years, Augustine was a supporter of creationism because it went along with his understanding of the nature of the body and the Fall of Adam and Eve. In *Letter 137*, Augustine introduces for the first time the possibility and a new terminology to explain the combination of the soul with the body. "This mixture is now, mysteriously, a persona."<sup>10</sup> The notion of the body and soul being a mix of two things to make something different was a new take on the understanding of human origins because many focused on the hierarchies placed in nature: man over nature, God over man, mind over body. However, Augustine still maintains the notion that just as God rules over us, the soul rules over the body. The important distinction to remember is that the two are now one, but it is the soul that maintains authority. In relation to the Fall of Adam and Eve, this is very important to Augustine's understanding of creationism. Augustine sees Adam and Eve as existing in the Garden of Eden with spiritual bodies and these bodies are made of 'matter.' At this point in the Genesis narrative, according to Augustine's understanding, Adam and Eve are both spiritual beings made of matter, but this matter is not flesh. Augustine believes that initially Adam and Eve were not meant to procreate physically, because they were not of flesh. Only when Adam and Eve fell from grace did their bodies

<sup>9</sup> John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 100.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Letter LXXXVII.3.11*.

ceased to be spiritual bodies and took on those of flesh.<sup>11</sup>

By combining these two teachings of Augustine, one begins to understand the implications they have on Augustine's view of creationism. Adam and Eve becoming of flesh after the Fall expresses the inherent perversion that flesh has. By having a soul that is mixed with this flesh, the soul is now culpable of the Sin that Adam and Eve committed. This is explained as due to the fact that the soul (an immaterial substance) mixed with the body (a material substance) is now one in perversion. However, it is through this same connection that Christ's death and resurrection is able to recapture both the soul and the body because the soul rules the body. In Augustine's first understanding of this connection he believed that humans return to a state of spiritual, non-flesh substance, like Adam and Eve in the garden, and comes to the conclusion that the flesh itself will become spiritual. The distinction here is not that the earthly body goes with the soul, but the connection that the soul has with the body on earth will be realized in a spiritual body made of flesh in heaven, while the worldly one returns to the earth.

The implications that this has on Augustine's view of creationism are found in his response to another Church Father's view on traducianism. Tertullian formulated the classic statement of traducianism. Tertullian argues that the soul is corporeal.<sup>12</sup> It is on these grounds that Augustine separates himself from traducianism. However, Augustine has declared his ignorance on the overall subject of the human soul in regards to its origin, and thus when we observe his views of creationism, they are not uninfluenced by an initial rejection of traducianism. Augustine's beliefs focus on the dichotomy and union of the soul and body. For Augustine, because the soul is of an immaterial substance, there is no way that the soul can be generated from person to person through procreation, i.e., material processes. Instead, Augustine focuses his attention on the propagation of the body through procreation. The body of flesh is the form of the fallen Adam and Eve and is derivative of them as well. Augustine's creationism is influenced by traducianism because it still expresses the same notion that everyone was created within Adam and Eve, but maintains that God creates the soul. The issue still faced Augustine, on which he was not able to arrive at a conclusion, that is, what is the divine character of the fetus at any given stage in gestation.<sup>13</sup> Augustine maintained his views on creationism for the most part, but eventually, later in life he gravitated toward traducianism in response to Pelagianism.

Although by the 5th and 6th centuries traducianism began to dominate think-

<sup>11</sup> On the implications Augustine draws from the doctrine of Original Sin and the Creation of Adam and Eve, see Williams, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

ing on this issue in the Western church, creationism remained a viable doctrine for the Western church and was reformulated for the High and Late Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> The creator of this revision of creationism was St. Thomas Aquinas, the single most important theologian of the Roman Catholic tradition. Aquinas was born around 1225 C.E. in the Kingdom of Sicily, and focused most of his energies on natural law and theology. Aquinas uses his accumulated knowledge of natural law to weigh in on the centuries-old debate between traducianism and creationism.<sup>15</sup>

First, Aquinas focused much of his attention on the relative position of male and female in regards to natural law. According to George Huntston Williams of Harvard University, "Aquinas worked two Aristotelian postulates into what would be the normative Latin Catholic theological position, one concerning the pre-eminence of the male sperm and the other related to the epigenetical theory and the delayed infusion of the rational soul..."<sup>16</sup> Aquinas adapted Aristotle's hylomorphic doctrine of generation and corruption. Hylomorphism is a theory that conceives that substance is a compound of matter and form. In this case it is dealing with the soul's relation to the body. Aquinas' version of the theory breaks the soul into three distinct parts: the nutritive, the sensitive, and the intellectual. In this, along with Aquinas' modification of Aristotle's sire-centered theory of procreation, Aquinas is able to explain and support his reasoning for creationism.<sup>17</sup>

The idea behind the sire-centered theory is that the male is temperamentally active and the female passive in coition. Therefore, the sperm is the active principle but the female produces the fetal matter. At this point you have the fetal matter (ovum), which is already providing the nutritive piece and you have the sperm that combines with the already present sensitive piece within both the sperm and the fetal matter. It is at the moment of coition that the semen of the male transmutes the fetal matter into the sensitive piece of the soul. However, Aquinas explains that the rational or the intellectual piece is a thing immaterial and that it is impossible for the seminal power to create like it did with the nutritive and the sensitive. Thus, the immaterial of the intellectual soul can only be given, fully forming the individual, through creation by God.<sup>18</sup>

Not unlike Augustine's formulation of creationism, Aquinas writes in response to Tertullian's traducianism. Aquinas states, "We must simply confess that intellectual souls were not created before bodies, but are created at the same time they are

14 *Ibid.*, 30.

15 Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 243.

16 Williams, 29.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 29-30.

infused into them.”<sup>19</sup> The problem that arises from this statement is there is no way of knowing when the intellectual soul is infused with the body and thus when it forms a living being. In other writings, Aquinas would often shy away from giving a real answer about the precise moment in fetal development that the intellectual soul is created-infused. Relative to the modern debate over abortion, Aquinas states that according to nature abortion is a misdeed because even animals look for progeny. However, Aquinas explains that “procuring temporary ‘sterility’” is not as heinous a crime as true homicide.<sup>20</sup>

In short, Creationism was the dominant teaching in Eastern Christianity and was held even by the most important fathers in the Western Catholic Church – Jerome, Aquinas, and for a time, Augustine. In time in the Western Church traducianism came to dominate, and we must turn to a consideration of its teaching. However, it is clear that the Christian tradition has not been uniform. It seems premature to claim, in the abortion and birth control debates, the entire tradition for one side of the issue.

### Traducianism

Traducianism, again, is the belief that both the soul and body are transmitted from Adam and Eve to all the following generations through coitus and procreation. At the time of the creation of Adam and Eve, God created the material for every soul. One way traducianism has been described is the idea that Adam, like the earth that he was created from, is the piece of clay from which all things will be made of. As each new being is created, it is like taking a piece of clay from the original and all the subsequent creation will be taken from the piece of the piece. The belief is that the clay (human beings) one sees today is an actual piece of the original.<sup>21</sup> The distinction that is made to explain individuals is that every piece that has come from the original clay is shaped into some clay object, whether that is a bowl or a cup. The metaphor is only used to explain the concept that it is both the body and soul that is propagated from parent to the child. The reason for traducianism’s overall popularity is because it fit into what was known about human procreation: both parents had the material to create a new human being, and so why wouldn’t the soul also be included in that material?

Tertullian was the first Christian to formulate the concept of traducianism in Christianity. The original concepts are from the Stoic understanding of an ethereally corporeal soul and the Aristotelian concept of the interpenetration of the body

19 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, q. 118, a. 3, quoted in Williams, 30.

20 Aquinas in his *Commentary on Peter Lombard’s Sentences*, 4, d. 31, q. 2 a. 3, quoted in Williams, 31.

21 Oliver Crisp, “Pulling Traducianism out of the Shed”, *Ars Disputandi* 6 (2006): 3.

(by the soul) as the form.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is found in Tertullian's *De anima* 27.<sup>23</sup> Tertullian was born in 160a.c in Carthage, the major African city in the Western Roman Empire, and he is considered to be a first father of the Western church. He was one of the first Latin writers for the church and due to his early influence; his conservatism affected the Church's position. Tertullian's role in introducing traducianism to Christianity came in a direct response to the doctrine of pre-existent souls that was being propounded by the Gnostic Valentinians. Tertullian went as far as to steal one of the terms that the Gnostics used and adapted it into his own understanding. Tertullian used the term *tradux animae*<sup>24</sup> to explain that the male semen was the "traductor" of the bodily, psychic, and spiritual substance of Adam. Essentially, the sperm has the ability to clone and translate the substance of Adam through procreation. It is also through this procreation and translation of Adam's substance that Tertullian opposes the Gnostic understanding of pre-mundane existence of souls, because at the moment of conception the body, soul, spirit and sex of the individual is determined.<sup>25</sup> Tertullian realized that such claims eliminated any opportunity for God to directly create individuals, and responded with the claim that God, in his creation of Adam and Eve, made sure that all human beings were thusly fashioned. Tertullian states that, "It is left to the angels to officiate for God in every new conception."<sup>26</sup>

The largest difference that traducianism faces when compared to creationism is the concept of the soul. It is creationism's belief that an immaterial soul is conjoined with the physical body inherited from the parents in a new creative act of God. By contrast, traducianism holds firmly to the view that when God created Adam and Eve God created everything in them including the ability to create new beings. Tertullian allows that there are two types of male seed, one attributed to the body and the other to the soul, but he declares that the two are inseparable. Therefore, it is through the Breath of God given to Adam and carried in his loins that the human soul and the body simultaneously originate in each conception.<sup>27</sup>

Tertullian's traducianism was the gateway into an understanding of the origin of the human soul and an understanding with which, for many reasons, many aligned themselves. However, Tertullian was a very early teacher in church history and as such, traducianism has been modified and changed through the course of time.

22 Williams, 15.

23 Ibid.

24 The term "traducianism" derived from the Stoic notion of *traducem animae*. Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 25 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 3, ed. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 515.

25 Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*. chap 3.1 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 183

26 Ibid.

27 Williams, 25.

The majority of Tertullian's theories on human origins were formulated largely out of interest in human nature, "the unity of the race and for the integrity of each individual, body and soul..."<sup>28</sup> but one aspect that Tertullian did not consider in formulation the doctrine of traducianism is the concept of "Original Sin." It is with this subject that Augustine struggled the most because he was not able to reconcile the consequences of original sin with traducianism's belief that the soul enters the body at conception. But Augustine's insistence on original sin in his debate with Pelagius, an educated Briton active in Rome c. 383-410, led to his eventual acceptance of traducianism in his own way, focusing on how to reconcile the fact of infancy death.<sup>29</sup>

Pelagius taught that the human soul is not tainted by original sin and that each individual has the ability to choose good or evil without divine aid. Augustine vehemently opposes this point of view, for him, it seemed to make humans the author of their own salvation and not dependent upon the Grace of God, and so he bases his formulations of original sin upon opposition to Pelagianism. Augustine led the Church to condemn, at least initially, Pelagianism as heretical because it deemed Jesus as "a good example" and did not attribute to Jesus the divine qualities deemed necessary for the salvation of fallen humanity that the council of Nicea made orthodox. For Pelagians, Adam and Eve's sin was a bad example. Therefore, all sin attributed to Adam and Eve was theirs alone and not passed generation to generation. In Augustine's affirmation of the deity of Christ and his divine origin, he argues that the situation of man prior to Christ's resurrection left human kind in a state that was hopeless because of the inherited sin of Adam and Eve. However, since Christ was of God he was untainted by original sin and died for those who were. Due to the resurrected nature of Christ, any who were baptized in Christ's name also inherited this nature. The importance here is that in affirming the reality of original sin Augustine also affirms the divinity of Christ. If original sin is passed unto each individual after Adam and Eve, necessitating a salvation possible only through Christ, it means that there needs to be a transfer of the soul from the parents to the offspring. As Tertullian suggests, the soul is a corporeal substance that can do just that.

For over a thousand years traducianism and creationism maintained a debate that considered the preferable teaching on the origin of the human soul and the correlation this had to the understanding of original sin. Eventually, in 1483-1546, Martin Luther reaffirms Augustinianism, offering his own interpretations that even-

28 Williams, 24.

29 John Cohen, "Original Sin as the Evil Inclination. A Polemicalist's Appreciation of Human Nature," *Harvard Theological Review* 73, no. 1 (1980), 498.

tually lead to the creation of Lutheranism. In Luther's affirmation of traducianism he restates the notion that the soul is 'sire-centered' due to his instruction in the Catholic Church. Of course, both Luther and Aquinas share this view of 'sire-centered,' but unlike Aquinas, Luther employs the notion in support of traducianism. He reasoned that the rational soul is latent within the seed of the father and that with this seed the father does not create, but generates the child. This seed was placed in Adam and it proceeds into all men, and thus Adam's sin taints the seed that is within all men. The idea is that the seed is then conceived in sin. What it generates is both a sinful body and sinful soul and this is how original sin is perpetuated throughout the human race.<sup>30</sup>

The relation between Luther's interpretation and Augustine's move towards traducianism expresses the importance of understanding original sin. For Augustine, the implications of original sin were more prevalent because he was alive during the time that the divinity of Christ was being argued. The deity of Christ was affirmed because without it the human nature, tainted by sin resident in the souls inherited from Adam and Eve, would make salvation impossible. In short, Augustine's insistence on the reality of original sin and opposition to Pelagianism leads him to abandon his original creationism and side with traducianism because if the soul were created without traduction, then the soul would be guilty without any guilt. For Augustine, if God is the creator of the soul (which without Christ is doomed to sin) then God is in fact the author of sin. Thus in his convictions regarding original sin, Augustine noncommittally affirms aspects of traducianism that Martin Luther uses later to affirm his 'sire-centered' interpretation.

## Reflection

Now, many centuries after the origin of human soul was first debated, the arguments continue to rage as to whether or not abortion should be legalized, and whether or not birth control should be encouraged. Today there are two sides: The Pro-Life position which sees abortion as murder of a human soul and should be prosecuted under the same laws as those regarding normal homicide and the Pro-Choice position which regards the full humanity of the fetus to be uncertain, especially in comparison to the full value and well-being of the mother.

The pro-life insistence that the fetus is a human soul from the time of conception is consistent with Traducianism, namely that the soul is inherited from the first parents through coitus and pro-creation. The "pro-choice" position may regard abortion as a tragedy to be avoided, especially in the third trimester, and never the

<sup>30</sup> Williams, 34.

most desirable response to an unwanted pregnancy, but its advocates are less certain that the fetus is a human soul (who would be murdered in an abortion) from the moment of conception, a view consistent with ancient Creationism. However, abortion of a fetus would be an unfortunate if not also wrongful interruption of the normal procreative process, it cannot with certainty be considered murder of a human soul and prosecuted as a homicide unless, as with traducianism, the soul is procreated with the body in conception.<sup>31</sup>

Today, the terms creationism and traducianism are seldom heard in conversation about the human soul, much less in debates over abortion. However obscure and complex the historical arguments over the origin of the soul, the church's debate over which of the two is preferable has greatly impacted the modern implications these terms have. The Pro-Life party, at least as articulated in the name of Christian tradition, could be considered a descendant of the traducian understanding.<sup>32</sup> Many Pro-Life supporters are found aligned with different churches and claim it is because of their religious values and Church tradition they believe abortion is homicide. This work's review of the Church's debate over the origin of the human soul suggests a greater diversity of opinion within the Christian church than is usually allowed and to come to a conclusion that Church tradition has always taught that abortion is the murder of a human person is too simplistic and partisan.

People who attend church and are active in their religion have very important questions to consider before aligning themselves with public opinions that their church declares are based on their doctrine. Focusing on the churches of the U.S., there is an overlap of religion and state, because the people who are active in their religions exist in two worlds: the church and society. The churches' decisions affect society, and based on public opinion, can influence the way that government and the country operate. The importance of this, in regards to understanding the political conflict over abortion, is to realize that the church's decisions are not only made for those who are in their parish, but will inevitably affect everyone in the society. Therefore, understanding the historical development of church traditions and how they come to influence current positions is vital, because religious leaders are seeking to decide for those who do not follow the same beliefs as they do. This leads to the extreme positions people take with Pro-Life and Pro-Choice, especially when it is dealing with the restriction of certain rights.

Both traducianism and creationism need to be understood in the modern world for there to be any conclusions on the direction that the church should take

31 Even Tertullian, the prototypical traducianist, made an exception to his opposition to abortion, if the mother's life was at stake. Williams, 25-26.

32 Williams, 10.

when facing the issue of abortion. Traducianism aligns itself easily with Pro-Life because as Tertullian and Martin Luther argue the soul is something that is transferred as material substance and is within the body at the moment of conception. We have seen that Luther seems to have simply inherited this position, which for him is supported by his perception of original sin. The other Church Father who was preoccupied with original sin was Augustine, and given his initial affirmation with Jerome of the Creationist view, it is instructive to see the role his passionate commitment to the doctrine of original sin played in his inclination later to support traducianism. But in this case we see how tangled are a number of issues leading to his traducian leanings – the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the fourth century, debates which the Church Fathers waged in theory out of concern to explain Christ’s role in human salvation, and Augustine’s perception that Pelagius’s insistence on free will and human freedom from an original taint of sin undermined the whole structure of Orthodox Christianity.

Whether or not contemporary religious leaders debating a national and political response to the availability of abortion and birth control recognize the ancient roots of some of their most passionately held positions, it is necessary to see that historically the Church has not spoken with one voice on the origins of the human soul. Traducianism, it is true, is more typical of Western Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) than it is of Eastern Christianity, and more dependent on its roots in Stoicism and Western definitions of sin and salvation than is Eastern Christianity<sup>33</sup>. But even here, two of its principal teachers, Jerome and Aquinas, were creationists and Augustine was, at best, a sort of reluctant proponent of traducianism.

While it would be naïve to expect parties to the debates over birth control and abortion to abandon deeply felt positions, an awareness of the history of Christian Thought should preclude the assumption that the whole tradition falls on one side of the debate. A Christian who aligns with the pro-choice position should not be made to feel that they have betrayed her faith. They may place high value on the humanity of the mother, as a soul precious to their God, while uncertain about the full humanity of the fertilized egg, the embryo, the early fetus, and they may therefore privilege the well-being of the mother over that of the fetus. And they may do so with the knowledge that many of the most important teachers of the Church throughout history would have been similarly uncertain. Before the Church may be said to speak with authority in its role as tutor to the society at large-- even assuming it has this authority-- it should acknowledge that in its own

33 And, as Williams points out, traducianism “was closest to what modern biologists would call the facts”. Williams, 16.

tradition it has been uncertain about its theological position on the origin and nature of the human soul. And arguments for or against the inheritance of the soul from the parents may have been long since abandoned (for example, the stoic notion of the materiality of the soul) while many of its conclusions remain common if unexamined. In the final analysis, while the Church must insist upon the value and dignity of the human soul and speak against its degradation in every context, perhaps greater generosity and humility is warranted and more allowance for the dignity and value of individual choice as an expression of that humanity.

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