

## An Interesting Aside: The Origin of the Soul

### Definitions:

**Traducianism**—The soul is propagated along with the body by natural generation. I.e., we received our souls from our parents.

**Creationism**—God creates each soul specially for the foetus *in utero*.

**(Pre-existentism)**—All souls existed in a previous state before birth, often coupled with the belief in a fall of humans in this spirit state before Adam in Eden. This is listed a note of historical interest. Origen [d. 254], who was the principal proponent of this view was anathematized in the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.)

### A Brief History

This question has been debated since the early church. Tertullian (d. c. 220) first proposed traducianism to explain the transmission of original sin (by inheritance). Traducianism became popular in the western regions of the Church (including northern Africa) but the eastern regions of the Church held to creationism. As noted, Origen held to the preëxistence of souls, but is not widely received outside of Alexandria. The Scholastics (1100-1500) all held creationism although some of the earlier Schoolmen viewed creationism as more probable but not certain. In the Reformation, Luther favoured traducianism, but Calvin espoused creationism. As covenant theology developed, the notion of inherited original sin was replaced with the concept of the federal headship of Adam acting on behalf of humanity in the covenant of works.

### Some Proponents of Each Position

#### *Traducians*

Tertullian d. 220  
Gregory of Nyssa d. 394  
Martin Luther d. 1546  
Jonathan Edwards d. 1758  
W. G. T. Shedd d. 1894  
A. H. Strong d. 1924  
Gordon Clark d. 1985

#### *Creationists*

Hilary of Picavium d. 368  
Jerome d.420  
Peter Lombard d. 1160  
Thomas Aquinas d. 1274  
John Calvin d. 1564  
Francis Turretin d. 1687  
Herman Bavinck d. 1921  
Louis Berkhof d. 1957  
Wayne Grudem b. 1948

### Scripture References

#### *Cited for traducianism*

#### **Genesis 2:2**

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

#### **Genesis 5:3**

When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

#### **John 1:13**

who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

#### **Acts 17:26**

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

#### **Romans 1:3**

concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

#### **Hebrews 7:9-10**

One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

#### *Cited for creationism*

#### **Numbers 16:22**

And they fell on their faces and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?"

#### **Ecclesiastes 12:7**

and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

#### **Isaiah 42:5**

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:

#### **Zechariah 12:1**

The burden of the word of the Lord concerning Israel: Thus declares the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him:

#### **Hebrews 12:9**

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

## A Brief Overview of the Debate

### *Arguments for traducianism:*

1. God largely ceased from his creative work after the creation week, now working ordinarily through secondary causes.
2. Explains of how original sin is transmitted without invoking God directly creating souls for evil.

### *Rebuttals against traducianism:*

1. Regeneration is a new creative process which does not depend on secondary causes
2. The imputation original sin does not require the inheritance model of transmillion.

### *Objections to traducianism:*

1. It is against the philosophical doctrine of the simplicity of the soul. To avoid arguing that the soul is divided from or a composite of the parents' souls, traducians sometimes propose *a.* the soul is potentially present in the seed of the man and/or the woman which is materialism or *b.* the soul is brought forth by the parents, which makes the parents creators in a sense.
2. Traducianism is usually believed together with a form of (Platonic) realism. This accounts for the original guilt via the numerical unity of man and the inheritance of original sin. However this cannot explain why men are only held responsible for the first sin of Adam and not his later sins or the sins of all their ancestors
3. Realism leads to problems with Christology. If human nature as a whole sinned in Adam (who at that time contained the whole of human nature) and this sin is the actual sin of every part of that human nature 'then the conclusion cannot be escaped that the human nature of Christ was also sinful and guilty because it had actually sinned in Adam.' (Berkhof)

### *Rebuttals to objections to traducianism:*

1. Simplicity properly belongs to God. Shedd argues by analogy that the lighting of a second candle by the first is similar to psychical propagation. *A.* the potentiality may be present *with* but not *in* the seed and *b.* in other aspects humans in some sense are creators working with existing materials to bring forth new things.
2. Realism is not a necessary component of traducianism but if one holds to it then it may be argued the sins of Adam and Eve before and after the fall are of a different type. Whereas before the fall sin was against the probationary statute, after they were transgressions of the moral law. Also the subsequent sins of men were not committed by the entire race in and with Adam; after propagation Adam was not the whole of the human race but only a fraction.
3. The sinless nature of Christ is not problematic if a miraculous conception is held. Shedd argues that 'So far, then, as the guilt of Adam's sin rested upon that unindividualized portion of the common fallen nature of Adam assumed by the Logos, it was expiated by the one sacrifice on Calvary. The human nature of Christ was prepared for the personal union with the Logos, by being justified, as well as sanctified.'

### *Arguments for creationism:*

1. It is more consistent with the Scriptural idea of the body being of the earth and the spirit being of God.
2. It preserves better the distinction of the immaterial nature of the soul.

### *Rebuttals against creationism:*

1. and 2. It is incorrect to associate propagation with materialism; it is not outside of God's power to propagate the spirit.

### *Objections to creationism:*

1. Creationism makes God the author of evil either *a.* directly by creating a soul with evil tendencies or *b.* by united a pure soul with a body with will inevitably corrupt it.
2. It makes the parents the progenitors of only the body of the child and limits the race of men to just the flesh. By contrast the animals reproduce after their kind. Creationism does not account for the observation that not just physical characteristics are inherited but personality traits and peculiarities which run in families, even when the parents do not raise their children.

### *Rebuttals to objections to creationism:*

1. While this is a difficult problem, however the creationist does not regard original sin entirely as a result of inheritance. 'The descendants of Adam are sinners, not as a result of their being brought into contact with a sinful body, but in virtue of the fact that God imputes to them the original disobedience of Adam. And it is for this reason that God withholds from them original righteousness, and the pollution of sin naturally follows.'
2. God can create souls adapted to particular situations or perhaps the union with the body influences the soul. Also we are not certain the extent of the role environment plays.

## Conclusion

The arguments on both sides of the debate are well-balanced and Scripture gives no clear support to either position. Perhaps Deuteronomy 29:29 speaks best to this discussion, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."