

Making Visions Available

Christian Teachings on Sin in Dialogue with Evolutionary Biology

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Abstract

Many Christian themes and thoughts are currently being enriched through dialogues with different sciences. The themes connected with the Christian doctrine of sin poses some interesting questions to theologians who wish to discuss human nature and human life with other academic disciplines. "Sin" as a concept has led a rather tumultuous life in the 20th century and its fate in the beginning of the 21st century seems to be much the same. "Sin", it seems, has been reduced to either a term used jokingly by us when we talk about indulging in some of the "forbidden pleasures" of modern life, food, sex and cigarettes for example. Or it has been reduced to a moralistic use within some religious communities, where the only function of the term is to separate the "good" from the "bad" and create borders between people and also potentially cause serious psychological damage related to abnormal feelings of guilt and shame.

But I think the concept of "sin" holds a much broader potential as a vision of human beings, their past, present and future. My claim is that sin is a complex term, which holds an equal complex view of human beings through its key component, which states that sin neither is the first nor the last word to be said about human beings.

This complex view of human nature can benefit from dialogue with other sciences concerned with understanding human nature. One of the most interesting and influential research on human nature in current times comes from evolutionary biology. In the development of evolutionary biology many questions concerning human nature have been asked, and these areas of questions have been widening their scope to areas connected to many other academic disciplines. Evolutionary biology's research opens up for discussions, which have been the concern of theologians for centuries; what are the basic forces at work in our lives? How does our past influence our present and our possibilities in the future? Are we as human beings free or are we bound by some more or less obvious boundaries? Is there a hope of transformation in the knowledge we have of human nature? What can we actually know about our lives and how can this knowledge be useful to us? How does the vision of human life we have in our philosophy affect the decisions we make in our lives?

My lecture will present the complex view of human beings entailed in Christian teachings on sin and set out some guidelines for how the anthropological vision in these teachings in Christian theology can go into a fruitful dialogue with modern evolutionary biology in a discussion of how we should understand human life, its origins, its present life and its hopes for the future.

Biography

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1 Introduction:

This paper will discuss how the Christian teachings on sin can work as a key to finding the anthropological visions of Christian theologies. Following this, I will briefly present the anthropological visions of evolutionary biology and end up discussing how an interdisciplinary dialogue can be fruitful in a common anthropological sphere. This will not in any way be a deep plunge into the theories of individual thinkers, instead it will be a journey through some important themes in the attempt to raise a discussion on the different anthropological visions available to us today.

1.1 Clarifying Key Concepts:

The following concepts are to be seen as helpful tools in understanding the perspectives on human beings presented by different academic disciplines.

First of all, what is meant by “anthropological vision”? In the context of my work I use this concept to describe the view or philosophy of human nature, which is inherent in any given theory or paradigm of theories. My claim is that in any discussion about human existence, there is an anthropological vision present, which entails the general anthropology of the theory and which provides a background for all the other statements provided. This anthropological vision entails a concept of the past, present and future of human beings and it represents the values and philosophical concepts present in the paradigm. This concept of “anthropological vision” is an important and fruitful tool in the inter-disciplinary dialogue on human existence, since it offers a common anthropological space, within which different disciplines can present their visions on equal ground.

The other key concepts of this paper are two aspects within anthropological visions; the universality and the totality of human existence. By “universality” I mean the notions in any theory, which deal with the universal aspects of human existence; those elements which describe what can be said of all of humanity and which discusses the common traits of the whole of human race. “Totality” presents the discussions concerning the individual’s place in this universal group called humankind. What do the different academic disciplines present as total perspective for the individual’s existence?

It is obvious that these two aspects are closely connected, since it is often a discussion of how the statements concerning the universal level are applied as a totality for the individual. But it is methodologically fruitful to keep them a part as two aspects of the anthropological vision, because it is exactly their cooperation as two aspects, which are at the heart of many discussions concerning the given anthropology of a theory.

These different concepts will be used throughout the paper. This paper will not be a traditional theological excursion into the doctrine of sin, but instead it will bring out some interesting themes from this doctrine.

2 The Doctrine of Sin:

The doctrine of sin contains anthropological statements; it has something profound to say about humanity, its past, present and future. When discussing the anthropological visions in theology, this is always at the same time visions about Gods relationship with humans.

Understanding what sin means has to do with understanding humanity in its relation to God; God is the origin, upholder and re-creator of humanity and of the world, which humanity lives in.

Understanding sin entails knowledge of this relationship and of the consequences this relationship has for humanity.¹

2.1 The Universality of Sin:

In Christian theology it is a basic claim, that sin is a universal force. At the same time it is always stressed that it is nothing in itself. Sin is the destruction of what is and the twisting of what was good from creation. It is universal, but it has not always been and will not always be.

Through the immense theological tradition of discussing sin, all possible elements have been thoroughly scrutinized and the teachings on sin we are faced with in the 21st century are highly complicated and diverse. But the universality of sin in this world until its total transformation by God is in many ways a common standpoint for all these diverse theologies of sin. Although of course, opinions differ on how this should be interpreted.

The architect behind one of the most profound and influential theologies of the universality of sin is of course Augustine.² His ideas on the universality of sin are formed within his concept of original sin, which has had an immense impact in western tradition. It has opened up for vast theological discussions. At the core of the teachings of original sin lies the understanding of sin as universal. Sin says something about the human condition universally.

Augustine stressed the universality of sin through his teachings on original sin in debate with two different anthropological statements of his time. First of all with the Manicheans, a Gnostic group, which Augustine was fascinated by in his earlier years. For the Manicheans, the world was not created good and all sin and evil in the world was due to an evil creator. Opposite this evil creator stands the power of light, and humanity is placed in the middle of this battle, with a soul of light trapped in a body of darkness. The goal is to escape this material world and join the

¹ On the subject of the doctrine of sin, I recommend Gestrich, Christoph 1997. *The Return of Splendor – The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

² For this short overview I have primarily used Brown, Peter, 1967. *Augustine of Hippo*, London; Faber and Faber.

power of light. The anthropological vision here is one of despair at the human condition and with a deep mistrust of the natural human life.

In contradiction to this view of the world and its creator, Augustine stresses the monotheistic vision of continuity of one God, who is active from past to present and into the future. This monotheism leaves him with the problem of evil, which he primarily solves through an understanding of human free will and his theology of original sin. God is almighty, all knowing and all good; sin is caused by humanity using its free will to disobey God. This disobedience caused humanity to be caught in sin. Now the free will is only free to do evil and disobey God. Humanity can no longer do good without the assistance of God. Humanity is a *massa damnata*³ or a *massa perditiones*⁴, a doomed mass, a mass of perdition. Evil is not a part of the Creator or the original creation, but it is a part of the rebellion of humanity against God. Now humanity can do nothing but realize this new “original condition” and hope for Gods mercy.

Augustine formed his theology of sin in the world through an understanding of God’s goodness and humanity’s fall from its original state into original sin, distancing himself from the Gnostics on the account of the goodness of the creator, but in some ways surpassing them in stressing the image of humanity’s condition as fallen. It was this theology of a fall and the mass of the doomed, which became the battle ground for the second front for Augustine’s anthropological visions in his understanding of sin.

This front was led by Pelagius and his followers. Pelagius was a very learned and influential theologian, who we primarily know through Augustine’s work.⁵ To Pelagius, the idea of original sin and the anthropology of the *massa damnata* were dangerous to the Christian message, because it pacified people. They might as well not even try to do good, since their condition was so

³ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Liber XIV, Caput XXVI: universa massa tanquam in vitiate radice damnata.

⁴ Augustine, *Sermo*, 26, xii, 13.

⁵ Cf. *De gestis Pelagii* and *Contra epistolas Pelagianum*. From Pelagius himself only a letter to Demetrias is available. The ideas of Pelagius were officially condemned at a concilium in 418.

universally fatal. There was no motivation to fight sin in this image of the fallen mass. Pelagius instead insisted that humanity is capable of doing good, and in fact in the very command to do good lies the possibility of doing good. Humanity fell into sin, but not to such a degree that they cannot climb back up again. They can and they must. And each and every human being is as such responsible for its acts. Humanity is not a *massa damnata*, instead it is has a project, which is hard, but possible to complete; salvation.

To Augustine, it is this theology, which is dangerous. He turned his attention to this problem through the massive work he had already done in connection with these questions. His main point was that humanity is a *massa damnata*, completely dependent on God for its salvation, and this salvation cannot be achieved by any human means at all. The transformation of humanity, as its creation, is in the hands of the triune Christian God. Each and every human being is in the same situation, when it comes to the relationship with God. All of humanity had the potential not to sin, and stay in the original relationship with God, all of humanity sinned in the sin of the first humans, and fell accordingly into the new original condition: sin.

Augustine defends his anthropological vision of humanity within the limits he meets in Manichaeism and in the theology of Pelagius; he attempts to present a more complex anthropology, which does not demonize humanity and its world, by setting it into a world of evil origin, but at the same time he wants to avoid trivializing humanity, as Pelagius did. To Augustine trivializing humanity would mean that everything becomes meaningless. What is the meaning of the crucifixion of Christ if humanity could rise on its own? What is Gods grace if humanity is capable of creating its own grace? And, what kind of hope lies in the message of Pelagius, which seems to say to those living a life where evil, suffering and sin is only too powerful; you just have to try harder?

It was the struggle with Pelagius, which formed the perspectives of Augustine's later works, and this is seen in his wish to fight any trivialization of humanity. But this of course brought out many elements in Augustine's theology, which becomes close to demonizing humanity instead. I will not here go into the massive discussion about Augustine's view of human sexuality, women and the material body. These discussions already have their battle lines drawn with many volunteers on both sides and anyone interested in these important debates will easily find the relevant sources.

From Augustine theology has a strong emphasis on the real power of sin, which at the same time is not a power in its own being, but a parasite on human free will and good creation. Sin is original, but it is not the true origin of human life. Sin is universal. Anyone and everyone is part of the *massa damnata*, and here lies the "solidarity of sin" in its truest form. Humanity does not have the right to divide sinners from non-sinners, as there are no such categories. The doctrine of sin entails a universal anthropological statement: all are sinners. We must realize that we are all equal in sin and that no one can take the high ground and use the category of sin to expel others and include the few righteous ones. But behind this notion of the *massa damnata* there is another, more primary universal fact; we are also the created mass. All humanity is created by God in God's image in a good creation. These two universals hold on to the complexity of the Christian anthropological vision found in the doctrine of sin. The primary universal statement is that of good creation, the secondary that of sin and the tension between the two is what forms the background for understanding the human condition universally.

2.2 The Totality of Sin:

The next element of the understanding of sin presented in this paper is the totality of sin as an example of the total perspective in the anthropological vision present in the teachings on sin. Where the universality of sin primarily becomes a discussion of origins and past events, the discussion of

the totality of sin draws on other perspectives associated with the present. It also draws more on a discussion of the individual's role in the universal framework. When we move to the presentation of the totality of sin, we have skipped many profound theologians from the middle ages and moved to another time of crisis and discussion, where the teachings on sin and the anthropology entailed once again are of in the center of attention.

Martin Luther's theological rebellion against the church and theology of his time in many ways circle around the understanding of sin and the human condition.⁶ To put it a little boldly, one could say that the whole reformation was spawned by a need to reexamine the understanding of sin and the anthropological statements within it. Where Augustine presented us with the *massa damnata*, Luther's anthropology could be exemplified in the expression *simul iustus et simul peccator, totus, totus*⁷, "totally justified, totally sinner". Sin is total, but so is justification. Sin is total, but there are two levels to this totality; *coram Deo*, in relation to God, sin is total, but God does not reckon with it. In God's eyes, we are totally sinners and at the same time totally justified. In this relation, the human person is free and cannot and must not do anything to improve their situation. On the other level, *coram hominibus*, the level of human beings living together and acting towards each other, sin is also total as a very real force. But here human beings can, through grace, behave rightly towards each other. Martin Luther's anthropology is based in this understanding of sin as the total condition of humankind. As with Augustine his ideas are presented in a series of battles with theologians, presenting different images of human nature.

First of all, Martin Luther wanted to stress that the individual human person seeking salvation will not be helped through a message, which says; "try harder". For Luther, every human being is captive to sin, and it is sin as a total condition. Only through realizing this totality of sin, can human beings see that salvation comes from God. But this salvation does not alter the human

⁶ For this short overview, I am dependent on the discussions of Luther's doctrine of sin in Grane, Leif, 1994. *Confessio Augustana*, Århus: Anis,

⁷ Cf. Martin Luther's commentary on the Paul's letter to the Romans. WA 56, 272, 17.

condition in relation to the power of sin in this world. Sin is overcome by God and does no longer separate us from him, but we live totally under the power of sin in this world and cannot change this situation ourselves.

Martin Luther distances himself to any theology which presents original sin as removed by baptism. The important sin is original sin, the *concupiscentia*, which is total in every human being and which does not disappear in baptism. For Luther it is no longer an abstract discussion of the different human condition before and after the Fall, or before and after baptism. It is a life-threateningly important statement about salvation. This makes him stress beyond any doubt that every human being is bound by sin and is held captive by the power of sin to such a degree that they do not even realize it any more. Baptism is not the removal of this sin, but the forgiveness of it in the eyes of God. Every human being is dependent on God before and after baptism, and is not given some new ability to manage by themselves. The human person is not restored into perfect independence, but into being aware of the dependence on God in everything. Human beings are not given a new, complete free will. They are still slaves, but now to God instead of the Satan, as Luther presents it in his image of human beings as horses, with a rider, who is either Satan or God. To sum up, Luther presents a very radical theology of original sin and puts his focus on the totality of sin. Each human person is responsible for original sin, because all join their bound will to sin.

This anthropology was a provocation for the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. Is there no free will in the human person, just in some minor degree? There must be, since otherwise there is no talk of responsibility. Erasmus was not drastic in his views and he did not claim that human free will was prior or in any way stronger than the grace of God. But for Luther it was enough to even claim any role of the free will in the relationship to God. *Coram Deo* there is no role for human free will. The human person is at the same time bound by sin and responsible for joining its bound will to sin. For Luther this was the only anthropology, which could present any hope to the human

person seeking salvation, because it present a realistic view of human nature and shows how only Gods grace has the power to truly transform the lives of sinners.

In Lutheran tradition this complex tension in the *simul iustus et peccator* and the position of lack of free will was strained by one of the students of Luther, Matthias Flacius, who took is so far as to say, that human nature in itself was ruined by the Fall, and that humanity has a whole new nature of sin. This again shows how the demonization and the trivialization of human nature are always present as two false alternatives to a complex anthropology within the doctrine of sin. Martin Luther holds on to the totality of sin, but there is another totality; the totality of justification. As the two universals held on to the complexity in Augustine's anthropology, so does the two totals in Martin Luther's. And again, the primary total perspectives are that of Gods forgiveness and grace, and the secondary, that of sin and the human condition. The tension between these two total-perspectives is the expression of the human condition in its totality.

2.3 20th century Theology - Translating the Unspeakable:

For the theologians of the 20th century a very different worldview presented itself from that of Augustine and Martin Luther. Speaking of God no longer had an obvious meaning. From the enlightenment and forward secularization, the natural sciences many discoveries, new technology, globalization, and many other elements changed our world and presented many new world views. The world was plural and filled with many competing versions of how to understand it. Talking about the traditional Christian theological elements became difficult. It became at task in itself to make the worldview of the Christianities understood. Some elements fared better than others; sin was not one of them. Under constant attack from many sides, the evolutionary theories attacked a literal understanding of the Fall, psychology attacked it for being dysfunctional and creating

distorted self-images, sin was criticized for being a tool for oppression, psychologically and politically. Sin moved into ridicule, purely being descriptive of “bad behavior” or it moved into more obscure religious territory. For the theologians who wanted to address the culture of their time and wanted to present the relevance of their tradition, sin became a difficult term, which needed serious translation, if it were to be meaningful in the context of the 20th century. We will now look at one of these “translation” attempts.

2.3.1 Wolfhart Pannenberg:

Wolfhart Pannenberg took up the challenge of making sin understood in his time. Pannenberg presents a theology based anthropology, which takes the statements presented by other academic disciplines very serious. The fundamental theological claims in such an anthropology holds on to the creation of humanity in the image of God and sin as a real force as predecessors for the message of Gods salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ.

The term Pannenberg uses to open the terminology of sin is the German; *Elend*, misery. Humanity is lost in its own misery; its distance to God and thereby to its own true identity. If theology wants to claim to be saying something truthful about the human condition it must be in accordance with the realities of human life, it must be recognizable from a general human point of view.⁸

With a monotheistic God as the creator and continuing upholder of everything it is obvious that the claims about Gods relationship with the world and human beings are universal claims. The key element in the teachings on original sin is the message of the universality of sin. But this universality is not connected to a physical inheritance through reproduction, as it was with

⁸ For Pannenberg's use of "Elend" see Pannenberg, Wolfhart 1991. *Systematische Theologie, Band II*, Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 207. For the following see Pannenberg, Wolfhart, 1983. *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, , and, *Systematische Theologie Band I & II*, 1988-1991, Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Augustine. Instead sin has become a controlling structure in human beings, working both within the individual and between human beings in their social structures. We spend our lives hunting for security and power, and in this endless hunt, we lose ourselves in an egotistical circle.

Each one is responsible for this, even though we are born into it, because we willingly add our own personal strength to this sin. The modern denial of sin only makes it stronger, as it escapes the categories, which used to shed light on it. Sin is the fundamental failure of human beings, who in their hunt to complete themselves, distances them from the only source, which can liberate them and bring them into their true state.

Pannenberg's view of sin as misery entails both the themes of universality and totality in the human condition as well as the tension on both levels. At the same time, the two themes are set in a new framework of inspiration from psychology and sociology, putting an emphasis on the inner human structures and the need for co-existence and interdependence, given through the relationship to God and practiced between human beings. Pannenberg also holds on to the complexity of the two aspects; humanity is a such a creature of God and is destined to be close to God, sin keeps it at a distance, but God's mercy will heal this distance.

3 Universality and Totality in the Anthropology of Evolutionary Biology:

The following will be a short journey through the key elements in the anthropological visions presented by evolutionary biology in the 20th century. After this section I will reach my conclusion on the challenges for a contemporary theology, which wishes to present its anthropological vision in dialogue with evolutionary biology. This will be a very short overview of some of the prominent voices in the many different debates on the consequences of evolutionary biology on our self-perception and the knowledge we have of humanity, its past, present and future. It will not be a discussion of the biology of these theories, but a presentation of their underlying anthropological visions.

It has been pointed out several times, how the Darwinian ideas on evolution combined with later knowledge of genetics have revolutionized the way we see our world in the same way the Copernicus did. And this time it was not the universe which differed from our self-perception. Suddenly a strong and penetrating light was directed towards the very building blocks of our lives. The triumphant roar of evolutionary biology has sounded ever since, as this quote from 1997 shows: “It’s happened. We have finally figured out where we came from, why we are here and who we are”.⁹ And evolutionary biology truly has given us magnificent insights into our past and present, and may even assists us in taking charge of some of these elements in the future.

The claims of evolutionary biology are first of all universal. They cover all biological life and include humanity in a very broad universal chain of being. But these universal claims are also claims about the totality of our human lives. These were the key elements in the debates stemming from sociobiology and moving up through the 20th century in different shapes and forms. Theological anthropology might also ask; is there a dynamic in the universal and total levels in the way we find it in theology, where there is a tension between good creation and sinful humanity, and sin and justification?

3.1 Sociobiology:

The term sociobiology, coined by E.O. Wilson, moved the scope of evolutionary biology to cover new territory. Evolutionary theories could explain cultural phenomena. Love, friendships, art, ethics and religion also belonged to the field of biology, and not exclusively to the academic disciplines of the social sciences, psychology and theology. In his “Sociobiology; The New Synthesis”¹⁰ and “On Human Nature”¹¹ Wilson presented a new anthropological vision entailing knowledge on the universality and totality of human beings and was able to say something about the ultimate

⁹ Betzig, Laura, ed. 1997 xi. *Human Nature*. Oxford; Oxford University Press,

¹⁰ Wilson, E.O., 1975. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Cambridge, Mass; Belknap Press.

¹¹ Wilson, E.O., 1978. *On Human Nature*, Cambridge Mass; Harvard University Press

mechanisms, which created and create human life. Natural selection and mutation lie at the root of all human behavior. We can know ourselves through knowledge of these mechanisms and what they produce. But what is the level of this survival, what survives and how? This discussion on the “surviving entity” became crucial in evolutionary biology and a central element in the discussion of the anthropological visions.

3.2 The Genes and Us

What is the unit of selection? What actually survives as the fittest or dies out through evolution? For Richard Dawkins¹² the answer was: the gene. The unit, which survives and as such is the central “subject” in evolution is the gene and all else must be understood in the light of this. His ideas on the “selfish gene” spawned a massive interest and discussion, not to mention wrath and disbelief in many circles, even crossing out of the academic milieu and into the mass media. Dawkins described the genes as “selfish” and meant by that, that genes are surviving entities, who can only survive or die out, and that everything on other levels are controlled in some way or other by this survival machinery. We are the genes survival machines. Where evolutionary biology had stressed the universality of our heritage, inherited very physically to us through sexual reproduction, now the discussion of the totality of human nature became a turning point. Should we as individuals see ourselves this way? What would be the ethical consequences of such a vision? Are we vehicles for little, material calculators, who make us love, hate, eat and be religious, in order to survive?

Through many different scopes, the joint venture of economic game theory and biology, knowledge of kin selection and reciprocity, suddenly human life was described as living out a “stable strategy” and being nothing but the bottles of surviving entities inside us. Certain elements of human nature, the genes, were demonized as being selfish, and it is the task of humanity to break the power of these demons within “We have the power to turn against our creators. We alone on earth can rebel

¹² Dawkins, Richard, 1976, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford; Oxford University Press.

against the tyranny of the selfish replicator”.¹³ It is a similar tone as in that of Pelagius, since we are able to change our bound condition, if we know enough and try harder, but the image of creation carries similarities to that of the Gnostics; we are fighting the selfish creator within ourselves.

The vast interest in the anthropological vision of Wilson, Dawkins and others show that this touched something very vital to everyone: their self-understanding and the portrayal of humanity in both its universality and its totality. But also within evolutionary biology itself, other descriptions of the human condition came forward. And these operate within the same theoretical framework, but they were not satisfied with the reductionism of early sociobiology in regards to the units of selection.

3.3 Multilevel Selection:

David Sloan Wilson and Elliot Sober presented in their “Unto Others” an evolutionary biological basis for understanding altruism through a multi-level selection theory, which leaves room for groups as the unit of selection.¹⁴ This presents a much more complex view of human nature, which shows a more dynamic vision of humanity, where there is an emphasis on how groups evolve and how the social life among humans has a status, not only as a place for the many “selfish genes” to operate, but as a vital part of evolution in itself. Also, Sloan Wilson and Sober emphasized the difference between ultimate and proximate levels of description of human behavior.

Very roughly described, the ultimate level is the level of the genotype and the proximate on the level of the phenotype. This distinction is used to present how both these levels are important, and that the proximate level cannot just be said to be an illusion or be reduced to the ultimate level of explanation. The complexity of evolutionary biology on the level of totality and

¹³ Dawkins, Richard, 1976, p. 201. *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford; Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Sloan Wilson, David and Sober, Elliot, 1999. *Unto Others – The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*, Harvard University Press.

universality has been widening through the last 10-20 years as shown by the work done by Sober & Wilson. There are more discussions on the complexity of the procedures of the past and present which make up our human lives.

4 Conclusion:

It seems that both theology and evolutionary biology is struggling with the temptation of reductionism, when it comes to presenting their anthropological vision. These short overviews did not in any way present all the details of the different struggles with this vision within the many different aspects in both theology and biology. Instead they helped us provide something which hopefully is the early sketching of the construction of a common ground for discussion our different anthropological visions. In many different academic disciplines a vast amount of perspectives on human life are presented and it is only through a sharing of these perspectives, that we can ever claim to say something valid and relevant about humanity, both in its universality and its totality. We saw that both theology and biology struggle with demonizing and trivializing images of human nature, its past, present and future. But we also so, that there are many attempts to reformulate ones own tradition and rethink the traditional ideas of ones field in order to provide more complex visions of humanity.

What we can primarily learn from a dialogue between theology and biology is to hold on to the complexity of humanity and be aware of the image we paint of our lives together. This image should be complex enough to encompass the many aspects of human life, instead of reducing them or calling them illusions, because they do not fit with the rigid paradigm. Our thoughts and theories on human nature should stay dynamic and open for the re-formulations and inspiration from outside our own academic borders. One thing we can take with us from the doctrine of sin is the awareness, that we are not perfect in our knowledge of ourselves. The last word has not been said on who we are and who we will be, and the last paradigm of understanding has not been

presented. This is a message of hope, because it relieves us from the self-justification of our systems and teaches us to never present a rigid and reductionistic truth about humanity and its world. Instead we should open up to the magnificent and powerful visions of other disciplines as well as critically reformulating our own tradition. It is important to recognize the plurality of voices in the common anthropological space, as well as holding on to ones own voice as a valuable resource. Exactly because the last word about humanity has not been spoken, we are called to continue the search and to keep our eyes open to different perspectives, than the ones we are trained within.