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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The 'cosmic terrorist': Reconsidering sin as personal agent

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Abstract

An important contemporary approach to understanding a Pauline account of sin takes sin to be a self or personal agent who acts in the world. This article engages with such a proposal by offering theological analysis. It is argued that the exegetical arguments in favour of the proposal that sin is a personal agent are less than convincing, and it is argued further that the theory encounters serious theological problems.

Keywords: apocalyptic; Matthew Croasmun; emergence theory; hamartiology; Paul; sin

Is sin – understood in accord with the main lines of Paul's theology – to be understood as an agent? Clearly it is a force with which to be reckoned; but is it a *self* or a *person*? One important approach to the doctrine of sin understands Paul to be teaching that sin is a self, a personal agent who acts in the world. In this article, I engage with a creative and particularly thorough version of this view. I show that the arguments adduced in support of the proposal are less than convincing, and I argue further that the theory runs into deep theological problems.

Sin as metaphorical personification or personal agent

At least since the response of Ernst Käsemann to Rudolph Bultmann's account of demythologisation, some scholars of Pauline theology (particularly of the 'Apocalyptic' school) maintain that sin (or Sin) is an active agent in the world. Thus Martinus C. de Boer thinks that there is a 'logically irreconcilable tension between corporate destiny and personal culpability' in Paul's teaching in Romans 5, and he maintains that we should understand Paul to be teaching that Sin (and Death) are 'inimical powers or beings that victimize and enslave human beings'.[1] Sin and Death are 'cosmological forces that have invaded the human cosmos as alien intruders'; they are 'malevolent powers' that are diametrically opposed to God's good intentions.[2] Thus sin is *not,* he insists, 'the result of a bad choice made by an autonomous individual', but instead is

[1]Martinus C. de Boer, 'Paul's Mythologizing Program in Romans 5–8', in Beverly Roberts Gaventa (ed.), *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), pp. 12–13.

[2]Ibid., p. 13.

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'the result and mark of a cosmological force that has come into the world and has reigned over human beings since the time of Adam'.[3] Similarly, J. Louis Martyn is convinced that sin is a 'cosmic power'.[4] Martyn does not think that a properly Pauline understanding of sin as cosmic power altogether eclipses the notion that sin is a human act for which humans are responsible, but he insists that 'the view of Sin as slavemaster is *primary,* while the view of the Adamic agent as active sinner is *secondary*'.[5] Beverly Roberts Gaventa holds (in substantial agreement with Paul M. Meyer) that sin is the 'major "character" in the argument', for Sin 'enters the world, Sin increases in power, Sin reigns like a king, and Sin enslaves'; sin 'deceives and kills' even as it 'takes captive the human being'.[6] 'Brought together,' she concludes, 'these "achievements" of Sin's resume create the portrait of a cosmic terrorist.'[7]

Matthew Croasmun offers one of the most thoroughgoing and creative statements of the theory that sin is a personal agent. He is dissatisfied with all of the major views on offer; instead, he wants a full and holistic doctrine of sin. In other words, he is not content to accept Bultmann's 'reductionist' account that reduces Paul's language to something merely 'figurative' and 'metaphorical'.[8] Bultmann's 'existentialist, modern, individualist concept of self' and corresponding notion of sin as individual acts of wrongdoing is correct to insist on the importance of such 'individual acts', but it will not suffice overall.[9] But nor is he entirely happy with Käsemann's mythologised 'dualism'. He understands Käsemann to insist that sin is a 'very literal demonic power', a cosmic force that disrupts and destroys.[10] And he firmly agrees with Käsemann that sin is much more than individual actions, for it is a 'personal power'.[11] Additionally, Croasmun wants to move beyond the 'two poles' that characterise much of the biblical studies guild (namely, the 'Concrete Action View', according to which the depiction of sin as an agent is mere personification in the literary sense, and the 'Demonic Entity View', according to which sin is a superhuman force with agential powers).[12] For he wants to incorporate insights from liberation hamartiology and to take with utter seriousness the reality of social sin, systemic oppression, and structures of injustice.[13] Putting these together, he concludes that 's/Sin' must be understood at all three levels: the 'individual or psychological (Bultmann); the social (the liberationists); and the cosmic or mythological (Käsemann, et al)'.[14] Thus 'Sin in Romans is a matter of concrete action and also a matter of social structures, and *also* a cosmic tyrant.'[15]

Croasmun's proposal is thoroughgoing in the sense that he wants to incorporate all that is right about the major competing theories on offer, and it is thoroughgoing in

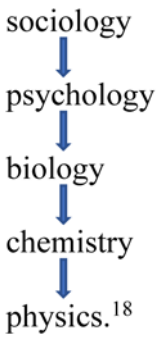
[3]Ibid., p. 14.
[4]J. Louis Martyn, 'Afterword: The Human Moral Dilemma', in *Apocalyptic Paul*, p. 161.
[5]Ibid., p. 163.
[6]Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'The Shape of the "I": The Psalter, the Gospel, and the Speaker in Romans 7', in *Apocalyptic Paul*, p. 77.
[7]Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 130.
[8]Matthew Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin: The Cosmic Tyrant in Romans* (New York: OUP, 2017), p. 6.
[9]Ibid., p. 13.
[10]Ibid., p. 12.
[11]Ibid., pp. 12, 14.
[12]Ibid., pp. 12–13. Croasmun draws from David J. Southall at this point.
[13]Ibid., pp. 15–20.
[14]Ibid., p. 20.
[15]Ibid., p. 21.

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another important sense as well: he goes beyond many of the 'apocalyptic' interpreters to insist that sin is not only a cosmic force but indeed is an agent, a *person*. And his proposal is creative in the way that he develops and defends this idea.

Croasmun wants to develop and defend his proposal that sin is a personal agent that results in individual acts of wrongdoing and creates structures of oppression and systems of injustice. To do so, he draws upon the notion of emergence to put these pieces together in an integrated way. Noting that the concept of emergence is common in various fields of study (e.g. philosophy of mind, philosophy of physics, psychology, biology and sociology), he summarises his 'central claim' as follows: there are 'emergent entities, properties, or processes that arise from more fundamental entities, properties, and processes and yet are irreducible to them'.[16] In other words, 'wholes have properties that their constituent properties do not' have; water has the property of wetness but the individual water molecules do not.[17]

Thus, in contrast to the reductionist ('bottom-up') approaches to science that have characterised much of the modern era, emergentism argues that more complex phenomena exercise 'top-down' causal effects that are not reducible to the properties of their component parts. Drawing upon fairly standard illustrations, Croasmun compares the relation of various scientific disciplines. Consider the following schema:



Croasmun observes that reductionist approaches want to seek explanations by digging 'downward'; that is, they assume a 'bottom-up' causal explanation that takes chemistry and physics to be the most basic sources of explanation. So why do we experience, say, the horrors of racism and of youth violence?[19] Reductionist accounts will start at the top and then dig deeper and deeper for explanations; they will look at sociological conditions and then ask what happens at the levels of social and developmental psychology to produce these conditions. Going deeper, they will seek biochemical explanations for such behaviour, and underneath everything else (if they go this far) are the laws of physics, which determine the chemistry that provides the basis for biological development. In contrast to such reductionism, emergentist approaches look for 'top-down' causation: how what happens at the level of social life shapes phenomena at the lower structural levels all the way down to the levels of neurobiological and chemical processes.

[16]Ibid., p. 23.
[17]Ibid., p. 25.
[18]See ibid., pp. 27–35.
[19]Ibid., pp. 189–90. This is Croasmun's own example.

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Moving from these basic observations about emergence, and drawing lessons about the importance of both 'upward' and 'downward' causation, Croasmun then focuses on an emergent account of personhood as he looks for an adequate ontology. He says that 'an emergentist account of personhood must engage both the emergence of mind from body, and also the emergence of that same living body from biochemistry'.[20] He wants to avoid both 'the eliminative reduction of biology to chemistry (in which living bodies – be they single cells or "whole organisms" – are only useful fictions) and the eliminative reductionism of psychology to neurobiology'.[21] In other words, the body of a person emerges from more fundamental constituent entities, and the mind of the person emerges from this bodily organism; thus a proper ontology of persons is emergent all the way down and all the way back up. Moreover, following recent work by E. O. Wilson on 'eusocial' evolution (which refers to 'the condition of multiple generations organized into groups by means of an altruistic division of labor'), Croasmun affirms the existence of 'superorganisms' that emerge from communities and social groups that cooperate.[22]

Armed with this emergentist ontology of personhood, Croasmun returns to his consideration of Pauline hamartiology. He employs this understanding of personhood to account for s/Sin at all three 'levels'.

> My hypothesis is that the multilevel account of human persons and social groups presented [here] is conducive to holding together at once the description of s/Sin at the personal, social, and mythological levels … all three can be held together through an understanding of ἁμαρτια in Romans 5–8 as a mythological person: that is, a superorganism with a group mind emergent from a complex network of individual human persons.[23]

The primary desideratum of the Bultmannians is satisfied, because 'individuals participate in the life of the superorganism through sinning'.[24] And the 'liberationist instinct' that we cannot ignore 'sinful social structures' is vindicated because 'the superorganism, Sin, emerges from the resultant complex interaction of sinning individuals and sinning institutions and exercises downward causation back upon institutions and individuals'.[25] And the commitment of the 'Käsemann school' to the reality of sin as a cosmic force is fully endorsed. Indeed, it is further clarified and significantly extended – sin is not merely a vaguely impersonal cosmic force for malevolence and evil but indeed *is a person*. 'Sin is a *self*, emergent from a complex system of human transgressions – the "all" who sin and live the dominated human lie. Sin is a superorganism, a body made of bodies, a self composed of selves.'[26]

Exegesis, science, and metaphysics: questions for clarification

Croasmun recognises that his proposal is not strictly one of straightforward biblical exegesis. His work includes serious exegesis, of course, and it is engaged with some of the most important work in contemporary Pauline biblical scholarship. But he is not simply

[20]Ibid., p. 60.
[21]Ibid., pp. 60–1.
[22]Ibid., pp. 74–80.
[23]Ibid., p. 99.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid.
[26]Ibid., pp. 124–5.

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doing exegesis (or exegesis and biblical theology). Nor, indeed, is his project simply a biblical- exegesis-and-science exercise. No – as he realises – it is one that includes theological and even distinctly metaphysical considerations and commitments.

But here is where questions arise. Consider his engagement with the work of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Croasmun says that 'if Murphy-O'Connor suggests that systems cannot appropriately be described as exhibiting intelligence or personhood, Emergence suggests precisely the opposite: namely, that *every* intelligent, personal agent we know emerges from complex systems'.[27] This statement calls for clarification. So far as I can see, it entails three important claims, as follows:

(E1) all personal agents emerge from complex systems;
(E2) complex social systems cannot be intelligent persons;
(E3) complex social systems are intelligent persons.

Just what is the relationship between these claims? Croasmun says that (E1) and (E2) are *opposed* – in other words, if (E1) is true, then (E2) must be false. But it is less than obvious that this is right. (E1) seems to be telling us how persons come to be, while (E2) makes a claim about what systems and persons are. Why should we think that it must be one or the other?

Moreover, Croasmun seems to think that (E1) either implies (E3) or at least licenses it; if all personal agents emerge from complex systems, then complex systems must be personal agents.[28] The point seems to be that if all personal agents emerge from complex systems, then that gives us reason to conclude that complex social systems actually *are* intelligent persons. But this is far from obvious. It is not at all clear that (E3) is implied by (E1); indeed, it is hard to see how an argument for this conclusion might go. At any rate, Croasmun does not give us one.

Croasmun rightly (in my view) recognises that, when we are dealing with these issues, we aren't just doing exegesis but are engaged in metaphysics and theology. And there certainly are a lot of metaphysical claims being made by Croasmun. For instance, he says that 'ontological monism – the belief that the universe consists of only one kind of substance – is scientific (and, to a lesser degree, philosophical) orthodoxy', and he decides that 'substance dualisms … are decidedly to be avoided'.[29] These are not, so far as I can see, either scientific claims or exegetical claims. They are, rather, metaphysical claims. And they are claims that are controvertible. He also says that 'selves…we know...turn out to be "selves made of selves"'.[30] This, again, is a metaphysical claim, and it is one that is less than obvious (whether or not we are souls or have souls, and whether or not those souls are simple, surely the regress has to stop somewhere). Now consider again (E1) above: 'all personal agents emerge from complex systems'. Perhaps that seems obvious if we let the science dictate the metaphysics. But it is far from obvious if we derive metaphysics from theology – and there are, it seems to me, strong grounds to hold that this claim is false. Most obviously, trinitarian orthodoxy holds that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are persons, but they are not emergent from complex systems or elements more basic than they are.

[27]Ibid., p. 176.
[28]Or, minimally, *can be* personal agents.
[29]Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin,* p. 27. In context, I take this to be a prescriptive (rather than merely descriptive) claim.
[30]Ibid., p. 102.

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In this context, let us consider Croasmun's central claim that sin qualifies as a *person*.

The reasoning behind this conclusion seems to go like this: 'science' tells us what a person is, and if we evaluate sin according to those scientifically oriented criteria of personhood, then it follows that s/Sin is a person. But the claim under consideration is a *metaphysical claim*, not a scientific one. Science is important, but it isn't metaphysics; and just as it is a mistake to ignore science, so also it is a mistake to expect it to replace metaphysics.

So here is a methodological question: what are the guidelines and the criteria for the metaphysics of Croasmun's proposal? I am sure that we might glean important insights about anthropology from E. O. Wilson's observation of ant-farms, but (the admonition to 'go to the ant' in Prov 6:6–8 notwithstanding) it is far from obvious that we should look to entomology (or any other branch of the natural sciences) for an adequate metaphysics of personhood. And here is a more substantive question: just what, more precisely, *is* the account of personhood on offer? Croasmun recognises that 'we have to know from the outset what does or does not qualify as a person, in order to know then whether a description of an entity of a person is metaphorical or not'.[31] That seems entirely right – but just what *is* a person? We still do not know. Croasmun seems to be committed to some view in which persons are both physical entities that emerge from more basic constituent physical elements and mental entities that emerge from these emergent physical bodies. But this falls short of providing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood, and without such conditions it is hard to pass affirmative judgement on the claim that sin is a person.

In short, within Croasmun's argument, just what is providing the operative metaphysics of personhood? It is not obviously driven by his exegesis. Nor does it seem to arise directly from the science. So from whence does it come? And just what is his actual metaphysical proposal – what *is* a person?

The exegetical arguments: a closer look

Croasmun holds that human agents become members of the collective physical 'body' of the cosmic tyrant Sin – that is, a collective person. He maintains as well that this tyrant, precisely as an entity emergent from a complex system, can reasonably be said to have both a body and a mind that exert agency in the world, and he concludes that sin qualifies as a *person*.

Note, again, that these claims about the personhood of sin are distinctly metaphysical claims. Note as well that we are left unsure about the support for these claims. Emergence theory tells a lot about the complex relations of individuals within communities, bottom-up and top-down causation, and many other important things. But – unless it also somehow delivers a metaphysics of personhood – it does not tell us that sin is a person.

Nor does Paul – at least not exactly. Yes, Paul does portray sin in terms of agency; as de Boer reminds us, Paul 'talks about Sin [and "Death"] as he elsewhere does about Satan (cf. Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; 6:14; 1 Thess. 3:5), evil angels (cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 4:9; 6:3; 2 Cor. 11:14; 12:7) or demons (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20–21), i.e., as inimical powers or beings that victimize

[31]Ibid., p. 57.

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and enslave human beings'.[32] But, as Croasmun of course knows, it is entirely possible that Paul is using *personification* as a literary device rather than making a straightforward metaphysical claim.[33] At the level of rhetorical and literary discourse, it is entirely possible that Paul is employing personification here as a literary device.

So the mere use of such agential language does not mean that Paul is claiming that sin is a person rather than a personification. After all, Paul also speaks of 'grace' and 'righteousness' as if they are distinct agents, and surely no one takes these to be persons or selves.[34] Croasmun knows this, and he mounts further arguments. In dialogue with ancient Stoic, Cynic and Platonic thought, he argues for his proposal from Paul's use of genitive plural personal pronouns in relation to singular nouns. Positively, he notes that Paul routinely joins the singular and the plural when referring to the body of Christ (e.g. Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12–27); in Romans, 'the addressees are to present their *plural* bodies as a singular *living* sacrifice' and are thus to be 'transformed by the renewal of their single, collective mind'.[35] Negatively, Paul says of sin that 'God handed them [pl.] over to a [sg.] debased mind', and this means that 'the moral degradation of the gentiles results in a social body with a debased corporate mind' (Rom 1:28).[36] Arguing from Romans 6, he says that

> we get collective language used of the addressees' former state: 'We know that our [pl.] old self [sg.] [ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος] was crucified with him so that the Body of Sin [τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας] might come to nothing [καταργηθῇ], and we might no longer be enslaved to Sin.' The phrase ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος (literally, 'our old human') has long troubled interpreters, but it need not trouble us too much. This is the 'self', the whole 'person' that supervenes on the Body of Sin. The characteristic genitive plural personal pronoun in possession of a singular noun (ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) gives us the sense of Sin having a social body – the Body of Sin – united by a shared habitual practice: sinning.[37]

Further, Croasmun argues that when Paul says 'do not let Sin reign in your [pl.] mortal body [sg.] … to make you [pl.] obey its [sg.] passions', we are to take the 'mortal body' not as individual bodies but instead as 'the collective, social body of Sin'.[38]

What are we to make of this argument? Let us start by considering the positive aspect.

Yes, Paul tells us that those who belong to Christ are all 'members' (μέλη, cf. 1 Cor 12:12–27) of one body. Paul does not say that there are many 'bodies' of one body; instead, his claim is that there are many members. Croasmun's view seems to be that the many bodies (or embodied persons) together form one emergent superorganism that is also, quite literally, an embodied person. But it seems obvious that Paul's language here is metaphorical. For Paul also refers to Christ as the 'head of the body' (κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος), and he makes it clear that this 'body' is the church (ἐκκλησίας; Col 1:18). If this language

[32]De Boer, 'Paul's Mythologizing', p. 13.

[33]See further Günter Röhser, *Metaphorik und Personifikation der Sünde* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987).

[34]See Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul,* p. 134.

[35]Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin,* p. 117.

[36]Ibid., p. 118.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

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were to be taken non- metaphorically, we should conclude that Christ is literally the cranium of the physically embodied superorganism that is the 'church'. Surely it is better – and certainly no less meaningful – to take this as metaphorical rather than literal.

Let us return to the negative aspect of Croasmun's discussion; we are, after all, primarily concerned with *sin*. So what are we to make of the 'body of s/Sin' and the 'debased Mind'? Does Paul's use of genitive plural personal pronouns in relation to singular nouns cinch Croasmun's case? No, it does not. As Croasmun is aware, it is entirely possible that Paul is employing the 'distributive singular' when the Apostle uses the genitive plural personal pronoun in relation to a singular noun. Grammatically, there is nothing untoward or even unlikely about such an account. And, indeed, there is a strong case to be made that the 'distributive singular' is not only a possible but also an eminently plausible and even preferable reading. Let us return to Romans 1:28. Here Paul says that God gave sinners over to their depravity, and he uses a plural pronoun (αὐτούς) with a singular noun (νοῦν).

Croasmun takes this as support for his view. He says that 'the moral degradation of the gentiles results in a social body with a debased corporate mind'.[39] He takes the 'debased mind' to be a singular metaphysical entity, one that is composed of or supervenient upon the distinct human minds from which it emerges. But if this is one mind – in Croasmun's terms one 'self' or 'person' – then this one Sin-self (or Sin-person) is the self (or person) that is responsible for the various items in the 'vice list' that follows. Here we have two options: either this emergent Sin-self/person is identical to the individual sinners, or this emergent entity is not identical to the individual sinners. If they are identical, then everyone would be morally responsible for and guilty of all the sins in the vice list. This is deeply counterintuitive, for it is hard to conceive of a way that *every* gentile is guilty of *every* sin in the vice list. It is one thing to affirm that 'all have sinned' (Rom 3:23), but it is another thing entirely to insist that all have sinned by sinning in the same way or committing all the same sins.

At any rate, however, with a brief bit of reflection is should be clear that the Sin- self/person is not identical to the sinners. For if any 'two' entities are really identical, then 'they' have all the same properties and thus are not actually 'two' entities at all – but clearly the Sin-self/person has properties that are distinct from those possessed by the individual persons.[40] So if Croasmun is correct that Paul here is talking about the Sin-self as debased and guilty, then it is the Sin-self who is morally responsible for the sins in the vice list. But this is to make a mess of Paul's teaching, as he clearly intends to call the 'gentiles' to moral accountability. Accordingly, the suggestion that Paul is intending to refer to one metaphysical entity called something like Sin-self or Sin-person is highly implausible; for if this is true, then we are left with one of two conclusions: either all the sinners who are (somehow) identical with the Sin-self/person are guilty of committing all the sins in the vice list, or only the Sin-self/person is guilty. Neither option comports well with Paul's teaching. In contrast, we run into no such troubles if we understand Paul to be using the distributive singular.

We see further confirmation that Paul is employing the distributive singular in passages where Paul is explicitly affirming the responsibility of distinct persons. In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul says that 'all' (πάντας ὑμᾶς) must appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of what has been done 'in the body' (διὰ τοῦ σώματος).

[39]Ibid.

[40]According to the law known as the 'Indiscernibility of Identicals': (∀x) (∀y) [x = y => (∀F) (F(x) <=> F (y))].

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Paul uses a plural pronoun and then follows it with the (other) singular noun that is important for Croasmun's case (viz., σώματος). But his point here is clearly that persons are responsible for what they have done in their discrete embodied actions. In Romans 2:6 Paul makes the same point: God 'will repay according to each one's deeds'. In this instance, however, he does not hesitate to follow the LXX (Ps 61:13) in retaining singular terms (ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ).[41] So Paul freely uses the plural as a distributive singular interchangeably with the singular.[42] At any rate, the singular 'body' here isn't plausibly one conglomerate super-body, for Paul's central point obviously concerns distinct agency and moral responsibility. For Paul's argument to work, he must be referring to what happens in distinct agency via individual *bodies*. In other words, it seems more likely that Paul is using personification as a literary device and employing the distributive singular with reference to the sinful 'mind' and 'body'.

The theological issues at stake: further considerations

If there are exegetical reasons to hold Croasmun's view at arm's length, there are theological reasons to reject it outright. We should appreciate the boldness of the claims being made: the claim is not the traditional position that sin (somehow) inheres in created persons, nor is it the traditional view that sin is something that corrupts human nature and human persons. No, the claims made here are something different: sin is *a substantive being;* sin is a *self,* a *person*.[43]

The basic concern raised by this claim may be summarised in the following terms: for classical Christian theology persons come in two basic kinds, created and uncreated. There are three and only three uncreated persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons just are the Triune God, and they are the source of all persons who are not God. Human persons, on the other hand, are the most obvious examples of created persons (for much of the Christian tradition, creatures such as unfallen and fallen angels may count as slightly less obvious examples of created persons). There are no other kinds, and there is no middle ground; the options are binary: persons are either created persons or uncreated persons. No person is neither, and no person can be both.[44]

[41]The use of the distributive singular is not uncommon in the LXX – which was, after all, Paul's 'Bible'. For further discussion, see Sunny Chen, 'The Distributive Singular in Paul: The Adequacy of a Grammatical Category', *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* (2015), pp. 104–30. On the use of *sōma* in the LXX, see Robert H. Gundry, *SOMA in Biblical Theology: With an Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), pp. 16–23.

[42]Paul's ability to use these formulations interchangeably is not uncommon; with respect to σώμα, Paul uses it as a singular with plural personal genitive pronouns in Rom 6:12, 8:23, 1 Cor 6:19–20 and 2 Cor 4:10. He uses it as plural with plural personal genitive pronouns in Rom 1:24, 8:11, 12:1 and 1 Cor 6:15. For further discussion see Chen, 'Distributive Singular', p. 113.

[43]A similar sort of claim was made in the latter part of the sixteenth century, when the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans, led by Matthias Flacius Illyricus, insisted that we should straightforwardly refer to sin as a 'substance'. Other Lutherans recoiled at this notion, and a debate ensued. A resolution was hammered out in the *Formula of Concord*, according to which sin is *not* a substance but instead is an accident. The defenders of this position argued for their conclusion from christology and the doctrine of creation, and their decision left no room for doubt: a recognition of the Creator–creature distinction and the conviction that the Creator is wholly and simply *good* demands it.

[44]In the incarnation, the Son who is divine becomes human; i.e. the person who existed as a divine person also takes upon himself a human nature. Whether this human nature is best understood as abstract or concrete need not detain us here; for non-Nestorians, at least, the person who is the Son does not add another human person to his identity. So the incarnate Son is both divine and human, but he is not a

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So, if sin is a person, just what kind of person is it (or 'he' or 'she')? To hold that sin is an uncreated person is to lapse back into the kind of cosmic dualism that was ruled out so decisively by the early church. It is to allow for the possibility of an uncreated person who exists as 'pure evil'. It is to posit the antithesis of the God who just is simple goodness, the God who is *actus purus* (on traditional doctrines of God, of course). It is to admit another ultimate but supremely malevolent power that exists alongside the Triune God of holy love. Accordingly, whatever such a view might ostensibly have going for it on other grounds, it simply cannot be an option for Christians with commitments to even the broadest conception of traditional orthodoxy.

So is Sin a created person? If so, who created it? We need not be distracted by the timing or the means of the activity, for whether we think of the origin of the Sin-person as a kind of 'continual creation', a sophisticated account of secondary causality or some other option, we are still faced with the same fundamental issues. Once again, the options are stark: the one who created it is either God or some agent who is not God. To maintain that the creator of the Sin-person is a non-divine agent is not promising. Perhaps an obvious answer (at least for those theologians who are not completely 'demythologised') is that a demonic agent (perhaps one named 'Satan') created the Sin-person. But to hold this is to make (at least) two mistakes, since it is both to cede far too much power to Satan and fundamentally to misunderstand Satan's work. For the work of Satan is to 'steal, kill, and destroy' (cf. John 10:10).[45]

Alternatively, the creator of sin and evil simply cannot be a perfectly good God. Note again the density of Croasmun's claim: his position is not that a fundamentally good entity 'fell' and 'went bad'; it is not a version of a traditional account according to which *all* that God created was fundamentally (though not *necessarily*) good. It is not the thesis that evil is the privation of the good, that sin is always and only something parasitic on what is created and called good by the God who is goodness itself. No, his view is that there is Something, or, more properly, *Someone* who just *is* evil. But this would mean that God creates what is intrinsically and essentially (and thus *necessarily*) evil. This conclusion is simply not consistent with mainstream Christian tradition.[46] In short, positing the idea of a Sin-person is either to compromise the doctrine of the goodness of creation or to impugn the goodness of the Creator.

Conclusion

Much of the current discussion seems to be bogged down in the debate between those of the house and lineage of Bultmann on one hand, and the intellectual progeny of Käsemann on the other hand. To his credit, Croasmun looks for a way beyond these categories, and what he offers is a creative proposal. But it comes with critical ambiguities, and it raises important questions. Where does one go to find a definition of personhood? And what is that definition – just what is a person? Moreover, while

human person who is added to a divine person. The incarnate Son is not, then, strictly speaking, a created person but instead is an uncreated divine person who is also fully and completely human in virtue of the created human nature that he has assumed.

[45]*The Formula of Concord*, art. 1, in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3: *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds,* 6th edn, ed. Philip Schaff, revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), pp. 97–106.

[46]For detailed discussion, see Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), pp. 124–35, 227–34.

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Croasmun's proposal is underdetermined with respect to exegesis, it encounters some serious theological challenges when looked at in broadly traditional theological categories. Perhaps the time has come to truly move beyond the impasse between the 'Bultmannian' and 'Apocalyptic' schools – and to do so precisely by revisiting and retrieving the insights of the classical Christian theological tradition.

Does Emergence Theory itself give us adequate necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood? No, at least not obviously. Does Emergence Theory demonstrate the truth of the claim that sin is a person?' It should be obvious that it does no such thing. Does a proper interpretation of Pauline theology either state or entail the conclusion that sin is a person? To this point, the answer seems to be that it does not. At best, such a conclusion is underdetermined by biblical exegesis; and it is at least as likely that in those instances adduced in support of the idea of sin as person by Croasmun, Paul is using personification (and making use of the distributive singular). More seriously, however, the claim that sin is a self or person encounters significant theological challenges – at least for Christians who accept the most broadly traditional accounts of the goodness of God and God's creation.

[18]See ibid., pp. 27–35.

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