

# THEOLOGICAL DISPUTATION ON ORIGINAL SIN

Which, with the help of God, the Best and Greatest, under the presidency of the Reverend, most distinguished, and most learned man, **DN. CHRISTOPH LUTHARD**, most celebrated Professor of the faculty of Theology in the illustrious School of Bern, his preceptor to be honored with perpetual observance, **ALBERTUS RÜTIMEIER** of Bern proposes for public examination on the day of August.

In Bern of the Swiss, by the press of **STEPHANUS FABRICIUS**, 1637.

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To the Illustrious, Noble men, most Eminent in power, authority, true piety, and rare prudence, **D. FRANCISCUS LUDOVICUS AB ERLACH**, Free Baron, Lord in Spietz, etc. **D. NICOLAUS DACHSELHOFER**, Alternate Consuls of the most Illustrious and most Serene Republic of Bern, Fathers of the Fatherland, their most gracious Lords and Patrons to be eternally honored.

This disputation on Original Sin is humbly offered and dedicated by the Author & Respondent.

# ON ORIGINAL SIN

## Thesis I

As I begin to write these theses on original sin, Horace, the bard of the Roman Lyre, immediately comes to mind, singing:

"You who write, take up a subject equal to your powers, and ponder long what your shoulders refuse to bear and what they are able to."

For I have seen that the treatment of this weighty argument—that I should begin it prudently, treat the beginning easily, and bring it to a happy conclusion—is unequal and by no means suited to my strength. For, as Augustine himself testifies in *On the Morals of the Church*, "nothing is more known for preaching, nothing more secret for understanding, than original sin." And how difficult this doctrine of original sin is, the most learned of English theologians warns in book 1, *On Original Sin*, when he says: "how it was propagated from Adam to posterity should be believed rather than inquired into; and it can be inquired into more easily than it can be understood; and it is better understood than it is explained." Therefore, I was on the point of bidding farewell to this subject, casting away my pen, and choosing another equal to my powers and more suitable, had not the authority of those who hold the helm of my studies constrained me and prescribed this subject for me to bring, as it were, under the hammer. Wherefore, to prove my obedience to them, I shall approach the matter itself with God (σύν θεῷ).

## Thesis II

Lest, however, our disputation be forced to wander and err, I will do that which I think ought to be done at the beginning, middle, and end of all disputations: that first, what it is that is being disputed should be defined; then, the common affections should be subjected to the definition; and finally, a division into parts and species should follow. And so our disputation on original sin will present: 1. its Definition, 2. its common Affections, 3. its Distribution.

## Thesis III

### On the Definition

Original sin is a sin immediately arisen from the first sin of Adam, by which all and every natural heir of Adam sinned in Adam, were made useless, are born by nature children of wrath, and subject to temporal and eternal death.

## Thesis IV

In explaining this definition, there occurs the **DEFINED TERM** and the **DEFINITION** itself. The **DEFINED TERM** is *original sin*. It is called a sin (*peccatum*), which in Greek is ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*), corresponding to the Hebrew name which means to err from the goal set for oneself. It is therefore called a sin (because it is ἀνομία, or lawlessness) and indeed a sin properly so-called, as is

clear from James 1:14-15, where desire, denoting original sin, is said to tempt and give birth to sin, from which it necessarily follows that it is itself a sin properly so-called, according to that saying of Christ, Matthew 7:18: "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit." Hence it came about that even Cicero, in his *Paradoxa*, said that "to sin is nothing other than to cross the lines within which one ought to contain oneself."

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### Thesis V

It is called **Original**: 1. Not only because it is the fount and origin of the other subsequent actual sins, but also, both to distinguish it from actual sin, and because by hereditary propagation it has stained our nativity, and has settled in us as soon as we are first men, and has been derived to us by the law of nature and origin, as seen in Genesis 8:21, Job 14:4, and Ephesians 2:3. Whence the Psalmist, in Psalm 51:7, not undeservedly says: "in iniquity I was formed, and in sin my mother cherished me." 2. Not because scripture itself so calls it, but because it fittingly agrees with the phrases of scripture that depict this lawlessness (*ἀνομία*), such as in Genesis 6:5 and Romans 7. Whence that very true rule of theologians: When there is agreement on the things, then there should be no dispute about the words.

### Thesis VI

But this sin takes on various other names. In the scriptures it is called by Paul **indwelling sin** and **adjacent evil**, because it endures to the last breath of our temporal life. This should be carefully observed against Flacius Illyricus, who taught that original sin is of the substance of man. But he is mistaken, since only accidents are said to be adjacent to and inhabit a substance. Just as, therefore, concerning the possessor of a house, it cannot be said that he is of the essence of the house because he inhabits the house, so also concerning original sin, it cannot be said that it is of the essence of man because it inhabits man. Also, it is called **the law of the members, the body of sin, and of death, and Concupiscence**, and indeed of **the flesh against the spirit**, which is prohibited not merely by title, but as a most grievous sin, indeed as the mother of sin. Here, however, it should be noted that not all concupiscence is sin; for there is also another concupiscence, a spiritual one, namely when the Spirit desires against the flesh; and a natural one, when a person desires to eat, drink, sleep, etc., neither of which can certainly be numbered among sins. By some of the fathers, however, it is called the **ancient wound of the serpent, poison, the weight of the ancient crime**, etc.

### Thesis VII

In the **DEFINITION**, the *Genus* and the *Specific Difference* occur. The **GENUS** is *a sin immediately arisen from the first sin of Adam*. For the efficient cause of this is Adam's first sin imputed to us all, namely the violation of the law concerning not

eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That Adam's sin is imputed to us is clear from the following:

1. From Romans 5:12, 17, 18, 19. For if by the disobedience of one man we are constituted unjust, sinners, then the disobedience of that one man must first be imputed to us before we can be called sinners and unjust on account of it.
2. Because no other sin was transfused into posterity than that which was also Adam's own. But Adam's sin was his disobedience, with the privation of original justice and the corruption of his whole nature.
3. Because we were not adjudicated to death for any other sin than for that for which Adam was also. But Adam was adjudicated to death for his disobedience. Therefore.
4. Because the Apostle does not say *On account of* but *through* the disobedience of Adam we were constituted sinners. Just as also he says that we were constituted, or made, just not so much *on account of* as *through* the obedience of Christ. Therefore, just as the obedience of Christ is our justice, so also the disobedience of Adam is our injustice, namely by imputation and guilt.
5. Because, finally, in any body, whether natural, animal, political, or mystical, this is accepted among all nations, that what the head does, insofar as it is the head, is rightly imputed to the whole body. For this reason, the whole man is punished for a sin which is committed by the command of the will alone. And children are stripped of all their father's goods on account of the parent's rebellion. Therefore, just as what Christ did as the head of all the elect and of the Church is imputed to the whole Church, and we are said in the person of Christ to have kept the law, to have died, to have been buried, to have been resurrected, and to sit in the heavenly places, so also, deservedly, what Adam sinned as the head of the human race is imputed to us, and we are pronounced to have sinned in his person.

### Thesis VIII

This sin is propagated to men not by example and imitation, but by propagation made through the seed of the man.

Reason 1. Because sin entered the world not through the woman, but through Adam as the head and root of the human race.

2. Because little infants do not sin by example, but are conceived in sins.

3. Because Adam begot a son, Seth, in his own image, that is, impious and a sinner.

### Thesis IX

I relegate the thornier matters of this question to the camp of curiosity, following the judgment of the most learned Johannes Spinaeus, who, in book 6 of *On the Tranquility of the Soul Against Curiosity*, says: "Concerning original sin, there is no reason for us to be so occupied with understanding how it is transfused from fathers to sons, and from the body to the soul, while in the meantime not conceding even an hour to seeking remedies for so pernicious a disease." This is just as if those suffering from a continuous fever or another illness, which ought to be promptly treated, were to care for nothing else than knowing its cause, while in the meantime, because a doctor was not called in time, death would invade. And certainly there are many who waste time investigating those things that surpass our grasp, who would do better if they were to apply the time they spend on that study and misspent exercise (παραδιατριβή) to cultivating the soul with the knowledge of more useful things prescribed to us, pertaining to the saving knowledge of God our creator and redeemer. We feel, alas, that fire burning sufficiently hot in us, which, unless the blood of the Son of God extinguishes it, and the Holy Spirit, merited for us by that blood, extinguishes and suppresses it, casts our body and soul down to hell with an unquenchable conflagration. Let us, therefore, consume the better part of our life in the knowledge of this our savior. Just as when a building is on fire, one does not so much ask how it was caught by the fire, as how it can be extinguished as quickly as possible, so let us also do here. That saying of Augustine in epistle 29 to Jerome elegantly applies here: "A certain man had fallen into a well, and had made known his fall by a shout; when someone had run up to him and asked how he had fallen, he received this reply: 'You may ask about this more opportunely at another time, now work to get me out.'" Thus, in the celestial homeland and Academy, we shall solve those knots which we cannot now solve.

### Thesis X

It should still be noted in passing that this sin, according to the two-fold respect of Adam, is considered in a two-fold manner. For if Adam is considered as his own and a single person, then what is here called original sin is only actual and personal; whence also it should be called originating rather than original, because it gives origin to the other sins. But if he is considered as a common person, representing the posterity of the whole human race, then it should certainly be called natural and original, because it is derived to all men by generation.

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### Thesis XI

The **SPECIFIC DIFFERENCE** is taken partly from the **SUBJECT**, partly from the **EFFECT**. The **SUBJECT** is all and every man naturally begotten of Adam, of whatever condition they may have been. And the reason is that all men, as many as there are, descend from Adam, as from a poisoned root. Now, just as from a

poisoned root only poisoned herbs arise, so also from Adam, submerged in sins, only sinners can be born. Again, just as a man physically leprous generates a leprous man, so also theologically, a sinner begets a sinner. Whence Job not undeservedly asks: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" And Horace wrote:

"nor do fierce eagles beget a peaceful dove."

For it cannot happen that a fierce hawk begets a peaceful and harmless dove, but another hawk, as bad crows a bad egg. Thus Theognis teaches that a servile head is never born straight, but always oblique, and with an oblique neck.

(For neither from a squill are roses born, nor hyacinths,

Nor ever from a slave-woman a free-born child.)

## **Thesis XII**

And thus original sin is equal in all men with respect to nature, not greater in some and less in others. And hence it is that scripture says: "We were all dead in trespasses and sins," and "all fall short of the glory of God." Reason also supports this; for just as all men were equally in Adam, so also all sinned equally in him. And from this it is clear how great a difference there is between original sin and the other actual sins: for original sin is equal in all; but these others are neither the same, nor of the same degree, nor finally are they equally present in the same subject. This happens, however, because of the diversity of God's grace, both of renewal with respect to the elect, and of coercion with respect to the reprobate.

## **Thesis XIII**

Because, however, we have said that the subject of original sin is all and every man, we wish no one to be excluded except Christ, who was without sin (*ἀναμάρτητον*). Not infants: for if such were purged from this leaven, why, I ask, are some snatched away by an untimely death, when no actual sin has been perpetrated by them? Why are they baptized, when the purpose of baptism is the washing away of sins and the sealing of the remission of sins? And for this reason, even the infants of the regenerate are in no way to be excluded from this sin, since a regenerate man begets offspring not according to that by which he is regenerate, but according to the flesh. Whence only they are called sons of God who are born not of blood and the will of the flesh, but who are born of God. Not the Virgin Mary, the mother of our savior according to the flesh: because she, equally with the rest of the faithful, acknowledges Christ as her redeemer, knowing that she is a member of that body of which Christ himself is the savior, and equally with the rest of men, she was subject to death, which certainly would not have happened if she had been utterly free of that sin.

#### **Thesis XIV**

The other difference is taken from the **EFFECT**, by which all natural heirs of Adam were made useless, and by nature children of wrath. Such effects are also other impure streams flowing from this impure source, such as: the dominion of Satan, to whom a window was opened through sin to rage against men, whence he is also called the prince of the world and the ruler of the air; to kill and to work all concupiscence; all actual sins; and also punishment, partly temporal, such as death, both of the body and of the soul; the wrath of God; diseases and all kinds of adverse things; partly eternal, such as eternal condemnation, called the second death, which is not only a punishment of loss, but also of sense, since, being deprived of eternal felicity, they cannot not feel that most grievous loss which brings with it perpetual exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

#### **Thesis XV**

**On the Common Affections.**

The common affections of original sin are its **EXISTENCE** and **DURATION**. The **EXISTENCE** of original sin is its affection by which original sin truly is and exists. That original sin exists, and has been propagated from the first parents until now, and is still being propagated, is clear from these and similar reasons:

1. If some depravity were not born with us, then surely there would be some men, or at least some, who by their nature would not rush into sins, which scripture, however, everywhere denies.
2. Because infants, scarcely brought forth into this temporal light, die. But no one dies except for sin, since death is proclaimed to be the wages of sin alone.

#### **Thesis XVI**

The **DURATION** of original sin is its affection by which original sin begins from the first origin of human conception and lasts to the end of his life. And from this it is most clearly evident what must be answered to those who say that original sin is taken away in this life in baptized and reborn men: namely, that this is not the sense, as if it were so taken away that it no longer exists, but that it does not reign, harm, and hand us over captive to eternal death. For since perfect regeneration is not given in this life, and the baptized sometimes become more wicked than the unbaptized, it is a necessary consequence that original sin is not taken away in this life with respect to its existence, but only with respect to its guilt. It will, however, be fully taken away at the departure of the soul from the body.

#### **Thesis XVII**

**On the Distribution.**

So much for the definition and common affections of original sin; its **DISTRIBUTION** follows. Original sin is distributed into its **PARTS** and

**SPECIES.** The **PARTS**, as it were, are two: the **PRIVATION OF ORIGINAL JUSTICE**, and the **CORRUPTION OF NATURE**.

#### **Thesis XVIII.**

The **PRIVATION** of original justice is the first part of original sin, which is a defect of wisdom and clarity in the mind, of righteousness and holiness in the will, of conformity and integrity in the sensuality. And this privation is wont to be called by theologians a privative quality, which is the same as not being able to do good. From which it is easily gathered that this privation is truly a sin; and that:

1. Because every lawlessness (*ἀνομία*) is sin. But to be destitute of that justice with which God had endowed you, and with which you therefore ought still to be adorned, is most iniquitous and a great *ἀνομία*.
2. Because it also fights against the law of God not to be such as He commands you to be, namely holy, as the Lord says: "Be holy, for I am holy." It is therefore *ἀνομία*, and consequently sin (*ἁμαρτία*), not to be such as God created you in Adam, and such as God again commands you to be by His law.

#### **Thesis XIX**

The **CORRUPTION OF NATURE** is the other part of original sin, consisting in the introduction of blindness and foolishness into the mind, of malice into the will, and of perversity and rebellion into the sensuality. This corruption of nature (which is called concupiscence by the Apostle) is as much a sin as the privation of original justice. The reasons are:

1. Because it is prohibited by the express command of God: "you shall not covet" (which command is to be understood not of actual concupiscence but of the source of all actual concupiscence).
2. Because original concupiscence in the regenerate begets evil concupiscences. Therefore it must be evil. But whatever is evil and vicious is condemned by the law of God; and what is condemned by the law of God is sin.
3. Because all the saints condemn this concupiscence still remaining in them, though not reigning; they detest it, mourn over it, and desire to be freed from it, because it does many evil things in them and opposes the spirit and the law of the mind.
4. From the definition of sin in 1 John 3:4: whatever is in us, or moves, or is done against the law of God, that is sin. For he says that sin (*ἁμαρτία*) is lawlessness (*ἀνομία*), teaching that in whatever thing, or motion, or action *ἀνομία* is found, that is, a turning away from the law of God and a repugnance to the law, there this *ἀνομία* is truly sin. But such a thing is concupiscence in the regenerate, both because it opposes the law of God



written in the minds of the pious, and because it hinders them from being able to fulfill the law of God.

#### **Thesis XX**

Whence it appears not only that all and every heir of Adam is universally corrupt, but also totally corrupt, namely both with respect to the soul, and with respect to the body, and finally with respect to the whole composite being. For it should not be thought as if only the body were corrupt, or even only the soul, but the whole man, as great as he is, is corrupt. For just as the image of God was not in the soul alone, nor even in the body alone, but in man and therefore in the whole composite, so also this original sin should be attributed not only to the soul and body, but to the whole composite consisting of soul and body; which can be best gathered from the opposite, regeneration, which pertains not to one or the other part of man, but to the whole man.

#### **Thesis XXI**

And although destructively (καταλυτικώς) both the whole man himself is corrupt, and all his actions, fighting against the law of God, are wont to be signified and called by the name of sin, according to that received definition of Augustine: "sin is either a word, or a deed, or a thought against the law of God"; yet properly the substance itself, or the nature, or the action of a rational creature is not sin, but is infected by sin. Sin, however, is the lawlessness (ἀνομία) itself, that is, the defect and privation of due righteousness in the action itself, or in the rational substance, according to the law of God. Therefore, the Apostle rightly did not say that sin is an unjust THING, or an evil ACTION, but ἀνομία, that is, that by which a nature or action is and is called unjust. So that the NATURE and the ACTION, which are good in themselves and of which God is the author, must be entirely distinguished from the INIQUITY, by which they are unjust, and of which God cannot be the author.

#### **Thesis XXII**

That the soul is corrupt is, alas, sufficiently clear from the depravation both of the intellect, which, although it may discern something in matters contributing to the convenience of civil life, yet in spiritual matters pertaining to the true worship of God and the salvation of our soul, it is not so much dim-sighted as blind, unless the Lord gives a mind to understand, eyes to see, etc. For its wisdom is enmity against God, holding those things which are of the Spirit of God for foolishness. And although worldly men sometimes understand something, yet they have it not from flesh and blood, but from the revelation of God the heavenly Father. Then of the will, which is placed in the same plight as the intellect. For original sin has so depraved the will that it in no way wills the spiritual good, namely, neither with respect to substance, nor with respect to manner, that is, from faith and for the glory of God. Whence the heart of man is not undeservedly called fraudulent, hardened, whose imagination is evil from his youth.

### **Thesis XXIII**

The body is so corrupt that, first in general, our members present themselves as weapons of unrighteousness for sin; then in particular, the mouth is full of curses and bitterness; the tongue is deceitful and the lips are filled with the venom of asps; the throat is an open sepulcher; the eyes are either lustful and evil; the hands are ready for theft; the belly is a god; the knees are bent to idolatry; the feet are swift to shed innocent blood.

### **Thesis XXIV**

The **SPECIES** are two (which by others are also referred to sin in general), namely, that original sin is **REIGNING** and **NON-REIGNING**. **REIGNING** sin is that which drives an unregenerate person to the point that he, as it were, slackens the rein for sin, and is carried with his whole heart and whole purpose (προαίρεσις) to sinning.

### **Thesis XXV**

The subject of this reigning sin is only the unregenerate. The reasons are these:

1. Because reigning sin cannot dominate those who are not servants of sin; for no one can dominate another unless he is first subject to him. Now, the regenerate are not so subject to sin that they serve in the place of servants; for only they are servants of sin who give themselves to sin. But the regenerate do not give themselves to sin, because those who give themselves to sin are of the Devil.
2. Because reigning sin dominates only in those who are under the law, that is, under the rigor and curse of the law. But the regenerate are not under this law, and therefore it cannot dominate in such people.
3. Because sin reigns in those who sin with full appetite, for sin cannot dominate in those who resist it. But the regenerate do not sin with full appetite, as is clear from the struggle of the flesh and the spirit, which the regenerate man sustains.

### **Thesis XXVI**

**NON-REIGNING** sin is when a man, reborn, being drawn back and impeded by the Spirit of God, is not carried with full force to sinning. The subject of this non-reigning sin is not only the unregenerate man, but also the regenerate, who, although he may sometimes seem to be conquered in battle, is nevertheless not conquered in war, because such a one is sustained by the Lord.

And let these things be said concerning original sin.