

Theological Theses on Original Sin

Which, with God (ΣΥΝ ΘΕΩ), under the presidency of the Reverend and most distinguished man, **D. D. Theodorus Tronchinus**, most worthy Professor of Sacred Theology in the renowned Academy of Geneva, and most faithful Pastor of the church in the same place, **Franciscus Dumasius Sebennensis** from Saint-Jean-du-Gard proposes for public discussion.

On the 19th day of March, at the usual hour and place.

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To the most distinguished man in Justice and Equity, **D. D. Lansaro**, King's Counselor in the Presidial Court at Nîmes.

Since nothing is better and more suited to Faith than for us to acknowledge that we are naked of all virtue, so that we may be clothed by God; empty of all good, so that we may be filled by Him; that we are blind, so that we may be enlightened by Him; that we are lame, so that we may be set aright by Him; that we are weak, so that we may be sustained by Him; to take from ourselves all material for boasting, so that He alone may stand forth glorious, and we may glory in Him; that our generation is vicious, so that we may know we have need of regeneration, according to that in John 3:5, "Unless one is born again, etc."; that we, finally, are slaves of Sin, so that being freed by Him, we may easily lower our crests and with true humility flee to Christ the propitiator: For this reason, so that the deliriums of certain Phrenetics might be dispelled, who with such a specter of perfect innocence try to dazzle the eyes of the simple, so that they might be confident that they can be rendered immune from all guilt, I have resolved to propose for public examination these few theological positions on Original Sin, from the sanctuary of celestial doctrine, and to defend them according to the measure of my ability.

But since my parent attests to the dutiful observance owed to you on account of the innumerable benefits conferred upon him both by your father and by you, who, having entered upon his footsteps, have hastened with great praise and honor on the journey that leads to true glory, I therefore consider myself to owe you a great deal, and I profess myself bound. Wherefore, I offer with a submissive hand and dedicate from my heart this small pledge of my observance to you, and also a token (μνημόσυνον) of my grateful mind. And I ask you again and again that you look upon these, my whatever they are, theological first fruits with favor and goodwill. I do not doubt in any way that they will be pleasing and acceptable to you, when you call to your memory the words of that Poet,

"Though the strength be wanting, yet the will is to be praised, and in great things, even to have willed is enough."

I supplicantly venerate God, the Best and Greatest, that He may be propitious to you.

Your most devoted,

Franciscus Dumasius.

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I.

Just as in defending a fortress, first those who favor the enemy ought to be cast out, and then it is fitting to fortify the fortress strongly and keep it closed; so in defending the fortress of the soul against the devil, the world, and the flesh, care must be taken before all things, lest any enemies lurk within the heart—evil desires, suggestions admitted through consent of the devil—because they would hand the fortress over to the enemy. Whence Hebrews 3:12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Then, a good custody of the senses must be made.

II.

But since the sin of man is either the first, namely the lapse of the first Parents, or one arisen or flowing from the first, that is, any other Original or Actual Sin, setting this latter aside, it is our intention in the present to look into Original sin.

III.

The name "Original" indeed does not exist in Scripture, but the thing does. It is called Original, first, because it is the font and origin of other sins; second, and chiefly, because it was derived from Adam, as the origin of us all, into us by hereditary propagation, and because from our origin and conception in the mother's womb it inheres in each one naturally descended from Adam. (Psalm 51:7).

IV.

Whence also it is natural in us, because it is in us and in our nature—not as it was created upright from the beginning by God (for "God has made man upright," Ecclesiastes 7:29, which rectitude of the whole workmanship rejects crookedness and distortion), but as it is depraved by the fault of the first principle from which we all naturally descend. This is what is said in Ephesians 2:3, that we are "by nature the children of wrath."

V.

Therefore, they are contemptuous toward God who, contending that the nature of Adam was infected with sin from the very beginning of creation, cast a most foul stain upon the divine name and work. Such were of old the Gnostics, Manichaeans, and others who taught that this viciousness and depravation of the will was not acquired by rebellion but was implanted by nature. Hence also are condemned the **Pelagians**, who denied this truth, asserting that all sins are done by intention; the **Anabaptists**, who, holding it to be a figment of Augustine, for this reason among others defend the delay of Baptism; and some of the **Pontificists**, who cry out that it is not properly a sin, that it does not have (at least as to its other part, concupiscence) the true nature of sin, but is only the guilt of another's crime.

VI.

But they are refuted by these reasons. First, because sacred Scripture testifies that all are involved in sin from the first moment of conception and are stained with its spots (Job 14:4; Psalm 51:7; John 3:6). And certainly, everything begotten is similar to the one begetting, not only according to essence, but also according to the accidents proper to the species, whether innate or adventitious. But we are all born of corrupt parents; whence Adam is said to have begotten a son in his own likeness (Genesis 5:3). Finally, the actual sins which flourish in all necessarily require some cause: where there are bad fruits, there is a rotten tree (Matthew 7:17).

VII.

It is thus defined as the corruption of nature and the guilt of the whole human race from the lapse of the first parents. Which corruption is so propagated into all posterity that it begets nothing in man but evil works (which Scripture calls the works of the flesh), just as a burning furnace blows out flame and sparks.

VIII.

Whence it follows that it is not only a disease of nature, that is, a certain weakness for good and a propensity for evil; nor only concupiscence, that is, a morbid quality of the soul or of the flesh exciting evil desires, which the Scholastics call the *fomes peccati* (tinder of sin); nor only guilt without fault, as Scotus dreamed; nor only a lack of the original justice that ought to be in men; nor the very substance and nature of man, as the Flacians held; but an accidental or adventitious contagion adhering in human nature, rendering it both evil and guilty.

IX.

Wherefore this sin is not something positive, that is, a certain subsisting thing created by God, nor is it simply nothing, nor a simple and pure privation, as death is the privation of life, or darkness is the privation of light; but it is that which is at the same time a defect and a destruction of a positive thing, namely of the work and divine order by which all our powers and inclinations ought to have been ruled, and therefore a vicious habit exciting and begetting internal and external motions, which, straying from the law of God, are displeasing to God.

X.

Hence, therefore, it is clear that it is properly a sin, and not only metonymically, because it is the cause of sin or its effect. Thus in the sacred Letters it is called sin absolutely (ἁμαρτία, Romans 7:8); also "sinful sin" (verse 13); the "law of sin" (verse 23); and the "body of sin" (Romans 6:6); in the same place, "indwelling evil," "adjacent" (ἐὺπερίστατον, Hebrews 12:1); the "old man," the "old leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

XI.

There are two parts of this sin: the former is the defection from God in the loins of Adam; the latter is the Pravitas (Depravity) that followed that defection. Hence it happens that Original Sin is said to be both **Inherent** and **Imputed**.

XII.

Imputed sin is that disobedience or defection of Adam, which was imputed to all his posterity who were in his loins, because they were in Adam as in their stock and root. For it is most just before God, and indeed it is received among all nations, that what the head does is deservedly imputed to the whole body, and that children are despoiled of all paternal goods on account of the father's rebellion. But the case is not the same for the sins of other parents, which, because they are truly personal, are therefore not transfused into their children.

XIII.

The sin of Adam in the very act of his sinning is indeed alien from us, because we were not yet in act, but only in potentiality (*δυνάμει*) and originally in his loins; but with respect to the nature common to us and to him, it is proper to each. Therefore, we are punished not on account of the sin of Adam, but on account of our own which is in reality inherent in us. Just as someone infected in a time of contagion infects others, and the infected die; he who dies, dies not on account of the plague of another, but on account of his own.

XIV.

And it is no wonder if Adam ruined his kind by his defection, he who perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and on earth. This contagion, I say, has crept so widely that all creatures, even the innocent, groan, being subject to corruption unwillingly (Romans 8:22). Since, therefore, the curse has flowed up and down from his fault, which rages through all the regions of the world, it is nothing alien to reason if it has been propagated to his whole offspring.

XV.

Inherent sin is the hereditary pravitas (depravity) and corruption of our nature, diffused into all the parts of our nature, which, as it makes us guilty of the wrath of God, so also it brings forth in us the works of the flesh.

XVI.

This sin exerts itself in three degrees: the first is when the mind is only tickled and delighted by an evil thought, and that a light and momentary one. The second is an evil will, when it fully assents to the sin. The third is when we execute the internal motion of the mind by hand and by deed.

XVII.

We assert that none of these is free from the stain of sin; for the root is of the same nature and character as the branches and fruits. Then, it is not very likely

that the Apostle in Romans 7:19 etc., is there dealing with the desire to sin with the consent of the will, since he says that he willed to do good and delighted in the law of God as to the inner man. But who will think that the desire with the consent of the will to do good and evil can be at the same time? Did not the Philosophers also argue against avarice of the heart and an evil purpose joined with open deliberation of the mind? XENOCRATES: "It is no less shameful to cast one's eyes than one's hands upon the goods of others." JUVENAL: "He who thinks any silent crime within himself has the guilt of the deed." Let the impudence of the Pontificists therefore depart, which can indeed bark at the justice of Christ from afar, but not touch it, while they feign that the offspring of concupiscence is not a mortal but a venial sin, and deny that the first motions have the nature of sin.

XVIII.

Baptism indeed promises us the submersion of our Pharaoh and the Mortification of sin, yet not so that it is no more or does not trouble us, but only that it does not overcome us, on account of Christ who, by His blood, prevents its power from condemning, and by His spirit, restrains it from dominating. This is not so that men may sleep securely in their sins, but only that they may not waver and lose heart, who are tickled and pricked by their flesh.

XIX.

The receiving subject of this sin is either the subject *to which* (cui) it is attributed and happens, or the subject *in which* (in quo) it resides.

XX.

The subject *to which* it happens are all men who are brought forth into the light by the common law of birth. And therefore, **Christ alone was immune** from this sin; and the **Virgin Mary was subject to this evil**, because she was propagated from Adam naturally. Then, since Holy Scripture convicts all of sin (1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:21; Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22, etc.), who can press forward and give exceptions to the general propositions of the word of God, besides the word itself? But it excepts only Jesus.

XXI.

For the reasons stated above, the children of believers are also involved in this contagion; for they are begotten by their parents not as believers or regenerate by the Holy Spirit, but as men and posterity of Adam according to the flesh. Thus from the circumcised Hebrews were begotten uncircumcised sons. And from seeds purged of chaff, husks, and awns, wheat is born with the same. (Augustine).

XXII.

The subject *in which* it resides is not only the lower faculties, namely of sensing and appetite, nor only the superior faculties, namely of understanding and

willing, but the whole man, both soul and body, with all their powers. Besides experience, these passages testify: Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 4:17-18; Romans 6:12-13, etc.

XXIII.

As to the mode by which this sin is derived into posterity, we confess that this cannot be explained with sufficient precision. Augustine advises that nothing should be rashly asserted in such a question; and certainly, one should rather ask by what way we can escape from that evil, than how it has come down to us.

XXIV.

It must be known, however, that it is not transferred to us only by custom or by example and imitation of the sin of the first parents, as the Pelagians contended, for those who cannot imitate the sins of others also die and are judged (Romans 5:14); but by propagation and natural tradition, we who are born such as Adam was after the sin.

XXV.

The effects of this sin are both the guilt of the fault, that is, the conviction of man that he is guilty of a crime, and therefore deformed by a stain, as it were, of guilt and formally constituted a sinner; and also the guilt of punishment, not only temporal but also eternal, not only of loss but also of sense. But these are not imputed to us on account of the Son of God, "because being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:1); and chapter 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ," etc.

THE END.