

SOME THOUGHTS  
*ON*  
ORIGINAL SIN

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## INTRODUCTION

**S**in is not my favorite subject; I would much rather write about the love of God, about Jesus, or the prophecies. However, sin plays a major part in the Great Controversy, and the Bible speaks much about sin, as do theologians. Among G. C. Berkouwer's nineteen volumes on dogmatics the largest volume by far is the one on sin - 590 pages. His two volumes on justification and sanctification together are less than 400 pages.

Why is the subject of sin so important? Because without sin we would still be in the garden of Eden. Without a correct understanding of the origin and the nature of sin we will have a distorted picture of Christ and salvation. In fact, much of our discussion on the nature of Christ and perfection is futile, unless we first come to a proper understanding of what sin really is.

Because the subject of sin is so vast, in this paper I have concentrated on the concept of original sin. Other aspects of sin will only be dealt with in as far as they contribute to an understanding of original sin.

## I DEFINITION

Original sin" like "trinity" is not a biblical but a theological term. Yet, it expresses what most Christian theologians believe is a biblical concept.

A Catholic catechism asks the question: "What is original sin?" The answer given is: "Original sin is that guilt and stain which we inherit from Adam, who was the ori-

gin and head of all mankind."<sup>1</sup> We note that the answer clearly identifies two aspects of original sin: (a) inherited guilt and (b) inherited stain. The inherited stain refers to our sinful passions, to our tendencies or propensities to sin.

## II THE ISSUES AND QUESTIONS<sup>2</sup>

A major portion of Scripture is devoted to the subject of sin. "Next to the word God, the word sin is the most closely packed with meaning for the human race and for the universe."<sup>3</sup> But how should sin be defined? Is it an act, i.e., is sin simply "transgression of the Law" (1 John 3:4 KJV), or does sin also refer to a state of being? Is a corrupt nature in itself sinful or not? Should sin as a state of being be considered as the cause of individual acts of sin? How about children, are they born sinners or do they become sinners only when they break the law? Is man a sinner because he sins, or does he sin because he is a sinner? What do we inherit from Adam? These are the questions and issues we will look at.

Adventists are divided in regard to how sin should be defined. E. Heppenstall, for example, wrote:

This state of sin into which all men are born is called original sin - not in the sense of

inherited guilt, but of an inherited disposition to sin. It goes back to an original source, the sin of Adam and Eve, the first parents of the human race. Involved is the sinful condition of all members of the human race before they are actually guilty of committing sin themselves.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to this position, D. E. Priebe said: "Sin is not basically what a man is, but the way man choose. . . sin is concerned with a man's will rather than with his nature."<sup>5</sup>

Since these questions concern important issues, we will first look at the biblical evidence, then we will explore the history of the original-sin doctrine, and lastly we will investigate the understanding of this doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

## III THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The Bible is very explicit in regard to the extensiveness (universality) of sin as well as to its intensiveness.

### THE EXTENSIVENESS OF SIN

The universality of sin is set forth in direct statements of Scripture:

1 Kings 8:46 "there is no man that sinneth not."

Psalms 14:3 "there is none that doeth good, no not one."

Ecclesiastes 7:20 "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

Romans 3:10 "There is none righteous, no not one."

3:23 "For all have sinned."

Even the heroes of faith in Hebrew 11 who are described as perfect (Gen 6:9), as friends of God (Jas 2:23),

<sup>1</sup> *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1958), p.19.

<sup>2</sup> For some of the thoughts and sources in this paper I am indebted to Norman Gulley, "Preliminary Considerations of the Effects and Implications of Adam's Sin", *Adventist Perspectives*, 2:2(1988), 28-44.

<sup>3</sup> E. Heppenstall, *The Man Who is God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1977), p.107.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.107-108.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis E. Priebe, *Face-to-face With the Real Gospel* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), p.17.

or as men after the heart of God (Acts 13:22), were sinners. Noah was a drunkard (Gen 9:21), Abraham was a liar (Gen 12:13), and David was an adulterer and murderer (2 Sam 1). Thus they could join us and every other human being, but one, in repeating Isaiah's words (53:6): "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way." The exception, the one - Jesus Christ - is mentioned in the last part of Isaiah's text: "and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The fact that Scripture declares the universal need of atonement (John 3:16; Acts 4:12), of regeneration (John 3:3,5), and of repentance (Acts 17:30) also indicates that sin is universal. An additional proof is the fact that all persons are subject to death, the penalty for sin (Rom 6:23).

### THE INTENSIVENESS OF SIN

How sinful is the sinner? How deep is our sin? Are we basically good, created in the image of God, but because of temptations we transgress God's law; or are we basically evil, with the image of God almost destroyed, and because of our evil nature we commit sin?

The Bible generally defines sin as an act, 1 John 3:4 "sin is the transgression of the law", or "sin is lawlessness" (NASB). In the Old Testament the most commonly used word for sin is *chata*' which in its most literal sense means "to miss the mark" as in Judges 20:16, "Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men left-handed; everyone could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss (*chata*)." In matters of morals, "missing the mark" refers to the fact that God's law is the standard of ethical behavior at which one must aim. Thus, when Joseph said: "how then can I do this great wickedness and sin (*chata*) against God" (Gen 39:9), he was in effect saying, "how can I do this great wickedness and miss the standard of God's law." Missing the mark is not merely an accidental mistake, but a voluntary and culpable wrong act. C. R. Smith says:

The hundreds of examples of the word's moral use require that the wicked man "misses the right mark because he chooses to aim at a wrong one" and "misses the right path because he deliberately follows a wrong one" - that is, there is no question of an innocent mistake or of the merely negative idea of failure.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of other Hebrew words which express the idea of sin as an act, e.g., *shagah* "to go astray" (1 Sam 26:21), *chet* "error" (Isa 1:18), or *pasha* "rebellion" (1 Kgs 12:19). And in the New Testament the most frequently used words for sin, *hamartano* (43x)<sup>7</sup> and *hamartia* (173x),<sup>8</sup> also have the underlying thought of missing a mark or aim.<sup>9</sup>

However, a great number of texts in both the Old Testament and the New Testament refer to sin as a state, or tendency of the heart. Jeremiah depicts sin as a spiritual sickness which afflicts the heart. He says that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (17:9). David in Psalm 51 expresses the thought that he was born a sinner, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Not that his mother did anything wrong in connection with his conception or birth, she was an honorable woman, but he recognises that he was born with a sinful nature. He desires to be washed and cleansed from sin (vss.2,7) and asks God to create in him a clean heart (vs.10). The same thought is expressed in Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Israel is called "a transgressor from the womb" (Isa 48:8). And "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness (not a sound spot NEB) in it", says God in Isaiah 1:6.

The Hebrew verb *chashab* (to think) and its derivatives appear some 180 times in the Old Testament. They are used in connection with the thoughts and purposes of God, but especially in reference to the cunning and sinful devisings of man's heart. In Genesis 6:5 God looks down on the earth and sees that the wickedness of man is great, "every imagination of the thoughts (*chashab*) of his heart was only evil continually." Man's thoughts, says Isaiah, are "thoughts (*chashab*) of iniquity" (59:7). He therefore calls on the wicked to "forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts (*chashab*)" (55:7).

The New Testament is even clearer and more emphatic on these matters. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of the inward disposition as evil (Matt 5:21-22,27-28). To the Pharisees he said: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt 12:34). Evil actions and words stem from the evil thought of the heart: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt 15:19). This sinfulness of

<sup>6</sup> Charles Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin and of the Ways of God with Sinners* (London: Epworth, 1953), p.20.

<sup>7</sup> Matt 18:15; Luke 15:18; John 5:14; Rom 2:12; 3:23; 5:12; etc.

<sup>8</sup> Matt 1:21; 3:6; 9:2,5,6; Mark 1:4,5; Luke 1:77; John 1:29; etc.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1948), p.239.

the human heart, which we will call SIN, produces individual acts of transgressions which are sins. Thus by nature we are children of wrath (Eph 2:3) who are enticed to sin by their own lusts (Jas 4:1).

Paul's own self-testimony also is a powerful argument that it is the corruption of human nature that produces individual sins. He recalls that "while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (Rom 7:5). He sees "in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (v.23). In Galatians 5:17 he writes that the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. The word here is *epithumeo*, which can refer to either a neutral desire or an improper desire. There are numerous "works of the flesh": "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (vss.19-21). In Paul's thinking, then, as in Jesus', sins are the result of human nature. In every human being there is a strong inclination toward evil, an inclination with definite effects.<sup>10</sup>

The only sinless human being in Scripture is Jesus. Of him alone we read that he "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), that he was "separate from sinners" (Heb 7:26) and that "no guile was found in his mouth" (1 Pet 2:22). Thus he could be the lamb "without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:19).

### Total Depravity

Total depravity is the phrase used to describe the comprehensive effect of sin. It does not mean that human beings are as bad as bad can be, or that there is no trace of goodness left in them. The word *total* simply refers to the fact that man as a whole is infected with sin. No part of man is exempt. His body is affected by sin (Rom 6:6, 12; 7:24; 8:10), his mind or reason is involved (Rom 1:28; 2 Cor 3:14-15; 4:14), and his soul or his emotions have been perverted (Rom 1:24-27; 2 Tim 3:2-4). Finally, also his will is

affected by sin. The unconverted person does not really have a free will; he is a slave to sin (Rom 6:17). He, therefore, is unable even to understand and acknowledge the truth about himself as God sees it.

Man in his sinfulness cannot apprehend the truth of God. Each succeeding generation makes the same tragic mistakes. Man never seems to learn. Evil tendencies abound. Sin has produced a radical insanity of evil passions, selfish ambitions, wild desires, unreasonable emotions that are the curse of all men on the earth.<sup>11</sup>

Whether this innate sinfulness is to be understood as an inherited state of sinfulness deserving condemnation, or only as an inherited proneness to sin, will be discussed later. For now we must turn our attention to the question of origin.

## THE ORIGIN OF OUR SINFUL NATURE

The doctrine of original sin is nowhere developed in any systematic fashion in Scripture. It is based on isolated scriptural texts scattered all through the Bible. Theologians throughout history have pulled these texts together to establish this doctrine. One of the key texts used for this doctrine is Gen 3, the story of the fall. However, upon closer examination we find that Gen 3 refers to a number of results from Adam's sin - guilt (3:8), enmity (3:15), pain in child-birth (3:16), hard work (3:19), death (3:19), etc. - but human depravity is not specifically mentioned. This may explain why, apart from possible references to Genesis 3 in Isaiah 43:27 and Hosea 6:7, the Old Testament nowhere explicitly connects the fall with the universal sinfulness of man. It describes the reality of sin and states that man is a sinner from birth, but it does not explain how sin is passed on from generation to generation.

Paul is the only biblical writer who clearly connects the fall of man with our death and our sinful nature. In 1 Cor 15:21-22 he teaches that death has its origin in Adam, "For as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In Romans 5:12 he says that sin too comes from Adam, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;

<sup>10</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p.627.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974), p.16.

and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

It is particularly the last part of Romans 5:12 which has caused considerable debate among interpreters. Does the phrase “all have sinned” refer to personal sins, committed by all, or to the fact that all men in some way sinned in Adam? As far as Greek Grammar is concerned, both interpretations are possible. If we choose the first interpretation, the meaning is that the result of Adam’s sin was merely that he himself became subject to death, and thereafter, because “all have sinned”, all men suffer the same fate. This seems to be the plain meaning of the text. The aorist *hēmarton* “have sinned” is understood in the same way as in 3:23 “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

However, if Paul meant that all became subject to death, because of their own sins, the conclusion would logically be that all receive eternal life on the basis of the righteousness which they themselves achieved. But this is ruled out by Paul’s statement in verses 17-19. Death came to all through the fall of one man (Adam), so likewise life is given to all because of the righteousness of one man (Christ).

The second interpretation, therefore, understands “all have sinned” to mean that “all men have sinned in

Adam<sup>12</sup>. This is supported by an appeal to 2 Cor 5:14, the death of one was the death of all; so in Romans 5:12 the sin of one was the sin of all. Furthermore, this interpretation is strengthened by the immediate context in Romans 5; “many died through one man’s trespass” (5:15), “because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man” (5:17), “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (5:19, RSV). Thus Paul seems to teach that Adam’s sin produced in mankind not only the penalty of death, but also a real state of sin.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the aorist *hēmarton* “have sinned” is linked to the other two aorists in verse 12; “sin entered (*eisēlthen*) into the world” and “death went through (*diēlthen*) to all men” All three are seen as historical aorists indicating what happened in Eden.<sup>14</sup>

How the sin of Adam resulted in the sin and death of mankind, and how Romans 5:12 is to be understood correctly, has been the subject of discussion for more than two millennia.

## IV HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

### THE APOCRYPHA

During the intertestamental period Ben Sira (ca. 180 B.C.) the author of *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach* (also called *Ecclesiasticus*) wrote, “From a woman was the beginning of sin; and because of her we all die” (Sir 25:24). And the unknown author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* (ca. 150-50 B.C.) stated that, “God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil death came into the world, and they who belong to him will experience it” (Wis 2:23-25).

These are the earliest extra-biblical sources teaching that death is the result of the sin of Adam and Eve. However, a specific statement that the sin of the first parents is transmitted to each of their descendants - the idea of original sin - is nowhere to be found.”<sup>15</sup>

### THE JEWISH APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Jewish apocalyptic literature flourished between 200 B.C. and A.D. 150. These writings deal primarily with the future, the end of this world, rather than with the present. Frequently in the form of visionary experiences they describe the spiritual world of angels and cosmic powers; and they major on the purposes of God rather than on the actions of men. Among the best known examples are the *Books of Enoch*, the *Fourth Book of Ezra*, the *Apocalypses of Baruch*, the *Book of Jubilees*, and the *Assumption of Moses*. From Qumran comes *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of death as an inherited penalty is mentioned a number of times in these writings. Some authors put the blame for death on Eve, others on Adam.

<sup>12</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), pp.214-215.

<sup>13</sup> A.M. Dubarle, *The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin* (London: G. Chapman, 1964), p.147.

<sup>14</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1936), p.360.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes B. Bauer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1970), p.621.

<sup>16</sup> J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), p.52.

**Apocalypse of Moses** (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)<sup>17</sup>

14:2 Adam said to Eve, "Why have you wrought destruction among us and brought upon us great wrath, which is death gaining rule over all our race?"

**4 Ezra** (100 A.D.)

3:7 Ezra speaking to God says: "And you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and his descendants."

**2 Baruch** (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.)

23:4 "When Adam sinned and death was decreed against those who were to be born, the multitude of those who would be born was numbered."

54:15 "Adam sinned first and brought death upon all who were not in his own time."

56:6 "For when he transgressed, untimely death came into being. . ."

Apart from death as the consequence of Adam's fall, 4 Ezra 7:118 seems to indicate that in Adam all his descendants fell, "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants." And in the *Life of Adam and Eve* (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) the sin of all generations is traced back to Eve, "And Adam said to Eve, what have you done? You brought upon us a great wound, transgression and sin in all our generations" (44:2).

In Rabbinic thinking man was created with a good impulse (*yetzer ha-tob*) and an evil impulse (*yetzer ha-ra*)<sup>18</sup> which struggle for the mastery in man's heart. Thus in 4 Ezra 3:20-22 we read:

For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the people's heart along with the

evil root, but what was good departed, and evil remained."

Through the study of the Torah man could protect himself against the evil impulses of his heart.<sup>18</sup> Thus the Tannaim, the religious thinkers cited in the Mishnah, had God saying to man as it were: "If I created the Evil Inclination to tempt you into error, I also created the Torah to keep you from error."<sup>19</sup>

We see then in Jewish literature an attempt to grapple with the question of sin and its heredity, but an unambiguous statement concerning original sin and its propagation is lacking.

**THE WRITINGS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS**

The Gnostic controversy, in which the problem of evil played an important role, forced the Early Church to define the doctrines of the original state and of the fall.

**The Greek Fathers**

The Greek Fathers viewed man as having been created "neither mortal nor immortal, but capable of both; his destiny depended on how he exercised his free will."<sup>20</sup> When man fell he became mortal and corrupt. This physical corruption was seen to be propagated in the human race, but was not considered sin in itself. Neither did it involve mankind in guilt.<sup>21</sup> Romans 5:12-21 was generally interpreted in terms of the death to which man became subject. The sin in Romans 5:12d "for that all have sinned" was understood to refer to man's personal sin.

**Irenaeus** (died c.195), bishop of Lyon, viewed all men as being seminally present in Adam, the head of the human race. By virtue of this union, all men were conceived of as existing in Adam and hence as being personally involved in Adam's sin. "In the first Adam", he wrote, "we offended God, not fulfilling His commandment . . . To Him alone were we debtors, whose ordinance we transgressed in the beginning."<sup>22</sup> However, he denied that children share in Adam's guilt because sin always originates in the free choice of man.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> All ancient quotations in this section are taken from James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> William D. Davis, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp.21-22.

<sup>19</sup> Nathan Ausubel, *The Book of Jewish Knowledge* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964), p.506.

<sup>20</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 5th ed., (London: A. and C. Black, 1977), p.168.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p.128.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, p.172.

<sup>23</sup> Julius Gross, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas*, 2 vols. (München: E. Reinhardt Verlag, 1960), 1:94.



**Origen** (c.185-254), a theologian in Alexandria, at first taught the theory of an inborn sinfulness as the result of the fall of all individual souls in a previous, celestial existence. Later, however, he accepted the doctrine of inherited corruption, introduced by Adam's fall.<sup>24</sup>

To summarise: The Greek Fathers understood death to be the penalty for Adam's fall. They believed that all men were involved in Adam's sin and that it affected our moral nature. They taught that we inherit an evil and corrupt nature, but that no guilt is attached to it.

### The Latin Fathers

Similar to the Greek Fathers, the Latin Fathers saw man's original state as one of supernatural blessedness. Adam and Eve, created immortal,<sup>25</sup> radiated perfect innocence and virtue, they were even exempt from the need of food.<sup>26</sup> Because of pride Adam fell and became mortal.

**Tertullian** (c.160-215), the founder of Latin theology, equated original sin with concupiscence (sexual lust) which, by inheritance, Adam passed on to his descendants.<sup>27</sup> He understood this in terms of the traducianist doctrine of the origin of the soul, which says that all individual souls were in some way contained in Adam from whom they ultimately derive. By his sin Adam is said to have infected the entire human race with his seed, making it the channel (*traducem*) of damnation.<sup>28</sup> He said:

Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ; moreover, it is unclean all the while that it remains without this regeneration; and because unclean, it is actively sinful, and suffuses even the flesh with its own shame.<sup>29</sup>

**Ambrose** (339-397) and **Ambrosiaster** (4<sup>th</sup> century) two other Latin fathers strongly emphasised

the idea of man's solidarity in sin by virtue of the participation of all in Adam's sin.

**Ambrose:** "In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died. How should God restore me, unless he find me in Adam, justified in Christ, exactly as in that first Adam I was subject to guilt and destined to death?"<sup>30</sup>

**Ambrosiaster:** "It is therefore plain that all men sinned in Adam as in a lump (*quasi in massa*). For Adam himself was corrupted by sin and all whom he begat were born under sin. Thus we are all sinners from him, since we all derive from him."<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, neither of these writers seems to have considered this inherited sin as worthy of punishment. Ambrose explicitly distinguishes our inherited unrighteousness for which we shall not be punished from our personal sins for which we shall be punished.<sup>32</sup> And Ambrosiaster in his interpretation of Romans 5:12-21 attributes the death of all men to their imitation of Adam's sin.<sup>33</sup>

There seems to be a certain amount of ambiguity and uncertainty in their statements. On the one hand Ambrose speaks of man being subject to guilt in Adam (see above) on the other hand he denies that Adam's guilt is somehow transferred to us. Possibly this is an indication of the tension these writers experienced as they wrestled with the problem of original sin.

**Pelagius** (5<sup>th</sup> century) was a well-educated Briton, trained in law, who appeared in Rome around the year 400 teaching Christian perfection and calling for repentance and penitence.

According to Pelagius, Adam was created with a middle nature, i.e., neither holy nor sinful, but with a capacity for both good and evil. He was created mortal, but with an entirely free and undetermined will. He chose to sin yet his fall injured no one but himself. Pelagius denied any hereditary transmission of a sinful nature or of

<sup>24</sup> James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 9:560.

<sup>25</sup> Gross, I:113.

<sup>26</sup> Kelly, p.353.

<sup>27</sup> Gross, I:117.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, p.175.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, 40 (ANF 3:220).

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, p.354.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.355.

<sup>33</sup> George Vandervelde, *Original Sin* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, N.V., 1975), p.10.

guilt, thus man is still born in the same condition in which Adam was before the fall. There are no evil tendencies or desires in man's nature. The only difference between Adam and man is that the latter has the evil example before him. Sin does not consist in wrong affections or desires, but only in a separate act of the will.<sup>34</sup> Sin's universality, said Pelagius, is due to wrong education, to bad example, and to a long-established habit of sinning. "By force of habit, sin attains a power akin to that of nature - sin becomes as it were 'second nature'."<sup>35</sup>

God's grace for Pelagius is primarily God's gift of man's good nature with its capability of freely choosing and doing the good. He saw grace in terms of "external gifts and natural endowments, such as man's rational nature, the revelation of God in Scripture, and the example of Christ."<sup>36</sup>

Jesus Christ, according to Pelagius, is the fullest concretisation of the original grace of nature. As the direct image of God, Christ is a mirror of what man is and ought to be. By beholding Christ man becomes changed into His image because Christ's example effects a resonating response in man's deepest being, i.e., in his *memoria* - the noetic ontological link with his original nature.<sup>37</sup>

Pelagianism with its rosy view of human nature was condemned at various councils and finally anathematised at the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>38</sup>

**Augustine** (354-430),<sup>39</sup> the greatest of the Latin Fathers, was bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa. He became the chief opponent of Pelagius.

Augustine conceived of four stages in the history of man: before the fall, after the fall, after conversion, in perfection. In the Edenic state man possessed a full measure of freedom. He could choose between good and evil and was thus able to refrain from sin (*posse non peccare*). This ability was not an innate ability, not a natural endowment, it was a gift of divine grace.

Since free will contains the possibility of a fall, the first sin was occasioned by free will. Through the fall man lost the gift of grace and with it the freedom which constituted the ability to choose the good. For when grace was lost, human nature was changed. His basic attitude changed. Whereas before the fall man's life was directed towards God, now it was directed toward self. Self-love was substituted for the love of God. The baser powers of human nature - concupiscence - assumed a dominating position. In isolated instances the will can overcome concupiscence but the direction of the will nevertheless remains the same.

Man after the fall no longer has the power to choose the good, he now has a compulsion to sin. He is no longer able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). This does not mean he cannot do isolated good deeds, but the direction of his will is toward evil. Within this basic attitude towards evil man still has a free will, but man is free only to sin.<sup>40</sup>

Augustine believed that the whole human race was seminally present in Adam and therefore also actually sinned in him. He said, "In the misdirected choice of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom on that account they all severally derive original sin."<sup>41</sup> Through sexual procreation Adam transmitted his fallen nature (guilt and corruption) to his posterity. Thus man, separated from God, burdened with guilt, and under the dominion of evil, cannot will that which is good in the sight of God, i.e., that which springs from the motive of love to God.

Here we have the first clear definition of original sin as it came to be accepted by most Christians from then on.

Salvation for Augustine is all of God's grace, but this grace includes the regeneration of man. Man's will is altered and he can truly do that which is good and thus he can become God's co-worker in faith. Man is saved by faith, but this faith also does that which is good. Deeds that originate in love are thought of as being meritorious and will

<sup>34</sup> Berkhof, pp.132-133.

<sup>35</sup> Vandervelde, p.12.

<sup>36</sup> Berkhof, p.133.

<sup>37</sup> Vandervelde, p.13.

<sup>38</sup> Kelly, p.361.

<sup>39</sup> This section is based on Bengt Hägglund, *History of Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 135-136, and Berkhof, pp.134-135.

<sup>40</sup> Kelly, p.365.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.364. In this argument Augustine relied on the Vulgate translation of Rom 5:12 which says, "**in quo omnes peccaverunt**," i.e., "in whom all sinned." All modern translations recognise that the Greek "**ep̄ ho**" has the sense of "because" or "considering that."

eventually be rewarded. But such merit can only be won by grace.<sup>42</sup> The actual basis of salvation, for Augustine, is grace alone (not man's free will), but that which is of note in the work of grace is not so much the "alien" righteousness of Christ which is imputed to us but rather the change which takes place in the life of the newborn individual.

To summarise: Like the Greek Fathers, the Latin Fathers before Augustine taught that death and original corruption are the result of man's participation in Adam's sin. Most of them, however, denied that man's corruption deserves punishment. Augustine, in the controversy with Pelagius, formulated the classical doctrine of original sin which includes death, corruption, and guilt.

## FROM AQUINAS TO ARMINIUS

**Thomas Aquinas** (1224-1274) was the greatest philosopher and theologian of the medieval church. Building on the teachings of **Augustine** and **Anselm** (1033-1109), Thomas Aquinas defined original sin as the privation of original justice or righteousness.<sup>43</sup> God created man and woman in a state of original righteousness which included supernatural grace and the exemption from concupiscence and death. Furthermore, in this state of original righteousness, reason and the will of man were in submission to God. When Adam rebelled, the supernatural gift of grace was withdrawn and the interior harmony of his nature as well as his submission to God were lost.<sup>44</sup> This is the condition of original sin in which all men are born. Original sin for Aquinas included guilt since he viewed humanity as constituting a single body in the sense that a civic community can be spoken of as one body.<sup>45</sup>

In opposition to Thomas Aquinas the Reformers maintained that original sin is more than a mere absence of original justice. Like Augustine they saw original sin as a total corruption of human nature (total depravity). They considered even the first movements of the desires, which tend in the direction of sin, to be sins - indwelling sins which make man guilty and worthy of condemnation.<sup>46</sup>

**The Council of Trent** (1545-1563) was one of the most important Councils in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. It was convened to halt the continuing success of the Protestant Movement. While the emperor hoped the Council would reunite western Christendom as a means of strengthening the imperial power against the Turks, the pope wanted the Council to anathematise every form of Protestant heresy. In the end the council provided the foundation for a revitalisation of Catholicism and the eventual success of the Counter-Reformation.

In regard to the question of original sin, the aim of the Council of Trent was to correct the teaching of the Reformers on the radical corruption of human nature by Adam's sin. The decrees of this Council represent the most comprehensive and definitive statement on original sin issued by the Roman Catholic Church.

### Canon One<sup>47</sup>

If anyone does not profess that the first man Adam immediately lost the justice and holiness in which he was constituted when he disobeyed the command of God in paradise; and that, through the offence of this sin, he incurred the wrath and the indignation of God, and consequently incurred the death with which God had previously threatened him and, together with death, bondage in the power who from that time "had the empire of death" (Heb 2:14), that is, of the devil; "and that it is the whole Adam, both body and soul, who was changed for the worse through the offence of this sin": let him be anathema.

### Canon Two

If anyone asserts that Adam's sin was injurious only to Adam and not to his descendants, and that it was for himself alone that he lost the holiness and justice which he had received from God, and not for us also; or that after his defilement by the sin of disobedience, he "transmitted to the whole human race only death" and punishment "of the body but not sin also, which is the death of the soul": let him be anathema. "For he contradicts the words of the Apostle: `Through one man sin entered into the world, and through

<sup>42</sup> This is different from the Reformers who said that only faith in Christ and His merits justifies a man; human works do not enter in.

<sup>43</sup> Vandervelde, p.28.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>46</sup> Berkhof, p.147

<sup>47</sup> These texts are from Vandervelde, pp.33-39.

sin death, and so death passed upon all men; in whom all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

#### Canon Three

If anyone asserts that this sin of Adam, which is one by origin, and which is communicated to all men by propagation not by imitation (*propagatione, non imitatione transfusum*), and which is in all men and proper to each, is taken away either through the powers of human nature or through a remedy other than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ who reconciled us to God in his blood, “being made unto us justice, sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30); or denies that, through the sacrament of baptism rightly conferred in the form of the Church, this merit of Jesus Christ is applied both to adults and to infants: let him be anathema. Because “there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Hence that voice: “Behold the lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world” (cf. John 1:29). And: “All you who have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

#### Canon Four

“If anyone denies that newly born infants are to be baptised”, even though they may have been born of baptised parents, “or says that they are indeed baptised for the remission of sins but that they do not derive anything of the original sin from Adam that must be expiated in the bath of regeneration” *to obtain eternal life*; “and, consequently, that for them the form of baptism - ‘for the remission of sins’ - is to be understood, not in a true, but in a false sense: let him be anathema. Because the words of the Apostle: ‘Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and so *death* passed upon all men; in whom all have sinned’ (Rom 5:12), cannot be understood in any other way than as the Catholic Church everywhere has always understood them. Because of this rule of faith”, *from a tradition of the apostles* “even infants, who have not yet been able to commit any personal sins, are truly baptised for the remission of sins, that in them that which they have *contracted* [*contraxerunt*] by generation may be washed away by regeneration” (DS, 223). “*For unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit,*

*he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5).

#### Canon Five

If anyone denies that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ conferred in baptism the guilt of original sin is remitted, or even asserts that everything having the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away but is only brushed over or not imputed: let him be anathema. For God hates nothing in the regenerated because “there is no condemnation for those who are truly buried with Christ by means of baptism into death” (Rom 6:4), who “do not walk according to the flesh” (Rom 8:1), but putting off the old man and putting on the new man “which was created according to God” (cf. Eph 4:22ff.; Col 3:9f.), are made innocent, without stain, pure, no longer hateful, but beloved sons of God, “heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), so that absolutely nothing delays their entrance into heaven. It is the mind of this council and it professes that concupiscence or the tinder [of sin] remains in the baptised; but since it is left to provide a trial, it has no power to injure those who do not consent and who, by the grace of Jesus Christ, manfully resist. Moreover, those “who compete according to the rules will be crowned” (2 Tim 2:5). As for this concupiscence which the Apostle sometimes calls “sin” (Rom 6: 12ff.), this holy council declares that the Catholic Church has never understood it to be called sin as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is from sin and inclines to sin. If anyone thinks the contrary: let him be anathema.

The Council of Trent rather than defining original sin described the results of it - loss of original justice and holiness, death, and bondage in the power of the devil (Canon One). Adam’s sin and its results are passed on to his inheritance (Canon Two) by propagation not by imitation (Canon Three). Thus Adam’s sin by virtue of the imputation of this single original sin to all men is inherent in each human being.

Original sin is taken away by baptism which is the application of Christ’s death to adults and infants (Canon Three). Thus, even infants who have not yet committed any personal sin must be baptised (Canon Four) in order for the guilt of the original sin to be remitted (Canon Five).

Canon Five is particularly aimed at the teaching of the Reformers, especially at Luther who held “that concupiscence, understood as man’s culpable bias to evil, remains in the Christian and constitutes sin in a true and proper sense.”<sup>48</sup> Thus the Christian, according to Luther, can be described as *simul justus et peccator*: “just, because in faith he shares in Christ’s redemption and, in the power of that faith, fights against the evil within; sinner, because precisely this evil, ‘invincible concupiscence’, continues to dwell in him.”<sup>49</sup>

Like Luther, John Calvin (1609-63) believed that original sin is a hereditary depravity which produces in man the works of the flesh. This corruption, Calvin taught, is not, as Augustine thought, primarily found in the sensual appetites, but also in the higher faculties of man.<sup>50</sup>

**Jacobus Arminius** (1560-1609) was a Dutch Reformed professor at the University of Leyden in Holland who came to question some of the teachings of Calvinism.

According to Arminius we receive from Adam a corrupt nature but not Adam’s guilt. We begin life without original righteousness, unable without divine help to obey God’s commandments, and destined for death. As a matter of justice, therefore, God grants to each person a special gift of the Holy Spirit (prevenient grace) which neutralises the corruption received from Adam. It makes obedience possible, provided the human will cooperates, which it still has power to do.<sup>51</sup>

Evil tendencies, said Arminius, may be called sin, but they do not in themselves involve guilt or punishment, neither are we accounted guilty because of Adam’s sin. “God imputes to each man his inborn tendencies to evil only when he consciously and voluntarily appropriates and ratifies these in spite of the power to the contrary, which, in justice to man, God has specially communicated.”<sup>52</sup>

### Summary

During the first 1600 years of the Christian era, we find that three views dominated the history of the doctrine of original sin.

1. The Pelagian View: In this view Adam transmitted neither corruption nor guilt to his descendants. His sin is only a bad example. Hence baptism does not remove sin or guilt in infants since they have none. Physical death is not the penalty of sin, but an original law of nature. Romans 5:12d, “death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”, means: “all incurred eternal death by sinning after Adam’s example.” Unitarians hold this view today.<sup>53</sup>
2. The Augustinian View: In this view Adam transmitted both corruption and guilt to his descendants. It holds that God imputes the sin of Adam directly (immediately) to all his posterity, because when Adam sinned all humanity was seminally present in him as its head. Romans 5:12d refers to physical, spiritual and eternal death for all men, because all sinned in Adam their natural head.<sup>54</sup> Luther and Calvin held this view and the Roman Catholic Church<sup>55</sup> and Lutheranism are its modern representatives.
3. The Arminian View: In this view Adam transmitted corruption but no guilt to his descendants. The state of sin into which man is born does not in itself involve guilt or punishment. Only when man consciously and voluntarily sins and he thereby ratifies his corrupt nature, then God imputes to each man his inborn tendencies to evil. Romans 5:12d is understood to mean that physical and spiritual death is experienced by all men because all consent to their inborn sinfulness by acts of transgressions. The Methodist Church is the modern representative of this view.<sup>56</sup>

### THE POST-REFORMATION ERA

In the post-reformation era three further theories (variations) concerning the imputation of Adam’s sin were developed.

<sup>48</sup> Vandervelde, p.39.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Berkhof, p.147.

<sup>51</sup> A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1967), p.601.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.597.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp.619-620.

<sup>55</sup> There is a difference between Catholicism and Lutheranism in regard to the question whether the Christian remains a sinner after baptism. Luther said man remains a sinner, the Council of Trent in canon five denied it.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.601-602.

1. **The Federal Theory:**<sup>57</sup> This theory originated with Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), a German theologian who taught at Leiden in Holland, and is also called “the theory of the Covenants.”

According to this view, God entered into a covenant with Adam as the federal head of the human race, stating that if Adam obeyed he and his posterity would receive eternal life. However, if Adam were to disobey, depravity and death would be the lot of all humanity.

Because Adam sinned, God accounts all his descendants as sinners, i.e., God immediately creates each soul of Adam’s posterity with a corrupt and depraved nature which always leads to sin and which is itself sin. Thus, a corrupt nature came upon the human race through God’s covenant and not through Adam’s sin.

In contrast to Augustine, who believed that all men sinned in Adam, the Federal theory teaches that Adam’s sin is imputed to his posterity. Thus Romans 5:12 “death passed unto all men, for that all sinned”, means: “physical, spiritual and eternal death came to all because all were regarded and treated as sinners.” The Reformed Church is a modern representative of this theory.

2. **Mediate Imputation Theory:**<sup>58</sup> Placens (1606-1655), professor of theology at Saumur in France, taught that all men are born physically and morally depraved due to Adam’s sin. This inborn sinfulness which has descended by natural laws of propagation from Adam to all his posterity and which is the consequence, not the penalty, of Adam’s transgression is the source of all actual sin, and is in itself sin. The soul is immediately (directly) created by God, but it becomes actively corrupt as soon as it is united to the body.

In a sense, therefore, Adam’s sin (guilt) is imputed to his descendants, not immediately, as if they had been in Adam or were represented in him, but mediately through the corrupt nature which resulted from Adam’s sin. In Romans 5:12, “death passed unto all men, for that all sinned”, means: “death physical, spiritual, and eternal passed upon all men, because all sinned by possessing a depraved nature.”

3. **New School or New Haven Theory:**<sup>59</sup> It developed at Yale University (New Haven, Conn.) under the leadership of Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) and Nathanael Taylor (1786-1858) and was directed particularly against Calvin’s doctrine of predestination.

New Haven Theology taught that a newborn enters life with a predisposition to sin, but this predisposition was not called sinful since nothing but the voluntary act of transgressing a known law can, in this view, be called sin. Thus infants do not need a Saviour. Sin is not viewed as a state, but solely as an act, hence man does not sin until he reaches the age of moral consciousness. Physical death is the result of Adam’s sin, whereas spiritual death is the result of one’s own sin. In Romans 5:12, “death passed on all men, for that all sinned”, means: “spiritual death passed on all men, because all men have actually and personally sinned.”

**To summarise:** The Federal and Placean theories are akin to the Augustinian theory, the New Haven theory is similar to the Arminian position. In the Augustinian tradition man is born a sinner and therefore sins; in the Arminian tradition sin is confined to an act, thus man is a sinner because he sins.

## V. THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN IN ADVENTISM<sup>60</sup>

### THE EARLY DECADES

The fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church was reared in the New England context and was initially influenced by the New Haven Theory of original sin.

George Storrs (1796-1867), a Methodist minister who left his church in 1840 over the question of natural im-

mortality, became the central figure in the earliest Adventist treatment of original sin. His book, *An Inquiry: Are the Souls of the Wicked Immortal? In Six Sermons* (1842),<sup>61</sup> was widely circulated among Adventists and adopted by many.<sup>62</sup>

Storr’s views can be summarised in five main points:

<sup>57</sup> Strong, pp.612-613.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.617.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 606-607. Some Presbyterians and Congregationalists support this view.

<sup>60</sup> This section is to a large degree based on Edwin H. Zackrisson, “Seventh-day Adventists and Original Sin” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1984).

<sup>61</sup> L. E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966), 2:307.

<sup>62</sup> J. White, *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek: SDA Pub. Assn., 1868), p.154.

1. Man is to be viewed as a holistic unit, indivisible. Whatever affects any aspect of man affects all of man, i.e., he does not have a soul, he is a soul.
2. In his original creation man was made neutral both in his character and his essential constitutive nature. He was neither holy nor unholy, mortal nor immortal. Character (good or bad) is the result of choices in relation to God's will. Mortality is the result of Adam's disobedience. By the same token immortality would have been the result of obedience and access to the tree of life in Eden.
3. The nature of the penalty for original sin, i.e., Adam's sin, is to be seen as literal, physical, temporal, or actual death - the opposite of life, i.e., the cessation of being. By no stretch of the scriptural facts can death be spiritualised as depravity. God did not punish Adam by making him a sinner. That was Adam's own doing. All die the first death because of Adam's sin regardless of their moral character - children included.
4. The role of the Atonement of Christ is to give a second probation, as it were, to the victims of original sin. Consequently, every one can demonstrate his own faithfulness by obedience to God and eternal destiny is decided on the basis of personal sin, not Adam's sin.
5. Finally, the "corrupt" nature that all of Adam's posterity inherit from him is not to be perceived as depravity but as a dying nature - "dying to die", or doomed to die - mortality. Original sin does not mean spiritual death for man, rather it means a dying condition or state of man.<sup>63</sup>

Early Adventists accepted Storr's view of sin and death and publicised them in the pages of the Review and Herald in 1854 and 1855 through articles by J. M. Stephenson,<sup>64</sup> D. P. Hall,<sup>65</sup> and J. N. Loughborough.<sup>66</sup>

J. M. Stephenson, whose series of articles was later published in book form, believed that Adam's posterity

was involved in his sin by proxy, or by their representative, not in actuality. Due to the fall Adam became mortal and passed a "mortal, corruptible, dying nature" on to his children. Yet because it was Adam who sinned personally, his posterity are not held personally accountable even though they now share his condition. Accountability only comes with personal sin.

Thus no one dies for personal sin except those who are lost, but all die the first death whether they personally sin or not. Since infants have no personal sin, they are automatically covered by the perfect Atonement of Christ, even though they must die for original sin.<sup>67</sup>

Both Testaments represent man as being exposed to death for personal sins. But, inasmuch as all die for original sin, none can die for personal sin, without a resurrection to a second life; hence the Bible teaches that there will be a resurrection of the dead, 'both of the just and the unjust.' To be preceded by a second life, it must, in the nature of things, be a second death; hence while the penalty for personal sin is only one death, yet in reference to its relation to the penalty for original sin, it will be a second death.<sup>68</sup>

Like Storr, Stephenson used "original sin" to mean "Adam's sin." He saw the result of Adam's sin only in terms of a dying physical nature not as spiritual death or a depraved nature. He understood man's spiritual lostness only as the result of one's personal transgression rather than as the result of original sin.<sup>69</sup>

James White (1821-1881) was in basic agreement with this when he suggested that children are innocent and born in a state of grace. Though he admitted that they possess a fallen and corrupt nature, he did not believe that they are guilty because of it. "Christ has cancelled the guilt of Adamic transgression, and in the resurrection of the last day, all the effects of the fall on the innocent, or justified, will be removed, not before."<sup>70</sup>

In the early decades E. G. White (1827-1915) said little on the subject, though she differed from her husband in regard to little children.

<sup>63</sup> Zackrison, pp.224-225.

<sup>64</sup> J. M. Stephenson, "The Atonement," RH 6, Aug.-Dec., 1854.

<sup>65</sup> D. P. Hall, "The Mortality of Man," RH 6, Aug.-Sept. 1854; "Man Not Immortal," RH 6, Sept.-Dec. 1854.

<sup>66</sup> J. N. Loughborough, "Is the Soul Immortal?" RH 7, Sept.-Dec. 1855.

<sup>67</sup> Stephenson, "The Atonement" RH 6:2 (August 22, 1854):10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Zackrison, p.235.

<sup>70</sup> James White, "The Kingdom of God," RH 5:20 (June 13, 1854): 153.

Children are the lawful prey of the enemy, because they are not subjects of grace, have not experienced the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and the evil angels have access to these children; and some parents are careless and suffer them to work with but little restraint.<sup>71</sup>

The most prolific Adventist writer on the subject of Adam's sin during the early decades was Uriah Smith (1832-1903), long-time editor of the *Adventist Review*. Like Storrs and Stephenson, Smith believed that Adam had a middle nature - created without morality - and that the penalty of Adam's sin was physical not spiritual death. He understood spiritual death to be a reality of man's sinful existence, but he viewed this as a result of Adam's sin not as the penalty for it. This was in contrast to the generally held Protestant opinion that man's punishment was death - spiritual (state of sin), temporal (separation of body and soul), and eternal (eternal misery).<sup>72</sup> Smith's definition of "total depravity", i.e., "our inability to render, unaided by Christ, acceptable obedience to God",<sup>73</sup> reflects the moderate views of the New Haven theology.<sup>74</sup> The state of sin is really the actual sinning of the individual and only personal sins not his nature decide the fate of man.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, for early Adventists the result of Adam's sin was mortality - a dying nature - physical death. Sometimes Adventists referred to this as the sinful nature: "Remember that a dying nature and a sinful nature are identical."<sup>76</sup> Because of their adherence to conditional immortality, Adventists first studied original sin from an anthropological perspective.

## A SHIFT IN UNDERSTANDING

The anthropological emphasis continued until the 1880s. At that time, particularly after 1888 when a new emphasis on righteousness by faith emerged from the Minneapolis General Conference, the focus of original sin studies shifted from anthropology to soteriology. As early as 1870 E. G. White had written:

The sin of Adam and Eve caused a fearful separation between God and man. And here Christ steps in between fallen man and God, and says to man, You may yet come to the Father; there is a plan devised through which God can be reconciled to man, and man to God; and through a mediator you can approach God.<sup>77</sup>

This theme of separation was taken up in 1888 by L. A. Smith, assistant editor of the *Review*, who argued for the moral effects of separation from God. He believed that the Fall of Adam affected the physical, mental and moral sides of man. Man sins because he is morally deranged; and all mankind are "heirs by nature" of this diseased moral nature.<sup>78</sup> By the turn of the century Seventh-day Adventists had come to consider original sin in terms of separation from God.

In regard to the moral derangement, early Adventists believed that it was acquired more by imitation than by physical inheritance, for it is not sin or guilt that the head of the race passed on to his children but simply death, and a dying nature.<sup>79</sup> Ellen White, however, from the 1880s on clearly identified it with the inherent natural depravity of the heart.

Moral derangement, which we call *depravity*, finds ample room to work, and an influence is exerted by men, women, and youth professing to be Christians that is low, sensual, devilish.<sup>80</sup>

Bad habits are more easily formed than good habits, and the bad habits are given up with more difficulty. The *natural depravity of the heart* accounts for this well-known fact - that it takes far less labor to demoralise the youth, to corrupt their ideas of moral and religious character, than to engraft upon their character the enduring, pure, and uncorrupted habits of righteousness and truth. . . In our present fallen state all that is needed

<sup>71</sup> E. G. White, "The Duty of Parents to Their Children," *RH* 6:6 (Sept. 19, 1854): 46.

<sup>72</sup> Albert Stone, "Thou Shalt Surely Die," *RH* 22:24 (Nov. 10, 1863):190.

<sup>73</sup> U. Smith, "Perpetuity of the Moral Law," *RH* 14:6 (June 30, 1859):45.

<sup>74</sup> Zackrisson, p.261. Cf. When . . . I say that mankind are entirely depraved by nature, I do not mean that their nature is itself sinful, nor that their nature is the physical or efficient cause of their sinning; but I mean that their nature is the occasion, or reason of their sinning - that such is their nature, that in all the appropriate circumstances of their being, they will sin and only sin. . . When the Apostle asserts, that mankind are by nature sinners, he must mean simply that such is their nature that uniformly in all the appropriate circumstances of their being, they will sin. (Nathaniel Taylor, *Concio ad Clerum* 2 [Ahlstrom, *Theology in America*, p. 224]), Zackrisson, p.335.

<sup>75</sup> U. Smith, "What is the Penalty of the Law?" *RH* 9:23 (April 9, 1857):181.

<sup>76</sup> E. Goodrich, "Grace Through Unrighteousness," *RH* 16:19 (Sept 25, 1860):149.

<sup>77</sup> E. G. White, "Christian Recreation," *RH* 35:24 (May 31, 1870):185-186.

<sup>78</sup> L. A. Smith, "The Irrational Nature of Man," *RH* 65:45 (Nov. 13, 1888):715.

<sup>79</sup> J. N. Andrews, "Institution of the Sabbath," *RH* 16:1-2 (May 29, 1860):10.

<sup>80</sup> Ellen G. White, *Letter 26d, 1887*, reprinted in *In Heavenly Places*, p. 196. (Emphasis mine).



is to give up the mind and character to its natural tendencies.<sup>81</sup>

They (Adam and Eve) were told that their nature had become depraved by sin; they had lessened their strength to resist evil, and had opened the way for Satan to gain more ready access to them. In their innocence they had yielded to temptation; and now, in a state of conscious guilt, they would have less power to maintain their integrity.<sup>82</sup>

Because of sin his [Adam's] posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience.<sup>83</sup>

At its very source human nature was corrupted. And ever since then sin has continued its hateful work, reaching from mind to mind. Every sin committed awakens the echoes of the original sin.<sup>84</sup>

There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist.<sup>85</sup>

There is a question as to whether E. G. White understands this depravity to be sin or not, i.e., is man guilty before he commits an act of sin simply because he is depraved or not? E. Zackrison seems to think not,<sup>86</sup> whereas R. Olson believes that our sinful nature (depravity) also needs forgiveness. In support of his position he quotes from 5 Testimonies, page 645, "God will be better glorified if we confess the secret, inbred corruption of the heart to Jesus alone than if we open its recesses to finite, erring man."<sup>87</sup>

Following E. G. White's lead, a number of Adventist writers during the 1890s took a decided turn toward a more radical expression of original sin than in previous decades. E. R. Jones, a minister from Healdsburg wrote:

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19). None will deny that this refers to the inherited depravity, the sinful nature and tendency in which, through disobedience, every single soul of Adam's race is born.<sup>88</sup>

F. J. Hutchins, pioneer evangelist and medical missionary in Central America described Adam's legacy in these words:

First Adam lost his innocence and left us sinful; second, he lost his dominion, and left us homeless, without an inheritance, third, he lost his life, and left us dying, our life forfeited, and only a process of time required to demonstrate the fact by the power of death.<sup>89</sup>

By 1894, M. E. Kellogg could write that it was Adam's sin that left man with a "sinful nature which made him subject to the second death - eternal death."<sup>90</sup> This view clearly suggested that Adam's legacy was not simply physical mortality leading to the first death, but also spiritual depravity deserving the second death. However, in spite of these clear statements to the contrary, the old traditional view of Storrs persisted in different circles<sup>91</sup> and Uriah Smith continued until his death in 1903 to reiterate and repeat the view that Storrs had introduced sixty years before.<sup>92</sup>

## VI OUR PRESENT POSITION

In 1988 the Ministerial Association of the General Conference published the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe ..., a biblical exposition of our twenty-seven fundamental doctrines. In the chapter on the nature of man sin is declared to include: 'the transgression of the law'

(1 John 3:4, KJV), a failure to act by anyone 'who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it' (Jas 4:14, NIV), and 'whatever is not from faith' (Rom 14:23).<sup>93</sup> On the question of original sin it says:

<sup>81</sup> Idem, Letter 26d, 1887, *ibid.*, p.195.

<sup>82</sup> Idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup> Idem, Letter 8, 1895, reprinted in Nichol, ed. SDA Bible Commentary, 5:1128.

<sup>84</sup> Idem, "The Warfare between Good and Evil," RH 78:16 (April 16, 1901):241.

<sup>85</sup> Idem, Education (Mountain View, 1903), p.29.

<sup>86</sup> Zackrison, p.335, n.1.

<sup>87</sup> Robert W. Olson, "Outline Studies on Christian Perfection and Original Sin", Insert to Ministry, Oct. 1970, p.29.

<sup>88</sup> E. R. Jones, "In the Flesh," RH 67:1 (Jan 7, 1890):2.

<sup>89</sup> F. J. Hutchins, "The True Object of Life," RH 69:7 (Feb. 16, 1892):98.

<sup>90</sup> M. E. Kellogg, "Life from the Dead," RH 71:42 (Oct. 23, 1894):644-645.

<sup>91</sup> See the Sabbath School Quarterly, Second Quarter (April 25, 1896):12.

<sup>92</sup> U. Smith, "The Resurrection of the Wicked," RH 70:27 (July 4, 1893):434.

<sup>93</sup> Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1988), p.89.

Paul said, "In Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22). In another place he noted, "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12).

The human heart's corruption affects the total person. In this light Job exclaims, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" (Job 14:4). David said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5). And Paul stated that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:7,8). Before conversion, he pointed out, believers were "by nature children of wrath", just like the rest of humanity (Eph 2:3).

Although as children we acquire sinful behavior through imitation, the above texts affirm that we inherit our basic sinfulness. The universal sinfulness of humanity is evidence that by nature we tend toward evil, not good.<sup>94</sup>

Thus the general consensus of Adventist scholars, as expressed in this book, defines sin as an act (1 John 3:4) as well as a state (Ps 51:5; Eph 2:3). We inherit a sinful nature (SIN) which, unless checked by the Holy Spirit, entices us to commit individual acts of transgression (sins).

The clearest expression of the hereditary nature of our innate sinfulness is found in Ps 51:5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary observes concerning this text:

David recognised that children inherit natures with propensities to evil (see Job 14:4; Ps 58:3; PP 61,306; MH 372,373; GC 533). He did not seek to excuse his sin, but sought to stress the still greater need of God's mercy because of his inborn tendency to do evil (see PP 64).<sup>95</sup>

## SIN AS SEPARATION FROM GOD

The underlying cause of our sinful state (original corruption) is our separation from God. The first action of our first parents after their first sin was to hide (Gen 3:8). And mankind has followed in their footsteps ever since. Through the fall the close fellowship which Adam and Eve had enjoyed with their Maker was destroyed. In sinning man broke his relationship with God.

Man's removal from the garden of Eden was symbolic of that broken relationship. From then on he had to exist distant from God. And every human being, except one, has been born into this state of separation from God. Therefore,

babies die, not because they have actually sinned or are punished by God, but because they are now part of this alienation from the source of life. All men are born self-centred, not God-centred.<sup>96</sup>

Self-centredness was the issue in the fall of Satan, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most high." (Isa 14:14). It is also the heart of the original sin problem. Through the fall, Ellen White says, Satan conformed to his own nature the father and mother of our race.<sup>97</sup> Is it any wonder that we are born as self-centred rebels? As any parent knows, children are by nature egotistic, everything belongs to them and revolves around them; children have to learn to share, to be altruistic in their actions. As Heppenstall points out:

Original sin is not per se wrong doing, but wrong being. So there is a causal connection between the first sin of the first man and the self-centredness of his posterity. The consequence of Adam's sin was total. Accordingly, original sin is a state of the whole self in relation to God. It is never simply a physiological or biological problem. Trying to locate sin or the transmission of sin genetically simply misses the real problem. The issue is a spiritual one and not something in a gene. Sin is not transmitted genetically from parents to children. Sin must not be reduced to something physical.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp.90-91.

<sup>95</sup> F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), 3:755.

<sup>96</sup> E. Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited*, p.12.

<sup>97</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p.114.

<sup>98</sup> E. Heppenstall, *The Man Who Is God*, p.122.

The last part of this quote makes an important point. SIN is a spiritual problem not a physical defect, though our physical degeneration is certainly one result of Adam's sin. But "bad habits and practices are developed, they do not come via the genes."<sup>99</sup> Whatever inherited character defects we may have, like death they are the result of the fall - the outgrowth of our separation from God. Our sinful nature is located primarily in our mind not in our bloodstream. Thus Ellen White says: "In order to understand this matter aright, we must remember that our hearts [minds] are naturally depraved, and we are unable of ourselves to pursue a right course."<sup>100</sup> In another place she writes:

Through sin the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted. Sin has degraded the faculties of the soul. Temptations from without find an answering chord within the heart, and the feet turn imperceptibly toward evil.<sup>101</sup>

The most important effect Adam's sin had was man's separation from God. Cut off from the tree of life, man's physical nature began to die. Cut off from the presence of holy beings, man's spiritual nature (his mind) became deranged. Man became self-centred and proud (the pride of life, 1 John 2:16); his eyes, which had beheld the glory of creation, now showed him what he desired to own and to control (lust of the eyes); and because of the close interrelationship between body and mind, the natural drives like sex and appetite turned into the unnatural perversions of the flesh (lust of the flesh). Death, sickness, and our corrupt and depraved nature are all the results of our separation from God - the source of life and of all goodness.

## ADAM'S GUILT

The Augustinian theory of original sin, which to a large extent has become Roman Catholic doctrine, includes the idea that Adam's guilt is inherited by every newborn. Babies, therefore, must be baptised to wash away this inherited guilt.

Adventists generally deny that we inherit Adam's guilt. The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia states: "SDAs believe that man inherited a sinful nature with a propensity to sin, and their writings either reject or fail to stress the idea that men inherit the guilt of Adam's transgression."<sup>102</sup>

Some Adventist theologians, however, do include Adam's guilt in their definition of original sin. Robert Olson, for example, says: "We inherit guilt from Adam so that even a baby that dies a day after birth needs a Saviour though the child never committed a sin of his own."<sup>103</sup> He bases this on such statements by E. G. White as these: "As related to the first Adam, men receive from him nothing but guilt and the sentence of death."<sup>104</sup> "Adam sinned, and the children of Adam share his guilt and its consequences."<sup>105</sup> However, she also says: "It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrong-doing, but they are not punished for the parent's guilt, except as they participate in their sins."<sup>106</sup>

There is a question, therefore, whether Ellen White's statements refer to an actual imputation of Adam's guilt to his descendants or simply to the consequences of Adam's sin. In other words, just as death comes to all men because Adam sinned, so guilt comes to all because we are born sinners and commit sin ourselves. A. L. Moore denies that Ellen White teaches inherited guilt. He says:

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>100</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p.544.

<sup>101</sup> Idem, Ministry of Healing, p.451.

<sup>102</sup> Don F. Neufeld, Ed. Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (Washington: Review and Herald, 1966), p.748.

<sup>103</sup> Olson, *ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>104</sup> White, Letter 68, 1899 (6BC, 1074). The immediate context of this statement is the education of children: "Parents have a more serious charge than they imagine. The inheritance of children is that of sin. Sin has separated them from God. Jesus gave his life that he might unite the broken links to God. As related to the first Adam, men receive from him nothing but guilt and the sentence of death. But Christ steps in and passes over the ground where Adam fell, enduring every test in man's behalf. He redeems Adam's disgraceful failure and fall by coming forth from the trial untarnished. This places man on vantage ground with God. It places him where, through accepting Christ as his Saviour, he becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Thus he becomes connected with God and Christ."

<sup>105</sup> Idem, Faith and Works, p.88. This statement appears in an Article in Signs of the Times, May 19, 1890 entitled "Obedience is Sanctification." The whole paragraph reads as follows: "We have reason for ceaseless gratitude to God that Christ, by His perfect obedience, has won back the heaven that Adam lost through disobedience. Adam sinned, and the children of Adam share his guilt and its consequences; but Jesus bore the guilt of Adam, and all the children of Adam that will flee to Christ, the second Adam, may escape the penalty of transgression. Jesus regained heaven for man by bearing the test that Adam failed to endure; for He obeyed the law perfectly, and all who have a right conception of the plan of redemption will see that they cannot be saved while in transgression of God's holy precepts."

<sup>106</sup> Idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, p.306. This is E.G. White's commentary on the statement in the second commandment which says: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me."

White's concern appears to relate to the consequences of separation from God and enslavement to Satan - which is inherited from Adam. A cause and effect chain is seen in which sin separates from God and leaves the soul with guilt.<sup>107</sup>

It may be useful to distinguish between Adam's guilt and our guilt as a consequence of our inherited sinful-

ness. We do not inherit Adam's guilt, but as a consequence of Adam's fall we are born distant from God, out of harmony with his will, in a state of sin which is condemnable, and therefore we are guilty before God. E. G. White may be referring to this guilt.

## VII CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

We have seen that sin is more than an act, that it is a state which we inherit because of Adam's separation from God. M. J. Erickson has well said:

Sin is not merely wrong acts and thoughts, but sinfulness as well, an inherent inner disposition inclining us to wrong acts and thoughts. Thus it is not simply that we are sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.<sup>108</sup>

Now, if every man is born a sinner, separated from God and in need of salvation, then how could Christ be born a man and still be sinless? Early Adventist sources show a wide divergence on the question of Christ's nature. In 1888 G. W. Morse replying to the question: "If Christ did not possess our carnal nature or evil passions, how could he be tempted in all points as we are?" said:

The only point of difference between his opportunity and ours, for resisting temptations, is found in the fact that *he possessed no natural trait of, or tendency to, sin*, whereas we do. It must be born in mind that Christ came to this earth to start from the stand-point that Adam did, and not from our stand-point.<sup>109</sup>

Two years later 1890 E. J. Waggoner, editor of the *Signs of the Times*, wrote in his book Christ and His Righteousness:

The fact that Christ took upon Himself the flesh, not of a sinless being, but of sinful man, that is, that *the flesh which He as-*

*sumed had all the weaknesses and sinful tendencies to which fallen human nature is subject*, is shown by the statement that He "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."<sup>110</sup>

In fairness to Waggoner, we must remember that Seventh-day Adventists at that time believed that inclinations and tendencies to sin were not sin in the proper sense of the word.

On the one hand, the answer to the question asked of Morse must avoid making Christ a man just like us. For the corporate solidarity of the human race with Adam made it impossible that one of the human race could rise above the basic sin-problem, i.e., the separation from God. "Only one from outside the race could enter it and bring change."<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, it must avoid making Christ so much unlike man that he cannot be identified with us. "He must be one with us in nature but not one with us in sin (whether sin as separation from God, as nature, or as acts)."<sup>112</sup>

The two sides of the problem were met in Christ's miraculous conception (Luke 1:35), when He took all the limitations of our humanity, except sin (Heb 4:15 Greek).

He [Christ] for our sakes laid aside His royal robe, stepped down from the throne in heaven, and condescended to clothe His divinity with humanity and became like one of us except in sin.<sup>113</sup>

Jesus was both like and unlike Adam in his human nature.

<sup>107</sup> A. Leroy Moore, *The Theology Crisis* (Corpus Christi, TX: Life Seminar, 1980), p.109.

<sup>108</sup> Erickson, p.578.

<sup>109</sup> G. W. Morse, "Scripture Questions," *RH* 65:35 (Aug. 28, 1888): 554.

<sup>110</sup> E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, 1890), pp.26-27.

<sup>111</sup> Gulley, p.39.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> White, *Youth's Instructor*, Oct. 20, 1886.

It was not the Adamic [nature], because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it had never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin.<sup>114</sup>

The statement in Romans 8:3 that Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” does not mean he had sinful

flesh, otherwise the word “likeness” would be inappropriate. The Greek word *homoiomati* refers to “likeness” not “sameness.”<sup>115</sup> Jesus was neither a sinner by nature nor a sinner by acts. Thus he was the unique substitute - the spotless Lamb.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A survey of the history of the doctrine of original sin indicates that this particular biblical teaching has been understood in a variety of different ways. Most influential were the Pelagian, Augustinian, and Arminian interpretations.

Until the end of the eighteenth century Augustinian theology dominated the churches' understanding of original sin in America. The New Haven theologians in the nineteenth century, in their opposition to the Calvinistic Federal theology, developed a doctrine of original sin similar to the Arminian position.

Seventh-day Adventism born in the milieu of New England acquired a hamartiology similar to the New Haven theologians who viewed man's inheritance as neither his responsibility nor properly called sin. There is a clearly discernible connection between the New Haven theology, the conditionalism of George Storrs, and the understanding of original sin in early Adventism.

Early Adventists taught:

1. Adam in his unfallen state had a middle nature - capable of becoming morally good or corrupt.
2. Original sin was understood to refer only to Adam's transgression.
3. The penalty for Adam's sin was seen only in terms of a dying nature - physical death. This dying nature was also called a sinful nature.

4. Spiritual death (depravity) was seen as a consequence not as a penalty of original sin. It could be overcome.
5. Because sin was defined in terms of transgression of the Law, depravity was not considered to be sin but rather as the natural bent or inclination to sin.

Ellen White's writings from the 1880s on slowly directed the church's view towards a more biblical understanding. By the end of the century it was recognised that Adam's legacy was not simply physical mortality leading to the first death, but also spiritual depravity deserving the second death.

Seventh-day Adventists today generally define sin as a lack of conformity to the will of God, either in act or state. They believe that children are born with a sinful, depraved nature as a consequence of Adam's sin and the resulting separation from God. This sinful state means that if a baby dies a few hours after birth he/she is subject to the second death, even though he/she has never broken any commandment.

If this were not so, then babies who died would not need a Saviour. Christ allowed for no such exception when He said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 14:6).<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p.47.

<sup>115</sup> W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Press, 1979), p.567. s.v. “homoioima.” Concerning Rom 8:3 the authors say that the word *homoiomati* brings out the idea that “Jesus in his earthly career was similar to sinful men and yet not absolutely like them.”

<sup>116</sup> Gulley, p.34. We cannot agree with Erickson (p. 639) who believes that there is no condemnation until one reaches the age of responsibility. He says, “If a child dies before he or she is capable of making genuine moral decisions, there is only innocence, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation based upon Christ's atoning death.” This line of reasoning would introduce the idea that some people can get to Heaven without a Saviour and that it is better for children to die, so they will be saved for eternity, than to grow up and possibly lose eternity through a wrong choice.

That each newborn possesses the guilt of Adam's sin has not been commonly accepted among Adventists. Nevertheless, the term original sin is used by Adventist authors - "not in the sense of inherited guilt, but of an inherited disposition to sin."<sup>117</sup> For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion, I would suggest that we use the term "original sin" for the Augustinian concept of imputed guilt and corruption; and the term "original corruption" for the state of sin into which each member of the human race is born.

There is a tendency on the part of some Adventists today to go back to the understanding of our early pioneers regarding original sin, in order to justify their opposition to our present understanding which they consider to be Calvinistic. However, any understanding of theological truths must take into consideration the total scriptural context as well as the inspired counsel of E. G. White.

While some believe that sin is only a wilful or negligent violation of God's will, our study of Scripture has shown that sin is also a state into which we are born (original corruption). This sinful state will remain with us until the end, though by God's grace we can overcome every temptation to sin.

A correct understanding of the nature of sin is also vital for a balanced view on the nature of Christ. While He became truly man, "made like unto his brethren" (Heb 2:17), he did not inherit the original corruption with which we are born (Heb 4:15).

The study of original sin and corruption should lead us to a greater awareness of our need of righteousness. That we need a Saviour the day we are born, not only after we have transgressed God's law, this is the message of this study. The everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ meets our need.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:16,17

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<sup>117</sup> Heppenstall, *The Man Who is God*, p.107.

