

Truth in a Time of Compromise

An Overview of the Formula of Concord



Article I. Original Sin

Review

- Historical situation
- Theological situation
- Purpose of Formula of Concord
- Principal authors

Confessional Background

AC II. Original Sin

“Our churches teach that since the fall of Adam (Romans 5:12), all who are naturally born are born with sin (Psalm 51:5), that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with the inclination to sin, called concupiscence. Concupiscence is a disease and original vice that is truly sin. It damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born anew through Baptism and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5).

“Our churches condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, thus obscuring the glory of Christ’s merit and benefits. Pelagians argue that a person can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.”

The Controversy

Two Sides:

1. Mankind’s nature, substance, and essence is corrupt since Adam’s fall. His essence is original sin itself. Called “nature-sin” or “person-sin.” There is no difference between man’s nature/essence and original sin.
2. Original sin is not the nature, substance, or essence of mankind, since humans even after the fall remain God’s creation. Instead, original sin is something *in* mankind’s nature. Since the fall, mankind lacks the righteousness in which he was created. A distinction must be maintained between man’s nature and essence, which are God’s creation, and original sin, which is the devil’s work, by which the nature has become corrupt.

Why it is important:

- An incorrect understanding of original sin leads to Pelagian or Manichaean errors (explained below).
- God’s work (creation) must be distinguished from the devil’s work (sin).

- God alone deserves the glory for salvation, and nothing in man.
- If original sin is the essence of humanity, Christ could not have assumed our humanity.

We Believe, Teach, and Confess

1. Actual transgression of God's commandments is sin. However, "*sin is also that horrible, dreadful hereditary sickness [Erbseuche] by which the entire human nature is corrupted.*" This is the chief sin, from which all actual sins flow. All men are infected with original sin, as with a spiritual leprosy. Because of this original sin, "*we are by nature the children of wrath, death, and damnation, unless we are delivered from them by Christ's merit.*"
2. God is not the creator or cause of sin. By the instigation of the devil sin entered the world through one man. Even now, God does not make sin; it is passed on through sinful seed (Ps. 51.5).
3. Reason does not know or understand this hereditary evil (Ps. 19.12). It must be learned and believed from Scripture.
 - a. Hereditary evil is guilt; all are in God's displeasure. Rom. 5.12-14; Eph. 2.3.
 - b. Original sin is a lack of original righteousness (i.e., man was created in truth, holiness, and righteousness). It renders him incapable of accomplishing spiritual things.
 - c. Original sin is "*a deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, mysterious, and unspeakable corruption of the entire human nature and all its powers.*" Man is hostile toward God (Rom. 8.7) and cannot please God (Rom. 8.8).
 - d. Mankind is thus born into the penalty of death (Rom. 3.23) and is in the devil's kingdom (Col. 1.13).
 - e. Man must be regenerated for the hereditary evil to be covered and forgiven, Titus 3.5; he will not be perfect until the life to come, Eph. 4.12-13.

We Reject and Condemn

Pelagian* Errors:

1. Our nature is not corrupt; original sin is only the guilt that applies to Adam.
2. Sinful, evil lusts are not sins.
3. All men are defective and evil, but that is not truly sin before God.
4. Man's nature is entirely good and pure.
5. Original sin is only "*a slight, insignificant spot sprinkled or a stain dashed on the nature of mankind.*" Man still possess power in spiritual things.
6. Original sin is only a difficulty in exercising spiritual powers.
7. Original sin has greatly weakened and corrupted human nature, but human nature still has something good in it. Man is able to begin something in spiritual things.

These false teachings are rejected because "*the corrupt nature can do nothing in God's sight of and by itself. It can only sin (Genesis 6:5; 8:21).*"

Manichaeism** Errors

1. Human nature was created good, but after the fall original sin is infused and mixed with the nature from outside itself by Satan, as wine mixed with poison.
2. Original sin is an independent substance existing within the person.
3. Original sin is the essence of the corrupt person.
4. Human nature even after the fall is pure, good, holy, and uncorrupted before God, while only original sin, which dwells in human nature, is evil.

Summary of the Correct Doctrine:

- Man even after the fall is God's creation (Job 10.8-12; Ps. 139.14-16). Therefore, corrupt mankind cannot be sin itself.
- The creature of God is nevertheless sadly corrupted by sin. This corruption is passed on as an inheritance.

"From this article, the distinction is now clearly and indisputably found. Original sin does not come from God. God is not sin's creator and author. Nor is original sin God's creature or work, but it is the devil's work."

The Gospel:

"Pious Christian hearts justly ought to consider God's unspeakable goodness. God does not immediately cast from Himself this corrupt, perverted, sinful materials into hellfire. No, He forms and makes the present human nature from it (which is sadly corrupted by sin) in order that He may cleanse it from all sin, sanctify, and save it by His dear Son."

Christ assumed our human nature, yet without sin, in order to redeem it. This would be impossible if there were no distinction between the nature of fallen mankind and original sin.

On the day of resurrection, the redeemed will rise in the substance of their flesh, body and soul (human nature), but without sin. (Therefore, sin is not the substance of human nature.)

*Pelagianism is named after Pelagius (c. 354 - c. 420), a British monk known for his asceticism. He came to Rome and was troubled by the moral laxity he found there. He attributed it to the emphasis on grace in the preaching there, particularly in a quotation of Augustine's he heard in a sermon. He denied the doctrine of original sin. Pelagianism emphasizes the ability of man's will to choose good or evil in spiritual things without divine aid. While condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431), it was never eradicated from the church. "Semi-pelagianism" is the view that man must make the first step towards God, and God will complete the work of salvation. Pelagianism or semi-pelagianism is in the background of the doctrine of salvation in Roman Catholicism, Protestant churches in the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition, and especially Eastern Orthodoxy, which entirely denies original sin.

**The terms Manichaeism or Manichaeism derive from a Gnostic sect, whose founder was Mani, who lived in Babylon in the 3rd century. (Augustine, before his baptism, was a Manichaeist.) Manichaeism is dualistic: the soul is immortal and good; the body (made of "earth") is evil. Salvation is achieved by rejection of matter and identifying with one's true self, the soul. Manichaeism doctrine is heavily influenced by Buddhism.