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# Original Sin in the Smalcald Articles With an Excursus on the Coat of Skins as an Image of Original

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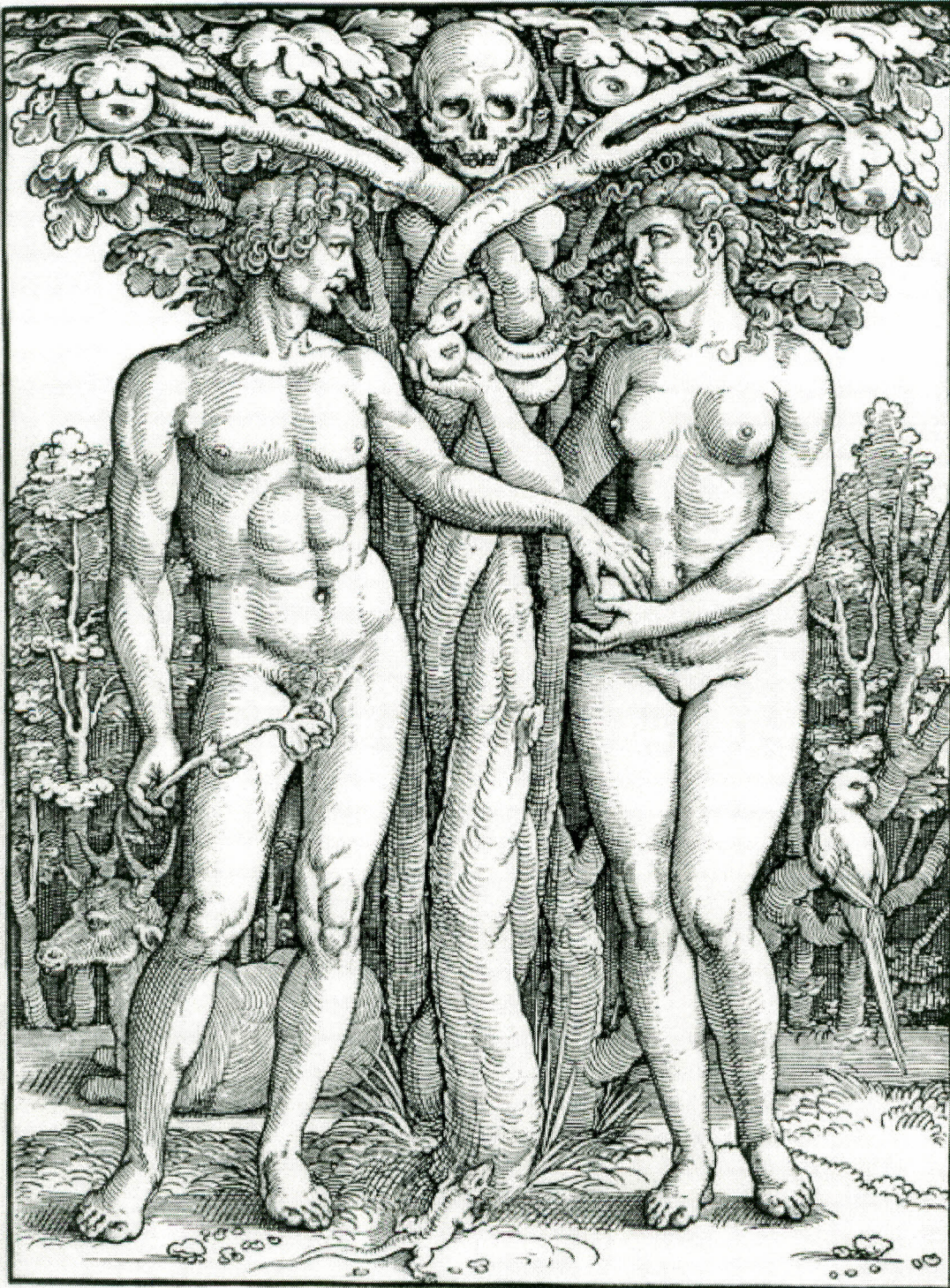
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**Original Sin in the Smalcald Articles**

*By Albert B. Collver, III*

About the Woodcut

The Fall

Hans Sebald Beham

c.1535 Coburg, London

**Original Sin in the Smalcald Articles**  
**With an Excursus on the Coat of Skins**  
**As an Image of Original Sin**

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A Seminar Paper submitted to the Faculty  
Of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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By  
Albert B. Collver, III  
May 1998

*All mankind fell in Adam's fall,  
One common sin infects us all;  
From sire to son the bane descends,  
And over all the curse impends.*

*But Christ, the second Adam, came  
To bear our sin and woe and shame,  
To be our life, our light our way,  
Our only hope, our only stay.*

*As by one man all mankind fell  
And, born in sin, was doomed to hell,  
So by one Man, who took our place,  
We all received the gift of grace.*

Lazarus Spengler;  
tr. Matthias Loy.

## Introduction

Martin Chemnitz wrote in his *Loci Theologica*<sup>1</sup> of 1591 that one could hardly find a reference to original sin before Augustine.<sup>2</sup> During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, scholars, making the same observation as Chemnitz, sought to demonstrate that the “doctrine” of original sin was an invention or novelty introduced by Augustine in his attempt to thwart Pelagius and his followers. Other scholars challenged original sin on the basis that both Saint Paul and Augustine based their views on the notion that man’s fall as presented in Genesis was historical fact rather than mythological as they thought.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, there were responses to the attack on the doctrine of original sin, but the fact remains that today fewer people than once did believe in the existence of original sin and those who profess belief in an “original sin” define it so loosely as to allow almost any understanding.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Locorum Theologicorum... : Quibus et Loci Communes D. Philippi Melancthonis perspicue explicantur...* (Francofurti: I. Spies, 1599). This work is also in English translation. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volumes I & II*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> “Augustine constantly and almost everywhere appeals to it [original sin]. Among the genuinely ancient ones, who preceded the time of Augustine, it is not easy to find this term.” Chemnitz, 548. Note all translations are mine unless otherwise noted. The Latin text reads, *Augustinus constanter & fere vbiue ita appellat. Apud vetustiores vero, qui Augustini ætatem præcesserunt, non facile reperietur hæc appellatio.*

<sup>3</sup> Tennant cites that Augustine’s view is only one possible interpretation of the texts of Genesis and Romans that was based on the assumption that Genesis is historical fact. He writes, “It can no longer be assumed, in the light of knowledge yielded by comparative mythology and the prehistoric sciences, that the third chapter of Genesis supplies us with the record of a revelation of historical fact...” F.R. Tennant. *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin*. Cambridge: University Press, 1903), 1.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Council of Trent refused to define original sin.

Those who subscribe to the *Lutheran Confessions* as a correct teaching and exposition of Scripture are not able to understand “original sin” as a mythological explanation on the origins of evil in the world, nor are they able to define it loosely to permit an imprecise and ambiguous understanding concerning sin. Yet because the doctrine of original sin offends man’s sensibilities and reason, in the words of Augustine, “Nothing is more difficult to understand than the nature of ‘the ancient sin.’”<sup>5</sup> Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles, “This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures.”<sup>6</sup> It is the very corruption of original sin that has caused the decay, disbelief, and doubt in original sin not only over the past couple of centuries but also in the past in such groups as the Pelagians and Socinians. It is fitting that the doctrine of original sin is confessed as an article of faith since it cannot be understood by reason.

Luther in the Smalcald Articles confesses original sin with the recognition that its loss will place the Gospel in danger of being lost. Through one man sin came into the world and through the God-Man Jesus Christ life and salvation came into the world. If original sin is weakened or lost, then Christ’s work is diminished or taken away. Recognizing what was a stake,

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<sup>5</sup> J.D.N. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), 363

<sup>6</sup> SA III, I.

Luther confessed the doctrine of original sin in the Smalcald Articles to provide a guide for how to confess it at a future council.<sup>7</sup>

In order to understand better how Luther understood original sin in the Smalcald Articles,<sup>8</sup> this paper will compare SA with two other Luther writings, one contemporary with its composition and one from his earlier writings. Since Luther adopted the term “original sin,” it will be useful to briefly examine the events that led to the coinage of the term by Augustine in addition to examining a few patristic sources in order to see how the idea of “original sin” was expressed formerly. Finally, Luther’s confession of original sin in SA will be addressed to current issues such as the decay of original sin and the reemergence of Pelagianism.

### Original Sin in SA

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther begins the discussion of original sin in part 3, article 1 after he has written that the following articles, of which original sin is a part, may be discussed with “learned and sensible men, or even among ourselves.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that these articles may be discussed does

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<sup>7</sup> Kolb holds to the position that the Smalcald Articles were written as a demonstration how to confess the faith at a future council. Russell is one of the primary supporters of the view that Luther wrote SA as a last will and testament. Luther states that he wrote SA for the council. While Kolb’s position appears to be closest to that of Luther’s, the SA at least functions for many people as a last will and testament of Luther. See the bibliography for the references to Kolb’s and Russell’s work.

<sup>8</sup> Smalcald Articles are hereafter referred to as SA.

<sup>9</sup> Gelehrten, vernunftigen oder unter uns selbs. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch lutherischen Kirche*. (Göttingen: Dandenhoed & Ruprecht, 1992), 433, 6 – 7. Hereafter referred to as *BSLK*.



not mean that the doctrines contained in them are negotiable or changeable. There is, however, flexibility in how the matter is expressed and with the words used to describe the doctrine. For instance, Luther uses two different words in this short quotation to describe original sin.

Here we must confess how Saint Paul in Romans 5 said that sin originated from one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men became sinners and became subject to death and the devil. This is called inherited sin or the capital sin.<sup>10</sup>

The first word that Luther uses is *Erbsunde* or inherited sin. Chemnitz explains that the term *Erbsunde* does not mean “inherited sin” as much as it describes an inherited disease passed on from parent to child. He writes, “what is more fitting, that from the infection of corrupted nature, it is propagated from parents to children.”<sup>11</sup> The SA’s use of *Erbsunde* guards against the Pelagian error that original sin is an “imitation” of Adam’s sin rather than a corruption of man’s nature.<sup>12</sup> If the sin is propagated from parents to children, it is not imitated but passed on from parent to child as part of his nature. It is important to guard against the Pelagian error of an “imitated sin” because it will not only distort anthropology but also Christology and salvation itself. For instance, if Adam’s sin is only imitated,

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<sup>10</sup> Hie müssen wir bekennen, wie S. Paulus Ro. 5. Sagt, daß die Sunde sei von Adam, dem einigen Menschen, berkommen, durch welchs Ungehorsam alle Menschen sind Sunder worden und dem Tod und dem Teufel unterworfen. Dies heißt die Erbsunde oder Häuptsunde. (SA III, I) *BSLK* 433, 11 – 16.

<sup>11</sup> Chemnitz, 531 – 532. “vel quod magis convenit, quia ex contagio vitiatae naturæ, a parentibus in liberis propagatur.”

<sup>12</sup> See Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione* I, X.

then the righteousness of Christ is also only imitated and his work is diminished and ultimately nullified. In the crassest form of this error, man will save himself by imitating the deeds of Christ; in the mildest form, man will, nonetheless, contribute to his salvation by modeling Christ's behavior.

The second word used by Luther is *Häuptsunde* or the "chief sin." This "chief sin" as Chemnitz describes is "the fountain, root, and cause of all sins."<sup>13</sup> The Latin text of *SA* translates the two German words for original sin with four words to convey more than one shade of meaning. The Latin version translates the German *Dies heißt die Erbsunde oder Häuptsunde*<sup>14</sup> with *Hoc nominatur originale, haereditarium, principale et capitale peccatum*.<sup>15</sup> What becomes apparent is that one word cannot convey the full impact of Adam's sin on his descendants and the term "original sin" can only be shorthand for a more involved definition that requires unpacking.

Luther, however, does not begin the article on original sin in *SA* by defining terms or by unpacking it, but by confessing it as an article of faith<sup>16</sup> with Saint Paul in Romans 5:12, "Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and in this way death

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 532. "id est, fons, radix & caussa omnium peccatorum."

<sup>14</sup> *BSLK*, 433. This is called the inherited sin or chief sin.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* This is named original, inherited, first, and chief sin.

<sup>16</sup> "Article of faith" means something that must be believed because it is not something understood with reason.

spread through all men, on account of which all sinned.”<sup>17</sup> This passage is the foundation for the SA discussion on sin, which is also the Scripture passage used by Augustine for his discussion on original sin. Luther also quotes another passage, Psalm 51:5, that Augustine used in his battle against the Pelagians beginning around 411 AD. Considering that Luther inherited the theological tradition from the West, it is not surprising that he adopts an anti-Pelagian, Augustinian<sup>18</sup> term and uses some of the same Scripture passages quoted by Augustine during the Pelagian controversy.

Not all scholars agree that Augustine’s teaching on original sin developed from his battles with the Pelagians. Williams suggests that Augustine’s teaching was “the product of a reaction, not against Pelagianism but against Manicheism.”<sup>19</sup> According to Williams, Augustine had developed all the necessary terms by 397.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, Augustine’s experience with and reaction against Manicheism influenced him, but as Weaver points out, “it was not until the beginning of the Pelagian controversy fourteen years

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<sup>17</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο ὡςπερ δι’ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

<sup>18</sup> The Book of Concord often quotes or alludes to Augustine for a specific purpose and reason. The majority of the Augustine quotations come from his anti-Pelagian writings. Ironically, the Augustine most cited against the Lutheran position is from Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings. See my article in the *Concordia Student Journal* regarding Melanchthon’s use of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings. Albert B. Collver, III. “Melanchthon’s Use of St. Augustine in Apology, Article IV,” *Concordia Student Journal*, Volume 21, Number 2 (1998): 27.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and Of Original Sin* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), 326. Williams was from Oxford and wrote his book in response to Tennant’s book (Tennant was from Cambridge).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

later that the doctrine emerged as prominent by becoming an object of disputation.”<sup>21</sup> While a treatment of Augustine’s battle with the Pelagians is beyond the scope of this paper, his use of Romans 5:12 is essential for the discussion about original sin.

### The Issues Surrounding Romans 5:12

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Augustine’s use of Romans 5:12 came under increased scrutiny. Considering that this is one of the primary texts for original sin in the *SA*, it is worthwhile to review this research which came to a head in England around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Augustine quoted five primary Scripture texts as proof-texts for original sin; they are. Psalm 51:5, Job 14:4, 5 (LXX), John 3:5, Romans 5:12, and Ephesians 2:3<sup>23</sup> with the fundamental text being Romans 5:12.<sup>24</sup> Before

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<sup>21</sup> David Weaver, “The exegesis of Romans 5:12 among the Greek fathers and its implication for the doctrine of original sin: the 5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, pt 1,” *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1983): 199.

<sup>22</sup> The decay of the doctrine of original sin was progressively increasing especially with rationalism. While the events leading up to the dismissal of original sin had been long in coming, there were two books published in England at the turn of the century on the topic of original sin. Tennant’s book *The Fall and Original Sin* appeared in 1903. His book was the first attempt in English to study the doctrine of the Fall from a “scientific” perspective. His conclusion is that the doctrine of original sin developed not from exegesis but from the speculation of Augustine. He is the first author that I found who traced out the exegetical problem of Romans 5:12. Williams wrote a book in response to Tennant’s, partly because Williams disagreed with Tennant’s interpretation of the historical data and because of the rise of “new psychology” which Tennant was unfamiliar. Both Tennant and Williams thought that the East had been more “faithful” and correct regarding the Fall than the West which had been influenced by Augustine’s “harsh view of the Fall.” Williams wants to harmonize the Fall of Adam and Eve (who may not have been actual people) and man’s original righteousness with the facts of modern science.

<sup>23</sup> Weaver, 202.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Rondet, *Original Sin – The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan Op (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1972), 128.

looking at the Romans passage, it would be helpful to see an example how Augustine reasoned against the Pelagians. In *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione*,<sup>25</sup> Augustine uses John 3:5 to dismiss the Pelagian distinction between eternal life and the kingdom of heaven.<sup>26</sup>

The Pelagians had to distinguish between eternal life and the kingdom of heaven because they practiced infant baptism. This practice opened the Pelagians up to attack since their lack of belief in original sin forced them to defend why they baptized infants who had not committed actual sin. In their defense, the Pelagians made a distinction between eternal life and the kingdom of heaven. According to the Pelagians, infants are innocent and sinless; therefore, they already have the gift of salvation and eternal life, yet if they are not baptized, they will not inherit the kingdom of heaven – that is a higher level of sanctification. The Pelagians pointed out that Jesus never said an unbaptized person would not have life but only that he would not have the kingdom of heaven. Thus, a person may be given life – that is eternal life – and not receive the kingdom of heaven. Augustine considers the Pelagian distinction between eternal life and the kingdom of heaven to be an absurd, novel, fiction that the church cannot tolerate. He asks how can a person have eternal life and not be in the presence of Christ in the kingdom

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<sup>25</sup> The question might be asked why use Augustine's *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione*. This work was addressed to Marcellinus, a layman, in the year 412 AD Augustine's *The Spirit and Letter* is also addressed to Marcellinus. In this work, Augustine exegetes the entire section of Romans 5 concerning original sin. He also exposes his opponent's arguments, thus providing a window in to the thoughts of the Pelagians.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione* I, XXVI.

of heaven. For Augustine, John 3:5 is very clear but for the sake of argument, he decides to move the argument away from Holy Baptism and to the Holy Table.

At this time, no one disputed that an unbaptized person was able to attend the Lord's Table. To rejoin what the Pelagians had separated, Augustine juxtaposes John 3:5<sup>27</sup> and John 6:53.<sup>28</sup> Augustine reasoned from these two passages that Holy Baptism is necessary to receive the Lord's Body and Blood, therefore, "kingdom of God" and eternal life are synonymous terms since receiving the Lord's Body and Blood apart from baptism cannot give life. Thus, the terms "kingdom of God" and "life" cannot be spilt and the Pelagians' argument is not cogent. Their argument why they baptize infants does not hold because they are avoiding the obvious answer that even infants are infected with the sin of Adam.

Of the remaining three texts, Augustine received two of them from the Fathers. The texts from Job came from Origen and the passage from Psalms came from Ambrose. It is the third text, Romans 5:12, that was Augustine's chief text and the one that causes difficulties because of the Latin Vulgate which translates ἐφ' ᾧ as *in quo*. Tennant, citing Sanday and Headlam,<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God.

<sup>28</sup> Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within yourselves.

<sup>29</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. in *The International Critical Commentary Series* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902). The first edition of this book was published in 1895. The only reason to cite this commentary over any others is that Tennant cites it.

writes that ἐφ' ᾧ ought to be translated as “because”<sup>30</sup> (“quia” in Latin), thus rendering the second half of Romans 5:12 as “death spread through all men **because** all sinned.” Scullion writes, “Exegetical solidarity across the Christian confession in the West virtually demands that one translate ἐφ' ᾧ by >>because<<.”<sup>31</sup> Sanday and Headlam note that Augustine, following the lead of Ambrosiaster and Origen, understood ἐφ' ᾧ (translated as “in whom”) as a masculine, relative pronoun with Adam as the antecedent.<sup>32</sup> Sanday and Headlam do cite Meyer who although understands ᾧ as neuter, assigns “to the sentence as a whole a meaning practically equivalent to that which it has if the antecedent of ᾧ is Ἀδάμ.”<sup>33</sup> Sanday’s and Headlam’s objection is that if Saint Paul intended to say that all sinned in Adam’s sin, he would have removed all doubt by writing ἐν Ἀδάμ.<sup>34</sup> This argument, based on how St. Paul might have hypothetically worded a sentence, is not solid ground to build a case. Morphologically ᾧ may be masculine or neuter, resulting in a text that is ambiguous regarding the antecedent. Thus, Augustine’s interpretation cannot be ruled out simply on the basis of grammar.

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<sup>30</sup> Tennant, 256.

<sup>31</sup> John J. Scullion “What of Original Sin? The Convergence of Genesis 1 – 11 and Romans 5:12,” in *Schöpfung und Befreiung Für Claus Westermann zum 80. Geburtstag* ed. Rainer Albertz, Friedemann W. Golka, and Jürgen Kegler (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1989), 32.

<sup>32</sup> Sanday and Headlam, 133.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Williams suggests that this error in grammar occurred because the West was ignorant of Greek and that “the supposed proof-text rested upon a blunder in translation.”<sup>35</sup> He suggests that Augustine borrowed from Ambrosiaster’s commentary on the Romans, which is also mistranslated, to develop the doctrine of original sin. Williams then gives a translation from a section of Ambrosiaster’s commentary that reads:

*In whom, that is, in Adam, all sinned.* The Apostle said ‘in whom’ in the masculine gender (*in quo*) although he is speaking about the woman, for this reason, that his reference is to the whole race of man, not to the particular sex <which as a matter of fact sinned first>. So then it is plain that all have sinned in Adam as in a lump (*quasi in massa*); for all the children whom Adam begat, having been himself corrupted by the woman (*ipsa*) through sin, having been born under sin. From him therefore all are sinners, because from him are we all; for Adam lost the gift of God when he transgressed, having become unworthy to eat of the tree of life, so that he died.<sup>36</sup>

This quotation demonstrates that Ambrosiaster used the same Vulgate translation as Augustine. Williams’s doubts that Ambrosiaster intended the passage in the way Augustine interpreted it and thinks that the doctrine of original sin was accepted solely because of Augustine’s authority without the support of Scripture.

The problem for the SA is that Augustine’s authority is not able to establish doctrine; Scripture alone establishes doctrine. Luther does not even mention Augustine in the article on sin in SA, but only cites Romans 5:12.

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<sup>35</sup> Williams, 308.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



Herein is the problem. If Romans 5:12 is taken away, does the doctrine of original sin fall out of *SA*. Many would say yes. Considering that Luther begins with Romans 5:12 and builds his argument on it, much if not all of the article of sin in *SA* would be nullified if the passage falls out. Later in the article on sin, Luther does mention three other Scripture passages as teaching original sin; however, the integrity of the article would be severely damaged. If Romans 5:12 is not usable to teach original sin, then the first paragraph of the *SA*'s treatment on sin must drop out. It is for this reason that the issue surrounding Romans 5:12 must be treated.

Incidentally, Augustine is under the same attack as Luther. Many would say that his argument on original sin would fall away if Romans 5:12 were taken from him. Rondet, a Jesuit, attempts to resolve the problem by admitting that Augustine was wrong regarding the exegetical detail of Romans 5:12 but that he "had nevertheless better understood the chapter as a whole and the force of verse 19"<sup>37</sup> than his opponents. Rondet is adamant to point out that, "Augustine did not invent the dogma of original sin."<sup>38</sup> With this, Luther would completely agree.

Chemnitz writes that it is more proper to say, "the title of original sin is not being taken from the speech of the Prophets, or from the Apostles, but is being received with genuine and weighty authority, just like the words

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<sup>37</sup> Rondet, 129.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

‘essence,’ ‘person,’ consubstantial,’ etc.”<sup>39</sup> Here Chemnitz harkens back and compares the Arian heresy and the formulation of the Nicene Creed with the Pelagian controversy resulting in the formulation of the term “original sin.” In both situations it was necessary for the church to coin a term that could not be used by her enemies.

Luther was not unaware of the translation problems involved with Romans 5:12 as is indicated from his lectures on the book of Romans given during the winter of 1515 – 1516.<sup>40</sup> Regarding verse 12, Luther wrote:

In which all have sinned [5:12]. This is ambiguous in the Greek whether [it is] masculine or neuter. Therefore, the Apostle seems to want to hear it both ways. Whence blessed Augustine explains in the formerly [mentioned work], chapter 10, saying, “In whom all have sinned.’ It is certain and evident that individual deeds, in which only they sin in what they had done is one thing, this one, is another, in which all have sinned when all were in this one man.” From this saying of Augustine it would seem to follow that original sin, itself, is the first sin, namely, the transgression of Adam.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chemnitz, 345. Appellationem peccati originalis non esse sumtam ex sermone Prophetico, vel Apostolico; sed vera & gravi auctoritate receptam; sicut vocabula, essentiae, personae, consubstantialis, &c.

<sup>40</sup> A translation of the entire lectures may be found in Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald in Luther’s Works Volume 25 “Lectures on Romans Glosses and Scholia” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), x. Here after referred to as *AE* (American Edition).

<sup>41</sup> WA 56, 314 - 315. In quo Omnes peccauerunt [5,12]. Hoc ambiguum est in Greco, An Masculinum Vel Neutrum. Ideo in vtroque accipi voluisse Apostolus videtur. Vnde et b. Augustinus vt supra c. X. pro vtroque exponit dicens: ‘In quo omnes peccauerunt. Certum manifestumque est alia esse propria, in quibus ii tantum peccant, quorum peccata sunt, Aliud hoc vnum, in quo omnes peccauerunt, Quando omnes vnus ille homo fuerunt.’ Ex quo Verbo Augustini sequi videtur, Quod peccatum originale sit ipsum peccatum primum, preuaricatio scil. Ade.

Luther demonstrates the recognition that the relative pronoun  $\omega\acute{\nu}$  may be understood as a masculine or neuter. While Sanday and Headlam admit that  $\omega\acute{\nu}$  may be either masculine or neuter,<sup>42</sup> the issue for them is how the phrase  $\epsilon\acute{\phi}' \omega\acute{\nu}$  is interpreted. Given the context of Romans 5:12 – 19 even if one interprets  $\epsilon\acute{\phi}' \omega\acute{\nu}$  as “because,” the interpretation that all sinned in Adam is not impossible. The debate does not appear to be one involving grammar as much as hermeneutics. Perhaps, the more important issue is to uncover the motivation behind the elimination of Romans 5:12 as a proof-text for original sin.

Chemnitz, being well aware of the motivations behind the elimination of Romans 5:12, writes that it is the source for the subject (*sede materiae*)<sup>43</sup> on original sin and for this reason, “it is the universal practice that such passages in Scripture are torn apart and corrupted more than other passages.”<sup>44</sup> He notes that Pelagius “did not wish to deny, or to remove the doctrine concerning sin, but he was saying that his point of contention was only about words. Because Augustine was bringing in a new mode of speaking in to the Church.”<sup>45</sup> Arguments similar to those of the Pelagians are

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<sup>42</sup> Sanday and Headlam, 135.

<sup>43</sup> Chemnitz, 565.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Et universale est, tales locos in Scriptura præ ceteris dilacerari & depravari.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 544. Se velle negare, vel tollere doctrinam de peccato; sed de verbis tantum dicebat certamen esse. Quod Augustinus novos modos loquendi in Ecclesiam inveheret.

used today,<sup>46</sup> namely that Augustine innovated doctrine and that the matter at hand is the words and grammar of Romans 5:12. Chemnitz notes that this grammatical question “did not cultivate comfort in Augustine and in other good men.”<sup>47</sup> About sixteen hundred years after Augustine and more than four hundred years after Luther and Chemnitz, the grammatical difficulties surrounding Romans 5:12 are still being used to attack original sin. Modern commentators and modern linguistics have not shed new light on the problem, rather they are simply reiterating an argument as old as Pelagius.

Considering that the issues involving Romans 5:12 have not changed since the time of Augustine and the Pelagians, it is helpful to revisit Chemnitz and his blow by blow description of Augustine’s argumentation during the Pelagian controversy. Chemnitz notes that  $\wp$  may be understood as a masculine or neuter and that “Augustine for a long time struggled and was tormented”<sup>48</sup> over “what it meant.”<sup>49</sup> He shows how Augustine first attempted to explain the passage to mean, “In which sin all have sinned.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> There are many Pelagian like arguments floating around today. For instance, the Pelagians argued that the passions or desires within a man did not make him good or evil; how a man acted on those passions or desires would make him good or evil. This line of argumentation sounds very similar to what modern psychology teaches about the nature of man. Other groups like the Anabaptists have revived the Pelagian error by rejecting infant baptism. The Cambellites outright reject original sin. Many other groups could be discussed.

<sup>47</sup>Chemnitz, 565. non leviter exercuit Augustinum & alios bonos viros.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Augustinus diu mulcumq; se torquet. A translation note: the word “mulcumq” posed some difficulty as to what it is. The word “mulco” means to “thrash” or handle “roughly.” The “cumq” may be short for “cumque.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* quid sit.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* In quo peccato omnes peccaverut.

Then Chemnitz writes, “but grammar does not permit this explanation.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, it was necessary for Augustine to make another explanation that in the first man all sinned.<sup>52</sup> Chemnitz notes that it was a good way of expressing original sin and that Anselm clarified Augustine’s definition further by adding that God gave Adam His image to pass on pure or perverted to his (Adam’s) descendants. Adam chose to pervert the image of God. “Thus, we all sinned in Adam, and we lost the image and glory of God. This is a true sentence.”<sup>53</sup>

Chemnitz next addresses the linguistic issue concerning the meaning of ἐφ’ ᾧ by citing the opinions of the greatest philologists from his day. He cites Varinus and Budaeus who demonstrated that the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ is causal. Then he cites Luther who rendered the phrase in German as *Diueil*,<sup>54</sup> followed by Erasmus who said that ἐφ’ ᾧ cannot be translated as *in quo* because the Greek does not read ἐν ᾧ. To counter Erasmus he cites Budaeus again who says that Paul occasionally uses ἐφ’ ᾧ in place of ἐπί τῷ with 1 Corinthians 15:22 as an example.

Finally, Chemnitz returns to the debate between Pelagius and Augustine where he demonstrates that Augustine was aware of these grammatical fine points just discussed. Apparently, Pelagius translated

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Sed hac expositionem Grammatica non admittit.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* In quo, scilicet primo homine. (In whom, namely, the first man).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Ita omnes in Adamo peccavimus, & amisimus imaginem & gloriam Dei Hæc sententia vera est.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Ideo Lutherus reddidit *Diueil*. (“Therefore Luther translated it ‘as long as.’”)

Romans 5:12 as *eo quod* or *quia omnes peccaverunt* (“as that they all sinned” or “because they all sinned”).<sup>55</sup> Pelagius interpreted these words to mean that only those who committed actual sin will die eternal death because physical death is just a part of being human and not the result of sin. Thus, to refute the error of Pelagius, “Augustine rejects that translation *eo quod* and preserves *in quo*.”<sup>56</sup> According to Chemnitz, Augustine was not ignorant that ἐφ’ ᾧ could be translated as a causal “because” but he expressly rejected that translation because of how Pelagius interpreted it.

Harbert, a 20<sup>th</sup> century author, would not agree with Chemnitz, supposing that Augustine is using the Old Latin while Pelagius is using the Vulgate; thus they are simply using a different text and talking past each other. He notes:

The coexistence of Old Latin and Vulgate versions of this crucial text was to complicate the debate on original sin until the sixth century. The Pelagian anthropology had more in common with the outlook of the Greek Fathers, with their optimistic and positive view of human nature, than with that of the more pessimistic Latins. The textual history of Romans 5,12 shows that the Pelagian controversy was in part the product of a meeting, not only between Eastern and Western minds, but between Eastern and Western texts of Scriptures.<sup>57</sup>

Augustine accuses Pelagius of distorting the meaning of Saint Paul.

Chemnitz takes this data and interprets it to mean that Augustine

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Augustinus illam translationem (*eo quod*) reciecit, & retinuit (*in quo*.)

<sup>57</sup> B. Harbert, “Romans 5,12: Old Latin and Vulgate in the Pelagian Controversy,” in *Studia Patristica* Vol. XXII, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), 263.

understood the issues involving ἐφ' ᾧ while Harbert assumes the differences are because of two different texts. If Harbert is correct, Chemnitz is being too generous to Augustine by assuming that he understood all the grammatical implications of ἐφ' ᾧ. The basic difference between Harbert's view and Chemnitz's is that Chemnitz assumes Augustine could read some Greek while Harbert would suggest that he could not. Harbert's argument in no way changes the fact that the Pelagians denied the teaching of original sin.<sup>58</sup>

While there is probably no end to the debate regarding Romans 5:12, in the words of Chemnitz, "I think this grammatical observation is not useless; therefore, I have cheerfully written about them."<sup>59</sup> Since Luther began the article on sin in the *SA* with Romans 5:12, it was necessary to see how the passage has been interpreted and is currently interpreted. The modern interpretation is more in agreement with Pelagius than with Luther or Augustine. As stated before, the issue is not as much of grammar as it is of hermeneutics. One may grammatically understand ἐφ' ᾧ as causal and still arrive at the same interpretation as Augustine and Luther. While Luther and Chemnitz thought Augustine understood the grammatical issues involving ἐφ' ᾧ, most modern writers do not think he did. Whether or not Augustine did understand all the finer grammatical points is not ultimately important,

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<sup>58</sup> No where in Harbert's article does he deny the doctrine of original sin. He simply suggests that Augustine and Pelagius used different texts and perhaps the discussion might have gone differently if Augustine recognized this fact.

<sup>59</sup> Chemnitz, 565. *Has Grammaticas observationes indico non inutiles esse; ideo libentius eas annoto.* Note: The above is not a literal translation since the particle has been made into a transitive verb.

however, finding him ignorant of the grammar and translation differences makes it easier to suggest his teaching on original sin was based on error. Even if Augustine was not aware of these issues, both Luther and Chemnitz were aware of them and did not have difficulty understanding the text as teaching original sin. A grammatical argument is not able to take away the teaching of original sin from Augustine or the Smalcald Articles. Again, there is cause to examine the motivation behind those who do not see Romans 5:12 as teaching original sin.

As previously mentioned, Augustine is charged with the innovation of the doctrine of original sin because this terminology was not known before the Pelagian controversy. Part of the charge of innovation is based on his interpretation of Romans 5:12; however, the other part of the charge is based on the fact that the words “original sin” simply do not occur before Augustine. Articles and books<sup>60</sup> have been written to show how the patristic view on sin and the Fall differed from Augustine’s teaching on original sin. A more recent trend has been to study the Jewish writings before the New Testament era for insights how the doctrine of original sin developed. All of these studies are helpful for providing the raw data to trace out patristic and Jewish thought regarding the Fall and sin. Despite this, their conclusions cannot be accepted that Augustine’s teaching on original sin was simply an innovation,

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<sup>60</sup> For a sample of the books and articles, see the bibliography at the end of this paper.



based on a mistranslation. More than anything, these studies reinforce what Chemnitz wrote about the fathers before Augustine concerning original sin:

It is necessary to observe also this, since the Pelagian struggle was not yet stirred up, how lightly the majority of the old Doctors of the church conveyed this topic, and how indifferent they treated it. Origin, Ambrose, and Chrysostom out of profession explained the Epistle to the Romans and nevertheless in this passage, Romans 5, they did not hardly explain the doctrine concerning the sin of origin, but concerning it, they spoke most annoyingly (if we speak most modestly).<sup>61</sup>

It could be said that had the fathers before Augustine taught more clearly on sin as it is revealed in Romans 5, the Pelagian heresy would have never begun. The reason that the Pelagian heresy never flourished in the East is that there was no well-defined doctrine of sin to raise alarms. The teaching from the East tended to be ambiguous as demonstrated by this quotation from John Chrysostom, “Because of this, you know that we baptize children although they are without sins.”<sup>62</sup> Such statements from Eastern teachers provided ammunition for the Pelagians to hurl at Augustine. Note that Chrysostom did not say the infants are sinless, rather they do not have sins – that is, they have not committed sins. Such was Augustine’s response in

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<sup>61</sup> Chemnitz, 567. Observandum est & hoc, cum nondum mota essent certamina Pelagiana, quam leviter hunc locum plerique veteres Ecclesiae Doctores transtulerint, quam frigide tractarint, Origenes, Ambrosius, Chrysostomus, ex professo explicant Epistolam ad Roman & tamen in illo loco Roman 5 non tantum non explicant doctrinam de peccato originis; sed de eo (ut maxime verecunde loquamur) incommodissime loquuntur.

<sup>62</sup> Chrysostom *The Third Instruction* (Stavronikita 3 / Papadopoulos-Kerameus 4) III, 6. Διὰ τοῦτο γοῦν καὶ τὰ παιδιά βαπτίζομεν καίπερ ἁμαρτίας οὐκ ἔχοντα. Text from Wenger.

*Contra Julian*.<sup>63</sup> These unclear statements and others like them muddled the teaching on sin for four hundred years until Augustine.<sup>64</sup>

### The Effects of Pelagianism in the East and Nestorianism

Shortly after Augustine restored the Scriptural teaching on sin to the church, the East demonstrated little benefit from his formulation. Cyril of Alexandria, who initially was neutral toward Pelagianism, was persuaded by Augustine to turn against the Pelagian heresy. The Council of Ephesus of 431 AD officially condemned the Pelagians at the insistence of Cyril and the Roman delegates.<sup>65</sup> However, the effects of Pelagianism still lingered in the East with the advent of Nestorianism, which primarily affected the East. This fact was recognized by several contemporaries to this heresy such as Cyril of Alexander, Prosper,<sup>66</sup> and John Cassian.

In the *Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius*,<sup>67</sup> which was written around 430 AD, John Cassian connected the Nestorian and Pelagian heresies by likening them to a hydra that grows a new head when the old head is cut

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<sup>63</sup> Augustine and Chrysostom were contemporaries and knew of each other.

<sup>64</sup> Until this time, the Church had been fighting the fatalism of Manichaeans and the false teaching that God was the source of evil. To fight Manichaeans, it was necessary for the church to emphasize the responsibility and role man bore in his sin. Thus, there was a strong emphasis on free will. It was from the unbalanced stress on free will that the Pelagians were able to rise.

<sup>65</sup> Lionel Wickham, "Pelagianism in the East," *The Making of Orthodoxy – Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick* ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 201.

<sup>66</sup> See the Appendix for more on Prosper and the connection between Pelagius and Nestorius.

<sup>67</sup> John Cassin, *De Incarnatione Christi Contra Nestorium Hæreticum* in MPL 50, 1 – 271.

off. In this case, the old head was Pelagianism and the new head was Nestorianism, which sprang from the wound issued by Augustine in his anti-Pelagian activities. Resisting the labeling the Nestorian heresy as something new, Cassian writes:

Whence this author of a new heresy which now is not new, who contends our Lord and Savior was born only as a man, perceives that he says entirely the same things which the Pelagians said before. And following from his error, which he asserts that Jesus Christ lived only as a man without sin, also he blasphemes that all men by means of themselves are able to be without sin. Nor do they even say that the redemption of the Lord is necessary for his example, since men (as they say) are able to come to the heavenly kingdom by their own great exertions.<sup>68</sup>

From Cassian's description of the Nestorian heresy, it appears that Nestorian and Pelagianism share the same error but approach it from two different directions. Pelagianism begins with anthropology while Nestorianism begins with Christology but they both end up in the same place. Cassian was the first to connect the Pelagian and Nestorian error.

Approximately one year later Cyril of Alexander would link Pelagianism to Nestorianism in a letter to Theodosius, the emperor. This letter is no longer extant but there remains a summary of it in Photius's writings dated from around 900 AD. Wickham writing about Cyril's letter notes that the Nestorians "ascribe man's salvation to his own act and make of

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<sup>68</sup> Unde advertit novus nunc jam, non novæ hæreseos auctor, qui Dominum Salvatoremque nostrum solitarium hominem natum esse contendit, idem se omnino dicere quod Pelagianistæ ante dixerunt: et consequens errori suo esse, ut qui utique sine peccato solitarium hominem Jesum Christum vixisse asserit, omnes quoque per se homines sine peccato posse esse blasphemet: nec necessariam quoque exemplo illius dicant redemptionem Domini fuisse, cum ad cœleste regnum suo tantum homines nisu (ut aiunt) valeant pervenire. (MPL 50, 23 – 24).

Christ not the Son of God born of Mary but one who was united by his choice to the eternal Son whose name he shares in a metaphorical sense.”<sup>69</sup> Christ then becomes an example to be followed. As Charles Gore put the matter, “The Nestorian Christ is the fitting Saviour [sic] of the Pelagian man.”<sup>70</sup>

This Pelagian-Nestorian heresy diminishes Christ’s work by making him an example to be followed for salvation and questions whether the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is anything more than a sham or a make-believe redemption. If man is corrupted by original sin and is so depraved that he is unable to imitate Christ, then the righteousness that is imputed to man is nothing more than the Father covering his eyes to man’s sin – something that a just God cannot do. The Pelagian-Nestorian heresy is unable to believe that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to those who believe in Him even though by nature they are corrupted with original sin.

The effects of the Pelagian-Nestorian heresy do not remain theological abstractions but play out practically in the liturgy. The Pelagian error affects the liturgy most prominently in the confession of sins and in the liturgy of Holy Baptism. For instance, a Pelagian (or semi-Pelagian) will have difficulty confessing that he is sinful according to his nature, resulting in its removal from the confession of sins. A confession of sins that omits man’s sinful nature in order to focus on deeds of wrongdoing against self and neighbor is

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<sup>69</sup> Wickham, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Gore, “Our Lord’s Human Example,” *Church Quarterly Review*, 16 (1883), 298.

Pelagian in varying degrees. Holy Baptism with a Pelagian emphasis will focus less and less on sin and its forgiveness and more on obeying the command to be baptized and the observance of Christ's example. Consequently, Baptism's liturgy will have less use for a renunciation of Satan and his works and ways, indicating that Satan is no longer seen as the author and source of sin. These Pelagian symptoms are found not only in ancient liturgies<sup>71</sup> but today in many congregations that seek to remove elements considered offensive and a hindrance to increasing the church's accessibility to the society at large. If these trends cannot be connected to the Pelagian and Nestorian heresies historically, they are connected, at the very least, logically.

While the brand of Pelagianism fought by Augustine appeared to play a small role in the East, it had a much more subtle and insidious effect – the spawning of the Nestorian heresy. Although the Nestorian heresy along with the Pelagian heresy was condemned at the Council of Ephesus, it to this day has not completely disappeared in the East or the West. With the strong emphasis on free will and *theosis*, original sin has played a tiny part in the East as is demonstrated by John of Damascus writing in his *Concerning the Orthodox Faith*<sup>72</sup> approximately three hundred years after Augustine. In it, he hardly treats the subject of sin, let alone original sin. Likewise, in the

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<sup>71</sup> For an overview of sin and the Devil in a Nestorian Liturgy see Bryan Spinks, "The rise and decline of sin and the devil in the East Syrian baptismal tradition," in *Studia Patristica*, 26, ed. E. Livingstone (1993): 67 – 74.

West with the rise of scholasticism, the teaching of original sin became more and more obscure until its recovering during Reformation in the teaching of Luther. Incidentally, this pattern of apostasy and restoration follows Melanchthon's view of history as outlined by Peter Frankel in *Testimonia Patrum*.<sup>73</sup> It could be said that since the time of Luther, the church has been on a decline toward apostasy regarding the doctrine of original sin. Thus, it is more important than ever before to cling to the teachings in the Lutheran Confessions and to proclaim them to the church and world.

#### Other Luther Writings and an Excursus on the Coat of Skin

In order to understand better original sin as found in the Smalcald Articles, it is helpful to look at the private writings of Luther on this subject. While many works could be consulted, this paper limited itself to two writings composed near the time of SA. This comparison may provide other images and ways of speaking about original sin that assist to help glimpse how thoroughly sin has corrupted man.

Luther, in his *Lectures on Galatians* of 1535, uses a clothing image to describe sin and righteousness. His comments on Galatians 3:27<sup>74</sup> the cloak of sin is the opposite of the cloak of righteousness given at Holy Baptism. The "coat of skins" image describes original sin in a different way.

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<sup>72</sup> The title in Latin is *De Fide Orthodoxa*.

<sup>73</sup> See Peter Frankel, *Testimonia Patrum* (Genève: Librairie E. Droz, 1961) for more detail on Melanchthon's view of church history.

<sup>74</sup> "For as many of you who were baptized into Christ, you have been clothed with Christ."  
(ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.)

We are clothed with the skin clothing of Adam, which is perishable clothing and a garment of sin, that is, we are all placed under and sold under sin, a horrible blindness, ignorance, contempt and hatred of God are in us. Thereafter, we are full of evil lusts, impurity, greed, etc. This clothing, that is, this corrupt and sinful nature, we have collected from Adam by propagation, which Paul is accustomed to call, ‘the Old Man.’<sup>75</sup>

There are several points to note from the above passage. First, Luther describes us as being clothed with the “coat of skins” that Adam wore. This image echoes back to Genesis 3:21 when the Lord clothed Adam and Eve with skins to cover their nakedness. Our sinful condition is linked to the Fall of Adam and to his sin. In this quotation, Luther in no way suggests actual sin committed by us; we are sinful because of Adam’s sin. The result of this sinful condition is that we do not fear and love God as the First Commandment demands but rather we hate God for hindering our desires; thus, we do commit actual sin. Secondly, there is no imitation of Adam’s sin in this passage; rather, the sin of Adam is passed to us by propagation. These two points just mentioned are also the primary concern of Luther in the article on sin in the *SA*.

From this passage, it becomes clear that the Latin phrase *pellicea tunica* is, for Luther, synonymous with original sin and the old man or Adam. It should also be noted that the word *contraho* could mean ‘to collect a debt.’

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<sup>75</sup> WA 40,1: 540, 19 – 25 (AE 26, 352) Nos vestiti sumus pellicea tunica Adae quae mortalis tunica est et vestis peccati, Hoc est, omnes subiecti sumus et venundati sub peccatum, horribilis caecitas, ignorantia, contemptus et odium Dei est in nobis. Deinde pleni sumus concupiscentia mala, immunditia, avaritia etc. Hunc vestitum, id est, hanc corruptam et peccatricem naturam propagatione contraximus ab Adam, quam Paulus vocare solet Veterem hominem.

This is precisely the image conjured from Luther’s description. Adam, the father of the human race, leaves an inheritance for his children, which is nothing other than a debt that requires death as its payment. The children did nothing to earn this debt but they simply inherit it from their father.

As previously mentioned, the phrase, *pellicea tunica*, comes from עֹר פְּתִינוֹת found in Genesis 3:21.<sup>76</sup> The next place to go in Luther is his *Genesis Lectures* of 1535 – 36, which appeared shortly after the *Galatians Lectures* and shortly before the *Smalcald Articles*. Concerning Genesis 3:21, He writes:

Here Adam and Eve are enveloped with garments by the Lord God Himself, so that they would think on this just as a reminder concerning their miserable fall from the highest happiness into the utmost misfortune and misery, as often as they were seeing the garments. Thus, they were constantly afraid to sin and continually driven to repentance, and to sigh for the forgiveness of sins through the promised Seed. And here he fashioned, that would not cloth them with leaves or wool that grows on plants; he envelops them with the skin of slain animals, for a sign that they are mortal and living in certain death.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to Luther’s understanding that the “garment of skin” is a sign or mark of Adam’s sin, Irenaeus sees the “coat of skin” as a sign of the Lord’s mercy because of Adam’s repentance. Irenaeus sees Adam’s attempt to

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<sup>76</sup> This goes into Greek as χιτῶνας δερματίνους.

<sup>77</sup> WA 42: 165, 13 – 20 (AE 2: 221) Hic ab ipso Domino Deo circumdantur Adam et Heua vestibus, ut hoc ceu memoriali admoniti cogitarent, quoties vestes aspicerent, de miserabili suo lapsu ex summa felicitate in extremas calamitates et miserias: Ut sic in perpetuum timerent peccare, ut agerent perpetuam poenitentiam, et ad remissionem peccatorum per promissum Semen suspirarent. Atque huc facit, quod non frondibus, non ista lana, quae in arboribus crescit, eos vestit: Pellibus occisorum animalium eos circumdat, in signum, quod mortales sint et in certa more versentur.



cover himself as repentance rather than an attempt to hide his sin from God.

Concerning this Irenæus writes:

On the one hand, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding; truly, the realization of transgression has brought about repentance; on the other hand, God grants his kindness to the penitent. And indeed, he [Adam] showed his penitence in accordance of his deeds through the griddle, covering half of himself with the leaves of a fig tree, even as many other leaves existed which would have irritated his body less. Yet he acquired clothing very fitting to [his] disobedience, having been frightened thoroughly by the dread of God, and quelling the imprudent urging of his flesh. Since he had lost the inborn and childish understanding, and he came into the reasoning of evil, he put around himself and his wife a bridle of self-control, fearing God and waiting for his coming, and as if indicating some such thing. Since he says that I have lost the robe from the Holy Spirit, which I had through disobedience, and now I know that I am worthy of such a covering, which indeed does not exhibit any enjoyment, but it stings and pricks the body. And this one may see clearly that he would kept this clothing always, humbling himself, unless the Lord who is merciful would have clothed them with the coats of skin in place of the leaves of the fig tree.<sup>78</sup>

This passage is significant because Irenæus is one of the first Christian writers to mention the “coat of skins.” His interpretation that the coat of skins was a gift from the Lord because of Adam’s repentance is the opposite of Luther’s interpretation that the skins are a sign and reminder of man’s sin.

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<sup>78</sup> Irenæus, *Against Heresies* III, 23, 5. Timor autem Domini initium intelligentiæ; intellectus vero transgressionis fecit pœnitentiam: pœnitentibus autem largitur benignitatem suam Deus. Etenim per succinctorium in facto ostendit suam pœnitentiam, foliis ficulneis semetipsum contegens, exsistentibus et aliis foliis multis, quæ minus corpus ejus vexare potuissent: condignum tamen inobedientiæ amictum fecit, conterritus timore Dei; et retundens petulantem carnis impetum, quoniam indolem et puerilem amiserat sensum, et in cogitationem pejorum venerat, frænum continentiæ sibi et uxori suæ circumdedit, timens Deum et adventum ejus exspectans, et velut tale quid significans: Quoniam, inquit, eam quam habui a Spiritu sanctitatis stolam amisi per inobedientiam, et nunc cognosco quod sim dignus tali tegumento, quod delectationem quidem nullam præstat, mordet autem et pungit corpus. Et hoc videlicet semper habuisset indumentum, humilians semetipsum, nisi Dominus qui est misericors tunicas pelliceas pro foliis ficulneis induisset eos.

Not all the ancient writers agree with Irenæus that the fig leaves were marks of Adam's repentance. Philo, who wrote approximately one hundred years before Irenæus, sees the fig leaves as a symbol that physical pleasures ought to be avoided. He was writing from a neo-platonic background and saw the physical as inferior to the spiritual. He writes:

Why do they sew the leaves of the fig tree as loin-cloths? First, because the fruit of the fig tree is sweeter and pleasant to the taste. Accordingly it symbolically indicates those who sew together and weave together many sense pleasures one with another. Wherefore they (the leaves) are girded round the place of the genitals, which are the instruments of greater things. Second, because the fruit of the fig tree is, as I have said, sweeter than that of other trees, and its leaves are rougher. Accordingly (Scripture) wishes to make clear symbolically that although the movement of pleasure seems to be somewhat slippery and smooth, nevertheless in truth it proves to be rough, and it is impossible to feel joy or pleasure without first feeling pain and again feeling additional pain. For it is always a grievous thing to feel pain in the midst of two painful states, one of them being at the beginning, and the other being added.<sup>79</sup>

Philo's interpretation is important because his method of exegesis was the forerunning of the method used by Patristic commentators.<sup>80</sup> Philo's literal interpretation corresponds to the Church Fathers' historical interpretation, while his physical interpretation corresponds to the Father's allegorical interpretation, and his ethical interpretation corresponds to the Father's

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<sup>79</sup> Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesis et Exodum*, I, 41. (Ralph Marcus, *Philo Supplement I Questions and Answers on Genesis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953), 23 – 24. Only fragments of Philo's work remain in Greek, Marcus translated the text from an Armenian copy.

<sup>80</sup> Marcus, ix.

moral interpretation.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Philo's allegorical interpretation was the forerunner for Origen's and other Fathers' allegorical treatment of the "coat of skins." Philo shares another commonality with many Fathers in that he sees the Fall in some way linked to sexuality and the lust of the flesh. Even Augustine was not immune to these influences.

Thus far, three ways of interpreting the "coat of skins" have been presented. It could be interpreted allegorically with many possible symbolic meanings; it could be interpreted as Gospel like the way Irenæus does. Finally, it could be interpreted as Law in the way that Luther does. Among the church Fathers, the allegorical method of interpreting "coat of skins" is the most frequent. Presently, with a shunning of allegorical interpretations, the most common way of understanding the "coat of skins" is as a merciful gift from the Lord to his fallen creatures. The least common and least popular way of understanding the "coat of skins" is how Luther takes it as a mark of Law and the antithesis of Holy Baptism. He specifically sees that the "coat of skins" and "clothes," in general, is a sign and reminder of original sin.

With this in mind, Luther's advocacy of modesty in dress is easier to understand. Preus notes that when Chemnitz was superintendent of Braunschweig, he was "successful in getting the women to give up wearing jewelry and other finery to Communion and to wear either white or black

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

clothing as a sign of their humility and Christian piety.”<sup>82</sup> This call by Luther and Chemnitz to modesty is not based in piety alone or intended simply as a curb to pride and jealousy between social classes, it is a call to repentance because of our sinful nature before the Lord. It is prideful and arrogant to dress splendidly before the Lord who clothed us with the skins of animals to remind us of our sinful nature. To dress immodestly and extravagantly is to take clothing that sign of our sin and turn it into a boast before God. Consequently, to bask publicly in nakedness is to reject the covering for our shame given by the Lord. Concerning this topic Luther writes:

For a skin was his daily garment, so that he may be daily reminded of his loss of happiness. But we, therefore, clothe [ourselves] with glittering and indulgent luxury, so that we may make known to all not only having forgotten the evil things, out of which we were snatched, but also the good things, which we have received.<sup>83</sup>

This passage clearly demonstrates that Luther does not see the garment of skin primarily as an act of kindness from the Lord, but as a mark of original sin. Now that man is sinful, he must be covered. The leaves that Adam tried to cover himself with were not sufficient to hide man’s shame or his sin. The mortal man<sup>84</sup> now became destined to die. Death entered the world because of

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<sup>82</sup> J.A.O Preus *The Second Martin – The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 138.

<sup>83</sup> WA 42: 166, 4 – 7 (AE 2: 222) Fuit enim ei pellis sua quotidiana vestis, ut quotidie admoneretur amissae felicitatis. Nos autem ideo vestimus splendide et indulgemus luxui, ut omnibus testemur nos non solum oblitos malorum, ex quibus erepti simus, sed etiam bonorum, quae accepimus.

<sup>84</sup> “Mortal” means having the capacity to die. Man always had within his nature the ability to die, but the Lord never intended man to die. After the Fall, man became destined to die.

Adam's sin and an animal was slain to provide the garment of skin. Clothing from now on is a symbol of the sin and death brought upon not only man but also all creation. To deny clothing or to use it as an ornament for pride is to deny our original sin before the Lord.

Luther properly distinguishes the Law from the Gospel. While Luther does not explicitly say the following in this section of the *Genesis Lectures*, the counter part to the "coat of skins" is the "coat of Christ" given in Holy Baptism. The Lord Jesus clothed himself in our flesh, thereby taking on the ability to die. And die he did not only for our actual sins but also for the sin that infects all men. Through Holy Baptism, we are now covered in a garment of Jesus' flesh and blood, thereby making us righteous.

#### Coat of Skins before Luther

It is helpful to see how the motif concerning the "garment of skin" was used before the time of Luther. For more than 1,000 years before Luther, Christian authors were writing about the coat of skins. Not all of what they wrote is helpful for explicating the doctrine of original sin, much of it is allegorical, but there are common elements between the fathers and Luther. According to Ladner, the most common interpretation of the coat of skins among the fathers was the mortality of man.<sup>85</sup> This would be one common element shared with Luther. Another topic found in the discussion of the coat of skins important to the doctrine of original sin is the transmission of souls.

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<sup>85</sup> Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform – Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 176.

Origen will use the coat of skins to prove that the soul exists before the body. Tertullian, while not having an opinion concerning the meaning of the coat of skins, emphatically states that it has nothing to do with the origin of souls. For these and other reasons, it is helpful to examine some of the patristic occurrences and to compare them with Luther.

While fathers had commented on the “garment of skin” as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, Luther most likely first encountered it in Augustine. There is a clear passage concerning the “garment of skin” in Augustine’s *Confessions* VII, XVIII. The context in which it occurs is Neo-Platonic in that Christ who is on high comes down lower so that we may be raised from the lower things to the higher things. Nonetheless, Word becoming flesh accomplished this. He writes:

That they may not continue advancing in confidence for themselves, but rather they may be made weak; they are seeing before their feet the divinity [made] feeble by partaking of our garments of skin, and being weary they may be trampled under in it, that raising, he might raise them up.<sup>86</sup>

The “coat of skin” is not a prominent topic in Augustine. Within this quotation is the idea that Christ took on a coat of skin in order to become capable of dying. In His dying, we will be raised up. Luther will echo this. The term “garment of skin” is more common in Eastern writers than in the Western writers.

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<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VII, XVIII Ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur, videntes ante pedes suos infirmam divinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae, et lassii prosternerentur in eam, illa autem surgens levaret eos.

Gregory Nyssa, one of the great Capadocian theologians, writes of the Fall and the coat of skins. His writing has been influenced by Origen and to some extent Philo but he rejects Origen's view that souls are pre-existent. Gregory, like Origen, believes that the first men were immortal, which is contrary to Augustine's view that man was created mortal but not destined to die. Gregory Nyssa is noteworthy because unlike most Greek Fathers, his view of sin approaches most closely Augustine's teaching on original sin. Gregory writes:

And Moses explains the doctrine such as this more historical than by riddle to us. However, the riddle has a clear teaching. For since he says, the first humans came into forbidden things and they were stripped bare of that happiness, the Lord put on skin coats on the first-formed [people]. It does not seem to me that the meaning of the phrase refers to these skins. For of what sort of slain and flayed animals is the covering devised for them? But since all skin having been separated from the animal is dead, I certainly think that the ability to die, which was taken from the nature of a brute beast out of the foresight of Him who heals our evil, was added to human beings, not to remain [in man] forever. For the coat, which is put on is outside of us, supplying itself as a loan to the body for a time, is not natural to its nature. Therefore, from the nature of brute beasts the capacity to die is bestowed providentially on the nature created for immortality, being wrapped around it on the outside, but not on the inside, and seizing the part of man which is perceptible to the senses, but not laying hold of its divine image.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Gregory of Nyssa *Oratio Catechetica* 8. PG 45, 53BCD. Τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον δόγμα ἱστορικώτερον μὲν, καὶ δι' αἰνιγμάτων ὁ Μωσῆς ὑμῖν ἐκτίθεται. Πλὴν ἔκδηλον καὶ τὰ αἰνίγματα τὴν διδασκαλίαν ἔχει. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ, φησὶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπηγορευμένοις ἐγένοντο οἱ πρῶτοι ἄνθρωποι, καὶ τῆς μακαριότητος ἐκείνης ἀπεγυμνώθησαν, δερματίνους ἐπιβάλλει χιτῶνας οἷς πρωτοπλάστοις ὁ Κύριος· οὐ μοι δοκεῖ πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα δέρματα τοῦ λόγου τὴν διάνοιαν φέρων· ποίων γὰρ ἀποσφαγέντων καὶ δαρέντων ζώων ἐπινοεῖται αὐτοῖς ἡ περιβολή; ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ πᾶν δέρμα χωρισθὲν τοῦ ζώου, νεκρὸν ἐστὶ· πάντως οἶμαι τὴν πρὸς τὸ νεκροῦσθαι δύναμιν, ἢ τῆς ἀλόγου φύσεως ἐξαίρετος ἦν ἐκ προμηθείας, μετὰ ταῦτα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπιβεβληκῆναι τὸν τὴν κακίαν ἡμῶν ἰατρούοντα, οὐχ ὡς εἰς αἰεὶ παραμένειν. Ὁ γὰρ χιτῶν, τῶν ἕξωθεν ἡμῖν ἐπιβαλλομένων ἐστὶ, πρὸς καιρὸν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χρῆσιν παρέχων τοῦ σώματος, οὐ συμπεφυκῶς τῇ φύσει. Οὐκοῦν ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἀλόγων φύσεως ἡ νεκρότης οἰκονομικῶς περιετέθη τῇ εἰς ἀθανασίαν κτισθείσῃ φύσει, τὸ ἕξωθεν αὐτῆς περικαλύπτουσα, οὐ τὸ ἔσωθεν, καὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέρος διαλαμβάνουσα, αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς θείας εἰκόνας οὐ προσαπτομένη.

It is apparent that Gregory is working primarily with an allegorical interpretation of the text. He is unsure whether many of the details in Genesis are literal or not, but Gregory indicates that originally man was immortal but animals were mortal. What the coat of skins represents is the mortal nature of the beasts now shared with man's nature. Note that the Gregory does not limit the effects of the coat of skins to Adam and Eve only but it affects the very nature of man. In this way, his teaching is similar to Augustine's on original sin. In Adam's Fall, all men are fallen; through one man sin is transmitted to all men. Gregory also notes that this capacity to die has been added to man like a coat that can be taken off; this coat of death is wrapped on the outside of man but is not part of his being. Here is the hope that the Lord in Holy Baptism will undo sin. The garment of death will be exchanged for a garment of life. Despite his Origenistic tendencies, Gregory may be the best bridge between the East and West in relation to original sin.

Some notes on the text: *ἄλογος* literally means "without words." The Greeks used this word to indicate any irrational creature since rationality required speech. Thus, what separated man from animals was speech. Since an animal was without words, *ἄλογος* became a synonym for "animal." In modern Greek *ἄλογο* is the word for "horse."

Another writer who used this image of the coat of skins was Methodius [AD 260 – 312], the Bishop of Olympus. He was a chief opponent of Origen and his school of interpretation. Methodius writes:



In order, then, that man might not be an undying or ever-living evil, as would have been the case if sin were dominant within him, as it had sprung up in an immortal body, and was provided with immortal sustenance, God for this cause pronounced him mortal, and clothed him with mortality. For this was what was meant by the coats of skins, in order that, by the dissolution of the body, sin might be destroyed from the very roots, that there might not be left even the smallest particle of root from which new shoots of sin might again burst forth.<sup>88</sup>

Methodius foresees sinful man never dying, thereby making sin immortal. This cannot be so the Lord cloaks man with the coat of skin, that is mortality, so that he will die and sin will cease to be within him. Thus, the coat of skin is not entirely bad news for man, for in the death of the body sin is removed and destroyed never to return. Note that nowhere does Methodius directly link mankind to Adam other than the fact that everyone shares death. In contrast to Origen, according to Methodius man sinned in the body – that he is he had a body when he sinned and was not a “spiritual being.”

Finally, it would be helpful to sample one example from Origen [AD 185 – 254] that so greatly influenced the interpretation on the coat of skins. Origen’s primary interpretation regarding the coat of skins involved the transmission of a soul into a body. Origen writes in *Against Celsus* IV, XL:

And the expulsion of the man and woman from paradise, and their being clothed with tunics of skins (which God, because of the transgression of men, made for those who had sinned), contain a certain secret and mystical doctrine (far transcending that of Plato) of the soul’s losing its wings, and being borne

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<sup>88</sup> Methodius *The Discourse on the Resurrection* I, IV. ANF 6, 354.

downwards to earth, until it can lay hold of some stable resting-place.<sup>89</sup>

Apparently, Origen believed that before the Fall Adam and Eve were spiritual beings without a physical body. As the result of the Fall, the coat of skins represented the body in which the soul is placed. From now on the soul loses its wings and is confined to a body. The soul is not transferred from parents to child but is sent from heaven into the body – thus, the souls are pre-existent. Origen does believe that there is a taint of sin in man, otherwise infants would not be baptized. While Origen does not explain how death is passed to all men, he does state that our bodies are sin because of Adam's Fall. Origen writes in his Romans commentary:

Therefore, the body of sin is our body; because Adam did not decree to become aquatinted with Eve, his wife, and to bring forth Cain, until after having sinned.<sup>90</sup>

Origen sees that all men after Adam have sin in their bodies because Adam waited too long to bear children. While Origen does not explicitly state it, the implication is that if Adam had had children before the Fall, sin would not have affected all of mankind. Augustine was familiar with Origen's commentary on Romans and made use of it. Origen probably had the most influence on the discussion surrounding the coat of skins. Tennant suggests that Origen based his writings about the coat of skins on Jewish

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<sup>89</sup> Origen *Against Celsus* IV, XL ANF 4, 516.

<sup>90</sup> *In Rom. V.* Corpus ergo peccati est corpus nostrum; quia nec Adam scribitur cognovisse Evam uxorem suam et genuisse Cain, nisi post peccatum. Text in Tennant, 303.

pseudepigraphical writings.<sup>91</sup> While there are some similarities between Origen's view of sin and Augustine's, there are more differences. It does not seem that Origen had provided a major influence to Augustine's teaching on original sin.

Before leaving the section on the coat of skins, one final anti-Origen quotation is given. Tertullian in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* does not say what the "coats of skin" are, but what they are not.

For it cannot be as some wish that those coats of skin, which Adam and Eve have put on<sup>92</sup> after having been stripped of paradise, they themselves were of flesh formed out of mud, since a considerable time earlier Adam had already recognized the flesh of his substance transferred in the woman: This now is bone out of my bone and flesh out of my flesh.<sup>93</sup>

As far as Tertullian is concerned, Origen's speculations on the coat of skins do not amount to much since Scripture says that Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. In summary, there are two basic interpretations regarding the coat of skins, namely that they represent human flesh or they do not. The Eastern Fathers were more inclined to side with Origen while those on the West tended to side with Tertullian. The most common interpretation for the coat of skins was mortality. None of the fathers

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Note the word play between "put on" (*induo*) and "strip" (*exuo*). Both words can be used of clothing. As the clothing of innocence and righteousness is stripped off, the garments of sin and death are put on.

<sup>93</sup> Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* VII. Neque enim, ut quidam volunt, illæ pellicie tunicæ, quas Adam et Eva, paradysum exuti, induerunt, ipsæ erunt carnis ex limo reformatio; cum aliquanto prius et Adam, substantiæ suæ traducem in fœmina jam carnem

suggested as Luther did that the coat of skins is the Old Adam that clings to every man.<sup>94</sup>

### Application and Conclusion

While it does not appear that the coat of skins significantly influenced the formulation of the original sin doctrine, as Luther demonstrated, the coat of skin image can be placed in service to original sin as a teaching tool. From the discussion on the coat of skins, useful images such as sin cloaking the outside of man with the implication that coat could be removed emerged. Luther inherited from Augustine the term original sin and he leaves no doubt in *SA* of man's corruption. All other evil deeds flow from original sin. For Luther original sin has so corrupted and blinded man that he is unable to recognize it without the revelation of Scripture. It is this difficulty and inability of man to understand original sin that prompted Pannenberg to write:

What Christians say about human beings as sinners is true to life only if it relates to something that characterizes the whole phenomenon of human life and that may be known even without the premise of God's revelation, even if this revelation is necessary to bring its true significance to light.<sup>95</sup>

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recognoverit: Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis, et caro ex carne mea. MPL 2, 803 – 804. (An English translation may be found in ANF 3, 550.)

<sup>94</sup> Another connection between the coat of skins and the high priestly garments of Aaron is that both of them hid man's shamefulness and sin from the eyes of the Lord.

<sup>95</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology Volume 2*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 236.

Part of the problem in teaching original sin is that it will never appear to be true to life according to our reason and senses apart from the illumination of Holy Scripture. It is difficult to understand how a man could be held accountable for an action that he did not do. Original sin appears to be deterministic and hindrance to the free will of man. While original sin is not actual sin, all actual sins flow out of original sin which is the beginning of unbelief that leads to idolatry and the neglect of God's Word. From this point, the sin flows out horizontally with the next rebellion between children and parents then to the greater society with murder, adultery, theft, etc. Perhaps, by teaching that this horizontal evil flows out of original sin is a place to start the discussion. Evil in general or evil individuals seems to be more easy to make "real" to people than the fact that all men are so sinful that they are unable to do anything about it. As Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles, original sin cannot be understood apart from the revelation of Scripture.

The view points within the church on original sin range from outright denial and blasphemy to a distorted view that cannot accept the full seriousness of the man's sinful condition. Even the Roman Catholic Church, which uses the same terminology as the Lutheran Confessions, cannot accept sin as it is confessed in the Book of Concord. Rondet writes that the fifth canon of the Council of Trent is directed against Luther.<sup>96</sup> In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Luther's teaching on original sin is clearly reject. It

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<sup>96</sup> Rondet, 175.

reads, "The first Protestant reformers, on the contrary, taught that original sin has radically perverted man and destroyed his freedom; they identified the sin inherited by each man with the tendency to evil (*concupiscentia*), which would be insurmountable."<sup>97</sup> The problem Rome has with Luther's teaching on sin is that it is "insurmountable." Original Sin as it is taught in the Book of Concord reduces man to the zero point where he can do nothing.

In recent years, the Lutherans and Roman Catholics came to a joint declaration on justification. Before a consensus on justification can be had, there must be consensus on sin and how it affects man. The Lutherans, who are under an "insurmountable" original sin, need a different kind of savior than the Roman Catholics who have original sin removed at baptism. The same can be said for those who regard original sin as a sin that is imitated from Adam. Those who hold to this view will have a Jesus who is to be imitated in order to be saved. Those who deny original sin altogether also deny redemption in Jesus since by one man all sinned and by the God Man Jesus all are made alive. Even the Calvinist, who teaches total depravity, cannot agree with the Smalcald Articles confession on sin. Apparently, total depravity does not yet reduce man to the zero point that is confessed in the Book Concord. The Scriptures and the Book of Concord present a Jesus who saves those who are in "insurmountable" sin. Anyone not in such a dire situation need not apply,

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<sup>97</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubay, 1992), 115.

As stated before, if the doctrine of original sin is lost so is the doctrine of redemption in Christ lost. There are varying degrees of error but they all hold the potential to lose Christ and to diminish His work and glory. Returning to the Pannenberg quotation, perhaps, the doctrine of original sin seems so unreal to the people because the church has ceased to teach it. In this regard, the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Confessions have much to offer the church at large. From the time of Saint Paul until Augustine, the doctrine of original sin was obscured. From Augustine to Luther, once again it became obscured. Now in the five hundred years since Luther, the doctrine of original sin is again in danger of being obscured by church bodies and preachers that are so eager to please their hearers that they are willing to water down and in some cases omit this teaching.

Perhaps, we ought to learn from the East that Pelagianism will ultimately produce Christological problems. In the end, Christ may be lost. As the Smalcald Articles confess, it is the Word of the Lord that will convince their hearts and minds that the problem of sin is insurmountable and that they need a savior who will rescue them totally and completely.

FINIS

## Appendix – Funeral Oration of the Nestorian and Pelagian Heresies

### Epitaphium Nestorianæ et Pelagianæ Hæreseon.

(Nestoriana hæresis loquitur.)

197 Nestoriana lues successi Pelagianæ,  
Quæ tamen est utero prægenerata meo.

Infelix miseræ genitrix et filia natæ,  
Prodivi ex ipso germine quod peperì.

Nam fundare arcem meritis prior orsa superbis,  
De capite ad corpus ducere opus voui.

Sed mea dum proles in summa armatur ab imis,  
Congrua bellandi tempora non habui,

199 Et consanguineæ post tristia vulnera fraudis,  
Aspera conserui prælia fine pari.

Me tamen una dedit victam sententia letho:  
Illa volens iterum surgere bis cecidit.

Mecum oritur, mecum moritur, mecumque sepulcrum

Intrat, et inferni carceris ima subit.

Quo nos præcipites insana superbia mersit,  
Exutas donis, et tumidas meritis?

Nam Christum pietate operum et mercede volentes

Esse Deum, in capitis fœdere non stetimus;

Sperantesque animi de libertate coronam,

Perdidimus quam dat gratia justitiam.

Quique igitur geminæ miseraris busta ruinæ,  
Ne nostro exitio consociare cave.

Nam si quæ Domini data munera sero fatemur,  
Hæc homini credis debita, noster eris.

S. Prosperi

MPL 51, 153 – 154.



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