

# Original Sin and Its Relation to Teaching Infant Baptism

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## Abstract

Adam's transgression resulted in initial guilt and pollution that is called original sin. The teaching of original sin became prominent for some theologians in the fourth century and, at the same time, became one of the most controversial. However, it was accepted as a part of Christian doctrine for some Christian denominations. One of the prominent theologians who impressed so much with this teaching is Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's notion of original sin arose from his dilemma and query about the influence of Adam's sin on his posterity during the fifth century B.C. He thought that all people who participated in Adam's first transgression and original sin were passed down to their children through their parents automatically without awareness of their children. The understanding of Augustine regarding original sin was not originated from his view on the Bible perspective but was influenced through his exploration of the view of Neo-Platonism on sin. According to Neo-Platonism, the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body as self-isolation is the root of sin. Before entering the body, the soul has a previous existence. The souls become wrapped in the body when they descend. But the point is that even before the soul enters the body, its illogical components have an unruly and terrible disposition. Augustine's perspective on original sin influenced the church's stance on infant baptism. The majority of Christian denominations accepted that every child inherited sin from their parents. The newborn baby must be baptized in order to be cleansed of the original sin. As a result, the purpose of this research is to examine the teaching of original sin and its relationship to the teaching of infants.

**Keywords:** Original Sin, Infant Baptism, Transmission

## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of the doctrine of original sin one of interesting for Christianity from the fourth century until today. One of the reasons why this teaching is very interesting to be discussed in the Christian world is that it stems from the debate between Augustine and Pelagius. Basically, the debate between these two church figures is based on Paul's writings to the Romans in Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (NASB) and Psalms 51:5 as David says, "Behold, I have been brought forth in iniquity, and in sin, my mother hath conceived me" (NASB)

In Augustine's understanding of the above verses, everyone has sinned because Adam passed that sin on to everyone. Every parent has passed sin on to their children biologically even though

they are still babies because children have been begotten in sin. Thus, the sin has been passed down from generation to generation without the participation of every human being born (Jacobs, 2001). The reason Augustine believed in the original sin transmission is that, in his view, the Grace that God provided for a human being is not only assisting our efforts to obey God, but it is also demanded by our fallen nature. There was already a demand for moral purity before the Fall. Because of the Fall, the requirement did not change, but we did. What was once a moral possibility becomes a moral impossibility without grace. Augustine's viewpoint is based on the concept of the original (Sproul, 2000).

However, Augustine's understanding met resistance from a theologian, Pelagius. He emphatically rejects Augustine's views. In his understanding, even though man (Adam) has fallen into sin, it does not mean that his sin is immediately passed down to his descendants under the human consciousness. Like him, man was created so good and really very good. When Adam fell into sin, it did not mean changing the moral nature of the human essence, which would be passed on to his descendants. Everyone who is born is inherently good, and when he or she sins, it is based on the free will that each individual has (Enns, 1997). Interestingly, Pelagius' arguments were rejected by the church and condemned at the council of Carthage in 408 (Ibid). Mostly, the prominent theologians of the fourth century and reformers such as John Calvin and Martin Luther agreed with Augustine's view that Adam's sin is transmitted to all his posterity as called the doctrine original. They admitted the teaching of Augustine on the original sin based on their understanding that human beings lacked capacity, capability, light, memory, and intellect when Adam fell into sin. All men lost their power, total depravity. Therefore, all people need grace in order to become the right person (Calvin, 1945 and Luther, 1959).

All people have sinned because they were sent down by Adam, and all of Adam's descendants pass that sin on to newborn babies and also, that man, after falling into sin, has no ability at all to do good because he has fallen completely. Therefore, in order to remove sin from the newly born human, the sacrament of child baptism must be performed. Augustine says;

If, by virtue of the perfection and administration of such a great sacrament, they (children) who are baptized are nevertheless counted in the number of the faithful, even though by their own heart and mouth they simply do not do what belongs to the acts of faith and confession; Surely those who have missed the sacrament must be counted among those who do not believe in the Son, and therefore, if they leave this life without it, they will know what is written about them— they will have no life, but the wrath of God abides in them. (Augustine, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5:25).

With those understanding, the Catholic church and many Christian denominations uphold, receive, and practice infant baptism.

Therefore, it is interesting to explore the relationship between the teaching of the original sin and infant baptism to see the relation between the two teachings. In order to explore study this interesting topic, this paper is trying to answer the following questions; what is the doctrine of original sin? How did this doctrine enter into Christianity? Is there any relation of this teaching to

the doctrine of baptism, particularly infant baptism? To answer all those questions, the researcher is using qualitative study through analyzing, exploring, and studying some literature or studies that support the teaching of the original sin and infant baptism explore then the description will be made on this study.

## DISCUSSION

### Original Sin

Before explaining further, the meaning of the original sin, it is important to first trace the origin of how the teaching entered Christianity. Because by looking at the history of the development of the teaching and how it was taught, we will be able to find its full meaning in the perspective of its background.

In the perspective of Judaism, there is no teaching of original sin, but an evil inclination that exists in the heart of every human being after Adam falls into sin, and the inclination may overcome with the obedience to the law of God (Wimer, 2000). Moreover, the early Fathers of the church, particularly Greek Fathers, did not have any definition of the original sin. For them, as the result of Adam's sin, all people have physical corruption but are not involved in Adam's sin. This view was formulated by Pelagius, which denied the doctrine of original sin. On the other hand, Latin Fathers had a different understanding from the Greek Fathers, which suggested all humankind is guilty because of Adam's sin (Berkhof, 1938). According to Overstreet (2000), the teaching of original sin was formulated by Augustine in the fourth century and adopted in the Catholic church. The first author of the original sin used the Latin word *peccatum originale* (Patte, 2019; Cross, 1966)

In the Catholic Church's understanding, the original sin is the general condition of humans that are born into sin without any actions on it. Sin Adam fell into sin, his nature, and all his posterity no power at all to resist the evil power which is called concupiscence. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos.416-4180). Furthermore, the Catholic Catechism explains that Adam's sin affected human nature by transmission. It is a sin not contracted or committed--then becomes a state in the human being. (404).

According to the Westminster catechism, original sin is "the sinfulness of that estate were into man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it" Moreover, original sin definition refers to the first sin that began in Adam that brought guilt to all humankind. Original sin also can define as everyone naturally inheriting Adam's in, and all people commit acts of sin due to their nature (Fruchtenbaum, 1983). "Moreover "original sin is the state of alienation from God into which all humans are born' (Guretzki and Nordling, 1999). "Original sin is not an activity but a quality, a state, an inherent condition. It exists, though there be no conscious, voluntary act of internal or external powers, mind or body" (Lueker,2000), and it is called "the chief sin, a root and fountainhead of all actual sins" (Kolb, Wengert, & Arand, 2000). Therefore, original sin is Adam's sin transmitted to all

humankind naturally, which is counted as an act of sin, although the descendants of Adam do not commit sin with their conscience.

### **The Root**

The idea of the doctrine of original sin in Christianity, particularly in the understanding of Latin Fathers such as Augustine, Tertullian, Ambrose, etc. Based on some Bible texts from the Old Testaments such as Job 4:17; 14:4; 15:14; 25:4; Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Eccl. 7:20 and in the New Testament that portrays all men have sinned, all people under the power of sin no one could overcome its power except by the grace of God (Roma 3: 24-25). Because of Adam's sin, all men are under condemnation (Rom 5:18), and the transgression of Adam is spreading to all his posterity (Rom 5:12). Therefore, Tertullian suggested that "propagation of the soul involves the propagation of sin. He regarded original sin as a hereditary sinful taint or corruption, which did not exclude the presence of some good in man". (Berkhof, 1938, p.244). More advanced on the Tertullian's view came from Ambrose considering original sin as a state and distinguishing between inborn depravity and man's guilt as a result. The fall impaired man's ability to exercise his free will (Berkhof, 1938). Both of them agreed that because of Adam's sin, all men inherit his sin, and with Adam's sin, that naturally transfers to everyone; therefore, the power of free will that God had endowed to human beings is corrupted at all and nothing can do with it.

The ideas of Tertullian and Ambrose were not without development. Augustine, a great theologian in the fourth century, developed the ideas of his seniors. On many occasions, Augustine listened to the preaching of Ambrose in Milan after he became Christian in 383, particularly about human nature, then he got baptized in 387 (Drobner, 2008). Unfortunately, his idea about the doctrine of original sin basically was not originally by his study of some biblical passages, the teaching of Ambrose but also through studying philosophy before he became a Christian, and he still continued to study the philosophy of Neo-platonism, although he never claims that his view comes from philosophy regarding the doctrine of original sin (Pane, 2021).

### ***Nature of Man***

The teaching of the doctrine of original sin is not separated from the understanding of the nature of mankind. Those who received and taught this doctrine basically understood that a human being is two elements soul and body. This idea came from philosophers such as Aristotle, that says the soul is the form of the body believed in the pre-existence of the soul and its transmigration. Plotinus believed that man is body and soul and transmigration of the soul. Moreover, Augustine identifies the soul with the inner man. Man is body and soul, but the latter (soul) is the most important of the two parts. Man was created according to God's image. Therefore, man can know God in the privacy of his own soul. Thomas Aquinas also said in his idea *Via Negativa*, the soul is the form of the body, as Aristotle believed the soul is immortal. But this disembodied existence, although possible, was not natural, and it would be resolved with the resurrection of the body (Graf, 2014). Martin Luther also suggested the same idea as written in the Disputation Concerning Man, and he accepts that man is a rational animal, a composite of soul and body (flesh), with certain faculties consequent on the possession of an intellectual soul (Luther, 1960).

For them, the soul is living reality, the soul is immortal, but the body is mortal. The reason is that mankind was created in the image of God that through the soul, the image of God is carried in the human body, and the soul itself controls the human body. However, when the first parent fell into sin, their body was corrupted and dead, but the soul is immortal.

Because Adam has fallen into sin, therefore the consequence is the human body becomes sin. Unfortunately, Adam's sin itself does not stop only within himself but to all humans who have bodies as he had because the body (nature) we have today is the same body (nature) as that of Adam (Hopkins, 1097). Augustine further said that our bodies were not created yet when Adam sinned and that the body that Adam wore is what we have today. Therefore, our bodies have sinned by nature because we use the same body as Adam (Augustine, 1968, XIII. 1.4). The idea of Augustine is the same as Tertullian, who believed that the transmission of the soul entails the transmission of sin. However, he believed everybody was an inherited sinful taint or contamination that did not preclude the presence of some good in man as Augustine's view. Further, Ambrose stated that original sin is a state which is born inherited because the body governs by sin (Berkhof, 1938). Martin Luther also believed that soul is ruled by faith while the body is ruled by sin. Thus, human body is enslaved to sin in an account of original sin as he says, "the human heart is by nature so desperately wicked that always flees from God. We are sinners and have merited nothing wrath (Luther, 1956:65). Therefore, as every human being has the original sin is enslaved to sin, and their body is corrupted not because of their actions but by nature which taints Adam's nature.

However, Aquinas sees beyond the above view; for him, the motive of Adam's sin was his in his soul, not merely the sensual pleasure but "therefore the soul, in respect of its essence, is the primary subject of original sin" and it is a form of the body" (Aquinas, 2009). In other words, the subject of original sin is the human (Adam's) soul that own body.

### ***The Corruption of Free Will***

The teaching of the doctrine of original is also connected with the understanding of free will. Since Adam falls into sin, human's free will becomes corrupt. Augustine assumes that the will of men to do good things and to exercise their faith or belief is no longer exists but has lost at all (Chadwick, 1991). Human beings cannot respond without the grace of God. The human's free will can restore only by the grace of God without any part of human beings in their nature because their nature is already corrupt. Thus" God is alone the source of good, and there is nothing in man apart from God" (Cushman, 1961. p. 93). Because the nature of the human being is corrupted, they cannot perform the good works without the hand of God in His grace. All the good works that humankind performs only by the work of God in us without the cooperation of human beings (Augustine, 1968). In other words, no one can produce well through power or exercise free will. All good works that human has performed is not the outcome of their free will to do it, but by the work of God in them, that is grace. Therefore, for Augustine, the grace of God is the only medicine for the remission of the original sin (Haight, 1979). The grace of God is given according to God's will, not ours because human's free will is corrupted. God determines who will have salvation and damnation (Scoot, 1995), and we cannot refuse the grace of God although we wish to do it (Cushman, 1961).

The idea of Augustine about the depravity of the human will also be supported by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas agreed that human being had lost their free will when Adam fell into sin. In their nature, humankind cannot exercise their free will as they did before the Fall. Therefore, grace bestows grace. However, the role of the grace of God for Aquinas is a little bit different from Augustine's. For Aquinas, grace has been given to mankind, not because of the human's sin or to cure human sin but because of their being...grace is bestowed to elevate human nature to make them act proportionate in principle as human beings. Although Aquinas' approach on the purpose of grace is slightly different from Augustine's, he regards it so much that grace is infused into a human being in order to become a new creature for their destiny that Divine supernatural that was lost (Gratsch, 1985).

Moreover, one of the greatest reformers, Martin Luther, also agreed with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas on their view on free will. Luther acknowledges that the state of human beings is totally different after the Fall. Adam's will and all his descendants are corrupted. There is no more righteousness in them at all. Human nature is completely fallen; they no longer know God's will, and human's will is in total depravity (L.W., 1:114). Furthermore, John Calvin also supported those ideas as he adopted Augustine's view "The orthodox, therefore, and more especially Augustine, labored to show, that we are not corrupted by acquired wickedness, but bring an innate corruption from the very womb (Calvin, 1964: 214) Thus, as the free will of human beings is corrupted then no one escape from Adam's sin as they cannot refuse Adam's sin due their total depravity.

### **The Nature of Original Sin**

The nature of the original sin is transmission. The transmission of the first sin to all humankind because of solidarity with Adam's nature. The transmission of the original sin is through concupiscence.

#### ***Solidarity***

According to Augustine, all man is bound to Adam. The nature that we possess is the same nature as Adam's, which means All sins of Adam flow contentiously to all human beings throughout the ages (Hopkins, 1907). This theory is called solidarity to Adam's sin. All men cannot be separated from Adam's nature, but all men are in the same group with Adam. Adam's sins are our sins. As for Augustine, human beings possess dual lives as a person and have a common life as Adam had. The solidarity theory is similar to the Neo-Platonic view-family relationship, which means the human's soul is partaking with Adam's soul before it enlivens to bodies (Pane, 2021).

Moreover, the ideas of Augustine and Neo-Platonic are supported by Aquinas. He acknowledged that only Christ that does not have Adam's sin because His nature is different from Adam. Aquinas states, "original sin, in virtue of the sin of our first parent, is transmitted to his posterity, just as, from the soul's will, actual sin is transmitted to the members of the body, through their being moved by the will. Now it is evident that actual sin can be transmitted to all such members as have an inborn aptitude to be moved by the will. Therefore, original sin is transmitted to all those who are moved by Adam by the movement of generation (Aquinas, 2009)

With those views, it can be concluded that all humankind, by nature, possess Adam's because the nature of his posterity is similar to him. Thus, every human being that has been born has sinful nature. Augustine further comments that sinful nature leads to the actual nature (Augustine, NPNF, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5:19). That view is accepted in some Christian denominations, such as Catholic Church (Aquinas, 2009).

### ***Transmission***

As mentioned above that, all humankind is bound with Adam naturally. Thus, all his posterity possess natural sins. The term "mediate transmission" refers to a transmission method. This means that it is passed on from Adam to all of his descendants through his parents. It does not come straight from Adam to each individual as blood transfusion does. Rather, it is passed down down the generations from Adam to all of his descendants, to our parents, and finally to us. On the other hand, children inherit their sinful nature from their parents.

Seemly the idea of transmission of the sin of the first parents to all the posterity with various descriptions was initiated by early Christian thinkers such Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian; coined by Augustine (Freedman, 2000) and developed by Aquinas and Martin Luther, then accepted by many Christians as Sproul (2000:121) says "virtually every Christian church has some doctrine of original. "

According to Augustine, Adam's sin is transmitted naturally to all human beings through sexual activities or concupiscence. As Augustine understands that the human body is a sin because it has fallen into sin, thus sexual activity is a sin. Therefore, when someone has sexual activities, indirectly, the semen that comes out of a man and mix with a woman's ovum and become a fetus, and the fetus becomes sin because the semen transmits sin of a man where itself sin came from Adam. Semen is not a sin, but it is a tool to transmit sin to every human being. (Augustine, NPNF, 1st chapter. 5:88). Thus, all men that born with sexual activities are inherited Adam's sin.

The understanding of Augustine of the transmission in Aquinas' view is insufficient because, in some sense, sexual desires are voluntary. However, he agreed with Augustine that original sin is concupiscence, materially, but the privation of original justice, formally (Aquinas, 2009). For Aquinas, the transmission of sin is merely not only as concupiscence but also because the human being has common nature and as one community or one body. Thus, Adam is the head of the human community or body. Then, all the members of the community received Adam's sin voluntarily, not by the will of the body of each member but by the soul of the first mover of the members, Adam himself (Aquinas, 2009). This theory of transmission of original sin is called imputation. Imputation sin means the sin of the first parents is imputed directly to every human being like the members of the body not because of the will of every human being, but because of the will of his parents who move that sin to every generation. Thus, all humankind possesses a sinful nature as they are bound to Adam, and Adam's sin is imputed to everyone which born naturally.

Catholic Church accepted that Adam and Eve transmitted their sins nature to all their descendants. As a result, human nature is weakened, subject to ignorance, death, and

concupiscence. The original sin is contracted, not committed as a state. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 404, 416).

Martin Luther developed this idea that says, "Here again you see the immensity of original sin, with which we are born and which has been planted in us through the sin of our first parents" (L.W. 25:171). Luther gives the analogy of a tree that brings forth fruit "a bad tree also bring forth bad fruit, and from the bad root only a bad tree can grow" (L.W., 12:348).

### **Rationale of the Relation Original Sin to Infant Baptism**

Mostly the early church fathers such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Cyprian believed baptism was a sign of forgiveness of sins because some Bible verses say so like (Mark 1:4; Acts 16:22; 1 Pet. 3:21; 2 Pet. 2:9). (Meyers, 1964). However, they did not yet have the theology that remission of sin was with infant baptism even though in their time, infant baptism had begun. However, it is undeniable that they have started to believe in the original sin doctrine, as explained earlier in this paper (Kelly, 1964). However, after the original sin, theology developed, especially in Augustine's understanding, which was supported by the Catholic Church. Then the theology of infant baptism becomes clearer which is closely related to the remission of sins.

As described earlier in this paper, some Christians believe all human beings naturally partake in Adam's sin since they were born. Every infant or baby is born with sin naturally. Then in order to remove that original sin sacrament of baptism is needed. Augustine believed that original sin is removed from every man who is born and is saved only by the sacrament of the church, infant baptism, because the guilt of the original sin is healed in them through the grace of Him who saves them through the laver of regeneration because infants are not bound by the sins of their own actual lives. (Augustine, NPNF, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5:4). The view of Augustine was supported by Catholic Church, especially in the west and at the Council of Carthage and reaffirmed at the Council of Trent that formulated baptism removes the guilt of original sin, but concupiscence remains and becomes normative for Catholic Church and for the Churches Lutheran Reformation (Pannenberg, 1998).

Moreover, Augustine believes there is no salvation to all unbaptized infants, merely only condemnations and live in darkness. Unbaptized kids will go to hell as a result of the original sin that they inherited naturally. (Pane, 2021). All unbaptized babies are condemned because they inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. Therefore, he suggested the church needs to administer infant baptism because the church has the authority to mediate the baby to receive forgiveness from God through baptism. When a baby is baptized, it is considered that he is a faithful person to Christ, although they do not belong to the act of faith and confession to avoid the wrath of God (Augustine, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 5:25). In other words, salvation is related to infant baptism as the removal of the original sin. There is no salvation that in them, the original sin is planted naturally.

Martin Luther accepted the rite of infant baptism as his former church, Catholic. He did not explicitly support the theology of Augustine on infant baptism, although he believed in the doctrine of original sin and its transmission to all humankind. For Luther, there is no problem whether



someone is baptized adult or baby because everything depends on God's word and His command (L.W. 34:369). Furthermore, Protestant Churches admitted that the rite of the infant's baptism is carried from Catholic Church, but their theology on that particular doctrine is slightly different. Theology Catholic Church is derived from Augustine's view, while Protestants stress the spiritual circumcisions. This teaching was influenced by John Calvin (Moller, 1999).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that infant baptism is essential to absolve the baby of original sin's culpability. Because the original blame has been eliminated, the infant is spared. Children who have not been baptized, on the other hand, are in the state of Condemnation.

## CONCLUSION

The doctrine of original sin was taught by some church fathers, especially by Augustine, in the fourth century, and that teaching was accepted by the church at that time and became a doctrine. The teaching of the original sin doctrine is not only accepted in the Catholic church but in the Protestant churches until now, with the understanding that everyone born from human marriage inherits Adam's sin automatically. Thus, one of the human natures is sinful nature. Therefore, because a person has been born in sin, their sin needs to be blotted out so that he will be subject to the wrath of God, namely condemnation. The way to remove the original sin is infant baptism. With the baptism of infants, they will receive salvation instead of condemnation.

So, it can be concluded that the teaching and understanding of the original sin doctrine are closely related to infant baptism even though some Protestant Christian churches do not teach it in such a way. They argue that infant baptism was practiced in early Christianity instead of circumcision, and infant baptism was seen as spiritual circumcision. But basically, the practice of infant baptism today is closely related to the teachings of the original sin.

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