PROLEGOMENA FOR A CONFERENCE
ON ORIGINAL SIN

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I welcome the opportunity, first of all, to present some reflections on methodology from the viewpoint of Christian Dogmatics, inviting reflection and response, and secondly to try to engage in some preliminary conceptual clarification.

The conceptual clarification I would like to attempt concerns the *concept* of 'Original Sin'. The set task for most of the papers to be prepared for the conference is to look for 'Original Sin' in the biblical literature and in various historical and contemporary schools of thought. So the first mental task is to ask: *what* are we actually looking for? In other words: what is our pre-understanding of 'Original Sin'? What do we *think* we are looking for? What description of this elusive figure do we have to guide us in our research? It would obviously help if we had some common notion of what we are looking for. I shall come to those questions more specifically in the second half of this paper when I attempt to clarify the *concept* of 'Original Sin' in a way which is sufficiently broad to take note of variations in usage.

But before that, I want to wrestle in the first half of this preliminary paper with the question of theological methodology. So while in the second half of the paper, I shall try to do a (fairly) neutral analysis of the meaning of the *concept* of 'Original Sin' reflected in common theological usage of the term, in this first part, I want to begin with Original Sin as a *doctrine*. The general point of *theological* method which I wish to argue for is that *any one doctrine can only be articulated in the context of Christian Theology as a whole*.

METHODOLOGY

This then is my starting point: that in this coming conference we are proposing to tackle a theological topic, a *doctrine*, no less: 'Original Sin'. It is our intention to tackle this complex and controversial doctrine in cross-disciplinary fashion (just to complicate life farther!), and the chances are quite good that we will end up talking at cross-purposes in a frustrating theological fankle.[1] To avoid this unhappy outcome, we need to begin by noting that the point at which we are being asked to start is a *theological* one. That is to say, we are starting off with a Christian *doctrine*, and therefore, to avoid methodological confusion we need to

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[1] I notice from my *Concise Oxford Dictionary* that we have not yet taught the English this word! It refers to a muddle or tangle. Cf your *Concise Scots Dictionary*, AUP, 1985.

have some explicit idea how Christian Theology is related to other disciplines, or, if you prefer to put it this way: how Christian Theology as an integrative discipline relates to its several sub-disciplines, particularly Biblical Theology.

Hermeneutics: the Concern of Both Biblical and Dogmatic Theology

Hermeneutics, and specifically the interpretation of Holy Scripture, has been the business of Theology for the last two millennia.   When Dogmatics became sclerotic in the era of Protestant orthodoxy following the Reformers, Biblical Theology broke away as a protest, and wherever Dogmatics becomes captive to a metaphysic or a rigid 'system', it must do so again.   But where Dogmatics is determined to be true to Scripture, the two must work in close partnership. This implies on the one hand that Dogmatics does not dictate to Biblical Theology how it is to exegete specific biblical texts, nor does it insist that all the later Dogmatic formulae be *read in* to Scripture as if they were the *explicit* teaching of the prophets and apostles. But this also implies on the other hand that Biblical Theology—if it is truly a Christian and Church discipline—must recognise that it is committed to the Trinitarian and Christocentric over-arching shape of Theology, and must understand that this is the hermeneutical framework, drawn from Scripture itself, which must guide our interpretation of it.

Given then that we have a *Christian* Biblical theology, hermeneutics then is understood to be the sole province of neither discipline (Biblical or Dogmatic Theology), but the joint concern of both. The interpretation of Scripture according to tradition, reason and experience, has been the business of Dogmatic Theology for two thousand years, but the young discipline of modern hermeneutics has much to contribute (if it remembers not to be too arrogant before the Fathers and the Reformers).

To pursue this matter of hermeneutics: we have to begin by clarifying first *where we already actually are*. For we do not start from nowhere ('neutrality' or 'the open mind') but from the position we have already inherited from the Christian theological tradition which has shaped the way we think. That is the house where we already live. Our real starting point (that is to say) is the structure of thought already in our minds, for it is that which determines the material we select for study, the questions we put to it, the framework we use to organise our descriptive analysis, and the critique we offer.

Original Sin as an Integral Part of Dogmatic Theology

That house where we already live is our Dogmatics, our inherited system of Christian Doctrine. It is rather a rambling old mansion. Over the centuries it has grown different wings, and we live in the Wesleyan rooms, part of the west wing. Parts of the old house have been knocked down and rebuilt, and new extensions have been added, and then closed off from the main house after a fight! But most

of the west wing of the house has in common a kind of scullery called 'Original Sin' where the dirty linen is taken and the rubbish is dumped. Some people think that it holds up the whole west wing: others admit that it is a necessary, integral part of the structure, but not foundational. Some think it could be gutted and re-modelled: others think it could be completely demolished without loss.

My point is (before I get carried away any further by my imagery) that Original Sin is part of the house called Systematic or Dogmatic Theology. As *doctrine*, it is *not* simply read off the text of Scripture, nor produced by Biblical Theology, any more than the Doctrine of the Trinity is. The Doctrine of the Trinity, the very key-stone of the arch, the doctrine which holds all Christian Theology together, is not *explicitly* laid out in Scripture, and therefore not a matter for Biblical Theology alone. It is the *total interpretative scheme* which Church Theology has developed since it began with the triadic *regula fidei* of Irenaeus.[2]   The formulation goes beyond what is *explicit* in Scripture (that, I suggest, is the province of Biblical Theology) to the structure of thought which, Church Doctrine contends, is *implicit — implied* by Scripture as a whole.

The early *regula fidei* came to be formalised in the creeds, most notably the one 'official' ecumenical creed of the Christian Church, the Niceno-Constantin-opolitan Creed of 381. The very canon of Scripture (also finalised by the same ecumenical councils), listing of those books in which the Church recognised the authoritative Word of God, is inseparable from the Church's faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, and its consequent confession of the Triune God. If Biblical Theology is *Christian* Biblical Theology (and presumably it should be if it takes the Christian canon—the 'Bible'—as its starting point), and not simply the study of the ideas found in an arbitrary group of ancient documents from a supposedly neutral standpoint, then it has to define its role within the context of the continuing dialogue between the Church (and its credal, confessional Christian Theology) on the one hand and the text of those Scriptures which the Church recognises as the Word of God on the other. It is this continuing dialogue between the *text* of Scripture and the churchly tradition of doctrinal *interpretation* (i.e., Dogmatics, Church Doctrine) which we characterise as 'the hermeneutical spiral'.

The indispensable role of Biblical Theology within the field of Christian Theology as a whole is therefore twofold, I suggest. First, it must act critically and analytically when Dogmatic Theology too easily claims that its doctrines are *implied* by Scripture and to make theologians check their claims against what is *explicitly* stated in the text. Secondly, it must lay out, always anew in the light of advancing research, the structure of thought in specific writers, books and traditions (Wisdom literature, priestly literature or whatever) so that Christian

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[2] For the critical role of Irenaeus in the development of the Christian credal hermeneutic, see James L Kuger and Rowan A Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), esp Chapter 3, 'A Framework for Interpreting the Christian Bible'. Cf also chapters 3 and 5 of Thomas F Torrance, *Divine Meaning. Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.

theologians can re-construct, refine, correct or elaborate Christian doctrine accordingly. In other words, in the hermeneutical spiral, conceived of as the continuing conversation of the Church and the Word of God through the centuries, Biblical Theology can act as interpreter at two points in the circle (conceived of, if you like, as two vertical lines cutting down through the spiral), namely, where the Bible speaks to the Church and where the Church asks questions of the Bible. In this way Christian Theology is not a dead, inert, rigid and fossilised corpse of doctrine to be passed on intact from generation to generation. It is a living, growing, developing body of truth. In other words, Theology is not a dead, but living, science.

That brings us more specifically to the particular doctrine of Original Sin.   Just as with the doctrine of the Trinity, this cannot be exegeted straight out of proof texts. Ps. 51:5 (for example) no more gives us a full-blown doctrine of Original Sin than Matthew 28:19 gives us a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity. Like all other doctrines, this one is an *interpretation* of Scripture, but it is an interpretation *developed and articulated within the context of this interpretative scheme as a whole*. The creed had already been decreed as official Church doctrine at the ecumenical council of 381 AD in Constantinople when Augustine started to elaborate this particular doctrine and gave it the form which has been so influential in the West. He was articulating in his particular way a belief in human sinfulness always held in the Church. He did not invent it and we are not tied necessarily to his particular formulation of it. But he formulated it in the light of the creed, not as a foundation for it. The doctrine of Original Sin is therefore not a foundational doctrine of the Christian Church for it is not part of our credal confession. The Church in her confession does not confess her faith in sin, death, hell and damnation! Rather we confess our faith in God the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ as God from God, and in the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of Life. The negatives are mentioned of course—sin, death, hell—but only in the course of the positive confession. That indicates what the proper place of a doctrine of sin is within Christian Dogmatics. Nor was the doctrine of Original Sin a foundation in the construction of Augustine's own theology. He formulated it *within the context of his understanding of grace*. For Augustine, in contention with Pelagius, it was an *implication* of, not a foundation for, the gospel of God's grace. The statement of the positive—the gospel of grace—implied this negative, the doctrine of human sin. So for us today, the doctrine of Original Sin cannot be articulated in isolation from the total holistic structure of Christian Dogmatics.

The Preparatory Work this Conference Can Do

What then should be our procedure for this conference? And what realistically can we expect to accomplish given the enormity of the theological task?

Our first mental task then, as I have suggested, in preparing to write papers for this conference is to ask: *what* are we actually looking for? We profess to be

looking for 'Original Sin' in the biblical literature and various historical and contemporary schools of thought. But what is our pre-understanding of 'Original Sin'? What do we *think* we are looking for? What description of this elusive figure do we have to guide us in our search? That is the question I am coming to in the second half of this paper when I attempt to clarify the concept of 'Original Sin'.

Our second task, to be undertaken in reading some of the papers and in discussion at the conference itself, is, I suggest, to ask whether the materials for building this particular room in the house genuinely come from the quarry of Holy Scripture. This is the task of Biblical Theology, and this is where we need to be sufficiently detached from our Dogmatic system of doctrine. We need to avoid reading our doctrine back into Scripture, and ask: 'What do these writers actually say, and what does it tell us about *their* structure of thought?' This scholarly task continues with the historical papers. There we ask: 'What were the plans which the builders of our house had in mind at the various stages of its long and rambling construction and never-ending re-construction?' Further: 'Was their construction in accordance with the shape of the Scriptural material, or did they distort it to some degree?' To drop the figure: 'How far did they truly interpret the *explicit* statements of Scripture so as to formulate what is *implicit*?' And how far, when they were constructing this doctrine, were they elucidating genuine Christian *Theology*, centred in the confession of the Triune God? Or were they at points constructing their own little anthropological hobby-horses?

But only then, once we have done that in our conference can we begin to tackle the third task, the real theological question: how shall we today in faithfulness to Scripture clarify the shape and content and meaning of this doctrine as part of the total structure of the house? What I am trying to underline is that any Christian doctrine only has its meaning within the total perspective of Christian faith. It can only be articulated within the organic whole of Christian Dogmatics in relation to the central confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and that therefore we believe in the One Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

THE CONCEPT OF 'ORIGINAL SIN'

Here I come to the question which I suggest all the paper writers have to ask first: *what* are we actually looking for in the Jewish literature, in Augustine, the Reformers, the primeval narratives of Genesis, the Psalms, Romans or whatever? This question is not the final Dogmatic question: how *ought* the doctrine of Original Sin to be formulated? The question here is the prior question: *how has it actually been formulated*? But here, if we are not going to be talking at cross purposes, we need some consistent idea of what we are looking for. The *concept* is of course to a large degree Augustinian, but not entirely. Many of the facets precede Augustine and have been held universally in the Church, and in any case,

we are concerned here with the *general* usage of the terms, and with identifying as many as possible of the ways in which the concept is understood.

It seems to me that the best way to define such a 'pre-understanding' of the concept is to lay out as far as we can all the facets of this complex *concept* of Original Sin. I wish to present a list therefore of facets of the *concept*. I have arrived at the list, first, by distinguishing the ways in which the *term* 'Original Sin' has actually been used. I have not attempted to analyse the usage historically (as in *OED* definitions), providing a concatenation of quotations showing the first known example of each usage, but simply depended on my own experience of usage. But the variety of usage of the actual *term*, 'Original Sin' has given me a guide to the range of connected meanings which make up the complex *concept* of Original Sin. To complete the full range of meanings in the *concept*, however, it is necessary to add some related *terms*.

The meanings given in the resulting list are not totally discrete. They all inter-connect, and so may be described as 'facets' of the concept. But laying them out distinctly may help us to see what a complex concept this is, and should help those examining the biblical and historical literature to determine in which of these meanings the actual term 'original sin' is used, and in which of these senses the *concept* (or a closely related concept) is present.

I think then that the *concept* of Original Sin can be analysed into ten connected facets. The question whether they all *ought* to be part of the doctrine does not concern us here. We are simply concerned to analyse at this point all the facets of meaning which have been part of this concept. They are rarely if ever all present in any one document, but writers tend to slide from one to another. Certainly some imply others. But we must not jump to the conclusion that because one is present others are implied. The scholarly task is to determine which of these are present in any one document. Because they interconnect in a complex way, it is not possible to put them in a completely linear arrangement, but I think the following order is probably as good as any.

(1) Universal Sin

Strictly speaking, this falls short of the concept of 'original sin', but sometimes this is all that is meant: that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.' Yet Pelagius denied even this, holding that there have been sinless human beings (in addition to Christ), including Jeremiah and John the Baptist. While this concept is 'universal' it may be individualistic, and that is how Pelagius seems to have understood it. Since it was for him an assertion about all individuals, it was open to denial like all inductive statements by finding exceptions.

(2) Fallenness

This is the idea of being in a fallen state or condition as a result of the event called 'the Fall'. For Augustinian western Christianity, the Fall resulted in

Original Sin, and therefore to be fallen is primarily to be sinful. This term is therefore often taken as meaning 'being subject to Original Sin'. In the Greek east, however, the focus is more on the ontological results of the Fall, that is, that we are mortal, subject to *phthora* (decay) leading to death. The Greeks therefore held that the Son of God assumed our fallen humanity, meaning our mortal humanity, but since he sanctified our humanity in taking it, for them this did not compromise the sinlessness of Christ's human nature.

Perhaps we also need to note here the danger of an ambiguity in the word 'corruption'. As a translation of *phthora*, it should primarily refer to ontological decay. But 'corruption' can also be a moral term and since sin and death are closely connected in Genesis, Paul and mainstream Christian theology, this may often be the primary denotation. We need to make sure we avoid any confusion here by determining exactly what is implied in each context.

> **Excursus on 'the Fall'**. Here we may note in passing that the concept of Original Sin is connected to the concept of 'the Fall'. Some have tried to cut out the idea of the Fall as a primeval event and yet retain the concept of Fallenness. That debate introduces vast and methodologically complicated questions of hermeneutics, theology, and the relationship of revelation to history and to science. Unfortunately these difficult questions are too often answered superficially on both sides of the debate by confusing two or more methodologies each of which is valid within its own horizons at its own level of understanding. I do not think these issues need to be, or can be, tackled within the concerns of our conference, but they cannot be avoided in a total integrated, holistic Christian Theology. N P Williams' magisterial work, *The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin*,[3] remains the definitive work in this whole field (although it doubtless needs to be updated to take account of a further seventy years of scholarship and theology). Williams, who is certainly not a fundamentalist, presents an argument which seems to me to be unassailable that Christian theology is bound to hold to the paradoxical doctrine of the Fall as an event within the temporal created order, i.e. within time, if it is not to succumb to Hindu monism or Persian dualism.

(3) The Original Act of Sin

Although this facet of the meaning is rarely used today, it appears to be the origin of the term 'original sin'. The eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was (said Augustine) the *peccatum originale*, the original sin. Although this usage of the term has virtually ceased, it gives an interesting explanation of what would otherwise be a rather strange term. Otherwise, why should this particular phrase, 'original sin', be used? It points once again to the connection between the concept of 'Original Sin' and the concept of 'the Fall' as a primeval event. But this originating use of the term rather sank into the background leaving the next two meanings of the term as the heart of the concept.

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[3] Longman, 1929.

(4) Original Guilt

Augustine taught that we all sinned in Adam and therefore shared in the *reatus*, the legal guilt for his sin. This was connected with his understanding of Romans 5:12 from the Old Latin as 'one man…in whom (*in quo*) all sinned.' This original guilt was washed away, however, in baptism. This Augustinian legacy continued in the post-Reformation Church of England, so that Wesley could refer to his 'original sin' (in this sense of the term) being washed away in baptism.   The idea of inherited guilt has always been puzzling, not to say immoral, for individualistic Western thought.

(5) Original Sin as a *Vitium* or Disease

Here we come to the meaning of the term which dominates contemporary usage. 'Original Sin' is primarily understood today to mean, not a legal sharing in the guilt of Adam, but a kind of inherited disease.   It is 'inborn' or 'inbred' and is sometimes referred to as our 'sinful nature', that is, a diseased condition with which we are born (*natus*). It is in this meaning of the term that 'original sin' is affirmed by all orthodox Catholic and Protestant theologians. Article 9 of the Thirty-Nine Articles refers to it as 'the fault and corruption of the nature of every man…whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil…'   It is an 'infection of nature' and it remains even 'in them that are regenerated'. This is the facet of the concept which Wesley defended in his Sermon, 'Original Sin'[4] on Genesis 6:5 and in his treatise on Original Sin in response to John Taylor of Norwich.

> **Excursus on the use of the term 'nature'**.   Luther said that those 'born again' had a new nature (from *natus*), but that the old sinful nature did not die.   When that is taken literally we have the very confusing idea of two 'natures' within the regenerate person, two entities, as it were. This confusing picture was strengthened in the popular mind when the translators of the NIV took it upon themselves not to translate the word *sarx*, but to *paraphrase* it as 'sinful nature' in certain passages. The confusion is even worse confounded when some writers in the Wesleyan tradition refer to this 'sinful nature' (or 'carnal nature') as a different entity from 'human nature'. By my reckoning we now have three natures to contend with!   (And we wonder why lay people say, 'Don't give us any theology!').   Richard S Taylor comments on the confusion caused by these uses of the term 'nature',[5] and it seems to me that the confusion can only be avoided by dropping those usages which suggest several different entities in the one human being.   We should only use the word, I suggest, to refer to that human nature, the common *humanitas* with which we are all born. (Analogously it is used in Chalcedonian Christology to refer to the 'nature' of God, but that can only be regarded as a figurative analogical usage).

> **Excursus on the term 'depravity'.** I am not distinguishing 'depravity' as a distinguishable facet of the concept, because I think it is largely synonymous with the idea of original sin

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[4] Sermon 44 in the *Works* [BE], Vol 2, 172-185

[5] Richard S Taylor, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, Vol 3, *The Theological Formulation*, Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1985, 151ff.

as a 'disease'. There is perhaps a slight difference in that our 'nature' is said to be 'depraved' as a result of this disease of sin. The 'sinful nature', or the fact that our nature is in fact sinful, or our being 'depraved', is the *result* of the disease rather than the disease itself. But I am not sure how far such a fine distinction is necessary in analysing the facets of the concepts we are hoping to discern in the writers we are to study.   Possibly, however, our researches will suggest that it would prove helpful to list this separately as another facet, bringing the total to eleven. (Ten seems tidier!) The phrase '*total* depravity' is also part of Augustinian anthropology, and obviously another way of expressing original sin as a disease (or its result), but this particular phrase tends to be used more in the context of Augustine's connected doctrine of predestination. There 'total depravity' more often refers to our inability to save ourselves apart from grace (irresistible grace, according to Augustine). In that context I have often thought it would be better to substitute the phrase 'natural inability'.

(6) Hereditary Sinfulness

This sixth facet is very difficult to separate from the last two. Indeed I have already referred to (4) Original Guilt as 'inherited'. But it can be *logically* separated certainly from (5) Original Sin as *vitium* or disease. Not all diseases are inherited, and therefore (5) does not logically entail (6). It may be helpful therefore in this analytical task to distinguish the idea of heredity as a distinct facet of the concept. It has always *in fact* gone with (5), as is seen in the words I missed out from Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles, 'every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam,' but it would be possible to separate them in logic. When we do, we can see that the concept of heredity is one of the major problems for modern western thinking, and indeed poses problems for both (4) and (5).

The problem for (4) is the ethical problem: how can guilt be inherited? As for (5), we are familiar with inherited disease, but the problem here is the mechanism. We can see how a physical disease can be inherited, but this is presumably not a physical disease. What on earth then is the mechanism for passing on a spiritual or moral disease? The outcome of such a line of questioning is to make it clear that Augustine's language of a *vitium* or disease must be understood as metaphorical. Part of our problem here may be that we are taking models too literally and are therefore bound to find them inconsistent.

(7) An Inner Disposition, Tendency or 'Bent Toward Sinning'

Augustine's term *concupiscentia* lies at the root of this facet of the concept, but some explanation is called for to avoid confusion. *Concupiscentia* gives us our English word, 'concupiscence', but the latter is more restricted in meaning. According to the *COD* 'concupiscence' means quite specifically 'sexual desire', but the Latin word has a broader meaning. The verb *concupisco* simply means 'to desire ardently, to covet'. The root of the word is *cupido*, from which also comes the noun *cupiditas*, an eager desire, from which we get the English word 'cupidity', greed or avarice. Although the sexual connotations are prominent therefore in the Latin words (we all know about Cupid), the word is not restricted

to that by any means. *Concupiscentia* may therefore be interpreted as 'self-centred desire'. Augustine's model of human motivation is that our *amor* (love, affection) is either directed to God (in which case it is *caritas*) or else it is directed to the creaturely realm (in which case it is *concupiscentia* or *cupiditas*).

Whereas *vitium* is a metaphor for sinfulness as a disease, *concupiscentia* is part of a psychological analysis of this condition in terms of human motivation. It is this facet of the concept of sin which John Wesley identified with Paul's phrase in Romans 8, the *phronema tes sarkos*. This then is the facet of the concept which is most obviously connected with Wesley's understanding of 'perfect love' or 'purity of heart' as the victory of single-minded *caritas* (whole-hearted love for God) over 'the self-centred mind-set' (*concupiscentia*). Indeed one could say that this is the *only* facet which is directly connected to the Wesleyan concept of 'entire sanctification'. It is this facet of the Augustinian model, I believe, which lies at the root of the Wesleyan phrase, the 'bent toward sinning'.

(8) The Propagation of Sin through Sexual Desire

This eighth facet of the Augustinian concept of 'Original Sin' explains why the meaning of the English word 'concupiscence' has narrowed to 'sexual desire'. For although the Latin term had a wider meaning, Augustine, as part of his Roman heritage, associated sanctity with chastity and sin with sexuality, and so tended to see sexual desire at the heart of all our wrong desires. Specifically, he devised an explanation of the passing on the *vitium* which he repeated *ad nauseam*. The mechanism of inheritance, he claimed, was in the lust of the father which preceded every human birth. This gave him, of course, a nice neat explanation of the virginal conception of Jesus as safeguarding his sinlessness, but at the cost of casting a slur and an insult on the sexual relations within marriage which, according to Scripture, God ordained and blesses.

There are two problems with this theory of Augustine. First, as part of his Roman inheritance, it has no basis in the positive Hebrew evaluation of human sexuality. His theory of the transmission of original sin through lust is totally without foundation in the Biblical literature, and must be dismissed as bizarre. Augustine's twisted evaluation of human sexuality is a distortion for which we are now paying a high price in the Church's inability to cope with the wild reaction against Augustinian sexual repression which has surged through twentieth century literature and culture. Secondly, it seems to sit oddly with the idea that our *nature* is sinful. If it is our *nature* which is sinful, the alleged lust of every father is irrelevant, for congenital sin would be inherited from mothers, who also share in the diseased, sinful human nature. (It was that problem, of

course, which led medieval Catholicism to the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary.)[6]

(9) The Flesh

Here we come to a related term which is actually biblical. But because it has been interpreted so often through Augustinian spectacles, it has taken on a meaning closely connected with the Augustinian concept of Original Sin. We can see the results of that in the frequent NIV translation (so-called) of *sarx* as 'sinful nature'. This is a critical area for Wesleyans, for the Augustinian tradition strongly influenced Luther and Calvin and the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. In our historical surveys of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods we particularly need to note the way the word 'flesh' is used. That usage then needs to be contrasted with the Biblical use of the word.

At the risk of over-simplification, I suggest that four usages of *sarx* in the Biblical literature need to be particularly noted:

> (1) *sarx* meaning the physical flesh, or the individual human being viewed from the perspective of physical existence; this physical flesh is weak and mortal, but not evil;

> (2) *sarx* meaning 'all flesh', that is the human race in its corporate solidarity, the humanity which is common to all the race, human nature—that which the Word assumed; considered corporately, humanity is weak and mortal and sinful, but not inherently evil;

> (3) *sarx* as that in which we put our trust—a peculiarly Pauline usage from which he develops his concept of the *phronema sarkos*, the 'mind set on the flesh' (RSV);

> (4) *sarx* as a power within which is in conflict with the Spirit—a peculiarly Pauline concept again.[7]

Usage (4) appears in Galatians 5, chronologically before (3), but (3) seems to be the missing link, the conceptual bridge from (2) to (4) which makes it clear that (4) is not to be interpreted in a gnostic way. The power of the flesh within does not mean that the 'flesh' is inherently evil, but that the power we are enslaved to is our own self-centredness, the disposition to live for merely human goals and values.

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[6] See the fascinating article by Paul M Bassett, 'Culture and Concupiscence: the Changing Definition of Sanctity in the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement, 1867-1920,' *WTJ*, 28 (1993), 59-127. Dr Bassett shows how, in reaction to the perception of increasing laxity of sexual morals in society, concupiscence (i.e., lust) became the dominating element in the concept of original sin/inherited depravity during this period (replacing pride), so leading to increased rules about female dress and restrictions on female leadership.

[7] Cf E Schweitzer's article on *sarx* in *TDNT*. Walter Brueggeman fails to deal with this aspect of OT anthropology in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (Fortress, 1997), referring us to Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (SCM, 1974), among other works.

It is in this context that we must interpret the phrase 'desires of the flesh' (*epithumiai sarkos*), to make it clear that, while the phrase is used pejoratively in Scripture, these desires are evil because they are *misdirected* and *out of control*. The doctrine of creation makes it clear that the basic physiological desires created by God are not evil in themselves as the Lutheran and Reformed traditions too often seem to suggest. At the same time, the holistic thinking of OT anthropology makes it clear that they are not unaffected by human sinfulness since the Fall, and that their 'inordinate' state is part of human 'fallenness'.

10. Corporate Sin

Finally we come to a concept too seldom developed in our individualistic European culture. But it seems to me that this is a facet of original sin which holds out the best hope for an imaginative and creative development which can make it speak to contemporary issues. I do not think we can abandon the perceptive Augustinian analysis of the psychology of human motivation which I believe lies behind the Wesleyan concept of 'purity of heart'. But it needs to be complemented by a deeper understanding of original sin as corporate. The focus should be shifted here from the problematic concept of heredity, always conceived of individualistically. The conundrum of how we each individually inherit Adam's sin has allowed our attention to be diverted from the understanding of *humanity's corporate solidarity in sinfulness*. We may have to work at the business of communicating this Old Testament concept of corporate solidarity to our individualistic European culture, but at least the much heralded tide of (so-called) 'post-modernism' is supposed to be moving attention from the individual to the community. And it would surely be easier to communicate the idea of corporate responsibility and corporate guilt than to defend the idea of hereditary guilt. Corporate sinfulness is also at the heart of Walter Wink's profound analysis of the powers of evil as the product of the 'domination system' of corporate human society.[8]

It also connects of course, as Paul shows us, with the idea of our corporate solidarity in Christ, the Last Adam. (In fact our understanding of corporate sin is, properly speaking, a *consequence* of our understanding of corporate salvation in Christ). It is the total, corporate sin of the race which Christ has taken on himself and dealt with in his atonement. That is why we must speak of 'universal' atonement: not because every individual will be saved (as in 'universalism'), but because corporate humanity as such is reconciled to the Father. Looked at individualistically, the cross only created the *possibility* of salvation. But then, was nothing *actually* changed as a result of the cross? Did the death of Christ not *actually accomplish anything at all*? Yes, yes, of course it did! 'In' our new Head

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8 Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (1984), U*nmasking the Powers* (1986), *Engaging the Powers* (1992). For my own assessment, see T A Noble, 'The Spirit World: A Theological Approach,' *The Unseen World*, ed. A N S Lane, Baker, 1996, 185-223.

and Representative, the second Adam, corporate salvation is actually achieved, so that already we sit in heavenly places with him, and, among the consequences—already every infant is 'covered by the blood'.

CONCLUSION

The work of scholarship, indispensable though it is, is *preparatory* to the theological task of articulating Christian doctrine for today. It is not enough to *describe* or even *evaluate* what others say—Moses, Isaiah, Paul, John, Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, contemporary writers—even if we do it analytically and critically. Rather, given what they say, the question then is: what do *we* say in continuity with the consensus of the Church through the centuries? That is the living task of Dogmatics, the task which each new generation living in the ancient house must do for its own generation. And it has to be a *holistic*, *integrative* task.

Perhaps these comments under (7), (9) and (10) are enough to suggest that while the Augustinian scullery may need to be 're-modelled', it cannot be demolished. We cannot dispense with a doctrine of sin which understands that 'sin' is more than merely a matter of individual actions. It is also a matter of inner motivation and it is also a matter of the corporate human condition. When we have finished this conference, we will only have essayed the necessary scholarly work which is *preparatory* to this third task of re-expressing this doctrine for today. But this final step can only be taken as the doctrine of sin is articulated within the Christocentric, Trinitarian shape of Christian Dogmatics as a whole.