

HOW TO TEACH ORIGINAL AND PERSONAL SIN IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

(An application for the Indonesia Nazarene Theological College)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Original and personal sin is not just a theoretical theological problem but also a personal living problem. In our Indonesian context, have many beliefs and religions. One rough division of religions would be Islam and Christianity. Then Christianity can itself be divided into several ideologies. Two of the main are Calvinism and Arminianism. Also, we have many tribes or ethnic groups, and most of have different beliefs that have had impact on Christianity. When someone accepts Christ, they become a new creature, part of the family of God, a new member of the church, and as such, should immediately reflect these new values and life styles. However, many times these new believers are struggling to move away from old patterns of life and belief.

This paper will discuss how to teach the Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine of sin, including original sin, in the Indonesian Christian context. There are many different ingredients that make up the Indonesian context. Islam is the majority religion in our country. They feel that there are two great beliefs in the world today that have come from heaven: Islam and Christianity. But even though this is the case, they recognize that there are great differences between these two “heavenly religions.” It is true also that the majority of Christians in Indonesia are followers of the Calvinistic interpretation of theology. This too then becomes a dividing line for us adherents of the Wesleyan-Arminian formulation of theology particularly its understanding of sin.

If we talk about sin, it is hard to at the same time not include a discussion on salvation. But, the focus of this paper deals with Article V on the Articles of

Faith and this article deals with original and personal sin. The title of this paper is “How to Teach Original and Personal Sin in the Indonesian Context.” Logic demands that first we must define our terms and then discuss how we can best teach these terms in the Indonesian context. Therefore, in this paper I am going to first discuss the various understandings of sin that are prevalent in our society including the following:

- The Muslim understanding of sin—original and personal
- The Calvinistic understanding of sin
- The Wesleyan-Arminian understanding of sin.

Then, I will present ideas for how we can best teach our Wesleyan-Arminian understandings of this doctrine to others.

II. UNDERSTANDING OF THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

A. Muslim Understanding

The Islamic understanding is that a human being is born without sin and as a perfect person. In the Islamic understanding, a baby born into the world is like “cotton” or a piece of “blank white paper”. They reject any suggestions of a doctrine of original sin. Man becomes a sinner when, as an adult, he chooses to perform a sinful act. There are several reasons why man chooses to become a sinner. One of them is because of his environment. Because of this, effort must be given to cleaning up the environment from influences that can lead to sin. One of the extreme applications of this understanding is that during the holy month of fasting all theaters, discothèques, pubs, or businesses in red light

districts are closed. The thinking behind this is that these things can cause a person to sin and thus make it more difficult for him to approach God and confess his sins. It must be understood that for Muslim, the holy fasting month (Ramadan) which is followed by the holy holiday of Idul Fitri, is an excellent time to cleanse oneself of all sins. Because of this belief, one of the features of the Ramadan period is the ritualistic requests for forgiveness from sin. Muslims will customarily exchange greeting cards just as we customarily exchange greetings cards during the Christmas season. The most common “greeting” on the Idul Fitri greeting card is “Mohon Maaf Lahir dan Batin” which translates “I ask for forgiveness both outside and inside. This request for forgiveness is only expressed once a year during this Idul Fitri season showing us that the environment is a very influential factor in determining if a person is cleansed from sin or is filled with sin.

B. Calvinistic Understanding

The influence of Calvin's thinking is very large in Indonesia. Most of the early Protestant churches in Indonesia were established by European missionaries coming from Calvinistic traditions. But many of the church members do not understand their own church's doctrinal positions. My own church roots are in such a denomination. However, I never understood the distinctives of the Calvinistic doctrine as it related to the definition of sin.

It is recognized that there is agreement between the Arminian and Calvinistic understanding on a number of issues including original sin. Both of us

agree that original sin is total depravity and was passed down from Adam to all persons. Among those who agree that all mankind has been infected with the effects of Adam's sin, there are sometimes differences in opinion as to exactly how this racial taint of sin has been passed down. There are differences of opinion there is a difference in opinion though concerning the manner of transmission of original sin to Adam's descendants.¹ However there is a major difference of opinion between the Calvinists and Arminians regarding the understanding of personal sin. For Calvin, sin is "any deviation from God's standards."² Using this as a definition for sin, we understand that it is not possible for man to live in victory and holiness. For this reason pastoral prayers in Calvinistic churches always include a prayer for forgiveness for sins in *word, thought and deed*. Or the prayer might take the form of asking forgiveness for sins committed with intent or without intent to do so.

C. Nazarene Understanding

We believe that sin came in the world through the disobedience of our first parents and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity and actual or personal sin. Articles of Faith No. V.

From this statement dealing with the origin and types of sin in the world today, it is evident that the Nazarene understanding is very similar to tradition Christian orthodoxy, including Calvinistic thinking. Calvinists also believe that sin came into the world through the first man and that sin must be understood in its

¹ Robert D. McCroskey, *Theologia Sistematica dari Sudut Pandang Wesley-Arminian* (Yogyakarta: Kabar Kekudusan, 2004), p. 28

² Ibid., p. 30

two aspects: personal and original. However, this understanding of sin is strikingly different from that encountered in the Muslim understanding for they only accept the concept of personal sin, but not original sin.

We believe that original sin or depravity is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclines to evil and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until eradicated by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Articles of Faith No. V.1.

In the process of doing theology in Indonesia, Wesleyan-Arminian proponent's face challenges from Calvinists. Calvinistic theology books in Indonesia, whether original writings or translations, take the position that proponents of Wesleyan-Arminianism do not accept the doctrine of Original Sin. One of the well used theology books here in Indonesia is a translation of *The Moody Handbook of Theology* by Eens. According to the Indonesian translation, Eens writes:

The Arminian understanding teaching that Adam was created in the state of sinlessness, that sin came from his actions that he chose to do using his freewill, that mankind has been polluted by our inheritance from Adam, but we do not possess the state of sin. Mankind is not totally depraved but has the ability to do what is right.³

From the above statement it is clear that for all Indonesian readers of this book, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Indonesian Nazarene Theological College have at best a weak position on Original Sin, and at worst deny its very existence. So, this is the challenge that presents itself to us-we must inform and explain to all (including students at INTC as well as Nazarene church members)

³ Paul Eens, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 312.

our position regarding Article V in our Manual. We most definitely believe in both personal and original sin. And in fact, our theology not only accepts original sin, but teaches God's plan of deliverance from this problem namely the work of the Holy Spirit in heart cleansing enabling us to live holy lives before God.

Our Manual further clarifies our understanding:

We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provide remedy is neglected or rejected. Article V.5.2

For us in Indonesia, the above statement is not opposition to the understanding or beliefs of other Christians. The problem though has already been alluded to above namely that many of the Calvinist oriented denominations here are of the firm conviction that the Church of the Nazarene, as an adherent of the Arminian understanding, rejects the doctrine of original sin. In actuality, the real difference in opinion is not in original sin, but rather personal sin. We differ dramatically with both Calvinists and Muslims in this area. For Muslim, sin is closely connected to humanity and since we are humans we are sinful. For Calvinists, sin is an inescapable fact of everyday life for humans and as such, this means that no human can live in victory over sin.

Moving on in our Manual exploration of this subject we read

We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person. It is therefore not to be confused with in voluntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct which are residual effects do not include attitudes or responses contrary to the spirit of Christ, which may properly be called sins of the spirit. We believe that personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love; and that in relation to Christ sin may be defined as unbelief. Article V.5.3

It is at this point that the difference of understanding between the Wesleyan-Arminians and Calvinists is most starkly apparent. For us Nazarenes, we agree with Wesley that sin is a willful transgression of a known law of God. For Calvin, sin is everything that falls short in expression or intent regarding the will of God. This means that it is not possible to live in sinless perfection before God because each of our “weaknesses” are equated with “sins”. This is an important distinction though for us Wesleyan. We differentiate between willful transgressions that we call sin, and human infirmities that we label as weaknesses. Because this divide is so great between Wesley-Arminians and Calvinists, often it leads to misconceptions including that of stating that the Wesley-Arminian position on sin is too humanistic.

III. HOW TO TEACH THIS IN OUR CONTEXT

The Church of the Nazarene in Indonesia is still a very small church compared with other denominations that have many times come through the Calvinistic tradition. Most of our members here in Indonesia have come from two religious backgrounds: Muslim, the majority religion here, and Calvinism, the majority belief of the Christian community here. Our converts have come from these backgrounds on purpose as they have been drawn to our teachings and have been effectively evangelized recognizing that their previous life in nominal Christianity was satisfying their needs.

Looking at the background of the Church of the Nazarene in Indonesia, it is evident that the major challenge facing our ministers is to teach and explain

our doctrines concerning sin and full salvation. This is not an easy task. We are thankful that we have INTC to help accomplish this mission and it is our hope that this institution can serve as a bridge of information and instruction of this doctrine.

Since most of our students are coming from the two backgrounds previously mentioned, before we can teach them “correct” theology, we first have to help guide them away from “incorrect” theology. We have to affect a paradigm shift in our students’ thinking and ministry. This need has been the motivation for our aggressive efforts in literature. As far as we can ascertain, we are basically the only Wesleyan-Arminian group producing holiness literature in Indonesia today. We have made a concerted effort in not only translating theological material, but also producing original writing in this area all designed to serve as tools to help us better teach the Wesleyan-Arminian understandings of sin and full salvation.

While I believe that we still have many failings in our teaching attempts to explain personal and original sin, I also believe that we have made some very positive steps in this direction. We have tried to systematically and biblically present our Nazarene doctrines on sin and its cure. As we teach our students about personal and original sin, we begin with looking at biblical definitions of sin. This forms the underlying foundation of our whole doctrinal formulation. It is our firm belief that there is no basic difference between the Wesleyan-Arminian understanding of sin, and the biblical understanding of sin. Then, secondly, we present our doctrinal teachings in a systematic format. Our intent is to show that

our doctrinal formulation is logical and represents healthy, correct and truthful exegesis of God's Word. It must be stated here that we recognize and adhere to the Quadrilateral foundation of thought that Wesley espoused. In the material that follows, I am giving a brief presentation of material that is taught at the Indonesian Nazarene Theological College.

A. Bible teaching

The biblical teaching on sin is easily found in the words that the Bible uses when talking about sin. There are many different terms that are used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are many more words for sin than there are for grace. There are only three biblical words that are translated "grace": *chen* and *chesed* in the Old Testament and *charis* in the New Testament.

In contrast to this, there are eight words in the Old Testament that denote sin in some sense. There are twelve such words in the New Testament.

1. Old Testament Words

- a. *Chata* This word means "missing the mark." Missing the correct mark carries with it the automatic meaning of hitting the wrong mark. This word would have evil moral implications such as worship of idols, etc. (Ex. 20:20; Judges 20:16; Prov. 8:36; 19:2).
- b. *Ra*. The basic meaning of this word is "break," and is often translated with the word "evil." This word points to a loss or something, something that is morally deficient (Gen. 3:5; 38:7; Judges 11:27).

- c. *Pasha*. The base meaning of this word is “rebellion.” Generally this word is translated a “breaking the law” (I Kings 12:19; II Kings 3:5; Prov. 28:21; Isa 1:2).
- d. *Awon* This word has two meanings: “iniquity” and “guilty.” (I Sam 3:13; Isa 5:36).
- e. *Shagag* This word means to do wrong or become lost like sheep (Isa 28:7). The implication is that the person is responsible for his actions.
- f. *Asham* This word deals with a wrong committed to God that is of a deep and basic nature.
- g. *Rasha* This word refers to doing wrong as opposed to doing right (Psa 9:16; Prov 15:17).
- h. *Taah* The word means to be lost and refers to sins committed with willful intent (Num 5:22; Psa 58:3; 119:21).

2. **New Testament Words**

- a. *Kakos* This word carries with it meanings like ugly, evil, and rotten. Sometimes it is used to refer to food that is rotten. (Matt 21:41; 24:48; Mark 7:21; Rom 12:17).
- b. *Poneros* This term is used for something that is evil and it is always used in connection with things that are morally evil (Matt 7:11; 12:39).
- c. *Asebes* Used to talk of someone who does not know God (Rom 1:18; I Tim 1:9).

- d. *Enochos* This word means someone who does evil things and merits death (Matt 5:21-22; Mark 14:64).
- e. *Hamartia* This term refers to missing the mark and is one of the most used terms to describe sin. (Matt 1:21; John 1:29).
- f. *Adikia* This word is used to describe actions that are not right. It is used to describe people who don't believe on Christ (Rom 1:18; Luke 16:9).
- g. *Parabates* This term means cursed and denotes a transgression against the law (Rom 2:23; 5:14).
- h. *Anomos* This term points to a breaking of the law (Matt 13:41; 24:12; I Tim 1:9)
- i. *Agnoein* This word refers to a laziness in correct worship of God (Heb 9:27).
- j. *Planao* This word shows how a man can deceive himself (I John 1:8).
- k. *Paraptoma* This points to a willful breaking of the law (Rom 5:15-20).

B. ORIGINAL SIN

Original sin is also referred to "inherited depravity" or "inherited sin" or "total depravity."

1. **Definition** Original sin is the depravity of the basic character of man which give man a bent to evil and a strong desire for enmity with the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:12-18).
2. **Scope of Original Sin**
 - a. Sin entered the world through Adam

- b. Death is a result of sin
- c. Judgment and justice will be meted out because of the influence of Adam's sin which has caused all mankind to be born in sin.

3. Depth of Original Sin

- a. Total Depravity does not mean:
 - 1) No conscience
 - 2) No appreciation for the good deeds of others
 - 3) Actions that are non-egotistic at times
 - 4) All people are very evil
- b. Total Depravity means:
 - 1) Depravity has infected the total human character
 - 2) There is no part of man that is capable of doing good
 - 3) Man is not able to fix his depraved character

C. SIN AND INFIRMITIES

From a wider perspective we can say that the Wesleyan doctrine firmly differentiates between sin and infirmities.

1. Definitions

- a. Sin according to Calvin: "Any deviation from or inclination to oppose God's law."
- b. Sin according to Wesley: "A willful transgression of a known law of God."

- c. Infirmities according to Wesley: “Inner and outer imperfections that do not involve the will.”

2. Implications of Calvin’s definition

- a. Man sins every day in word thought and deed.
- b. There is no difference made between willful sin and sins of omission or non-intent.
- c. The natural state of man is sinful
- d. Salvation only has meaning when a person dies.

3. The Biblical Statement

The Bible differentiates between sin and infirmities. This is clearly shown in comparisons of John 1:7 with Hebrews 4:15 and then Romans 8:2 with Romans 8:26.

4. Meaning of Infirmities

- a. According to the New Testament if something is not against the law of love, it is not sin
- b. Infirmities are not removed from human existence in either of the two great crisis experiences on our spiritual journey: salvation or entire sanctification.
- c. Examples of infirmities:
 - o Don’t understand

- Unable to see something
- Forget
- A wandering mind during prayer
- Hesitation
- Tendency to believe or favor certain individuals over others
- Sickness
- Bad dreams
- Nervousness
- Specific bouts of fear (as opposed to a long term state of living in fear)

IV. CONCLUSION

The great challenge for us in Indonesia is how to carefully and clearly teach about personal and original sin to our people? We have already pointed out that we face opposition from two camps: Islam as well as traditional church Calvinism. Original sin is not acceptable to Muslim. Our understanding of the definition of personal sin and its differentiation with infirmities is not acceptable to Calvinists.

If all Nazarenes in Indonesia can be teach in such a manner that they fully grasp the meaning and importance of this crucial doctrine, this will greatly enhance our ability to effectively and coherently evangelize our communities with holiness evangelism.

INTC is the ideal place to emphasize the teaching of holiness to our young people who are called by God to minister to their own churches. We hope that by training them, they in turn will train others so that the effect will be felt throughout all of our churches and our people will have a correct understanding of the meaning and remedy for sin.

The Church of the Nazarene in Indonesia faces the reality that we have a several shortage of literature in the area of Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine written in Bahasa Indonesia. It would be a great thing if we had an equivalent number of Wesleyan-Arminian books as there are Calvinistic books. If that were the case, I am sure that the gap in understanding our doctrinal position on sin compared with theirs would be much narrower than it is. And hopefully there would be many more adherents of the Wesleyan-Arminian position that were convinced through the careful presentation that they were able to read. If this were to happen, we would be very happy realizing that we were being so much more effective in bringing the gospel of full salvation from sin to our generation.