

# Article II (Original Sin)

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*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*

The Rev. Dennis Whalen  
Lighthouse Lutheran Church  
Freedom, PA 15042

The *Augsburg Confession* is the primary confession of faith of the Lutheran Church. This confession was presented at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. On August 3, 1530 the *Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession* was read to eagerly waiting Lutherans. This document refuted the *Augsburg Confession*, article by article, and demanded that the authors of the *Augsburg Confession* back down or drastic measures would be taken to quiet them. These measures included exile as well as personal property loss of the individual.

The Lutherans were not willing to give up so easily. Encouraged by Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon and other leading Lutheran theologians drafted a rebuttal to the *Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession* entitled the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. The word “apology” in this case means “defense”. Melanchthon drafted a defense for the beliefs he held as they are explained in the *Augsburg Confession*. The *Apology* is the longest and most detailed Lutheran confession. The *Apology* was finished in April 1531. Soon after its publication, other Lutheran theologians backed Melanchthon’s confident reply to the Roman Church. By the end of 1531, the Smalcaldic League, an organization of German territories, required acceptance of both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* to join.

One article of particular interest in the *Apology* is Article II (Original Sin). In the *Augsburg Confession*, Article II (Original Sin) contained the following:

Our churches teach that since the fall of Adam, all who are naturally born are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without the trust of God, and with the inclination to sin, called concupiscence. Concupiscence is a disease and original vice that is truly sin. It damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born anew through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. Our churches condemn the

Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, thus, obscuring the glory of Christ's merit and benefits. Pelagians argue that a person can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.<sup>1</sup>

The author of the *Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession* is Johann Eck. Eck refutes this article with the following argument:

In the second article we approve their Confession, in common with the Catholic Church, that the fault of origin is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death upon those who are not born again by baptism and the Holy Ghost. For in this they properly condemn the Pelagians, both modern and ancient, who have been long since condemned by the Church. But the declaration of the article, that Original Sin is that men are born without the fear of God and without trust in God, is to be entirely rejected, since it is manifest to every Christian that to be without the fear of God and without trust in God is rather the actual guilt of an adult than the offence of a recently-born infant, which does not possess as yet the full use of reason, as the Lord says "Your children which had no knowledge between good and evil," Deut 1:39.

Moreover, the declaration is also rejected whereby they call the fault of origin concupiscence, if they mean thereby that concupiscence is a sin that remains sin in a child even after baptism. For the Apostolic See has already condemned two articles of Martin Luther concerning sin remaining in a child after baptism, and concerning the forms of sin hindering a soul from entering the kingdom of heaven. But if, according to the opinion of St Augustine, they call the vice of origin concupiscence, which in baptism ceases to be sin, this ought to be accepted, since indeed according to the declaration of St. Paul, we are all born children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), and in Adam we all have sinned (Rom.5:12).<sup>2</sup>

Although the article approves the *Augsburg Confession* teaching on Original Sin, Eck and the Roman Church deny two points. First, they deny Original Sin to mean that men are born without the fear of God and without the trust of God. Second, they deny that concupiscence (the powerfully strong tendency to sin) remains after Baptism. In essence, the Roman Church's rebuttal claims that, provided you define Original Sin

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, Second Edition, Translated by William Hermann Theodore Dau and Gerhard Friedrich Bente, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> *Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession*, Part I, To Article II

using our words and meaning our definition, then we agree. However, Melanchthon did not agree with their definition of Original Sin.

Originally, Melanchthon thought that Rome and the Lutherans were in complete agreement on the definition of Original Sin. However, Eck's claim in the *Confutation* is that Rome's definition of Original Sin is equated with an adult version of guilt. Eck writes "...to be without fear of God and without trust in God is rather the guilt of an adult than the offence of a recently-born infant". Melanchthon disagrees with Rome's position and is actually surprised by the disagreement from Eck. Melanchthon quotes from the *Augsburg Confession* that the Lutheran understanding of Original Sin is "...since Adam's fall all human beings...are born in sin...[and] filled with evil desire and the inclination toward evil"<sup>3</sup>. The Lutheran position is that all humans are born according to the flesh have concupiscence. Therefore, since all humans born according have concupiscence from the moment of conception, they not only lack fear and trust in God, but also do not have the power or gifts to produce fear and trust in God.

Melanchthon believed that the understanding of Original Sin was of utmost importance for a theologian. According to *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, editor Paul McCain adds the following comment to Article II of the *Apology* "Article II of the *Apology* is essential for understand what follows in Article III and IV"<sup>4</sup>. McCain is alluding to the Articles on Christ and Justification. If, as Eck writes, human beings are capable of fearing and trusting in God, then why is Christ's grace necessary. If human beings are

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<sup>3</sup> From the German translation of the *Augsburg Confession*, Article II

<sup>4</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, Second Edition, Translated by William Hermann Theodore Dau and Gerhard Friedrich Bente, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 76.

capable of loving God and fulfilling His commandments, is Christ's righteousness needed? Melanchthon points out the absurdity in this teaching from Rome. He continues that Original Sin is "the absence of original righteousness". According to Melanchthon, Original Righteousness is obeying God's commandments completely (loving God and loving neighbor), which include fearing God, faith, and loving God. Therefore, Original Righteousness, as it pertains to God, is the possession of certain knowledge of God, fear of God, confidence in God, and the desire and ability to give God these things. Melanchthon concludes that mankind was given this ability when he was made in the image and likeness of God, but this image and likeness was lost after Adam's fall. When a child is born, that child brings into this world an ignorance of God, unbelief, distrust, contempt, and hatred of God. Only by the grace of Christ can one who is naturally born into this world fear and love God. Only by the grace of Christ can one who is naturally born into this world be justified, that is, receiving the Righteousness of Christ in the place of the believer's sin.

Now that Melanchthon has demonstrated that Original Sin is a lack of Original Righteousness, he desires to respond to Eck's rejection "that concupiscence is a sin that remains sin in a child even after baptism". Melanchthon falls back on the teaching of Martin Luther that, although Baptism removes the guilt of Original Sin, the sin remains. To illustrate Luther's point, Melanchthon adds that the Holy Spirit "...begins to put to death the concupiscence and begins to create new movements within a person".

In other words, "...the sin is forgiven, not in such a way that it no longer exists, but that it is no longer charged"<sup>5</sup>.

The final response to Eck's *Confutation* comes in the form of a summary from Melanchthon. Melanchthon writes that, according to Eck's definition of Original Sin, "sin is only sin if it is a voluntary action" and "nature is not evil". Melanchthon summarizes in this manner so that Eck is cornered in his teaching. According to Melanchthon, if we adhere to the teaching of Eck and of Rome, there is little need for Christ or the Holy Spirit. Luther, however, clearly taught that the consequences of Original Sin are devastating. Christ's grace is needed so that sin is not counted against us as sin and the Holy Spirit is needed so that sin may be put to death. Without recognizing the evils within ourselves, we will never be able to recognize the abundance of grace in Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, Second Edition, Translated by William Hermann Theodore Dau and Gerhard Friedrich Bente, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 80.