

Project Title

Original Blessing & Original Sin:
A Postmodern Conversation in Narrative

Project (Description)

The area of exploration for this project is the Pelagian Debate or Controversy (414 CE-418 CE). It is the central thesis that the Controversy – between the theological premises of Original Sin (Purity) and Original Blessing (Pluralism) – presented two binaries in which only one would be accepted by the Early Church. This dichotomy and the subsequent acceptance of Original Sin has informed Western Christianity and its post-Christian context into the twenty-first century in such a way that such topics as consumerism, self-image, diversity, and environmental degradation have become symptoms of a ‘brokenness’ that is both artificial and destructive. In this postmodern context, exploring a relationship between these two schools of thought – Purity and Pluralism– is of notable import, especially in the context of practical theology. If we are to navigate well and safely into the postmodern context in which we collectively find ourselves, it is important to explore these old binaries that undergirds our current understanding of self and relationship to power in new creative and generative ways.

The Debate, which occurred during the movement toward the establishment of Christian Orthodoxy, was centred between the discussion, theological reflection and debates of a British Monk named Pelagius and the Bishop of Hippo, Augustine. The Debate, though resolved in favour of the theological premise of Original Sin, as articulated by Augustine, would continue to find itself in tension with the Pelagian School and its inheritors beyond the establishment of the Doctrine of Original Sin. Though this Controversy was not new to the evolving theology of the early church (namely the idea of purity versus universality) it was not until this juncture that the binary became institutionalised.

By utilizing Relational Construction (RC) as a philosophical stance to navigate this old Controversy, it is contended that the historic need for a winner and a loser might be addressed. Furthermore, RC will be utilised to demonstrate the inherent challenges of this dichotomy as we enter a time of cultural change that possess the potential for our species to flourish or decline in the context of modernity’s need for binaries. The realities that multiple truths can co-exist – even when in tension – as articulated through RC present an opportunity to imagine new and creative ways for us to interact in a globalised, interconnected and pluralised planet. From a Christian context, such a discussion has implications for the ways in which we engage in practical theology both within our communities of faith and our larger relational connexions with the global community.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. A Conversation in Narrative
3. Practical Theology & Social Construction
4. Foucault: Normalising, Violence & the Church
5. Original Blessing & Original Sin: Holding ‘t’ruths
6. Implications: The United Church of Canada – Exploring a Theology of Diversity
7. Appendix: Fiction: The Story of Then
8. Bibliography

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