Jonathan Edwards on the Nature of Sin

Summer Study June 2018
Transmission of Sin

- Tertullian: realistic conception of humanity.
  - The whole human race was potentially and numerically present in Adam, and therefore sinned when he sinned and became corrupt when he became corrupt.
- Augustine: humanity is seminally present in Adam and actually sinned in him
  - close to the idea: Adam as their representative.
  - main emphasis on the transmission of the corruption of sin.
Transmission of Sin

- Scholastics in general thought along the lines indicated by Augustine, the emphasis all the while being on the transmission of the pollution of Adam’s sin rather than on that of his guilt.
- Hugo St. Victor and Peter the Lombard held that actual concupiscence stains the semen in the act of procreation, and that this stain in some way defiles the soul on its union with the body.
- Anselm, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventura stressed the realistic conception of the connection between Adam and his posterity. The whole human race was seminally present in Adam, and therefore also sinned in him.
Transmission of Sin

- Protestant Reformation
  - Differed with the medieval scholastics on the nature of original sin, but their view of its transmission did not contain any new elements
  - Luther (Calvin) one is accounted guilty by God because of the indwelling sin inherited from Adam.
- Post-reformation: Federal theology stressed the fact that there is an "immediate" imputation of Adam’s guilt to those whom he represented as the head of the covenant.
  - N.B Socinians and Arminians both rejected the idea of the imputation of Adam’s sin to his descendants.
Transmission of Sin

• Question was from the 17th century onwards, whether one is guilty in the sight of God solely on account of Adam’s sin, imputed to one, or solely on account of one’s own inherent sin (the latter - New School (New Haven) theology).

• Options

  • The realistic theory: human nature constitutes, not only generically but numerically as well, a single unit. Adam possessed the whole human nature, and in him it corrupted itself by its own voluntary apostatizing act in Adam. Individual men are not separate substances, but manifestations of the same general substance; they are numerically one. This universal human nature became corrupt and guilty in Adam, and consequently every individualization of it in the descendants of Adam is also corrupt and guilty from the very beginning of its existence. This means that all men actually sinned in Adam before the individualization of human nature began.

  • Federal theology: The natural & covenant relationship.

  • Theory of mediate imputation: denies that the guilt of Adam’s sin is directly imputed to his descendants; Adam’s descendants derive their innate corruption from him by a process of natural generation, and only on the basis of that inherent depravity which they share with him are they also considered guilty of his apostasy. They are not born corrupt because they are guilty in Adam, but they are considered guilty because they are corrupt.
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- Where is Edwards in all of this?