

Augustine and His Heritage

I. Life and Times

A. Understanding Augustine

1. Possibly the most important theological figure between Paul and the Reformation, particularly in the doctrines of sin and grace
2. A controversial figure—one should not to accept him too readily nor to attack too quickly
3. *The Confessions*, the first true autobiography, provides more insight into him than we have of most church fathers

B. Chronology

1. 354: Born the child of a mixed marriage → His mother, Monica, was a primary influence
2. 370: Goes to Carthage to study rhetoric
 - a. “To Carthage I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me.”
 - b. Some take this as a statement of sexual indulgence
 - c. Also refers to unholy philosophical loves that seduced him, i.e., Manicheanism (Gnostic-like dualistic philosophy from Persia)
3. 383: Goes to Rome—leaves his mother & her influence
4. 384: Goes to Milan as professor of rhetoric
 - a. Became a hearer of Ambrose (“To him was I unknowingly led by Thee, that by him I might knowingly be led to Thee”)
 - b. Embraced Neo-Platonism, which provided his “bridge” to Christianity, and began his study of Scripture
5. 386: Converted through Romans 13:13-14
6. 396: Becomes bishop of Hippo
7. 410: Alaric sacks Rome → spurred the writing of *The City of God*
8. 411: Public disputation with the Donatists
9. 416: Joins in condemnation of Pelagius
10. 430: Death in Hippo, as city is under siege by Arian barbarians

II. Donatist Controversy

A. Background

1. Origin
 - a. Donatists began shortly after persecution of Diocletian
 - b. Spurred by a bishop who had allegedly lapsed under persecution (had allegedly become a *traditore* by giving up copies of the Scripture)
 - c. Strong in North Africa
2. Earlier struggles over lapsed and rigorism (e.g., Hippolytus, Cyprian) focused on penance and the situation of the lapsed; Donatist controversy moved toward questions of the church and its sacraments.
 - a. They desire a “pure church”—an idea that appealed as masses began entering (and were eventually forced to enter) the church.
 - b. They denied the efficacy of sacraments performed by unworthy priests
 - c. They were *schismatic*, not heretical.

B. Augustine’s position

1. Used “wheat and tares” (Matt. 13:24-30) as basis of argument; he identified the kingdom of God with the church

2. Saw the visible church as always a mixed body, but contained seeds of the idea of the “invisible church” put forth by the reformers.
3. Argued that sacraments work *ex opere operato* (“by virtue of the act itself”)
4. Abandoned his earlier stance toward relative religious tolerance began to claim Luke 14:23 (“compel them to come in”) as basis for his teaching
5. Schaff calls Augustine’s view of the church “the confusion of Christianity with the church, and of the church with a particular outward organization”

III. Pelagian Controversy

A. Background

1. Had come to view sin as negation, the absence of good
2. Concupiscence in his thought is understood in this context as an excess or distortion of what is legitimate (e.g., sex drive—but more than just sex)
3. Reacted in the early 400s when Pelagius appeared from Britain in Rome, Asia Minor, and Africa teaching his views of sin and grace.

B. Issues in the Controversy

1. The Fall
 - a. Pelagius denied original sin
 - b. Augustine
 - 1) Natural headship (Realistic, or Augustinian, view) in which all humanity is in Adam
 - 2) Original sin includes both corruption and guilt
2. Free will
 - a. Pelagius: Sinless perfection by free will apart from grace
 - b. Augustine: Free will is doing what you want to do, and the unaided sinner does not want to do good
3. Grace
 - a. Pelagius
 - 1) Denied necessity for additional divine grace for salvation (although he saw gracious provision in life)
 - 2) “Grace” = natural ability
 - b. Augustine
 - 1) Salvation is “all of grace, all of God”; denied synergism & asserted monergism
 - 2) Need for ongoing gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life
 - 3) Even in Augustine, one can fall from grace.

C. Augustine’s conclusions

1. No forensic justification
2. Confuses sanctification w/ justification
3. Did not understand the imputed righteousness of Christ
4. Baptism is necessary to wash away original sin and the sacraments infuse transforming grace into the sinner.
5. Predestination
 - a. Augustine came to assert a strong doctrine of election from the “mass of damnation”
 - b. Augustine suggests what would be termed double predestination and irresistible grace; they follow logically but are not explicitly taught

IV. *City of God*

A. Background

1. When Alaric took Rome in 410, it caused Pagans to blame the collapse of the Roman Empire on Christianity.
 2. A student of Augustine's, Orosius, answered them by writing *Seven Books Against the Pagans* to show that Rome's "good old days" weren't so "good," that Rome actually suffered *more* under the old gods.
 3. Augustine took up the challenge to answer the pagans by writing the first Christian philosophy of history.
- B. Structure of the work
1. "A tale of two cities"
 - a. History: parallel stories of the city of man (Cain built a city) & the city of God
 - b. The story of two loves: the love of God vs. the love of self
 2. A "theology of history" rather than a "philosophy of history"
 3. Stresses the sovereignty of God in history
 - a. Contrast w/ Eusebius
 - 1) Rejects more dualistic view by stressing the unfolding of the divine city not the competition with the earthly
 - 2) Separated the church from "Eternal Rome"
 - b. Denied synergism in history as he did in salvation
 4. Eschatology and history
 - a. Converted from premillennialism to amillennialism; believed this age was millennium and saw the kingdom in the present age
 - b. A linear view of history—God moving purposefully toward a goal
- C. Ramifications of the work
1. A universal history
 2. The church is not tied to any earthly kingdom, such as the Roman Empire, or to any earthly system.
 3. Christendom—Distortion or reflection?
- V. Other Doctrinal Contributions
- A. Trinity
1. Orthodox on the Nicene faith & helped establish it in the West.
 2. *On the Trinity*, his most important work on topic
 - a. Stresses unity Godhead
 - b. Teaches double procession of the Spirit
- B. Purgatory—Augustine suggested the possibility; Gregory I accepted it as a reality
- C. Theory of "Just War"
1. Many early Christians had been pacifists, though not as universally as some have argued.
 2. Tenets
 - a. Just cause for war
 - b. Competent authority to wage war
 - c. Waged in a righteous manner (no looting, massacres, etc.)
 - d. War is only a last resort
- VI. Semi-Pelagian Controversy
- A. Positions (on grace and original sin)
1. Pelagianism
 - a. No special (prevenient, "preceding") grace

- b. No guilt or corruption of original sin
 - c. Condemned by Council of Ephesus (431)
- 2. Semi-Pelagianism:
 - a. Initial turning to God by the sinner through natural ability
 - b. Man is spiritually sick, not dead
 - c. “God helps those who help themselves.”
 - d. Original sin is, at most, a corruption or weakness
- 3. Semi-Augustinianism
 - a. Initial movement comes through God’s grace, but the individual then cooperates with that grace
 - b. Original sin is a corruption and usually involves guilt
- 4. Augustinianism
 - a. All work in salvation is done by God’s grace without the active cooperation of the sinner
 - b. Original sin involves both corruption and guilt
 - c. Strongly predestinarian
- B. Leading Parties
 - 1. Semi-Pelagian
 - a. John Cassian, monk in Gaul contemporary with Augustine; usually considered leading Semi-Pelagian theologian, that human nature and effort can cause God to respond with saving grace
 - b. Vincent of Lérins
 - 1) “Vincentian Canon”: True doctrine is “what has been believed everywhere, always, by everyone”
 - 2) Actually directed against Augustine’s views of sin and grace
 - 2. Augustinian: Prosper of Aquitaine, Defender of (modified) Augustinian views
- C. Synod of Orange (529)
 - 1. Rejects Semi-Pelagianism
 - 2. Adopts Semi-Augustinianism
 - a. Insists on need of prevenient grace
 - b. Ignores Augustine’s predestination
 - 3. Confirmed by Pope Gregory I
 - 4. The Catholic Church is, however, often practically Semi-Pelagian