

IN SIN DID MY MOTHER CONCEIVE ME:  
A DEPRAVED AUGUSTINE CONFRONTS AN IMITATION PELAGIUS

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the church there has existed a cycle of fundamental doctrinal error that seems to repeat itself in spite of widespread and even formal condemnation by Church councils and their resultant creedal statements. As Solomon wrote, "...there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has been already in the ages before us" (Eccl. 1:9-10). The doctrines of sin and grace, which, in the Church Age, found their roots in the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, have not been excluded from these cycles of error. In the fourth century, the British monk, Pelagius, taught that the original sin of Adam had no impact on Adam's progeny – he is not born with a sinful human nature, his will is as free as Adam's to choose to do good or evil. Augustine of Hippo, drawing from a sound biblical base, was able to demonstrate the fallacy of Pelagius' views, which were also rejected by the Church.

This study will attempt to capture the confrontation between Pelagius and Augustine through the lens of history beginning with the theological atmosphere of the region, moving through external forces that ultimately shaped Augustine's theology, and finishing with a presentation of the actual theological views that sparked one of the greatest controversies in Church history.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

The theological atmosphere of North African Christendom during the fourth and fifth centuries was heavily influenced by Tertullian (ca. 155-240/60 A.D.) who had denied Origen's

“pre-existence” theory of the origin of the soul and instead advocated a “traducianism” (i.e., sin is transferred from Adam as a unit with the body). Out of this latter concept of the soul came Tertullian’s maxim – *tradux animae* – the propagation of the soul implies propagation of sin. To Tertullian, innate sin and the soul’s origin are compliments and, therefore, the nature Adam passed on to his descendants is inclined toward sin – implying our solidarity with the first man in his original guilt.<sup>1</sup> Having said this much, Tertullian was inconsistent in his views of prevenient grace by allowing for a cooperative free will; that is, he speaks of human ability to effect change. He wrote, “Some things are by virtue of the divine compassion, and some things are by virtue of our agency.”<sup>2</sup>

Following in Tertullian’s footsteps, Ambrose of Milan (340-397 A.D.), who had great influence on Augustine, seems to clearly articulate the solidarity of the race with Adam.

Ambrose wrote, “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died. How should God restore me, unless He find in my Adam, justified in Christ, exactly as the first Adam I was subject to guilt and destined to death.”<sup>3</sup> And yet he also at times speaks advocating a synergism believing that God’s grace begins the work of salvation and that, when grace has initiated it, a man through his will cooperates.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly stated, “Thus Tertullian takes the view that, while Adam received from God true human nature in its integrity, the nature he passed on to his descendants is vitiated by an inclination to sin; an ‘irrational element’ has settled in the soul (*irrationale autem . . . codoleverit in anima ad instar iam naturalitatis*). He is more explicit and outspoken about his sinful bias than previous theologians, in whose eyes corruption and death seem to have been the principal legacy of the Fall [J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (London: A. C. Black, 1977), 176.]”

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, electronic ed., Tertullian: A Treatise on the Soul (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series*, X vols., Ambrose: Select Works and Letters., vol. X (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 1753.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1953), 177.

Even with these theological underpinnings, by the time of Augustine, Christians in the West still had not devoted much time and energy to theological reflection or interaction with the intellectual ideas circulating around the Mediterranean region.<sup>5</sup> There prevailed a sense of theological staleness and the North African Church leadership was characteristically close-minded with an air of anti-intellectualism and authoritarianism. The masses were discouraged from asking deep questions of faith and were expected to blindly accept Church teaching without question. It was in this atmosphere that we see an infiltration of Manichaen beliefs into the church.

### The Manichaen Infiltration

For those seeking wisdom and truth from the Christian faith, there were few options by which one could gain intellectual satisfaction. As a result, some were finding solace with the Manichaens who pressed no one to believe until the truth had been discussed and elucidated.<sup>6</sup> This concept intrigued many, including Augustine, who, though misguided by a Neo-Platonist ideal of pursuing pure reason, preferred this route to that of blind submission to Church authority.

The Manichaens were the rationalists of the day that held to a simple material dualism – of evil matter versus spiritual good. The kingdom of darkness at one time attacked the kingdom of light, and the result was a mixed creation of light and darkness (good and evil) in which the

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Copan, "Augustine and the Scandal of the North African Catholic Mind," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 2 (Lynchburg, VA: The Evangelical Theological Society, 1998): 289.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 291. Manichaeism, which was somewhat similar to Gnosticism, was developed by Mani or Manichaeus (216-76 A.D) of Mesopotamia in the middle of the third century. Mani worked a curious combination of Christian thought, Zoroastrianism, and other oriental religious ideas into a complete dualistic philosophy [see Earle Edwin Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries : A History of the Christian Church*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 101.].

kingdom of light was engaged in a program of gradual purification. Christ came into this world to aid the good in the human soul to overcome the thrusts of the kingdom of darkness.<sup>7</sup> Though they professed the highest reverence for Christ, they held under this cloak a purely naturalistic system. Warfield writes,

The negative side of their teaching included a most drastic criticism of the Christian Scriptures, while on the positive side they built up a doctrine of God which seemed to separate Him effectually from all complicity with evil, and a doctrine of man which relieved the conscience of all sense of unworthiness and responsibility for sin.<sup>8</sup>

Salvation, to the Manichaens, was an ascent from the vulgarity of matter (physical appetites) to the lesser vulgarity of mind – man is a being mingled with light (the good in his soul) and darkness (the evil of his material body). Salvation was a matter of liberating the light in one's soul from its bondage to the matter of one's body. Cairns writes,

This liberation could be accomplished by exposure to the Light, Christ. The elite or perfect ones constituted the priestly caste for this group. They lived ascetic lives and performed certain rites essential to the release of light. The auditors or hearers shared in the holiness of this elect group by supplying their physical needs. In this way the hearers might also participate in salvation.

Manichaens taught that truth might be exhaustively captured by the unaided reason, which flattered the intelligence and egos of many seekers and “removed the scene of battle from moral and religious responsibility to disinterested speculation.”<sup>9</sup> They claimed to give a complete, rational explanation for all their tenets independent of any faith whatsoever. They laid so much stress on the ascetic life that they looked upon sexual instinct as evil and emphasized

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<sup>7</sup> Howard Frederic Vos and Thomas Nelson Publishers., *Exploring Church History*, Nelson's Christian Cornerstone Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), ch. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia,: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1956), 355.

<sup>9</sup> David Wesley Soper, "Augustine Is with Us Still!," *Westminster Theological Journal* 6, no. 1-2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1943): 137.

the unmarried state. Though condemned by the Church and by the State as heresy, the Manichaens had a great deal of influence for fostering the ascetic spirit in the churches and were in large measure responsible for the division of church members into clergy and laity.<sup>10</sup>

### The Resurgence of Neo-Platonism

Although there was certainly a sense of mysticism in the Manichaen system, the rise of Neo-Platonism in the third century continued into the fourth century, even for a time influencing Augustine.<sup>11</sup> The Neo-Platonists thought of absolute being as the transcendent source of all that is and from which all was created by emanation. This emanation finally resulted in the creation of man as a reasoning soul and body. The goal of the universe was reabsorption into the divine essence from which everything had emanated.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this reabsorption was to experience a mystical union resulting from a beatific vision of the Good. This experience of mystical union seems to those who pass through it “to be a progressive stripping off of everything that is alien to the purest nature of the soul, which cannot enter into the Holy of Holies while any trace of earthliness still clings to it.”<sup>13</sup>

In essence, Neo-Platonism considers the true self to be the eternal soul which is temporarily coupled with a material shell. Geisler comments,

Through this attachment with matter, the soul becomes contaminated. If a person does not strive toward the ultimate good and unity, and instead is concerned only

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<sup>10</sup> Vos and Thomas Nelson Publishers., ch. 7.

<sup>11</sup> According to Cairns, Neoplatonism originated in Alexandria in the mind of Ammonius Saccas (ca. 174-242 A.D.), who was born of Christian parents. A man name Plotinus (ca. 205-79 A.D.) studied under Saccas and then became the real leader and taught this doctrine in Rome during the third quarter of the third century. The work of producing the literary statement of Neoplatonism was done by Porphyry (232-305 A.D.) from collected writings of Plotinus [Cairns, 101.].

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> David R. Anderson, "Another Tale of Two Cities," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 18, no. 35 (Irving, TX: The Grace Evangelical Society, 2005): 59.

with matter, the self will become absolutely evil. To be saved and attain ultimate perfection, the person must turn from matter and toward the One. Salvation consists in overcoming the body-soul dualism. This normally requires many cycles of reincarnation. To escape the cycle, a person must turn to the inner by asceticism and meditation.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly we find nowhere in Scripture that these concepts appear. Nevertheless, the long arms of Plato reached forward through the centuries and, as we shall soon see, through resurgent disciples such as Plotinus embraced the contemplative Bishop of Hippo.

### THE CLASH BETWEEN PELAGIUS AND AUGUSTINE

Having presented the theological backdrop that heavily influenced Western Christendom in the fourth century, we will now turn our attention to a singular debate that raged between the truth-seeking Augustine and the mild-mannered monk Pelagius on the issues of sin and grace. It was in the Age of the Theologians (300-600 A.D.), most particularly in the life and writings of Augustine, that the doctrines of sin and grace received their most intense study and delineation. Augustine's views were developed by around 387 A.D., years before Pelagius reacted against them as he taught in Rome after 407 A.D. Pelagius took offense at Augustine's famous maxim, "Lord command what thy will and will what they command," and taught his equally famous maxim, "If I ought I can."

The purpose of this section will be to understand the views of Pelagius and Augustine in their doctrines of sin and grace, as well as to conceive the history of the controversy occasioned by the differing views.

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<sup>14</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 597.

## The Major Figures

To understand the clash that occurred between Pelagius and Augustine, we would do well to understand briefly their backgrounds, as well as we know them, and how their backgrounds likely influenced their individual theologies.

### **Pelagius**

Little of certainty is known of the early life of Pelagius. His birth date is uncertain and most agree that he was of British origins (*Pelagius Brito*). His character, in contrast to Augustine's, shows no sign of having passed through any serious moral crises in its development; rather, "he led a silent life in the midst of studies and monastic asceticism."<sup>15</sup> He was apparently a man of clear intellect, mild disposition, learned culture, and high moral integrity. Pelagius was a monk (not a monastic or hermit) with enormous learning (Antiochene). He was fluent in both Latin and Greek and was clearly linguistically superior to Augustine, his most formidable opponent.

Pelagius arrived in Rome around 380 A.D. and became a highly regarded spiritual director for both the clergy and laity alike. His followers "were few but influential and their rigorous asceticism was a reproach to the spiritual sloth of many of their fellow Catholics."<sup>16</sup> While teaching in Rome, Pelagius wrote an *Exposition of Paul's Epistles* (405 A.D.), the basic explanation of his views. Controversy over his religious views emerged through his teaching and writing as well as an ever-increasing body of convinced followers, principally Rufinus

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<sup>15</sup> August Neander, Justus Ludwig Jacobi, and J. E. Ryland, *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas*, 2 vols., Bohn's Standard Library, vol. 2 (London,: G. Bell and sons, 1888), 633.

<sup>16</sup> Catholic University of America., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols., vol. 9 (Detroit; Washington, D.C.: Thomson/Gale; Catholic University of America, 2003), 58.

(Antiochian), Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicus Severus, and Coelestius (a lawyer).<sup>17</sup> He left Rome for Africa via Sicily in 409 as Alaric, king of the Goths, was about to sack the city.

### **Augustine**

Aurelius Augustine was born in Tagaste, North Africa, on November 13, 354 A.D. His father was a pagan and his mother a Christian, yet his father, Patricius, regarded Christianity with cool contempt. His Christian mother, Monica, “endured with silence her rough-willed husband and did not always come off the loser in their struggles.”<sup>18</sup> The battle line was clearly drawn in this pagan-Christian household, especially regarding their son. Shortly before his death, around the same time Augustine left for school at Carthage, Patricius became a Christian. “The stout pagan learned to kneel with the subtly stronger Monica.”<sup>19</sup>

Augustine’s youth is generally seen as a catalogue of excesses variously flowing between play and study, flesh and spirit. He is reported to have hated school work, preferring much more ball-playing, and it is said that he frequently received the full-measure of the school-master’s rod (petty thieving was also on the bill). His “natural tendency to excessive sensuality was further strengthened by the Latin authors he studied, with their detailed delineation of the pagan gods’ flagrant bestialities.”<sup>20</sup> In his sixteenth year, he began an illicit relationship, being condemned by his mother, which continued for some fifteen years until his conversion. The relationship appears to have been characterized by more than sensual love as his separation from the young

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<sup>17</sup> John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy : History of Christian Doctrine* (NavPress, 2001), 212.

<sup>18</sup> Soper, "Augustine Is with Us Still!," 135.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



woman at his conversion rather than a public marriage was unfortunate, especially in view of their son, Adeodatus.

At eighteen, Augustine moved his studies to Carthage where he was quickly consumed by the exotic magnificence of temples, theaters, public baths, and palaces. He was quite carried away by the immorality of the city and made little progress in his studies alongside his attendance at the theater and his carousing. Nevertheless, his intellectual abilities finally overtook him and he became a master teacher of rhetoric, but was little interested in claims of truth. It was not until Augustine consumed Cicero's now lost *Hortensius* that he moved beyond simple philosophy to a moral philosophy and the love of wisdom.

It was at this point in Augustine's life that he drifted to the Manichaens which served as the context for his inward war. As previously described, the allure of the Manichaens was their teaching that truth might be captured unaided by reason. This appealed to Augustine's ego, who, conscious of his moral weaknesses, wished to believe that neither God nor himself were answerable for his shortcomings, especially his appetite in sexual areas which the Manichaens strongly discouraged as evil. His move to Manichaeism was in a sense an attempt at denial of self, or at least an outcry against his own lack of self-control. He wandered in this mystical system for many years before "the doubts which had early in it began to insinuate themselves, first as to the mythological elements, and then as to the whole structure of the system, had fulfilled themselves."<sup>21</sup> Later in life Augustine would admit, "It resulted that whatever they said. . . I approved of as true, not because I know it to be true, but because I wished it to be."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Warfield, 357.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*, XIV vols., Augustine: On the Trinity, vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 118.

Finding the Manichaen “truth” to be unfulfilling, in 384 A.D. Augustine found himself professor of rhetoric in Milan, in part due to the influence of Manichaen friends in Rome. He went through a brief period of skepticism at this time losing much faith in almost every system (a not uncommon outcome when a complete system, such as Manichaeism, begins to fall apart). He was rescued from his doubts by Neo-Platonism: “the dualism of Manichaeism was dissolved in the spiritualism of Neo-Platonism.”<sup>23</sup> In this system Augustine learned from Plotinus that all beings are good and there are immaterial realities. Plotinus introduced Augustine “to a truer conception of God as the absolute spiritual entity, exalted far above space, time, and matter, whose image was reflected in the human soul.”<sup>24</sup> Even so, this movement toward Neo-Platonism still did not satisfy his longing for wisdom and truth, and it would take Milan’s most famous public speaker, Ambrose, to open his mind to Christianity.

Having been taken on by Simplicianus as a personal project, Augustine read the commentary on Paul written by Marius Victorinus, which resulted in his intellectual conversion, though a moral conversion was still forthcoming. He still had a problem with sexual self-control as exemplified by the concubine still at his side. It would not be until his “conversion experience” in 386 A.D. that he finally set aside this young lady and experienced the moral conversion that would guide the remainder of his life.

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<sup>23</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 270.

<sup>24</sup> Nick Needham, "Augustine of Hippo: The Relevance of His Life and Thought Today," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2 (2008): 41.

## The Historical Controversy

It would be advantageous, before comparing the theological views of Augustine and Pelagius, to unwind the ongoing theological clash between the two men. Teaching from Rome in 405 A.D., Pelagius penned an *Exposition of Paul's Epistles* that provided a basic explanation of his theological views. He arrived in Africa just before the sacking of Rome in 409 A.D. to meet Augustine with Coelestius at Hippo, but Augustine was at Carthage. Pelagius wrote a letter to Augustine to which he received a courteous, but coarse reply. In 412 A.D., Pelagius met Augustine in Carthage and then went east leaving Coelestius (the lawyer) to expound his views. Augustine saw to Pelagius' condemnation at two provincial synods in Carthage (416 and 418 A.D.).

### The Actual Theological Clash

In 415 A.D. Augustine wrote a work against Pelagius entitled "On Nature and Grace." Also, in 415 A.D. Augustine sent Orosius, a young Spanish presbyter, to Palestine to subvert Pelagius' influence. Orosius convinced John of Jerusalem to call a synod but Pelagius was acquitted largely due to the unfamiliarity of the East with the issues or with Augustine's writings.<sup>25</sup> Pelagius was again acquitted in December 415 A.D. at a second synod in Diospolis (Lydda) due to the failure of accusers to present the charges because of illness, linguistic inability of those presiding, Pelagius' ability, and his disavowal of Coelestius' views (whom he had left previously to expound his very views!).

Upon hearing of Pelagius' acquittal, Augustine wrote *On the Freedom of the Will* (416 A.D.) and had Pelagius and Coelestius condemned at two local synods (Carthage and Mileve).

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, X vols., A Work on the Proceedings of Pelagius, vol. V (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 183.

The North African bishops wrote to Innocent I, bishop of Rome to mediate the issue. In 417 A.D. Innocent condemned Pelagius and Coelstius, but his untimely death brought Zosimus to Rome. After hearing a defense from Coelestius, Zosimus reversed the decision reproving the North African bishops. The North African bishops then appealed to Emperor Honorius who supported them, banishing Pelagius and Coelestius. Zosimus capitulated the same year and thereafter all bishops were required to subscribe to the doctrine of the African bishops as set forth by a synod at Carthage in 418 A.D. The Church at the Third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus in 431 A.D. universally condemned Pelagius' views.

### **The Theological Opinions of Pelagius**

The essence of Pelagius' teaching had to do with the nature of mankind as it relates to the sin of Adam. Only by implication from his teaching is the argument regarding the freedom of the will revealed. His teachings can be summarized in three basic ideas.

First, Pelagius and Coelestius taught that there was no connection between Adam's sin and what state man is born into the world. The state of man at birth, as it relates to Adam, is "merely that of a tendency to follow bad examples, which, for some reason, we voluntarily emulate."<sup>26</sup> Man has no identity in Adam's fall from grace, and each person is born into the same state as Adam before he voluntarily fell from grace.<sup>27</sup> In sum, our condition is a voluntary one.

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<sup>26</sup> Hannah, 212.

<sup>27</sup> Pelagius justified this view from Romans 5:12ff (also 1 Cor. 15:21 and Eph. 2:3). The sense of the whole passage, he would say, was that by one man sin has come into the world, and moral ruin with sin, so moral corruption has come to all, because all have sinned after Adam's example. His interpretation of Romans 5:12 means that men are justified by their own voluntary action just as they come under condemnation by their own voluntary sin. For a thorough exposition of Pelagius' defenses from Scriptures see Gustav Friedrich Wiggers and Ralph Emerson, *An Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism from the Original Sources* (Andover, New York,; Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1840), 66-316.

Second, since man is born into a pre-Fall state (the doctrine of inherited inability has been disregarded), people have the ability to choose, just as Adam did, between good and evil. Man's will is only inhibited by his tendency to follow bad examples. This will is a determinative will versus a will that can select various options it is presented.

Third, grace from God is a resistible grace; it is an assisting gift from God should one choose to avail oneself of it. It is a grace that influences mankind toward a voluntary cooperation with God.

Pelagius' views, simply put, expound a doctrine of human ability and the dependency of God upon the will of His creature to carry out His purposes. Once Augustine became aware of these views, he perceived them to be a threat to the very life of the church.

### **The Theological Opinions of Augustine**

As has been demonstrated, Augustine reacted quite negatively to Pelagius' views and with enormous literary zeal and skill sought to formally refute them. Having traversed a wasteland in his own personal life, Augustine has finally arrived at the truth, the truth that only existed in the faith he had run away from during the previous period of his life. His teachings on sin and grace will now be summarized.

Augustine maintains that by Adam's first sin, in whom all men jointly sinned together, sin and the other positive punishments, such as guilt came into the world. Thus, human nature has been both physically and morally corrupted and every man brings into the world with him a nature already so corrupt that it can do nothing, in and of itself, but sin. After his fall from grace, Adam lost the gift of grace which enabled him not to sin and, therefore, he was free only to sin.

Mankind, therefore, did not lose the ability to choose (i.e., freedom of the will); rather, mankind in exercising his freedom to choose was limited only to evil choices.

For Augustine the need for grace was central. Man's corrupt condition does not mean he is unable to choose Christ; rather it is that humanity does not have a desire to know Christ. On Augustine's view Hannah writes,

The effect of the unmerited favor of God is twofold: first, God reveals the wonder of His Son's redeeming mercies; and second, He strengthens the will so that humankind can freely embrace Christ as the sinner's only hope of forgiveness. This grace is irresistible. God, through grace, boosts the will, strengthens and stimulates it, so that the will itself, without any coercion, desires to love Christ. People do not save themselves, because they cannot, nor are they saved against their will, because they will not.<sup>28</sup>

The freedom to choose the good out of a proper motive, which was lost in the first Adam, is renewed by means of God's grace. By grace, a believer in Christ now has freedom of choice (good-evil) which Augustine calls a gift.<sup>29</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to present both the historical and theological context of possibly one of the most significant debates in Church history. The development of the doctrines of sin and grace was not central to the early Church and only became a formal necessity when teachings and writings in the third and fourth centuries ran askew of Scripture. Many forces were pulling at Augustine, the primary polemicist in the debate, as he wove his way from a rebellious childhood, through the fringe teachings of the Gnostic-influenced Manichaens,

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<sup>28</sup> Hannah, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Albert C. Outler, "St. Augustine, Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love", Christian Classics Ethereal Library [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/augustine\\_enchiridion\\_02\\_trans.htm#C26](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm#C26) (accessed 12 December 2010).

dabbling as he did in Neo-Platonism only to finally arrive at the truth of Scriptures as revealed to him by the Spirit of God. When confronted by the heretical teachings of a pious monk, Pelagius, Augustine's strong will and personality showed through in a litany of writings and pleadings to the leadership of the Church.

The soul of the Pelagian system is human freedom; the soul of the Augustinian system is God's grace. Pelagius begins with the natural man and works up, by man's own actions, to righteousness and holiness. Augustine, Schaff writes, "despairs of the moral sufficiency of man, and derives the new life and all power for good from the creative grace of God."<sup>30</sup> Pelagius' system proceeds from the freedom of choice to legalistic piety; Augustine's system proceeds from man's bondage to sin to the "evangelical liberty of the children of God."<sup>31</sup> To Pelagius, Christ is merely teacher and example, and God's grace cooperates with the native powers of man. To Augustine, Christ is also Priest and King and God's grace creates in man a new heart and a new life. Schaff continues,

Pelagianism begins with self-exaltation and ends with the sense of self-deception and impotency. Augustinianism cast man first into the dust of humiliation and despair, in order to lift him on the wings of grace to supernatural strength, and leads him through the hell of self-knowledge up to the heaven of the knowledge of God. . . The former is grounded upon the philosophy of common sense, which is indispensable for ordinary life, but has no perception of divine things; the latter is grounded upon the philosophy of the regenerate reason, which breaks through the limits of nature, and penetrates the depths of divine revelation. . . Both make use of the Scriptures; the one, however, conforming them to reason, the other subjecting reason to them.<sup>32</sup>

Warfield sums up the controversy writing,

All the elements of the composite doctrine of man were everywhere confessed. But they were variously emphasized, according to the temper of the writers of the

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<sup>30</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7 vols., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), 787.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 788-789.

controversial demands of the times. Such a state of affairs, however, was an invitation to heresy, and a prophecy of controversy; just as the simultaneous confession of the Unity of God and the Deity of Christ, or the Deity and the Humanity of Christ, inevitably carried in its trains a series of heresies and controversies, until the definition of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ were complete. In like manner, it was inevitable that sooner or later someone should arise who would throw so one-sided a stress upon one element or the other of the Church's teaching as to salvation . . . the emphasis that he laid on free will than in the fact that, in order to emphasize free will, he denied the ruin of the race and the necessity of grace. This was not only new in Christianity; it was even anti-Christian . . . . The struggle with Pelagianism was thus in reality a struggle for the very foundations of Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

In the period of the fourth century, the church leadership in North Africa who surrounded Augustine was a very conservative body of men. They had no sense of adopting novelties when they took up "the sword of God's sovereign grace to split the skull of Pelagian pride."<sup>34</sup> Augustine wielded the sword first, and ultimately overcame the Pelagian heresy by laying a solid biblical and theological foundation for the doctrines of sin and grace. Augustine believed with David that, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5).

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<sup>33</sup> Schaff and Wace, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Needham, "Augustine of Hippo: The Relevance of His Life and Thought Today," 47.



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