A History of Christian Thought

From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation

Justo L. González

Abingdon Press
NASHVILLE
And for nearly the whole of those nine years during which, with unstable mind, I had been their follower, I had been looking forward with but too great eagerness for the arrival of this same Faustus. For the other members of the sect whom I had chanced to light upon, when unable to answer the questions I raised, always bade me look forward to his coming, when, by discursing with him, these, and greater difficulties if I had them, would be most easily and amply cleared away. When at last he did come, I found him to be a man of pleasant speech, who spoke of the very same things as they themselves did, although more fluently, and in better language. But of what profit to me was the elegance of my cup-bearer, since he offered me not the more precious draught for which I thirsted? My ears were already satiated with similar things; neither did they appear to me more conclusive, because better expressed; nor true, because oratorical; nor the spirit necessarily wise, because the face was comely and the language eloquent.\textsuperscript{11}

Disappointed with Manichaeism as well as with the bad behavior of his Carthaginian students, Augustine decided to move to Rome. There he continued in contact with the Manichees, although he no longer believed their doctrines and was rather inclined to accept the skepticism of the Academy.

For I was half inclined to believe that those philosophers whom they call "Academics" were more sagacious than the rest, in that they held that we ought to doubt everything, and ruled that man had not the power of comprehending any truth.\textsuperscript{12}

But Rome was not a much more convenient place for furthering his career as a teacher of rhetoric, for his students found devious ways to avoid paying his fees. He therefore decided to try his luck in Milan, where there was a vacancy for a teacher of rhetoric. It was at Milan that Augustine became a Neoplatonist and later, through the influence of Bishop Ambrose and his teacher Simplician, a Christian.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 5.6 (trans. Pilkington, pp. 67-68).
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 5.10 (trans. Pilkington, p. 74).
However, this new vision of the meaning of the Christian faith was not sufficient to make Augustine accept it. The Christianity that he had known in his home was ascetic, and so were the moral views of the Neoplatonist philosophers whom he had learned to admire. For these reasons, he thought that if he came to accept the Christian faith this must imply a life of self-denial for which he was not ready. Intellectually, the decision had been made; but his will still refused to follow his mind. His prayer was: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."

Finally, Augustine was led to shame, despair, and conversion by the story of two cases in which others had shown more courage than he. The first was that of Marius Victorinus, whom Augustine greatly admired as the Latin translator of several Neoplatonic works, and who, at a recent date and after a long period of doubt, had made a public confession of his Christian faith. The other case was the story of two men who, upon reading of the *Life of Saint Anthony*, decided to abandon the world and devote their lives to the service of God. This story so touched Augustine’s heart that, despairs of his ability to take the final step, he fled to a garden and threw himself down under a fig tree while he cried:

How long, how long? To-morrow, and to-morrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; take up and read...." I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell,—"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended,—by a light, as it were, of security into my heart,—all the gloom of doubt vanished away.  

---

Others have defended the traditional interpretation, which emphasizes the finality of Augustine's conversion. Perhaps the best interpretation of the event is that since his early youth Augustine knew the main Christian doctrines, most of which he had never really doubted, so that the function of his Neoplatonist readings, of Ambrose's sermons, and of his discussions with Simplician, was simply to set aside the doubts that stood in the way of his full acceptance of the Christian faith. However, during his years of search, Augustine had developed a Neoplatonist understanding of the nature of truth and of the life of the true philosopher, which determined the way in which he understood the Christian life as a combination of the self-denial that Jesus advocated and what the Neoplatonists called the "philosophical life." Thus, what took place in the garden was not that Augustine decided to accept one or another of the doctrines of Christianity, but was rather his discovery of a power that enabled him to overcome all the difficulties that he had found standing in the way of a life of contemplation. This was what his mother had been praying for. This was all that he needed to become a Christian. Intellectually he was a Christian even before the events in the garden; from that moment on, he would lead the life that he thought was expected of a Christian—and in so doing he would progressively develop a theology that would be less and less Neoplatonic and more and more characteristically Christian.

After his conversion and the brief retreat at Cassiciacum, Augustine, his son, and a friend returned to Milan, where they were baptized by Ambrose. Then they left for Tagaste with Augustine's mother, but she died at the Port of Ostia shortly after leaving Rome. Augustine and his party then spent several months in Rome, and finally made their way back to Africa. In Tagaste, Augustine sold the properties that he had inherited from his parents, gave to the poor most of the money that he received from them, and decided to lead a serene and retired life together with his son and some friends, combining some of the discipline of a monastery with study, meditation, and discussion.

In A.D. 391 he visited the city of Hippo with the hope of convincing a friend to join the monastic community at Tagaste. During that visit, Valerius, the Bishop of Hippo, placed him in a position where he could not avoid being ordained a priest. Thus began Augustine's direct involvement in the life of the church, although he did not abandon his earlier monastic inclinations, but rather developed at Hippo a similar community to that which he had organized at Tagaste. Four years later, he was made a bishop through the insistence of Valerius. This—and Valerius' subsequent death—placed upon him all the responsibilities of the episcopate: preaching, administering the sacraments, judging between various parties in disagreement, the practice and management of charity, the administration of the funds and properties of the church, pastoral counseling and care, etc. However, what led him to produce a number of works of great significance for the development of Christian theology was a series of controversies in which he became involved—mainly with the Manichaeans, the Donatists, and the Pelagians.

---

16 The legend according to which Augustine and Ambrose were inspired to sing the Te Deum on this occasion is entirely groundless. Furthermore, Ambrose seems to have had no idea of the great gifts of his new convert.
17 Before his mother's death, Augustine enjoyed moments of deep spiritual communion with her. His narration of one of these moments, the so-called vision of Ostia (Conf. 9.10), has been a source of controversy among modern scholars, for it has traditionally been interpreted as the account of a mystical experience, and this interpretation has been questioned by some, notably E. Hendriks, *Augustinus Verhältnis zuo Mystik: Eine patriarchische Umschau* (Würzburg: Riu-Verlag, 1956). The importance of the debate lies in the fact that this is the only text in Augustine's voluminous writings in which he seems to claim a mystical experience. For further bibliography, see J. Heitz, "Eine question ouverte: La mystique de saint Augustin," *RHPRel*, 45 (1965), 315-34; V. Zangara, "La visione di Ostia: Storia dell'indagine e della controversia," *RSLat*, 15 (1979), 63-82.
The Donatist Controversy

Augustine's life after his conversion may be divided into three periods, as suggested by Bonner:

Very roughly speaking, Augustine's career as a Christian writer can be divided into three periods. In the first, he was mainly concerned with attacking and refuting the Manichees. During the second, he was preoccupied with the Donatist schismatics; while in the third, he was concerned with the Pelagians. 28

Most of the works which have been mentioned up to now deal either with the contemplative life or with the refutation of the Manichees. The latter was Augustine's main concern until A.D. 405, when he wrote his treatise On the Nature of the Good. After that he became engrossed in the Donatist controversy—although his first work dealing with Donatism dates from A.D. 394.

The origins of Donatism 29 are to be found in the persecution of Diocletian, which took place in A.D. 303–305. The imperal edicts ordering Christians to deliver all copies of Scripture to the magistrates placed believers in a difficult situation. From ancient times, most Christian teachers had repudiated every action that could incite the authorities to greater rigor, and therefore they almost unanimously counseled flight in time of persecution, although they also insisted that, if worse came to worst, every Christian should be ready to give up life rather than faith. What, then, should be done by those bishops, readers, and Christians in general who were asked to surrender the Scriptures? Should they refuse, even if in so doing they were provoking the wrath of those in authority? Was the act of giving up the sacred writings an act of apostasy? Or was it simply an act of prudence, which could be justified as a means of avoiding suffering for the church at large? There was no agreement regarding these questions; there could not have been, because of the sudden and urgent manner in which they were posed. Some church leaders turned

28 Bonner, St. Augustine, p. 133.
manner in which their refutation shaped Augustine's theology and, through him, that of the Middle Ages. Three basic issues are significant on this score: the nature of the church, the relationship between church and state, and the sacraments.

Donatist ecclesiology insisted on the empirical holiness of the church. Every one of its members must be holy here and now—and quite often this holiness was measured not so much in terms of the practice of love, as in terms of one's attitude during the past persecution. One who is not holy has no place in the church. And, as Cyprian taught, the sacraments were not valid outside the church, all the religious ministrations of the tradiores, who no longer belonged to the true church, were invalid.24

It was over against this position that Augustine developed his distinction between the visible church and the invisible, which will be discussed further on.

The question of the relationship between church and state was posed by the violence of the circumselliones, and later by the barbarian invasions. At first, Augustine believed that one should not employ force to attempt to persuade others on spiritual matters. This meant that, even in the case of the Donatists, all the Catholic bishops could do was to refute their doctrine, and thus attempt to persuade them to return to the communion of the greater church. But as a matter of fact the Donatists themselves were making use of force in order to keep their own members from returning to the church, and used that force in such a way that Augustine finally was led to sanction the intervention of the state to counterbalance the physical force the Donatists used. Thus the violent steps that the empire took against the Donatists were supported from the first by most African bishops, and eventually also by the Bishop of Hippo.25

This situation, as well as the invasions of the barbarians, led Augustine to develop the theory of the just war, for which he drew from Cicero as well as from Ambrose and others. According to Augustine, a war is just if it is carried on with a just purpose—that is, the establishment of peace—if it is led by the proper authorities, and if, even in the midst of killing, the motive of love still subsists.26

As to the sacraments, the Donatists appealed to Cyprian's authority in order to claim that they could be valid only within the church, but they went further in affirming that only those who led a holy life were capable of administering valid sacraments. Naturally, also in this case holiness was measured in terms of one's attitude before persecution rather than in terms of love. In any case, what was at stake here was the validity of a sacrament. It was in order to solve this question that Augustine introduced the distinction between valid and regular sacraments. Only those sacraments are regular which are administered within the church and according to its ordinance. But the validity of a sacrament, as will be seen further on, does not wholly depend on its regularity.27

Pelagianism

Finally, the last great controversy that contributed to shape Augustine's theology was that which he held against Pelagianism. This controversy is probably the most significant, for it gave him the occasion to formulate his doctrines of grace and predestination, which would have enormous consequences in the future.

Pelagius—from whom Pelagianism draws its name—was a native of the British Isles.28 Although he is frequently referred to as a monk, it is by no means certain that he was one.29 Nor is the date of his birth known. What is known is that in a.d. 405, while at

25 See Ep. 93.3.
27 Besides our discussion of Augustine's doctrine of sacraments further on, the reader may consult Willis, Saint Augustine, pp. 154-68. Augustine's main works against Donatism are On Baptism Against the Donatists, and Against Cæsarius.
28 The most significant studies that I now on Pelagius and his theology are: Georges de Plessis, Pelagie: ses livres sur sa vie et sa reforme (Lausanne: Payot, 1943); John Ferguson, Pelagius (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1936); Torgny Bohlin, Die Theologie des Pelagius und ihre Genesis (Cypriana: Lundequist, 1957); S. Frese, Pelage e il pelagianismo (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1961); G. Bonner, Augustine and Modern Research on Pelagianism (Vatican: Augustine Institute, 1973).
Rome, he had his first encounter with Augustine's theology, against which he reacted violently because it made everything dependent on God's grace and seemed to leave no place for human effort and participation. "Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt," Augustine had said in his Confessions, and Pelagius had no place for such quietism. After this episode, Pelagius disappears from the records until he is found four years later, on the eve of the fall of Rome, on his way to Africa with his disciple, friend, and apostle, Coelestius. He then left Africa for the East, without having had the occasion to meet Augustine. But Coelestius, who was less moderate than his teacher, remained behind to be the main opponent of Augustine in the Pelagian controversy.

In Palestine, Pelagius was able to muster the support of some bishops. But he found a formidable opponent in the fiery Jerome—whom we shall not have occasion to study in this history, but who is without any doubt one of the most remarkable personalities of the fourth and fifth centuries—who thundered from his retreat in Bethlehem, and rained fire and brimstone upon the head of Pelagius. Jerome was joined by Orosius—to whom reference will be made further on—and Pelagius' situation became untenable. Finally, after a long series of African synods that condemned the doctrine of Pelagius, and several oriental synods in which he managed to avoid being condemned, the matter came to Rome, where Bishop Innocent supported the position of the African bishops in condemning Pelagius. His successor Zosimus for a while supported Pelagius and Coelestius, but later changed his mind and condemned them. After that time, Pelagianism constantly lost ground in the West as well as in the East and was finally condemned in A.D. 431 by the Council of Ephesus, as has already been mentioned in the first volume of this History.

The doctrines of Pelagius are known directly through several works of his which have survived—a few under his own name, others under the names of orthodox authors, and others, finally, in fragments quoted by his opponents. His main surviving works are his Exposition of the Pauline Epistles, and his Book of Faith, addressed to Pope Innocent in an attempt to gain his support.

Pelagius' theology seems to be a reaction against the moral determinism of the Manichees. The latter claimed that good and evil were based on the very nature of eternal principles, and therefore that the evil nature could not do any good, nor the good any evil. It was against these claims that Augustine wrote his treatise On Free Will. It was also against it that Pelagius opened his theological campaign. Thus, the difference between Augustine and Pelagius was that the former was not willing to relinquish the absolute need for grace, even while defending freedom, whereas the latter believed that Augustine's doctrine of grace was a threat to human freedom and responsibility.

From a practical point of view, Pelagius was interested in leaving no place for the excuses of those who impute their own sin to the weakness of human nature. Against such persons, Pelagius affirmed that God has made us free, and that this freedom is such that through it we are capable of doing good. The power not to sin—possess non peccare—is in human nature since its very creation, and neither the sin of Adam nor the Devil himself can destroy it. Adam's sin is in no way the sin of humanity, for it would be absurd and unjust to condemn all for the sin of one. Nor does the sin of Adam destroy the freedom that all his descendants have not to sin. It is true that the Evil One is powerful, but he is not so powerful that he cannot be resisted. The flesh is also powerful, and it struggles against the spirit; but God has given us the power to overcome it. As a proof of this stand the men and women who, according to the Old Testament, led lives of perfect holiness. Thus, we each sin for ourselves out

---

30 Conf. 10.29.
31 See Augustine, On the Gift of Perseverance, 20.
32 P. 356.
33 A work that has been preserved under the names of several ancient Christian writers. Erasmus published it and attributed it to Jerome. This is the edition to be found in PL 30:645-802. There is no doubt that its true author is Pelagius.
34 Often attributed to Jerome or to Augustine. Printed in PL 48:488-91. The entire list of works that can reasonably be attributed to Pelagius may be seen in de Plancy, Pelage, pp. 44-45.
35 Such is the thesis of Bohlin, Die Theologie des Pelagius und ihre Genesis. Against this view see G. de Plancy, "Points de vue récents sur la theologie de Pelage," RSRei, 46 (1958), 272-37. On this point we tend to agree with Bohlin's general thesis, although not with his working hypothesis that Pelagius takes the young Augustine as his point of departure (p. 56).
of our own free will, and therefore children who die before being baptized are not lost, for the guilt of Adam is not upon their shoulders.

Does this mean that grace is not necessary for salvation? Certainly not, for Pelagius claimed that there is an "original grace" or "grace of creation" which is given to all. This "grace," however, is not a special action of God, and de Plinval is right in asserting that "it is in a way confused with the grace to which we owe existence and intelligence." Paradoxically, it is "natural grace." Besides this grace of creation Pelagius affirmed that there is a "grace of revelation" or "grace of teaching," which consists in that revelation by which God shows the way that we are to follow. It is not that revelation offers us a special power to obey God, for to affirm such a thing would imply that, apart from revelation, we are incapable of doing good.

There is, finally, the "grace of pardon" or "grace of the remission of sin." This is the grace that God grants to those who—of their own free will—repent and make an effort to act correctly and to repair the evil that they have done. Once again, this grace does not influence human will, but is limited to the forgiveness of sins.

As to baptism, Pelagius claimed that infants are innocent and therefore do not need it. Furthermore, baptism does not give birth to a free will where there was formerly a will under the bondage of sin. It only breaks the custom of sinning and calls believers to a new life that they can build through the use of their own freedom.

Finally, according to Pelagius, the predestination to which Paul refers is not a sovereign decree of God in virtue of which people are saved or condemned, but is rather God's foreknowledge of what will be future human decisions. "To predestine is the same as to foreknow." 37

As to Coelestius, the most famous of Pelagius' disciples and Augustine's main opponent, his doctrines are simply a clarification and exaggeration of those of his teacher. Augustine summarized them in the following nine points: 38

1. That Adam was created mortal, for he would have died no matter whether he had sinned or not.
2. That Adam's sin injured him only, and not all of humankind.
3. That the Law, as well as the gospel, leads to the Kingdom.
4. That there were some before the time of Christ who lived without sin.
5. That recently born infants are in the same state as was Adam before his fall.
6. That the whole of humankind does not die in the death or fall of Adam, nor does it resurrect in the resurrection of Christ.
7. That, if we will, we can live without sin.
8. That unbaptized infants attain unto eternal life.
9. That the rich who are baptized will have no merit, nor will they inherit the Kingdom of God, if they do not renounce their possessions.

It was against these doctrines of Pelagius and Coelestius that Augustine wrote some of his most significant works, among which the following must be mentioned: *On the Spirit and the Letter, On Nature and Grace, On Original Sin.* 39 He also wrote several works against Julian of Eclanum, a second-generation Pelagian, and in these he further developed his doctrine of original sin, grace, and predestination.

Augustine's views on these matters soon evoked opposition, not only from those who were properly Pelagians, but also from others who were not willing to go as far as Augustine, and who have been given the rather inaccurate title of "semi-Pelagians." Since it would be impossible to understand the semi-Pelagian controversy without a previous exposition of Augustine's views on grace and predestination, that controversy will be postponed for the following chapter. Let it suffice to say here that opposition to Augustine's views centered in southern France,

---

36 Pelag., p. 237.
37 Ad Rom. cap. 8. 29: "Prædestinare est idem quod præ圣地re" (quoted by Ferguson, Pelagius, p. 158).
38 De fess. orig. 11.
39 These and others are listed by Portalé, Guide to St. Augustine, pp. 34-36.
and that its leader was John Cassian. Although most of this controversy took place after Augustine's death, he did write two treatises responding to the objections of the so-called semi-Pelagians: *On the Predestination of the Saints*, and *On the Gift of Perseverance*.

Besides the treatises written in connection with these controversies, four other works of Augustine merit special attention: *The Enchiridion*, the *Treatise on the Holy Trinity*, *The City of God*, and the *Retractions*.

The *Enchiridion*, written at the request of a friend who wished to have a handbook on the Christian faith, is a commentary on the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue. It is the best short introduction to Augustine's theology.

The *Treatise on the Holy Trinity*, which took Augustine sixteen years to write, has been discussed in the first volume of this History, while dealing with the development of trinitarian doctrine.

*The City of God* was inspired by the fall of Rome, and by the claims of some pagans that this catastrophe was due to the fact that Rome had forsaken her ancient gods in order to follow the Christian God. As an answer to such claims, Augustine developed his philosophy of history.

Finally, the *Retractions* were written toward the end of Augustine's life, when he reread each of his earlier writings, pointing out that on which he had changed his mind, as well as that which did not seem sufficiently clear. They are a most valuable document for establishing the chronology of Augustine's works, as well as for understanding his attitude toward theological inquiry.

**Theory of Knowledge**

We must now turn to the theology that Augustine developed as a result of his spiritual pilgrimage and of the various controversies in which he was involved. The best starting point for this task seems to be his theory of knowledge.

---

46 Pp. 328-34.

47 *Civ. xvi.* 44: "I do not see how an academic can refute one who says: I know that this seems white to me; I know that this pleases my ear; I know that I like this odor; I know that this feels sweet to my taste; I know that I feel this to be cold."

48 *Ibid.*: "But if the three times three are nine, and the square of intelligible numbers, is necessarily true, even if all of mankind is snoring."

49 *De vera rel.* 32: "And if you do not understand what I say, and doubt it, then see if you are not certain that you are in doubt."

50 In *On Free Will*, 1.12, the matter of the possible pre-existence of souls is left open. Later, in *On the Soul and Its Origin*, he rejects the idea that human souls are in this world because they have sinned in an earlier existence.
Time

The doctrine of creation leads directly to the question of the nature of time, as Augustine himself pointed out in his Confessions. This is not a purely metaphysical question, but rather an existential issue, for it is in time that the Eternal comes to us. "For him it was a matter of the relationship between eternity and time, of the possibility of a beginning of time, of the possibility of creation."

The problem posed is, first, that of time itself, and, second, that of the relationship between time and creation. As to the first, Augustine affirmed that time is a "distention" of the soul according to its various faculties. The past as mere past no longer exists, but is still given to us now in that "present of the past" which is memory. The future does not yet exist, but is given to us in that "present of the future" which is expectation. Only the present is offered directly to vision. All other times are known to us as they are present in our soul—the past as memory, and the future as expectation.

As to the relationship between time and creation, the issue is whether God created time or not. Augustine believed that only the first of these alternatives is feasible, for otherwise it would be necessary to declare that not only God, but time also, is eternal.

For whence could innumerable ages pass by which Thou didst not make, since Thou are the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by Thee? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? Since, therefore, Thou art the Creator of all times, if any time was before Thou madest heaven and earth, why is it said that

---


45 Conf. 11, 12.


47 Flores, Dimensiones, p. 124.

---

The Theology of Augustine

Thou didst refrain from working? For that very time Thou madest, nor could times pass by before Thou madest times.

Evil

Another question that the doctrine of creation poses is that of evil. This issue was especially significant for Augustine because the doctrine of evil which the Manichees proposed was wholly unacceptable to him. They affirmed an absolute dualism in which two equally eternal principles—Light and Darkness—struggled with each other. Augustine rejected this theory because it contradicted Christian monotheism, as well as because it was irrational. In fact, Manichean dualism attributes evils to the principle of good—such as that of being subject to the attacks of evil—and good to the principle of evil—such as that of existing and being powerful. Any absolute dualism—that is to say, any dualism that takes as its starting point the existence of two eternally antagonistic principles, will necessarily fall into absurdity. Therefore, it is necessary to affirm that all that exists comes from God.

All life both great and small, all power great and small, all safety great and small, all memory great and small, all virtue great and small, all intellect great and small, all tranquility great and small, all plenty great and small, all sensation great and small, all light great and small, all suavity great and small, all measure great and small, all beauty great and small, all peace great and small, and whatever other like things may occur, especially such as are found throughout all things, whether spiritual or corporeal, every measure, every form, every order both great and small, are from the Lord God.

What then can be said of evil? Evil is not a nature; it is not "something", it is not a creature. Evil is only a negation of good.


50 De nat. boni 13 (NPNF, First Series, 4:358).
All that exists is good, for there is a certain "measure, beauty and order"—*modus, species et ordo*—in everything. Those things which are "better" are such only because they enjoy these attributes to a greater degree. Those which we call "worse" are such only because they do not enjoy the same degree of goodness. But they are all truly good, for all have been created by God and all have at least the good of existence. A monkey, for instance, is not "beautiful," relatively speaking, for we compare its beauty to that of other beings who have a greater degree of it. But in the exact and correct sense, a monkey is indeed beautiful, even if it be only with that beauty which is proper to its own kind of creature. Every nature, by the mere fact of being a nature, is good.

In spite of this, evil is not a fiction of the intellect, but is an undeniable and inescapable reality. Evil is not a nature, but is rather the corruption of nature. As a thing, as a substance, evil does not exist; but it does exist as a lack of goodness. At this point, Augustine followed the lead of Neoplatonism, for which evil consisted not in another reality besides the One, but simply in withdrawing from the One.

**Free Will**

Whence does evil spring? It springs from the free will of certain creatures to whom God has given a rational nature. Among these creatures are the angels, some of whom have fallen and are now called demons. And among them is also the human creature, who has been given free will and has used it for evil.

Here again, Augustine felt compelled to refute the Manichees, who claimed that the good that there is in us will always act rightly, while the evil will always do evil. Augustine, on the other hand, claimed that there is no such thing as a naturally evil being. All being is created by God and is good. Evil is a corruption of the good, and its origin must be attributed to a being that is good in itself, but that is capable of doing evil. Only thus can one claim that God is the creator of all things, but is not the author of evil. Therefore, Augustine taught that God gave free will to Adam and to the angels. This free will is good, for it comes from God and is one of the characteristics of a truly rational being. But it is an "intermediate" good, for it can decide to do what is good as well as that which is evil. However, let it be stated clearly, free will is what makes us truly human and is in no way evil in itself, but is rather a good gift of God which is capable of turning to evil.

If man is good, and if he would not be able to act rightly except by willing to do so, he ought to have free will because without it he would not be able to act rightly. Because he also sins through having free will, we are not to believe that God gave it to him for that purpose. It is, therefore, a sufficient reason why he ought to have been given it, that without it man could not live aright.

What then makes the will move away from the good? No matter how irrational this may seem, there is only one possible answer: the will itself. The nature of the will is such that one has to say that it itself, and not some extraneous agent or factor, originates its own decisions.

But what cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing? Either it is a will, in which case we have not got beyond the root of evil will. Or it is not a will, and in that case there is no sin in it. Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin. Now sin is rightly imputed only to that which sins, nor is it rightly imputed unless it sins voluntarily.

**Original Sin and Fallen Human Nature**

One must point out, however, that what has been said about the will is strictly true only before the fall, for that occurrence in such a way affected the totality of Adam's descent that it is no longer possible to speak of a total freedom of the will. It is...
important to note this point because many interpreters of Augustine—even as early as the fourth century—have claimed that he contradicted himself by asserting free will when combating the Manichees, and denying it when opposing the Pelagians.79

Augustine accepted and developed the understanding of original sin as an inheritance that Adam bequeathed to his descendants. Such an interpretation of the text which claims that "in Adam all die" is certainly not the only one that has appeared in the history of Christian thought; but it is the one that, from Tertullian on,79 became more and more common in Latin theology. This was due in a large measure to Augustine's support of it.

Before the fall, Adam enjoyed several gifts, among which was that free will we have described which gave him the power not to sin (poste non peccare) as well as the power to sin (poste peccare). Adam did not have the complete gift of perseverance, that is, of being unable to sin (non poste peccare), but he did have the gift of being able to persevere in the good, the power not to sin.80

But the fall came to change matters. Adam's sin was his pride and unbelief, which led him to make an evil use of the good tree that God had planted in the garden.81 As a consequence of that sin Adam lost the possibility of living forever, his special knowledge, and his power not to sin. After the fall, he was still free, but he had lost the gift of grace which enabled him not to sin and was free only to sin. By reason of the inheritance of Adam, all human beings are by nature in the same situation as their first forefather. Following a tradition that begins with Tertullian, Augustine affirms that

79 It would be impossible to give here even a brief summary of the various ways in which the relationship between free will and predestination in Augustine's theology has been interpreted. In the following books and articles, however, the main lines of interpretation may be found: E. Yrunen, "Augustinus et de vieil vie," Studia, 113 (1939), 530-55; G. Capone-Braga, La concesione agostiniana de libbrit (Pavia: A. Draghi, 1931) G. Vranken, Der göttliche Konkurs zum freien Willen und der Menschen beim hl. Augustinus (Rome: Herder, 1942); J. Ball, "Libre arbitre et liberté dans S. Augustin," AnnTh, 10 (1945), 451-52; E. Baillet, "La liberté agostinienne et la grâce," MAR, 100 (1950), 50-54; M. Hufnag, "Libre arbitre, liberté et pêché chez saint Augustin," RTHAM, 35 (1956), 187-281.

80 See Vol. I of this History, p. 185.
81 De corr. et grat. 12.
82 De Gen. ad litteram 11.15; De natura hominis 35.

83 Exch. 35.
84 De Gen. ad litteram 10.25.
86 Exch. 24-25. Ignorance and concupiscence are the common lot of fallen humans and demons, but death does not rule over the latter.
87 De gen. Christi et pec. orig. 2.34. That in this passage Augustine does not take into account the physiological differences between men and women is an indication of the degree to which he considers the male normative.
88 De dis. quaest. ad Simpl. 1. 1. 10.
In summary, fallen human nature is free only to sin. “Thus, we always enjoy a free will; but this will is not always good.” This does not mean that freedom has lost its meaning, as though we were only able to choose a particular sinful alternative. On the contrary, we have true freedom to choose between several alternatives, although, given our condition as sinners subject to concupiscence, and as members of this “mass of damnation,” all the alternatives that are really open to us are sin. The option not to sin does not exist. This is what is meant by saying that fallen human nature has freedom to sin (posse peccare) but does not have freedom not to sin (nonsposse non peccare).

Grace and Predestination

If all that we can do is sinful, how are we to take the step that will lead us from our present state to that of the redeemed, especially if one takes into account the fact that such a step cannot be called sin? The answer is inescapable: by ourselves, we cannot take such a step. This was the focal point of Augustine’s polemic against the Pelagians, as well as of his doctrines on grace and predestination.90

Augustine’s starting point on this matter is that we can do no true good without the help of grace. Adam could do good because he had that help; but he lost it through his sin and thus became a subject of evil. All his descendants come into the world under the bondage of sin and are therefore incapable of doing true good. Our will is twisted in such a way that it is free only to sin. Therefore, in order to enable us to take the step that will lead us from our present state to that of salvation it is necessary that grace act in us. Only through that grace is conversion possible. Without it, we cannot and will not approach God. Furthermore, it is grace that, after conversion, continues enabling the Christian to do good works.

90 De gratia et libero arbitrio, 15.
91 Bibliographical material on this subject is abundant. Two works, however, merit special mention: G. Nygren, Das Prädikationsproblem in der Theologie Augustins (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), and J. Chêne, Théologie de saint Augustin: Grâce et prédetermination (Le Puy: Massy, 1962).
omnipotence, but rather from soteriological and existential considerations, in attempting to affirm that human salvation is the unmerited result of God’s love.

According to Augustine, the predestination of some to salvation is an undeniable fact, although it is at the same time an inescapable mystery. This predestination is such that the number of the elect is fixed; no matter how much the church grows, the number of those who are to enter the kingdom will always remain the same.99 On the other hand, God does not predestine any to sin or to damnation. The elect are pulled out of this “mass of damnation” which is humanity through a sovereign act of God, who has predestined them for salvation. Those who are condemned simply continue existing within this “mass” not because God had decreed that it will be so, but by reason of their own sins. Thus, the doctrine of Augustine is not an attempt to conciliate the divine omnipotence with human freedom, but an attempt to testify to the absolute primacy of God in human salvation.

The Augustinian system of grace and predestination has led to long controversies—of which the first began during Augustine’s lifetime, as will be seen in the following chapter. It is not possible to discuss here each of these controversies, which will be discussed in their proper places within this History. One must point out, however, that the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century thought that the bishop of Hippo was a forerunner of their doctrine. In this they were partly right and partly wrong. There is no doubt that Augustine’s emphasis on the priority of divine action in human salvation, and a great deal of his doctrine of predestination, agree with the theology of the Reformers. It is also true that Augustine stressed the priority of faith over works.98 On the other hand, however, Augustine differed from the Reformers inasmuch as he did believe that merit had an important and necessary place in salvation. Although grace is not given according to merits, it does operate in us in such a way that we are enabled to perform good works whose merits will lead us to our final salvation.97

99 Sermon 111, 251; De corrup. et grat. 13.
98 De grat. et lib. arb. 7.
97 Ibid., 2.

The Theology of Augustine

Finally, one must point out that Augustine understood grace as a divine power or fluid that is infused into us. For him, grace is no longer an attitude on God’s part, but rather the manner in which God acts in us. This understanding of grace would have two important consequences in the development of medieval theology. First the question is posed of the relationship between grace and the Holy Spirit, for grace conceived as a divine power in us seems to take over some of the functions that were traditionally ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Second, and partly as an attempt to solve some of the problems posed by Augustine’s doctrine of grace and predestination, a system of grace was developed in which various types of grace were distinguished and classified, thus introducing a rigidity that was not present in Augustine’s theology.

The Church

Divine grace comes to each of us through Jesus Christ, in the communion of the church, through the sacraments. Augustine’s influence in the development of Western Christology has already been discussed in the first volume of this History.99 Therefore, we must now turn to his ecclesiology, and then to his doctrine regarding sacraments.

We have already pointed out that Augustine’s ecclesiology90 took shape over against the Donatist schism. Slightly earlier, Bishop Optatus of Milevis had written Seven Books on the Donatist Schism, where he not only attacked the history and practices of Donatists, but also devoted a large section of his second book to expounding the nature of the true Catholic Church. To this end, Optatus developed two main arguments that showed that the true church was that which the Donatists rejected: the argument of the diffusion of the church throughout all the earth,100 and that of the apostolic succession, which the Bishop of Rome has received from St. Peter, “the head of all apостles.”
Basically, Augustine followed Optatus and, to a certain extent, Cyprian. He saw the catholicity of the church as consisting fundamentally in its presence throughout all the earth. Unity is the bond of love which ties all those who belong to this single body of Christ; where there is no love, there is no unity; but it is also true that where there is no unity there is no love and therefore no church. The apostolicity of the church is based on the apostolic succession of bishops, epitomized in Rome, where it is possible to point to an uninterrupted succession beginning with Peter, "a type of the entire church." As to holiness, Augustine agrees with Cyprian that it is impossible in this life to separate the wheat from the tares. The church is holy, not because all its members lead a life free of sin, but because it will be perfected in holiness at the end of time. Meanwhile, it is a "mixed body" in which tares grow amidst the good grain, so that not even the elect are totally free of sin.

This leads us to the distinction between the church visible and the church invisible. Some interpreters of Augustine have stressed this distinction to such a point that they lose sight of the importance that he gave to the institutional, hierarchical, and visible church. When Augustine speaks of the church he usually refers to this earthly institution or mixed body. God gathers in this body those who are to be saved. Through its sacraments, the elect are nourished in the faith. But in spite of all this it is still true that this earthly church does not coincide exactly with the body of the elect—with the heavenly church of the consummation. There is still chaff in it, and there are still a number of the elect who have not been led to it. Hence the idea of an "invisible church," which helps to understand Augustinian ecclesiology, but which must not be exaggerated if one is properly to understand that ecclesiology.

108 De uniate ecc. 5. (A work of doubtful authorship, although certainly Augustinian in its theology.)
109 Ibid., 4.
110 Ep. 53. 1.
111 Sermo 88. 15.
112 The importance of the visible, prieatly organization for Augustine is clearly shown by D. Zähringer, Das kirchliche Priestertum nach dem heisigen Augustinus (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1931).

The Theology of Augustine

The Sacraments

Augustine's sacramental theory is characterized by the fluidity that appeared in earlier theologians, and that would not disappear before the classifications and distinctions of the scholastics. Augustine did not hesitate to apply the title of "sacrament" to a variety of rites and practices, although he was inclined to use that term, in a more precise sense, to refer specifically to baptism and the eucharist. It is these two sacraments which will be discussed here, although under this heading several other practices of the church could have been included—some that later received the official title of "sacrament" and some that never did.

Augustine was led to discuss baptism within the double context of Donatism and Pelagianism. The Pelagians believed that infants had no need of baptism, for they had no sin. However, they could be baptized as a "help" to overcome the works of the flesh. The Donatists claimed that only within their church was baptism valid, and based this claim on the authority of Cyprian.

Once again at this point Augustine could draw from Optatus, who in his Seven Books on the Donatist Schism had posed the question of the validity of baptism outside the communion of the church, as well as the vital question of the validity of that sacrament when administered by an unworthy person. As to the last question, Optatus affirmed that the sacrament has validity in itself, in spite of the possible unworthiness of the person offering it. In baptism there is the intervention of the Divine Trinity, of the recipient, and of the person administering it. The first two are necessary, but the validity of the rite cannot be said to depend on the third, "for it is God that washes and not man." But on the other hand, the validity of the sacrament does depend on the community in which it takes place, for when it is offered among the schismatics it works not for salvation, but for
condemnation. In any case, the repetition of baptism would deny the uniqueness of the faith, of Christ, and of God.

Augustine agreed with Optatus regarding the validity of the sacrament even in spite of the moral defects of the person administering it. This was necessary to refute the argument of the Donatists, who claimed that, since only they had remained steadfast in persecution, only they had the true sacraments. But, because of his irenic spirit and of his pastoral interest in attracting rather than overwhelming the Donatists, Augustine was ready to depart from Optatus in granting a certain validity to sacraments celebrated among the schismatics. The schismatics do have the sacrament, but do not benefit from it in justice and love. This is why heretics and schismatics returning to the church are not to be rebaptized, but only to submit to the imposition of hands so that they may receive the bond of unity which they did not have because of the irregular nature of their baptism. Thus, Augustine distinguished between the validity and the regularity of the sacrament.

Augustine’s eucharistic doctrine has been variously interpreted. These various interpretations are often due to attempts to read Augustine through the lens of later definitions and controversies, but some are also due to the various manners in which Augustine referred to the presence of Christ in the eucharist. There is no doubt that there is a certain ambiguity in his thought at this point. But this ambiguity cannot be solved by an easy attempt at conciliation on the basis of a particular modern understanding of the eucharist. One must rather say that two opposed tendencies are struggling in Augustine: the

111 Ibid., 5. 3.
112 Ibid.: “If you give another baptism, you give another faith; if you give another faith, you give another Christ; if you give another Christ, you give another God.”
113 Sermo 59.13.

The Theology of Augustine

eucharistic realism that was becoming more and more general, and the Neoplatonic spiritualism that earlier had led Origen and others to interpret the eucharist in spiritualistic terms. Another possibility would be to say that Augustine believes that the person who partakes of communion really receives the body and the blood of Christ, not in the sense of physically eating them, but rather in the sense that, by eating the elements of bread and wine, one becomes a partaker of the body and blood of Christ.

The Meaning of History

The church that nurtures its believers through the sacraments is not yet in heaven, but struggles and lives as a pilgrim within historical events. The fall of Rome in A.D. 410, which shook the Mediterranean world, led Augustine to think and write on the meaning of history. This is the purpose of his work The City of God, whose subtitle is “Against the Pagans.” Here Augustine distinguishes between two “cities” or societies, each led by a different impulse.

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, “Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.” In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.”

Quite obviously, these loves, and the two cities that spring from them, are incompatible. And yet, in the period that goes from the initial fall to the final consummation of history, the