

CHAPTER 6

THE LIFE AND WORK OF AUGUSTINE

Aurelius Augustine (354-430) spans the fourth and fifth centuries, and was in some ways the greatest father of the ancient church. After his death the church soon passed into its medieval phase. Because of his importance to church history (even to Western history in general), it is appropriate that we devote an entire chapter to him.

Importance of Augustine

able leader of church

Prolific: more writing than any other except Origen and Jerome

greatest thinker in early church: “sage of the ages” –Bruce Shelley

tremendous conversion experience; documented

three important controversies:

- Manichean
- Donatist
- Pelagian

*big influence on subsequent church history (Roman Catholic theology and Protestant theology)

- 1) interpretation method (allegory)
- 2) politics (two spheres)
- 3) eschatology (classic amillennialism)
- 4) Augustinianism leads to Reformation (Calvinism = renewed Augustinianism)

marks transition from classical to medieval period (ca. 500-1450)

Early life

primary source: his *Confessions*; also friends' biographies of him

Aurelius Augustinus was born in Tagaste, north Africa (Nov. 13, 354); father was a minor official and a pagan (converted shortly before his death in 370); his mother Monica a Christian; made him a catechumen; he had a brother and a sister

12 years old, sent to school in Tagaste, then to Madaura; studied law (desire of his father)

engaged in boyhood pranks and sins; fell into lust and immorality

18 years old, went to Carthage to school, switched to literature and rhetoric; great ability, but did not master Greek

became a teacher; took a concubine, had a son (Adeodatus, “Gift of God”); lived with concubine 13 years

19 years old, read Cicero’s (lost) *Hortensius*, became a lover of philosophy; rejected Bible as too simplistic; for nine years an aspirant of Manichaeans; had serious doubts about God, etc., involving astronomical statements; bishop Faustus could not answer them

26 years old, wrote work on aesthetics, *The Beautiful and the Fitting* (work now lost)

29 years old, sailed to Rome for money and fame in law and teaching; left mother behind—she followed later; during all this time, mother Monica praying for him, dismayed by his unbelief; a bishop friend told her, “A son of so many prayers cannot be lost.”

30 years old, moved to Milan to be professor of rhetoric; heard and admired Ambrose; followed neo-Platonists; mother came, arranged suitable marriage, to take place in one or two years; concubine sent home, became a nun in Africa; instead, Augustine took another concubine; but mentally was accepting Christianity (allegorism explained difficulties) at this time he said, “God give me chastity, but not yet”

Conversion (summer of 386)

32 years old, heard story of St. Anthony and monks; in garden, under fig tree, heard child playing, *Tolle Lege*: “*Take up and read, take up and read.*” Opened nearby Bible to Romans 13:13-14: “Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

strong, dramatic, tearful conversion; recognized conversion as by grace alone; retired and philosophized about a year; baptized by Ambrose in Milan with son, Adeodatus who died next year at age 18.

returned to hometown in Africa; Monica died in Ostia, on the way; happy her son was saved; arrived home, sold father’s estate, organized a small monastery (first one in north Africa—beginning of Augustinian order, oldest extant order in Roman Catholic church); desired to contemplate, conquer desires of flesh, and pursue studies

Augustine as bishop

Hippo, port city west of Carthage; large Donatist and Manichean churches there, small Catholic church; Augustine went there to answer Manicheans; elderly bishop there needed helper, asked Augustine; ordained a presbyter (over his protest); made auxiliary bishop

42 years old (396), became bishop of Hippo; remained the bishop for 34 years, until his death

promoted monasticism in north Africa; training school for future bishops; excellent preaching and administration; against feasts, etc., supported clerical asceticism

Augustine’s *Confessions*

wrote them when about 43-45 years old; they go up to the death of his mother; = the greatest Christian autobiography

Manichean controversy

debated Mani, bishop in Hippo; defeated him (Donatists thrilled):

God's sovereignty explains reality better than dualism can

- Darkness/Evil not equal to God and His goodness; rather evil is the absence of divine goodness
- A divine judgment will deal with evil
- Until the judgment, God uses evil and brokenness to drive humans to His mercy (Rom 3.5,6)

sin is a necessary possibility for the free choice of man

wrote against Manicheanism (e.g., *Confessions*)

Donatist controversy

Donatist schism continued from 313 AD
not great doctrinal difference, but rather one of ecclesiastical administration that resulted in two churches with two sets of officers

Donatists had not surrendered the Scriptures to the Roman persecutors and they rejected Felix since he was accused as a traitor (unforgivable); they thought his ordination invalid, and his sacraments invalid (need a pure church for effectual sacraments); Augustine said sacraments are valid if the form is valid, the character of the administrator is not the issue: it's the office, not the officer. But arguing did not lead to reconciliation



Augustine arguing with Donatists

hostilities broke out; chief baker not willing to sell to Catholics; Catholics accused Donatist deacons with avarice; Donatist “circumciliators” carried clubs (called “Israels”) to keep Donatists from attending Catholic services

The Donatist's scattered use of force set the stage for Augustine's “Just War Theory” that must have:

1. Valid cause (beneficial moral cause vs. land or power grab by tyrants)
2. Valid authority (vested and vetted leader vs. tyrants or vigilantism)
3. Valid motive that shapes method: love for one's neighbor (reduced death & property damage)

Contrary to the ideal of an absolutely pure church on earth, Augustine promoted the doctrine of “the visible and invisible church” (cf. WCF 25:1,2); Augustine decided persuasion by argument useless and appealed for intervention by the government since he agreed with the Nicene Creed that there was only one church; he used Luke 14:23, “compel them to come in,” said use of force was appropriate; later the Inquisition would follow this precedent based on this text!

408, court case decided which side was true—Augustine won; all Donatist churches turned over to Catholics; remnant of North African Donatists destroyed by Muslims in 600s

LESSONS from this early schism

1. Importance of forgiveness and the longevity of unresolved bitterness
2. The mixed nature of the church on earth and the value of the sacraments
3. Importance of dialogue and the unity of believers
4. Danger of extremes
5. Inefficacy of coercion in spiritual matters
6. Corruption of the idea of “one true church” leading to isolation or coercion; Jesus came for the spiritually sick, not for those who think themselves well
7. Purity of the church ultimately is dependent upon the Chief Shepherd (Rev 21:9)

Augustine’s *City of God*

1. Political situation

barbarian invasions strong after Theodosius died in 395—since 375 they were being squeezed by the invasion of the Huns out of Mongolia; Visigoths under Alaric sacked Rome for three days in 410 (city had been free for 700 years)

2. Pagan reaction

pagans said Rome forsaken by the gods because it had become Christian
Christians inside Rome were disillusioned that their piety did win God’s protection for the city

3. Augustine’s answer

took 14 years to write book (410-424), many interruptions

gods did not help Rome ever, or her enemies, nor did the ancient gods deliver the great city of Troy; rather, Rome punished by God for its wickedness (churches spared by Goths); besides, Rome was part of the city of man

Both cities rooted in love, either for self or for God. The City of Man is mixed with evil, though it does good; City of God is most important.
Kingdom passages in Scripture spiritualized to refer to the church, invisible and visible

Jerome saw the fall of Rome as the end of the world, while Augustine saw it as a clean slate

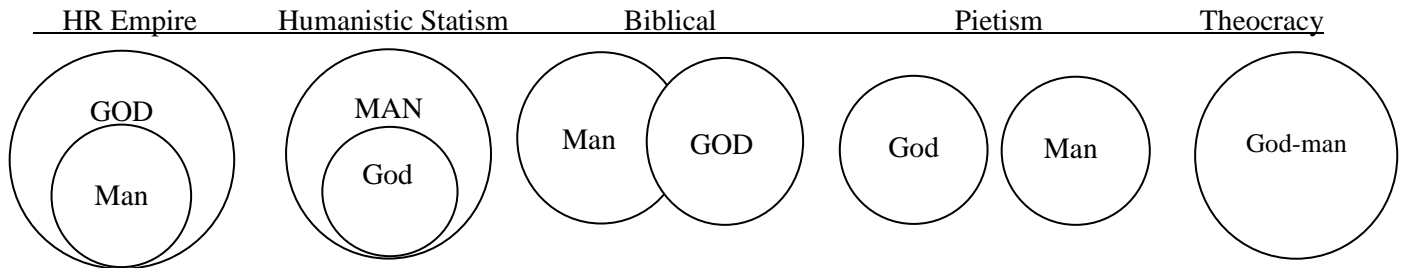
4. Effects of the book

first rigorous Christian philosophy of history (early “historiography”)

comfort during barbarian take-over

Established idea of “two overlapping spheres” responsible to God

-CITIES-



--later used to support papal supremacy over earthly affairs
--strong force for amillennialism

Augustine and Jerome

There was an extensive correspondence between these two fathers. At first they fought. In this stage Augustine sent five letters to the older Jerome:

- 1) when Augustine in early 30's, he sent famous Jerome in Bethlehem a letter, never arrived or answered
- 2) next letter disagreed with Jerome's interpretation of Galatians 2:11-14; carrier showed Augustine's letter to friends in Rome; anti-Jerome clergy gleeful; Jerome's friends told him; no answer
- 3) Augustine sent friendly letter; sarcastic answer
- 4) Augustine sent friendly letter, but disagreed on a translation in Jonah; another sarcastic answer
- 5) Augustine sent explanatory letter; bitter answer

Conclusion: eventually, correspondence ironed out animosity; mutual admiration; Jerome supported Augustine in his controversy with Pelagius

Pelagian controversy

Earlier challenges to biblical truth had centered on the tri-unity of God and on the deity of Christ and the Spirit. This controversy (411-431) addressed human nature and Christ's atonement.

1. Promoters of Pelagianism

a. Pelagius (fl. 390-420)

British monk named Morgan ("of the sea"—Gk. *pelagios*); orderly and outwardly pious

His concerns:

Troubled by Augustine's published prayer, "O God, Grant what you command, and command what you will."

Believed morality was impossible without total free will to choose good or evil (if Augustine is correct that we are subject to our natures, we cannot choose against nature). Pelagius said, why try to be good if it does me no good before God?

Grace must be based on merit, otherwise God would be involved in blessing unrighteous persons

Beliefs of Pelagius:

Big Concern: How can man be accountable to God if he is not able in himself to obey God's demands? ("Ought" implies "Can")

Adam was mortal and bound to die before his fall into sin; his rebellion merely brought the presence and model of sin into the world = "environmental" cause alone

all men born in same condition as Adam—able to be perfect or to sin

no original sin, only random, sinful acts; therefore, human nature is good, or at least neutral

cause of sin: bad example in sinful parents

limbo for non-baptized infants that die

perfect people existed before Christ, and we also can be perfect

people are able to overcome their sin—otherwise, sin is excuseable

no special divine grace is necessary for conversion and holiness, although he felt baptism put sin and guilt behind oneself

therefore, had legalistic standards of holiness and sanctification leading toward perfection: the law of God and example of Christ help us to live without sin as opposed to "salvation by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8,9). This led to a stoic conception of ascetic self-control as opposed to Augustine's "being apprehended by the grace of Christ" (Phil. 3:13).

"Give me the grace [O, Lord], to do as you command, and command me to do what you will. O, holy God... when your commands are obeyed it is from you we receive the power to obey." –cited in Piper's, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, p. 56.

*Pelagian Summary: Man has the 1) possibility, 2) will, and 3) power to live a sinless life

Augustine's response:

- *Pelagius focused on outward moralism instead of obedience from the heart
- Man is powerless to control his own lusts because
 - Man has no power to change his affections, and

- total depravity is more than our evil nature—it is our deadness to God’s beauty and the joy He brings (Rom 5:5)
- Man needs “sovereign joy” (a.k.a. “grace”) to supplant our old desires and affections. Then, and only then, is there freedom of the will.

ORTHODOX POSITION

Original Sin is scriptural as opposed to neutral entrance into the world

Psa 51:5 “conceived in sin”

Rom 5:12 death came into the world by the sin of one man

Rom 6:16 slave of either sin or righteousness (not of both)

Accountability does not demand ability (Rom 1:20,21; 9:13ff.);

–ignorance of the law is no excuse

Absolute free will is impossible: cannot turn off our sin nature to make objective decisions

*Righteousness is Christ’s, not our own

Gal 2:21, Christ died for nothing if we can be saved by the law

Keeping the letter of the law does not make us or the Pharisees innocent

Pelagianism underestimates sin (Hab 1:13)

- Sin’s gravity before God
- Sin’s power to enslave the will (Rom 5)

Divine initiative in the human heart is necessary before we choose God and can love Him

Only believers have freedom to sin or not to sin: *posse peccari, posse non peccari*

b. Celestius (fl. 400-430), the Pelagian polemicist

Roman lawyer; converted to monasticism and Pelagianism by Pelagius in Rome; more able and consistent debater for Pelagianism than Pelagius was; held to salvation by keeping the law

c. Julian of Eclanum (ca. 380-455)

bishop of Eclanum in Italy (near Rome); gifted scholar in Latin, Greek, logic, theology; most systematic proponent of Pelagianism

refused to give up views when required to do so by pope Zosimus in 418; deposed and banished; visited and received by Theodore of Mopsuestia and by Nestorius in Constantinople; continued to defend views from exile in Sicily (was a schoolmaster there)

2. Beginning of the controversy

409, Pelagius moved from Britain to Rome; wrote short commentary on epistles of Paul; tried to improve corrupt morals in Rome; converted Celestius to his cause

410, Visigoth Alaric sacked Rome; chaos and poverty

411, Pelagius and Celestius escaped to north Africa; passed through Hippo to meet Augustine (he not there), left friendly letters for him; Pelagius moved east, to Palestine; Celestius remained, sought ordination as a presbyter in Carthage; Celestius gained friends and adherents, but also aroused suspicions and enemies by his novel doctrines; synod in Carthage rejected his application and excluded him from communion of the church; Augustine not yet involved

412, 414, Augustine wrote treatises against Pelagianism, because spreading in Africa; Donatist struggle subsiding by this time

CONCLUSION

Augustine's personal experience with sin and grace helped him assess the danger of moralism: free will cannot conquer internal lusts

Augustine's garden experience in Milan informed him that the joy and grace of God are superior to the futile efforts of one's will

3. Controversy in Palestine

*eastern church not so alert to controversies in anthropology and soteriology (more concerned with Christology); eastern church followed an undefined synergism of divine and human will in conversion (Gk. *sun ergon*, "work together"); fit with both Pelagian and Augustinian ideas; eastern church did not recognize Augustine as anyone special.

Orthodox Christianity, however, while recognizing a divine-human cooperation in the believer's sanctification (Rom: 13), absolutely denies synergy in regeneration, but rather affirms divine monergism.

but two western leaders were in Palestine at the time, Jerome and Orosius (a student of Jerome's from Spain)

during this time eastern church was divided over Origen; pro-Origen faction tended to be pro-Pelagius as well, because of similarity of expression concerning freedom of the will

414-415, controversy broke out between Pelagius and Jerome; series of written rebuttals

415, bishop John of Jerusalem called synod to examine Pelagius

- Orosius opposed Pelagius, referred to Augustine, but John admired Origen over Augustine
- Pelagius had another advantage: John spoke Greek, Orosius spoke Latin, but Pelagius spoke both languages
- Pelagius temporarily approved; case to be taken to Rome to pope Innocent

Dec., 415, another synod in Palestine; Pelagius and Celestius approved; their views not clearly represented

416, Pelagian mob broke into Jerome's monastery in Bethlehem and burned it; beat up many monks; bishop John never disciplined mob leaders

4. Controversy in Rome

416, two African synods met, condemned Pelagius, sent their conclusions to pope Innocent; Augustine and four other bishops sent a private letter to Innocent, asking him to condemn Pelagianism; Pelagius also sent a letter, but it did not arrive until after Innocent died in 417; Innocent understood the situation, agreed with condemnation of Pelagius and Celestius

*Augustine said in sermon: “Two synods and Rome agree; the matter is finished”; later misquoted by Romanists as follows: “Rome has spoken, the matter is finished”

417, Innocent died, replaced by pope Zosimus; Zosimus lacked theological strength; letter from Pelagius arrived; Celestius came to Rome and pleaded cause; Zosimus supported them, sent letter blasting Africans; Celestius left Rome vindicated

418, African synod at Carthage with more than two hundred bishops; strongly protested and disagreed with Zosimus, said he was deceived; Africans got emperor Honorius to issue edicts against Pelagians

Zosimus changed mind, sent letter everywhere anathematizing Pelagius and Celestius; ordered anyone refusing to cooperate to be deposed, banished, and property confiscated; eighteen Italian bishops refused to subscribe to Zosimus’s letter, and were deposed (some later recanted and were restored); most able and distinguished of these deposed bishops was Julian of Eclanum; Julian continued in writing, debated with Augustine (much of this material is preserved)

5. The controversy resolved

419, Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote for free-will (died, 428); but gradually Pelagianism lost face in the churches

429, patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople received Julian and Celestius; interceded to pope and emperor for them, in vain; Pelagius and Celestius passed, time and place of death unknown; Augustine died in 430; Julian ended his days as schoolmaster in Sicily, died ca. 450

431, *third ecumenical council (Ephesus); condemned Pelagianism, not so much for its doctrine as for its links to Nestorius

eastern church officially condemns Pelagianism, but never accepted Augustinianism; synergistic

Roman church rejected Pelagianism, but soon fell from Augustinianism; in 529 the Roman church officially became semi-Pelagian (no predestination) at the Synod of Orange in Gaul. This synod

- 1) condemned Pelagianism and reaffirmed original sin
- 2) condemned Augustine’s double predestination
- 3) gave prominence to good works in salvation (synergism and remnant of good in us)
- 4) taught the freedom of the will (like Erasmus), but not the possibility nor power of the will to come to God of its own; hence the sinners need of “prevenient grace” that still can be resisted (see Warfield on *Calvin and Augustine*).

Augustinianism slept in Romanism until reawakened during the Reformation followed by stirrings in RC Jansenist movement. B.B. Warfield describes the Reformation as the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church!

Augustine and the church of Rome

1. Immediate effect of Augustine's work on the Roman system

a. Respect for Rome

increased respect for bishop of Rome (but not having authority in north Africa over bishops)

famous sermon: "synods and Rome have spoken"

*but opposed Zosimus; rule passed in north Africa that no north African churchman could appeal to Rome

b. Donatist schism

Augustine taught

- 1) there is no church perfectly pure, contrary to the club-carrying Donatists; this gave impetus to only one organized church, enforced by the government
- 2) ministers are only channels of God's grace, despite their own personal character failures; this led to a sacerdotal view of grace dispensed by priestly officers

c. *City of God*

title taken to represent the church versus the city of man (civilization); concept of invisible-visible church;

essence: "love of temporal vs. love of God;" therefore the church is the only community working to build up the love of God in the world;

*misapplication of authority of God given to the church led to

- 1) idea of apostolic succession, and 2) the church dominating the state

2. Ultimate effect of his work

teachings of the doctrines of grace (=Augustinianism); became central to the Reformation

Augustine's other writings

"*On the Trinity*" = final form of western teaching on the trinity

- 1) full equality of Father, Son, and Spirit
- 2) Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and from the Son (as in revised Athanasian Creed)

- philosophical works.—(early in Christian life) Platonistic framework, important in philosophy

- exegetical works and sermons.—lengthy works on Genesis, Psalms, Galatians, 1 John, part of Romans; also practical subjects, ethics, etc.
- letters.—270 of them; discuss all important subjects of the time
- controversial works.—surveyed 28 heresies; especially Manichaeism, Donatism, Arianism (Gothic soldiers came to him with questions, had been influenced by Ulfilas), Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism
- *Retractions.—(427, three years before he died) quoted Pro. 10:19; took back statements he had written during his life; surveyed his writings as bishop

Last days of Augustine

1. Political developments

Boniface, governor of north Africa, went to Spain to meet conquering Vandals; married chief's daughter; Vandals were Arian

Roman empress (widow of Honorius) sent for Boniface to come to Rome (to be killed); Boniface called on Vandals to help him in north Africa; 40,000 with families came from Spain; eventually an army of 80,000 assembled

Vandals began taking north Africa; burned churches; conquered Morocco; Boniface told them to go back—too late; Vandals conquered all north Africa in three years

2. Augustine's death (Aug. 28, 430)

Vandals gathering around Carthage and Hippo

Augustine dying, had ten days' preparation; *had Psalm 51 written on the wall over his bed; spent time in prayer and repentance; died before Vandals entered on Aug. 431

many escaped from Hippo; Vandals destroyed churches and much of Augustine's practical work; preserved his library and house