



Fifth Century Theologians and Controversies, Pt 2

Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Pelagianism,
Iconoclasm.

Augustine of Hippo, 354-430

- He is considered the greatest theologian since the Apostle Paul. He shapes European Christianity for the next 1,000 years.
 - He had one of the brightest, deepest, and most powerful minds in the history of human thought. We know more about him than most others because of his autobiography, *Confessions*.
- He was born in Tagaste in 354, in the Roman province of Africa (Lybia).
 - The native peoples were called the Berbers, of which Augustine's mother Monica was descended. Augustine's father, Patrick, was a Roman official.
 - Patrick's Roman-Greco achievements and Monica's Christian faith competed for the mind of young Augustine.
 - Both parents wanted their son to be successful in the Roman system rather than the African culture. At the same time, both parents represented something entirely different—paganism and Christianity.



Augustine's Restless Heart

- Augustine's parents paid for his education in Madaura until they ran out of funds.
- Returning to Tagaste at sixteen, he indulged in pranks and mischief, including the famed thievery of the pears.
- A philanthropic neighbor did not wish for Augustine's raw potential to go to waste, and thus he offered to pay for Augustine's continued education in the great city of North Africa, Carthage.
- This city was far enough from the supervision of his parents to allow the teenager to indulge in all kinds of immorality.
- At the same time, he excelled in his studies, surpassing his fellow students.
- Soon after, he established a permanent relationship with a concubine who would later provide him with a son.
- Soon after, Augustine's father Patrick converted to Christianity and shortly thereafter died. Patrick's death freed Monica up to move to Carthage to be with her gifted son, but she found herself alienated from him due to his embracing of Manichaeism.
- Against his mother's wishes, Augustine moved to Rome, thus rejecting the African part of himself to chase after the Roman side.



Restless Heart

- He became a professor of rhetoric in Milan.
- During this time he broke with Manichaeism and instead embraced Neoplatonism since it more persuasively answered his doubts.
 - He traded the material conception of God in Manichaeism for the pure, infinite spirit of Neoplatonism.
- His problem with Christianity was the problem of evil, since he did not yet know a Christian answer. Manichaeism's answer was inadequate.
 - Neoplatonism offered him a paradigm for understanding evil not as a real thing in and of itself, but instead as an absence of good due to its distance from the Ineffable One. This answer to the problem of evil will stay with Augustine, even as a Christian.
 - Intellectually, Neoplatonism served as a bridge to Christianity for Augustine because it provided a cogent answer for how there can be one God that is purely spirit as the Christians insist.
- Augustine still saw little value in the Christian Scriptures (especially the OT) until he heard Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan (he used allegory).
 - With allegory, Augustine could overcome the parts of the Bible that were insensible to his Roman-Greco mindset, and now was able to wed the Roman culture of his father to the faith of his mother.
- At this point, his faith was only intellectual, for he had not yet converted. His soul was tormented. His mother had recently forced him to cruelly abandon his longtime concubine and set him up to marry another who would come of age in a few years time. In the meantime, he plunged into sexual license and even took another concubine, as he was brokenhearted over the first that he sent away. He knew his sins were great, but he had no power in himself to stop.
- His heart grew even more restless as he learned of Christian heroes who lived in a way that seemed unreachable for him.
 - It was here that the famous garden conversion occurred. After hearing children chant *tolle lege*, he grabbed Paul's epistle to the Romans (13:13-14), and read an excerpt that forever changed him. Augustine converted to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Augustine the Christian

- Augustine thought of the Christian life like a scholar that writes on academic and philosophical matters, offering a Christian viewpoint.
 - He did not yet understand the church or its mission, and thus he envisioned a life of Christian leisure.
 - Eventually, Augustine came to understand his error, and finally sought to join the church of Jesus Christ, the assembly so often mentioned to him by his mother.
 - In 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine after receiving several weeks of instruction. His mother happily died soon after.
- Augustine, afterward, returned to Africa. He settled back in his hometown of Tagaste and continued writing (Against Manichaeism and in favor of Christian Platonism).
- He also took up a monastic lifestyle and it was his goal to live the rest of his days this way, but his writings gained him fame.
 - After the death of his son, a public functionary of Hippo asked Augustine to come and show him how to set up a monastic community similar to the one Augustine set up in Tagaste.
- The elderly bishop of Hippo, Valerius called on Augustine to become a presbyter.
 - Augustine was perfectly suited to deal with Hippo's biggest challenges: Manichaeism and Donatism. Cultural background for Donatism.
- Augustine's role was so important that Valerius insisted he be made a coadjutor bishop of Hippo, even though it was forbidden to have more than one bishop per city. The African churches agreed to the exception. One year later, Valerius died, leaving Augustine as the bishop of Hippo, where he served for 46 years.
- Augustine died in 430 while Hippo was under siege from invading Vandals from Germany.

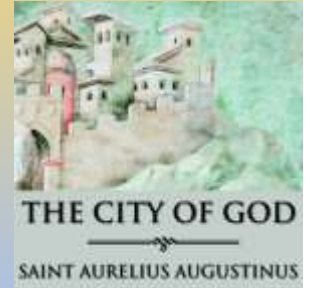
Augustine's the Bishop

- As bishop, Augustine was an exemplary pastor and trainer of pastors. People often came to Augustine to seek just civil decisions. Therefore, he was busy both pastorally and politically.
- As bishop, however, much of his writing was dedicated to controversy; three main controversies in particular: Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.
- In his disputes with the Donatists, he articulated a view of the sacraments that became normative in Western Christianity.
 - As long as a sacrament was carried out in accordance with Christ's command, the worthiness the one leading it was irrelevant. The sacraments had power in and of themselves, not the people administering them.
 - He also argued against their view that the true church is morally pure. Instead, the Bible presents wheat and tares mixed together. Augustine eventually came to support the Western Emperor using military force to compel the Donatists back into the true church.
 - Some Donatists tried to assassinate him, so the lawlessness had to be answered.
 - And, after exiling Donatist leaders and seizing their buildings, most returned to the Catholic church. Since it worked, Augustine said it was like a loving father compelling kids to virtue.



City of God

- We must not forget his battles with paganism as well.
- Augustine will face what other Christian theologians faced before him.
 - Whenever natural and political disasters would occur, pagans blamed it on the abandonment of the gods.
 - As Christianity spread, it became the number one target of the pagans.
 - With the sacking of Rome in 410, this argument gained a resurgence.
- Augustine will respond with his *magnum opus*, known to history as *The City of God*.
 - Here, Augustine works out an entire theory of history itself, where mankind chooses between two cities, the earthly and the heavenly.
 - Long before Rome and long before Christianity entered the scene, the earthly city frequently faced natural and political disaster.
 - Instead, people must set their hope on the heavenly city, where disaster is nonexistent.



Pelagianism

- Of all the controversies, however, the most important for church is the controversy with Pelagius.
 - Augustine left us many writings over this, and he articulated perhaps his most famous contribution to Christianity—a detailed argument for original sin.
- Pelagius was a monk from England, who around 400 began traveling the empire.
 - He eventually came in contact with the teachings of Augustine when in N. Africa. Soon after, he went to the Holy Land and came in contact with Jerome's teachings – which were in line with Augustine's.
- He did not like the teaching of these men and believed it led to moral laxity.
 - In his personal life, he was devout and followed Christian guidelines for moral living. In much of the "Christian empire" he saw too much moral laxity and thought the teachings of Augustine contributed to it.
- He was offended by a famous prayer of Augustine: "God, command what you will, but give what you command."
 - He believed it put too much dependence on God and allowed God to do whatever He wanted. Man apparently was not responsible, and could then do whatever he wants and say, "God willed it."



Pelagianism

- He said that God does not run our lives, or even dictate how we must act.
- He gives us the freedom to obey or rebel against His moral commands.
 - This in and of itself is not heresy, although it certainly does not take into account the Biblical doctrine of inability.
- The heresy came by Pelagius asserting that each person gets to decide whether they are going to be a sinner or righteous.
 - In other words, man could choose to live a sinless life for all of his life, and never truly need atonement from Christ. You alone are responsible for every sin you do because there must always be a choice.
- Pelagius thought this way because compared to other people, he lived a good life, never did the “hard sins.” Very few people live as good as he did. Augustine in his youth didn’t even come close.



Summary of the Controversy

- Augustine’s view was that we have a sinful nature, live in a sinful world, and there is a devil. These things influence our choices in life.
- Pelagius to contrast this wrote, *Of Nature* and *On Free Will*. He sees man having a neutral nature and a libertarian free will.
 - Yet, Pelagius did not confront Augustine or Jerome because he hated confrontation. It will be his student that gets this whole thing started.
- His student Celestius (a lawyer) was eloquent and analytic. He loved to tear apart theology.
 - He showed up in N. Africa looking for a fight on this and began proclaiming the teachings of his master Pelagius.
 - Pelagius did not care about theology or debate, but only practical living. Celestius was into theology and debate. As a result, the teacher gets tagged a heretic because of the student.
- People would have tolerated his position, but he attacked infant baptism.
 - Augustine said it washed the taint of original sin. Pelagius did not believe in original sin or even a sin nature. Thus, there is no need for infant baptism.
 - All of this leads to the Council of Carthage in 412, where Pelagius gets condemned because of Celestius. They lived discouraged lives in Palestine afterward.

Augustine vs. Pelagius

- Augustine's experience was, "I was a terrible and depraved sinner, but by the grace of the marvelous God I was transformed into a saint."
- Pelagius was different. As long as he could remember, he had served Christ.
 - So he did not know about the idea of transformations.
- Because Augustine understood sin through his experience, he held to divine monergism. However, being a product of his time, he also believed in sacramentalism. This is where he erred.
 - He correctly understood from Scripture that we carry original sin from Adam. Believing that baptism had sacramental power, it made sense to him that a baby's original sin can only be cleared by the infant baptism.
- Pelagius knew this was wrong. There is no infant baptism in the Bible. So he believed Augustine's whole premise of original sin was wrong too.
- In the end, this becomes a debate about infant baptism – something that is unbiblical – yet it brings up the major issues of anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology.

Augustine vs. Pelagius: Anthropology

- Each man's position begins with the nature of Adam and what took place in the Garden of Eden.
 - Pelagius argued that Adam was created innocent, with a free will, and mortal.
 - Augustine argued that Adam was created innocent, with a free will, but immortal. Death was not original to creation.
 - Would have Adam died if he never sinned? The Scriptures make it clear that through his sin, death entered (Romans 5).
 - What about Christ? Would have He died if not crucified for our sin? It is hard to answer.
- It will be the issue of the Fall that truly places these men in great contrast.

Augustine vs. Pelagius: The Fall

- Pelagius said the Fall only affected Adam, but no one else. Physical death would happen anyway. It only brought spiritual death, and only to Adam himself. This is why he needed physical death to be natural.
- Augustine said it brought both physical and spiritual death and affected everyone who followed.
 - Genesis 2-3 and Romans 5 completely favors Augustine.
- Pelagius believed that every individual is born into the world just like Adam was before the Fall. They are innocent, mortal, and have a free will.
- Augustine said that everyone born after Adam enter into life being like Adam was after the Fall. They are no longer innocent, have a corrupted will by sin instead of a free will, and are mortal.
- Pelagius insisted that men enter into sin by free choice, just like Adam, and only then experience spiritual death.
- Augustine said you do not have a true choice in sin because you were conceived in sin, and are children of wrath by nature. Sin begins at conception.
- The Scriptures support Augustine on this too. He was mainly wrong about baptism.
- The church favored Augustine, and Pelagianism was condemned.

Semi-Pelagianism

- After the victory over Pelagianism, there will arise a small group of writers in Southern France.
- They were dubbed Semi-Pelagians, but it is probably more accurate to call them Semi-Augustinians.
- Their leader was John Cassian, one of the leading figures of Western Monasticism.
- They agreed with Augustine that human race fell in Adam and that sinners could not become Christians or do good works apart from grace.
 - But they did believe that humans had the ability to believe on their own and cry out for salvation, to which God will respond.
 - They argued that conversion was a joint effort between divine and human will working together—a view known as synergism.
- The Semi-Pelagians argued that the test of Catholic doctrine is that it had been believed everywhere and always by everyone in the church.
 - Augustine's views of predestination and monergistic salvation did not pass that test since they were not articulated until Augustine himself.

Semi-Pelagianism

- Augustine wrote against the Semi-Pelagians, but with respect since he considered them brothers rather than heretics like real Pelagians.
- He countered them first by arguing that it was the view of Jesus and the Apostles, so that matters most.
- Second, he said it was present, but undeveloped, in Cyprian and Ambrose.
- Third, it was Pelagianism itself that forced the church to finally and clearly think out the relationship between grace and human will.
 - For the most part, Augustine's understanding won the West, whereas Semi-Pelagianism won the East.
- Because Augustine believed God's grace was only channeled through the true church via sacraments, those outside of the Catholic church could not be saved.
- That was the kind of Augustinianism that prevailed in the Middle Ages.
 - The Protestant Reformers will reject that part of Augustinianism, but embrace his general view of election and monergistic salvation.
 - It is also worth noting that over the course of time, the Western church became Semi-Pelagian. But there were Augustinians.