

The Rationale for Augustine's Development of the Doctrine of Predestination

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Abstract

Many Christians have misconceptions about predestination. It is a complex issue that is characterized by great theological disagreement. However, it cannot be disregarded given that someone's belief on the matter has great consequences. The African theologian Saint Augustine (AD 354–430) spoke extensively on predestination. Although the setting of the modern church is different from Augustine's day, this article argues that the issues that Augustine confronted were not unique to his day. A comparative analysis of the literature is conducted to discover and evaluate some historical ideas. As a result, the translated work of Augustine and recent scholarly publications on this topic were consulted. This was done to identify historical opinions to assess Augustine's influence

on the theological development of the doctrine of predestination. The present article endeavors to demonstrate the influence of Augustine's exegetical approach to the Epistle of Romans on his dogmatic pronouncements. Furthermore, it seeks to establish the polemical influence of the Pelagius controversy on Augustine's theological views. Through a critical analysis of Augustine's writings, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these two factors shaped Augustine's theological thought.

Conspectus

Keywords

Augustinianism, Pelagianism, predestination, sin, grace

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<https://www.sats.ac.za/conspectus/>

This article: <https://www.sats.ac.za/conspectus/rationale-augustine-doctrine-predestination>
<https://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2024.1.3>



Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

The doctrine of predestination has always been the subject of intense debate in the history of the church. This doctrine always sparks much debate in Christian circles; both among Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. This is not surprising since it focuses on the doctrine of theology proper. According to the doctrine of predestination, God alone determines a person's salvation. This has been the understanding of this doctrine throughout the history of the church, especially for Saint Augustine. Although the situation of the modern church is different from that of Augustine's day, it is argued that the questions that Augustine confronted are still relevant to the modern church (Hyde 2010, 237).

The Reformed movement is experiencing a renaissance all around the English-speaking world. In Australia, North America, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Zambia, and other nations it has made a comeback. The Reformed soteriological presupposition is discussed not only in the old Reformed denominations but also in the Baptist congregations. A new generation is now deeply ingrained with the idea of salvation by grace alone (Duncan 2009, 227). A close and sympathetic reading of Augustine is required to arrive at this contemporary interpretation. The current discourse surrounding Augustine's original historical material comprises an intellectual historical perspective, along with historical hypotheses that consider the specific books under consideration. The intellectual and historical perspectives provide a comprehensive approach to the analysis of Augustine's original historical content. Additionally, the historical hypotheses offer valuable insights into the context in which the specific books were produced. The amalgamation of these approaches provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Augustine's original historical material (Olson 2011, 9). The main aim of this paper is to provide

a historical analysis of the doctrine as it was formally established in its original form to provide some context for the debate of this doctrine in the modern church.

As such, the article concentrates on Augustine's rationale for the doctrine of predestination noting its early conceptualization and development. This requires the selection of some recent work in the study of historical and systematic theology. It is therefore fundamental to examine his notion of hamartiology to comprehend the contours of his theology. This article examines when the doctrine of predestination was formally established in Augustine's writings during the Pelagian controversy. This provides a clear understanding of both the doctrine's original shape and the motivations for its development.

This paper builds its argument according to the following structure: First Pelagius, a major opponent of Augustine, is discussed. This section outlines Pelagius's contribution to this debate by stating his view on grace and sin. Next, article looks at Saint Augustine's view of grace and sin because of the major role they played. After this, the article outlines the major development of the doctrine and its influence. Lastly, a concluding analysis is presented.

2. Pelagius's View of Sin and Grace

Upon his arrival in Rome in the early 380s, the British monk Pelagius (354–418), who possessed exceptional intellectual rectitude, cultural refinement, and high moral characteristics, swiftly established himself as a spiritual authority among both clergy and laity. His religious beliefs became a matter of public debate due to his teaching and writing (Hannah 2001, 211). In his responses to Augustine or Jerome, he attempted to

undermine their doctrines to such an extent that they were enemies. Arianism¹ and Manichaeism² were the two main targets of his apologetic writings. He was hostile towards those whose views differed from his. This enthusiasm for fighting heresy can be seen in both modern appraisals of his writing and writers of his day (Robert 2011, 63). Ferguson (2005, 280) argues that Pelagius had a solid foundation in the classics and the Early Church Fathers, but he was particularly well-versed in the Bible. Therefore, he discovered concepts like free will, moral behavior, carrying out the Father's plan, performing good deeds, modeling oneself after Jesus Christ, and a system of rewards and punishment.

According to Berkhof (1996, 233–234), Pelagius held to the dogma of individualism and isolation from Adam. Thus, according to Pelagius, Adam's fall did not harm anyone other than himself. As such, his fall did not permanently alter the nature of other humans. In this view, he did not accept the idea that humans inherit corruption from Adam's sin and that the first man's transgression condemned his descendants to the same misery. Pelagius's perspective on human nature begins with a particular viewpoint. His central thesis is that since God commands something, it must be possible for humans to accomplish it. This implies that humans

335–336 served as the main foundation for Arianism. Because God is one, the fundamental tenet of Arius's philosophy was that Jesus Christ could not have been the true God. To address the scriptural evidence for Christ's high status, Jesus was envisioned by Arius and his adherents as God's highest created being. Christ was therefore not entirely God, yet being fully human (Hannah 2001, 366).

² Manichaeism was established in the third century by the Iranian philosopher Mani, who considered himself to be the greatest and final prophet sent to perfect the Persian, Christian, and Buddhist faiths. Manichaeism is a type of dualistic Gnosticism that promotes knowledge as the means to redemption. Claiming to be defective, Manichee's asceticism entailed strict self-denial, including abstaining from physical pleasure. Augustine spent nine years as a Manichee before his conversion to Christianity (Letham 2019, 943).

have absolute free will, the ability to do good or harm. It also implies that humans have a moral character. According to Pelagius, the idea that God would ascribe Adam's guilt and corruption to his offspring is blasphemous. As an individual, not a representative of all of humanity, Adam's transgression only damaged him; it only served as a negative example for those who came after him. Humanity is still created in the same state that Adam was before the fall. They are not only guilt-free but also pollution-free. They lack the wicked tendencies and desires that inevitably lead to wrongdoing. They differ from Adam in that they have a bad example set before them (Culver 2005, 379).

Pelagius asserted that God's predestination of someone for redemption is in consideration of their anticipated final faith. He thus rejected the idea that people are unable to do good and please God. The implication is that only when someone chooses to join of their own free will would efficacious grace be infallibly effective. This perspective, therefore, points out that Pelagius was a moralist who rose to prominence as a moral reformer and spiritual guide. He rose to prominence while he was in Rome studying law, even though he was not a theologian or a mystic (Voak 2009, 136).

Pelagius (1991, 7) argued quite specifically that God's grace is extended to everyone equally and not just to a select few chosen individuals. He agrees with the generally held Christian beliefs that God has bestowed upon us the gift of free will and the ability to perform virtuous acts. The divine law has been revealed to us through the Old Testament, while Jesus's teachings are documented in the New Testament. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the integral components of Christianity, and through the sacrament of baptism, we attain forgiveness for our sins. Pelagius differentiated between ability, will, and action. He argued that only ability, which is God's creation,

is given by grace. Will and action can both be controlled by people. Therefore, he found grace in things outside of human beings; in the Law, in the teachings of Jesus Christ, in forgiveness, and in the life of Christ (Ferguson 2005, 280).

In conclusion, since God's help is not inevitably necessary or prevenient, Pelagius's soteriological presupposition is synergistic and it allows for a gradual slip into libertarianism since God's assistance is not inherently required or prevenient. After all, humans can exercise actions of righteousness that earn eternal life and so are able to save themselves. According to Pelagianism,³ God's foreknowledge of individuals who would merit redemption, even without gracious assistance, serves as the foundation for God's election.

3. Augustine's View of Sin and Grace

Any examination of Augustine, the most prominent Church Father,⁴ must cover two aspects of his soteriology. First is human depravity, and

³ Pelagianism is the teaching that claims salvation may be obtained via human effort alone and does not require divine intervention. The saying "God helps those who help themselves" expresses this belief in modern times (Hannah 2001, 372).

⁴ Augustine (354–430) was born in Thagaste, North Africa, in AD 354, to a Christian mother named Monica and a pagan father named Patricius. His mother, a devout woman, tried her best to instill in her son a strong Christian faith (Needham 2008, 40). However, as he grew older, he indulged his passions by having an illicit relationship with a concubine, following the example of many other students of the time. In AD 372, his son Adeodatus was born of this relationship (Cairns 1996, 139). Augustine's parents sent him to Carthage to finish his education and pursue his dream of teaching rhetoric. He started studying philosophy when he was in Carthage in his quest for the truth. His contact with the literature of Cicero, a famous Latin rhetorician and philosopher, caused him to reject his mother's beliefs, igniting his search for the truth (Cloud 2010, 25). In his *Confessions* (2004b, 41), Augustine mentions reading a philosophical work by Cicero that enraged him. He was encouraged by Cicero's exhortation, or at least sufficiently so that he was enlivened and stirred to love, seek, get, hold, and embrace philosophical wisdom. According to Muller (2017, 103), Cicero supported free will, contending that the independence of individuals made it impossible to divine the future because events that were known in advance would inevitably take place.

second is God's grace. According to his perspective, humanity's depravity weakened their capacity to rise to heaven on their own. No one could be redeemed for all eternity apart from God's grace. In soteriological discussions, total depravity and human potential were seen as opposite, yet grace is seen as the solution to depravity. The necessity of grace was highlighted by depravity. The only way for humankind to be saved was by God's grace (Anderson 2002, 31).

Paul was not a new character to Augustine's inquiry for the truth when he studied the Epistle to the Romans in the middle of the fourth century. He had the chance to carefully read Paul on multiple occasions throughout the previous ten years, both as a Manichaean and later, in Italy, as a Catholic catechumen and developing Neoplatonist (Olson 1999, 257). But after he returned to Africa, Augustine was forced to publicly debate a well-organized Manichaean sect whose dualistic teaching heavily drew on the New Testament, particularly Paul, in front of his church. He also had to debate their schismatic competitor, the Donatists. Arguments against Manichaean determinism primarily based on the philosophical justification of human goodness and free will would be of little use to such a listener and foe. Augustine had to exegetically present his case to defend Paul (Ticciati 2011, 422).

He directly refuted his prior claim that election is based on God's understanding of man's faith by referring to Romans 9. Previously, Augustine believed that man had the freedom to reject God's mercy and continue to sin or to respond to God's call with faith and thus repent. However, later he believed that such autonomy compromises God's omnipotence (Berkhof 1996, 109). Augustine had previously argued that the goodwill of man precedes God's call to faith, but later he believed that it is God who chooses man's goodwill. Faith is not something that man can earn, instead, it is a gift given by God. Similarly, God's righteousness

was once considered unrivaled by human justice due to his immense mercy and grace, but it is now beyond our understanding because he has chosen to forgive a select few of the debt of damnation that all humans supposedly owe. From this point forward, Augustine developed a Christian anthropology against the Manichees that turned more and more to the Bible, notably Pauline epistles, and less and less to philosophy (Armstrong 2003, 202).

Humanity is not composed of a great number of relatively independent individuals acting separately. Rather, it is composed of a huge number of individuals that are organic components of the general human nature that existed in Adam. The sin of human nature then, was the sin of inherent individualism (Berkhof 1953, 134). However, he was subject to God's due punishment because he decided to disobey God. As a result, he was doomed with all his offspring because they shared his sin while still fully contained in him. A significant number of his descendants who are freed by God's grace are likewise freed from the damnation (Augustine 2010, 209).

Augustinianism's⁵ anthropological presupposition asserts that sin was introduced into humans through a self-initiated, culpable deed, and every human is rightfully held accountable for it equally and similarly. But for this to happen, Adam and Eve's descendants need to somehow benefit from it. The basis of meritorious imputation, but not for gratuitous or unjustified imputation, is participation. The next generation was unable to partake in the original sin as an individual; therefore, they were forced to do so as a race. This presupposes that the race form existed before the individual form, that humans first existed as a race or species, and that they committed a single, common sin in this way of life. The unique and

⁵ Augustinianism is the teaching that says God kindly predestines individuals who are powerless over sin to turn to him and repent.

separate individuals are a component of a large whole (Shedd 2003, 444). Therefore, the whole group is punished, and if the just punishment of condemnation were meted out to everyone, it would unquestionably be meted out strictly. Therefore, those who are saved from it by grace are not referred to as "vessels of their own merits," but rather as "vessels of mercy" (Rom 9:23 ESV) (Augustine 2004b, 123).

The belief in biblical anthropology emphasizes the unity of Adam, who committed the first sin and fell from God, and his descendants. This unity is crucial for upholding God's justice in the face of inherited sin. It is believed that no individual can have moral standards that differ from those of their species (Barret 2013, 6). Humans are believed to be inherently sinful and unable to achieve holiness. This perspective maintains that one's actions are limited by their species, and it is impossible to surpass this constraint. Therefore, individuals are responsible for the original sin of their race and must identify with their collective identity to make amends. The story of Adam and his original sin serves as a foundation for this concept, representing the shared human nature expressed through our individual existence, character, and actions. This viewpoint, which began with Paul and was followed by Augustine, highlights the significance of recognizing our common origins and their impact on our individual lives (Curley 2015, 13).

Powers (2017, 330) and Anderson (2002:31) have argued quite specifically that Augustine's biblical anthropology and hamartiology demand a soteriology that is entirely based on divine grace, which differs in a major way from the hamartiological and soteriological presupposition of Pelagianism. Thus, Augustine's formulation of the notion of grace was influenced by his theology of the fall of man and its lasting ramifications. He based his theological assumption on the notion of predestination, which focuses on his anthropological and soteriological discoveries. Therefore,

biblical hamartiology emphasizes that original sin is a comprehensive degradation of human essence. However, Augustine states that his perspective on man's depravity weakened humanity's capacity to climb to the heavens by themselves. It would not be possible for anyone to be rescued for all time without God's grace. In soteriological discussions, total depravity and human capacity are directly opposed to one another, while grace is the inverse of depravity. Therefore, it should not be surprising to learn that Augustine's view of grace is greatly influenced by his view of the idea of original sin and that his view of grace offers a remedy to the issue that original sin caused (Pereira 2013, 100).

In the study of Systematic Theology, the notion of original sin is one of the weightiest and most challenging topics. It is astounding, however, that the mystery that has never been fully understood is the transmission of sin, the one thing that is necessary for us to understand ourselves. Adam's disobedience is the original sin; this is what the Bible explicitly teaches (Brotherton 2016, 603). According to Augustine, children do not have a spiritual descent but rather a carnal descent. Humans are born with guilt because they are descended from a contaminated seed (Augustine 2016, 373).

Therefore, Augustine goes on to claim that to understand the central theme of Romans, one must keep in mind the recipients' actions. This instantly creates the framework for his critique of Manichaeism, as Augustine (like Paul before him) must fight hard to defend the Old Law's positive standing and the need for moral autonomy against those who (like the Manichees) interpret Paul's comments as condemning both. To achieve this, Paul introduces the four stages of the history of salvation: before the Law, under the Law, under grace, and in peace (Augustine 1982, 35).

Augustine is adamant that God gives grace to sinful humans, not because they believe, but so that they may believe because faith is a gift

from God. In the course of the work of divine grace, he makes many distinctions that he refers to as *prevenient* grace, *operative* grace, and *cooperative* grace. In the first, the Holy Spirit makes use of the law to instill a sense of guilt and sin. In the second, he applies the gospel to the development of the kind of faith in Christ and his atoning acts that result in justification and peace with God. In the third, the renewed man works with him in the ongoing process of sanctification (Culver 2005, 662). Augustine (2004b, 123) writes, "however, without this grace from Christ, neither children nor adults can be saved. It is given freely for no reason, which is why it is also known as grace. 'Freely being justified through his blood,' the apostle claims in Romans 3:24."

Augustine's theology of the predestination of believers was derived from his portrayal of God's grace as the effective cause of redemption. God intended to carry out his eternal plan when it came to the gracious rebirth of the sinner in due time (Venema 2015, 7). Initially, Augustine showed a propensity to believe that God predestined some individuals to be saved by predicting who would accept Christ and who would not. However, he soon realized that consistency and a fair interpretation of the pertinent biblical passages required him to consider a person's will to do good and his faith in Christ as being the result of divine favor. He therefore changed his view of predestination. Then he emphasized that God's gracious choice is what determines how God predestines the elects to faith, holiness, and eternal glory rather than only God's foreknowledge. God chooses some to receive grace by grace while allowing the rest to sin and this redemptive transformation of human activity is rooted in God (Brink 2011, 239).

But this favor of Christ without which neither children nor adults can be saved is not paid for by any merits, which is why it is called grace. It is instead given without charge. According to Augustine, a human

will not participate in the appropriation of grace unless they have been regenerated. Despite several scriptural commands urging people to turn from their sins and accept Christ as their personal savior, he contends that even the foundation of the faith by which we are Christians is a gift from God (Knapp 2000, 66–67).

According to Augustine, if faith came from a person, they would be worthy. Instead, only those who have been predestined receive faith as a gift of grace (Ticciati 2011, 419). Only God's good pleasure is the source of this unqualified election. Instead of selecting a specific human trait or deed from a conceivable list as a requirement for redemption, God adopts individuals from the general group of sinners to be his property apart from their merit (Venema 2015, 7).

Therefore, according to Augustine's original sin concept, humans lost their innate ability to make moral decisions after the fall, resulting in every person bearing guilt for their personal sins and being condemned for the original sin. Given the incapability of human beings to make righteous choices, God must extend mercy and take initiative. Augustine refutes the notion that God could have chosen to save individuals based on their presumed response since humankind cannot fully comprehend the depth of God's grace (De Bruyn 2016, 25). While Augustine acknowledges that God's will is the ultimate cause, the Christian belief posits that God knows everything beforehand, and human beings act freely based on their knowledge and what they deem best for themselves.

4. The Rationale for Augustine's Development of the Doctrine of Predestination

When analyzing Augustine's reasons for holding certain views, it can be challenging to distinguish the ones he would have arrived at apart from his opponents and the views he arrived at in response to his opponents. A large

portion of his theology of grace was articulated in response to the views of others (Couenhoven 2018, 25).

After successfully disproving the Manichean view of evil, Augustine turned his attention to God's grace, the subject covered in Romans 9. While many think that Augustine acquired his ideas of grace and predestination while debating Pelagian theologians, his interpretation of Roman 9 goes back to before Pelagius's day. Romans 9 provided Augustine with an exegetical foundation for his insistence on the generosity of grace (Augustine 2010, 156).

When Augustine initially began to believe in the grace of God, he was not motivated by Pelagianism. *Confessions*, which Augustine published ten years before the disagreement (around 400), reflects on what Paul says in Romans 9 and exposes the depravity and complete incapacity of man's free will while exalting the sovereign favor of God. The experiences of Augustine's conversion in the Milan Garden served as inspiration for his proclamation of sovereign grace (Barrett 2013, 5). Augustine (2004b, 137) writes:

So, I eagerly focused on the esteemed writings of the Spirit, especially those of the apostle Paul. My previous assumptions that Paul occasionally contradicted himself and that the content of his teaching did not line up with the testimony of the Law and the Prophets have all been dispelled. And when I realized that there was only one face to those pure words, I discovered how to delight while trembling.

First, Paul's soteriological presupposition, particularly as it is outlined in the Epistle to the Romans, inspired Augustine to a deeper and more determined engagement. The Augustinian soteriological presupposition began to take on a new perspective on humankind and salvation. Therefore, this was a significant shift in contrast with his

initial soteriological epistemological presupposition of libertarianism, since he later came to believe that such autonomy compromises God's omnipotence. Humankind's goodwill, which Augustine had previously believed came before God's call to commence the merit of faith, is now itself chosen by God; man's faith itself is not man's effort but rather God's gift and the righteousness of God (Berkhof 1996, 109). Romans 9:11–12 (ESV) supports this idea: "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad so that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls, she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'"

This passage led Augustine to the conclusion that all human worth had to be disregarded as a basis for God's decision. He further argues that Paul in other places writes: "Not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace" (2 Tim 1:9). As a result, it should be understood that the statement that those who are predestined are those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28–30) means that they were called in line with his purpose. The apostle stated at the beginning of that paragraph that "God works all things together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28 ESV). He continued: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29 ESV). To avoid the misconception that some of them were called but not elected, the apostle wants readers to understand that *those* refer to those whom God "called by his plan." This is in keeping with the Lord's proclamation that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 20:16 ESV) (Augustine 2010, 197).

Augustine read Romans 9 again, and he concluded somewhat to his surprise that Paul could not be referring to an election based on foreknowledge of faith; that would be too close to the notion that

divine favor is bestowed based on what some people do more skillfully than others. Jacob would be more dependable in this situation than his brother (Muller 2022, 14). Therefore, Paul's rejection of a work-based election had previously persuaded Augustine, but he had not yet considered how broadly the term *work* could be construed. According to his altered interpretation of Paul, he decides that election and the means of imparting it must be completely gracious. If God chooses to favor Jacob as a brother deserving of preference it is for reasons that are only known to God. If someone is so blessed by God that he chooses to save them they will respond with devotion; God never needs to wait for human faith to emerge on its own (Stump and Kretzmann 2001, 54).

However, Augustine's views were also shaped, in part, by his disagreement with the British monk Pelagius. Augustine was better able to understand the character of God's grace. During the Pelagian debate, he emphasized that man is naturally corrupt and only God's grace can make humankind whole (De Vries 2011, 84). Pelagius's writings *On Nature* and *In Defense of the Free Will* publicly incensed Augustine because they contained little discussion on divine grace and too much discussion on human free choice. Therefore, the consequences of salvation have been effectively taught to Christians through this dialogue. Augustine's soteriological formulation established a robust concept of grace during the Pelagian debate, whereby Augustine argued quite specifically that man can do nothing apart from effectual grace (Frame 2015, 114).

All kinds of original sin were refuted by Pelagius. He stated that even if Adam had not sinned, he would have perished because he was made mortal. People choose to sin by copying others. Grace may be of assistance to those who have already sinned, yet it is constantly resisted. Fundamentally, moral submission to God's command is what saves humankind. He understood grace as a method of illumination about what

people think and do. Christ is primarily the one to imitate (Daniel 2019, 36). Pelagius argued further that baptism does not regenerate individuals but rather merely aids them. He emphasized that human beings have free will beyond all else. They have the same ability to sin and not to sin. They can do good. Ability is required for responsibility. Furthermore, God is just and never overrides human free choice or issues impossibly difficult orders. Contrary to Augustine, he commands obedience, and it is up to humans to comply. God predetermined who would exercise free choice, believe, and obey, hence God predetermined their salvation. However, if humans do not continue to use free will, they may eventually lose all their good deeds, faith, salvation, and grace (Bird 2021, 74).

Augustine responded to Pelagius and his followers in several treatises, sermons, and letters. First, he strengthened the original sin concept much more than previous theologians had. Some of his opinions were based on Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and death spread to all men because all have sinned” (ESV). Since Adam served as the foundation of humanity, all people are born with a wicked nature that permeates every aspect of their being. Because of their sin, humans are incapable of obeying God. Augustine claimed that humans are spiritually dead, not alive and well, as Pelagius claimed (Daniel 2019, 36). The notion of operative grace was one of his teaching’s most important components. Some sinners’ fallen wills are efficaciously moved by God, causing them to always respond with faith, which is a heavenly gift. The credit belongs to God since he exalts his gifts rather than meritoriousness (Guelzo 2019, 258). He taught justification through infused righteousness rather than imputation, in line with popular theology of the day. Although he appeared to have seldom taught that redemption was only available to the elect, he said very little concerning the atonement. It would be

correspondingly fundamental in the theological research that this was a significant development considering his position in theological history (Ticciati 2011, 419).

Therefore, according to Augustine grace is both particular and effective, in salvation. In contrast to Pelagius who argued for synergism, Augustine affirms that God works irresistibly on his elect giving the sinner a new heart and a renewed will so that the sinner will respond in faith and repentance. God does not bestow his special saving grace upon all humankind and wait to see if an individual will cooperate with it. Therefore, rather than humanity’s will causing and effecting God’s grace, God’s grace causes and effects man’s will to react in faith (Barrett 2013, 7). Grace from an almighty Savior naturally is irresistible. The will of an omnipotent God cannot be overthrown. God had omnipotent control over human hearts and may direct them in any direction. Nevertheless, irresistible grace means that when God decides to act on his elect, he overpowers all humankind’s resistance, not that humans do not fight God (Olson 1999, 274).

Kame (2013, 96) demonstrates that more recent work on predestination has drawn a rather different picture. Some scholars have argued for the centralization of faith by promoting a modern interpretation of predestination. Despite God’s sovereign decision to elect people apart from their own will, human beings must place their faith for grace to be applied to their salvation (Kirkpatrick 2019, 51). The presumption would be based on the biblical idea of faith, the philosophical idea of the covenant in Christ alone, and the anthropological idea of sinfulness and universal salvation. It is asserted that salvation is a particular and unique reaction to trusting in Christ. It is *viewed* as a way into God’s holy, and loving, eternal purpose that is available to everyone who will acknowledge their extreme sinfulness and ability to be saved by

none other than Christ. This pathway is provided by the person and works of Christ alone (Hankins 2011, 99).

However, Augustinianism has also been paying attention to the nature of saving faith. Augustine believed that the free grace of God produced both the instrumental cause (faith) and the effectual cause (grace) of justification. He frequently references Ephesians 2:8–10 to support the idea that the foundation of saving faith is a divine gift that is not subject to human volition or control. Augustine’s understanding of soteriology was essentially shaped by these verses (Anderson 2002, 33). Augustine (2004a, 504) affirms this in his exposition of this passage:

The apostle makes a distinction between work and faith but does not suggest that work is not a part of faith. Since Judah is Israel itself, the apostle makes a distinction between faith and works in the same way that Israel and Judah are separated in the two kingdoms of the Hebrews. And he asserts that a person is justified by faith and not by good deeds because faith is the foundation from which other things can be attained that is specifically characterised as good deeds and enable a person to live a virtuous life. Because he states, “By grace, you have been saved through faith and this is not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God.”

Augustine refers to grace in soteriological terms. Using soteriological terms to refer to grace is also valuable from the epistemological perspective. Not only are humans sinful, but their created nature and the constraints of time prevent them from seeing and knowing God. As a result, revelation is required for the understanding of God, and grace’s primary impact on reason is revelation (Ferguson 2005, 279).

In conclusion, the incredible theological riches of Augustine’s anti-

Pelagian treatises can be used to understand his continued relevance to the modern church. Those who are confessional, Lutheran, or Reformed, would find in these writings the first clear, coherent expression of the biblical anthropology and soteriology that are dear to their theological persuasions: the total spiritual inability of unregenerate human nature to respond to God and be saved, the unconditional divine election of those who are saved, the manifestation of this grace in the mission of Christ the Savior, and the sovereign efficacy of the Holy Spirit in giving faith and repentance to people (Needham 2008, 46).

Augustine is well recognized for adopting a strong predestination doctrine that holds that God has predetermined whom he would freely save (those known as the elect). From the perspective of grace, it does not matter when God bestows the benefits; it is an unmet need that God is free to fulfill whenever he sees fit.

5. Conclusion

This study of the concept of predestination, particularly as presented in Augustine’s works during the Pelagian conflict, has yielded several important findings. These discoveries have arisen from an examination of the theological development of this teaching by Augustine and Pelagius. It is important to first understand the foundational aspects of the predestination of believers. Pelagius, a notable theologian, held a unique perspective on the notion of original sin. He rejected the idea that a sinful nature is inherited through generations and therefore believed that salvation is achievable through human effort alone, without requiring God’s assistance. His ideas have had a profound influence on how we understand the fundamental assumptions of human nature and sin.

It is extremely important that the church’s stance on predestination, given the resurgence of the Reformed movement throughout the English-

speaking world, is grounded in the historical intellectual perspective established within Augustinianism. To arrive at a contemporary interpretation, it is essential to read Augustine's work closely and sympathetically. By doing so, we can analyze Augustine's original historical content from both an intellectual and historical perspective. Augustine's belief in predestination was shaped by his religious experiences and his study of the Epistle to the Romans. Initially, he believed that predestination depended on supernatural knowledge, but later modified his doctrine to consider the effects of divine grace on an individual's decision to do good and have faith in Christ.

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