

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • October 15, 2014

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Homily on John 10:1-10*

I bare still a subject of concern, and what concerns me I shall impart to you.... Hear, then, what it is that moves me. By the Prophet Ezekiel the Lord rebukes the shepherds, and among other things says of the sheep, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled." He both declares it *a wanderer*, and calls it *a sheep*. If, while wandering, it was a sheep, whose voice was it hearing to lead it astray? For doubtless it would not be straying were it hearing the shepherd's voice: but it strayed just because it heard another's voice; it heard the voice of the thief and the robber. Surely the sheep do not hear the voice of robbers. "Those that came," He said,—and we are to understand, *apart from me*,—that is, "those that came *apart from me* are thieves and robbers, and the sheep did not hear them." Lord, if the sheep did not hear them, how can the sheep wander? If the sheep hear only Thee, and Thou art the truth, whoever heareth the truth cannot certainly fall into error. But they err, and are called sheep. For if, in the very midst of their wandering, they were not called sheep, it would not be said by Ezekiel, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled." How is it at the same

time a wanderer and a sheep? Has it heard the voice of another? Surely "the sheep did not hear them." Accordingly many are just now being gathered into Christ's fold, and from being heretics are becoming Catholics [that is, members of the Christian church]. They are rescued from the thieves, and restored to the shepherds: and sometimes they murmur, and become wearied of Him that calls them back, and have no true knowledge of him that would murder them; nevertheless also, when, after a struggle, those have come who are sheep, they recognize the Shepherd's voice, and are glad they have come, and are ashamed of their wandering. When, then, they were glorying in that state of error as in the truth, and were certainly not hearing the Shepherd's voice, but were following another, were they sheep, or were they not? If they were sheep, how can it be the case that the sheep do not listen to aliens? If they were not sheep, wherefore the rebuke addressed to those to whom it is said, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled"? In the case also of those already become catholic Christians, and believers of good promise, evils sometimes occur: they are seduced into error, and after their error are restored. When they were thus seduced, and were rebaptized, or after the companionship of the Lord's fold were turned back again into their former error, were they sheep, or were they not? Certainly they were catholics. If they were faithful catholics, they were sheep. If they were sheep, how was

* Tractate XLV, Chap. X, 1-10, "Homilies on the Gospel of John" in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, v. VII, Philip Schaff, Ed. Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986. 253-254.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

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it that they could listen to the voice of a stranger when the Lord saith, "The sheep did not hear them"?

12. You hear, brethren, the great importance of the question. I say then, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." He knoweth those who were foreknown, He knoweth those who were predestinated; because it is said of Him, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified. If God be for us, who can be against us?" Add to this: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not with Him also freely given us all things?" But what "us"? Those who are foreknown, predestinated, justified, glorified; regarding whom there follows, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Therefore "the Lord knoweth them that are His;" they are the sheep. Such sometimes do not know themselves, but the Shepherd knoweth them, according to this predestination, this foreknowledge of God, according to the election of the sheep before the foundation of the world: for so saith also the apostle, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." According, then, to this divine foreknowledge and predestination, how many sheep are outside, how many wolves within! and how many sheep are inside, how many wolves without! How many are now living in wantonness who will yet be chaste! how many are blaspheming Christ who will yet believe in Him! how many are giving themselves to drunkenness who will yet be sober! how many are preying on other people's property who will yet freely give of their own! Nevertheless at present they are hearing the voice of another, they are following strangers. In like manner, how many are praising within who will yet blaspheme; are chaste who will yet be fornicators; are sober who will wallow hereafter in drink; are standing who will by and by fall! These are not the sheep. (For we speak of those who were predestinated,—of those whom the Lord knoweth that they are His.) And yet these, so long as they keep right, listen to the voice of Christ. Yea, these hear, the others do not; and yet, according to predestination, these are not sheep, while the others are.

13. There remains still the question, which I now think may meanwhile thus be solved. There is a voice of some kind,—there is, I say, a certain kind of voice of the

Shepherd, in respect of which the sheep hear not strangers, and in respect of which those who are not sheep do not hear Christ. What a word is this! "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." No one of His own is indifferent to such a voice, a stranger does not hear it: for this reason also does He announce it to the former, that he may abide perseveringly with Himself to the end; but by one who is wanting in such persevering continuance with Him, such a word remains unheard. One has come to Christ, and has heard word after word of one kind and another, all of them true, all of them salutary; and among all the rest is also this utterance, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." He who has heard this is one of the sheep. But there was, perhaps, some one listening to it, who treated it with dislike, with coldness, and heard it as that of a stranger. If he was predestinated, he strayed for the time, but he was not lost for ever: he returns to hear what he has neglected, to do what he has heard. For if he is one of those who are predestinated, then both his very wandering and his future conversion have been foreknown by God: if he has strayed away, he will return to hear that voice of the Shepherd, and to follow Him who saith, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." A good voice, brethren, it is; true and shepherd-like, the very voice of salvation in the tabernacles of the righteous. For it is easy to hear Christ, easy to praise the gospel, easy to applaud the preacher: but to endure unto the end, is peculiar to the sheep who hear the Shepherd's voice. A temptation befalls thee, endure thou to the end, for the temptation will not endure to the end. And what is that end to which thou shalt endure? Even till thou reachest the end of thy pathway. For as long as thou hearest not Christ, He is thine adversary in the pathway, that is, in this mortal life. And what doth He say? "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him." Thou hast heard, hast believed, hast agreed. If thou hast been at enmity, agree. If thou hast got the opportunity of coming to an agreement, keep not up the quarrel longer. For thou knowest not when thy way will be ended, and it is known to Him. If thou art a sheep, and if thou endurest to the end, thou shalt be saved: and therefore it is that His own despise not that voice, and strangers hear it not..... But let all of us be guided by Him to whom we say, "Lead me, O Lord, in Thy way, and I will walk in Thy truth." ∞

Reformation Issue: Augustine

Although it might seem a bit strange, at first blush, to devote the annual Reformation issue to a church father who died almost 1100 years before the great sixteenth century Reformation, we have good grounds for doing so. Our two main reasons are expressed well by the noted church historian Philip Schaff.

First, Augustine's theology was foundational for the Reformation. In his *History of the Christian Church*, Schaff contends that "Augustine is, of all the fathers, nearest to *evangelical Protestantism*, and may be called, in respect to his doctrine of sin and grace, the first forerunner of the Reformation" (Vol. 3, p. 1021, his emphasis).

Second, among the church fathers, Augustine had unparalleled influence on the Reformers. In the same

volume, Schaff maintains that "Augustine, of all the fathers, most resembles, in experience and doctrine, this very apostle [Paul], and stands next to him in his influence upon the Reformers" (p. 787). Well documented it is that Calvin, Luther, and the rest of the Reformers quoted none so much as Augustine. The theology of the Reformation was a return to and development of (the better parts of) Augustine's theology—long discarded or perverted by the church of the Middle Ages.

In this issue we highlight a few areas of Augustine's teaching—some predictable and foundational for the Reformation, and others a bit less well known. May God use it for the continued defense and development of Reformation truth.

RJD 

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Augustine: His Life and Confessions

His Life

Aurelius Augustine was born in AD 354 in the northern African town of Thagaste, located in present-day Algeria. Although they lived a fair distance from Rome, Augustine's family considered themselves to be decidedly *Roman*—hence his given name. Augustine's father Patricius was an unbeliever. He insisted that his son be well-schooled, convinced that this was the way to advancement in society and in life.

Augustine's mother Monica was truly a God-fearing woman who did all she could to train Augustine in the way of faith and obedience to God. However, for the first thirty-two years of his life, Augustine would have

no regard for his mother's instruction or admonition. He refused the way of godliness in favor of a life of fulfilling his sinful lusts. He despised Christianity, because with his powerful intellect and philosophical arguments he could overwhelm Christians.

Without question, God fashioned Augustine with one of the keenest intellects in all of church history. Yet his family was of modest means and unable to provide a good education for him. In the providence of God, a wealthy man recognized Augustine's intellectual gifts and offered to finance his further education. Thus it was that at age sixteen Augustine was sent to nearby Madaura to study grammar and rhetoric, and a year later to the larger city of Carthage. Introduced to Cicero, Augustine fell in love with philosophy, especially that of the Romans.

When Augustine was eighteen, his father died. In that same year, Augustine took to living with a girl,

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whom he called a concubine. (Nowhere is the name of the woman recorded.) They remained together for some fifteen years until Augustine's conversion. Although they never married, they had one son, Adeodatus.

In 375, at the age of twenty-one, Augustine returned to his home town of Thagaste to teach. He soon became dissatisfied with his position and moved back to Carthage after only a year. Later he moved to Rome in search of another good teaching position.

In his infatuation with philosophy, Augustine had become a devotee of Manichaeism. Manichaeism's source was Eastern religion and philosophy, with some adaptations based on the Bible. It maintained that material things are inherently evil. In dualistic opposition to evil material, the spiritual is light and good. Manichaeism taught that the spiritual light in man longs to be delivered from the bondage of evil material. Those with a higher knowledge could hope that the spiritual (good) in them would one day be released and reunited with "god"—the spiritual. This philosophy appealed to Augustine, first, because it elevated those with special *knowledge*, and he considered himself to be such a man. Second, he thought he could blame his corrupt life on the evil material part of him, and assure himself that the spiritual element of him was undefiled by his sins.

Ultimately, however, Manichaeism failed to satisfy Augustine for it could not answer his questions about life and the order of the universe. Yet, Augustine still despised Christianity intellectually and morally, and turned next to Neo-Platonism, a modification of Plato's philosophy with an emphasis on the unseen spiritual and the eternal. Evidence of his struggles with these anti-Christian philosophies appear in Augustine's *Confessions* (see below).

In 383 Augustine moved to Milan (Italy) to accept a position as a professor of rhetoric. There he frequented the worship services led by Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. Augustine's motive was to observe and learn from the capable preacher. God's purpose was that Augustine sit under faithful preaching of the gospel.

Augustine's mother caught up with him in Milan as well. In about 386 or 7, her prayers were answered when God converted Augustine from a life of sin and unbelief to faith in Jesus Christ. Both Augustine and his son Adeodatus were baptized. Not long afterward, Monica died.

The radically changed Augustine returned to North Africa in 389. In a relatively short period of time, Augustine endured two severe blows—the unexpected deaths of his son and of a close friend.

In 391 he moved to Hippo (in North Africa) and started a monastery. He was soon ordained a priest and began preaching. He was actively engaged in defending Christianity against the false claims of Manichaeism. In 395 he was consecrated the Bishop of Hippo. He faithfully fulfilled the duties of his office—especially in preaching and writing—until his death in 430.

This brief biography hardly does justice to the fascinating life of Augustine, nor to the powerful use God made of him. The rest of this issue of the SB will flesh out some of his genius, his theology, and his significance to the church of Jesus Christ. Interested readers are urged to do further reading.

Brief Bibliography

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His Confessions—a Synopsis of Books 1-10

Books 1-5: Autobiography

The first five books (chapters) of Augustine's *Confessions* contain an autobiographical sketch of Augustine's life from his infancy up to his conversion. It is written in the form of a "confession" to and about God as Augustine looked back on his life. He writes an account of his spiritual pilgrimage which, in these five books, describes primarily his life apart from and departing from God. Thus, in the *Confessions*, the discerning reader will find many of the significant elements of the Reformed faith set forth—God's sovereignty, man's depravity, salvation by God alone, all glory to God, and even the Reformed idea of the covenant as fellowship and friendship with God.

This work is a true confession in both senses in which the Scriptures use the word—a confession of sin and a confession of faith in God. Written by Augustine as a believer, it is characterized by proper humility, awe of God's greatness, and reverence for the one only true God who has revealed Himself in His Word.

The major theme of the work is expressed in the opening paragraph—“...Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.” This idea of rest is oft repeated in these first five books. A main element of resting in God is the desire for fellowship with God. This includes enjoying His love, blessings, and infinite goodness and mercy. Augustine even uses implicitly the figure of marriage to describe his relationship with God. For example, he characterizes his sins as fornication against God (II, 14 & IV, 3). He confesses that he “loved (a friend) as a substitute for (God); and this was a vast myth and a long lie. By its *adulterous caress*,” he writes, “my mind which had ‘itching ears’ was corrupted” [emphasis mine, RJD].

Augustine’s confession of sin flows out of his desire to “rest in God.” He loves God, and the fact that he has sinned against God obviously grieves him. He knows that sin is a departure from God (II, 7 “...I was traveling farther from Thee”) and sin separates him from experiencing God’s love, making him experience instead God’s punishment (III, 16). He makes confession of sin in order that he might be forgiven and live in the love of God (II, 1). This humble confession is part of his return to God (III, 16): “Return to Thee is along the path of devout humility.” (III, 27): “Thou didst not grant joy and gladness to my hearing, nor did my bones exalt, for they had not been brought to humility.” He desires that God cleanse him from sin: “Look into my heart, my God, look within.... (F)or Thou dost cleanse me from these flawed emotions” (IV, 11).

At the same time, Augustine’s confession of sin is for the glory of God, whom he praises. He writes, “But I shall nevertheless confess to Thee my shame, since it is for Thy praise” (I, 1; IV, 1). And again, “Let my soul praise Thee that it may love Thee, and confess to Thee Thy mercies that it may praise Thee” (V, 1).

Most striking in this work is Augustine’s extreme consciousness of and sensitivity to sin. He recognizes sin as sin, never making light of or giving excuses for any sin. He laments the fact that at one time, holding to the teachings of the Manicheans, he did not see himself as a sinner, and made excuses for his sins (V, 18). He recognizes that sin is more than the deed—it is also in the mind and in the motives (III, 17). He admits that although his life often gained the praise of men, he was

walking in sin because he was against God, not seeking Him (III, 17). He confesses that though he may have demonstrated an outward conformity to God’s law, as in honesty, for example, yet even that was sin because “it was not motivated by respect for the purity which (God) enjoin(s)” (IV, 3).

Augustine also confessed the doctrine of original sin by name (V, 16) and description—“...my mutable nature deviated by its own choice and that error is its punishment” (IV, 26). At the same time that he confesses his own sin, Augustine affirms the sovereignty of God, particularly as God led him through his life of sin, finally to bring him to conversion and deliverance from sin.

Books 6-10: Conversion

Book VI follows directly from the previous section. Augustine had come under the preaching of Ambrose in Milan, and was brought to the point where he was discarding the tenants of Manichaeism. Book VI describes his slow development and painstaking movement toward accepting the truths of the Christian Church. Augustine relates some of the struggles and the people who influence him, including his mother Monica, Ambrose, and two of his friends. He confesses the sins that held him back from making a full confession of faith—particularly ambition (honor and money) and fornication.

In Book VII, Augustine describes what effect his encounter with Neo-Platonism had in his gradual conversion. He seems to be quite convinced that this had a positive effect, leading him closer to God. He holds that all truth is God’s truth, convinced that Neo-Platonism has some truth and that it set him on the right path to knowing God. According to Augustine, Neo-Platonism taught him to stop seeking God in the outward, physical creation, and to turn within himself to find God. At the same time, Augustine is careful to show that Neo-Platonism did not, and could not give him the true and complete knowledge of God. He points out many truths about God and salvation that he could learn only from the Bible.

Book VIII recounts Augustine’s conversion. It was a great struggle—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically. The last great hurdle was the need to forsake his fornication. Though he knew well that God required it, Augustine had not the will to do so, and did

not believe it possible for him to overcome this sin. In the end he was convicted by the command of God in Romans 13:13-14: “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; 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 fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Book IX sets forth the consequences of Augustine’s conversion, particularly his decision to cease teaching rhetoric. The major part of this book is devoted to his mother Monica. Augustine extols the virtues of his God-fearing mother, their closeness after his conversion, and finally her entrance into glory.

In Book X, Augustine discusses the faculty of man’s “memory,” which includes also man’s unconsciousness. He investigates his own memory, particularly for the purpose of understanding how he knows God. This is compared and contrasted with the mind of the unbeliever. A second purpose seems to be to show the abiding sinfulness of the regenerated man, because the old sins are stored away in his memory—unknown to the man—to spring from this dark cavern in his dreams. Augustine is deeply conscious of his sinfulness, even as he writes. He examines and confesses his sins under the threefold “temptations” of

the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He attributes to the sanctifying power of God any strength to fight sin and walk in obedience. More than once he asks God, “Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt” (40, 60).

Several elements in books VI-X are quite striking. First, Augustine manifests deep insights into human nature, which he is able to describe well and forcefully. For example, explaining the great hesitancy of the unbeliever to embrace the truth, he writes, “But just as it commonly happens that a person who has experienced a bad physician is afraid of entrusting himself to a good one, so it was with the health of my soul. While it could not be healed except by believing, it was refusing to be healed for fear of believing what was false” (VI, 6).

In all these books, Augustine maintains themes dear to every Reformed believer, namely, God’s sovereignty, man’s great sinfulness, that salvation is all of God, and that to God belongs all the glory. Throughout, this classic work is a confession of his sin, and a confession of God’s greatness. The believing reader finds that the confessions of Augustine resonate in his own soul. So, I urge anyone who has not yet done so—take it up and read it. ☞

REV. MARTYN MCGEOWN

Augustine: Preacher, Exegete, Biblical Apologist

From the beginning of his Christian pilgrimage, when, as a young man, he heard the call, *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (“Take up and read”), and his eyes lighted on Romans 13:12-14, until the end of his life, when, on his deathbed, he asked that the penitential psalms be written out for him, so that he might read and meditate on them, Augustine loved the Scriptures. As bishop of Hippo, Augustine aimed to preach biblical

sermons, and as a writer, Augustine saturated his treatises and letters with quotations from the Bible.

Augustine was also a churchman—one who loved the church, one who pursued his theological studies in the church and for the sake of the church, and one who revered the tradition of the church, developing that tradition and defending it against heretics, both inside and outside the church.

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Augustine the Preacher

Hughes Oliphant Old, in his monumental seven vol-

ume work, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, devotes almost fifty pages to Augustine as a preacher. Although trained in the art of rhetoric, Augustine “was concerned that the congregation understand the Scriptures, and so he preached without the artificial eloquence that was popular in his day.”¹ Augustine’s sermons “show us how one of the most profound theological thinkers the church has ever produced preached theology to a very average, provincial sort of congregation.”² “Today we read these sermons and wonder how the preacher of a small provincial city in North Africa, preaching well over an hour, could hold the attention of his congregation.”³

That alone ought to be a rebuke to the presumptuous Romish church, who, instead of leading their people to feast on the Word of God as Augustine did, provide barely ten-minute homilies on moralistic subjects, leaving their people in appalling ignorance—something of which, alas, many evangelical churches are just as guilty!

Augustine the Exegete

There can be no doubt that Augustine the preacher—with the other church fathers—revered Scripture. For Augustine, Scripture was the very Word of God. Quotations could be multiplied, but in the interests of space, we offer only one. In a letter to Jerome, Augustine writes, “I have learned to do only those books that are called the Holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that none of their writers has ever erred. All others I so read as not to hold what they say to be truth unless they prove it to me by Holy Scripture or clear reason.”⁴

Augustine was not content merely to *admire* the Bible. He labored to *expound* the Bible. Marveling at the detail of Augustine’s exegesis in his commentaries and sermons, one scholar writes, “Augustine finds a great deal in his chosen texts—partly because, being thoroughly convinced of their divine authority, he expects to find a

great deal in them.”⁵ One of Augustine’s most significant works is *De Doctrina Christiana*, a guide to Bible interpretation. He explains his purpose in the preface:

There are certain precepts for treating the Scriptures which I think may not inconveniently be transmitted to students, so that they may profit not only from reading the work of expositors but also in their own explanations of the sacred writings to others. I have undertaken to explain these rules to those able and willing to learn, if God our Lord will not deny me, in writing, those things which He usually suggests to me in thought.⁶

Although some of Augustine’s exegetical principles are fanciful, especially his tendency toward allegory, some of what he writes is the basis of our modern Reformed hermeneutics. For example, Augustine teaches the dictum “Scripture interprets Scripture,” so that clearer passages are used to explain obscurer passages:

...The Holy Spirit has magnificently and wholesomely modulated the Holy Scriptures so that the more obscure places present themselves to hunger and the more obscure places may deter a disdainful attitude. Hardly anything may be found in these obscure places which is not found plainly said elsewhere.⁷

For Augustine biblical interpretation is not merely an intellectual activity for scholars, but a spiritual activity for Christians.

Pride is a danger for exegetes:

In asserting rashly that which the author before him did not intend, he may find many other passages which he cannot reconcile with his interpretation. If he acknowledges these to be true and certain, his first interpretation cannot be true, and under these conditions it happens, I know not why, that, loving his own interpretation, he begins to become angrier with the Scriptures than he is with himself. And if he thirsts persistently for the error, he will be overcome by it.⁸

¹ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 345.

² Old, 348.

³ Old, 351.

⁴ Cited in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1969), 125.

⁵ Thomas Williams, “Biblical Interpretation” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: [Cambridge Companions Online] Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60.

⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr.), the Library of Liberal Arts (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958) [prologue], 3.

⁷ *On Christian Doctrine*, [Book II, chapter 6], 38.

⁸ *On Christian Doctrine*, [Book I, chapter 37], 31.

For Augustine the fundamental hermeneutical principle is love: “Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything but cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men.”⁹ This hermeneutical principle determines for Augustine whether something should be taken literally or interpreted figuratively:

Those things which seem almost shameful to the inexperienced, whether simply spoken or actually performed either by the person of God or by men whose sanctity is commended to us, are all figurative, and their secret to be removed as kernels from the husk as nourishment for charity.¹⁰

Augustine the Apologist

Augustine did not pursue his exegetical labors in a vacuum—he was a churchman, devoted to the dogmas of the church, devoted to defending the truths that had already been elicited from Scripture by the church, and devoted to developing the truth. Therefore, Augustine appeals to those who preceded him, quoting copiously from the fathers in his writings. However, Augustine is not afraid to correct the fathers when he sees that they have erred in their understanding of Scripture.

In Augustine’s writings against the Manicheans, a dualistic Gnostic cult to which Augustine himself had belonged for a time, he defends the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament. In an important work, *Contra Faustum*, Augustine shows that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and that the Old Testament is the inspired Word of God, profitable for Christians. Augustine’s superb insights merit a lengthy quotation:

If we are asked why we do not worship God as the Hebrew fathers of the Old Testament worshipped Him, we reply that God has taught us differently by the New Testament fathers, and yet in no opposition to the Old Testament, but as that Testament itself predicted. For it is thus foretold by the prophet: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt,” Jeremiah 31:31-32. Thus it was foretold that that covenant would not continue, but that there would be a new one. And to the objection that we do not belong to the house of Israel or to the house of Judah, we answer ac-

cording to the teaching of the apostle, who calls Christ the seed of Abraham, and says to us, as belonging to Christ’s body, “Therefore you are Abraham’s seed,” Galatians 3:29. Again, if we are asked why we regard that Testament as authoritative when we do not observe its ordinances, we find the answer to this also in the apostolic writings; for the apostle says, “Let no man judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of a holiday, or a new moon, or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come,” Colossians 2:16-17. Here we learn both that we ought to read of these observances, and acknowledge them to be of divine institution, in order to preserve the memory of the prophecy, for they were shadows of things to come; and also that we need pay no regard to those who would judge us for not continuing the outward observance; as the apostle says elsewhere to the same purpose, “These things happened to them for an example; and they are written for our admonition, on whom the end of the ages have come,” 1 Corinthians 10:11. So, when we read anything in the books of the Old Testament which we are not required to observe in the New Testament, or which is even forbidden, instead of finding fault with it, we should ask what it means; for the very discontinuance of the observance proves it to be, not condemned, but fulfilled.¹¹

Sometimes, however, Augustine seems to stray from an appeal to Scripture as the final authority as, for example, when he appeals against heretics to the authority of *the church*. The following statement is infamous:

Perhaps you will read the gospel to me, and will attempt to find there a testimony to Manichæus. But should you meet with a person not yet believing the gospel, how would you reply to him were he to say, I do not believe? For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church. So when those on whose authority I have consented to believe in the gospel tell me not to believe in Manichæus, how can I but consent? Take your choice. If you say, Believe the Catholics: their advice to me is to put no faith in you; so that, believing them, I am precluded from believing you. If you say, Do not believe the Catholics: you cannot fairly use the gospel in bringing me to faith in Manichæus; for it was at the command of the Catholics that I believed the gospel. Again, if you say, You were right in believing the Catholics when they praised the gospel, but wrong in

⁹ *On Christian Doctrine*, [Book III, chapter 10], 88.

¹⁰ *On Christian Doctrine*, [Book III, 12], 90.

¹¹ *Contra Faustum*, [Book XXXII, chapter 9], trans. Richard Stothert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

believing their vituperation of Manichæus: do you think me such a fool as to believe or not to believe as you like or dislike, without any reason?¹²

We might be uncomfortable with Augustine's language, but we need to bear a few things in mind. First, the Catholic Church of Augustine's day is not the Roman church of our day—with its supposedly infallible pope and imposing Magisterium.¹³ Second, Augustine does not teach that the church has greater authority than Scripture, or that Scripture depends on the church

¹² *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichæus* [chapter V, paragraph 6], trans. Richard Stothert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Calvin discusses this quotation in *Institutes*, Book I, chapter 7, paragraph 3.

¹³ For example, the Council of Carthage, at the behest of Augustine, met in 418 to condemn Pelagius, despite Pope Zosimus' objections. Pope Zosimus had mistakenly supported Pelagius and rebuked Augustine and the North African church for condemning him. See Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Canon Press, Moscow, ID: 2001), 220.

for its authority. Rather, he teaches that the church has a *secondary* authority in *recognizing* Scripture as Scripture—but to recognize something is not the same as to *create* it. By way of contrast, the writings of the Manicheans have no authority whatsoever.

Keith A. Mathison writes concerning Augustine: "While it is questionable that either of them [Basil and Augustine] actually endorsed a two-source [Scripture and tradition] position, the language they used would later be interpreted as supporting such a position."¹⁴

Augustine loved the Holy Scriptures, and he loved them in the church—*only* in the church.

Let us do likewise. 

¹⁴ Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Canon Press, Moscow, ID: 2001), 151. See also Mathison's citation of Georges Florovsky, "St. Augustine had no intention 'to subordinate' the Gospel to the Church. He only wanted to emphasize that [the] 'Gospel' is actually received always in the context of [the] Church's catholic preaching and simply cannot be separated from the church" (Mathison, 42).

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Augustine and Pelagianism

The Pelagian conflict arose in the church when Augustine was in his sixties. God ordained that it be so, in his wisdom, to prepare Augustine to be the man who defended the truth of God's Word. The issue that confronted Augustine was at the heart of the Christian faith—the truth of sin and grace. Augustine's study of the Word had led him to see the depravity of man from the viewpoint of his own sin and to see his own salvation in the light of God's sovereign grace. God used Augustine's pathway to salvation in his own life to open the Word of God to his understanding. Augustine's doctrine was based on the Word, but not merely in a formal sense. It was through seeing his own sin and the wonder of God's grace to him that Augustine was spiritually equipped to search the riches of the Scriptures and to draw out the doctrines of sin and grace against the false teaching of Pelagius.

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The Pelagian controversy, like its later spiritual offspring, the Arminian controversy, received its name from a man who was not always in the forefront of the conflict directly but as one who taught others. Pelagius' followers were often more direct and further developed in error than the man himself. The history of Arminianism would be similar. Arminius would die and his followers would form the Remonstrants before the Synod of Dordt. Pelagius' follower Coelestius was, in many ways, the intellectual leader and true protagonist in the conflict.

Augustine, likewise, was not alone in his conflict with Pelagianism in the Christian church in North Africa and the Middle East, though he was the spiritual leader opposing Pelagius. The churches under his leadership would also stand against the error, as did Jerome in Bethlehem, the man who translated the Bible into its final Latin form, the Vulgate.

Like the later Arminians, Pelagius and Coelestius were not forthright about their views. When questioned by

church councils, they were often evasive or dissembling, willing to agree with partial or incomplete statements that left room for their errors. They also traveled from place to place. Pelagius, who probably came from Britain, initially appeared in Rome after about the year AD 400 where he studied and taught for a while. When the city was being pressed by the invading Goths in 409, he went to North Africa. There Pelagius and Coelestius passed through Hippo, Augustine's home, (modern day Annaba in Algeria) with the intention of visiting Augustine about 410. Since Augustine was absent confronting the Donatist controversy at Carthage at the time, they merely exchanged letters. Having come to some knowledge of the trend in Pelagius' thinking, Augustine warned him to hold faithfully the biblical doctrine of sin and the fall.

The controversy really began after this, in 412, when Coelestius sought to be ordained in Carthage after Augustine had returned. Being condemned there for his false doctrine, Coelestius went on to Ephesus where he was ordained. Pelagius meanwhile had gone to Palestine, where his writings occasioned controversy in 414. Pelagius and Coelestius both eventually made their way back to Rome where the controversy continued, with the bishops and councils in Rome becoming involved and with continuing councils in the churches in North Africa. The result was an ebb and flow, in which Pelagianism was periodically in and out of favor in Rome until finally it and its adherents were condemned and exiled. Yet its influence would in time lead to the semi-Pelagian hybrid position of the medieval church. Pelagius himself passed from Rome and the scene of history by 420, and the place of his death is not known.

While the doctrinal issues touch many elements of the Christian truth, the doctrines of grace and even the sacraments, the focus of the debate was over the truth of sin and the fall, of man's depravity and free will. Pelagius taught that Adam's fall affected only Adam himself directly. Adam is not then the representative head of the race, nor does descent from Adam organically have any effect on man's moral nature. In Pelagius' view, all men are born in the same innocence in which Adam was created.

Adam's fall, even for Adam, according to the Pelagians, was an individual and isolated act of disobedience. Thus Adam retained, after the fall, the ability to will and choose the good, to go on and never sin again. He

was free to choose either good or evil; the fall did not corrupt Adam's nature. They even taught that there were men who were free from actual sin. This is, in part, an argument from silence since Scripture does not record the sins of every child of God. Pelagianism also reduces sin, effectively, to a mere external act of disobedience. If followed out, this would mean that such persons were righteous in themselves and needed no savior or grace. The cross is made void. Pelagianism denies original sin and the depravity of man's nature. Pelagius went so far as to teach that Adam would and could die after his creation, effectively as a natural process, rather than as a judgment of God upon sin.

From where then, in the Pelagian view, does sin arise? As our Confession of Faith puts it in rejecting the Pelagian error, "from imitation" (Belgic Confession, Art. 15). This theory is, in fact, the repackaged pre-Christian Greek humanism of Plato and Aristotle. Plato taught that man was a blank slate in his nature, that is, morally neutral. His choices were the product of imitation, environment, education, and circumstances. The cure for the evils of society was the formation of a wise state which would lead men to solve the problems of life. This pagan philosophy, now in a post-Christian world, still dominates modern societal and political discourse, even though it has failed every time it has been tried as a cure for the human problem. In its Pelagian form, it also shaped and continues to shape modern liberal Christianity and its social gospel.

The doctrine of free will is also an integral part of the Pelagian system. It separates the will from any moral direction, holy or unholy, and conceives of it as neutral, able to choose the good or the evil. This requires a definition of freedom which confounds two different things. In philosophy, freedom is the ability to act without being forced or compelled to do something. Someone in chains or someone who is being coerced or forced to do something against his will is not free to act. This is a philosophical idea, not a biblical or theological one.

In Scripture, freedom is both the legal right before God and the spiritual, moral ability through holiness to seek and choose what is pleasing to God. Freedom is rooted in the orientation of a nature directed toward God in love, founded upon righteousness and holiness. It requires the holiness of the nature. Sin, on the other hand, is bondage

in guilt and corruption. Pelagianism supplanted the biblical idea of freedom with the philosophical one. Later, semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism would try to blend the two definitions, and that blend characterizes most modern evangelicalism today.

The correct relation between the two concepts is not difficult to determine. Man acts freely, in the philosophical sense, when he acts without compulsion *in harmony with his nature*. But his nature, which was created holy, has become wicked through the fall. Thus it is contrary to man's fallen nature, now totally depraved, to will or choose the good. For a sinner to choose the good from the heart is not possible from the viewpoint of his will. Though he may find it is expedient or useful to have some outward conformity to it, for the sake of good order in the world, his heart is not in it. A good tree brings forth good fruit and a corrupt tree brings forth corrupt fruit (Matt. 7:17).

Against this background, Augustine laid out the biblical doctrine of original sin. Augustine, in his own experience and personal struggle with sin and unbelief, had already developed the foundation of the doctrine of sin and grace. Through his personal struggles God had spiritually prepared him to set forth the truth of sin and grace from the Word of God. Augustine's view can be summarized in three basic simple statements which we will consider rendered into English from the Latin.

1. "*Possible not to sin.*" In God's creation of man, Augustine found the wonder of that first state in which man stood in Adam—holiness in a sinless world. Man was complete in all respects, with his will formed to serve the will of his Creator in righteousness. Man was free to serve God without sin and was righteous. Yet Augustine also recognized that Paradise the first was not the end of God's design, which could only come in Christ and perfection in Him. While it was possible for him not to sin, man could also fall into sin and turn from that holy state in disobedience into sin. The wages of sin is death, and man could, as a judgment of God upon sin, die, spiritually in separation from God, as well as physically. It is in that light that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the temptation and the fall must be understood. In that first state man was free to serve God, but he could turn from that freedom into bondage and death.

2. "*Not possible not to sin.*" When man fell into sin,


he died spiritually and his nature became corrupted. He became a slave to sin and in bondage to it. The result is that in Adam's fall we all died. There is an organic connection between Adam and the human race. In Adam, man was created after the image of God and when Adam fell, he became the fountain of a corrupted human nature in all his posterity. His children were conceived and born in sin after him, so that the presence of sin and corruption extends to children in their mothers' wombs. With this development in doctrine, Augustine laid the foundation for the doctrine of original sin, focusing primarily on its organic aspect as corruption and pollution of nature.

The result is that man has lost his freedom to serve God and is by nature in bondage to sin and corruption. And that too, as a judgment of God upon him for his sin. Consequently, his will is corrupted, his knowledge of God and holy things polluted, and, being guilty before God, he has lost his grace or favor. Lust or concupiscence now rules his internal existence and holds him captive in the bondage of willful sin. For fallen man, it truly is "not possible not to sin" from the heart. Moreover, he freely (that is, without coercion) wills sin in his heart. Thus, Augustine also laid the foundation of the doctrine of the bondage of the will, while maintaining the principle that man nevertheless acts as a responsible, rational moral creature in his actions. He has become a corrupt tree that brings forth fruit in harmony with his fallen nature, that is, corrupt fruit.

3. "*Not possible to sin.*" On this foundation of original sin, one finds the only way of salvation is in God's sovereign grace in Christ in the incarnation, in the atoning effectual death of Christ, and in the saving grace of God in the soul. It is in view of this doctrine of sin that Augustine sets forth the truth of sovereign election, of particular and efficacious atonement, and of the power of saving grace. Viewed from the end or perfection of salvation, it is the work of grace to lead one from death to life and to that eternal perfection of glory in which, in its consummation, it shall be "not possible to sin." The work of grace, therefore, leads one who is in himself dead in sin, through the way of regeneration and conversion, and finally of a resurrection to holy perfection.

While all of these elements as we now hold them were not fully developed by Augustine, the foundation was laid in his writings and defense of the truth of sin

and grace. The Protestant Reformers were Augustinians in their doctrine. Augustine's treatment of sin and grace was the first development of this doctrine, the early church before him being focused on the Trinity and on the person and natures of Christ and their relationship.

Augustine's work rested upon that development, and built upon it. The church, so often departing from the foundation laid by God through Augustine's work, also continues today to depart from the historic Christian faith and to turn again to the errors of Pelagius in some form. 

REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK

Election of Grace: Augustine's Doctrine of Predestination

All who love the Reformed faith should give thanks for Augustine. Through him, the Lord imparted to us a rich, enduring knowledge, especially of grace. His contribution to our understanding of grace is substantial, even foundational, for by grace are we saved.

But Reformed believers may want to consider his development of predestination greater, more important, and essential to our faith. Not because predestination itself is more important, or even because his development of it was so robust. Rather, please consider it because Augustine established the principle that without predestination, there is no grace by which we are saved.

Our purpose is not to lay out all the salient points of Augustine's view on predestination, but rather to set forth its particular significance in defense of grace over against semi-Pelagianism. Nevertheless, we may briefly describe his doctrine. We can be brief, because anyone familiar with the Reformed creeds will recognize it—because Augustine's presentation is biblical, often being mere quotes from Scripture; and because his teaching is basic, clear, yet thorough.

These traits are easily visible in what is probably the closest he gives to a definition of predestination:

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...to the adoption of children, not because we were going to be of ourselves holy and immaculate, but...that we might be so.... He did this according to the good plea-

sure of His will, so that nobody might glory concerning his own will, but about God's will towards himself. He did this according to the riches of His grace...which He purposed in His beloved Son, in whom we have obtained a share...to the purpose, not ours, but His...that He worketh in us to will also. Moreover, He worketh according to the counsel of His will, that we may be to the praise of His glory...for which purpose He called us...[with] that special calling of the elect.¹

These, then, are the basic elements: predestination is an act of God's will, grace, and pleasure, before time, in which He chose certain people to be members of Christ (who was first chosen, for God purposed this in His Son), by which they share in His holiness and are made to will and work good, to the end that they will glorify and praise God, and not themselves. This, as to its basics.

The particular significance of Augustine's predestination we want to promote is this: the necessary, causal relationship he establishes between grace and election. In general, this relationship is summarized by his oft-repeated phrase "election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). By this he meant that election is grace *unto* grace, so that all grace is out of election. Predestination, therefore, is the act of God before time that is the necessary cause of all gifts and acts of grace in time; and predestination requires grace to be discriminating in distribution, irresistible in reception, and efficacious in power.

Augustine's linking of predestination with grace was

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¹ "On the Predestination of the Saints," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NAPF), vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), vol. 5, ch. 37, 516.

deliberate. It was to establish predestination as an “impenetrable bulwark for the defense of God’s grace.”² As with most doctrinal developments, this one grew out of necessity in battle. It occurred during the last ten years of his life against a modified form of Pelagianism that had established a beach-head in Southern France (then Gaul). Later called the semi-Pelagians, Augustine knew them as Massilians due to their city of origin, Marseilles. So around the age of 65, when most men quietly contemplate retirement, and after already enduring the Pelagian siege of the City of God, Augustine again reinforces the walls against what amounted to an old foe, albeit one with fresh resolve and new weapons. Significantly, he fortifies primarily with predestination.

Predestination was not unknown to the church or Augustine prior to this. He had written on it decades earlier, and referred to it often against Pelagius. But it did not play a major role then because that conflict was mainly about human nature, the necessity of divine grace, and the role of human merit. The semi-Pelagian controversy was different. It chiefly and directly impugned the nature of divine grace. The semi-Pelagians agreed (against Pelagius) that everyone is born with original sin so none can be saved except by grace. However, they also insisted human nature, although sick and weak, can begin faith, and merit the other gifts of grace. B. B. Warfield says they admitted that “all men...needed God’s grace for salvation. But...objected to...prevenient and irresistible grace...and denied that the gifts of grace came irrespective of merits.”³ In other words, although they championed grace in salvation, it was defective—merited, dispensable, subsequent, common, and resistible grace. Sound familiar?

Against this, Augustine champions grace as free, antecedent, particular, irresistible, and efficacious.⁴ Importantly, he does not do this merely by arguing the nature of grace directly. Rather, he grounds grace in predestination. Why? He believed their errors regarding grace were because “they are in darkness...concerning

predestination.”⁵ This darkness was partly, that they limited predestination to foreknowledge, and charged that Augustine’s teaching was fatalism, rendered God unjust, abolished free-will, and was contrary to sound doctrine. Besides, according to them, preaching predestination would drive men into indifference or despair.⁶ They also claimed predestination contradicted the “will of God to save all men” and the death of Christ for all.⁷ Sound familiar?

Augustine, of course, refutes them, especially with copious quotes from Scripture. He dismisses the cavil of fatalism by appeal to the determinative will of God, demolishing the underlying premise of free will: “The human will does not attain grace by freedom, but rather attains freedom by grace.”⁸ Against a “will of God to save all men,” he explains this is impossible because “man’s will cannot withstand the will of God.” He also asserted that “all” in I Timothy 2:4 may be understood as “all the predestinated...because every kind of men is among them.”⁹

Augustine also defends preaching predestination. To oppose it was to oppose the preaching of Christ and the apostles. Saying it rendered useless exhortations and rebuke was to indict Scripture.¹⁰ Preaching predestination did not hinder progress or perseverance of faith, but rather promoted them.¹¹ He states, for example: “Although...we say obedience is the gift of God, we exhort men to it.”¹² And, “Predestination must be preached, that God’s true grace...may be maintained with insuperable defense.”¹³

Strikingly, Augustine rarely argues predestination for its own sake, or even because it is biblical. His basic,

² Mathijs Lamberigts, “Predestination,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 678.

³ B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, “Introductory Essay,” (Philadelphia: P & R Publishing, 1956), lxiii.

⁴ Warfield, 322.

⁵ “Predestination,” 2, 498.

⁶ Warfield, “Introductory Essay,” lxiv.

⁷ William John Sparrow-Simpson, *The Letters of St. Augustine* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 182. “What they could not credit was that any human being exists whom God does not will to save. They maintained...that the propitiation offered by Christ is inclusive of every human being.... For God repelled no man from life but desired that all men should be saved and should come to the knowledge of the truth.”

⁸ “On Rebuke,” 17, 478.

⁹ “On Rebuke,” 44-45, 489.

¹⁰ “Perseverance,” 345, 538.

¹¹ “Perseverance,” 36, 540.

¹² “Perseverance,” 37, 540.

¹³ “Perseverance,” 54, 548.

underlying purpose is always to teach predestination because grace is dependent upon it. If grace is divorced from election, grace is no longer grace. Augustine knew this from experience, for it was his error at one time: “I thought...faith whereby we believe on God is...in us from ourselves...and to consent when the gospel was preached to us...was our own doing...[because] I had not as yet found what is the nature of the election of grace.”¹⁴ So he argues vigorously that “God’s grace...is given according to the good pleasure of His will.... The grace of God, which both begins a man’s faith and...enables it to persevere unto the end...is given according to His own most secret...righteous, wise, and beneficent will.”¹⁵ “This is the predestination of the saints—nothing else, to wit, the foreknowledge and the preparation of God’s kindnesses.”¹⁶

Augustine’s commitment to defending grace by predestination is especially evident in his willingness to explain its difficulties. He acknowledged “the mystery” of the doctrine, but denied it was contradictory or unknowable. To him, the mystery of it was that we can know only what God reveals and can expect opposition because it seems contrary to our natural (depraved) sense of justice. Besides, there are limits to our understanding. Nevertheless, he is not shy or ashamed to teach whatever Scripture reveals—that grace through election might stand, and not fall.

One example of this is Augustine’s defense of *particular* grace. He recognizes that if grace is of election, then “grace...is not common to the good and the wicked.” But he also recognizes that then not everything commonly called grace is grace—grace is not properly every “unmerited gift of God.” So he addresses the issue: “Grace...is that which makes the good to differ from the wicked,” that is, grace has a moral quality to it.

Let the grace, therefore, whereby we are living and reasonable creatures, and are distinguished from the cattle, be attributed to nature; let that grace also by which, among men themselves, the handsome are made to differ from the ill-formed, or the intelligent from the stupid...be ascribed to nature...[even] the capacity to have faith, as the capacity to have love, belongs to men’s nature; but

to have faith, even as to have love, belongs to the grace of believers.”¹⁷

Another evidence of Augustine’s zeal for predestination in the interests of grace is his attempt to explain the apostasy of the baptized. It is a problem because he promotes irresistible, efficacious grace by election from a sovereign God. “Of these [elect] no one perishes.... None of them perishes, because God is not mistaken...[and] because God is overcome by nothing.”¹⁸ The number of those “predestinated...is so certain that one can neither be added to them nor taken from them.”¹⁹ And the basic reason is that the grace of election works everything necessary to persevere:

For such [the elect] it is provided that they should hear the gospel, and when they hear they believe, and in the faith...they persevere unto the end; and if, perchance, they deviate from the way, when they are rebuked they are amended...and return into the path which they had left.... For He worketh all these things in them..., who also elected them in His Son before the foundation of the world by the election of grace.... As it is said, of grace, not of any precedent merits of theirs.²⁰

But this creates a problem. For many called the children of God, or Israel, or the church, fall away in unbelief. Again, Augustine addresses the difficulty. First, he appeals to the biblical distinction between children of “flesh” versus “promise,” and those “Israel” versus “of Israel.” Second, he distinguishes between what we know only outwardly and what God knows eternally:

Far from being so [that] these [who fall away] were of those who are predestinated and called according to His purpose—who are truly the children of the promise.... While they live piously, they are called children of God; but because they live wickedly and die in impiety, the foreknowledge of God does not call them God’s children.... They are not so called by God.... They who are truly children are foreknown and predestinated.... Such children would be given to Christ the Son,...[and] are ordained to eternal life.... And therefore none of them ends this life when he has changed from good to evil.... [And] those whom we call His enemies..., whomever of them

¹⁴ “Predestination,” 7, 500.

¹⁵ “Perseverance,” 33, 538.

¹⁶ “Perseverance,” 35, 539.

¹⁷ “Predestination,” 10, 503.

¹⁸ “On Rebuke” 14, 477.

¹⁹ “On Rebuke” 39, 487.

²⁰ “On Rebuke” 13, 476-477.

He will so regenerate that they may end this life in that faith which worketh by love, are already, and before this is done, in that predestination His children..., and may not perish but have everlasting life.²¹

In defense of grace, Augustine also boldly teaches *double predestination*. Some (such as Schaff himself) deny or doubt this. We are not sure why. Perhaps because Augustine routinely uses election interchangeably with predestination. Perhaps because he teaches election from an infralapsarian perspective—elected before time, they are chosen logically post-lapse, that is, out of the mass of fallen humanity. Perhaps it's because he consistently refers to reprobation in terms of God's leaving sinners in perdition, or an act of God's justice. But all this is simply the same perspective, language, and doctrine of the Canons of Dordt (1618-19). Besides, his position is clear from his writings, especially two somewhat unrelated works written during that controversy. "These we call...the two cities, or two communities of men, of which the one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other [predestined] to suffer eternal punishment with the devil."²² And,

When the intelligent creation, both angelic and human, sinned, doing not His will but their own, He used the very will of the creature which was working in opposition to the Creator's will as an instrument for carrying out His will, the supremely Good thus turning to good account even what is evil, to the condemnation of those whom in His justice He has predestined to punishment, and to the salvation of those whom in His mercy He has predestined to grace.²³

Lastly, to demonstrate not only the veracity of Augustine's doctrine of predestination, but especially its significance for the promotion and defense of grace as free, antecedent, particular, irresistible, and efficacious, consider this wonderful proof which Augustine raises in a number of places—Christ according to His human nature. Something all who love Christ should consider.

There is no more illustrious instance of predestination than Jesus Himself.... If any believer wishes thoroughly to understand this doctrine, let him consider Him, and in Him he will find himself also.... The believer, I say; who

in Him believes and confesses the true human nature that is our own.... Therefore He predestinated both Him and us, because both in Him that He might be our head, and in us that we should be His body, He foreknew that our merits would not precede, but that His doing should."²⁴

Therefore in Him who is our Head let there appear to be the very fountain of grace, whence...He diffuses Himself through all His members. It is by that grace that every man from the beginning of his faith becomes a Christian, by which grace that one man from His beginning became Christ. Of the same Spirit also the former is born again of which the latter was born. By the same Spirit is effected in us the remission of sins, by which Spirit it was effected that He should have no sin.... This, therefore, is that same predestination of the saints which most especially shone forth in the Saint of saints...; and who is there of those who rightly understand the declarations of the truth that can deny this predestination?²⁵

Yet, the sad truth is, many have done just that. Rome did, while still upholding, at least officially, Augustine's doctrines of grace. Sadder still is that Reformed folk, whose creeds teach this same grace and predestination, deny it (or muddle it or treat it like a disease). The legacy of Augustine is that he shows us the inevitable result—grace is no longer grace and varies little from of the semi-Pelagians. Conversely, where this happens to grace, one can be certain that predestination has been denied. Why? Because election is of grace, and grace is of election—any grace given, taught, received, or worked, that is cut-off, divorced, or not flowing from election, is no grace at all.

This is the citadel Augustine built upon the foundation of Christ and the apostles. This is the same fortress of the Reformed creeds, particularly the Canons of Dordt, a vigorous, thorough confession of predestination made in the interest of grace. In this bulwark about the City of God, grace is kept safe. Grace kept safe, God's people are secure—for by grace are we saved. Remember, sometime, to give thanks to our predestining, gracious Lord for Augustine, especially those last 10 years of his life. ∞

²¹ "On Rebuke" 20-21, 480-481.

²² "City of God," in *NAPF*, vol. 2, Book 15, Ch. 1, 284.

²³ "Enchiridion," in *NAPF*, vol. 3, Ch. 100, 269.

²⁴ "Perseverance," 67, 552.

²⁵ "Predestination," 31, 512.

Augustine, the Donatists and the Catholic Church

"It is better indeed that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment or by pain. But because the former means are better, the latter must not therefore be neglected.... Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering before they attain the highest grade of religious development.... The Lord Himself orders that the guests be first invited, then compelled, to His great supper."

This quotation is taken from Augustine's anti-Donatist writings in which he offers his interpretation of the command in the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." The quotation serves to highlight the significance and one of the central ecclesiological issues involved in the schismatic division that enveloped the church in North Africa during the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

The Donatist schism or controversy, as it has become known, had its origins in events that occurred before Augustine's birth in 354 and were still unresolved at the time of his death in 430. Though this schism had its origins in events well prior to his birth, Augustine came to play a leading role in this controversy. His involvement arose with his ordination as a priest in Hippo in North Africa in 391, which was followed by his appointment as the bishop of Hippo in 395 (Hippo is the former name of present day Annaba in northeastern Algeria).

The significance of the Donatist controversy should not be underestimated. For an entire century it split the church in North Africa into two hostile camps. The schism concerned the purity of the church, the administration of church discipline, and the administration of the sacraments. In other words, the theological issues centered around ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church. However, it should not be thought that this controversy was merely a doctrinal controversy. It was much more than that. It was a controversy that involved not only the

church, but also the secular authorities and the relationship between the two, including the place of temporal force in church discipline.

The precise origins of the schism are somewhat uncertain, though it is generally agreed that it had its roots in the Diocletian persecutions (303-311) that followed a series of imperial edicts by the emperor aimed at the extermination of the church throughout the Roman empire. The ferocity of the Diocletian persecutions saw members of the church in North Africa respond with differing degrees of commitment and determination to the violent measures perpetrated against them by the empire. Some remained resolutely steadfast, even fanatically contemptuous of death. As a result, many *confessors*, as they became known, suffered martyrdom.

However, not all in the church embraced the attitude of the *confessors*. Some were willing to compromise their faith to varying degrees in order to preserve themselves and their way of life. Some of those fled out of fear and abandoned the faith. They became known as *the lapsed*. Still others, principally those in the ranks of the clergy, shrank back under the persecution and surrendered the Scriptures to their persecutors. This earned them the ignominious title of *traditors* (*traditio*, "handing over"). Not surprisingly, the *confessors* viewed the *lapsed* and the *traditors* as cowards and traitors, unworthy of a place in the church.

These different responses to the Diocletian persecutions produced conflict within the different Christian communities throughout the Roman empire, including North Africa. This internal conflict continued long after the Edict of Milan in 313 by which the emperor Constantine brought the persecution to an end, declaring "that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow the mode of religion which to each of them appeared best."

In North Africa, tensions such as those between the *confessors* and the *traditors* came to a head in the diocese of Carthage. These tensions began during the period of the persecutions and continued long after they had ended. During the persecutions, Mensurius was the bishop of Carthage. He steered a course in which he vacillated

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between an accommodation of and a confrontation with the demands of the Roman authorities. He denounced the fanatical pursuit of martyrdom and resisted what he perceived to be the unnecessary antagonism of the secular authorities by the *confessors*. When the secular authorities demanded the sacred books from him, he hid them, leaving only heretical books that he surrendered to the authorities. This action led him to be branded a *traditor*.

Following the death of Mensurius, his archdeacon Caecilian was elected to fill the vacancy in Carthage. However, his appointment was strenuously opposed because he espoused views similar to those of Mensurius. His opponents accused him of having failed to support *confessors* imprisoned as a result of persecution. In addition, they asserted that one of those who ordained him to the office of bishop, Felix of Apthugni, was a *traditor* and that consequently his ordination was invalid. They also charged Caecilian with uncanonical procedure in not consulting with Secundus of Tigisi, the primate of Numidia, regarding his appointment. The latter was the senior bishop in North Africa in the absence of the bishop of Carthage.

Tensions between Caecilian and Secundus saw the church in Carthage divided into two factions. The *confessors* urged Secundus to exercise his authority. As a result, Secundus, accompanied by some seventy Numidian bishops who supported the position of the *confessors*, assembled in Carthage, whereupon they condemned Caecilian, as having been ordained by a *traditor* and as having failed to care for imprisoned *confessors*. Secundus then proceeded to appoint Majorinus, an opponent of Caecilian, to replace him as the bishop of Carthage. In 313, Majorinus was succeeded by Donatus of Casae Nigrae, who occupied the see of Carthage until 347. It was his name that gave rise to the description "Donatists."

With the appointment of Majorinus, in effect, two churches existed in Carthage: one Catholic (not Roman, but universal), the other Donatist. Within a short period of time, the schism spread throughout North Africa and further afield, as advocates of the two opposing bishops sought the support of other churches.

From a theological perspective, the issues between the two parties concerned differences regarding the doctrine of the church. The Donatists maintained the pure church ideal. On that basis, they contended that the *lapsed* and *traditors* had no place in the church; some even going so far

as to contend that the *lapsed* should be forever barred from rejoining the church. Others allowed for their reinstatement, but contended that before they could be reinstated, they had to be rebaptized. Likewise, the Donatists maintained that *traditors* by their actions forfeited their offices; for them to be reinstated to office, they had to be rebaptized and re-ordained. They also maintained that any ecclesiastical functions purportedly performed by *traditors* were invalid. It followed that baptisms and ordinations performed by those identified as *traditors* were not recognized.

The Donatists proceeded from an ideal and spiritualistic conception of the church. They considered themselves to be the only true and pure church. They laid stress upon the subjective holiness or personal worthiness of members, and made the catholicity of the church and the efficacy of the sacraments to depend upon that. The true church for the Donatists was, in effect, a body which was already holy, or at least had the appearance of being so. They considered that, by the toleration of those who were openly sinful, the church lost her holiness. This was the basis on which they rejected the appointment of Caecilian. It was also on this basis that they demanded the excommunication of all unworthy members, especially those who had denied the faith or who had given up the Scriptures under persecution.

In 313, the Donatists, in an attempt to resolve the schism, appealed to Constantine to determine which group was entitled to imperial recognition. Constantine referred the matter to Miltiades, the bishop of Rome who fought against the Donatists. However, this decision was rejected by the Donatists. The schism became even more deeply entrenched.

Constantine tried to persuade the Donatists to come back into the fold of the Catholic Church. But those attempts failed and he eventually resorted to force. However, coercive measures by the imperial authorities failed to curtail the expansion of Donatism in North Africa. In 321, Constantine was forced to change tack, which resulted in him granting the Donatists full liberty of faith and worship. At the same time, he urged the Catholic Church to patience and indulgence. However, patience and indulgence were in short supply.

Despite sporadic bouts of imperial repression after the death of Constantine (337), the schism continued unabated throughout the fourth century. It was toward

the latter part of that century that Augustine became involved in the controversy following his ordination as a priest in the diocese of Hippo in 391. At that time, Hippo was home to a large congregation of Donatists. Catholics and Donatists lived and worked side by side in Hippo. Families in Hippo included members of both the Catholic and Donatist communities. The tension between the two groups waxed and waned.

At the time that Augustine settled in Hippo, tension between the groups was on the rise. Therefore, from the outset of his ministry Augustine engaged the Donatists in debate. He spoke and wrote against them. Reputedly, Augustine's dialectics were formidable and so the Donatists avoided him whenever possible.

Through his studies and writings on the Donatist schism, Augustine developed his doctrine of the church. He taught that there is one universal church in the world. For him, that was the Catholic Church. He also maintained that within that one church there were two realities, the visible church and the invisible church; the visible church being the institutional body established by Christ on earth appointed to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments; the invisible being the body of the elect, made up of genuine believers from all ages and who are known only unto God. Furthermore, Augustine maintained that the church visible will, according to the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24ff., be made up of the godly and the ungodly until the end of the world. True holiness will only be attained in a state of grace.

Nonetheless, Augustine also contended that the church was to be holy. He taught that the church was holy, in principle, and that it was that in and through Jesus Christ. Though he maintained the holiness of the church, Augustine neglected to emphasize that the church must also seek to manifest its holiness. His failure to emphasize that meant that little or nothing was done to deal with those in the church who were blatantly living unholy lives. In support of his approach, Augustine relied upon the fact that in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the tares were removed, but only at the end. Augustine's reluctance to pursue holiness within the church led to the church retaining within her ranks those who openly violated the word of God.

Augustine insisted that there could be no salvation outside of the Catholic Church. From this understand-

ing, he derived his view on the sacraments. His views on the sacraments were also developed as a result of the Donatist controversy, particularly his view on the administration of the sacraments. In reaction to the assertions of the Donatists, Augustine developed a distinction between the "regularity" and "validity" of the sacraments. He contended that the sacraments when performed by the clergy of the Catholic Church were "regular," whereas those performed by the Donatists were "irregular." Nonetheless, he asserted that because the validity of the sacraments did not depend upon the holiness of the priest who administered them, irregular sacraments could still be valid provided they were administered in the name of Jesus Christ and in the manner prescribed by the church.

Augustine maintained that baptism only existed in the Catholic Church and that only in the Catholic Church could it rightly be received. While he granted to the Donatists that they may have a proper baptism, he denied that they could have the efficacy of baptism.

Having developed these views through study, reading and debate, Augustine attacked the Donatists' conception of the holiness and purity of the church; he repudiated their attempts to separate physically the holy from the unholy in the midst of the church; he contended that the Donatists were sectarian and not catholic; he challenged their practice of rebaptism; and he contended that those who administered the sacraments were mere instruments, not fountains of grace upon which the efficacy of the sacrament depended.

In 411, Augustine participated in a conference in Carthage called by the emperor in a further attempt to bring the schism to an end. The conference, which was designed to settle matters once and for all, was attended by 286 Catholic bishops and 279 Donatist bishops. The bishops met three times over the course of a week. Seven delegates from each side engaged in heated debate over the origins of the schism and their divergent ecclesiastical views. However, the conference failed to resolve the differences. The Donatists reasserted their biblical warrant for separating from those who had cooperated with the Romans in the persecutions under Diocletian. They also maintained their view of the need for separation between the holy and unholy on the basis that the sins of one might affect the spiritual health of others. Furthermore, they forcefully argued against compulsion in religion and the confusion of the powers of the church and the state.

The failure of the conference saw the reimposition of stringent imperial laws upon the Donatists. Donatist bishops were banished from North Africa, fines were imposed on the laity, and Donatist churches were confiscated. In 415, the Donatists were even forbidden to meet for worship upon the pain of death.

Tensions between the two groups ran high. Even Augustine, who had previously maintained that only spiritual measures should be employed against the Donatists, began to advocate the use of force in order to bring them back into fellowship with the Catholic Church. In support of this proposition, he appealed erroneously to the command in the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 24:23 to “compel them to come in.”

The Donatist schism was never formally resolved, though it was effectively brought to an end by the invasion of North Africa in 428 by the Arian Vandals—an invasion that devastated both the Catholic and Donatist churches in North Africa. Nonetheless, remnants of the thinking of the Donatists lived on and, in fact, can still be found in Christendom today.

As noted, through his anti-Donatist writings, Augustine developed and clarified his doctrine of the church, not only for himself, but for the church. This is not to suggest that every conclusion that Augustine espoused in his anti-Donatist writings was right. Clearly, Augustine erred in a number of areas. For example, he erred in his willingness to see heretics and schismatics compelled to return to the church. Though Augustine himself was reluctant to see persecution of heretics and schismatics, nonetheless, his views were the catalyst for the whole

system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution adopted by the Church of Rome during the Middle Ages. He also erred in his toleration of ungodliness within the visible church. Likewise, he erred in his views on the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism being tied to the Catholic Church.

Nonetheless, Augustine has bequeathed to the church today an enduring legacy. Consider the following excerpts from the Westminster Confession of Faith and you can discern ecclesiology that first found expression in the writings of Augustine.

1. The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof.
2. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion.
4. This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them (WCF, Chapter 25).

Augustine was truly one of the great church fathers, and his doctrine of the church, which was shaped and honed through the Donatist schism, continues to benefit the church today.

Soli Deo Gloria 

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGHA

Augustine's View of the Indissolubility of the Marriage Bond (1)

Background and Summary

In so many respects the Reformation was a return to Augustine. Sadly, in one important respect it was not.

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The one respect in which the Reformers generally did not return to Augustine, but deviated from him, was with regard to the doctrine of marriage. With firm resolve Augustine maintained the Bible's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. He resisted the pressure of those who wanted to make allowances for divorce on

grounds other than adultery and who permitted remarriage after divorce. In line with Scripture, Augustine permitted divorce only on the ground of adultery. But he insisted that even then, those lawfully divorced might not remarry. As long as one's spouse remains living, the marriage bond remains intact and no remarriage is permitted. Nothing but death, which is to say that only God, dissolves the marriage bond, thus freeing those previously married to be married again.

Among Reformed Christians Augustine is probably best known for his defense of sovereign grace. Repudiating the Pelagian error of the innate goodness of man and the meritorious value of good works, Augustine defended the truth of salvation by grace alone. He taught the will of God in predestination as the source of salvation, a salvation of totally depraved sinners sinful with original sin, who can neither save themselves nor desire to be saved. Perhaps less well known among Reformed Christians is Augustine's teaching concerning marriage.

Augustine's treatise entitled *Adulterous Marriages*, written in two books, was the only treatise written in the first five centuries of the New Testament that was devoted exclusively to the subject of divorce and remarriage. In *Adulterous Marriages* (Book 1) Augustine responds to various questions put to him by a certain Pollentius, whose identity is unknown. After Pollentius read Book 1 of Augustine's *Adulterous Marriages*, as well as his exposition of *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, he was troubled by Augustine's strict interpretation of Jesus' teaching concerning divorce and remarriage in his exposition of Matthew 5:31, 32 and Matthew 19:9.

In Book 1 of *Adulterous Marriages*, Augustine is primarily concerned to expound the pertinent biblical texts, particularly I Corinthians 7; Matthew 5:31, 32; and Matthew 19:9, with its parallels in Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18. Reading Paul's teaching in the light of Jesus' teaching in the gospel narratives, Pollentius argued that a distinction must be made between divorce that takes place because of fornication and divorce that occurs on other grounds. While Pollentius argued that in both cases divorce is allowed, only in the case of divorce on the ground of fornication is remarriage also permitted. In defense of his view, Pollentius appealed, as might be expected, to Matthew's exception clause—Matthew 19:9, "except it be for fornication." He argued that the

prohibition of remarriage applies only to those who were divorced on grounds other than fornication. But if the divorce has been on the ground of fornication, "except it be for fornication," remarriage is allowable.

Augustine rejected Pollentius' interpretation. He demonstrates that Jesus in Matthew 19:9 teaches that the only lawful reason *for divorce* is fornication. In Matthew 19:9 Jesus is giving the only valid ground for divorce, not a ground for remarriage after divorce. He contends that neither Jesus nor Paul allow for divorce on any other ground. And even in cases of divorce on the ground of fornication, Augustine maintains that the marriage bond remains intact ("till death do us part") and, because the marriage bond remains intact, remarriage is prohibited. In response to Pollentius' appeal to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 to justify both divorce *and* remarriage, Augustine calls for the interpretation of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 in light of the parallels in Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18. In these passages the prohibition of remarriage is absolute and unqualified: "whosoever marieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."

In Book 2 Augustine begins with Paul's word in I Corinthians 7:39, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." He argues that even when a spouse has been legitimately divorced because of adultery, the bond of marriage remains intact until the death of one of the spouses. Even when divorce has occurred on the ground of adultery, and therefore is a valid divorce, the marriage bond remains intact in the eyes of the Lord. And because the marriage bond remains intact, no remarriage may be permitted. Additionally, Augustine argues against the remarriage of those lawfully divorced on the basis of the apostle's teaching in I Corinthians 7:11, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." Augustine points out that to allow remarriage after divorce effectively precludes the possibility of reconciliation: "or be reconciled to her husband." With a view to the reconciliation of husband and wife—something the husband or wife sinned against by an unfaithful spouse ought to be praying for daily—even those divorced on the one ground permitted by Scripture must remain unmarried.

Augustine's Teaching Concerning Marriage Generally

Before considering the specifics of Augustine's teaching on divorce and remarriage, it will be profitable to take note of his views on marriage generally. Augustine set forth his views in a treatise entitled "The Good of Marriage," in his *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, in his two books on *Adulterous Marriages*, as well as in various tracts and sermons.¹

Foundational to Augustine's teaching on marriage was his conviction that marriage is a divine institution. "God did not create [Adam and Eve] separately and join them as if strangers, but He made the one from the other, indicating also the power of union in the side from where she was drawn and formed."² "They who have been well instructed in the Catholic faith know," among other things, "that God created marriage, and as the union is from God, so divorce is from the devil."³

Because marriage is a divine institution, marriage is good. Over against the sect known as the Manichees, a sect to which Augustine belonged for a time, as well as contrary to most of the leaders of the church of his own day who spoke disparagingly of marriage, Augustine affirmed the inherent goodness of marriage. In fact, he entitled one of his treatises on marriage, "The Good of Marriage." In that treatise he wrote that "according to the present condition of birth and death, which we know and in which we were created, the marriage of male and female is something good."⁴ He insists that the marriage of believers "is a good and can be defended by right reason against all charges."⁵

In his *Tractates On the Gospel of John 1-10*, Augustine appeals to Jesus' attendance at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee as proof of the goodness of marriage. If Jesus had not approved of marriage, he would not have attended the wedding in Cana or participated in the celebration of the union. Our Reformed fathers followed Au-

gustine's lead in this respect by including in our Reformed Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church appeal to "Jesus' presence, gifts and miracles, in Cana of Galilee," by which he "highly honor[ed]" marriage.⁶

Although marriage is good, the goodness of marriage is a relative goodness, according to Augustine. In comparison to the goodness of marriage, celibacy and virginity were a superior good. Augustine believed that "marriage and continence are two goods, the second of which is better."⁷ And although "[m]arriage and virginity are, it is true, two goods, the second of them is the greater."⁸

It belongs to the good of marriage that it is God's provision for the companionship of those who are married. That is an exceedingly great good in a world of sin and sorrow, sickness and death, pain and persecution. That we who are married have someone with whom we can fellowship, to whom we can turn for companionship, from whom we can receive encouragement—a greater good can hardly be imagined. By virtue of God's creation, "human nature is something social and possesses the capacity for friendship as a great and natural good.... And so it is that the first natural tie of human society is man and wife."⁹ Marriage is not to be considered "good solely because of the procreation of children, but also because of the natural companionship between the two sexes."¹⁰

Although marriage is God's provision of companionship for those who are married, the friendship of marriage was not the main purpose of marriage, in Augustine's view. The main purpose of marriage was not even the fellowship of husband and wife in marriage as a picture of the love relationship between Christ and his church. Rather, the main purpose of marriage was the begetting of children. Thus "[m]arriage has also this good, that carnal or youthful incontinence, even if it is bad, is turned to the honorable task of begetting children, so that marital intercourse makes something good out of the evil of lust."¹¹ According to Augustine the "crown of marriage...is the chastity of procreation

¹ I will be quoting from these works of Augustine as they are included in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Thomas P. Halton, Ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, repr. 1981-2011), volumes 11, 27, 38, 70, and 78.

² "Good of Marriage," 9.

³ "Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10," 195

⁴ "Good of Marriage," 12.

⁵ "Good of Marriage," 39.

⁶ *The Psalter*. PRC Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 77

⁷ "Good of Marriage," 20.

⁸ "Good of Marriage," 45.

⁹ "Good of Marriage," 9.

¹⁰ "Good of Marriage," 12.

¹¹ "Good of Marriage," 13.

and faithfulness in rendering the carnal debt.”¹² Augustine went so far as to teach that sexual relations in marriage motivated by any other purpose than procreation were sinful: “In marriage, intercourse for the purpose of generation has no fault attached to it...”¹³ But, “there is a defilement if anything is done in marriage through the union of the flesh that exceeds the need for generation, though this is pardonable.”¹⁴

Augustine was mistaken. Not the bringing forth of children—procreation—is the main purpose of the marriage of husband and wife. Rather, the first and main purpose of marriage is the friendship and fellowship of husband and wife in the covenant of marriage. Although Augustine went too far in one direction, many go to the extreme in the opposite direction today. They separate the conception and birth of children from marriage. They marry with the deliberate intention of postponing the conception of children, some indefinitely, until they suppose that they are financially secure enough to have children. Or, for wrong and selfish reasons they prevent the birth of children or destroy children who have been conceived. Or, what is still more perverse, those who defy the will of God for marriage and contract same-sex “marriages” bring children into these relationships. This is contrary to the clearly revealed will of God, which will of God is that children are brought forth and nurtured by a husband and wife who are living faithfully in the bond of marriage.

As far as the relationship of husband and wife in marriage is concerned, Augustine taught that the husband is the head of his wife and the wife is called to be in subjection to her husband. This was contrary to the spirit of the age in which Augustine lived, as it is contrary to the spirit of our age—the age of feminism and individual rights. Augustine warned that the husband’s headship may not become an excuse for tyranny on the part of the husband. Since the husband’s headship is to be modeled after Christ’s headship of the church, his calling as head is that of godly, patient, loving leadership. For that reason, the husband as head must take special care to walk faithfully before God in his marriage. In a sermon that he preached “To Married Couples,” Augustine exhorted the husbands in his congregation: “If you are the head, take

the lead; let her follow her head. But notice where you’re going; don’t go where you don’t want her to follow. Don’t go where you’re afraid of having her hard on your heels, of your both tumbling together into the pit of adultery, of your teaching her to do what you do.”¹⁵

In that same sermon, Augustine points Christian wives to their calling towards their husbands. That calling is:

In all other respects be the servants of your husbands, obedient and compliant. Don’t let any impertinence be found in you, any pride, any shrewish answering back, any disobedience; be in all respects at their service, at their beck and call.¹⁶

Those who live according to the will of God in marriage, husband and wife each fulfilling their calling, will inevitably enjoy peace and unity in their marriage.

The Permanence of Marriage

Of all that Augustine taught regarding marriage, one of the most notable features of his teaching was his insistence on the *permanence* of the marriage relationship. The marriage bond is *indissoluble*, except by death. Nothing—not permanent disability, not incapacitating injury, not faithless desertion, not adultery, not divorce—dissolves the marriage bond. Only death, the death of one of the spouses, dissolves the marriage. Augustine recognized that this view and practice were completely contrary to the practices of the non-Christian society of his day. The culture of his day was as much a culture of divorce as is our culture today. It was widely practiced and commonly accepted. Men and women freely walked away from their marriages and just as freely contracted new marriages. And all this was sanctioned by the state.

Augustine rejected this view and practice. He was convinced that the Scriptures teach that marriage is indissoluble. In marriage “an association of fidelity that cannot be dissolved” is entered into.¹⁷ When marriage is entered upon in the City of God [that is, the church], “marriage bears a kind of sacred bond, [which] can be dissolved in no way except by the death of one of the parties.”¹⁸ “Because of this sanctity it is wrong for a woman, leaving with a divorce, to marry another man while her husband still lives, even if

¹² “Good of Marriage,” 25.

¹³ “Good of Marriage,” 17.

¹⁴ “Good of Marriage,” 47.

¹⁵ “To Married Couples,” 423

¹⁶ “To Married Couples,” 423

¹⁷ “Good of Marriage,” 46.

¹⁸ “Good of Marriage,” 31.

she does this for the sake of having children. Although that is the sole reason why marriage takes place, even if this for which marriage takes place does not follow, *the marriage bond is not loosed except by the death of a spouse*¹⁹ (italics added for emphasis).

In Augustine's view, the marriage bond is indissoluble. It cannot be broken. Augustine scholar Eugene Portalie says concerning Augustine's position that "[t]he indissolubility of marriage found a staunch defender in Augustine."

Because the marriage bond cannot be broken, they

¹⁹ "Good of Marriage," 47.

who are married are married for life. So long as both spouses are living, even if they have separated or divorced, they remain married—married in the eyes of the Lord and married in the eyes of the church. It is exactly because marriage is an unbreakable, lifelong relationship, that all remarriage, even remarriage after a lawful divorce, is forbidden. This was Augustine's position. It is the biblical position. It is the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches. To this aspect of Augustine's teaching concerning marriage, we will return next time, D.V. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Reformation Lecture
Saturday, **October 25, 2014**,
2:00 P.M.
Professor Russell Dykstra
"The Reformation's Zeal
for Christian Education"
at Hope PRC
1307 E. Brockton Ave.,
Redlands, CA.

Reformation Lecture
What are your plans for
Reformation Day, October 31?
Reformation Day Lecture
Abraham Kuyper:
A Flawed Reformer
Prof. Russell Dykstra
October 31 at 7:30 (CST)
Crete PR Church.
We invite you to join us in
person. The lecture will also be
live streamed via the Internet at
www.prccrete.org.

Notice

■ The digital *Standard Bearer* Index for
volumes 1-90 is now available for \$10.00
at www.rfpa.org.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of
Randolph PRC note God's gathering of
our friend and fellow saint,

JEMIMA ENNEMA.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave,
where is thy victory? The sting of death
is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, which giveth us the
victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"
(1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, President
Jeff Krossschell, Clerk

Forty Years

■ With thanks to God, the Council and
congregation of Southwest PRC mark
forty years of faithful gospel ministry by
our beloved pastor,

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG.

Ordained into the ministry in October
1974, Rev. denHartog has humbly served
four pastorates in the USA, and as
both missionary and minister-on-loan
in Singapore. "How beautiful upon
the mountains are the feet of him that
bringeth good tidings, that publisheth
peace; that bringeth good tidings of good,
that publisheth salvation; that saith unto
Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah 52:7).

Southwest PR Church
Wyoming, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ We, your children and grandchildren,
give thanks to God for you,

LEON and VICKI GRIESS.

We thank God for giving you 45 years
of marriage on September 18, 2014! "For
the Lord will not forsake his people for his
great name's sake: Because it hath pleased
the Lord to make you his people. Only fear
the Lord, and serve him in truth with all
your heart: for consider how great things
he hath done for you" (1 Samuel 12:22, 24).

- ❖ Shon and Brenda Griess
Jesse, Amber, Quenton, Anthony, Brodie
- ❖ David and Christi Stains
Bradi, Brittany, Sammi, Jordan, Jerod
- ❖ Craig and Tiffany Poortinga
Alexis, Jaden, Carlyn, Morgan, Jaelle, Liam
Loveland, Colorado

Fall Lecture

What do you believe about Satan and his power?
What methods does he use in his attacks?

Prof. Barrett Gritters

**"THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS GRIM:
The Reformed Teaching about Satan"**
Friday, November 14, 2014

7:30 P.M.

at **Kalamazoo PR Church**

4515 Green Acres Dr.

Kalamazoo, MI

sponsored by the Evangelism Committee
of Kalamazoo PRC