

Saint Augustine's Doctrine on Grace (1)

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During the 4th and the 5th centuries three great controversies troubled the Church: the Trinitarian and Christological controversies in the East and the Pelagian controversy in the West. The first two were, so to say, theoretical, and were about the notions of nature and person as applied to the doctrine of faith, while Pelagianism was about the relation between nature and grace, about man's free will and the infallibility of grace. Man is a Pelagian at heart, defending his personality and his social and moral conquests, and we can notice this in pagan literature: the Greeks and the Romans were, in their way, religious people, but, for example, Cicero to defend man's free will denied God's foreknowledge. "No one", says Cicero, "has received virtue from God and so no one thanks God for being good"¹ and Horace adds that from the gods we receive honours and riches but not help in the performance of our duties.²

This was the problem which Augustine had to solve in his controversies with the Pelagians: how to reconcile God's foreknowledge with man's free will. It is a problem with no easy solution so much so that it has continued to be discussed throughout the centuries to the present day. The unorthodox solution either denied free will to exalt grace, or denied grace to exalt free will, while truth lies in the *veritatis medium* as Augustine expresses himself. Stressing divine grace to the detriment of human free will we have Calvinism, Lutheranism and Jansenism; while at the other extreme we have Pelagianism, followed by Semi-Pelagianism, and their counterpart in the 19th century Protestant Liberalism and Modernism.

Augustine's position can briefly be summed up as follows: redemption and grace are necessary for salvation on account of human frailty; salvation is a gift of God. Pelagians distorted Augustine's doctrine accusing him of inventing original sin and thus denying his earlier opinions; they accused him of denying the efficacy

1. Num quis quod bonus vir esset, gratias is agit unquam? (*De natura deorum* 3,36)
2. Det vitam, det opes, acquum mihi animum ipse parabo (*Epist* 1,18,1120)

of Baptism for according to them Augustine held that it had not completely taken sin away; they accused him also of denying the existence of free will in man, as, they said, he held that free will was destroyed by sin, or, at least, that free will was incompatible with his ideas of the efficacy of grace; he was accused of condemning marriage for through it children are born in sin; and finally he was accused of being a Manichee because of his doctrine on concupiscence. Augustine found no difficulty in answering these charges as we will see further on; for the moment it is enough to hint at Augustine's answers; Augustine insists that his ideas are according to the teachings of the Church and that he always remained faithful to these teachings: he never denied that Baptism remits all sins, what he held was that Baptism destroys sin, but not the *infirmitas* which is the consequence of sin; he never taught that grace destroys free will, but, on the contrary, he held that grace strengthens free will; and for him marriage was something good.

Semi-Pelagianism is the term applied in the 17th century to those monks of Marseilles who, although admitting the existence of original sin and the necessity of grace, had difficulty in accepting Augustine's idea on the relation between free will, grace and predestination. Augustine insisted on God's initiative, while the Semi-Pelagians saw man's initiative as being more important. The origin of Semi-Pelagianism was Augustine's *De correptione et gratia*: informed about the opinions of the monks at Marseilles³ Augustine wrote two treatises: *De prædestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiæ*. But the controversy continued after Augustine's death, and Augustine was accused of holding blasphemous ideas v.g. Christ has not died for all men; God created the majority of men for damnation; those predestined to hell cannot say to God: Thy will be done, etc.⁴ Both Prosper of Aquitaine and Cesarius of Arles defended Augustine and had Semi-Pelagianism condemned in the Council of Orange in 529.

Augustine's writings continued to be misunderstood throughout the centuries. In the 9th century, Godescalc held that Augustine taught that Christ did not die for the salvation of all men, and God's foreknowledge violently forces man to eternal death.⁵ This was also the idea of Wyclif and Hus; later on it was taken up by Calvin whose theology is dominated by two great ideas, God's glory and "double"

3. *Epist.* 225 and 226

4. *Capitula obiectionum Vincentianarum*

5. Christus mortem non pro omnium salute suscepit et præscientia Dei hominen violenter compellit ad mortem

predestination, either for good or for evil. These were also more or less, the thoughts of Jansenius who held that Augustine taught that Christ did not die for all men, and those who held the contrary opinion were Semi-Pelagians.

Luther thought that his doctrine on justification was based on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* although he admitted that his doctrine of justification in Augustine could be found but still not perfect (*adhuc imperfecte*).

On the other hand we have the decisions of the Council of Trent and the teachings of several Popes - Innocent I, Boniface II, John II, Leo XIII, Pius XI, Paul VI, who have extolled Augustine's teachings on original sin, necessity of grace and gratuity of justification.

Augustine method against t his opponents

Augustine shows great respect for his adversaries and even praises their virtues (v.g. Augustine once wrote that he had heard that Pelagius was a holy man, and a Christian of no small regard)⁶ and their intelligence, and is very careful not to be offensive in their regard; he even sometimes refrains from mentioning them by name not to lose their friendship (*servata amicitia*), and expresses his joy when he finds he is in agreement with them on some point or other, so much so that he can write: "These words are mine also, no truer word can be said"⁷.

He is always at pains to express his opponents' opinions as objectively as possible; he never attacked an opponent only on hearsay, but insisted on having his opponents' writings before refuting their opinions.

He always dealt with essentials, and criticized the Pelagians for insisting too much on accidentals without a clear distinction of terms, something which for Augustine was very important although he did not like arguing about terms⁸ as long as the doctrine expressed by the terms was clear enough; he easily accepted the use of a word not clear enough for he clearly distinguished between the defence

6. About Pelagius in *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* (3,1,1), Augustine wrote: Pelagii quædam scripta, viri, ut audio, sancti et non parva profectu Christiani...

7. Hæc et verba mea sunt, verius enim dici non potest, (*De natura et gratia*, 58,68)

8. De verbis contendere non amamus...

of a false doctrine of faith and the unhappy use of a phrase or sentence.⁹ but he strongly objected to expressions, even single words, which could change the meaning of a sentence: with reference to the efficacy of grace, Pelagius used the term *facilius* (more easily), a word which denied the necessity of grace for salvation, and held, that grace only made salvation easier.

To avoid confusion, Augustine continually insists on the need of clear distinctions. With regard to original sin he clearly distinguishes between the *tradux peccati* which is certain and the *tradux animæ* which is discussed among scholars and accuses the Pelagians of creating “clouds of darkness” (*latebrarum suarum nebulas*) by confusing the two questions, which are altogether different. He also distinguishes the existence of original sin, which is certain, from the nature of original sin, which is a mystery; and finally he distinguishes “concupiscence in itself” (*concupiscentia in se*) and “concupiscence in the present state of humanity” (*concupiscentia qualis nunc est*): concupiscence in the present state of humanity is not a sin, but an evil because of the disorders it brings in man. With regard to justification he also makes some clear distinctions: in baptism remission of sin is full and perfect (*plena et perfecta*), but this does not mean that the whole man is fully renewed: renewal begins with baptism and continues progressively till the final resurrection. Augustine clearly distinguishes between the truths the Pelagians accepted and those they denied; “When we insist with Pelagians ... not to deny original sin ... or God’s grace ... they bring forth their ‘clouds of darkness’ to hide their errors. These ‘clouds’ (*nebulæ*) are the praise of creatures, marriage, law, free-will, the saints ... as if there was some one among us who despised these things ...”¹⁰

The whole problem was a theological problem not a philosophical one, and it is here that the Pelagians erred for they began their discussion from the data of philosophy, while Augustine started from the data of faith. The Pelagians quoted the Scriptures continually but Augustine’s impression was that they quoted the Scriptures to prove what they had achieved through reason. Augustine’s approach was different.

9. *Alia est enim causa fidei sanæ, alia locutionis incautæ.*

10. *Contra duas epistulas Petiliani* 3,24

Addressing Pelagius, Augustine writes: "O brother, it is a good thing if you remember that you are a Christian. To believe these things perhaps would be enough, but if you prefer discussion, there is no objection, and it would also be worth while if a very strong faith precedes our discussions, faith which will make us not think that human nature cannot be vitiated by sin, but that faith based on the authority of the Scriptures which will help us to find out how it could have been possible for human nature to be vitiated by sin.... We must first submit ourselves to the yoke of the authority of Holy Scripture, so that we might then arrive at knowledge through faith."¹¹

Augustine always took a global view of the question he was discussing, and with regard to nature and grace he criticized the Pelagians for limiting themselves to one aspect of the question. Augustine to Pelagius' *De natura* replied with his treatise *De natura et gratia* for his aim was not denying what had been said but affirming what had been denied, for grace does not deny nature but saves nature.¹² Similar statements are continually met with in Augustine's writings. To Pelagius' insistence that people should convince themselves that they must accuse themselves when sinning, Augustine answers that they should also convince themselves of the need of grace not to sin. And when Pelagius says that man could, if he wanted, live without sin in this world, Augustine answered: "Maybe, but one should add that this is impossible without the grace of God." It is in such a manner that Augustine continually answers the Pelagians with regard to death being the punishment for sin¹³, to redemption¹⁴, to justification¹⁵, to grace and free will.¹⁶

Augustine always proceeded from what was evident to what was less evident or was obscure: "Even if I am unable to refute these arguments, I feel that I must

11. O frater, bonum est ut memineris te esse christianum. Credere ista fortasse sufficerit, sed tamen quia disputare vis, nec obest, sed etiam prodest, si firmissima præcedat fides, non existimemus peccato humanam naturam non posse vitari sed divinis credentes Scripturis peccato eam esse vitiatam quomodo id fieri potuerit inquiramus... (*De natura et gratia* 20,22)

Prius sanctorum Scripturarum auctoritatibus colla subdenda sunt, ut ad intellectum per fidem quisque perveniat (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 3,4,7)

12. *Retractiones* 2,47

13. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,2,2;8,8.

14. *Ibid* 1,13. 33-38, 56.

15. *De Spiritu et littera, passim.*

16. *De Gratia et libero arbitrio, passim.*

accept what is very clearly affirmed in the Holy Scriptures so that without any hesitation I may believe those revealed truths which are obscure, or which my mind is unable to see although they can be proved or at least investigated if too abstruse".¹⁷

Central point of the controversy according to Augustine

For Augustine, Pelagianism was injurious to our salvation which is in Christ, pernicious and contrary to the religion we profess and to our piety for God¹⁸, because if justification is through nature then Christ died uselessly.¹⁹ The whole problem is about the need of admitting a Saviour for young and old, for the cries of infants and the white hairs of the elderly (*parvis et magnis, id est a vagitibus infantum usque ad canos senum*) and about the cure for which the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us (*ea medicina qua Verbum Caro factum est ut habitaret in nobis*) – once this is admitted the problem is solved (*causa dissoluta est*).²⁰ Augustine felt that he had to defend this truth so that the Cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power (*ne evacuetur crux Christi*) (1 Cor 1,17); he considered the Pelagians as enemies of the grace of Christ (*inimici gratiæ Christi*) for denying it. He felt the need to refute strongly and vehemently (*acerrime et vehementissime*) the terrible poison of their heresy (*horrendum virus hæresis vestræ*).

Theologically speaking, according to Augustine, we must start considering the problem not from Adam but from Christ, our starting point should be redemption not original sin.

Granted that the Lord Jesus Christ did not come on earth for no any other reason but to give life to all, save all, free, redeem all who were, through sin, dead, in languor, in servitude, in captivity, in darkness, under the power of the devil, the prince of sin,²¹ we must hold that redemption was necessary and that it was an objective reality; in other words redemption was not simply the good example

17. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 4,7.

18. Noxium salutis nostræ quæ in Christo est, perniciosum atque contrarium ipsique religioni qua imbuti sumus et pietati qua Deum colimus. (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,2,2,)

19. Super naturam iustitia ergo Christus gratis mortuus est (*De natura et gratia* 2,2)

20. *De natura et gratia* 52,60.

21. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 26,39.

given to us by Christ, as the Pelagians contended (this was the *horrendum virus hæresis vestræ*), but a reconciliation, an expiation, the gift of spiritual renewal. Redemption is universal: *pro omnibus mortuus est Christus* – Christ died for all men: Augustine was continually saying this with Saint Paul, therefore all needed redemption, even infants; and if even infants needed redemption then even they were born alienated from God. If redemption was not just a good example given us by Christ, then Adam's sin is not just a bad example we imitate; if redemption implies reconciliation with God, then sin is a separation and an alienation from God; and finally if justification means the gift of God's grace, then sin means a lack of grace not brought about by one's actions (imitating a bad example, Adam's), but inherited through birth. From these premises, Augustine concludes that the *horrendum virus hæresis Pelagianæ* is considering God's grace not God's gift, but just a good example given by Christ, and thus saying that we are justified simply by imitating Christ and not by the gift of the Holy Spirit. And since redemption is for all men, all are sinners, even infants; if one has died for all, all are dead (2 Cor 5, 14); but the sin of infants can only be original sin.

Saint Augustine expresses the parallelism between Adam and Christ, by speaking of *unus et unus*, of *unus* a giver of death and of *unus* a giver of life and therefore he concludes *omnis homo Christus* and *omnis homo Adam*.

Pelagianism

The main exponents of Pelagianism were two laymen, Pelagius and Celestius, and a bishop Julian of Eclanum. Augustine refuted the works of all three although he only knew personally Pelagius, from whom he received a letter and which he answered.

Pelagius was born in Britain, probably in the same year as Augustine; for a long while he resided in Rome but after the sack of Rome in 410 he went to Palestine. Of him Augustine says that he was a holy man and a Christian of no small standing²² and that he was moderate in his ideas.

22. *Ibid* 3,1,1.

Celestius was a jurist from Rome and a disciple of Pelagius; after the sack of Rome he went first to Africa and then to Palestine where he was ordained priest, more logical in the exposition of his ideas and more enterprising he brought on himself the attention of the church of Carthage and his ideas were condemned there; probably Pelagianism belongs more to Celestius than to Pelagius himself, and the latter took his distance from Celestius at the synod of Diospolis.

Julian was the most polemical and the most talkative of the three. Augustine considered him as “the architect of the Pelagian dogma”, although he added nothing to the ideas of Pelagius and Celestius except making them more radical.

Augustine has this to say about his three opponents: “They are people who should not be considered as worthy of low esteem ... on the contrary they are worthy of praise for their good works. They believe in the true Christ, equal and co-eternal with the Father, who became true man and will come again, not like the Manichees who believe in a false Christ. But they ignore God’s justice and want to establish their own”.²³

The centres where Pelagianism mainly flourished were

Rome where Pelagius had many friends and was greatly esteemed; a particular friend of his was the priest Sixtus, who later became Pope; he was the friend of Melania the Younger and Melania the Elder, of St Paulinus of Nola, and took active part in the discussions which were going on in Roman circles on Origen and Jovinian.

Sicily: at Syracuse some Christians (*quidem Christiani*) were causing trouble with their ideas and a certain Hilary wrote to Augustine requesting his opinion about the ideas these Christians were propagating. Augustine wrote a long letter not only refuting the ideas he had been told about, but also expressing his suspicion that they were being diffused by Celestius who was attracting several others to his opinions.

Carthage: in the year 411 Celestius was accused of disturbing clergy and people with his ideas, which were summarised in six propositions; later on.

23. *Epist* 140, 37, 83.

Augustine fully discussed and refuted these propositions in the first two books of his treatise against the Pelagians *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*. At the Synod of Carthage only two propositions were taken into consideration, namely those about the nature of original sin: (i) Did Adam become subject to death after his transgression, or was he already subject to death before sinning? (ii) Is it certain that the guilt of our sins and the guilt of original sin have the same origin?²⁴

At Carthage Augustine was not present and did not influence the decisions taken. Caelestius was asked to retract his errors, but he refused and was excommunicated.

Palestine: The Synod meeting in Jerusalem in 415, under Bishop John, a friend of Pelagius, was inconclusive.

At Diospolis in Lydda (Palestine) in the same year, 14 bishops met under the presidency of the metropolitan of Caesarea, and took into consideration (i) six propositions taken from Pelagius' work *Testimonia*, (ii) the six propositions which had been taken into consideration at the Carthage synod, (iii) three propositions which Augustine had received from Syracuse, and (iv) ten propositions taken from a book attributed to Coelestius. Pelagius explained the six propositions taken from his books, and condemned all the other propositions. His explanations satisfied the bishops and he was absolved for he had condemned "Pelagianism", but Augustine had his doubts about the sincerity of Pelagius' condemnation of "Pelagianism".

The African Bishops informed Rome of the gravity of the problem sending two letters to Pope Innocent stressing two principal errors: the uselessness of prayers of intercession and the uselessness of the baptism of infants; another letter was sent to the Pope from some bishops of Augustine's circle, with a copy of Pelagius' *De natura* and Augustine's comments on it. The Pope wrote three letters in answer supporting the African bishops and renewing the excommunication of Pelagius and Coelestius till they recanted their errors. Following the Pope's letter, Augustine more than once made his comments on the Pope's decision and in *Sermo* 131, 10 he exclaimed "Rescripts have arrived from Rome; the problem is now definitely decided; may the heresy also come to an end,"²⁵ This statement became popularised

24. An certe de eadem origine peccati, de qua nascitur, transgressionis culpam trahat.

25. Inde etiam rescripta venerunt, causa finita est. Utinam aliquando finiat error

in the phrase: *Roma locuta est, causa finita*; in one of his letters Augustine wrote that the Pope had told him that what was done was lawful and necessary²⁶ and in one of treatises against the Pelagians he wrote with the Pope's decision all doubts had been resolved.²⁷

But in fact, the result was altogether different, for Pelagius protested that he had been misunderstood and wrote a *libellus fidei*; to Pope Zosimus who meanwhile had succeeded Pope Innocent. The Pope tried to bring about a reconciliation, writing two letters to the African Bishops telling them that they had been too hasty in their decisions and advised them to love peace, love one another, encourage agreement.²⁸ The letters caused great sorrow to Augustine and the African bishops, but Augustine was certain, as he later affirmed,²⁹ that the Pope did not approve some false dogma (*non falsitas dogmatis probata est*), but only expressed his desire that all should make amends if they had erred against brotherly love (*voluntas emendationis*). We do not know exactly what really happened afterwards, but three facts emerge: (i) a plenary Council of all Africa (*concilium plenarium totius Africae*) condemned Pelagius and (ii) Caelestius escaped from Rome running away, refusing to be examined (*se subtraxit et negavit examen*), namely the *audientia plenior* fixed by Pope Zosimus after receiving an answer to his letters from the African bishops; (iii) the rescript of the 30th April, 418 by means of which the emperor Honorius ordered the expulsion of the heretics. Convinced of the falsity of Pelagianism, Zosimus wrote a *Tractatoria littera*, which has been lost except for some small fragments: some scholars basing themselves on these fragments have doubts whether Zosimus accepted the whole doctrine of the African bishops on original sin, or only parts of it.

With the *Tractatoria littera* one could really say that *causa finita est*, but not Augustine's desire: *utinam aliquando finiatur error*, for Pelagianism through Julian of Eclanum became a formal schism until it was finally condemned at Ephesus in 431, when the decisions of Innocent I and Zosimus were ratified.

26. *Epist 186,2*: quo fas erat et oportebat.

27. ... dubitatio tota sublata est (*Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum 2,3,5*).

28. Amate pacem, diligite caritatem, suadete concordiam.

29. *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali 2,7,8*.

Towards the end of his life, Augustine in *De hæresibus* gives a summary of Pelagianism, beginning by saying that "In our times Pelagianism, the last of all heresies, has arisen: it is due to Pelagius. Coelestius followed his master so faithfully that their disciples are often called Coelestians".

The Pelagians are

- i. so strongly opposed to the grace of God that they hold that one can obey God's commandments without the help of God's grace, but one should not conclude that grace is useless, for it helps to make easier the observance of God's commandments,
- ii. they speak exclusively of the grace of free will given by God as a gift to man in creation, and sustained by God's law and doctrine,
- iii. they deny *caritas* by means of which one leads a pious life (*pie vivitur*), as being a gift of the Holy Spirit; they consider knowledge (which fills man with pride) as a gift of God, but not the *caritas* (by means of which knowledge does not become a source of pride) as a gift of God;
- iv. they deny the efficacy of prayer both for pagans that they may be converted and for the just that they may grow in faith and persevere,
- v. they hold that the just on earth are without sin: the just alone form the Church, which even on earth is without blemish,
- vi. they hold that children when born do not contract "the contagion of the ancient sin" and Baptism serves to bring them *de bono in melius*; unbaptised children do not enter the kingdom of heaven, but will enjoy eternal blessedness,
- vii. even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died, for death is natural to man.

According to Augustine the above are the main tenets of Pelagians, while the other opinions they hold are derived from these.

Augustine's opinion of Pelagius is expressed in the words with which he begins his *De natura et gratia* to refute Pelagius' *De natura*: reading Pelagius' works, Augustine saw a man ardently zealous against those who sought not to accuse their human will for their sins, but preferred instead to accuse human nature and thus excuse themselves.³⁰ Pelagius was thus a champion of free will, and for this

30. Hominem zelo ardentissimo accensum adversus eos, qui cum in suis peccatis humanam voluntatem debeant accusare, naturam potius accusantes per illam se excusare conantur (*De natura et gratia* 1,1.)

reason Augustine defines him as an exalted defender of free will while his followers were proud defenders of their free will.³¹ Elsewhere³² he calls the Pelagians not only defenders but also pompous defenders (*inflatores*) of free will, because, excluding grace, they make free will something empty and harmful.

Augustine explained his doctrine of grace and free will in his *De gratia et libero arbitrio*. At the synod of Diospolis, faced with his statement: “all are ruled by their free will,” Pelagius explained that God gives his help so that man, through his free will, may choose to do good; but if man sins, it is wholly his fault, because of his free will. The bishops at Diospolis accepted this explanation, and Augustine commented that no one could condemn free will, when we also have God’s help. On Coelestius’ statement that the will can very easily change itself willingly,³³ Augustine noted that with reference to a change of will, from evil to good, one would be presuming too much without God’s help.

The principal consequences which Pelagians derived from their notion of free will were,

(i) *Impeccantia* (Pelagius insisted on this in his *Testimonia*, and the 6th proposition extracted from Pelagius’ works and submitted to the Synod of Diospolis regarded this point). Augustine discussed *impeccantia* and refuted the Pelagian position in his *De peccatorum mentis et remissione*. Augustine heard about this key-idea of Pelagianism, from Macellinus, prefect of Carthage, and at first Augustine gave little importance to it, though he was convinced that it was a false opinion.

(ii) *Denial of the necessity of grace*. Augustine was certain about this from Pelagius’ own treatise *De natura*. Pelagius did not explicitly deny the necessity of grace: finding himself unable to answer the difficulties brought forward against his opinion he tried to avoid the problem by quibbling, and giving evasive and unsatisfactory answers. Coelestius was more explicit: he saw a contradiction between the necessity of grace and free will and so excluded grace to defend free will: free will comes to an end if it needs help.³⁴ Julian of Eclanum was more

31. Pelagius: liberi arbitrii elatus assertor; Pelagians: superbi sui arbitrii defensores.

32. *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 2,154.

33. Perfacile potest voluntas voluntate mutari.

34. Destruitur voluntas quæ alterius ope indiget.

radical for he held that with free will man had been freed from God (*emancipatus a Deo*). The principal argument of the Pelagians to prove that man does not need grace to avoid sin, was that God does not demand the impossible. "This is true", replied Augustine, "but, to overcome certain difficulties and temptations we sometimes need a very strong will, and God knows that we do not always make perfect use of a strong will, and so God helps us with his grace to overcome our temptation".³⁵ As a consequence of the denial of grace, the Pelagians concluded that prayers of intercession were useless: "Why ask God for something which you already have?"³⁶

At Diospolis Pelagius condemned Coelestius' opinion that grace is given to us for single acts (*ad singulos actus*), but Augustine quoted a long extract from Pelagius' *De libero arbitrio* to show that Pelagius was in agreement with Coelestius. Augustine quoted at length to show that he was not distorting the ideas of Pelagius.

(iii) According to Pelagius grace is (a) the gift of free will; (b) divine law, the Gospels, Christ's example; (c) the remission of sins. Augustine remarks here that the Pelagians were omitting the most important aspect of grace, namely the *caritas*, the gift of the Holy Spirit which helps us to observe the law and persevere in its observance. According to Coelestius grace depends on merit and is not gratuitous. At Diospolis the following proposition, taken from a work of Coelestius, was taken into consideration: "The grace of God is given to us according to our merits ... grace is in my will, whether I am worthy of it or not." Pelagius at Diospolis condemned this proposition, but, according to Augustine, this was a false condemnation, for it was not sincere, as Pelagius in all his writings continually stated that grace is given to us by God according to our merits.

(d) The Pelagians denied the possibility of human nature being weakened by sin, and therefore logically we cannot speak about "fallen" nature. The Pelagians argued that sin is not a substance but an action, so they asked. "How could it be possible for sin to weaken or a change human nature?"³⁷ The 4th proposition from

35. Ad nonnulla superanda ... magnis ... aliquando viribus opus est voluntatis quæ non perfecte in omnibus adhibituros prævidet (Deus) (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,3,3.)

36. Ut quid peto a Deo quod in mea posuit potestate?

37. Quomodo potuit humanam debilitare vel mutare naturam quod substantia caret?

the works of Coelestius condemned at Carthage refers to this: Infants newly born are like Adam before he sinned. This point came to the fore in the polemics with Julian of Eclanum, and Augustine reproached him for holding this opinion: “Vobis refuse to admit that our nature could be changed by sin”³⁸; the reproach was merited as such an opinion leads to the denial of Soteriology, and therefore also the Christian notions of death, concupiscence, sin, redemption, necessity of infant Baptism, and salvation history.

a) If sin did not weaken human nature, then death cannot be the consequence of sin, therefore Adam, even if he had not sinned, would have died; if death is really the consequence of sin, the Pelagians argued, belief in Christ would have given us immortality. According to Augustine this was a key-opinion of Pelagianism, although some Pelagians, after the condemnation of their doctrines, denied having held such an opinion. Augustine on the other hand was so convinced of this that he wrote: “The whole problem between us is all about this, what we affirm you deny.”³⁹

b) Concupiscence, *qualis nunc est* or man’s *infirmetas* with regard to moral good, according to the Pelagians, existed in Adam before he sinned; if concupiscence *qualis nunc est* is a consequence of sin, Baptism would have removed it. This was the main point of the heated controversy with Julian, who even derided all who believed that concupiscence *qualis nunc est* did not exist in Adam before he sinned.

c) Coelestius explicitly affirmed that the transmission of sin is altogether alien to Catholic feeling,⁴⁰ and considered heretics those who believed in the transmission of sin: it was on this point that Coelestius first clashed with the Church. Pelagius, according to Augustine, though holding the same view, was more careful and more moderate, while Julian was too radical, arriving even at accusing Augustine of having invented original sin. For Pelagius the problem was a difficult one and debatable among Christians. For Augustine the Pelagians, considering

38. Non vultis confiteri nostram per peccatum mutari potuisse naturam.

39. De hac re inter nos et vos vertitur quæstio, quod nos dicimus ... vos negatis (*De hæresibus* 88)

40. Peccatum de traduce longe catholico sensu alienum est.

the problem as debatable among Christians, were mixing together two difficult problems, that of the transmission of sin and that of the transmission of souls: the former was certain, the latter debatable. The principal argument of the Pelagians against the transmission of sin was man's free will: for them a sin which did not originate from a personal act of a man born free was inconceivable, and therefore they believed that in a child, before the first act of its free will, there is only what God created, there is no sin. Consequently

i. infant Baptism is not required because man is born in sin, but is required only for entry into the Kingdom of God. The Pelagians distinguished between eternal life and the Kingdom of God: unbaptised children enjoyed eternal life, but were not admitted into God's kingdom. We will discuss this point when speaking about the Baptism of children.

ii. The Pelagian notion of salvation history is altogether different from the Catholic notion. The Pelagian notion is clearly expressed in two propositions from Coelestius' work taken into consideration at Carthage:

-Law introduces into the Kingdom in the same manner as the Gospel does;
-not all men die because of Adam's sin or death, and not all men rise again because of Christ's resurrection.

For Augustine this opinion of the Pelagians denied all power to the Cross of Christ – Christ would have died in vain.

Original sin

In discussing original sin, the first problem Augustine had to tackle was that about the mystery of death. The Pelagians interpreted Gen 2, 17: "Thou shalt surely die" and St. Paul's statement that in Adam all die (Rom 5, 12) as referring not to natural death, but to spiritual death. Augustine understood the Scriptural statements as referring to natural death and devoting the whole of Book XIV of *De Civitate Dei*, he distinguished three decisive moments in the history of salvation:

the possibility of not dying (*posse non mori*)
the impossibility of not dying (*non posse non mori*)
the impossibility of dying (*non posse mori*)

Adam in the Garden of Eden could have avoided death (*posse non mori*) if he had obeyed God's commands; Adam knew what would be the punishment for his disobedience: "Thou shalt surely die" (*morte morieris*). God had told him this, and the death Adam had to suffer was natural death, and this is evident from the words God said to Adam: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return"; this is confirmed by Saint Paul: "The body is dead because of sin" (Rom 8, 10); "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom 5, 12; cf 1 Cor 15, 21).

Refuting Pelagianism, Augustine distinguished between the mortal body (*corpus mortale*) which Adam had even in the Garden of Eden, and the body subject to death (*corpus moriturum*) which Adam did not have before his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Adam had the first immortality (*prima immortalitas*), the *posse non mori*, through divine grace (*ex mirabili Dei gratia*), symbolised by the tree of life. Adam, because of the mortal condition of his human body (*mortali condicione corporis animalis*), was subject to death, but, before sin, he enjoyed the *prima immortalitas*, though a gift of the Creator (*beneficio Conditoris*).

God did not create death (Wisdom 1, 13), but death entered the world as a consequence of sin, and therefore man cannot but die – *non posse non mori*. Augustine clearly states that the consequence of sin is not the act of death, but the subjection to death, the *mortalitas*: once the stability of our lifetime is lost, we move towards death, because our lifetime has lost its stability. Although we might live for many years, we begin dying from the moment we come under the law of death, through which we become old.⁴¹ *Curruptio* namely illness, etc. followed *mortalitas* and these slowly bring the body to destruction.

The act of death remains, says Augustine, even in those redeemed by Christ's death, although Christ could have given immortality in this world to those who believed in him: he did not do this for otherwise the virtue of fortitude and the spirit of faith would have suffered; we obtain immortality at the end of our earthly life, for our justification starting with baptism moves forward progressively till it reaches its fulness in heaven, when our body will achieve immortality (*immortalitas*) the *non posse mori*, having become a spiritual body, but still a body and not a spirit.⁴²

41. *Stabilitas ætatis in qua creati sunt amissa per mutabilitatem ætatum irent in mortem; quamvis ergo annos multos vixerint, illo tamen die mori coeperunt, quo mortis lege, qua in senium veterascerent, acceperunt (De peccatorum meritis et remissione 16,21)*

42. *...caro spiritalis, sed tamen caro, non spiritus.*

Concupiscence

Augustine was falsely accused (i) of having derived concupiscence from original sin, (ii) of having reduced concupiscence to sexuality, as if it were that evil power through which original sin is transmitted.

Concupiscence is a Biblical term, and is often met with in the Scripture v.g. Ex 20, 17: *Non concupisces* (Do not covet); Mt S,28: *Qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendam* (Every one who looks at a woman lustfully...); Gal 5, 17; *caro concupiscit adversus spiritum* (the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit); Jn 2,15: *concupiscentia oculorum* (the lust of the eyes). The term is not necessarily a negative concept, though it often is, and so one must have a clear idea of its meaning. Augustine tried to establish the meaning of the term through a series of denials and a series of statements:

Concupiscence is NOT

- i. the human body: for matter is not evil and all that God had created is good;
- ii. the senses: one should distinguish between concupiscence and the senses, and if one fails to do this he would be acting evilly (*turpiter*), as Augustine wrote to Julian. Christ, says Augustine, did not condemn looks, but libidinous looks: He did not simply say *Qui viderit mulierem...* (if one looked at a woman), but he said *Qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendam eam* (If one looked at a woman lustfully...)
- iii. sex: concupiscence is in all the senses. God created sex, and so sex is not something evil, so much so that if man had not committed sin, propagation of mankind would still have taken place through sexual intercourse;
- iv. sexual pleasures: concupiscence existed before man sinned, but was subordinated to reason; sexual pleasures existed before man's sin but were controlled by reason; sin opened the way to illicit pleasures, to pleasures uncontrolled by reason. *Libido* itself if orderly, that is controlled by reason, is not evil.

Concupiscence IS

- i. rebellion against the dictates of the mind (*inobedientia contra dominatum mentis*); a preference for any type of temporal goods to the exclusion of eternal good (*appetitus animi quo æternis bonis quælibet temporalia bona præponuntur*); it is not simply inordinate sexuality, but something more serious:

- it is the radical opposition between love (*caritas*) and selfishness (*cupiditas*).
- ii. a division in one's own self: an opposition between flesh and spirit: *habeo aliam* (Rom 7,22) ... *quæ militat adversus spiritum* (Gal 5,17) (another law, opposed to the spirit).
 - iii. Concupiscence *qualis nunc est* in our present state is a disorder, for it is not controlled by reason and leads to evil. Concupiscence exists also in animals, but does not cause disorder in them, for they do not have reason; in animals concupiscence is part of their nature.
 - iv. Concupiscence is a weakness, an infirmity when compared to virtue; it is a sort of languor⁴³ brought about by sin which weakened the power of reason: reason could no longer dominate concupiscence – before man's sin reason had complete dominion over concupiscence, but after sin reason lost its dominion.

There was concupiscence in Christ, but fully dominated by reason: for he was the perfect man: desiring what is permissible, never wishing for what is not permissible.⁴⁴

Having established the nature of concupiscence, we can now see what Augustine has to say about concupiscence before Adam's sin, after Adam's sin, and after the resurrection of the body. But, before proceeding further, we should note here that Augustine, because of his doctrine on concupiscence, was accused by Julian of being a Manichee. He rebuts the charge by stating that the Catholic Church refutes both the Manichees and the Pelagians: telling the Manichees that concupiscence in the present state of human nature is not something natural but a disorder; and telling the Pelagians that concupiscence as it is in the present state of human nature is not something willed by God the Father, but brought about by the present state of the world; it is a weakness which could be healed if the Manichees desisted from believing that it can never be healed, and the Pelagians desisted from saying that it is something worth praising.⁴⁵

43. *Affectio ... quædam malæ qualitatis, sicut languor.*

44. *Quidquid concupivit licuit, quidquid non licuit non concupivit.*

45. *Catholica utrosque redarguit, Manicheis dicens 'Non naturam sed vitium est', Pelagianis dicens 'Non a Patre sed ex mundo est', ut iam malam valetudinem sanari utrique permittant, desistendo illi tamquam insanabilem credere, isti tamquam laudabilem prædicare (Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum 2,2,2.)*

Before sin *concupiscentia qualis nunc est*, namely disorderly concupiscence, did not exist and could not exist in man; disorderly concupiscence is the result of man's sin. Augustine treats the whole question in Book XIV of his *De Civitate Dei*, where he states the Catholic doctrine simply and directly without being polemical. He dealt with the problem in *De Civitate Dei* because (i) he felt that he should give ample consideration to the problem of man's passions, a problem very dear to philosophers, and a fundamental problem for ethics; (ii) he wanted to show that the conflict between flesh and spirit, and therefore disorderly passions, was a consequence of sin, and therefore (iii) before man's sin this conflict did not exist, for the passions, even sexual pleasures, were fully dominated by reason; (iv) he wanted to show that ultimately the foundation of the two cities, the city of God and the city of the world, was living either according to the spirit or according to the flesh.

To prove that concupiscence *qualis nunc est* did not exist before sin, Augustine quotes Genesis contrasting Gen 2,25 (Adam and Eve were both naked and not ashamed) and Gen 3,7 (they saw themselves naked and covered themselves because they were ashamed). Julian in his attacks on Augustine quoted Genesis, but Augustine did not want to limit himself to one aspect of concupiscence – sexual concupiscence, he wanted to speak about concupiscence in all its extent, about the about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (*concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vitae*) at Jn 2,16) – disorderly concupiscence is not from God (*a Patre*) but from the world (*ex mundo*).

Before sin nakedness did not trouble Adam and Eve, not because they lacked sexual attraction but because it was controlled by reason; nudity was not shameful (*turpis nuditas*). After sinning man felt shame, namely the feeling of having done something he should not have done or the unwillingness to do something which one feels he should not do.

Modesty was not necessary before sin, but once man began feeling shame, modesty was a necessary consequence – all men feel shame and feel the need of modesty, even married people during their sexual act to have children (*procreandarum causa filiorum*) – it is always done privately.

Disorderly concupiscence, *concupiscentia ut nunc est*, did not exist before man's sin: this cannot be proved by a metaphysical argument, but only by an argument of convenience namely, man's dignity required perfect unison between body and soul,

between reason and the senses: God could not have created man feeling shame for something given him by God himself i.e. orderly concupiscence, concupiscence totally governed by reason. And so Augustine concludes telling Julian that he would certainly be a convinced Manichee if he held that concupiscence before man's fall was no different from concupiscence as it is in the present state of human nature.⁴⁶

Concupiscence after man's sin can be taken into consideration with reference to original sin, or to justification, or to marriage.

a) As regards original sin, Augustine was accused by Julian and even by some modern authors, as having identified concupiscence with original sin. These writers might have been deceived because in Augustine's writings one can meet with statements which seem to identify concupiscence with original sin, but there are also other texts in Augustine that clearly deny this identification, while other texts can help us to interpret correctly those texts which seem to imply the concupiscence is original sin.⁴⁷

i. If Augustine identified concupiscence with original sin, he would have never stated that Baptism removes all sins totally. He affirmed this truth before the Pelagian controversy, he continually repeated it during the controversy, and continually rebutted all Julian's statements, accusing him of identifying concupiscence with original sin. A full and complete remission of sin takes place in Baptism⁴⁸: "Does any one amongst us deny that all sins are remitted in Baptism and that all the faithful come out of the bath of regeneration spotlessly clean?"⁴⁹ "They lie, they deceive, they doubt; we never said what they accuse us of: we hold that Baptism washes away all sins, without exception."⁵⁰ "Notice

46. Si dixeris, qualis nunc est, talem fuisse concupiscentiam carnis ante peccatum vincet te procul dubio Manichæus (*Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 1,710)

47. v.g. J. Turmel, *Histoire des dogmes, Le péché original*, Paris 1831 ; P. F. Beatrice, *Alle fonti della dottrina agostiniana del peccato originale*, Milano 1978; O. Rotmanner, "L'Augustinisme" in *Melanges des sciences religieuses* 6 (1940) 31-48

48. In baptismo ... tota et plena fiat remissio peccatorum (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,7,9)

49. Quis nostrum negat omnium in baptismo peccata dimitti et omnes fideles sine macula et ruga de lavacro regenerationis ascenderent (*De gestis Pelagianorum* 12,28)

50. Mentiantur ... insidiantur ... tergiversantur: non hoc dicimus ... Baptisma igitur ablui quidem peccata omnia, prorsus omnia... (*Contra duas Epistulas Pelagianorum* 1,13,26)

what I say; grace renews man perfectly ... this is true also in the present state of mankind with regard to liberation from all sins..."⁵¹

- ii. But in Augustine's works we often meet with texts where concupiscence is called sin although we meet also with texts where concupiscence is called an *evil*. Such texts obviously are confusing, and therefore need a deeper examination. When Augustine calls concupiscence sin he is making use of the language of the Bible, especially Rom 6,12: *non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore ut obediatis concupiscentiis vestris* (Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions) and Rom 7,7: *peccatum non cognovi nisi per legem: nam concupiscentiam nesciebam, nisi lex diceret: Non concupisces* (If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin, I should not have known what it is to covet, if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'). With reference to this text of St. Paul, Augustine remarks, in his *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* (6,41), that with these words the Apostle had quite clearly shown that concupiscence is sin. In the same treatise (5, 3, 8,) he says that concupiscence is sin because it disobeys the dictates of the mind (*quia inest illi inobedientiam contra dominatum mentis*).

We meet also with several other texts which apply to concupiscence the connotation proper to sin, as when Augustine writes that concupiscence must be considered as the law of sin in our mortal bodies; in a baptised infant guilt has not been taken away...; unbaptised infants are guilty being children of anger, and therefore, dying, they will be condemned.⁵²

- iii. The two groups of texts just mentioned seem to be contradictory, but they are only apparently so, and Augustine himself tells us how we ought to understand them. "We call sin," he writes in *De libero arbitrio* (3,19,54), "not only what is sin in itself but also what is the consequence and effect of sin". And elsewhere he says that "in a manner of speaking we can say that concupiscence is a sin because it is the consequence of sin for it originates in sin and leads to sin."⁵³ Speaking in this manner Augustine is making use of rhetorical speech.

51. Attende quod dico. Gratia perfecte hominem novum facit... Nunc etiam perfecte innovat hominem quantum attinet ad liberationem ab omnibus omnino peccatis... (*Contra Iulianum* 6,13,40).
52. Concupiscentia igitur tamquam lex peccati manens in membris corporis mortis huius cum parvulus nascitur, in baptizatis a reatu solvitur ... parvulos non baptizatis reos innectit, et tamquam irae filios, etiamsi parvuli moriuntur, ad condemnationem trahit (*De peccatorum mentis et remissione* 2,4,4).
53. Quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinat (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1,23,25)

Although Augustine does not identify concupiscence with original sin, he held that the transmission of original sin was connected with concupiscence. The Pelagians strongly opposed this opinion, arguing that if Baptism removes the ancient sin, children born of baptised parents cannot inherit original sin, for no one can give what he does not have. Augustine found great difficulties in answering this objection by trying to clarify his ideas, stating that original sin is transmitted through concupiscence (*originale malum non ex nuptiis sed de carnali concupiscentia*)

i. not because concupiscence is a sin in baptised persons;

ii. not because parents sin through their sexual act, for marriage is not something evil, but something good, honest, licit and praiseworthy;

iii. not because parents transmit some personal sin, transmitting life. Some scholars have given this meaning to the statement of Augustine: "Infants inherit the guilt of sin because of their solidarity with and in the person from whom they inherit sin, once they admit sin";⁵⁴ but such an interpretation is contrary to Augustine's thinking: in the letter Augustine is speaking of the solidarity of the whole human race with Adam, and the words quoted are written in connection with what Augustine writes immediately before i.e. that original sin has been inherited from Adam (*ex Adam traxit*);

iv. not because of the pleasures in the sexual act (*libido actualis*) as some Scholastics thought. Aquinas with regard to this point clearly explained Augustine's thought when he wrote: "The immoderate desires which transmit original sin to one's offspring must not be considered as actual immoderate desires...but should be taken as habitual immoderate desires, because sensitive desires and appetites are not regulated by reason."⁵⁵ We do not find in Augustine this distinction of Aquinas but it is implied; concupiscence is the means for the transmission of original sin, not as a cause, but as a sign that the nature which is being transmitted is a nature which lacks immortality and original goodness, a sign that the nature being transmitted is not perfect nature (*natura integra*) as it was in Adam before he sinned, or the restored nature (*natura redintegrata*) of the blessed in heaven, but a fallen nature subject to death (*mortalitas*)

54. *Traxit ergo reatum (parvulus) quia unus erat cum illo et in illo, a quo traxit quando quod traxit admissum est (Epist 98,1)*

55. *Libido quod transmittit peccatum originale in prolem non est libido actualis ... sed libido illa intellegenda est habitualiter, secundum quod appetitum sensitivum non continetur sub ratione (Summa Theol. I-II, q.82, a.4)*

and sickness (*infirmitas*), a disordered nature, by means of which humanity is punished: sin is an act of grave disobedience, and is being punished in man himself by acts of disobedience to the dictates of reason.

Augustine's answer to the Pelagian objection is based on two theological principles:

- i. original sin is inherited not by imitation but by transmission (*non imitationis sed propagationis modo*) even from baptised parents;
- ii. only Christ was free from original sin: in the man Christ there was the reality of the flesh, but a total absence of concupiscence *qualis nunc est* because he was conceived by a virgin without sexual pleasure (*sine concupiscentia*), an idea which Augustine derived from Ambrose.

b) Augustine's doctrine on concupiscence is intimately connected with justification, the actual grace of the Scholastics, but this point will be discussed later on.

c) Augustine discussed concupiscence and marriage mainly in his *De nuptiis et concupiscentiis*. Augustine was no hater of sexuality and strongly opposed the ideas prevalent in his time i.e. that God created man as male and female in view of original sin, that women in the final resurrection will rise again as men, and that second marriages can only be tolerated if not altogether prohibited.

For Augustine marriage is good not because it is a remedy to concupiscence or because it is a lesser evil than fornication, but because it is good in itself, and would have existed even if man did not sin. Marriage is good in spite of the fact that concupiscence is an evil, just as lameness does not destroy the goodness of walking. Marriage was not only good in the Old Testament-when it was needed for the propagation of God's people in preparation of Christ's coming on earth, but has remained good also in the New Testament; it is good even compared to virginity, although the later is a better state of life. Even second marriages are good, for the Apostle does not make any limits.

Marriage has three great properties or gifts, namely the procreation of children, unity and indissolubility, which Augustine calls *proles, fides* and *sacramentum*, once these gifts are safeguarded, marriage is good, although concupiscence, when going beyond reason will cause sorrow to a just man.

Concupiscence after the resurrection from the dead will be a concupiscence

subject to reason in a *natura redintegrata*. In a *natura redintegrata* there will be perfect unison in man between reason and the senses, and the petition *libera nos a malo* will be completely satisfied as the *malum* from which we ask God to free us is, according to Augustine, concupiscence: making comments on the last petition of the Lord's prayer, Augustine once wrote: "Forgive us what concupiscence drags us into, help us not to be dragged away by concupiscence, take away our concupiscence."⁵⁶

Making reference to the prevalent ideas of his time on sexuality in his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine says that at the final resurrection God will restore both sexes as he created both⁵⁷, for femininity is not an evil but a nature.

56. Ignosce nobis ea in quibus sumus abstracti a concupiscentia, adiuva ne abstrahamur a concupiscentia, aufer a nobis, concupiscentiam (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 4)

57. Utrumque sexum instituit, utrumque sexum restituet.