

By Eric Landstrum

History shows Calvinism is one the wrong side of history. History shows Calvinists are systematically attempting to rewrite history.

History teaches that in the early church all the Gnostics, Marcion, Valentinus, Manes and so on and many of the pagans were determinists of one stripe or another. We learn this because the early church Fathers spend time rejecting determinism. The factual basis of this isn't disputed by any theologian or historian that I'm aware of. Even celebrated Calvinist theologian Alister McGrath concedes, "The pre-Augustinian theological tradition is practically of one voice in asserting the freedom of the human will" (McGrath, *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 1998, p. 20).

Post Augustine, Augustine's doctrines that were in agreement with orthodoxy such as the inherent sinfulness of man¹ and the necessity of prevenient grace were held but Augustine's predestination was rejected as early as the Third Ecumenical Council held at Ephesus in 431 AD and then reaffirmed and expanded at the Council of Arles in 475 AD that rejected five heresies against grace. The rejections are: (1) Those opinions that serve to oversimplify and argue that the work of human obedience need not be united with divine grace; (2) that after the fall Adam the free choice of will was completely destroyed (a freed will sustained by grace is the orthodox view); (3) that Christ, Lord and Savior did not incur death for the salvation of all; (4) that the foreknowledge of man impels man to death (they rejected fatalism); (5) that those who perish, perish by the will of God.

So the non-determinists celebrate, right? No they don't. Reformed theological history basically teaches that the Bible clearly taught a determinist doctrine and this doctrine was lost on the early church and only rediscovered by Augustine 350 years after Paul finished writing his letters. As such, Augustine is celebrated for going against his contemporary teaching by those following in the Augustinian tradition for his rediscovery of determinism in Christian doctrine. Calvin acknowledged as much in his *Institutes*, writing of Augustine and his Western contemporaries:

But Ambrose, Origin, and Jerome, were of opinion, that God dispenses his grace among men according to the use which he foresees that each will make of it. It may be added, that Augustine

also was for some time of this opinion; but after he had made greater progress in the knowledge of Scripture, he not only retracted it as evidently false, but powerfully confuted it (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.8).

Marston and Forster note that Augustine himself wrote:

I labored indeed on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace overcame, and I could only reach that point where the apostle is perceived to have said with the most evident truth, "for who makes you to differ? And what do you have that you have not received? Vow if you have received it why do you glory as if you received it not? And the martyr Cyprian was also desirous of setting forth... Faith then, as well in its beginning as in its completion, is God's gift; and let no one have any doubt whatever, unless he desires to resist the plainest Scriptures, that this gift is given to some, while to some it is not given" (Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, chapters 8, 16).

Marston and Forster observe that Augustine notes his own change of view and that the view Augustine formerly labored for was the orthodox view before he was "overcome" by new ideas. Marston and Forster also note that Augustine wasn't entirely aware of the extent of his break with orthodoxy. He cites Cyprian even though Cyprian never claimed faith was an irresistible gift and in the passage Augustine cites Cyprian speaks an opposing view to that of Augustine's. I think it important to quote in its entirety Marston and Forster's third observation.

Third, it is important to note that the issue is not one of whether salvation is of works or of faith; it is whether faith itself is an irresistible gift. This is important, for the two issues are frequently confused. What, therefore, was the real issue between Augustine and the early church? To understand this it will help to summarize the *three* alternative views:

(1) Works: The Pelagian view, which Augustine stated thus: "the law being given, the will is of its own strength sufficient to fulfill that law, though not assisted by any grace imparted by the holy Spirit in addition to instruction in the Law." He also stated it as, "the grace of God is bestowed in proportion to our own deserts."

(2) Faith: The early church view, and Augustine's earlier view. He stated it as: "For it is ours to believe and to will, but it is His to give to those who believe and will with the power of doing good works through the Holy Spirit."

(3) Irresistible gift of faith: Augustine's later view (which triumphed in the church) was that faith was an irresistible gift given by God to a few people whom he had selected on some basis known only to himself. God could have given it to others had he so chosen for it is "rejected by no hard heart." Without it no man could perform any good, whether in thought, will, affection, or action (Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy in Human History*, 2000, p. 307).

Essentially Augustine incorrectly thought he was inline with other Christian thinkers and was not gifted in the original languages² but felt free to impress his imagination on Scripture. He invented the predestination message and that message was first rejected. Later Augustine's predestination came back because other elements of Augustine's theological thinking were very desirable to the first state church.³ Because of these desirable elements, his other novelties were later adopted.

This is history.

1. The idea of transmitted *guilt*, a central feature of Augustine's later doctrine of original sin, is totally absent from the Greek patristic tradition (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 2000, pp. 425-26).

2. Augustine once wrote to Memorius of Hebrew he knew nothing and relied on either the LXX or the Latin. In 394 he wrote Jerome not to waste his time translating the Hebrew for if the Hebrew was obscure then no one had any hope in understanding it and if it was plain then surely the LXX translators must be right.

3. It goes all the way back to the theological framework Augustine first formed and the first state church readily adopted. Augustine formed the idea that if God compels belief then precedent is given for his servants to also compel belief. He was the first to see that the visible church contained not just saints who freely entered in but saw the visible church as containing both the wheat and the tares. Thus state enforcement, forced belief simply

became an extension of church discipline (which also goes far to explain why Augustine's theological innovations were accepted by the Western Church). Thus Augustine formed a theological basis for God's servants to use force. And succeeding generations ran with the idea. On this Farrar comments:

Augustine must bear the fatal charge of being the first as well as one of the ablest defenders of the frightful cause of persecution and intolerance. He was the first to misuse the words Compel Them To Come In - a fragmentary phrase wholly unsuited to bear the weight of horror for which it was made responsible. He was the first and ablest asserter of the principle that led to the Albigensian crusades, Spanish armadas, Netherlands' butcheries, St Bartholomew massacres, the accursed infamies of the Inquisition, the vile espionage, the hideous balefires of Seville and Smithfield, the racks, the gibbets, the thumbscrews, the subterranean torture-chambers used by churchly torturers who assumed "the garb and language of priests with the trade and temper of executioners," to sicken, crush and horrify the Revolted Conscience Of Mankind.... It is mainly because of his later intolerance that the influence of Augustine falls like a dark shadow across the centuries. It is thus that an Arnold of Citeaux, a Torquemada, a Sprenger, an Alva, a Philip The Second, a Mary Tudor, a Charles IX and a Louis XIV can look up to him as an authorizer of their enormities, and quote his sentences to defend some of the vilest crimes which ever caused men to look with horror on the religion of Christ and the Church of God (F.W. Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1889, p. 536).

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