

AUGUSTINE AND THE PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY

Grace

THE ISSUE

- ▶ Who acts to save us?
 - ▶ Me or God?
 - ▶ If God, do I act at all?
 - ▶ If me, does God act at all?
 - ▶ Is reliance on God only for the weak and the untrained?
 - ▶ Is independence a perfection of human nature?

GRACE

“My entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will” (*Confessions*, 10: xxix/40)

Augustine's works on grace

- 388-395 De libero arbitrio
- 412 De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum
- 412 De spiritu et littera
- 412 De gratia Novi Testamenti (Ep 140, ad Honoratum)
- 414-415 De natura et gratia
- 415 De perfectione justitiæ
- 417 De gestis Pelagii
- 418 De gratia Christi et de peccato originali
- 419-420 De nuptiis et concupiscentia
- 420 Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum
- 421 Contra Iulianum
- 426-427 De gratia et libero arbitrio
- 426-427 De correptione et gratia
- 428-429 De prædestinatione sanctorum
- 428-429 De dono perseverantiæ
- 429-430 Contra secundam Iuliani: Responzionem opus imperfectum

PELAGIANISM

- History
 - First stage
 - Pelagius's preaching
 - Second stage
 - Pelagius's defense
 - Council of Carthage
 - Third stage
 - Celestius
 - Julian of Eclanum
- Doctrine
 - Humans can follow the commandments of God by their own efforts, without divine aid
 - The power to do good comes from God; the doing of the good comes from us
 - Nothing can erase the fundamental free will given by the creator
 - Human merit derives from the will and good works
 - It's all in our hands: we decide how we will progress
 - I need not rely on anyone else

AUGUSTINE'S TEACHING

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ADAM'S SIN

- Slavery
- No freedom
- Desire for evil, making humanity into a *massa damnata*
- Sin in every desire
- Pervasiveness of sin

- Weight of sin

JUSTIFYING GRACE IS A FREE GIFT OF GOD

- Grace restores us
- It is a free gift; there is nothing in us that merits it
- Faith itself is a free gift
- Baptism does not make us independent of grace
- Justification is being refashioned by the Holy Spirit

GRACE GIVES THE POSSIBILITY FOR THE GOOD

- All good acts are performed through grace
- Without grace, there is no goodness
- The desire for good is only possible in the Spirit

ANTHROPOLOGY

- The human person is incomplete without the indwelling of God
- For humans to act on their own power, independent of God, is the definition of sin
- Growth in goodness is growth in dependence upon God
- Only God acting in us restores our freedom
- God's help does not take away our agency; it makes it possible

PERSEVERANCE

- Achieved by the cooperation of the person with God's grace, thus allowing the person to merit everlasting life; this perseverance in itself is a gift of grace, received through prayer
- The final gift of perseverance in faith, being a free gift of God, is also something that God chooses/elects/predestines

PREDESTINATION

- *De correptione et gratia; De praedestinatione sanctorum; De dono perseverantiae*
- The gift of grace is the result of God's free choice/election, as all are worthy only of damnation
 - Those who are saved were predestined by God to receive the gift of grace
- God only saves a small portion of humanity
- There is no predestination to sin; sin is a result of human choice

COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE (418)

- Justifying grace does not only consist in the remission of sins already committed but is a help that we no longer sin
- The grace of Christ that helps us to not sin does not only give us the knowledge of good to be done and evil to be avoided but gives us the love of the good and the power to do it
- Justifying grace does not only give the capacity but the power to accomplish the divine commandments
- Even the saints are powerless to avoid sin

SEMI-PELAGIANISM

TEACHINGS

- A reaction against strict Augustinianism
- It admits the necessity of grace for saving acts and the existence of original sin

- It also emphasizes the universal salvific will of God
- It argues against Augustine, seeing in his teaching the removal of any reason for human action
- It asserts an independence of human action in regard to grace in order to explain how some merit salvation and some do not
- In creation, God gives to everyone the natural grace sufficient for the *initium fidei*; if humans accept this, then they receive saving grace
- Perseverance in faith is an act of the person, not a special gift of God

COUNCIL OF ORANGE (529)

- The saving initiative comes from God; no saving action is accomplished without grace
- The causes of the necessity of grace are: original sin, the weakening of the will by original sin, the condition of the creature
- Grace precedes all effort on the part of humans: prayer, good will, desire for good, *initium salutis*, all effort towards faith, all saving actions, all preparation, all merit
- In justification, grace repairs, liberates, transforms, and gives the justice of Christ
- After justification, grace is necessary to act for God, to persevere, to follow a vocation, to achieve virtue, for the life of Christ in us, for the love of God
- Grace is universal and necessary for every good act
- Predestination is formally condemned; there is no predestination to evil
- All the baptized have the ability to be saved, if they wish

THE ISSUE

- Does the presence of God in our life take away our responsibility or enhance it?
- Is goodness doing it "my way"?