

Semănătorul (The Sower)

The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research

Volume 2, Number 2.

Articles published by the Faculty of Theology in Emanuel
University of Oradea, and International Contributors,
March 2022.

Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania

Augustine on Nature and Sin

Corin Mihăilă ¹

ABSTRACT

The question of the nature of man was of great interest to Augustine, given the philosophical and religious milieu in which he lived. His focused was on the concepts of free will and of the grace of God, and how the fall, salvation, and glorification impacted man's capacity to choose freely and remain good. From his writings, especially in his controversy with Pelagius, we can understand that human nature must be understood along the four stages in redemptive history: creation, fall, salvation, and glorification. In his pre-fall state, man was able to choose either to sin or not to sin. In this state, the grace of God assisted man in establishing him on a good course, had he chosen to obey. In choosing evil, in the fall, man lost the ability to choose not to sin. The only way he is able to do good is if God intervened with his grace in salvation. Once man is saved by grace, man's will is again freed to do what is good, God's grace acting not only in freeing the will, but also causing the will to desire good. The state of the saved person, however, anticipates the glorified state in which man will not be able to sin any longer and thus unable to desert the good.

KEYWORDS: Augustine, nature, sin, gnostic, ascetic, Platonism, Pelagius, free will, free choice, grace.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches that man was created in the image and likeness of God. This characteristic, quality, or capacity is constitutive of his nature and it has often been identified with man's capacity of reason. This, in turn, speaks of his ability to freely and equally choose between good and evil. Thus, when God created the first man, he created him responsible for his choices; he had a free will and thus could have chosen to live without sin or to go against God's command and therefore sin. In choosing to disobey God, he *fell short of the glory of God*. The question resulting from such a tragedy and that has come up every so often as a debate throughout the Church history, even from its beginnings, is how the fall has affected human nature, especially his capacity of free choice or free will.

¹ Dr. Corin Mihăilă is lecturer in New Testament at Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania. He resides in Braşov, Romania, working also as a pastor at First Baptist Church, Braşov. Email: corinro@hotmail.com.

The answer to this question, that has to do more with the doctrine of Creation and Anthropology, effects the way we interpret man's responsibility for his moral behavior after the fall. Thus, the way we view the doctrine of the fall and of the nature of man shapes the way we view the doctrine of salvation.²

The first theologian to put in a systematic form the doctrine of human nature in relation to the fall of man and his redemption is Augustine, bishop of Hippo, whose thinking has influenced and shaped the formulation of orthodox theology for the centuries to follow. Thus, it is not in the least surprising that an examination of Augustine's theories of the will, freedom, and grace is still of great contemporary interest.

No one questions that Augustine held that every man is responsible, but judgements diverge radically on the implications to be drawn from this responsibility. Hence, Augustine can be shown to hold that the will is free but the question is in what sense is it free in relation to the four stages in the history of salvation: creation, fall, redemption and glorification? In this article, we will try to analyze and summarize Augustine's Anthropology, specifically man's capacity to choose, or the freedom of the will, in relation to these four stages in redemptive history. By this, we will try to explain the initial state and vocation of humanity, to estimate the damage done in the Fall and, as a conclusion, to point to the resources for recovery provided in Christ. All this we will do taking into consideration the future eschatological state of man in relation to free will and sin.

Before we engage in this study we need to note and emphasize three important things about Augustine's thinking which stand as a foundation to his view of human nature. Firstly, his theology was very much influenced by the religious and philosophical trends of his day, influences that we will discuss shortly. Secondly, most of Augustine's philosophical theories of man (i.e., freedom of the will) depend on his psychological insights, in particular into his own behavior, and the accuracy and therefore the wide applicability of these insights and observations have made his *Confessions* of universal interest. Thus, in his theology there is a relationship between theory and practice; he is realistic in his affirmations. Lastly, and probably the most important, it must be emphasized that for Augustine it is impossible to demarcate the boundary between

²For more details, which we cannot include here because of space and of the limitation of the subject treated here, on the importance of Anthropology in relation to other doctrines see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996, pp.455-462. Also see him on the different interpretations of the image of God in man, pp.495-517.

philosophy and theology. Hence it becomes impossible to discuss ‘philosophical’ questions, like that of the freedom of the will, without recourse to theological problems like the operations of grace. Taking these three things into consideration in our discussion of Augustine and his opinion on the human nature in relation to the fall, we will begin by pointing to the religious and philosophical presuppositions that had influenced his thinking and how his theology constituted a turning point in thinking of the human nature.

MAJOR THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES ON AUGUSTINE³

The Gnostic Movement

The basic idea of Gnostic anthropology was that “the material condition of humanity is a tragic accident for which human beings do not bear primary responsibility.”⁴ The Gnostics emphasized the inevitability of sin; everything happens by necessity, even God himself. They subjected God and man to the slavery of an all-powerful fate. The various schools of Gnosticism depicted man as the victim and slave of forces over which he had no control, and, therefore, they diagnosed sin as inevitable and man as lacking responsibility. The fall did not produce a major change in man since he was a slave to sin before and after. In their view, then, salvation means the salvation of the spirit from the prison of the flesh, aided by Christ, who is offered as a model of such liberation. This salvation is entirely eschatological, since only then will the spirit be freed from matter.

Irenaeus was the first one to make responsibility and freedom of choice, rather than fatalism, determinism and inevitability, the burden of his message, writing against the Gnostics. Thus, the switch was made from the pessimistic view of the state of man to a more optimistic one, but without a big influence of the fall upon his free will. Salvation, in Irenaeus view, will be completed in eschaton, when the bodily condition of man, in which he was created, will finally be perfected.⁵

³For a detailed treatment of these influences see for example, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: Harper & Row, 1978, p.344-361, who presents the theological thought in the East and West before Augustine. Also, see Jeroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (vol.1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp.278-292. Most of the information that follows in this section is indebted to Patout J. Burns, *Theological Anthropology* (Sources of Early Christian Thought; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp.1-22.

⁴Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 3.

⁵Ibid., 4.

Augustine, on the other hand drew a pessimistic picture of man but not as the Gnostics did (also Manicheism) who saw matter as evil but from the point of the fallen nature of man. Thus, the fall did effect the free will of man. This pessimistic view of the fallen man, as we will see, constituted the starting point of his Anthropology.

The Ascetic Movement

Burn states that “the differences between the condition of Adam and that of his offspring are, in ascetic theory, largely environmental.”⁶ The surroundings before the fall made Adam's obedience to the command of God without difficulty. He had the freedom of choice and according to the choice he would be punished or rewarded. According to the ascetic movement, every man is born with the same capacity. The only difference is that we have to struggle to serve God in a hostile environment and with every sin, our capacity to choose good becomes “increasingly difficult and improbable.”⁷ Thus, we can say that:

the freedom of self-determination to good or evil, which is the inalienable divine image implanted in humanity at its creation, stands as the foundation of this anthropology. The exercise of this autonomy for good may be enhanced or encumbered by environmental factors whose actual influence, however, depends upon the individual's own prior consent. Through repeated choices a person will orient himself to either good or evil.⁸

Though Augustine retained some features of this anthropology, he disagreed with the fact that man possessed the capacity to desire and choose the good as God required as the inalienable property of nature without the possibility of losing it. Augustine believed in a radical change that the fall brought in the nature of man regarding his capacity to choose freely to do good. Thus, though he believed in the notion of reward, he explained that it was grace that made it possible while the ascetics believed in the assistance of grace only after man chooses the good.

Christian Platonism

Christian Platonism “identifies the divine image in humanity not as the autonomy of self-determination (as in the ascetic movement) but as rationality, the human capacity for knowledge of God.”⁹ This capacity is relegated to the

⁶Ibid., 4.

⁷Idem.

⁸Ibid., 6.

⁹Ibid., 7.

spirit, through which man can attain salvation. Matter, in turn, is considered evil, because of the passions, which for Augustine are named *concupiscence* (i.e., sexual desires, inclination). Prior to the fall, the human spirit was able to subject the desires of the flesh, but, with the fall, “the human spirit lost its dominion over the desires of the flesh and fell under the spell of sensual satisfactions...the dynamism of the spirit became the passion which serves bodily appetites.”¹⁰ According to Christian Platonism, salvation, then, is liberation from passions by the ascetic behaviour born of free will. Augustine rejected the fact that the effort, the desire or love for good and ultimately for God (*charity*) is inherent in man's nature. He believed that both the conversion and the perseverance (the beginning, the increase, and the fulfilment of charity) are gifts of God's own love. No wonder he was called “the doctor of grace.”¹¹

Augustine retained some of the features of these three religious-philosophical trends as we will see next, but rejected most of them because of his view of the nature of man, the impact of the fall, and the nature of salvation. All of them considered human nature inherently good, even after the fall, and thus having the capacity to choose to do good; the fall did not effect the freedom of the will. The only change is that the circumstances are hostile to him after the fall and the desires of the flesh (*cupiditas*) overwhelm the spirit. In this case, salvation is nothing but a cooperation between God and man¹² and Christ is an example to be followed. Of course, the objection brought to all this by Augustine is that it renders grace in vain. In response, Augustine emphasizes the pessimistic state of man that needs the help of God in every step of the way.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., 8. For a deeper study of the influence of Platonism on Augustine see John Burnaby, *Amor Dei* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947). He does a great study on the concept of love (*amore*) in Augustine. *Amore* is a neutral word and it characterized the initial state. At the fall *amore* became *cupiditas* and at conversion it became *charitas*, but *cupiditas* is still existent and a possibility. “*Amore* is *charitas* when it is the love of God” (*Amore Dei*, the greatest of loves, actually the true love), p.142.

¹¹Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, p.294; he quotes here, Albert C. Outler who said: “the central theme in all Augustine's writings is the sovereign God of grace and the sovereign grace of God.”

¹²Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.352.

¹³This emphasis on grace can be seen especially in his book *On The Grace of Christ*. It is to be noted that this view was cultivated during the Pelagian controversy and thus what follows will be discussed in this context. Pelagius is the one who retained most of the features of these theological-philosophical trends, because he emphasized an optimistic view concerning the capacity of the human nature.

THE HUMAN NATURE AND ITS RELATIONS TO SIN

Having looked at the theological and philosophical contexts in which Augustine formed his view of the human nature and capacity to choose good, their influence upon his own reflections on these matters, and his rejection of the major features of these trends, we will turn now to examining in a systematic way his own views.

For any study of Anthropology, including that of Augustine, we believe that the most useful approach would be that of trying to understand the condition of man before and after salvation. This would be important for the way we understand and minister to the unbelievers and, on the other hand, it will provide us with an understanding of how we need to live as redeemed and what to rely on as the basis for our hope of glorification. But in a study of biblical Anthropology, we need to realize that a proper understanding of man's condition is reached only by a proper understanding of the human nature before the fall and in the light of the eschatological hope. Therefore, we will consider the human nature in all four stages of the redemptive history as perceived by Augustine. The basis of Augustine's classification of the four ages can be understood as the relationship between law and sin, free choice and divine influence or free will and sin: *ante legem*- when men were ignorant of their sin (*posse non peccare*), *sub lege*- when they were aware of it but unable to conquer it (*non posse non peccare*), *sub gratia*- when they believe in the Redeemer and struggle against sin with divine aid, and *in pace*- when for the first time the body will be brought fully into subjection to the spirit (*non posse peccare*).¹⁴

Posse Non Peccare (it is possible not to sin)

The nature of Adam before the fall is the nature of spiritual beings (including Satan) before they were affected by sin. According to Augustine, Adam was endowed with every possibility to do good and with the Spirit's gift of charity. By God's grace, man was given the freedom to choose between good and evil. His spirit and body worked together in perfect harmony. *Cupiditas* was not yet powerful in his body because he had not yet sinned to cultivate the custom of sinning, though he had the freedom to sin. In their pre-fall state, Adam and Eve had no obstacles between them and their love for God and their obedience to God's command; neither the environment nor the desires of the flesh placed any such obstacles. Though the soul was not yet all that it could have become had Adam not sinned, the first couple was governed by the merit-reward economy

¹⁴see E. TeSeile, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), p.160.

described by the ascetic anthropology and could easily have earned eternal life by ending up with the capacity of no longer being able to fall.¹⁵ Thus, Adam and Eve had the possibility and freedom not to sin and could have remained without sin had they only persevered in the good.

It is to be noticed here that Augustine makes a distinction between being without fault and remaining in that goodness which is without fault.¹⁶ Being without fault was a gift of God while remaining without fault was of the first man. He received the ability to persevere in good, but perseverance was up to him.¹⁷ This does not mean that he had no assistance from God; he had the help of God but in a different way than the saved and glorified people have it. God gave Adam the possibility to persevere only if he so willed it.¹⁸ Thus, Adam was not left alone in his choices, but he was helped by God once he chose good. The emphasis is on the capacity of the free will to choose to persevere, on the grace of God that can be seen in the capacity of not sinning and the reward for not choosing to sin, and his responsibility if he chose to sin. In this respect, Adam was the recipient of three valuable opportunities: “he was able not to sin, not to die, not to desert the good.”¹⁹ Hence when Adam sinned, he sinned with full knowledge.

Augustine’s emphasis on the free will of the pre-fall Adam must not be confused with Pelagius’ view. The major difference between their views of the freedom of the will is in regard to the locus of the ability not to sin. Pelagius distinguishes three elements which are involved in fulfilling divine commands: capacity, will, and action. “By his capacity, a persons can be just, by his will he decides to be just and by his action he is just.”²⁰ Thus, according to Pelagius, it is in our own power to avoid sin, and the ability not to sin is of nature. And because not to sin is ours, we are able to sin and to avoid sin at the same time.²¹ For Augustine, on the contrary, the capacity of not sinning is of God; it is a gift. Augustine transfers Pelagius’ thinking and makes it an analogy for God, in order to prove the nonsense of this reasoning: “inasmuch as, in an infinitely greater degree, it is

¹⁵Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, X.27.

¹⁶Ibid., X.28.

¹⁷Ibid., XI.32.

¹⁸Ibid., We will note later the difference between this gift of perseverance and the one given to the saved and the glorified.

¹⁹Ibid., XII.33.

²⁰Ibid., III.4.

²¹Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 56.XLVIII, 57.XLIX; notice that for Pelagius, the fall did not change anything in the nature of man (probably the greatest fault in his thinking) thus we can compare this view with Augustine’s view of the unfallen nature.

God's not to sin, shall we therefore venture to say that He is able both to sin and to avoid sin?"²² By this analogy, Augustine seeks to show that the first man received the capacity to be good (actually was made good) and thus could have remained good, but choosing sin was of his own doing.²³

This moves us to the question of the origin of sin; if God created man as good, where is the idea of choosing bad from, i.e., what is the cause of the evil will? In the words of Augustine, "If the first man was created wise, why was he misled? And if he was created foolish, how can God not be the cause of vice, since folly is the greatest of the vices?"²⁴ The most satisfactory analysis of this doctrine in Augustine is done, in our opinion, by T.D.J. Chappell.²⁵ He argues: "In this case there is no cause which is efficient- only a cause which is deficient; for the Fall is not an effect, but a defect."²⁶ He continues:

An action can be explained only by reference to some supposed good at which it is said to aim. It follows that an action which cannot be seen as aiming at any supposed good whatever *cannot be explained*. But, plausibly, the first wrong action was just such an action. Therefore, the first wrong action is necessarily inexplicable; it can have no explanation of the only kind which is appropriate to the explanation of actions. To look for its motivation will be wholly vain; it can only be sin as a bare, unmotivated, inexplicable, irrational assertion of the will's freedom to choose. Thus the fall cannot be explained.²⁷

With this explanation of Augustine's theory, we can see how the first man was assisted by God's grace (making him good, giving him the possibility to remain good, and rewarding him for choosing good) and was also responsible for every action. Thus, in this first stage, man had the freedom not to sin and assisted by God when choosing good. The question that must be answered next is what

²²Ibid.

²³Augustine was trying to show that there is not really any difference between capacity and will. According to him, the will (*voluptas*) is not a part of the human *psyche*, rather it is the human *psyche* in its role as moral agent. "*Voluptas* is not a decision-making faculty of the individual, as subsequent philosophy might lead us to suppose, but the individual himself." As a result, a man wills what is good because he is good and he wills what is bad because he is bad. See Rist, "Augustine on free will and predestination," *Journal of Theological Studies* (vol.XX, Oct.1969), p.421-423.

²⁴Augustine, *On the Free Will*, III.71.

²⁵Chappell, "Explaining the Inexplicable Augustine on the Fall," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LXII/3, pp.869-883; he calls this theory the "no-explanation account" (NEA).

²⁶Ibid., 869.

²⁷Ibid., 871.

happened at the fall and what consequences it had upon the nature of man, namely his free will in relation to sin.

Non posse non peccare (it is impossible not to sin)

In the fallen condition, asserted Augustine, the human person lacks the resources to love and to choose good. Man is not free not to sin or to sin any longer, the only freedom he has being the freedom to sin. Augustine does not deny man's free will, only the idea of autonomous beings, that is, man's ability to weigh up good and evil and decide upon the one or the other. Unless we are helped by God's grace, fallen man's freedom of choice is only the freedom to sin.²⁸ Augustine justifies this by saying that:

For this is the most just penalty of sin, that a man should lose what he has been unwilling to make good use of, when he might with ease have done so if he would: which, however, amounts to this, that the man who knowingly does not do what is right loses the ability to do it when he wishes. For, in truth, to every soul that sins there occur these two penal consequences- ignorance and difficulty.²⁹

Thus, according to Augustine, we are free and able to do evil of our own accord, but we are unable to choose the good freely. We are devoid of *caritas* but the servant of its opposite, namely *cupiditas*. Our only freedom is to choose among evils.³⁰ Of course, this concept is drawn from the fact that once man started to sin, he continues to do it unless God intervenes. That is, the choice to sin set man on a course of sin, sin becoming a custom and a habit that is cultivated in man.³¹

²⁸It is here where Pelagius disagrees with Augustine; he sees grace located in freedom of choice and in the law and teaching (for this see his writing, *Letter to Demetrios*), Christ being just an example to be followed and imitated. Of course, the criticism brought by Augustine is that this thinking makes Christ's sacrifice in vain (this can be read for instance in his writing *On Nature and Grace*).

²⁹Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 81.10.

³⁰By this he does not mean that the fallen man is incapable of some good. But all good done by fallen man is with God's help, though this help is not necessarily sufficient to salvation. The good man is capable of doing even after the fall may be included in what is called common grace.

³¹It is to be noted that even Pelagius believed in this power of habit, but he believed this to explain the tragic situation of man apart from the original sin. He says: "Doing good has become difficult for us only because of the long custom of sinning, which begins to infect us even in our childhood. Over the years it gradually corrupts us, building an addiction and then holding us bound... What you establish in the beginning will last, and the rest of your life will follow the pattern you set at the start... Its power (custom) is greatest when it develops in people from their

Augustine's understanding of the consequences of the fall upon human nature and the freedom of the will can be explained as the loss of the two functions of grace that were effective in the primitive condition: 'operating' or 'prevenient' grace, on the one hand, and 'cooperating' or 'subsequent' grace, on the other hand. The first assures man of his ability to use his free will in a good way and the power to subjugate all other desires, while the second assists man after he chooses good and rewards him for his choice of good. Once the fall occurred, man lost these two functions of grace, free will remaining, but not in the real sense. TeSelle explains: "Willing, wherever it is found, is freedom within a certain horizon of necessity; and the difference between true freedom and bondage is not that between arbitrariness and constraint, but that between responsiveness to authentic value and self-will."³² Although our wills and choices are free, we still need freeing from sin. Although we are *liberi*, we are not *liberati*.³³ Therefore, although we are 'free' agents in the sense that we are responsible for our acts, we are unfree, until God intervenes, in that we are in bondage of sin.³⁴

Thus, according to Augustine, men do not begin *tabula rasa*, coming into being in a state of neutrality, somewhere between good and evil, able to equally choose good or evil. Instead, all men and women start with a handicap. This doctrine is fundamental to Augustine, for it is the basis for his scepticism about the intellectual powers of mankind and hence to his reliance on divine revelation. At the same time, his view of the consequences of the fall upon human freedom of choice, leads him to a weak view of the transmission of original sin. O'Donnell argues that "the weakest link in Augustine's theology of sin is his view on the transmission of original sin."³⁵ Augustine inclined to a theory of physical propagation, according to which the disorder of the sexual appetites was not only the sign of sin but the instrument of its transmission.³⁶

early years." (*Letter to Demetrias*, 12, 13). From this we can see that he believed in the necessity of grace but in a different way from what Augustine understood it, as we shall see later.

³²TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p.292.

³³It is to be noted that in this context, Augustine uses this term 'free' in the sense of 'responsible'.

³⁴For a more detailed analysis of the concept of 'free will' in Augustine, see Rist, "Augustine on free will and predestination," pp. 420-425.

³⁵James O'Donnell, *Christ and the Soul*, p.2; for the influences of the earlier fathers upon Augustine concerning this doctrine see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp.344-366; Kelly notices that even Augustine was divided in mind between the traducianist and various forms of the creationist theory of the soul's origin.

³⁶Because of the belief in the transmission of the original sin, Augustine believed also in the baptism of the infants which is not enough for receiving the blessedness of heaven but the avoiding of damnation. Thus, though the eternal consequences of original sin are removed by

Thus, the most obvious symptom of the corruption produced by the fall is his enslavement to ignorance, *concupiscence*, and death. *Concupiscence* stands, in a general way, for every inclination that makes man turn from God to find satisfaction in material things, which are intrinsically bad. By far, the most violent, persistent, and widespread of these is, in his opinion, sexual desire, and for practical purposes he identifies *concupiscence* with it.

Thus, as a conclusion to this part, we can say that, according to Augustine, the debility of sinful man is a problem within the will, arising from the power of custom and affection in the case of personal sin, and from the temptations of *concupiscence* in the case of original sin. Man is free in the fallen condition, but free only to sin unless the grace of God changes the situation.

Posse peccare (it is possible to sin)

This pessimistic view of man's fallen state, as enslavement to sin and damnation, requires a radical intervention of God's grace to save man, according to Augustine. God's saving grace establishes man in a state of a new freedom, a freedom different from the freedom Adam had before the fall. The difference between the pre-fall freedom and post-salvation freedom is explained by Augustine by pointing to the different way grace works in these two conditions:

A stronger grace is in the Second Adam. By the first grace, a person has justice if he wills it. The second grace can do more; it moves a person to will, indeed, to will so strongly and love so ardently that by the opposing will of the spirit he conquers the lusting will of the flesh. The first grace, which showed the power of free choice, was not insignificant; without this assistance a person could not persevere in good, although he could abandon the help if he so chose. The second grace is greater because a grace which restores a person's lost liberty

baptism what was left untouched by baptism was concupiscence, the inclination toward sin and, as a result, every human being eventually succumbing to sin. To this, Pelagius answered by saying that sin is transmitted from Adam not by propagation but by imitation. By stating this, Pelagius claims the possibility of living without sin and claims that there were people in the Old Testament who lived sinless lives. In response, Augustine stated the fact that, even if there were sinless people, they were so not because of free choice but because of the assistance of God's grace (see, *Man's Perfection in Righteousness*). But if there were people who lived without sin, Augustine emphasizes over and over, then they could not have prayed the Lord's prayer where it says *Deliver us from evil*.

and enables him to attain and remain in good if he so wills does not do enough unless it also causes him to will it.³⁷

By this, Augustine states the perseverance of the saint who, by free will (freed by God's grace), chooses the good only because God so arranges the circumstances that he will choose freely whatever God wants.³⁸ We need to notice here that for Augustine, the state of the saved man is not the same as the unfallen Adam; one reason is because if he was restored to the same state, any sin which he committed would be a sin laden with the consequences of Adam's original sin. So, when the saved man sins, he sins because the grace of God is not assisting him, God does not provide the circumstances to influence his will to choose the good, and therefore he sins out of his free will. But in general, the saved person is the slave of *caritas* and thus he chooses good naturally and freely because God wants so: "Their wills are so inflamed by the Holy Spirit that they are able because they so will and they so will because God causes them to will."³⁹

Thus, according to Augustine, there is a paradox here: moral responsibility for rejecting God remains, while the moral merit for accepting God is abolished by grace.⁴⁰ Man does wrong of himself but does right only because God does it in him.

We can see in all this how Augustine tried to preserve the free will of man and at the same time to emphasize the effective work of the grace of God. All choices of will and all acts are acts of desire, hence acts of love, either the

³⁷Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XI.31.

³⁸By this Augustine claims the fact that when God decides to offer us salvation, he doesn't just present to us this possibility of getting saved and then allows us to choose but, besides the fact that he gives us the capacity to choose He also prepares our will in such a way that we will choose. Thus, he believes in predestination only because he believes in the sovereign nature of the grace that cannot be overcome. Predestination is defined as God's foreknowledge of his own actions and his preparation of the means by which those whom he does liberate are liberated unfailingly. So, we are talking about not only the possibility but the actuality of perseverance. The fact that salvation is a work of God is seen, argues Augustine, in the baptism of the infants: they are capable of neither assent nor refusal, it's all the work of the grace of God. He says concerning the fact that God gives both the ability and the will to believe: "Then is the will of use when we have ability; just as ability is also then of use when we have the will. For what does it profit us if we will what we are unable to do, or else do not will what we are able to do?" (*On Grace and Free Will*, 31.XV). For more information on the subject of salvation see also TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp.319-338.

³⁹Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XII.38.

⁴⁰For a more detailed study of these paradoxes in Augustine see, James O'Donnell, "Augustine: Christ and the Soul," <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/twayne/aug4.html>, accessed 04.03.2022.

divinely inspired love called *caritas*, or the sinful selfish love called *cupiditas*. God's grace works effectively in changing the circumstances that create *caritas* and eventually changes the will.⁴¹ The faithful Christian, therefore, is one who believes utterly in God but who responds to the exigencies of daily life by living as though everything, salvation included, depends on his own actions. Therefore, it is still possible to sin as a saved person, and sin we will, but it will not be a habit, because we have the grace of perseverance.

Non posse peccare (it is impossible to sin)

Once man is saved, he continues to struggle with sin, but, assisted by God, he is able to maintain a life of obedience. This state, however, is not the final one; the final one awaits the time when man will not be able to sin. This glorified state of the nature is best understood in comparison to the initial state of man:

The original freedom of will was to be able not to sin; the final freedom will be much greater—not to be able to sin. The original immortality was to be able not to die; the final will be greater—not to be able to die. The original power of perseverance was to be able not to abandon the good; the final will be the blessedness of perseverance itself—not to be able to desert the good.⁴²

This statement is a comprehensive and a sufficiently clear one and therefore does not need any further explanation. What is obvious in Augustine's statement and must be emphasized is that the final state of man should not be confused with the initial state of man. By comparing these two states, Augustine reaches the conclusion that "freedom will be greater once free choice is unable to serve sin."⁴³ Freedom, in its highest degree, is the possibility to choose only good, because freedom is defined in relation to the good purpose it can serve. The more you choose good the more freedom you have. Being slaves of God is the greatest freedom we can have: *You will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

CONCLUSION

We have seen in this article the state of human nature, its capacity, will, and action, in the four stages of the history of salvation, as viewed by Augustine. In

⁴¹This of course contradicts what Pelagius believed and that is that man has not lost the capacity to choose, it is inherent in our nature, but that he became slave of sin through custom and all that God does is to present him the way of salvation and man can choose it or reject it. Augustine, on the contrary, believed that man's nature had been damaged, corrupted but it was still existent.

⁴²Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XII.33.

⁴³*Ibid.*, XI.32.

all these four stages, Augustine sought to preserve the free will of man under any circumstances. The way he did it was by rejecting the idea of fatalism in Gnosticism and by using some of the features of the existent religious and philosophical ideas, especially that of the Ascetic movement, namely the principle which emphasized the power of custom. Needless to say, his doctrine on human nature was developed during the Pelagian controversy. Thus, though he believed in the free will of man, he did not do so at the expense of the grace of God, which he saw as effective from the point of the preparation of the will for salvation all the way to glorification, in every step of the way. In trying to keep the balance between these two, the free will and the grace of God, he himself recognized that he did not know why people do not choose to avoid sin if the possibility is guaranteed to them. The only thing that he was able to say concerning this is that “God will certainly recompense both evil for evil, because he is just; and good for evil, because he is good; and good for good, because he is good and just; only, evil for good he will never recompense, because he is not unjust.”⁴⁴ Thus, the emphasis throughout all his writings is on the sovereign grace of God that is the only means of redemption and glorification of the fallen man: *What hast thou that thou didst not receive it? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

Do we have free will as fallen men? Yes. Can we choose God? No. It is God who chooses us: *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how*

unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Augustine of Hippo, *Man's Perfection in Righteousness*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene*

Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

⁴⁴Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, 45. XIII.

_____, *On Nature and Grace*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

_____, *On Grace and Free Will*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

_____, *On the Grace of Christ*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

_____, *On Rebuke and Grace*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

Burnaby, John, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947.

Burns, J. Patout. *Theological Anthropology*. Sources of Early Christian Thought. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

Chappell, T.D.J. "Explaining the Inexplicable: Augustine on the Fall," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LXII/3, 1994, pp. 869-83.

Kelly, J.N.D., *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: Harper & Row, 1978.

Harnack, Adolf, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol.1. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965.

O'Donnell, James J., "Augustine: Christ and the Soul,"

<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/twayne/aug4.html>.

Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887-94.

Pelikan, Jeroslav, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol.1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Portalie, Eugene S.J., *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975.

Rist, John M., "Augustine on free will and predestination," *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol.XX, Oct.1969, p.421-423.

TeSelle, Eugene, *Augustine the Theologian*. London: Burns & Oates, 1970.