

Why Did Augustine Revert to Pagan Salvific Determinism in AD 412?

The major influence on Augustine's AD 412 reversion to his prior deterministic Manichaean interpretations of Scripture was the arrival of Pelagius and Caelestius near his North African home in late AD 411. Augustine previously admitted (AD 405) he did not know why infant baptism was practiced (*Quant.*80). But the conflict with Caelestius and Pelagius forced him to rethink the church's infant baptismal tradition and precipitated his reversion to his pagan DUPED.²⁶ Caelestius had argued that infants did not receive baptism for salvation from sin but only for inheritance of the kingdom. Augustine's polemical response to Caelestius in AD 412 was logical: (1) Infants are baptized by church tradition; (2) water baptism is for forgiveness of sin and reception of the Holy Spirit; (3) some dying infants are rushed by their Christian parents to the bishop for baptism but die before baptism occurs, while other infants born of prostitutes are found abandoned on the streets by a church virgin who rushes them to the baptismal font where the bishop baptizes them; (4) these infants have no "will" and no control over whether or not they are baptized to receive the Holy Spirit to become Christians. Therefore, God must unilaterally and unconditionally predetermine which infants are saved by baptism and which are eternally damned without baptism (unconditional election).²⁷ God's election must be unconditional since infants have no personal sin, no merit, no good works, no functioning free will (incognizant due to the inability to understand at their age), and therefore, no choice.

In his next work that same year, Augustine concluded if this is true for infants, then unbaptized adults also have no choice or free will (*Sp. et litt.*54– 56). The Holy Spirit was received in water baptism, transforming the person into a Christian with a free will. Since humans have no free will before baptism, God must unilaterally choose who will be saved and infuse faith into those persons. Augustine taught even when "ministers prepared for giving baptism to the infants, it still is not given, because God does not choose [those infants for salvation]" (*persev.*31). Infant baptism became the impetus for Augustine's novel theology when he reinterpreted that church tradition and reached a logical conclusion. By doing this he abandoned over three hundred years of church teaching on free will. According to the famous scholar Jaroslav Pelikan, Augustine departed from traditional Christian theology by incorporating his prior pagan teachings and thereby developed inconsistencies in his new anthropology and theology of grace, especially his "idiosyncratic theory of predestination."²⁸

Augustine Reverted to His Prior Pagan Philosophies in AD 412

The controversy over infant baptismal regeneration propelled Augustine to revert to his pagan training. Augustine's reading of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus (*Enneads*) and Porphyry provided vital concepts he would incorporate from philosophy into his new theology.²⁹ Evil

produced an incapacitating fall with a total loss of the image of God in humans (*Enn.*1.1.12; 1.8.5; 4.3.12). In Neoplatonism, all humans were created as pure spirits (no physical body). Their voluntary choice to become physical resulted in the loss of free will.

By this choice humanity lost the "good will" and became inextricably chained in universal wickedness from an "evil will" (*Enn.*3.2.10; cf. Stoicism). This required the Spirit to implant the desired love and restore the "good will" by divine infusion (*Enn.*3.5.4; 1.7.9; 3.2.9.1; 2.3.1.1; 3.3.19–21; 4.8.5.1– 4). Although human souls do not possess genuine free will, (somehow) neither do they act by compulsion (*Enn.*4.3.13).³⁰ The Neoplatonic "Reason-Principle" (god) purposefully created only a few individuals to whom he would gift a "good will" but created many more evil individuals who would remain devoid of personal choice. These evil persons were created as predestined to damnation. Nevertheless, those created for damnation remain inexcusably culpable and guilty, because the universe is just and good when each person accepts his or her god-imposed role, including those eternally tortured screaming in pain (*Enn.*3.2.17). Because "The One" (god) can only do good, he is exonerated by doctrinal definition from committing any injustice. These pagan philosophical teachings were the warp and woof of Augustine's earlier studies, and these buttressed his theological answers to the Pelagian challenge.

Augustine utilized all these Neoplatonic doctrines after AD 411: (1) humanity's fall resulted in total inability to respond with loss of free will (leaving only an evil will); (2) individuals were created for the purpose of damnation unto God's glory; (3) individuals were culpable despite the lack of any choice to do good or respond positively; and (4) God was just, despite deliberately creating persons for eternal torture. After AD 412 Augustine regurgitated these pagan doctrines. "This absolutely obvious truth by which we see that so many are not saved because God does not will this, though human beings do" (*Ep.*217.19). God purposefully created persons to damn them eternally (*Nupt. et conc.*2.31–32). We possess no writings from any prior Christian author who held such pagan views.

Similarly, in AD 412, Manichaean Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Eternal Destinies (DUPED) invaded Christianity through Augustine. Foreknowledge now resulted from God unilaterally predetermining the elect (in other words, divine foreordination preceded divine foreknowledge). This was a Gnostic requirement. "Present a command to us to see Thee, so that we may be saved. Knowledge of Thee, it is the salvation of us all! Present a command! When Thou dost command, we have been saved" (*The Three Steles of Seth*, 125). Augustine wrote a similar line: "Give what you command, and command what you will" (*Conf.*10.40).

Thus, Augustine abandoned the unanimous consensus of the earlier Christian view and reverted to his Gnostic-Manichaean deterministic interpretations of Christian Scripture in AD 412. This can be best visualized by examining the following chart that compares the different interpretations of key Scripture passages by early Christians, Gnostic-Manichaeans, and Augustinian-Calvinists.

Scripture	Early Christian	Gnostic-Manichaean	Augustinian-Calvinist
Rom 5:12	physical death	spiritual death	spiritual death
Rom 9-11	temporal benefits	election to salvation	election to salvation
Eph 2:3	self-formed nature	created nature by birth	fallen nature from Adam
Eph 2:8-9	salvation is the gift	faith is the gift	faith is part of the gift
John 6:44	God's Word draws all persons equally	only the elect are drawn	only the elect are drawn effectually
John 6:65	granted to all who believe	DUPED <small>(DIVINE UNILATERAL PREDETERMINATION OF ETERNAL DESTINIES - UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION)</small>	DUPED
John 14:6	Christ is an open door for all persons	closed door DUPED	closed door DUPED
Phil 2:13	favor/good pleasure*	God gives the "good willer"	God gives the "good willer"
Ps 51:5	hyperbole for sinner	physical birth damns	Adam's guilt damns at physical birth

*Greek *eudokias*; the five other texts (Ps 5:13, 68:14, 144:16; Sir 15:15; Luke 2:14) containing *eudokia* refer to favor, acceptance, or good pleasure; "good willer" is my pejorative term for the pagan concept of a formal faculty that can "will good" (Stoic/ Neoplatonic/ Manichaean). It must be gifted by god/ the One to overcome the "evil will" in spiritually dead persons incapable of a positive response to god/ the One's offer of salvation. The same passages the Gnostics and Manichaeans had interpreted as deterministic are now used by modern Calvinists to prove total depravity and unconditional election (the essential elements of Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Eternal Destinies, DUPED).

Gnostics and Manichaeans had used these same Christian Scriptures (listed above) for centuries to promote their unilateral determinism. Before Augustine, orthodox Christians had refuted heretical Gnostic and Manichaean DUPED and "interpreted *proorizō* [election] as depending upon *proginoskō* (foreknow)—those whom God foreknew would believe he decided upon beforehand to save. Their chief concern was to combat the concept of fatalism and affirm that humans are free to do what is righteous."³¹

Augustine's move toward DUPED was recognized by his peers, so he was accused of reverting to his prior Manichaean theology.³² But as a splendid rhetorician, Augustine defended himself brilliantly by creating a subtle distinction. He modified Gnostic/Manichaean "created human corrupt nature" (producing damnation) into a Christianized "fallen human corrupt nature" in Adam with inherited guilt (producing damnation; *Nupt. et conc.* 2.16). Augustine's novel nuanced "fallen" nature borrowed a key Gnostic/Manichaean and Neoplatonic doctrine: humans have total inability to respond to God until divinely awakened from spiritual death.

Furthermore, to avoid violating centuries of unanimous Christian teaching, Augustine had to redefine the Christian meaning of free will. He concluded God must micromanage and manipulate the circumstances that guarantee a person would "freely" respond to the invitation of God's calling to eternal life.³³ This should be compared to placing a mouse in a maze, then opening and closing doors so the mouse could "freely" reach the cheese. (In Christian theology that emphasized free will, all doors remained open for the maze traveler to choose his or her own path.) Augustine's redefined free will was Stoic "non-free free will." A millennium later, Calvinists would label this divine manipulation of the human free will by the term *irresistible grace* (God forcing a person to "love" him).

NOTES

26 Wilson, 285. See also Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 110–11.

27 Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* 1.29–30. In contrast, ca. AD 200, Tertullian had rejected infant baptism, stating one should wait until personal faith was possible (*De bapt.* 18).

28 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (100–600) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 278–327, quotation at 325.

29 O'Daly, *Platonism Pagan and Christian*, 719.

30 This equivocation was also practiced by the ardently deterministic Stoics, since a total absence of free will was untenable to many among the ancient populace.

31 Carl Thomas McIntire, "Free Will and Predestination: Christian Concepts," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 15 vols., ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5:3206–9.

32 *C. Jul. imp.* 1.52. His ordination as a bishop was blocked and almost prevented due to his prior Manichaeism. See Jason D. BeDuhn, "Augustine Accused: Megalius, Manichaeism, and the Inception of the *Confessions*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009): 85–124; and Henry Chadwick, "Self-Justification in Augustine's *Confessions*," *English Historical Review* 178 (2003): 1168. As in the chart above, see Augustine's Manichaean interpretations of Romans 9–11 (*Pecc. merit.* 29–31, *Spir. et litt.* 50, 60, 66; *Nupt.* 2.31–32, *C. du ep. Pelag.* 2.15, *Enchir.* 98, *C. Jul.* 3.37, 4.15, *Corrept.* 28); Eph 2:8–10 (*Spir. et litt.* 56, *C. du ep. Pelag., Enchir.* 31, *Praed.* 12); John 14:6 and 6:44, 65 (*C. du ep. Pelag.* 1.7, *Grat.* 3–4, 10); and Phil 2:13 (*Spir. et litt.* 42, *Grat. Chr.* 1.6, *C. Jul.* 3.37, 4.15, *Grat.* 32, 38).

33 Burns, "From Persuasion to Predestination," 307.