

History of Christian Thought I

Theology of Augustine

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Final Paper - December 10, 2017

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Original Sin

Original sin is the doctrine which holds that human nature has been morally and ethically corrupted due to the disobedience of mankind's first parents to the revealed will of God. The Fall of Adam is seen as the original sin as well as the fallen nature and moral corruption he passed down to his descendants. The doctrine of *original sin* holds that every person born into the world is tainted by the Fall such that all of humanity is ethically debilitated, and people are powerless to rehabilitate themselves, unless rescued by God. "Pelagius taught that Adam's sin influenced the human race only as a bad example and that all people are born in the same state as Adam was before his fall. Augustine taught that men inherit natural corruption from Adam."¹

The Position I hold on original sin is that Adam introduced sin into the world therefore introducing it into our lives as we are born. We are born into a world where sin is not looked upon as sin but as a way of life. For example, if you are born into a family where majority of them drink alcohol you don't see it as wrong you see it as normal. It is not until you are given the truth about alcohol that you see it from a different perspective. Adam had permission to eat from every tree in the Garden except one tree and he chose this tree not out of necessity but curiosity what harm will come if I eat from this tree. Like many Christians today we bring sin into our lives not out of need but because we are curious, and we say to ourselves what harm will it cause if no one knows.

Free Will

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought. (Nashville: Abingdon Press Publisher, 1971) 43

Augustine taught that God gave free will to Adam and to the Angels in the beginning of time. Free will is a choice to make your own decision. God knew he created us in His own image and he wanted to see if we would make the right choice when the time came. According to, Gonzalez “free will is what makes us truly human and is in no way evil in itself, but is rather a good gift of God which is capable of turning into evil for it can decide to do what is good as well as what is evil.”² Geisler mentions there was free will before the fall. Adam and Eve were told to be fruitful and multiply and to eat of every tree except for the tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Since they had to be told to do these things, there was a possibility for them to not do it. Choice existed before the fall, but the true question is did it exist after the fall? Although Adam was spiritually dead after the fall he was still able to respond freely to God’s call.³ Genesis 3:9-10 confirms But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.”

My position on Free will it is a gift from God because he did not want slaves He wanted us to freely love Him. God gave us the ability to choose rather or not we wanted to follow Him. It is written in Galatian 5:13 “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather serve one another humbly in love.” Tatian one of the fathers of history said “our free will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold though sin. Nothing else was created by God; we manifested wickedness.”⁴

2 Ibid., 42

3 Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 773.

4. Alexander Roberts, et al. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. Hendrickson, 1995.

Evil

Evil has been a question for centuries where does it come from and who made it. It was suggested by Manichees that Light and Darkness are two equally eternal principles fighting each other. They believe that being can be naturally evil as well as good. Evil to them is an absolute dualism and if God created good then he created evil. Augustine rejects this theory it goes against Christian Monotheism. He also believes all beings are created by God and that they are good. Evil is a corruption of good and its origin stems from a being that is good but is capable of doing evil. That is the only time one can claim God is the creator of all things, but He is still not the author of evil.⁵ Geisler states “in order for God to conquer evil, God had to permit it. God permitted evil to allow for a greater good through a free creature.”⁶ Gonzalez goes further to say evil is not a creature or something or even nature it is only a negation of good. He believes everything that exist is good there is a certain measure of beauty and order in everything. Meaning that things some consider ugly or not truly ugly just not the greater level of pretty.⁷ Even the saying of the beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

My Position on evil is much like Augustine. Evil existed much like darkness did before God created us. Honestly, we did not know dark was something bad until God said let there be light. When light is present it is inviting, it is warm, and it is attractive. Light is bright, and it shines which makes you not like darkness. We consider darkness to be a bad thing because we know what light is. Which goes back to Gonzalez point a greater degree of somethings makes the

5 Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2008.

6 Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 790.

7 Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press Publisher, 1971) 42

other object not be as valuable as the first. The more light you have the less darkness exist. Therefore, when good is not present it gives evil the opportunity to emerge. Evil exist only when people lack goodness. When good is present evil is nowhere to be found. Which helps me to believe the more we allow goodness to take over our lives the less evil will exist in the world. In the end evil will be defeated by God. As long as there is free will, evil will exist. Beings have a choice if all we could choose was good it would not be a choice.

Predestination

Predestination is the decree of God by which certain souls are foreordained to salvation -- called the elect. God does not predetermine the evil acts of men, nor does God cause them. Rather, these permitted acts mean that God knows beforehand how people will react in each circumstance. He allows people to make autonomous decisions, the choice to do good or evil. God's foreknowledge of the evil that people perpetrate onto others caused Him to create within humans the ability to overcome that evil. And the good that people are capable of was predetermined by God to be blessed when doing good was chosen. While fulfilling God's total plan blessings enable humans to win over evil. God uses those choices to bring about His purpose since he is all-knowing and knows the outcome of the choices men will make.⁸

Grace

⁸ Slick, Matthew J. "Predestination and Calvinism." *Predestination and Calvinism*. N.p., 2012. Web. 15 Mar. 2017.

Grace and Merit are mutually excluding as well as not coexistence per scripture. (Rom. 11: 6). If man could merit his salvation, God's grace would not be required. Although grace is the only thing needed for salvation, your works show that you have received salvation. Christians must realize that man's sins cancel God's grace and His grace can be given in vain. Paul ask the question in Roman 6:1-2 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Grace is God's gift and Faith is man accepting the gift." Augustine believes grace is gentle with us it does not force us to make decision against our own will, Instead God's plan is that our will desire to do good from the strength and stimulate that grace gives us and not through coercion. Gonzalez also mentions it is impossible for the will to reject grace that is given to it because it is so enticing.⁹ Pelagius did not want us to have an excuse of the sins we committed by putting it on human nature. For example, you know how we make this statement "I am only human" to give us permission to sin. According to Gonzalez, Pelagius believed in grace but from the "original grace" he state it is a "natural grace". He also refers to the "grace of revelation" or "grace of teaching", "grace of pardon" or "grace of remission of sin". One of Augustine response was given in a nine point summary of Adam. One the statement included "that Adam was created mortal, for he would have died no matter whether he had sinned or not."¹⁰

Salvation

According to Geisler, "the origin of salvation is the will of God, who decreed from all eternity to provide salvation for those who would believe": "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 9 Justo L. Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought. (Nashville: Abingdon Press Publisher, 1971) 46

10 Ibid., 32-33

2:9).¹¹ Fruit of the Spirit is the true evidence of salvation. One's works alone will not show salvation but what one produce from his works is what shows he is saved. For instance, there are some fruits that are produce from bad seeds. "Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."(Eph. 5:21-23) With that being said, not all our works are good therefore works alone are not evidence of salvation, but it is the fruit that is produce from it as well as the faith that shows evidence. According to, Geisler, "we do not work in order to obtain salvation; we work because we have already been given it." God works salvation in us by His justification, and we work out our salvation through sanctification by His grace (Phil. 2:12-13). However, "Catholicism holds that part of the basis for obtaining eternal life is meritorious works; it makes no difference whether or not a work is prompted by grace if the accomplishment of meritorious works is a condition for eternal life, then salvation is not solely based on God's grace. Further, when condemning the idea of works for salvation, Paul does not limit it to "works of the law " but sometimes simply refers to "works" or "works of righteousness" (Eph. 2:8-9' Titus 3:5-7). Therefore, if all righteousness is a standard set by God, it follows that all true works of righteousness will be according to, His nature.¹²

Baptism

¹¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 877.

¹² *Ibid.*, 878.

Baptism is perhaps the most universal of all Christian ordinances. By many branches of Christianity baptism is considered the "portal" into the Christian church. Baptism sparked a significant amount of debate, because the early church fathers put a tremendous amount of emphasis on it. There are different types of baptisms and John the Baptist being the first to introduce baptism of repentance according to, Mark 1:4 "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." However, John mentioned in Mathew 3:11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*:" Baptism is cleansing and washing away of our sins and our conscience being clear towards God.

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