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THE NICENE AND POST NICENE FATHERS

INTRODUCTION:

Reading the Fathers is essential but can be very confusing. Some claim that reading the Bible is enough. *Sola Scriptura* is the creed of most Protestants, and yet, they read Luther and Calvin and a host of others. The problem with *Sola Scriptura* is in the interpretation of the scriptures. All of the heretics were very well versed in the scriptures and they used them very effectively to spread their heresies. The problem was that they misinterpreted the scriptures. The Fathers of the Church took on those heretics and fought them by showing the proper interpretation of the scriptures, and herein lies the importance of the writings of the Fathers.

But as we said, reading the fathers can be confusing, since sometimes they contradict each others and sometimes they even contradict themselves. So, where do we go from here? The first thing is that we have to realize that the fathers are not infallible, and that some are more fallible than others. So, it is in the consensus of their views that we can find the truth.

How do we know which Fathers are more to be trusted than the rest? In our own Coptic Orthodox Church, we can find this out from our Liturgical Tradition. In the Absolution said after the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest says:

May Thy servants, ministers of this ..., be absolved from the mouth of the All-Holy Trinity—the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and from the mouth of the One, Only, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; and from the mouths of the twelve Apostles; and from the mouth of the Beholder of God, Saint Mark the Evangelist, the Apostle and martyr; the patriarch Saint Severus, our teacher Dioscorus, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, Saint Peter the martyr among the priests and the high priest, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyril, Saint Basil, and Saint Gregory; and from the mouths of the three hundred and eighteen assembled at Nicea, the one hundred and fifty at Constantinople, and the two hundred at Ephesus

The fathers from whose mouth we ask the absolution are those whom we should put in a place of pre-eminence among the rest. These are:

1. Saint Severus
2. Saint Dioscorus
3. Saint Athanasius the Apostolic
4. Saint Peter the martyr among the priests
5. Saint John Chrysostom
6. Saint Cyril the Pillar of the Faith
7. Saint Basil
8. Saint Gregory the Theologian
9. The Fathers of the three ecumenical councils acknowledged by our Church.

This is what I call “The Safe Fathers List”

The other fathers who are not on the “List” have to be measured by the writings of these pre-eminent Fathers. If there is a disagreement with these pre-eminent fathers, the writings of the latter should take precedence.

There is also another measure by which we can evaluate the writings of any of the Fathers; the agreement between their writings and the Liturgy. And by the Liturgy I mean the Liturgy of the Baptism, that of matrimony in addition of course to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The purpose of this series is to present the most important of the

writings of those fathers, with a view of reading them critically; accepting those writings that are deemed orthodox as determined by the criteria we set above, and rejecting the others as either non orthodox or controversial.

For those who do not own a printed copy of Ante Nicene, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, here is a Link :

<http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/>

Father Athanasius Iskander

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354-430)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in 354 in Thagaste (present-day Souk Ahras, Algeria), He studied rhetoric in near-by Carthage. His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian, and his father, Patricius, a pagan. Although raised as a Christian, Augustine left the Church to follow the Manichaean religion, a dualistic Persian religion centred about a good God and an evil God.

As a youth Augustine lived a hedonistic lifestyle for a time and, in Carthage, he developed a relationship with a young woman who would be his concubine for over fifteen years. During this period he had a son, Adeodatus.

In 383 he moved to Rome, and one year later, at age thirty, he became a professor of rhetoric for the imperial court at Milan. It was there that he became a Christian, through the preaching of the bishop Saint Ambrose and the fervent prayers of his mother Saint Monica.

In 386, after having read an account of the life of Saint Anthony which greatly inspired him, Augustine underwent a profound personal crisis and decided to convert to Christianity, abandon his career in rhetoric, quit his teaching position in Milan, and devote himself entirely to serving God and the practices of priesthood, which included celibacy.

Saint Ambrose baptized Augustine, along with his son, Adeodatus, on Easter Vigil in 387 in Milan, and soon thereafter in 388 he returned to Africa. On his way back to Africa his mother died, as did his son soon after, leaving him alone in the world without family.

Upon his return to north Africa he created a monastic foundation at Tagaste for himself and a group of friends. In 391 he was ordained a priest in Hippo (Algeria). He became a famous preacher, and in 396 he was made bishop of Hippo.

Augustine died on August 28, 430, at the age of 75, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals, who were Arians.

WORKS:

Augustine was one of the most prolific Latin authors, and the list of his works consists of more than a hundred separate titles. They include apologetic works against the heresies of the Arians, Donatists, Manichaeans and Pelagians, texts on Christian doctrine, exegetical works such as commentaries on Genesis, the Psalms and Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, many sermons and letters, and the Retractions, a review of his earlier works which he wrote near the end of his life. Apart from those, Augustine is probably best known for his *Confessions* which is a personal account of his earlier life, and for *The City of God*, consisting of 22 books, which he wrote to restore the confidence of his fellow Christians, which was badly shaken by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410.

THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

Augustine introduced Platonism into Western Christianity, something Origen introduced into Eastern Christianity two centuries earlier. Saint Athanasius theology succeeded in freeing Eastern Christianity from Greek Philosophy half a century before Augustine introduced it into Western Christianity.

Augustine's concept of original sin was expounded in his works against the Pelagians. However, Eastern Orthodox theologians, while they believe all humans were damaged by the original sin of Adam and Eve, have key disputes with Augustine about this doctrine, and as such this is viewed as a key source of division between East and West. His writings helped formulate the theory of the just war. He also advocated the use of force against the Donatists (a heretic sect)

Augustine's doctrine of divine predestination would later become the inspiration of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Augustine's vision of the heavenly city has influenced the secular projects and traditions of the Enlightenment, Marxism, Freudianism

and Eco-fundamentalism.

Augustine of Hippo does not have an entry in our Synaxarion, neither is he mentioned in our Liturgy.

THE CONFESSIONS:

A work of great devotional and philosophical value in which there is an outline of the author's life up to his mother's death. It was written ten years after his baptism. The purpose of writing it is clearly explained in the fourth section of his Tenth Book. It was that the impenitent on reading it might not say, "I cannot," and "sleep in despair," but rather that, looking to that God who had raised the writer from his low estate of pride and sin, he might take courage, and "awake in the sweetness of His grace, by which he that is weak is made strong;" and that those no longer in sin might rejoice and praise God.

The confessions are in thirteen books. Starting from book 11, Augustine inserts some exegetical writings about the creation of the world in Genesis 1. It is a commentary that sometimes wanders into abstract ideas like the notion that the heaven of heavens is an intellectual creature:

For verily that heaven of heavens which Thou createdst in the Beginning, is some intellectual creature, which, although no ways coeternal unto Thee, the Trinity, yet partaketh of Thy eternity, and doth through the sweetness of that most happy contemplation of Thyself, strongly restrain its own changeableness; and without any fall since its first creation, cleaving close unto Thee, is placed beyond all the rolling vicissitude of times.¹

Books XI and XII also have philosophical speculations on memory and time. These speculations on time were quoted by Stephen Hawkins in his famous book *A Brief History of Time*.

It was Saint Augustine that suggested that the creation happened six thousand years ago (before his time). That places the date of creation at 5,500 years BC. This figure is used today by the "Young

¹THE CONFESSIONS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE--ANOTHER
TRANSLATION Book XII chapter IX N/PNF series I vol I

Earth” creationists. He also asserted that there was no time before the creation.

Like Origen, he thought that many passages in Genesis should be explained allegorically rather than literally. He gave a few far fetched allegorical interpretations that not too many agree with.

THE CITY OF GOD: Composed 413-418

Written after the invasion and sacking of Rome by the Visigoths under Alaric in 410 AD. The composition is in 22 books. The first 10 books are built around the theme that Christians live in this world but they are not of this world. They are present here as strangers sojourning in a foreign country, enjoying the blessings the world has to offer, but always ready to move on. Heaven is the Christian’s true home, and it is to heaven that his affections and his loyalties should be directed.

Books 11-22 are exegetical about the creation and fall of men and angels as written in Genesis. In Books 15-18, he presents a narrative of world history from the creation to the coming of Christ and establishment of the Church.

The last books are eschatological speaking about the last judgement, Hell and Heaven.

Book 11 is good, as it has some important discussions about the creation. More plausible than those in his confessions.

Book 12 again treats the creation of the world, of man and angels. His speculation, however, that the light created in the first day was the angels is far fetched, as well as his assertion that when God separated light from darkness it means the good from the bad or fallen angels. The Book of Job tells us that the angels were there before the days of creation.

Book 13 is about the fall: Adam’s sin and its effect. Here he introduces his controversial doctrine of the original sin. It was an unfortunate choice of words when he said that we inherited the guilt of Adam. We indeed inherited the sinfulness of Adam through our corrupted nature (a bad tree brings forth bad fruit) We also inherited the result of Adam’s sin which is death but we cannot inherit his guilt.

That we inherited Adam’s sinfulness is obvious from Cain slaying his brother, but Cain perished because of his sin not his father’s sin. Most of the Orthodox have issues with this doctrine, mainly because none of the Eastern Fathers spoke of it. Our Liturgy of Baptism does

not even mention Adam and Eve (even though the Liturgy of the Eucharist and that of holy matrimony mention them). Remission of sins in Baptism is mentioned many times but only in relation to personal sins.

Book 14 has a very cute justification for why Adam obeyed his wife: “... but the man could not bear to be severed from his only companion, even though this involved a partnership in sin.” (Chapter 11) I told this to my wife and she answered: nice try!

In chapter 16 he speaks about sexual lust even in marriage:

What friend of wisdom and holy joys, who, being married, but knowing, as the apostle says, “how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the disease of desire, as the Gentiles who know not God,” would not prefer, if this were possible, to beget children without this lust.

Here is an area where St. Augustin because of his past, exceeds the pastoral limits in judging even the lawful marital relationship. It is these writings that led the Catholic church to abandon marriage of the priests which was upheld by the council of Nicea, and to ban the use of contraceptives on the premise that marital relationships that do not lead to child birth are lustful.

In the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) said that if any pleasure was mixed with intercourse, it “transgresses the law of marriage.” According to Gregory, pleasure “befouls” intercourse, though, like Augustine, he concluded that this was only a minor sin within marriage. And so, a tradition was firmly established: All sex was suspect, and any non-procreative sex—during infertile times, pregnancy, and old age—was especially sinful.

The Orthodox have a big issue with that, for Saint John Chrysostom speaks of the marital relationship in a way that makes most blush, even today:

How do husband and wife become one flesh? As if she were gold receiving the purest gold, the woman receives the man’s seed with rich pleasure, and within her it is nourished, cherished, and refined. It is mingled with her own substance and returned as a child. But suppose there is no child; do they

then remain two and not one? No; their intercourse effects the joining of their bodies, and they are made one, just as when perfume is mixed with ointment.

Saint Paul, even though a celibate, recognized this relationship as important regardless of procreation:

1 Co 7:3-5 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

The Orthodox believe that in marital relations, lustful Eros is transfigured into self sacrificial Agape, a love modelled on the love of Christ and the Church: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Eph 5:25) It is the self giving in this relationship that raises it above worldly love.

The rest of Book 14 is a controversial speculation about how if Adam and Eve had not sinned they would have begotten children without lust.

In Book 15 (Chapter 1), Augustine introduces his controversial doctrine of predestination according to grace:

When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was the first-born, and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above. By grace,--for so far as regards himself he is sprung from the same mass, all of which is condemned in its origin: but God, like a potter (for this comparison is introduced by the apostle judiciously, and not without thought), of the same lump made one vessel to honour, another to dishonour.

This doctrine of Absolute Predestination later became the foundation of Calvinism and later on of Darby's doctrine of Assured Salvation or Eternal Security.

In quoting Romans 9:21 to justify his doctrine, Augustine ignored another important saying of Saint Paul that qualifies this predestination in Romans 8:29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." This is called Predestination According to Foreknowledge, which is what we believe in and which is anathema to Calvinists and Darbyists.

Our objection to Absolute Predestination is that If God decided that some are going to be saved and some are going to perish, then injustice can be imputed to God which is untenable.

Like we said earlier, Book 20 is eschatological about the last judgment. In chapter 7 he speaks about the Millennial rule of Christ and admits: "I myself, too, once held this opinion." Then he goes on to refute it. In chapter 8 he speaks about the loosing of the devil during reign of Antichrist.

In chapter 25 he makes a big blunder: the purgatory! Commenting on a passage from Malachi he says: "From these words it more evidently appears that some shall in the last judgment suffer some kind of purgatorial punishments." Then he speaks about the nature of hell and eternal punishment (confuses hell with the lake of fire.)

Book 22 speaks of the eternal happiness of the saints and the bodily resurrection. In chapter 22 he returns to the premise that salvation is possible only through grace: "From this hell upon earth there is no escape, save through the grace of the Saviour Christ, our God and Lord." Salvation through grace only is the mainstay of Protestantism.

ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE:

The four books of St. Augustin On Christian Doctrine deal with exegetical theology to guide the reader in the understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. The first three books were written A. D. 397; the fourth was added 426.

BOOK I:

Speaks about God and the necessity of loving him, and how to interpret the scripture. In Chapter 18, he has a remarkable statement:

“He has given, therefore, the keys to His Church, that whatsoever it should bind on earth might be bound in heaven, and whatsoever it should loose on earth might be, loosed in heaven.” So here he admits that Peter does not have monopoly on the keys!

In chapter 26 he comes up with this peculiar statement: “The command to love God and our neighbour includes a command to love ourselves.” If we compare this with our own Eastern spirituality, we get the opposite:

It is precisely our egoism, our self-centredness and self love that cause all our difficulties, our lack of freedom in suffering, our disappointments and our anguish of soul and body. ... Your freedom is curbed by the restraining bonds of self-love.¹

Theophan the Recluse tells us: If a man can escape from self love he will find the love of God and his neighbour. This is the opposite of what Augustine tells us.

In chapter 31, under the heading: “GOD USES RATHER THAN ENJOYS US”, he poses the question: “In what way then does He love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment?” Then he answers this way: “He does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us”. In Proverbs 8:31, the Logos or Wisdom of God declares: “and my delights were with the sons of men.”

In chapter 39, under the heading: “HE WHO IS MATURE IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE, NEEDS SCRIPTURE NO LONGER”, he writes:

And thus a man who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others. Accordingly, many live without copies of the Scriptures, even in solitude, on the strength of these three graces.

BOOK II:

Here he Speaks about various topics related to scripture, science, logic and demons.

¹Tito Colliander: *Way of the Ascetics* St. Vladimir's Press page 5

BOOK III:

Here he speaks about the proper punctuation and pronunciation of the scripture in order to minimize ambiguation and when a phrase is to be taken figuratively and when it is to be taken literally. In chapter 21 under this heading: “DAVID NOT LUSTFUL, THOUGH HE FELL INTO ADULTERY”, he makes this profound statement:

And hence we may understand with what temperance he possessed a number of wives when he was forced to punish himself for transgressing in regard to one woman. But in his case the immoderate desire did not take up its abode with him, but was only a passing guest.

How could he consider having a number of wives temperance? And for a man who took his neighbour’s wife, committed adultery with her repeatedly, and when she became pregnant, he tried a cover up and when this didn’t work, he killed her husband, can we say that desire did not abide in him but was a passing guest? I think not.

BOOK IV:

Here he gives advice to the Christian teacher about style, the use of rhetoric etc... useful in some way.

THE FIFTEEN BOOKS ON THE TRINITY:

A very lengthy composition on the Trinity that does not measure up to any thing the Eastern Fathers wrote on the topic. It also has many mistakes.

BOOK VII:

In this book Augustine demonstrates lack of understanding of the difference between “essence” and “hypostasis” In Greek the word *ousia* means essence. Saint Athanasius insisted that the Son is *homousius* or of one essence with the Father. The word *ousia* in Greek means *substantia* in Latin.

That is why Catholics say that the Son is *consubstantial* with the Father, while the Orthodox, following the words of Saint Athanasius say *co-essential*. But the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each have their own *hypostasis*, a Greek word that means subsistence or “personal

existence” according to the use of Saint Cyril of Alexandria. This word has no equivalent in Latin and this led to a lot of confusion as we shall see. So, to us, the Trinity is one essence in three hypostases.

For the sake, then, of speaking of things that cannot be uttered, that we may be able in some way to utter what we are able in no way to utter fully, our Greek friends have spoken of one essence, three substances; but the Latins of one essence or substance, three persons; because, as we have already said, essence usually means nothing else than substance in our language, that is, in Latin.

First of all, we never say one essence three substances, since as he admits essence (Greek *ousia*) means substance (Latin *substantia*). A little later on he adds this:

But lest I should seem to favour ourselves [the Latins], let us make this further inquiry. Although they [the Greeks] also, if they pleased, as they call three substances three hypostases, so might call three persons three “prosopa,” yet they preferred that word which, perhaps, was more in accordance with the usage of their language.... But neither is the word person commonly so used in any case; nor in this Trinity, when we speak of the **person** of the Father, do we mean anything else than the **substance** of the Father.

The Greek word *prosopon* which in English means person is sometimes also used to signify the Trinity, so we can say the Three persons of the Trinity, but we prefer three hypostases. He then says that when they (the Latin) speak of the person of the Father they mean nothing else than the substance of the Father. So, if person is sometimes used instead of *hypostasis*, and if essence means substance as he said earlier, then how can person be the same as substance? Translated into Greek that means *prosopon* or person, which is loosely used instead of *hypostasis* is the same as *ousia* or essence. This confusion about *hypostasis* and *ousia* spilled over to Chalcedon and caused the schism.

BOOK XIII:

In chapter XII of this book, under this heading: “ALL, ON ACCOUNT OF THE SIN OF ADAM, WERE DELIVERED INTO THE POWER OF THE DEVIL”, he writes this:

By the justice of God in some sense, the human race was delivered into the power of the devil; the sin of the first man passing over originally into all of both sexes in their birth through conjugal union, and the debt of our first parents binding their whole posterity.

That God delivered the human race to the power of the devil was a common heresy that Saint John Chrysostom wrote three homilies against: “Three Homilies Concerning the Power of the Demons”. We shall discuss these when we treat Saint John Chrysostom’s writings, and show how Augustine missed the mark.

And again he claims that the original sin passes to children through the conjugal union, which God had blessed. And how can we reconcile this with St. Paul’s saying in 1 Timothy 2:14-15 “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding **she shall be saved in childbearing**, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”?

BOOK XV:

In the last book on the Trinity, Augustine gives us the Filioque, that caused the final schism between Rome and Constantinople. I will give you the titles of two chapters in that book:

CHAP. 25.--THE QUESTION WHY THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT BEGOTTEN, AND HOW HE PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON.

CHAP. 26.--THE HOLY SPIRIT TWICE GIVEN BY CHRIST. THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM THE FATHER AND FROM THE SON

A TREATISE ON FAITH AND THE CREED: (393 AD)

Augustine gave this explanation of the “Creed” to the bishops

assembled at the Council of Hippo-Regius. It was subsequently issued as a book at the desire of friends. But what “Creed” was this? Was it the Nicene Creed, issued by the council of Nicaea (325AD)? Or the expanded creed issued by the council of Constantinople (381AD)? It was neither! The Creed he was explaining is the so-called “Apostle’s Creed”, which reads as follows:

1. I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY.
2. (And) IN JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER,
3. WHO WAS BORN THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT OF THE VIRGIN MARY.
4. WHO UNDER PONTIUS PILATE WAS CRUCIFIED AND BURIED.
5. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD.
6. HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.
7. HE SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER.
8. FROM THENCE HE WILL COME AND JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.
9. (AND I BELIEVE) IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.
10. I BELIEVE THE HOLY CHURCH (CATHOLIC).
11. THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.
12. THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.
13. THE LIFE EVERLASTING.

This was the only creed Augustin knew and taught, 68 years after the council of Nicaea and 12 years after the council of Constantinople. The whole Christian world used the Nicene-Constantinople creed, and yet Augustine either ignored it or didn’t know about it! In chapter 9 of his book on the “Creed”, he tells us:

With respect to the HOLY SPIRIT, however, there has not been as yet, on the part of learned and distinguished investigators of the Scriptures, a discussion of the subject full enough or careful enough to make it possible for us to obtain an intelligent conception of what also constitutes His special individuality.

As a matter of fact, the learned and distinguished investigators of the scripture met in the second ecumenical council at Constantinople and reached that intelligent conception! And even before that Saint Athanasius wrote about the Holy Spirit and Saint Basil wrote a great treatise about the Holy Spirit. The problem of Augustin is that he did not know Greek, and that isolated him from the rich heritage of the church.

THE ENCHIRIDION:

One of the latest books Augustine wrote (written after 420 AD)

CHAP. 30.--MEN ARE NOT SAVED BY GOOD WORKS, NOR BY THE FREE DETERMINATION OF THEIR OWN WILL, BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

But this part of the human race to which God has promised pardon and a share in His eternal kingdom, can they be restored through the merit of their own works? God forbid. For what good work can a lost man perform, except so far as he has been delivered from perdition? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will? Again I say, God forbid. For it was by the evil use of his free-will that man destroyed both it and himself. For, as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live, and cannot restore himself to life; so, when man by his own free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost.

Here Augustin denies salvation by good works and claims that fallen humanity has lost its free will. This is why Protestants love Augustine.

CHAP. 46.--IT IS PROBABLE THAT CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED IN THE GUILT NOT ONLY OF THE FIRST PAIR, BUT OF THEIR OWN IMMEDIATE PARENTS.

Here Augustine carries his theory of original sins to cover the sins of our immediate parents!

ANTIMANICHEAN WRITINGS:

Manicheanism was (and is) a dualistic religion founded by Mani, a Persian sage, in the third century after Christ. Mani synthesised Christian, Buddhist and Zoroastrian elements into his religion. He taught that there were two gods, one good, one evil.

The good god, YHWH, the God of Jews and Christians is spiritual and light; the bad god, called Satan in the New Testament, is material (hyle or hyola) and darkness, but equally eternal and equally powerful.

The good god is responsible for human souls and minds, the bad god for human bodies, passions and emotions. Humans are the battleground between the two gods, since they blend mind and matter, the basic principles of the two gods.

Life for fourth century Manichean devotees consisted of avoiding the material and passionate and emotional and striving to become fully spiritual and rational. Those who became fully spiritual and rational could shed their bodies at death and return to heaven. Those who remained attached to their material and passionate selves, who were evil and emotional were condemned to a continuing cycle of re-birth into physical bodies. In practice, Manichean adepts avoided meat, sex, and subsisted only on “light-bearing” vegetables, such as melons and radishes.

Augustine himself joined the sect for 8-9 years, to the great disappointment of his saintly mother Monica. He later converted to Christianity and wrote several books attacking that religion.

The editor of the Nicene/Post Nicene Fathers series gives us some insight into his conversion to Christianity:

But to reject Manichaeism was not necessarily to become an orthodox Christian. Augustin finds himself still greatly perplexed about the nature of God and the origin of evil, problems the somewhat plausible Manichaeian solutions of which had ensnared him. It was through Platonism, or rather Neo-Platonism, that he was led to more just and satisfying views, and through Platonism, along with other influences, he was enabled at last to find peace in the bosom of the Catholic

church.¹

Neo-Platonism enters so largely and influentially into Augustin's polemics against Manichaeism, so much that he goes to a dangerous extreme, and narrowly escapes fatalism on the one hand, and denial of the true personality of God on the other.²

Augustin approaches the Platonic doctrine of the ideal or archetypal world. Finite things, so far as they exist, are essence, i.e., God; so far as they are not essence they do not exist at all. Thus the distinction between God and the world is almost obliterated. Again, whatever is finite and derivative is subject to negation or nothingness. Thus he goes along with Plato and Plotinus to the verge of denying the reality of derived existence, and so narrowly escapes pantheism.³

Far less satisfactory than his confutation of the fundamental principles of the Manichaean system were his answers to the Manichaean objections against the Old Testament. His principal reliance here is the allegorical or typological method of interpretation. It would be hard to find examples of more perverse allegorizing than Augustin's Anti-Manichaean treatises furnish. Nothing more wearisome and disgusting in Biblical interpretation can well be conceived of than certain sections of *The Reply to Faustus, the Manichaean*.⁴

ANTI DONATIST WRITINGS:

The Donatists were followers of a belief considered a heresy by

¹Introductory essay on the Manichaean heresy: Nicene/ Post Nicene Fathers, Series I, Volume II, chapter IX; Augustin and Manichaeans

²Ibid

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

the broader churches of the Catholic tradition. They lived in the Roman province of Africa and flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The primary disagreement between Donatists and the rest of the early Christian church was over the treatment of those who renounced their faith during the persecution of Roman emperor Diocletian (303–305), a disagreement that had implications both for the Church’s understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and of the other sacraments in general.

The rest of the Church was far more forgiving of these people than the Donatists were. The Donatists refused to accept the sacraments and spiritual authority of the priests and bishops who had fallen away from the faith during the persecution. Many church leaders had gone so far as to turn Christians over to Roman authorities and had handed over sacred religious texts to authorities to be publicly burned. These people were called traditors (“people who had handed over”). These traditors had returned to positions of authority under Constantine I, and the Donatists proclaimed that any sacraments celebrated by these priests and bishops were invalid. Canon X of Saint Peter, (Seal of the Martyrs) prevents those from returning to their priestly orders.

As a result, many towns were divided between Donatist and non-Donatist congregations. The sect had particularly developed and grown in northern Africa. Constantine, as emperor, began to get involved in the dispute, and in 314 he called a Council at Arles; the issue was debated and the decision went against the Donatists. The Donatists refused to accept the decision of the council, their distaste for bishops who had collaborated with Rome came out of their broader view of the Roman empire.

Augustine led the drive against Donatism. He wanted the Donatists to come under the discipline of both church and state. When they refused, he convinced the emperor of the west, Honorius, to outlaw Donatism. Donatists were deprived of bishops and funds. Their meeting together for religious purposes was declared punishable by death. Donatists could not hold public office, protect their property in the courts, nor pass their property to their heirs.

Augustine wrote justifying the legal “coercion” of Christians who disagreed with him.

ANTIPELAGIAN WRITINGS:

Morgan of Wales is more commonly known by his Latin name Pelagius Britto was born around 360 A.D. in South Wales. He came from a Christian romanized Celtic background. Pelagius received a Latin education and was taught Holy Scriptures, inheriting the Celtic tradition which had links with the Church of Gaul and the Eastern Church. An emphasis was placed on faith and good works, on the holiness of all life.

In 380 Pelagius went to Rome to study law but soon abandoned his law career for the Church, becoming a monk. In doing so, he was to become the first-known major Celtic writer and theologian.

Pelagius became the spiritual advisor to many and moved about successfully in Roman Christian circles, emerging as a theologian of note and as a man of personal sanctity, moral fervour, and charisma. He became a major religious and intellectual force of his time, pointedly showing that his ideas had solid foundation in the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Church Fathers.

Pelagius was appalled by the laxity of Christian discipline among religious and secular leaders in Rome. He chastised the wealthy and powerful, including Emperor Honorius, for their abuses of property and privilege, exhorting them to the Christian virtues of mercy and charity.

Pelagius opposed Augustine's doctrines of original sin, predestination and election as being un-Scriptural and not supported by the writings of the Early Church Fathers. He speculated that Augustine's theology was laced with his previous Manichaeism. Augustine had previously referred to Pelagius in favourable terms with praise for Pelagius, calling him "a man of high reknown, a great orator, and most excellent Christian." However, in 413 he openly attacked Pelagius in two sermons.

When Rome fell to Alaric in 410 Pelagius and Celestius (one of his followers) departed with numerous other refugees for Carthage in North Africa. Pelagius and Celestius soon parted company with Pelagius moving on to Palestine while Celestius stayed in Carthage -- the center of Augustinian theology. In 411-412 the African Church condemned Celestius as a heretic but no charges were brought against Pelagius.

In 415 Augustine sent Orosius to Palestine with the mission of convicting Pelagius of heresy. Augustine was of the opinion that the root cause of Celestius' heresy was in the teachings of Pelagius.

In June 415, a Synod was convened in Jerusalem with Orosius accusing Pelagius of heresy. Pelagius was present to defend himself and was acquitted. A second council was called in December at Diospolis (Lydda) with two previously deposed Gallic Bishops bringing charges against Pelagius. Again, he was present to defend himself and, again, he was acquitted.

In dissatisfied reaction the Augustinians convened two of their own councils in 416 -- at Carthage and Milevum where they condemned both Pelagius and Celestius. Pelagius was not present to defend himself.

Augustine also appealed to Pope Innocent I who claimed universal authority for the Bishop of Rome over "all the churches of the world". Augustine successfully persuaded him to issue a conditional condemnation of Pelagius and Celestius on January 27, 417 which would be effective only if they did not return to orthodoxy. However, Innocent I died on March 12 and was replaced by Pope Zosimus I on March 18.

Zosimus was an Eastern Christian who decided to re-examine the case, calling for a Synod at the Basilica of St. Clement in Rome. Pelagius was unable to attend but sent a Confession of Faith. Zosimus was favorably impressed with Pelagius's defense and proclaimed that Pelagius was totally orthodox and catholic and that he was a man of unconditional faith. Zosimus went on to say that Pelagius had for many years been outstanding in good works and in service to God; he was theologically sound and never left the catholic faith. The conditional condemnation was effectively overturned. Zosimus proceeded to condemn and excommunicate Pelagius's accusers (Heros and Lazarus) and sent several letters to Carthage including one summoning Paulinus (another accuser) to Rome to account for his charges. Paulinus rudely refused.

Augustin appealed to the Roman Emperor Honorius, a target of Pelagius's exhortations against the abuses of wealth and power, issued an Imperial Rescript ordering action against Pelagius on the charge that his public meetings affect the peace of Rome. The emperor also

pressured Zosimus to reverse his decision. He condemned Pelagius as a heretic and banned him from Rome.

Pelagius was not a systematic theologian like Augustine. He was, primarily, a Christian ethicist and moralist who sought practical applications of the Christian virtues to daily life. His theological concepts are grounded in attempting to balance faith and works in that way which is reflected in the Epistle of St. James and epitomized and by the life of Christ. For Pelagius, Christianity was not an abstract system of thought but a concrete way of life. Unlike Augustinianism with its grounding in neo-Platonic philosophy and Manichean religion, Pelagius's theology is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and the Early Church Fathers.

Here is what the editors of the Nicene/PostNicene series say about the AntiPelagian writings:

Other controversies of a completely different character, especially the Pelagian, caused Augustin to look to other aspects of truth and so led to certain modifications in his own statements, nay led him on some occasions to the verge of Manichaeian error itself.¹

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL:

In book four of this composition he writes:

Owing to one man all pass into condemnation who are born of Adam unless they are born again in Christ, even as He has appointed them to be regenerated, before they die in the body, whom He predestinated to everlasting life, as the most merciful bestower of grace; whilst to those whom He has predestinated to eternal death, He is also the most righteous awarder of punishment not only on account of the sins which

¹Introductory essay on the Manichaeian heresy: Nicene/ Post Nicene Fathers, Sries I, Volume II, chapter IX; Augustin and Manichaeans

they add in the indulgence of their own will, but also because of their original sin, even if, as in the case of infants, they add nothing thereto.

What about Enoch, who walked with God and was translated into heaven? And what about the Lord's saying "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (Mt 18:14) The Catholic Church, embarrassed by his teaching that unbaptized children will perish, adopted the doctrine of the "Limbo"

In another of his ANTIPELAGIAN writings, *Treatise on Rebuke and Grace*, he tells us:

CHAP. 14.--NONE OF THE ELECT AND PREDESTINATED CAN PERISH.

This led Protestants to the doctrine of "Assured Salvation" or "Eternal Security"

In chapter 33 of the same composition, we are told:

Therefore the first liberty of the will was to be able not to sin, the last will be much greater, not to be able to sin; the first immortality was to be able not to die, the last will be much greater, not to be able to die; the first was the power of perseverance, to be able not to forsake good--the last will be the felicity of perseverance, not to be able to forsake good

Here he tells us that Adam had a free will that made him "able not to sin", but to us (according to him) was given by grace "not to be able to sin". This is called "Irresistible Grace", which Protestants delight in. In chapter 36 he tells us:

It is He Himself, therefore, that makes those men good, to do

good works. ... It is He, therefore, who makes them to persevere in good, who makes them good. But they who fall and perish have never been in the number of the predestinated.

This is pure unadulterated Protestant doctrine! Our church believes in a synergy between grace and free will as is described beautifully in H.H. book *SALVATION IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT*. There is also an excellent rebuttal of both Pelagius and Augustine in one of the conferences of Cassian: THE THIRD CONFERENCE OF ABBOT CHAEREMON: ON THE PROTECTION OF GOD¹.

NON DOGMATIC WRITINGS:

These include: On the good of marriage, on the good of widowhood, on continence, on virginity, on the profit of believing , on lying, on patience, on the work of the monk etc... all these are excellent since they stay away from dogmatic questions.

EXEGETICAL WRITINGS:

Augustine wrote commentaries First John, sermon on the mount etc are good. The exposition of the Psalms is also good. His Psalms are very similar to the Coptic ones used in the Agpeya.

THE RETRACTIONS:

Near the end of his life, Augustine wrote a book called “The Retractions”, in which he “retracted” some earlier writings.

VERDICT ON ST AUGUSTIN:

A minority of the Orthodox uncritically accept him as a saint and a father of the church like the late Fr. Peter Rose, a convert to the

¹NICENE AND POST-NICENE FATHERS, SERIES II
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Russian Orthodox Church. Another minority consider him an outright heretic like the late Fr. Romanidis of the Greek Orthodox Church and Father Askoul of the Antiochian church. The majority consider him a saintly man "the blessed Augustin" (Not St. Augustin) but because of his many errors cannot consider him among the Fathers of the Church.

Our Coptic Synaxarion does not mention him, even though another African bishop, Cyprian, who taught two centuries earlier is mentioned in the Synaxarion¹.

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PAROUSIA was not issued during August and September 2007. Our apologies to our readers.

Please note that our website has moved. Our new website is now www.stmaryscopticorthodox.ca

¹St. Cyprian is commemorated on the 21st day of Tut. Unfortunately, his story is confused with that of Cyprian the sorcerer, who is a different saint, so that Cyprian the sorcerer became the great African bishop, a very embarrassing mistake