

Augustine

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Reformed Theology pastors today put a lot of importance on the writings of Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.) yet I don't think he should be the definitive source on general Christian theology for reasons I will show below.

415 A.D. - St. Augustine's writings fostered anti-Semitism: St. Augustine wrote, "*The true image of the Hebrew is Judas Iscariot, who sells the Lord for silver. The Jew can never understand the Scriptures and forever will bear the guilt for the death of Jesus.*"

Source: http://www.chosenpeople.com/main/article/a_brief_and_incomplete_history_of_jewish_suffering.html

Contrast Augustine's comments to what the Apostle Paul wrote:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. **Romans 1:16***

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

Romans 2:8-10

Augustine is both the founder of modern Roman Catholicism and the primary source for various positions of Calvinism. John Calvin clearly obtained his understanding and formation of many doctrinal issues such as infant baptism, predestination, and the use of civil authorities and punishments to enforce church policy from the writings of Augustine. As Dave Hunt states in *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*, you can't read five pages of Calvin's *Institutes* without Augustine being quoted¹.

The interesting thing about Reformed Theology using Augustine to make the case for their doctrine of predestination is that Augustine also espoused many other doctrinal ideas that pretty much most of those in the Calvinist camp today as well as most "Bible Believing" Protestants reject (with perhaps in some cases the exceptions being the Lutherans):

- Augustine stated that a person cannot know if they are going to Heaven or Hell.
- Augustine said Biblical text should not be interpreted literally if it contradicts what we know from science and our God-given reason and taught that much of what is in Genesis is allegorical².
- Mary was born and lived her entire life without actual sin³.
- Appealing to Mary can lead to salvation (see Augustine's prayer below).
- Baptism was required for salvation.
- Unbaptized infants are eternally damned⁴. John Calvin and Martin Luther believed this as well and had believers tortured and killed who determined that infant baptism was not scriptural and were later baptized as adults.
- Sex within marriage is an inherently debased act⁵.

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- There will be no literal millennium⁶. Reformed Theology today believes this.
- There is no forgiveness of sins outside of the Roman Catholic church⁷.
- There is a purgatory fire⁸.
- The dead can benefit from the sacrifice of the Eucharist⁹.
- It was proper for a Christian state to persecute heretics¹⁰. Augustine allowed and even encouraged the persecution of those whom he disagreed with such as the Donatists *. This persecution included appealing to the Roman government to decide and enforce doctrinal issues and the confiscating of property and instituting floggings. (For more see The Golden Rule)
- "I would not believe in the Gospel if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me to do so." Augustine.¹¹

Augustine's position on the Virgin Mary's role in salvation and as our mediator is best summed up in Augustine's prayer

*Blessed Virgin Mary, who can worthily repay you with praise and thanksgiving for having rescued a fallen world by your generous consent? What songs of praise can our weak human nature offer in your honor, since it was through you that it has found the way to salvation? Accept then such poor thanks as we have to offer, unequal though they be to your merits. Receive our gratitude and obtain **by your prayers the pardon of our sins**. Take our prayers into the sanctuary of heaven and enable them to bring about our peace with God.*

***May the sins we penitently bring before Almighty God through you be pardoned.** May what we beg with confidence be granted through you. Take our offerings and grant our request; obtain pardon for what we fear, **for you are the only hope of sinners**. We hope to obtain the forgiveness of our sins through you. Blessed Lady, in you is our hope of reward.*

Holy Mary, help the miserable, strengthen the discouraged, comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for the clergy, intercede for all women consecrated to God. May all who venerate you, feel now your help and protection. Be ready to help us when we pray, and bring back to us the answers to our prayers. Make it your continual care to pray for the People of God, for you were blessed by God and were made worthy to bear the Redeemer of the world, Who lives and reigns forever.

-- Augustine^{12, 13, 14, 15}

More on Infant Baptism (pedobaptism)

- Augustine believed that no one could be saved unless they had received baptism in order to be cleansed from original sin. He also maintained that unbaptized children would go to hell. Augustine's position on infant baptism was later carried forward by some in the reform movement.
- John Calvin called *pedobaptism* "a divine institution."

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- Martin Luther said that infant baptism was justifiable because babies have "*hidden faith*," just as a believing adult is also a Christian even while he is asleep.
- Around 1524 at the instigation of Huldrych Zwingli, the Zürich council ordered all unbaptized babies to be baptized within eight days. On March 7, 1526, the Zürich council again sided with Zwingli and passed an edict making adult baptism punishable by drowning. Tens of thousands of Anabaptists were executed in several countries over baptism.

Augustine's position on predestination¹⁶:

- As a result of Adam's fall, man is totally depraved. He is absolutely unable to do anything good or to save himself. In fact, he's even unable to believe or have faith in God.
- Therefore, humans can believe in God or have faith in Him only if by grace He first gives them this faith or belief. Man has no free will to choose either to believe or not to believe.
- God's decision to save one person and condemn another, to give faith to one person and withhold it from another, is totally arbitrary. There's nothing we can do to influence God's choice.
- Before the creation of the world, God arbitrarily predestined (not simply foreknew) who would be saved and who would be damned. There's nothing we can do either in this life or the next to change these matters.
- The elect, those who were predestined for salvation before the creation, cannot possibly lose their salvation. Those predestined for damnation cannot possibly be saved.
- No one can know whether or not he or she is of the elect. God gives many people the gift of faith so that they believe, are baptized and walk in Jesus' commandments. However, some of them haven't been predestined for salvation and ultimately won't persevere. The gift of perseverance is a separate gift from that of faith. We have no way of knowing who in the church has been given the gift of perseverance.

What this history lesson and critique of Augustine demonstrates is that Augustine was very wrong on a number of points, at least as far as modern day Calvinists and Reformed Theology movement are concerned. That is the inherent danger in developing and defending doctrine based on men instead of the Scriptures. And if Augustine was wrong on the issues above, his position on predestination deserves equal scrutiny and criticism. If Augustine was wrong then Calvin was misguided when he justified his positions based on Augustine. My guess is, if you removed the issue of predestination from the discussion current day adherents of Reformed Theology would probably be aligned much closer with the Anabaptists than with John Calvin...

* **Donatism:** *[the following neither is a complete explanation nor a defense of Donatism, just a very brief description of a group that Augustine violently opposed.]*

Catholics and Donatists were not divided by the doctrinal issues. The Donatists were generally recognized as orthodox Trinitarian Christians, although anti-heresy laws were eventually used against them.

Donatism had been around since the persecutions under Diocletian, when Christians were ordered to turn over their Scriptures to Roman authorities. Some obeyed this order and others refused, suffering torture or death. Many went into hiding or fled. Once the persecution ended,

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the question remained: if a bishop had complied with the order, could he still serve as a bishop once the persecution was over? If he had lost his authority as a bishop, should he be deposed or should he be retained and made to do penance? There were other questions along this line.

Bishop Donatus argued that the personal holiness of individuals was what validated an office. A lapsed bishop or priest, therefore, no longer kept that authority. Augustine on the other hand took the view that church authority conferred in the consecration and office of a bishop held true, even if the bishop's personal purity fell short of ideal. Such a bishop ought to do penance, but his acts as bishop were valid and carried the church's full authority. And the orders and authority of anyone ordained or consecrated by such a bishop were valid.

Donatus' writings were destroyed primarily by the Roman government and the established church, however even his adversary, Augustine, acknowledged their brilliance and referred to Donatus as a '*precious jewel*' in the church and '*the man who reformed the church in Africa.*'

Nevertheless, Augustine wrote against the teachings of Donatus. In 399, at Augustine's instigation, laws against heretics were applied to the Donatist movement, even though it was not yet officially designated as *heresy*. The annual council at Carthage decided in 403 on a policy of persecution by applying economic pressure rather than making additional martyrs. In 405 the emperor, Honorius, issued an edict of unity proscribing Donatism as a heresy, confiscating property, exiling the clergy and instituting floggings. When economic persecution and floggings failed, a Catholic delegation requested Honorius to convene a conference in Carthage to settle the conflict. Augustine's friend, Marcellinus, was appointed by the emperor as the mediator to head the conference and as such the outcome of this conference was no surprise: Marcellinus declared in favor of the Augustine and the Catholic delegation.

References:

1. Hunt, Dave. *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God-*, Chapter 4
2. Augustine, *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* (early fifth century, AD).
3. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* chapter 42.
4. Augustine, *On Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism of Infants*, book 1 chapter 21
5. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapters 26,34
6. Augustine, *The City of God*, book 20 chapter 7
7. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapter 65
8. Earl E. Carin, *Christianity through the Centuries* page 161
9. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapter 110
10. Augustine, *Donatists*, chapter 2.
11. The Berean Call, <http://www.thebereancall.org/node/5931>
12. <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/prayers/SaintsPrayers.htm>
13. <http://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/augustineprayer.htm>
14. *The Greatest Marian Prayers : Their History, Meaning, and Usage* / Anthony M. Buono Imprint New York : Alba House, c1999, BX2160.2 .B86 1999, p. 112
15. *Blessed Art Thou: A Treasury of Marian Prayers and Devotions* / Richard J. Beyer Imprint Notre Dame, IN : Ave Maria Press, c1996, BX2160.2 B46 1996, p. 35
16. Augustine, *On Predestination of the Saints*

<http://www.freewill-predestination.com/>