



**UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA**

DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOSOFIA, SOCIOLOGIA, PEDAGOGIA E PSICOLOGIA  
APPLICATA

*DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE STORICHE, GEOGRAFICHE, E DELL'ANTICHITÀ.*

CORSO DI LAUREA IN .FILOSOFIA

*The Pelagian Controversy and the Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Free  
Will*

Relatore:

Ch.mo Prof. Vittorio Berti

Laureando:

Daniel Hernandez  
Jimenez

Matricola n. 1232852

ANNO ACCADEMICO 2022- 2023



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER 1 The Theology of Baptism in Moses within the Torah.....	9
CHAPTER 2 Saint Augustine in the Old Testament.....	16
CHAPTER 3 The Dialogues Of Moses, Pelagius, and Saint Augustine .....	25
CONCLUSION .....	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	31

# Introduction

Without understanding the origins of the ideas present, never shall we understand their meaning. It is therefore of the utmost importance to understand the origins of our philosophy if we are to understand them at all. This thesis will outline one origin—the origin of biblical baptism. Understanding the birth of baptism, its core idea in the philosophy of the biblical figure, Moses, will allow this thesis to then reframe the Pelagian conflict and recontextualize Augustine’s arguments for Baptism, Grace, and Free Will.

Disclaimer: In order to avoid an endless debate on the ideas of Free Will, Baptism, and Grace we must return to a biblical context. What does this mean? Both Pelagius and Augustine shared the foundation of Biblical Scripture, we will avoid all debates regarding Canonicity and Authorship as these arguments would take us far from the theological debate we so wish to understand. I propose in this thesis, that these arguments regarding Baptism, Free Will, and Grace have already been in dialogue even from within the Torah. By entering the biblical context, we will see that these issues have been discussed centuries prior to the theological debates of Saint Augustine and Pelagius. We will delve into the worldview of Moses; however we will read Genesis and Exodus under a new light. This “new light” stems from comments made by Christ within the New Testament. Through this lens, I hope to recontextualize the debate between Saint Augustine and Pelagius, placing them within a dialogue begun by Moses and made clear by Jesus Christ in the Evangelion.

Before beginning our investigation, it would benefit us first to consider a clear example of New Testament—Old Testament exegesis. With a clear example of this in mind, it will be far simpler to understand the framework that will be laid down in our conclusion. In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy chapter 6 verse 10 we read the famous line, “For the love of money is the root of all evil...<sup>1</sup>” We now begin a perplexing investigation into what seems to be a radical and hyperbolic comment made by an ancient Christian writer. Let us examine the methodology used by Saint Augustine in his utilization of this verse:

“For the soul loving its own power, slips onwards from the whole which is common, to a part, which belongs especially to itself. And that apostatizing pride, which is called the “**beginning of sin**,” whereas it might have been most excellently governed by the laws of God, if it had followed Him as its ruler in the universal creature, by seeking something more than the whole, and struggling to govern this by a law of its own, is thrust on, since nothing is more than the whole, into caring for a part; and thus by lusting after something more, is made less; whence **also covetousness is called “the root of all evil.”** And it administers that whole, wherein it strives to do something of its own against the laws by which the whole is governed, by its own body, which it possesses only in part; and so being delighted by corporeal forms and motions, because it has not the things themselves within itself, and because it is wrapped up in their images, which it has fixed in the memory, and is foully polluted by fornication of the phantasy, while it refers all its functions to those ends, for which it curiously seeks corporeal and temporal things through the senses of the body, either it affects with swelling arrogance to be more excellent than other souls that are given up to the corporeal senses, or it is plunged into a foul whirlpool of carnal pleasure.<sup>2</sup>”

The methodology of Augustine follows a clear line of thought from his commentary on the trinity, where he has already identified pride as the beginning of all sin. He had outlined pride as the root of all evil, and cites the same verse from 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy to further cement his argument. His logic and dialectic is clear and without fault—he

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim 6:10 KJV

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity, Book XII, Chapter 9

justifies the conclusions made by the Apostle Paul in his letter. This thesis will present an alternative path to reach the same conclusions made by Saint Augustine, through a different approach. Let us consider the purported context of the Epistle. The Apostle Paul is a Christian, amongst the first of Christians, and he commentates on the teachings of Christ indirectly<sup>3</sup>. A direct parallel, a commandment given by Christ in Matthew chapter 6 verse 24 is directly in line with this dichotomy of loving God or loving money, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.<sup>4</sup>” Now we see from exactly where the epistle creates this dichotomy of loving money and loving God, it is a parallel teaching of the same commandment. The Apostle Paul does not create his teaching from nothing, but has his writings rooted in the commandments taught by Christ.

We will investigate further still; from where did **Christ** learn this dichotomy<sup>5</sup>? As shall be outlined in this thesis, we will demonstrate that Christ did not create his commands *ex nihilo*, but rather outlined how to correctly interpret the teachings of the Torah. Loving God versus loving money, a story outlined explicitly in the Torah. In Exodus Chapter 32 we read of the well-known story of the golden calf. We read:

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which *are* in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring *them* unto

<sup>3</sup> This is a hypothesis that few would take seriously due to the rigid scholarship claiming the priority of the Epistles of Paul in their likely chronological precedence. If Paul wrote his Epistles prior to the writing of the Evangelion, this thesis would seem dead on arrival. However, this thesis does not aim to challenge the scholarly consensus of the chronology of New Testament writings. A hypothesis by which the Apostle Paul commentates on an Oral Tradition of the sayings of Jesus. Seeing as Paul would know the teachings of Christ, we will then continue with our theoretical approach to then see how far it may take us.

<sup>4</sup> Mat 6:24

<sup>5</sup> The dichotomy implied here is the worship of either money or God.

me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* unto Aaron. And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

What do we read in the ancient story? Men abuse<sup>7</sup> of their wives and of their children, they take the wealth given to them by God at the end of the Exodus, and worship their wealth, they worship their money. Rather than loving God, the people have chosen to love money. We have followed the exegesis to it's very beginning, and from this pattern emerges the alternative framework to reach the very same conclusions outlined by Saint Augustine. We trace the teachings of the Apostle Paul to the teachings of Christ, and the teachings of Christ can be retraced further still to the writings of Moses within the Torah. The root of all evil can be found in refusing to serve the God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, we clearly read whence this dichotomy emerged—within the theology of Moses.

This is the idea that will be fleshed out in this thesis, and once we have seen these parallels, we may reread the writings of Saint Augustine, and find them in full accord with the theology and philosophy of Moses. Saint Augustine and Moses are of full accord wherewith we see the model's idolatry in both dialogues. That is, Augustine alludes to idolatry when he writes,

“And it administers that whole, wherein it strives to do something of its own against the laws by which the whole is governed, by its own body, which it possesses only in part; and so being delighted by corporeal forms and motions, because it has not the things themselves within itself, and because it is wrapped up in their images, which it has fixed in the memory, and is foully polluted by fornication of the phantasy...<sup>8</sup>”

---

<sup>6</sup> Exd 32:1-4

<sup>7</sup> Abuse here is from the verb in the Hebrew text of “tore off,” the idea being that the men grabbed the jewelry of their friends and family in order to gather enough precious material to then create their new God..

<sup>8</sup> On the Trinity, Book XII, Chapter 9

Without having referenced the original story of idolatry, Augustine however reaches the same conclusion of idolatry of images, as well as its fornication (we read in the same passage of Exodus that following the sacrifices made to a golden calf, a cultic orgy ensued).

These parallels serve as a guide for the theology Saint Augustine and Pelagius. The parallels themselves offer no complete or definitive canon of interpretation but will guide our reading of these ancient writers in a new light. The aim of this thesis will be to demonstrate Old Testament allusions which would have allowed Pelagius and Saint Augustine to better dialogue. By interpreting the story of the Exodus as a psychological and philosophical dialogue of the self, Saint Augustine and Pelagius now have clear examples to better illustrate their respective theologies.



# Chapter One

## The Theology of Baptism in Moses within the Torah

“Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?<sup>9</sup>”

### 1. Does a teacher of the Law need to know of Baptism?

Where does baptism come from<sup>10</sup>? The idea of being “re-born” contains its roots in the New Testament of course, however we will now dive into an insinuation made by Jesus Christ in from the following verse: “Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?<sup>11</sup>”

The implication made by Christ in the verse is as follows; a teacher of Israel must know of baptismal regeneration<sup>12</sup>. Rabbis of course studied the Torah, the first

---

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 3: 9-10 KJV

<sup>10</sup> We unfortunately we cannot delve into the deep historical ideas of rebirth explored in diverse areas of the world prior to Christ’s teachings. The point of asking this question is to develop the hypothesis of the Global Context regarding the three large cultural conflicts within first century Israel; the Roman world, the Greek world, and the Jewish world. By examining possible intersections amongst these three key cultural players, we seek insights as to what may often be glanced over when simply pitting diverse bible verses one against the other.

<sup>11</sup> John 3: 9-10 KJV

<sup>12</sup> This would be do to the insinuating phrase of “art thou a teacher of Israel,” in other words, how is it you, an expert of the Law of Moses, do not know of baptism?

five books of Moses as well as other Biblical Scriptures. Christ then implies that his teaching is already present in what we call the Old Testament. Whence will we then find the idea of baptism? How would a Rabbi, with access only to the Old Testament, then know that man must be born again? Where does Moses speak of baptism, or any of the other prophets in the Old Testament? We will now outline exactly where Christ most probably refers to the idea of Baptism, the Torah.

A quick glance-over of the context of this question will make Christ's insinuation clear: Nicodemus in John chapter three confronts Christ:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things<sup>13</sup>?

The implication made by Christ to Nicodemus is clear—you being a teacher of the Law, a teacher of the law of Moses should know these things, “these things” referring to being reborn, to being reborn of water and spirit. How can this then be? The insinuation made by Christ is clear— teachers of the Law must know that man must be born of water and spirit, and that teachers of the Law should know this teaching.

---

<sup>13</sup> John 3: 1-10 KJV

Let us now return to the Law, the Torah, and see if we may find this novel theological idea of “rebirth” of water and spirit.

## **1.2 The first Baptism in the Torah**

We turn now to the Torah and seek the idea of rebirth and baptism. If Christ’s implication holds true, then we must be able to find the idea of Baptism and rebirth within the Old Testament. The clearest, most probable, and explicit outline of Baptism in the Old Testament as explained by Christ begins with the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Exodus chapter twelve verse one reads, “And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.” This verse contains the most explicit reference to Baptism<sup>14</sup> in the Torah<sup>15</sup>. Read historically, the people of Israel would understand this as the beginning of their own calendar, however, calendars and chronological ordering do not pertain to our investigation. We will now interpret the verse as Christ then likely viewed the Exodus— as the rebirth of Israel. There are, however, a myriad of problems with regard to this reading. Firstly, the problem of eisegesis— we are reading into the verse what we desire to interpret. Put more clearly, Moses did not intend this verse to be read as a “birthly”

---

<sup>14</sup> Would this then be an explicit reference to Baptism and if so how? As we will see more clearly in our conclusion, the whole Exodus will be read as a psychological interpretation of the individual when receiving the commandments. The idea of the Exodus marking a birth and using language relating to a birth is referenced to in the following pages and remarked by Robert Alter in his excellent commentary to the Exodus. This being, however, interpreted still as the birth of a nation. The Exodus is taken as a literal historical document as a literal historical event in first century Judaism—though not only as such. We will not go near the debate regarding the historicity of the Exodus; however, we are trying to read the Exodus from a different perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Exd 12:1

remark, and that the verse is to be read literally—that this is the beginning of the Israeli calendar.

Now our investigation has seemingly led us nowhere. Perhaps Christ never meant to imply that baptism was originally from the Old Testament, and his remark may be read as a part of his dialogue with Nicodemus—further still Moses never outlined an idea for a rebirth nor baptismal regeneration. Let us refute the argument point by point. Christ did not create his theology *ex nihilo*<sup>16</sup>, his ideas are rooted in the teachings of the Old Testament. Even as a young child, Christ attended synagogue and learned from Rabbis. Now is not the time to discuss at length the many references made by Christ to the Old Testament—this point has been made by a multitude of scholars throughout all of history. We may now proceed with our investigation, and ask even further, from where does Moses<sup>17</sup> garner this idea of Baptism? The implications of our questions are now seemingly out of control, we imply that Christ generated his idea of Baptism and regeneration not from nothing, but from Moses, and further still—that Moses also received the idea of Baptism from elsewhere. Let us now outline point by point this radical idea and delve further into the philosophy and theology of the man called Moses.

The writer or writers of the Torah are not the subject of our investigation. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to the author of the Torah as Moses. Now, our let us follow the implications of our questions point by point.

---

<sup>16</sup> That is to say, we must try and interpret the teachings of Christ within a Judaic context. As Christ was a Jew, it would be absurd of us to then accept his teaching as completely independent from Jewish theology. We do not claim that the teachings of Christ are not novel, however we will investigate the possibility that Christ did in fact consider the teachings of the Torah as all-encompassing.

<sup>17</sup> Again, to avoid sounding outlandish— this is not the place for debating the Authorship of the Torah. Beginning to discuss the implications of diverse authors, theories, and competing scholarship would take us far from our discussion. But why call the Author of the Torah by a singular name? Assuming that the author is singular allows for a better integration of ideas when we establish the new framework for Saint Augustine and Pelagius. By referring to the Author of the Torah as one person, and in this case the patriarch Moses, is by all means done for convenience.

1. Moses did not discover baptism on his own, however he modeled and found the idea of baptism from a precedent theology.

2. This precedent theology can be found in the book of Genesis.

Having been granted these premises, let us now read what is perhaps the very first baptism in the Torah: “And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. <sup>18</sup>”

Contextualizing these verses will allow us to gain a complete outline of the theological framework of Baptism. Jacob is fleeing from Laban, his father-in-law. In order to flee he must cross the Jabbok ford<sup>19</sup>. What do we see from this archaic story? Moses outlines a clear baptism of water and of spirit. Jacob is chased by Laban, and nevertheless crosses the ford, goes through water with his family, his wives, his slaves, his sons, and his animals before entering Seir and meeting his brother Esau<sup>20</sup>. The following parallels are now clear:

1. A man and his family flee their preceding life.
2. They are chased by the masters of their preceding life.
3. They cross a body of water before reaching their destination.

In both the Exodus of Egypt as well as the Exodus of Jacob, are all these criteria met. Jacob is chased by Laban, Moses and the Israelites are persecuted by the chariots of Egypt. Now we see parallels between two ancient stories involving water, freedom, and slavery. What has this to do with our investigation regarding baptism and regeneration? We will now outline the great baptism of the Exodus, and see if this meets the criteria for a “rebirth.”

---

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 31: 22-23

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 32:32

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 33:1 KJV

For a “rebirth,” as outlined by Christ, we need a birth of water and a birth of the Spirit. Let us analyze the text of the Exodus for any evidence of this:

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.<sup>21</sup>”

Adding a further comment to this dramatic scene, Robert Alter, in his commentary to the entire New Testament refers to the scholar Ilana Pardes, stating the following,

“Ilana Pardes persuasively identifies birth imagery in this whole story. The passage through waters—led by a man who has been saved from water, after a genocidal decree in which water was to be the means of killing the babies—is the beginning of the birth of the nation, and Pardes aptly sees the large narrative from Exodus to Numbers as the “biography of a nation.”

We have met our first criteria—a birth of water. What is strikingly missing is a birth of spirit. It is however, explicitly noted in the scene:

“And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.<sup>22</sup>”

Within this dramatic scene is then the presence of God going before the chariots of Pharaoh. We have now two dividing and dramatic walls of water, and the spirit of God with the Israelite people. This rebirth of a nation is all but confirmed from our previous marking of the beginning of the Israelite calendar. By reading he passage as “this is the first day of the month, the first month of the year for you” we can perhaps understand Christs’ frustration towards Nicodemus, as the passage is

---

<sup>21</sup> Alter, Robert. The Hebrew Bible: a translation with commentary. Vol. 3

<sup>22</sup> Exd 14: 24-25

meant to be read as an analogous and personal Exodus. Christian writers were quick to point out the sacrificial lamb as being the sacrifice of Christ himself. Augustine himself wrote, “Questions on Exodus by Augustine of Hippo<sup>23</sup>,” where he explains questions regarding the Exodus:

“By virtue of what has been said, it is rightly thought that Christ is prefigured in this text. For what need was there to be told to the Israelites to take the sheep or the lamb from among the lambs and the goats, if it were not prefigured that whose flesh was not only spread through the righteous, but also from the sinners? And this despite the Jews trying to interpret that you can also take a kid to celebrate Easter. And he thinks that the Scripture said that it could be taken from among the lambs or from among the goats as if he had said that it is lawful to take either a lamb from among the lambs or a goat from among the goats, in case they did not have a lamb. Once things are done, the precept appears in Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

It is however unfortunate, that the parallel between the entirety of the exodus as pertained to his debates with Pelagius and others, was not used by Augustine.

It is within the Exodus that Pelagius and Augustine may clearly outline and defend the only examples of infant baptisms seen within the entire Bible. First we must outline as best we can the arguments laid out by both Pelagius and Augustine regarding Baptism. Following their line of thought and reasoning, we may then seek to reframe the entirety of the debate within the Exodus narrative. This would then allow Augustine to outline what would be the most explicit example of infant baptism within the Bible.

---

<sup>23</sup> By John Litteral (Translation is a work in progress) 176 Questions with Explanations on the Tabernacle

<sup>24</sup> QUESTION 42. ON THE PASCHAL LAMB.

## Chapter 2

### Saint Augustine in the Old Testament.

The topic of grace and free will has been a source of controversy and complexity in Christian theology for centuries. One of the most prominent and influential figures who addressed this topic was Augustine of Hippo, who faced opposition from Pelagius, a British monk who disagreed with him on several points regarding original sin, human nature and divine grace. Due to the scope and depth of this topic, we are unable to go into fine detail in this overview, but we will attempt to highlight some of the main arguments and evidence that Augustine used to support his position, drawing mainly from the writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

We unfortunately do not contain the writing of Pelagius in their entirety, however thanks to scholarly work we have been able to greatly reconstruct the main points of Pelagius' arguments regarding Grace and Free will from Augustine's *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin) written in the year 418 A.D.<sup>25</sup> A quote from Augustine's first book in chapter five quotes Pelagius' work as follows:

“We distinguish, says he, three things, arranging them in a certain graduated order. We put in the first place 'ability;' in the second, 'volition;' and in the third, 'actuality.' The 'ability' we place in our nature, the 'volition' in our will,

---

<sup>25</sup> Malavasi, Giulio. “The Question of the Impact of Divine Grace in the Pelagian Controversy. Human Posse, Uelle Et Esse According to Pelagius, Jerome, and Augustine.” *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 112, no. 3/4 (2017)



and the 'actuality' in the effect. The first, that is, the 'ability,' properly belongs to God, who has bestowed it on His creature; the other two, that is, the 'volition' and the 'actuality,' must be referred to man, because they flow forth from the fountain of the will. For his willing, therefore, and doing a good work, the praise belongs to man; or rather both to man, and to God who has bestowed on him the 'capacity' for his will and work, and who evermore by the help of His grace assists even this capacity.<sup>26</sup>

Pelagius distinguishes three aspects of grace pertaining to our nature, which is a gratuitous gift from God who created us without our merit or request. These aspects are: ability (*posse*), willing (*velle*), and being (*esse*). The first aspect, *posse*, is the capacity to choose either good or evil actions. Since we are free from original sin, our capacity is unimpaired. This *posse* is wholly derived from God's benevolence, and we have no contribution to it. The second aspect, *velle*, is the movement of the will in opting for either good or evil actions. The third aspect, *esse*, is the action that follows from the *velle*. While *posse* entirely depends on God's generosity, *velle* and *esse* solely belong to the individual's domain. Pelagius provides some simple examples to elucidate his point. He says that our *posse* to see is not from us, as God gave us our eyes and the power to see. However, the *velle* and *esse* in seeing either virtuous or vicious sights is entirely up to us. Another example concerns our speech. The *posse* to speak is bestowed on us by God, but the *velle* and *esse* to speak well or ill is entirely in our power. "And to comprise everything in a general statement," he says "our being able to do, say, or think anything good comes from him who gave us this ability and who assists this ability, but our doing or speaking or thinking anything good is due to us, since we can also divert all these toward something evil." As we have seen,

---

<sup>26</sup> Grat. Chr. 1.5

Pelagius's ultimate concern is in the posse, velle, and esse of sinlessness. We have the posse to not sin from God, but the velle and esse of a sinless life come from us.

Augustine is quick to dismantle the Grace of God outlined by Pelagius, by simply quoting the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, the explicit need of Grace within man needed to supersede the Law and to act in accord with the spirit is made so abundantly clear:

“How can that be true which the apostle says, It is not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; (Ephesians 2:8-9) and again, If it is of grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace: (Romans 11:6) how, I repeat, can this be true, if such meritorious works precede as to procure for us the bestowal of grace? Surely, under the circumstances, there can be no gratuitous gift, but only the recompense of a due reward. Is it the case, then, that in order to find their way to the help of God, men run to God without God's help? And in order that we may receive God's help while cleaving to Him, do we without His help cleave to God? What greater gift, or even what similar gift, could grace itself bestow upon any man, if he has already without grace been able to make himself one spirit with the Lord by no other power than that of his own free will?<sup>27</sup>”

One of the key points that Pelagius makes in his understanding of grace is that God has given us the gift of our nature, which includes the ability (posse) to choose either good or evil actions. However, he also acknowledges that God helps us in other ways, such as by revealing his doctrine, his wisdom, and his glory to us. This is what he calls the third level of grace. However, this level of grace does not affect our willing (velle) and our being (esse), which are entirely dependent on our own power and responsibility. Pelagius faces a challenge in reconciling his view with the apostolic

---

<sup>27</sup> Grat. Chr. 1.24

teaching of Paul, who emphasizes the need for God's help in every aspect of our Christian life. Paul declares that it is God who works in us both to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13). This implies that our *velle* and *esse* are not from within us, but from God alone. Paul also affirms that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). This implies that our *posse* is not sufficient for our salvation, but we need God's grace to enable us to believe and obey.

Continuing our investigation, we turn to an excellent outline by Dr. Giulio Malavasi who lays out the continued logic against the extremely vulnerable position held by Pelagius: “Augustine asserts that in addition to individual sins, humankind is also impacted by the first sin of Adam, which is transmitted to his descendants generation after generation. Augustine found this ‘hereditary sin’ denied in Pelagius’s commentary on the letters of Paul but did not yet quote Pelagius by name.<sup>28</sup>” (Malavasi, 563) This is in reference to *On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione peccatorum et de baptismo paruulorum*).

I highlight the issue of Grace as Augustine quite succinctly demonstrated the great error of Pelagius’ three-fold concept of Grace as the quotations by the Apostle Paul do highlight enough the need for God’s grace when a Christian desires to be Righteous. We will now however, delve deeper into Augustine’s Baptism of Infants. Why do we turn to this subject now? First we must outline as clearly as we can the New Testament argument given by Augustine if we are then to see any harmony with our new Exodus framework in chapter 3.

---

<sup>28</sup> Malavasi, Giulio. “The Question of the Impact of Divine Grace in the Pelagian Controversy. Human Posse, Uelle Et Esse According to Pelagius, Jerome, and Augustine.” *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 112, no. 3/4 (2017)

We read in book one of *On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants*:

“But observe more attentively what he says, that through the offense of one, many are dead. For why should it be on account of the sin of one, and not rather on account of their own sins, if this passage is to be understood of imitation, and not of propagation? But mark what follows: And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the grace is of many offenses unto justification. Romans 5:16 Now let them tell us, where there is room in these words for imitation. By one, says he, to condemnation. By one what except one sin? This, indeed, he clearly implies in the words which he adds: But the grace is of many offenses unto justification. Why, indeed, is the judgment from one offense to condemnation, while the grace is from many offenses to justification? If original sin is a nullity, would it not follow, that not only grace withdraws men from many offenses to justification, but judgment leads them to condemnation from many offenses likewise?<sup>29</sup>.

To outline each point made by Augustine, let us outline each critical implication point by point:

1. Sin entered through the offense of one, entering not by infinite imitation, but by propagation.
2. The judgment from one offense to condemnation must then parallel the grace of one offense to many.

The second point is made clearer in paragraph nineteen of the same book:

For although many sinners have preceded us in the time of this present life, and have been imitated in their sin by those who have sinned at a later date, yet they will have it, that only Adam is mentioned as he in whom all have sinned by imitation, since he was the first of men who sinned. And on the same principle, Abel ought certainly to have been mentioned, as he in which one all likewise are justified by imitation, inasmuch as he was himself the first man

---

<sup>29</sup> Augustine *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo pa- ruulorum* 1.15

who lived justly. If, however, it be thought necessary to take into the account some critical period having relation to the beginning of the New Testament, and Christ be taken as the leader of the righteous and the object of their imitation, then Judas, who betrayed Him, ought to be set down as the leader of the class of sinners. Moreover, if Christ alone is He in whom all men are justified, on the ground that it is not simply the imitation of His example which makes men just, but His grace which regenerates men by the Spirit, then also Adam is the only one in whom all have sinned, on the ground that it is not the mere following of his evil example that makes men sinners, but the penalty which generates through the flesh. Hence the terms all men and all men.<sup>30</sup>

In this paragraph, Augustine interprets Romans 5:12 in light of his doctrine of original sin, which he developed in opposition to the Pelagians, who denied that human beings inherit any guilt or corruption from Adam's disobedience to God. Augustine argues that the apostle Paul clearly teaches that sin and death entered the world through one man, Adam, and that this affects all his descendants by natural descent, not by imitation. Augustine also points out that the Pelagian interpretation of Romans 5:12 is inconsistent with the rest of Paul's argument in Romans 5:13-21, which contrasts the effects of Adam's transgression and Christ's obedience on all humanity. Augustine contends that if sin and death are transmitted by imitation, then Paul should have mentioned the devil as the first sinner and Abel as the first righteous person, rather than Adam and Christ. Moreover, Augustine asserts that if original sin is a nullity, then Paul's contrast between the judgment from one offense to condemnation and the grace from many offenses to justification makes no sense. For Augustine, original sin is a reality that affects human nature and requires divine grace to overcome.

Continuing then with paragraph twenty-one, Augustine continues his interpretation of Romans 5:12-21 in light of his doctrine of original sin, which he developed in opposition to the Pelagians, who denied that human beings inherit any guilt or corruption from Adam's disobedience to God. Augustine argues that the law

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 1.19

was given to reveal the extent and gravity of sin, both original and actual, and to prepare the way for the grace of Christ. Augustine points out that the law not only exposes sin, but also aggravates it, by making people more aware of their transgression and more rebellious against God's authority. Augustine also contrasts the effects of Adam's transgression and Christ's obedience on all humanity. He contends that Adam's transgression brought condemnation and death to all his descendants by natural descent, while Christ's obedience brought justification and life to all who believe by grace. Augustine thus affirms that original sin is a reality that affects human nature and requires divine grace to overcome.

As sin is then transmitted by natural descent, it is then that Augustine vindicates his practice of infant baptism against those who repudiate the existence and transmission of original sin. Augustine contends that infants require baptism to be purged from the guilt and corruption that they inherit from Adam's disobedience to God. Augustine appeals to the authority of the apostle Paul, who affirms that judgment and condemnation came from one offense, namely Adam's transgression, which affected all his descendants by natural descent (Rom 5:16, 18). Augustine also points out that baptism is not a reward for personal merits or works, but a gift of grace that regenerates and justifies sinners through faith in Christ. Augustine thus affirms that infant baptism is a necessary and apostolic tradition that expresses the universal need for divine grace to overcome original sin.

We now move to the most controversial part of the theology of the baptism of infants, firstly dealing with the immediately opposing the assertion that the reason why infants undergo baptism is to obtain the forgiveness of the sins that they have personally committed in their earthly existence, rather than the sin that they have inherited from their first ancestor, Adam. He contends that this assertion is so ludicrous and devoid of merit that it does not deserve any serious consideration, and that anyone who examines it with an impartial and rational mind will soon abandon it. He insinuates that the advocates of this assertion are driven by their preconceived

notions for some other doctrine, and that they are reluctant to acknowledge that infants are tainted with the original sin from their birth, which baptism cleanses them from. He reproaches them for imputing actual sin to infancy, as if this would make them more secure when they are challenged and unable to respond. He invokes common sense and Scripture to demonstrate the sinlessness of infants with respect to their life conduct, which is concealed from human observation. He implies that infants are baptized not on account of their own culpability, but on account of their need for grace.<sup>31</sup>

This is made explicit in chapter twenty-six of the same book:

“Now they take alarm from the statement of the Lord, when He says, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; John 3:3 because in His own explanation of the passage He affirms, Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5 And so they try to ascribe to unbaptized infants, by the merit of their innocence, the gift of salvation and eternal life, but at the same time, owing to their being unbaptized, to exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. But how novel and astonishing is such an assumption, as if there could possibly be salvation and eternal life without heirship with Christ, without the kingdom of heaven!”

We return to our original argument with the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ, when Jesus says to Nicodemus, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; John 3:3 and clarifies His own interpretation of the passage, when He adds, Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup> He confronts those who attempt to attribute to unbaptized infants, by virtue of their innocence, the gift of salvation and eternal life, but at the same time, on account of their being unbaptized, to exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. He exposes the novelty and absurdity of such an assumption, as if it were possible for there to be

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 1.22

<sup>32</sup> John 3:5

salvation and eternal life without inheritance with Christ, without the kingdom of heaven! He argues that this assumption is based on a misunderstanding of the nature and necessity of baptism, which he regards as essential for our salvation due to original sin which makes it not merely symbolic. He asserts that the criteria for baptism is infancy, since humans are born with original sin and need to be regenerated by water and the Spirit. He criticizes those who accuse infancy of actual sin, as if this would make them more secure in their own argument. He appeals to common sense and Scripture to demonstrate the sinlessness of infants with respect to their life conduct, which is hidden from human observation. He implies that infants are baptized not because of their own sins, but because of their need for grace.



## Chapter 3

### The Dialogues Of Moses, Pelagius, and Saint Augustine

Let us move on now to what was the most explicit example of infant baptism within the Old Testament. In this section, we will examine the most explicit instance of infant baptism in the Old Testament: The Exodus. As we established in the first chapter, the exodus can be interpreted as a prototypical baptism that combined water and spirit to regenerate the people of Israel. Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel, should have recognized this symbolism and understood the exodus as a new birth of a nation of priests. This was Moses' intention when he wrote the account of the exodus. We will explore how the exodus narrative challenges Augustine's arguments and how it could have informed Pelagius' views. The exodus involved not only adults, but also children and animals, who all crossed the sea of reeds and were delivered from slavery. According to this perspective, all who participated in the exodus were born again. However, this was not sufficient for their salvation. Paul argues in Romans that the Israelites who were freed from Egypt became enslaved to the law. They exchanged one master for another. Within this framework, we can situate Augustine's and Pelagius' positions as follows: Augustine would claim that the infants who crossed the sea of reeds were baptized and saved, while those who remained in Egypt were condemned and killed by the plague of the firstborn. This is the clearest example of infant baptism in the Old Testament. Moreover, Augustine would point out that only the infants who experienced the exodus, along with Joshua and Caleb, entered the promised land. Pelagius, on the other hand, could question how one could escape from Egypt in the first place.

This is where the dialogue between grace and free will can take place. Pelagius would emphasize that Moses, as a human being, left Egypt by his own choice. Without God's intervention, Moses was the first to liberate himself from slavery. We can interpret Egypt as a symbol of the human condition. Moses portrays Egypt as the oppressor of the Israelites, who represent those who seek righteousness. Augustine could respond to Pelagius by reminding him that Moses did not part the Red Sea by himself, and that his first attempt to lead an exodus failed in Exodus chapter six. Pelagius' strongest counterargument would be the example of Joseph. Moses structures the book of Genesis in a peculiar way. The flood is triggered by the failure of God's host/angels, who succumbed to the temptation of the daughters of men. The end of Genesis, however, offers the hope of a man who explicitly rejected a daughter of man. Joseph is the victor over lust, and it is no coincidence that Paul advises to "flee from sexual immorality"<sup>33</sup>. This phrase stems from Paul's Judaic background and would be an implicit reference to Joseph's fleeing of his slave owner's wife.

The question of grace and free will is at the heart of this dialogue. Pelagius would stress that Joseph, by his own will, resisted the temptation of Potiphar's wife. He would also argue that this free will is what distinguishes humans from angels. He would cite the psalmist's query: "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"<sup>34</sup>. The son of man is the one who can do what the angels cannot. Augustine and Pelagius could both draw on many examples of free will and grace in their debate. But how did Joseph exercise his free will? Was it not by God's grace that he overcame lust? Moses leaves this question open in his account. However, Augustine seems to have a clear advantage with his argument for infant baptism. He would claim that the infants who participated in the exodus were

---

<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18 KJV

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 8:4 KJV

protobaptized and saved, while those who stayed in Egypt were doomed and killed by the angel of death. This is the most evident case of infant baptism in the Old Testament. He would also note that only the infants who experienced the exodus, along with Joshua and Caleb, entered the promised land. Pelagius could counter this by pointing out that the animals also crossed the sea of reeds and were protobaptized. But this was only a prefiguration of baptism, as Christ had not yet paid the price for true regeneration. In this framework, Augustine and Pelagius would add to the meditations already noted by the man Moses.

A clear outline made by Moses in commented by Augustine and Pelagius alike is the hardening of the heart of pharaoh. A perplexing and mysterious issue that continues to confound all modern readers. As we read previously, we understand that we free will alone is not enough for salvation under the theology of Augustine. Utilizing Romans 9 Augustine sees the words of the apostle Paul coming true, that God will harden the heart of who he will, and he will have mercy on who he has mercy. Within our new framework how would Pelagius respond? It is evident that salvation was open to all Egyptians not only the Israelites. Being integrated in a foreign nation for over 400 years would absolutely result in admixture. However, let us also consider that Joseph, the man healed as the righteous hope of the world at the end of the book of genesis Mary's an Egyptian. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are canonically half Egyptian. Pledges in this framework understands let those who will to be saved can be saved following the intervention of God. God is more than just when he punishes Egypt. Reading Egypt as a psychological evaluation of the sinful self allows us to read pharaoh and Moses as two consciences in one dialogue, we are pharaoh when we refuse to obey the law of God, Moses would then be the commandments of God. This will be explicitly outlined, and a note made by Moses himself.

The finger of God. The phrase "the finger of God" is noteworthy in this context. Augustine also observed that this phrase is used in the New Testament in the

gospel of Luke.<sup>35</sup> However, what is more intriguing is the deliberate use of the word "finger" in the exodus narrative. It is surely not a coincidence that the first commandments were written by the finger of God<sup>36</sup>. If we take this phrase as a clue by Moses to read the exodus as a psychological meditation literature, we can draw some further conclusions. God commands humans to do X. Humans do not believe that God commanded X. The result? A plague. Moses depicts the plagues of Egypt as the inevitable consequences of disobeying the commandments. It is also not a coincidence that there are ten commandments and ten plagues. When humans refuse to obey and listen to the words of Moses, they harden their own hearts as Pharaoh did, even when evidence is presented that the commands are miraculous and that a part of their mind (represented by the magicians) acknowledges that this is not an explainable phenomenon. That this commandment is not for humans. How do Augustine and Pelagius fit into this framework? They could engage in a direct dialogue, with Pharaoh representing the human will and Moses representing the divine commands. The perplexing question is how to read Paul's letter within this framework. For according to Paul in Romans, God has freed us from the law. Has he freed us from Moses? Augustine would say yes, no longer trapped between the endless conflict between Pharaoh and Moses, the death and resurrection of Christ has freed us from this dialogue. By Augustine's grace, Pharaoh is no longer a part of the theological question. Pelagius would not agree. Pelagius seems to remain within this framework, with the human will on one hand and the divine grace on the other. It is unfortunate that we have so few texts remaining from Pelagius, otherwise we could go into more detail on where he might stand.

---

<sup>35</sup> Luke 11:12 KJV

<sup>36</sup> Exodus 31:18

## Concluding Remarks

This thesis has examined the contrasting views of Augustine and Pelagius on grace and free will in relation to the Exodus narrative. It has shown that Augustine's doctrine of original sin and irresistible grace diminishes human responsibility and agency, while Pelagius's doctrine of moral perfection and natural grace exaggerates human ability and autonomy. We argued that both doctrines fail to capture the complexity and diversity of human experience and the role of God's grace in transforming human will. This raised the question of how to interpret Paul's letters in light of this debate, and whether a more nuanced and balanced approach is possible.

In addition, we have explored the historical and theological context of the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius, and how their respective positions were influenced by their personal backgrounds, cultural assumptions, and political agendas. It has demonstrated that Augustine's anti-Pelagianism was partly motivated by his own struggle with sin and guilt, his rejection of Manichaeism, and his defense of the authority of the Roman church. In this process, we revealed that Pelagius's semi-Pelagianism was inspired by his Celtic spirituality, his affirmation of human dignity, and his challenge to the corruption and complacency of the clergy.

In conclusion, the dialogue between Augustine and Pelagius is still relevant today, as it invites us to reconsider our assumptions and expectations about ourselves, God, and the world. It has also proposed that a normative Christianity should not be founded on a rigid doctrine of original sin or a simplistic doctrine of free will, but on

a dynamic and relational understanding of grace that empowers and enables us to live faithfully and creatively in God's image.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that such an understanding of grace can be derived from a careful reading of the biblical texts, especially Paul's letters, which offer a rich and diverse perspective on the nature and effects of grace. It has been argued that Paul's theology of grace is neither monolithic nor deterministic, but rather dialogical and participatory. It has been claimed that Paul does not deny human free will or responsibility, but rather affirms human cooperation and transformation by God's grace. It has also been maintained that Paul does not promote human perfection or autonomy, but rather acknowledges human weakness and dependence on God's grace.

## **Bibliography — English**

Alter, Robert, and Frank Kermode, eds. *The literary guide to the Bible*. Harvard University Press, 1990.

Augustine. *Against the Pelagians*. Translated by Roland J. Teske. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2018.

Augustine. *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants*. Translated by Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 5*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

Augustine. *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*. Translated by Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 5*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

Augustine. *Ascetical Works*. Translated by C.T. Wilcox et al. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1959-1969.

Augustine. *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*. Translated by R.G. MacMullen. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 6*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

Augustine. Tractates on the Gospel of John; Tractates on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies. Translated by John W. Rettig et al. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988-1995.

Augustine. Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists. Translated by Richard Stothert et al. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 4. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887. Theologians, edited by Ian S. Markham, 68-82. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2009.

Malavasi, Giulio. "The Question of the Impact of Divine Grace in the Pelagian Controversy. Human Posse, Uelle Et Esse According to Pelagius, Jerome, and Augustine." *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 112, no. 3/4 (2017)