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EX AUDITU

An International Journal for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture

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Ex Auditu – Volumes Available

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE 2015 SYMPOSIUM

North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, is pleased to announce that the thirty-first Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture will take place September 24–26, 2015. The symposium will start at 7:00 p.m. on September 24 in Nyvall Hall and will extend through a Saturday afternoon worship service on September 26. The theme in 2015 will be Race and Racism. The following persons have agreed to make presentations:

Ray Aldred, Theology, Ambrose Seminary/Ambrose University
Lewis O. Brogdon, New Testament, Claflin University
Bo Lim, Old Testament, Seattle Pacific University
Nestor Medina, Theology, Regent University
Emerson Powery, New Testament, Messiah College
Love Sechrest, New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary
Lisa Sung, Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Soong-Chan Rah, Preaching, North Park Theological Seminary
Kyle Small, Church Leadership, Western Theological Seminary

Persons interested in attending the sessions should write before September 1 to:

Ms. Guylla Brown
North Park Theological Seminary
3225 W. Foster Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625

Meals may be taken at North Park and assistance can be provided in finding nearby lodging.

ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations are as specified in Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). Bibliographical details and any abbreviations not listed here can be found there.

AB	Anchor Bible
BibSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
CD	*Church Dogmatics* (Karl Barth's)
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Series
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NLT	New Living Translation
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

Encounter with God is surely what any human should seek, and surely any biblical approach to the topic will always underscore the divine initiative. After that, all bets are off. Do humans have to respond, can they respond, and, if they can, how should they respond? The church's history has seen numerous debates on the topic, and key issues are at stake. Just how fallen is the human race? Is depravity so fierce that any thought of response is precluded? Is the human will so bound in sin that freedom to act does not exist? If the race is so fallen that response is precluded, is there either dignity or responsibility still left for humans? The biblical texts urge response, and if humans are not engaged in acting, nothing observable happens in the human sphere. What are humans supposed to do? How is obedience achieved, assuming obedience is indeed important. The biblical texts do not sort out the relation of divine initiative and human response, and despite discussions in church history, not much focus is given to this topic in current theological discussions.

A Swedish friend says, "With theology you always have to pay," meaning, if you put too much down on one aspect of theology, you do not have enough left for other aspects. Any discussion of encounter with God and human response treats anthropology, hamartiology, sovereignty of God and the freedom of humanity, and the relation of community and individual, all evident in the essays. As at least two essays imply, Jews do not have a problem with this topic and seem generally not to bifurcate themes like divine initiative and human responsibility the way some Christians tend to. Further, much of Scripture orbits around divine initiative and human response, as, for example, Luke 14 and 15 demonstrate.

Perhaps the problem is that we do not have a sufficiently robust anthropology. Human action, choice, and responsibility are crucial, but we humans do not act in a vacuum by ourselves. Even our acting is an engagement with the Holy Spirit, and a more biblical view is the awareness that we do not exist apart from God and that in all we do we have to do with God. Any action we take is in response to God and involves God, but our own involvement is still very much a factor. If this is true, perhaps we should have focused on *how* humans engage with God. We have no illusion that we have solved the problems in this debate, but hopefully the essays will stimulate thought and encourage discussion.

At the symposium twice as much time is given to discussion of the papers as to their delivery, and the journal cannot reproduce the character of those discussions,

which are always stimulating and enriching. People in attendance at the symposium include an interesting mix of faculty types, pastors, church leaders, students, and lay people. We are grateful to all who participated. Appreciation is especially expressed once again to all the presenters and respondents who made a significant investment in the life of North Park. Special gratitude is expressed to Jay Phelan for stepping in to offer a paper after a presenter withdrew late in the game. The friendship of all the people involved is a gift we value deeply. The authors of papers were given a chance to edit their contributions after the symposium, but the responses are essentially as they were presented. As is obvious, the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the journal or of North Park. Special gratitude is expressed to Anne Jorgensen and Peter Schwich, students at North Park, for their work on the bibliography and especially to Guylla Brown from North Park's staff, without whom the symposium would be impossible. Anyone who has been to the symposium knows that is true every year.

Since this is the thirtieth issue of *Ex Auditu*, some comment is in order concerning the history of the symposia and the journal. The first three symposia and their publication were connected to Princeton Theological Seminary (1985–1987) as the Frederic Neumann Symposium, which was started largely because of the work of Dikran Hadidian, Ben Meyer, and Peter Stuhlmacher and their conviction that not enough attention was being given to theological interpretation of Scripture. Thomas Gillespie was editor of the journal, and Dikran Hadidian, who owned Pickwick Publications, did the publishing. The next two issues of the journal did not really have a home, but Pickwick remained the publisher. Robert Guelich became the editor, and shortly thereafter he inquired about North Park's interest in hosting the symposia, to which an affirmative answer was quickly given. From 1990 and volume six of the journal North Park has hosted the symposia. Unfortunately, shortly after that first symposium at North Park Guelich died. Don Miller served as interim editor for one year, and then Hadidian asked me to edit the journal. Later Pickwick Publications was sold to Wipf and Stock, and since 2004 Wipf and Stock has published the journal. Gratitude is expressed to the good people there for all their assistance and cooperation. Their involvement with us is a delight.

The symposia and journal have always had the goal of doing theological interpretation of Scripture for the church. The academy too easily ends up in its own discussions—at times disconnected from life, and the church too frequently is naïve about the contours and significance of its own theological foundation. Scripture is often examined with little concern for theology, and conversely some theological discussions forget the necessity of rootedness in Scripture. When *Ex Auditu* began, few others were focused on doing theological interpretation of Scripture, but a

movement started. Today there is a burgeoning trend toward theological interpretation, with commentaries, sessions at AAR/SBL, and other journals engaged in the task.

North Park's symposia are always interdisciplinary and interconfessional, with the only requirement of presenters being a commitment both to the church and to Scripture. I confess that at times it has been difficult to get presenters to stay with the goal and on topic. Still, the agenda of the symposia and the journal is precisely what is needed of Christian academics and what is needed for the church. The symposia have always attracted some of the most important people doing theology, there has always been a variety in outlook and procedure, and many truly significant articles have been published. Over the twenty-five years I have been editor the symposia have treated a variety of aspects of Christian theology such as Christology, the authority of Scripture, atonement, and conversion. We have also treated issues related more to practice such as worship, spiritual formation, and money and possessions. The amount of time given to conversation of each paper is almost without parallel. For me personally the conversations and the resulting friendships are among the most significant and enjoyable aspects of this enterprise, and I thank all those who have been involved.

Theological interpretation of Scripture is an ongoing task, the apex of what Christian Scripture is about, and I can only hope that future symposia and the volumes of the journal make a decided mark in the work of the church and the lives of Christians.

Klyne Snodgrass
Paul W. Brandel Professor of New Testament Studies
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THE LONG SHADOW OF AUGUSTINE

John E. Phelan Jr.

In his programmatic essay "Discipline and Hope" Wendell Berry indicts American education for being "not a long-term investment in young minds and in the life of the community, but a short-term investment in the economy. We want to be able to tell," he continues, "how many dollars an education is worth and how soon it will be able to pay." He argues this has had a dire impact on the discipline of teaching: "It produces a race of learned mincers, whose propriety and pride is to keep their minds inside their 'fields,' as if human thoughts were a kind of livestock to be kept out of the woods and off the roads."[1] By definition the work of doing theological reflection for the church is multi-disciplinary. By necessity it involves us in wandering out of our "fields." A NT scholar examining a text cannot ignore how that text has been read for the last two thousand years. A theologian reading a NT text cannot ignore the historical, social, and cultural context of the original writers. Church historians, of course, can criticize both of them! We all, to a certain extent, must venture, at least on occasion, out of our "fields."

Having said this, with due respect to Berry's complaint and the essential character of doing theological reflection for the church, I must admit that with this paper I have wandered rather far out of my "field." By training I am a NT scholar, although my interests have always been wide—perhaps too wide. Be that as it may, I am wandering knowingly into the dense woods of patristics and particularly the tangled thickets of Augustine of Hippo.

Few people have influenced the West and the Western church more than this great North African. Perhaps no one had greater influence on the conundrum of human agency than he. Throughout the centuries those arguing for obviously contradictory notions of "free will," "predestination," and "original sin" have cited Augustine as authoritative. These debates continue to this very day, as this symposium illustrates. As I worked my way through the conflicts of the late fourth and early fifth century, I began to wonder if the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius, Prosper and Cassian, and many others was really about human agency in the first place. Were

1. Wendell Berry, "Discipline and Hope," in *Recollected Essays 1965–1980* (San Francisco: North Point, 1981) 193.

these often fierce arguments displaced from a more serious set of questions plaguing a church in transition? I am, of course, not alone in wondering about this, but if this is true, what was this argument really about and what conclusions should we draw for the life of the church?

Gottschalk and Eriugena

In the middle of the ninth century a Saxon monk by the name of Gottschalk ignited a controversy in the realm of the Frankish King Charles the Bald. He preached that God's predestination was double. That is, some people were destined for good and salvation, others for ill and damnation. His critics, the king among them, were concerned that his teaching would undercut the moral motivation of Christians. After all, if their fate was already determined by God's sovereign decision, what difference did it make how they lived? Gottschalk's views were condemned at synods in Mainz in 848 and Quierzy in 849. Charles the Bald presided over the latter synod and approved the burning of Gottschalk's works.[2] But Gottschalk had many friends, and in spite of his condemnation and eventual imprisonment, the controversy continued to rage.

Eventually Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, requested the aid of John Scottus Eriugena, a scholar in the court of Charles the Bald. Very little is known of Eriugena. His name identifies him as from Ireland. His work suggests he was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism.[3] He was evidently part of the Irish migration that during the sixth through the tenth centuries brought thousands of monks and scholars to the continent to found monasteries and establish schools. The brilliant court of Charles the Bald and the famous Cathedral school at Laon had attracted some of the great minds of the era, including Eriugena. According to Dermot Moran, "Laon had both a cathedral and a chapel, an important library and scriptorium, and connections with other monasteries. . . . It was also noted for its large 'Irish colony.'"[4] Small wonder Eriugena found it a congenial place to study and teach.

Eriugena was evidently not an ecclesiastic. Far from quieting the controversy, "His intervention," Mary Brennan writes, "left Hincmar further abashed."[5] Eriugena enthusiastically inveighed against the views of Gottschalk, but in the process he

2. On this see Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 27–34; and John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, translated by Mary Brennan (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1998) ix–xiv.

3. Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 103–22.

4. Ibid., 20.

5. Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination,* x.

opened himself up to charges of heresy. His work against Gottschalk, *Treatise On Divine Predestination*, attacked the notion of double predestination and insisted on the freedom of the human will. Gottschalk, he argues, "tries to deny the most equitable rewards of justice and the most merciful gifts of grace."[6] Eriugena asserts, "Where there is inevitability there is no will."[7] In fact, he insists, "if the will of God is free—and to believe otherwise is wicked—and if the free will is devoid of all necessity, then no necessity has hold of the will. . . . All necessity is excluded from the divine will. Therefore it is excluded from his predestination."[8]

Eriugena, however, was not a Pelagian. "Free choice," he insists, "must not be defended in such a way that good works are attributed to it without the grace of God; nor must grace be so defended that, as it were from the safety afforded by it, evil deeds may be habitually performed."[9] Grace and predestination cannot become a cover for misbehavior, and good works are not to be seen as merely a human accomplishment. Eriugena goes on to insist that while human beings were damaged by the sin of Adam, "he [Adam] did not lose the substance which is to be, to will, to know. . . . For God did not create in man [sic] a captive will but a free one, and that freedom remained after the sin."[10]

This was all too much for Hincmar and his colleagues. Eriugena's work was condemned in 855 and "inelegantly described (echoing St. Jerome) as 'Irish porridge.'"[11] This conflict, typical in many ways, reflected the centuries-earlier conflicts between Augustine and Pelagius and, slightly later, between John Cassian and Prosper of Aquitaine. Pelagius, more likely a Briton than an Irishman, had incurred the wrath of Jerome and exercised the pen of Augustine. The latter's solution to the problem of Pelagius has cast a long shadow over the history of the church, as the topic of this symposium suggests. This ninth-century conflict illustrates the theological and pastoral challenges Augustine's views entailed—challenges he tried, with mixed success, to address in his own writing, as we will see.

Ironically both Eriugena and Gottschalk based their arguments on Augustine. Some of Eriugena's critics thought, quite rightly, that he was a bit cavalier in his use of the saint. In fairness to Eriugena though, Augustine was not entirely consistent and could be read on this and other topics in a variety of ways, and in fairness to Gottschalk, it seems that his views of human agency were closer to the mature views

6. Ibid., 1.4 (in what follows I will cite the sections of the treatise rather than the page numbers in Brennan's translation).

7. Ibid., 2.1.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 4.3.

10. Ibid., 4.6.

11. Ibid., xi.

of Augustine than were those of Eriugena. Be that as it may, in spite of his condemnation Eriugena apparently stayed in the court of Charles and suffered no further consequences. Gottschalk, on the other hand, perhaps ironically, died in prison.

Eriugena in his appeal to reason was perhaps ahead of his time. According to Brennan it was this appeal that aroused the most resentment.[12]

> Reason is given a hearing on an equal footing with the time-honored authorities of Scripture and the Fathers; this balancing of reason and authority was to be greatly elaborated in [Eriugena's later work] the *Periphyseon*. The secular language of the liberal arts is applied in theological discussion, a procedure duly and formally anathematized by Prudentius of Troyes and Florus of Lyon in their rebuttal [of Eriugena's work on predestination].[13]

Reason, of course, would trouble tradition and authority in ever increasing ways over the following centuries.

This conflict reflected the concerns that had originally occupied Augustine, Pelagius, and their heirs. These concerns were both theological and pastoral. In the conflict between Gottschalk and Eriugena the bishops were concerned that Gottschalk's preaching of double predestination could result in moral indifference or despair in monks as well as ordinary Christians. The same charges had been made against Augustine's views. Eriugena, like Pelagius, seemed to give free rein to the human will and to limit the sovereignty of God. This for many was clearly unacceptable.

The terms of the conversation have not shifted a great deal over the centuries. Calvin and Pighius and Luther and Erasmus wrestled over the same ground a thousand years after Augustine and Pelagius and seven hundred years after Gottschalk and Eriugena.[14] The issues are as alive today as they were in fifth-century Hippo and sixteenth-century Geneva. Nevertheless, in spite of all the theological and philosophical wrangling of Augustine and Pelagius, Gottschalk and Eriugena, and Calvin and Pighius, I would suggest the real issue was pastoral. It addressed a question very much alive in the monasteries of Gaul and North Africa as well as the churches of Rome and Hippo: How is one to live as a Christian? This is still the real question.

The Church in the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Century

The Western church in the late fourth and early fifth century was experiencing a time of dramatic change and upheaval. The old Roman political and civic order was

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. See John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) and E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds. *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

eroding. Barbarian invasions, violence, and war threatened the settled life of towns and the emerging power of the church. By the early sixth century, Robert Markus argues, the culture and society that had fostered Augustine and his peers had been replaced by a culture and society that could properly be called medieval.[15] It is difficult to say how the conflicts and chaos of those decades impacted the thinking of the main subjects of this study: Augustine, Pelagius, Prosper of Aquitaine, and John Cassian. But they were not writing in a vacuum, and the key question was not simply how one understands grace and nature, or God's sovereignty and human free will, but, as suggested above, *how one lives a Christian life.* What did it mean to be a Christian, a faithful follower of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus? Perhaps especially, what did it meant to be a Christian when Rome was sacked and the seemingly eternal order of Rome was being swept away.

Varieties of Monasticism

A young Augustine describes in his *Confessions* his early plan, even before he was baptized, for a kind of semi-monastic community. In reality it was, as Peter Brown puts it, modeled on a Greek "philosophical community."[16] It entailed a group of sophisticated, well-to-do young men living a kind of common life supported by a wealthy patron so as to engage in "a life of philosophical detachment." But "by the autumn of 386," Brown writes, "everything had changed in Augustine himself—everything, that is except for the social setting in which he intended to live his new life."[17] By now he was a baptized Catholic set on being celibate. The group gathered around him in Cassiciacum in the foothills of the Alps near Milan was not very different from that he had hoped to gather in his "philosophical community," but this time the focus was upon the leisured reflection on the Christian life and love of God. In fact, Brown writes, "they became Platonic lovers. They were united by the vision of a single Beloved, a Supreme Beauty who was both utterly distant from them and yet hauntingly present."[18]

This monastic/philosophical interlude did not last long. By the autumn of 387 Augustine was on his way to North Africa. In Thagaste he and his intellectual colleagues formed another monastic community. This one not only lacked a wealthy patron but was consciously modeled on the Jerusalem community described in the

15. See Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

16. Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 161.

17. Ibid., 162.

18. Ibid., 165.

books of Acts.[19] The pooling of their resources, they thought, would enable them to live in unity with God and with each other. Brown describes how Augustine eventually gave up his wealth as had the "rich young man" confronted by Jesus.

> Nor was the wealth realized from Augustine's property given directly to the poor. Gifts to the church tended to be spoken of, in a pious formula, as if they were gifts "to the poor of the church." More probably, Augustine's estates and those of his friends were quietly donated to the church of Thagaste. In return each may have received an annuity or the usufruct of a portion of the revenues of their estates. They would then contribute this income to the common fund of the new community.[20]

When he moved to Hippo as first priest and then bishop this community came with him. Brown comments:

> From the time of his ordination as a priest at Hippo in 391 to his death in 430 Augustine's life and thought were inextricably linked to the monastery that he had founded. . . . But unfortunately, the precise course of its development as an institution is shadowy. For most of the time, except when provoked by the occasional scandal, he took the existence of the monastic backdrop to his daily life for granted and seldom discussed it. As a result, it remains for us the dark side of the moon of the life of Augustine.[21]

In its origin and functions, Augustine's community, at least at the beginning, was very different from a form of monasticism coming to the West from the Eastern deserts. In earlier centuries of the church the martyrs had been the model of Christian perfection. Their suffering and death at the hands of callous Roman officials had fueled a cult of the martyrs that had focused the worship and motivated the courage of thousands. With the recognition and then privileging of the church by the Roman Emperors of the fourth century, the martyrdoms ceased. According to Robert Markus, "The emotional energies previously absorbed by the duty to rise to the demands made on a persecuted Church were largely redirected towards disciplined ascetic living."[22] Monasticism was, in fact, now seen as a form of martyrdom, and monks were Christian soldiers giving battle to the world, the flesh, and the devil. In this battle leisured philosophical reflection was not the norm. Rather such a battle required a fierce asceticism, a commitment to virginity, and increasingly to poverty. The Eastern monks were uncompromising in their commitment to ascetic discipline

19. Ibid., 168.
20. Ibid., 169.
21. Ibid., 173.
22. Markus, *The End of Christianity*, 70.

even though, as Markus puts it, "the severity of ascetic observance was subject to a good deal of variation."[23]

Eastern monasticism made its way west and had perhaps it greatest impact in Gaul. On an island near Marseilles, Lerins, a new community, was founded. According to Brown it was "the most successful of island monasteries that had been chosen for their sheer 'horror.' Spiritual Counts of Monte Cristo, the upper-class converts to the monastic life who lived at Lerins and on similar bare islands, claimed to have brought a touch of the awesome desert of Egypt to within sight of the Cote d'Azur."[24] Figures like Martin of Tours and, perhaps most importantly, John Cassian communicated the Eastern forms of monasticism to Gaul. Cassian's *Conferences* are dialogues regarding the monastic life with some of the great figures of the Eastern deserts.[25] This form of heroic monasticism made its way even to Ireland and its remote and inhospitable islands. Ascetic rigor fueled the forms of religious life that flourished in Ireland, Scotland, and the north of England and eventually spread across Europe through the monastic foundations of Columbanus and his heirs.[26]

In Gaul the result was a two-tiered notion of Christianity. There were the "saints" of the monasteries and the ordinary laypersons of the cities and countryside. With Brown, "the writings that came from Marseille, Lerins, and Arles concentrated to an unusual degree on defining the boundary between the new demands of the ascetic movement and the average Christianity of well-to-do secular persons."[27] The presence of these ascetic communities alongside cultivated lay persons and local bishops "provoked constant debate as to which Christianity was authentic and which was a half-hearted compromise. Equally vigorous was the debate among monks themselves as to who were true monks and who were tepid amateurs. This situation generated arguments on almost every aspect of Christian behavior and of Christian society—from the nature of grace and free will to the fate of the Roman empire."[28] However these monks understood and answered these questions they were convinced that there was an advantage to their lives of rigorous asceticism. They were convinced they were the "spiritual elites" of the world separated from the spiritual dilettantes by poverty, virginity, and obedience. All this was called into question by the conflict between Pelagius and Augustine.

23. Ibid., 75.

24. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 412.

25. See Boniface Ramsey, ed. *John Cassian: The Conferences* (New York: Paulist: 1997). Subsequent quotations from Cassian are from this volume.

26. See Brendan Lehane, *The Quest of Three Abbots* (London: Murray, 1968); and John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History AD 200 to 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

27. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 413.

28. Ibid.

The Rise of Pelagius

It is bitterly ironic that Pelagius, a man of scrupulous morality and, at least to his way of thinking, confident orthodoxy should become perhaps *the* arch-heretic of the Catholic, and for that matter, the Protestant Church. Subsequent to his condemnation, orchestrated by Augustine and his friends, his name has been used as an epithet and warning. B. R. Rees observes, "For centuries now the adjective 'Pelagian' has been a convenient term of abuse in the Christian Church and Pelagius himself a bogeyman for upright clerics to evoke when wanting to frighten wayward members of their flock."[29] The list of people accused of being "Pelagian," "Semi-Pelagian," or "Synergist" is long and distinguished. Fourteenth-century "Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine," Rees continues, "detected a Pelagian hiding beneath every academic gown, just as Reinhold Niebuhr in twentieth century America saw Pelagians in every pew."[30] Charges of semi-Pelagianism perhaps even cost John Cassian, whom Rees calls "one of the most attractive of the Western fathers," official status as a saint.[31] Why was Pelgius deemed such a threat?

Pelagius came to Rome from Briton as a moral reformer. To Pelagius the Catholic Church, at both center and periphery, was compromised and morally flaccid. In his magisterial biography of Augustine, Peter Brown observes that Pelagius

> . . . had no patience with the confusion that seemed to reign on the powers of human nature. He and his supporters wrote for men "who wanted to make a change for the better." He refused to regard this power of self-improvement as having been irreversibly prejudiced; the idea of an "original sin," that could make men incapable of not sinning even more struck him as quite absurd. He was annoyed by the way in which Augustine's masterpiece, the *Confessions*, seemed merely to popularize the tendency toward a languid piety.[32]

In spite of this, as Rees points out in his *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers*, Pelagianism "was not a coherent theological statement."[33] Its adherents held wildly differing views, and Pelagius became embroiled in theological controversy as a result of the implications of his moral teachings rather than his explicitly developed theological reflection. As Brown puts it, "Pelagian*ism* as we know it, that consistent body of ideas of momentous consequences, had come into existence; but in the mind of

29. B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1991) ix.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 108.

32. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 343.

33. "Letter to Demetrias" 3.2 in B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1998) 1. Subsequent quotes from the letter are from this edition.

Augustine, not of Pelagius."[34] Augustine saw serious theological problems lurking in the "icy Puritanism" and heroic individualism of Pelagius. He would not rest until he secured his condemnation.

Pelagius's views are well illustrated in his letter "To Demetrias." Demetrias was a wealthy young woman who had forgone marriage for a life of virginity and devotion to God. She was only one of a large circle of wealthy and prominent young Romans who were attracted to the rigor of Christian perfectionism in what they saw as a compromised Roman society and church. Pelagius offers Demetrias a bracing challenge to obedience and faithfulness. He insists that she has within her, as do all humans, the capacity to do good and not evil. He writes, "It was because God wished to bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice by implanting in man the possibility of choosing either alternative, that he made it his peculiar right to be what he wanted to be, so that with his capacity for good and evil he could do either quite naturally."[35] This ability to choose between good and evil was a gift of God's grace and was not destroyed by the fall of Adam. Such a pale notion of grace would not have satisfied Augustine.

It was, Pelagius told Demetrias, an insult to God to imagine that he would give commands that humans were incapable of obeying of their own free will:

> What blind madness! What unholy foolhardiness! We accuse God of a twofold lack of knowledge, so that he appears not to know what he has done, and not to know what he has commanded; as if, forgetful of the human frailty of which he is himself the author, he has imposed on man commands which he cannot bear. And at the same time, O horror!, we ascribe iniquity to the righteous and cruelty to the holy, while complaining, first, that he has commanded something impossible, secondly that man is to be damned by him for doing things which he was unable to avoid, so that God—and this is something which even to suspect is sacrilege—seems to have sought not so much our salvation as our punishment.[36]

In his message to Demetrias and other prominent, wealthy Romans, Pelagius in the words of Brown, "appealed to a universal theme: the need of the individual to define himself, and to feel free to create his own values in the midst of the conventional, second-rate life of society. . . . He would offer the individual absolute certainty through absolute obedience."[37] But this would mean that for Pelagius and his followers, the vast majority of "good Christians" in the Roman world would be damned.

34. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 346.
35. "Letter to Demetrias," 3.2.
36. Ibid., 16.2.
37. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 347.