

ANOTHER TALE OF TWO CITIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. The best of times in Athens, but the worst of times in Jerusalem. Alexander the Great found no more worlds to conquer, but when his four generals split up his kingdom, the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemys in Egypt used Palestine as their football field in their effort to control the Mediterranean world. The Golden Age of philosophy had flourished in Athens for over two hundred years when (167 BC) Antiochus Epiphanes stormed into Jerusalem and committed the original abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Dan 8:11-14). Even in the Babylonian deportations Nebuchadnezzar had not so desecrated the holy temple of the Jews. Yes, it was the best of times in Athens, but the worst of times in Jerusalem.

The dream of Alexander the Great, who had studied at the foot of Aristotle for three years, was to “hellenize” the known world. He was so convinced of the superiority of Greek philosophical thinking that he carried copies of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* with him as he swept over the Medo-Persian Empire faster than a hawk dive-bombing a field mouse. He wanted each of his conquered countries to experience the wisdom of Athens. Greek became the *lingua franca* of his realm. East met West, and the resulting union was a marriage that has had more impact on Western Civilization than Newton’s discovery of the laws of motion. What we are talking about is the ripple effect of two thinkers from Athens as their philosophies landed in the sea of Judaeo-Christian thought like two meteors into the Mediterranean. Those thinkers were Plato and Aristotle.

Ralph Stob, a Christian philosopher, has observed: “This element of the Greek spirit had great influence on . . . the Christian movement in the first three centuries. At the same time it was the factor which was

operative at the bottom of some of the heresies which arose.”¹ Or as Marvin Wilson puts it, “Westerners have often found themselves in the confusing situation of trying to understand a Jewish Book through the eyes of Greek culture.”² Dom Gregory Dix goes so far as to say that the miscegenation of early Christianity with Greek philosophy has led to a “spiritual schizophrenia in the process.”³

What we would like to do in this study is to focus on a few salient points of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle which have impacted Western Christianity. Special emphasis will be placed on the search for “the elect” and the doctrine of Double Predestination.

II. PLATO (D. 347 BC)

Plato bought into the dualistic philosophy of the Persians (Zoroaster), which recognized the ongoing struggle between the impersonal forces of good and evil. However, Plato’s twist was to relegate everything good to the spiritual world. Everything evil was in the material world. Only in the spiritual world could we find the perfect ideals of which their inferior, material replicas are made. And in this spiritual world we also find immortal souls, which pre-exist their union with material bodies.

When an immortal soul does enter a material body, good mixes with evil, and suffering begins for the immortal soul. The goal of human life becomes the release of this entrapped soul to reenter the world of ideals, the perfect and good spiritual world. So, just as his dualism (good versus evil) is a way to explain the nature and function of the entire universe, so it is for man. Man’s body is a prison for his soul. This immortal soul is incarcerated in a defective, crumbling pot of clay. “Salvation” is not something one attains until death, when the soul is freed and able to float upwards into that celestial realm of goodness and perfection. This dualistic view of man is at the very root of salvific doctrine in Western Christianity.

Werner Jaeger goes so far as to say that “the most important fact in the history of Christian doctrine was that the father of Christian theology,

¹ Ralph Stob, *Christianity and Classical Civilization* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 49.

² Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 167.

³ Dom Gregory Dix, *Jew and Greek* (London: Dacre Press, 1953), 14.

Origen, was a Platonic philosopher at the school of Alexandria. He built into Christian doctrine the whole cosmic drama of the soul, which he took from Plato, and although later Christian fathers decided that he took over too much, that which they kept was still the essence of Plato's philosophy of the soul."⁴

Plato's soteriology was far from that taught in the OT. Most OT readers have to work hard to think of an OT promise of salvation in heaven for man's soul after death (it is in there, but most folks do not know where). The salvation emphasis in the OT was longevity in the land. God's fellowship and blessings were something to be savored and enjoyed in the historical context of this world. As Wilson points out,

Certainly, the godly of the Old Testament could never have brought themselves to sing such patently foreign and heterodox words as the following, which may be heard in certain churches today: "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through," or "Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away," or "When all my labors and trials are o'er, and I am safe on the beautiful shore." To any Hebrew of Bible times this kind of language would be unrealistic and irresponsible, a cop-out—seeking to abandon the present, material world, while focusing on the joys of the "truly" spiritual world to come.⁵

Now despite the claims of Jaeger that Origen of Alexandria was most responsible for inculcating Platonism into Christianity, this author believes the Bishop of Hippo had far more influence than Origen. And Augustine did not get his Platonism from Origen. It came from the influence of Plotinus and Neo-Platonism. Therefore, in order to trace the influence of Athens on Jerusalem, the next link in the chain is Plotinus.

III. PLOTINUS (D. AD 270)

This man of brilliance and mysticism is considered by some to have been the most influential man since the Apostles on Western

⁴ Werner Jaeger, "The Greek Ideas of Immortality," *Harvard Theological Review* 52 (July 1959): 146.

⁵ Wilson, 168-69. It must be observed that Wilson is referring to OT believers. Obviously, there is some NT emphasis on the temporary trials of this world as opposed to the glory that shall be revealed in the sons of God when Christ returns.

Christianity. He is known as the Father of Neo-Platonism. After growing up and studying philosophy in Alexandria and Persia, he settled in Rome, where he began a school. He was said to have been a man without enemies, greatly beloved for his divine wisdom. He himself made no attempt to perpetuate his wisdom, but Porphyry, his disciple and biographer, edited and organized his scattered lectures. These became known as *The Enneads*, which were translated by Marius Victorinus and studied diligently by Augustine. Augustine actually credits Plotinus for getting him on the road to truth and, eventually, of his conversion to the Orthodox Church.⁶ Says Michael Azkoul:

In the case of Augustine...his attraction to Platonism—specifically Plotinus of Lycopolis (204-270) and his school (Neo-Platonism)—was very serious, perhaps fatal. He did more than accessorize his theology with it. From this Greek philosopher and his *Enneads*, more than any other, Augustine borrowed the principles to develop his Christian version of Greek philosophy.⁷

It has been said that Augustine was Christianity's first writer of introspection, as witnessed by his *Confessions*. Perhaps, but it was the mysticism of Plotinus and his elevation of contemplation to the status of a productive principle which was Augustine's inspiration for his *Confessions*. Augustine even compared the writings of Plotinus with the Holy Scriptures.⁸ He both paraphrased and quoted freely from Plotinus. So influential was Plotinus that W. R. Inge claims:

Plotinus gave an impetus to this fusion [the coalescence of Greek philosophy into a theocentric system of religious discipline], for the victory of his philosophy was so rapid and overwhelming that it absorbed the other schools, and when Neoplatonism captured the Platonic academy at Athens, ...it reigned almost without a rival until Justinian closed the Athenian schools in 529.

⁶ In the *Confessions*, VII, Augustine makes clear his dependence on Plotinus and *The Enneads*.

⁷ Michael Azkoul, *Texts and Studies in Religion* 56 (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 129.

⁸ Apud Platonicos *me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, repertum esse confideo* (*Conta Acad.* III, xx, 43 PL 32, 957).

...Even Augustine recognized that the differences between Platonists and Christians were slight, and the church gradually absorbed Neoplatonism almost entire [sic]...It is no paradox to say with Eucken that the pagan Plotinus has left a deeper mark upon Christian thought than any other single man.⁹

While Inge no doubt overstates his case, we cannot be hasty in dismissing his claims. For many would ascribe such sweeping influence to Augustine, and if Augustine's primary source was Plotinus, then the implication is obvious.

According to Plotinus, the Supreme Being is the source of all life, and is therefore absolute causality. This Supreme Being is moreover, the Good, in so far as all finite things have their purpose in it, and ought to flow back to it. The human souls which have descended into corporeality are those which have allowed themselves to be ensnared by sensuality and overpowered by lust. They must turn back from this; and since they have not lost their freedom, a conversion is still possible.

Here, then, we enter upon the practical aspect of his philosophy. Along the same road by which it descended, the soul must retrace its steps back to the Supreme Good. It must first of all return to itself. This is accomplished by the practice of virtue, which aims at likeness to God, and leads up to God. In the ethics of Plotinus all the older schemes of virtue are taken over and arranged in a graduated series. The lowest stage is that of the civil virtues; then follow the purifying; and last of all the divine virtues. The civil virtues merely adorn the life, without elevating the soul. This is the purpose of the purifying virtues, by which the soul is freed from sensuality and led back to itself, and thence to the Supreme Being. By means of ascetic observances the man becomes once more a spiritual and enduring being, free from all sin.

But there is still a higher attainment; it is not enough to be sinless, one must become "God." This is reached through contemplation of the Supreme Being, the One—in other words, through an ecstatic approach, the soul may become one with God, the fountain of life, the source of being, the origin of all good, the root of the soul. In that moment, it enjoys the highest indescribable bliss; it is as if it were swallowed up by divinity, bathed in the light of eternity. Porphyry tells us that on four

⁹ W. R. Inge, "Plotinus," *Encyclopedia Britannica* 18 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1955), 81.

occasions during the six years of their correspondence Plotinus attained this ecstatic union with God.

As Porphyry set out to popularize the teachings of Plotinus, he emphasized the religious side of Neo-Platonism. The object of philosophy, according to Porphyry, is the “salvation” of the soul. The origin and the cause of evil are not in the body, but in the desires of the soul. Hence, the strictest asceticism (abstinence from meat, wine, and sexual relations) is demanded, as well as the knowledge of God. He became an enemy of Christianity in his writing *Against the Christians*. Here he does not attack Christ, but he does denounce the practice of Christianity current in his day. By 448 his works were condemned.

IV. AUGUSTINE (D. 430)

A. THE PLATONISTS

When Augustine began reading *The Enneads* in the late fourth century, they opened his eyes to the “invisible things” (*Confessions*, VII, 20). When it comes to the Platonic principles, it must be stated that Augustine held the Christian philosophy to be the highest of the philosophies, since it rested on faith, while the Greek philosophies relied upon reason. But he also saw them as preparatory for the coming of Christianity. Once here, the Christian philosopher could “spoil the Egyptians” just as Moses did when he left bondage in Egypt.

Rational inquiry was to be pursued in order to grasp by reason what was already held by faith. Platonism was “the handmaiden to faith.” Therefore, Augustine did not seek to know in order to believe, but rather he believed in order that he might know (faith seeking reason).¹⁰ There were certain matters in which reason could precede faith (*ipsa ratio antecedit fidem*), such as in physics or mathematics.

For Augustine, God was the Platonic Good. Augustine thought of the material world as a hazy copy of the World of Ideals, the spiritual world. Indeed, all phenomena are but contingent *ektypes* (*ek* meaning “out of” or “from” in Greek) of the eternal Ideals. Again, since there are some created and material things superior to others and some things below

¹⁰ Augustine anticipated the Anselmian “*fides quaerens intellectum*,” and he quoted Isaiah on behalf of this proposition—“*fides quaerit, intellectus invenit; propter quod aut propheta: Nisi credideritis non intelligentis*” (Isa 7:9).

which more greatly resemble things above, Augustine's universe is a hierarchy or ladder of beings leading to Him who is the Supreme Being. The ascent to God begins with a *turning* to Him, a *turning* which necessarily involves divine illumination. Of course, the limitation of our ascent is not merely the limitation of our created nature, but also the result of our moral and spiritual condition.

At this point, Augustine introduces his version of the Platonic memory. Memory according to him is the soul's ability to recall the past, the bringing forward what has been stored within our being. Memory is the storehouse of knowledge which, with the intellect's *a priori* categories, brings the truth of the world external to it. Memory is the *sine qua non* of all knowledge, whether intellectual or sensory.

The intellect, unlike the sense, is fed by two streams: from the soul and, indirectly, from the world of phenomena. The intellect, stamped or "impressed" with the divine Ideals, beckons us to contemplate the soul and the heavenly realm to which it is akin. When the intellect or reason concerns itself with the physical world, it produces "science" (*scientia*); but when it searches the realm of the spirit, it uncovers "wisdom" (*sapientia*). Inasmuch as both *scientia* and *sapientia* comprehend some aspect of the truth, they both, to some degree, require illumination. The higher we ascend on the scale of being, the greater the "light" given to the soul.

Now where, we must ask ourselves, do these concepts appear in Scripture? Alas, they do not. But the long arms of Plato have reached forward through the centuries and through his resurgent disciples like Plotinus to embrace the Bishop of Hippo. In fact, this new strain of Platonism in the church was so evident in Augustine that Michael Azkoul claims,

[Augustine's] philosophical religion is a perversion of the Christian revelation. He is also responsible, in large measure, for the division between East and West; and, indeed, even for the Occident's loss of the patristic spirit...There is good reason that Orthodoxy has never recognized him as a Father of the church—his latter-day champions notwithstanding; and, certainly not a "super-Father," as he has been known in the West since the Carolignian period. He is surely not the apex of the

patristic tradition; in fact, he was the beginning of something new.¹¹

Augustine's life quest was to experience the mystical union resulting from a beatific vision of the Good, just as Plotinus claimed to have done. Plotinus was convinced that during this mystical state we actually have an experience of formless intuition. This mystical ascent seems to those who pass through it to be a progressive stripping off of everything that is alien to the purest nature of the soul, which cannot enter in to the Holy of Holies while any trace of earthliness still clings to it. He describes this holy ascent as "a flight of the alone to the Alone."

Plotinus acknowledged that such an ascent was a rare experience indeed. It is the consummation of a life-long quest of the highest, to be earned only by intense contemplation and unceasing self-discipline. Hence, asceticism was seen as the means by which one could experience this mystical union.

Augustine, as Bishop of Hippo, set up a school for young aspirants, who were willing to mortify their bodies for the prize of the goal of holy ascent. Augustine himself never experienced the mystical union described by Plotinus, though he yearned for it his entire life.

In order to be fair, we must not credit Augustine with imbibing all of Plato's philosophy. E. Portalié enumerates the Platonic theories which the Bishop of Hippo rejected: eternity of the world, emanationism, pantheism, autosoterism, the pre-existence and the transmigration of the soul, and polytheism.¹² But he also lists those doctrines of Plato which Augustine always approved and appropriated: philosophy as *amor sapientiae*, with God and the soul as its object; the idea of the Good, the doctrine of "illumination" and the distinction between "intellection" (knowledge of eternal things) and "science" (knowledge of temporal things), corresponding to Plato's double-tiered reality; and, of course, the theory of eternal ideas or Forms which Augustine placed in the Essence of God.

A. H. Armstrong called Augustine "the first Christian thinker whom we can place among the great philosophers."¹³ Augustine the philosopher

¹¹ Azkoul, ii-iii.

¹² E. Portalié, "Augustine" *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* I (Paris: n.p., 1909): 2268-2472.

¹³ A. H. Armstrong, "St. Augustine and the Eastern Tradition," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* V, 7-8 (1963): 161.

believed truth came by rational inquiry, but Augustine the theologian also believed that faith certifies reason's discoveries. Another way of putting this is that faith leads to understanding, or, Christianity supplies the "faith" and Platonism satisfies the reason. The confidence he placed in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry, and the like was not shared by the earlier Fathers. They may have taken elements, but never principles from the Greeks. At best certain elements from the philosophers could decorate the temple of truth, but never form its foundation.

Augustine's dependence on reason explains why his writings chase rabbit trails of the mind far from the halls of revelation. It seems strange that one who believed so thoroughly in the depravity of man and the corruption of human reason would, at the same time, depend so completely upon his own reason to ratify truth. It was centuries after his death before Augustine became the theological master of the West.¹⁴ But he has had such an impact on Western Christianity that, as Hermann Reuter observed, "Augustinianism prepared the West for division with the East."¹⁵ B. B. Warfield agreed, saying, "But it was Augustine who imprinted upon the Western section of the Church a character so specific as naturally to bring the separation of the Church in its train."¹⁶ And, as Armstrong remarks, "The *sine qua non* of Augustinianism is Neo-Platonism."¹⁷

To trace all or even the majority of Augustine's influence on the West would span far beyond the scope of this study, but one of his salient doctrines will be examined: Double Predestination. We will see that behind this difficult doctrine, to put it mildly, lies an elitism implicit within Augustine's theology, an elitism which finds its identity in the elect.

B. DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

In Augustine's mind, his doctrines of "original sin," "irresistible grace," and "double predestination" were organically linked. We have

¹⁴ See H. Leibscheutz, "Development of Thought in the Carolingian Empire," *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: n.p., 1967), 571-86.

¹⁵ Hermann Reuter states: "*Augustin hat die Trennung des Occidents und des Orients verbereits, eine bahnbrechende Wirkung und den ersteren ausgiebt*" in *Augustinische Studien* (Gotha: n.p., 1887), 229.

¹⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1956), 307.

¹⁷ Armstrong, 161, 167.

written on his doctrine of “irresistible grace” in a previous article.¹⁸ The grace referenced in Augustine which is irresistible is not the grace of regeneration, which he believed was bestowed at water baptism, nor the grace of an efficacious call, but rather the grace (gift) of perseverance. It was this grace that God irresistibly foisted on the elect so that, for them, apostasy was impossible. Of course it was impossible, since Augustine *defined* the elect as those who persevere in their loyalty to Christ until the end of their lives (Matt 24:13).

Because the Scriptures were refracted by Augustine through the prism of the Platonists, God’s light was bent toward the elite. And because of their emphasis on the contemplative life (mysticism) and self-denial (asceticism) as twin engines which power the flight of the soul out of its corporeal prison into the presence of the Supreme Good, “heaven” was inaccessible to the masses. After all, how could illiterate people (the masses) ever hope to enjoy a life of study and contemplation (reason plus revelation)? And among the contemplative still fewer could qualify for heaven based on the austere requirements of asceticism (all sex is sin, either venial or mortal).

Augustine did allow for sexual relations between a husband and wife as a necessary evil for the propagation of the race, but his Manichaean background never left him in this area. For the Manichaeans, sex was always evil. So it was also for Augustine. Plotinus himself so abhorred his body that he never bathed so as to not give any honor or attention to the body, while at the same time making it all the more repugnant (not to mention pungent). The point here is that Neo-Platonism fostered an elitism which manifested itself in Augustine through his understanding of the elect.

While all baptized were regenerated by the Holy Spirit, only those who persevere until the end of their lives will prove to be the elect, the few. In other words, Augustine believed that everlasting life could be lost, but only by the non-elect. Perseverance proved whether one was elect, and hence whether he would keep his everlasting life or not. Again we quote from Azkoul, a former student at Calvin College, until he began his study of Augustinianism:

¹⁸ David R. Anderson, “The Soteriological Impact of Augustine’s Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 (Spring/Autumn 2002).

Also, predestination is inseparable from Augustine's doctrine of irresistible grace. Grace for him is a divine but created force, whereby God compels the will of man from evil to good and negates the consequences of "original sin" in those who are baptized. The grace of the Sacrament of Baptism is given to "many" while on the "few" is imposed irresistibly "the grace of perseverance" which denies apostasy to the elect. Saving grace is compulsory, because, if freely given, the wicked nature of man would reject it. The Reformation will adopt Augustine charitology as its own.¹⁹

The "elect" become the focal point of Augustinian theology. To understand this it may help to remember the passage of Augustine from the Manicheans to the Academics to the Platonists to Christianity. He spent nine years as a "hearer" (*auditor*) in the Manichaeon philosophy, a combination of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. The Manichaeans distinguish between the "sons of mystery" and "the sons of darkness," with the latter obviously being outside the realm of Manichaeon enlightenment. But within the ranks of their own members, the "sons of mystery" were divided between the "elect" and the "hearers." Mani proclaimed salvation through knowledge (*gnōsis*), which itself was achieved through ascetic practices. The elect were sealed with a threefold preservative: 1) Purity of the mouth—abstinence from meat and alcohol; 2) Purity of life—renouncing physical property and physical labor; and 3) Purity of heart—forsaking sexual activity.

Few of us are able to cast away the baggage of our past. These Manichaeon distinctions are easily transferred to the world of Christianity, especially since the word "elect" is a biblical term. But the distinction between the regenerate (the baptized) and the elect (those who are compelled by the gift of perseverance) is the creation of Augustine. No doubt his ascetic background originated with Manichaeism and was perpetuated by Plotinus and Porphyry. This is a salvation for only the "few," the "elect," the "sons of God," who slowly but surely distance themselves from material things. By grace, the grace/gift of perseverance, the elect escape the bondage of the flesh.

Tied in closely with election and perseverance is predestination. Ferdnan Prat claims that Augustine changed his exegesis of Romans 9 in 397. He began to see Jacob and Esau as types of two different sets of

¹⁹ Azkoul, 181.

people, the elect and the reprobate. By adopting the hermeneutics of Tyconius,²⁰ which utilized typology extensively instead of allegory, Augustine began finding types all over the Bible. Regardless of the fact that Romans 9 never mentions hell, Hades, heaven, eternal, judgment, condemnation, or the like, Augustine reads eternal bliss and eternal condemnation right into the passage.

And within Romans 8 Augustine equated God's knowledge with God's will, that is, God's foreknowledge is tantamount to predetermination. Like the propagators of Open Theism today, Augustine failed to see that foreknowledge is but a subset of the all-inclusive omniscience of God, which includes both the actual *and the possible*. Hence, it is predetermined before the foundation of the world that those whom God chose (the elect) would spend eternity with Him and those He passed over (the Reprobate) would spend eternity without Him. Of course, Augustine is left with the same dilemma that the Reformers who copy his system will inherit—how does Augustine's idea of Double Predestination exonerate God from evil? All Augustine's sophistry could not answer this dilemma, nor could that of the Reformers. Alas, the omnibenevolence of God becomes the foil in the double predestinarian shield. As we shall see, Theodore Beza simply punted on the idea of omnibenevolence. He elevated the hatred of God to the same level as the love of God, calling both virtues and evoking equal glory to God from each.

C. HIS INFLUENCE IN THE WEST

Although Augustine was praised by Pope Celestine as a man of great learning and a doctor of the Faith, Augustine still lived in the shadow of the Fathers. St. Jerome did not mention him in *De viris illustribus*. St. Gennadius of Marseilles shows little knowledge of what Augustine had written. Sulpicius Severus ignored Augustine altogether in his biography of St. Martin of Tours, but in the same work he showed great appreciation for the works of Sts. Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Paulinus and John Cassian. Nor did Sts. Nicetas of Remesiana, Valerian of Cimiez, Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna reveal any hint of Augustinian influence in their writings.

Those who opposed the teachings of Augustine were formidable, among which were St. John Cassian, Sts. Vincent of Lerins, Hilary of Arles, Honratus and Gennadius of Marseilles, Faustus of Riez, and Ar-

²⁰ Anderson, 4.

nobius the Younger. Cassian was his most powerful contemporary, who claimed that Augustine's new and dangerous opinions were unknown to the Fathers and at variance with accepted interpretation of the Scriptures. In reaction to Augustine's doctrines on irresistible grace and double predestination, Cassian accused him of transposing grace and liberty, realities of the spiritual order, to the rational plane, where grace and liberty are transformed into two mutually exclusive concepts. Cassian's voice was drowned out by the din of the Pelagian/Augustinian controversy, but that of St. Faustus of Riez (d. 485) was not.

Faustus opposed both the autosoterism (you can save yourself) of Pelagius and the double predestination of Augustine. He preached the doctrine of *meritum de congruo et condigno*, that is, grace is commonly imparted but not imposed. He also took predestination to be a parody of the pagan notion of fate. Under his leadership the Council of Arles condemned predestinationism. And in 530 the Council of Valence rejected double predestination.

However, during the so-called "Carolingian Renaissance" the star of Augustine began to rise. Among the Frankish intellectuals, Augustine became the greatest of the Fathers (*doctor super omnes*). Charlemagne slept with a copy of *The City of God* under his pillow. At the Benedictine Monastery of Corbie (near Amiens), Ratramnus affirmed double predestination and also concluded that the Eucharist was simply a memorial (based on the metaphysics of Augustine, which separated material and immaterial entities). One of his disciples, Gottschalk of Mainz (d. 869) claimed to be the true heir of Augustine. He defended double predestination, was condemned at the Council of Mainz (848), was vindicated at Valence (855), and finally opposed again in 856 until an "exhausting compromise" was reached at the Council of Douzy.

From this point on, there were disagreements on what Augustine meant, but no disagreement in the West that he was the greatest of the Fathers. Anselm, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Reformers would drape themselves in the mantle of Augustine. And, as we have seen, Augustine was heavily influenced by Plato. But before we jump from the double predestination of Augustine to that of the Reformers, we need to stop long enough to take a glimpse at the influence of Aristotle on the historical theology of Western Christianity. Aristotle entered the church through Thomas Aquinas, and it was the principles of logic taught by Aristotle which the Reformers used to justify double predestination.

V. ARISTOTLE (D. 322 BC)

Aristotle was the son of the court physician to the king of Macedon. At the age of seventeen he went to Plato's Academy in Athens, where he remained for twenty years as a student and then a teacher. After the death of Plato he spent the next twelve years away from Athens, serving for three of these years as the tutor to the son of Philip II of Macedon, Alexander the Great. In 335 he returned to Athens to open a new school called the Lyceum, where he taught for the next twelve years. Upon the death of Alexander, anti-Macedonian feelings threatened the school, forcing Aristotle to flee to Euboea, where soon afterward he died.²¹

Though he was a student of Plato, Aristotle reacted to the concept of the unseen world of ideas being more real than the world of the five senses. Reality for him was what he could observe right in front of him. The unseen world would require revelation for validation. Not so with the empirical world of nature. Reason and logic alone could mine the diamond fields of nature. He is sometimes called the Father of the Scientific Method, and was the first to classify the physical world into specific fields of biology, zoology, and physics. He is also known as the founder of logic, and his syllogistic reasoning and "four causes" were utilized heavily by the Reformers to buttress their approach to predestination.

A syllogism contained a Major Premise, a Minor Premise, and a Conclusion. Knowledge can be *deduced* by syllogistic reasoning as described in *Prior Analytics*. The Reformers relied heavily on this type of reasoning in order to give assurance of election to church members: Major Premise—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved; Minor Premise—I have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; Conclusion—I am saved.

The "four causes" of Aristotle were used by him to explain change in nature: 1) Material Cause—the matter from which something has evolved; 2) Formal Cause—that which gives shape and structure to that which is changing; 3) Efficient Cause—that which imposed the form on the matter; and 4) Final Cause—the end to which that substance emerges and which requires the efficient cause to act in a determinate way. These will be honed and applied by Theodore Beza to theology in order to undergird his supralapsarianism (God decreed to elect some and reprobate

²¹ Paul D. Feinberg, "Aristotle," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 75-78.

all others before the creation and fall of man) and double predestination to the glory of God. In doing so he used both the inductive and deductive logic of Aristotle.

The writings of Aristotle were lost to western thinkers for centuries after the Fall of Rome. But during the twelfth century, scholars discovered a mother lode in Spain. Here in the libraries of Toledo, Lisbon, Segovia, and Cordoba Arabic translations of books that Europeans had long talked about but never read were found: Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the lost key to astronomy and astrology; Galen's *On the Art of Healing* and *On Anatomical Procedures*, the first scientific medical textbooks; Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*; Archimedes' treatises on mathematical engineering; and, best of all, the vast corpus of Aristotle's works—*Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *History of Animals*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *De Anima* (Aristotle's famous treatment of the soul), *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*.

Two more works attributed to Aristotle were also found, although it was discovered at a later date that these belonged to Neo-Platonists: *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Book of Causes*. Taken together, these books were the greatest discovery in Western intellectual history. It became the joint task of scholars from Europe and Africa (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) to translate these books into Latin. Here is an excerpt of what they read after translation into English:

The evidence of the senses further corroborates [the sphericity of the earth]. How else would eclipses of the moon show segments shaped as we see them? As it is, the shapes which the moon itself each month shows are of every kind...but in eclipses the outline is always curved; and, since it is the interposition of the earth that makes the eclipse, the form of this line will be caused by the form of the earth's surface, which is therefore spherical....Hence one should not be too sure of the incredibility of the view of those who conceive that there is continuity between the parts about the pillar of Hercules [the Straits of Gibraltar] and the parts about India, and that in this way the ocean is one.²²

No wonder these men were bug-eyed over this treasure trove of knowledge. The church was in shock. Ever since the start of European

²² Aristotle, *On the Heavens (De Caelo)*, J. L. Stocks, trans., in *Works*, 1 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 2.14, 297b.24-298a.20.

universities, the Queen of the Sciences had been theology. But with Aristotle's *redivivus*, there emerged a new interest in the physical world. Along with this information came the realization that Aristotle accumulated his wealth of knowledge apart from any assistance from the church or the Bible, using human logic, reason, and observation as his guide. Here the church was not an authority. This was no minor matter, for at this time the church enjoyed a position of unchallenged power and authority, dominating European thought and culture.

Some welcomed this new fount of wisdom. Peter Abelard (d. 1142) went so far as to imply that whatever could not be proven true though logic was considered false. Unfortunately, when one leans upon reason solely and independently of revelation, and makes reason the final arbiter of truth, a very strange thing begins to happen: reason reasons out revelation altogether. This is what slowly took place on the European stage between the 1200s and the 1700s.

VI. THOMAS AQUINAS (D. 1274)

In the 1200s Thomas Aquinas sought to accommodate the work of Aristotle with the church and make room for both to coexist under the blessing of church authority. His work, known as Thomistic Scholasticism, brought resistance from the church initially because of its dependence on Aristotle. In 1277 several of his propositions were condemned in Paris and Oxford, but in 1323 he was canonized. In the sixteenth century Thomism was the leading light of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). He was made a Doctor of the Church in 1567, and in 1879 Pope Leo XIII commended his work for study. It is because of his influence on the Reformers and in particular their adoption of Aristotle's syllogistic reasoning and his "four causes" that Thomas Aquinas is included in our discussion.

Aquinas sought to unite reason-based and revelation-based thinking into a new and acceptable whole. He did this by dividing life into two distinct realms: the realm of Nature and the realm of Grace. In the lower realm of Nature (which included science, logic, and things having to do with the natural, temporal world) man's intellect and independent reason operated quite well on its own. Reason was seen as a reliable guide to truth in this realm. Revelation, on the other hand, was necessary for understanding the upper realm of Grace, which included such things as theology, prayer, worship, God, angels, and things pertaining to the eternal supernatural world.

Aquinas did not think of the realm of Nature and the realm of Grace as oppositional. He believed the realm of Nature should be subjected to the authority of the church. But by simply placing the material world in a category of its own, even though initially connected to the realm of Grace, over time the distinction became so great in people's minds that the connection disappeared altogether.

The "Enlightenment" was a celebration of human reason, and it rose like a beast out of the sea of the "Dark Ages," an age when revelation reigned supreme. The celebration of human reason is the corner stone of modernism, where there is a blatant disregard for revelation and a high regard for reason; where Nature is the sole, impersonal, guiding intelligence of the universe; where the Word of God is considered as relevant as the proclamations of Zeus; where human reason is the sole measurement of ethics, morality, and freedom. Despite the protestations of post-modernism against the omnipotence of human reason, the stronghold of reason over divine revelation remains as powerful as ever.²³

We are now ready to jump forward to the Reformers in order to see how the influence of Plato and Aristotle converged at the Geneva Academy through their dependence on Augustine and Aristotelian logic.

VII. THE REFORMERS

A. JOHN CALVIN (D. 1564)

Although John Calvin is often thought of as Augustine's alter-ego, most of the Reformers were Augustinian in background. Martin Luther, for example, was an Augustinian monk. John Calvin followed Augustine almost exclusively in his typological dependence on Romans 9 to support his double predestination. But as Sanday and Headlam point out, the loving of Jacob and the hating of Esau "has reference simply to the election of one to higher privileges as head of the chosen race, than the other. It has nothing to do with their eternal salvation."²⁴ And again, "The Apostle says nothing about eternal life or death. He says nothing about the principles upon which God does act...He never says or implies that

²³ See Christian Overman, *Assumptions That Affect our Lives* (Louisiana, Missouri: Micah Publishing, 1996), 106-107.

²⁴ William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968), 245.

God has created man for the purpose of his damnation.”²⁵ Calvin and his followers never consider that the initial use of “wrath” in Romans occurs in Rom 1:18 and deals with God’s anger against man’s sin in time instead of eternity. This may well be its use throughout Romans, including Rom 9:22 (“vessels of wrath”).

It should be apparent that this hermeneutical approach to Romans came directly from Augustine. Like so many others of his time Calvin had been studying Augustine for quite some time before dedicating his talents to Christian theology. He had only been a believer for four years when he published the first edition of his *Institutes* (1536). He claimed that his theology was thoroughly Augustinian. Of course, he differed from Augustine in his understanding of justification and the sacraments, but with regard to predestination and his preoccupation with the elect and getting one’s soul to heaven, he adopted Augustine almost wholesale. He taught a clear double predestination and supralapsarianism.²⁶ He said God caused the Fall of Adam and so “arranged” it in His decree of predestination “for His own pleasure.”²⁷ So did his successor at the Geneva Academy.

B. THEODORE BEZA (D. 1605)

Beza succeeded Calvin in Geneva. His supralapsarianism emphasized that Christ died only for the elect. Although Calvin certainly subscribed to the double predestination of Augustine, Beza brought it to the forefront of his theology. He even developed a chart (see appendix) which elevated the hatred to God to the same level as the love of God, making them both equal attributes of God which brought equal glory to God. As we shall see, he utilized the “four causes” of Aristotle to arrive at his conclusion, but the roots of his double predestination went back to Augustine and Neo-Platonism. So through Beza, Plato and his student Aristotle met once again at the Geneva Academy.

By the time of Beza, the preoccupation of the Reformed church was to find out whether or not one was a member of the elite group, the elect. Assurance was separated from faith so that one could no longer find

²⁵ Ibid., 258.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 21, 5.

²⁷ Ibid., III, 23, 7. Notice his appeal to Augustine for support. Compare *Opuscules*, Sp. 2054: “*Cependant je recognoy ceste doctrine pour mienne, qu’Adam est tombé non seulement par la permission de Dieu, mais aussi par le secret conseil d’iceluy.*”

assurance of his salvation by looking to Christ, since Christ only died for the elect, and the person in question might very well be one of the reprobate. This began the great fruit-inspecting industry of the Reformed Church.

From the chart in the Appendix we can see that the just and merciful God decrees to elect some and reprobate others before the creation and fall of man. This is called supralapsarianism. Limited atonement is a corollary of supralapsarianism deduced from the decree of election and reprobation before the creation of man. If, it is reasoned, that God's first decree was election and reprobation, then the death of Christ could only have been for the elect. That is called limited atonement. It does not come from Scripture; it comes from reason and logic. Moses Amyraut, who studied at the Geneva Academie under Beza, spent his career trying to convince Dortian Calvinists that Calvin did not teach Limited Atonement.²⁸

Beza, in fact, seems to have gotten lost in the maze of human logic and reasoning. Building from a Platonic *a la* Augustinian base in order to determine who the elect might be, he incorporates the logic of Aristotle to help make this determination. He employs syllogistic and dialectical reasoning, as well as inductive and deductive logic. He takes Aristotle's "four causes" (material, formal, efficient, and final) and creates sub-causes to keep God from being the author of evil.²⁹

Beza realizes he not only is in danger of making God the author of evil, but his supralapsarian approach (people are damned before they are created) presents a potentially repugnant concept of the Creator. So he works hard to make man the efficient cause of sin, while God is the deficient cause (permissive will). He works deductively, starting with the attributes of God (He is merciful and just) and extrapolates from there, all leading to the ultimate glory of God. The glory of God means the

²⁸ Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1969), 210-14.

²⁹ See Walter Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche 25 (Lemgo, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins GmbH Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1967), for a full discussion of Beza dependency on Aristotelian logic along with his own developments in addition to the "four causes": 61-68, 159-66. There were *causa prima* and *causa secunda*; direct causes and indirect (three types) causes; *causa efficiens* and *causa deficiens* (*permissio volens*, permissive will) and *causa finalis*.

open, public, manifestation of His attributes. If His justice is going to be manifested, God must do something just which can be observed. So He chooses to justly condemn the reprobate.³⁰

No question that God's justice demands judgment of sin and condemnation of unbelievers. The rub comes in His decree to condemn the reprobate before He creates them. Beza realizes this decree before creation presents an image-of-God problem, but it is a dilemma from which he could not extricate himself. Nor could his followers, like William Perkins. Arminius would try, but he simply swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme.

C. WILLIAM PERKINS

Perkins defended his theology in a book called *A Golden Chain*. Since he was trained at the Geneva Academy under Beza, the subtitle of his book should come as no surprise: "*A GOLDEN CHAIN: or, THE DESCRIPTION OF THEOLOGIE: Damnation, according to Gods word. A view whereof is to be seene in the Table annexed Hereunto is adioyned the order which M. Theodore Beza used in comforting afflicted consciences.*" Like the theology of his predecessor, the most obvious feature of *A Golden Chain* is the centrality of the doctrine of double predestination.³¹

Perkins defines predestination as "that by the which he hath ordained all men to a certaine and everlasting estate: that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for his owne glory."³² Perkins quotes Augustine no less than 588 times with Chrysostom coming in second with 129 references.³³ He completely mistranslates Rom 9:22 when he says, "Moreover, every man (as Paul *avereth*) is unto God, as a lumpe of claye in the potters hand: and therefore God according to his supreme authoritie 'doth make vessels of wrath...."³⁴

³⁰ Kickel rightly observes, "*dass das ganze System Bezas hinfällig ware, wenn zugegeben werden müsste, dass Gott seine Vorsätze ändern kann,*" 166. He argues that the immutability of God precludes His changing what He has decreed.

³¹ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 55.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁴ *Works*, 11. 694.

Perkins writes about four degrees of God's love: effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification.³⁵ Notice how conveniently he slips "sanctification" into the mix, when Rom 8:30 quite obviously omits sanctification in its "golden chain." It is, in fact, conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps God does not guarantee progressive sanctification as the champions of an amillennial interpretation of Matt 24:13 presume. As Kendall observes, "The horror of horrors for a disciple of Perkins is the thought that he could be a reprobate."³⁶

The reprobate man is doomed to eternal condemnation before he is even born, no matter what he does in his lifetime. It does him no good to make his calling and election sure; his lot is unalterably fixed and decreed by God, whose right it is to take the lump of clay from which man is to be created and "make him a vessel of dishonor." All such interpretations of Rom 9:22 fail to observe that the verb they keep translating as active (*katērtismena*) is not active at all, but rather a middle/passive participle. God does not act upon these vessels in any way, shape, or form. By contrast God does act upon the vessels of mercy in the very next verse; He prepares these for glory.

D. JACOB ARMINIUS (D. 1609)

Although Arminius studied under Theodore Beza and was an admirer of William Perkins, it is surmised that he never agreed with their understanding of the decrees of God or their resulting double predestination. Arminius's contention was that God only predestines believers. Arminius saw four decrees:

- 1) God appointed Jesus Christ to be our Mediator and Redeemer;
- 2) God decreed to receive into favor those who repent and believe and leave in sin all unbelievers;
- 3) God decreed to administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner all means which were necessary for repentance and faith;
- 4) God decreed to save those who He knew from all eternity would believe and persevere and to damn those He likewise knew who would not believe and persevere.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 78.

³⁶ Kendal, 67.

³⁷ Jacobus Arminius, *Works of Arminius*, I:589f.

Arminius remains consistent in his thesis that “election of grace is only of believers,”³⁸ for predestination “is the decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ, by which He determined within Himself from all eternity to justify believers.”³⁹ If a person believed, he was elect; if he did not believe, he was not elect. From the above it can be seen that both the mainline Reformers and Arminius made perseverance a requirement for election. The difference was that the Calvinists said lack of perseverance proved the professing Christian never truly had everlasting life in the first place, even if he did have temporary faith. Arminius said that a lack of perseverance could cause one to lose everlasting life. In either case, the one who did not persevere until the end (Matt 24:13) was not elect.

The position taken by Arminius might be argued to be more biblical in that one cannot find any biblical support for the use of the word “predestination” in connection with unbelievers. However, his understanding of faith differs very little from that of the Calvinists.⁴⁰

E. THE SYNOD OF DORT (1618-1619)

The year after Arminius died his followers preserved his teachings in the Remonstrance of 1610. His five points were:

- 1) God has decreed Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of men and decreed to save all who believe on Him;
- 2) Christ died for all but only believers enjoy forgiveness of sins;
- 3) Man must be regenerated by the Spirit;
- 4) Grace is not irresistible;
- 5) Perseverance is granted through the assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit, but whether one can fall away from life in Christ is left open.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., III:583.

³⁹ Ibid., II:392.

⁴⁰ See Kendal, 141-150, for a lengthy discussion of this claim.

⁴¹ The full text of the Five Articles of the Remonstrants (also the Canons of Dort) are given in Peter Y. DeJong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in commencement of the great Synod of Dort, 1618-19* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 207ff.

In November of 1618 the Synod of Dort began the first of 163 sessions, which resulted in what is known as the Five Points of Calvinism. Though not in the order popularly referenced under the acronym TULIP, here is the Synod's response to the Remonstrance:

- 1) God's eternal decree of predestination is the cause of election and reprobation, and that this decree is not based upon foreseen faith;
- 2) Christ died for the elect only;
- 3) Men by nature are unable to seek God apart from the Spirit;
- 4) Grace is irresistible;⁴²
- 5) The elect will surely persevere in faith to the end.⁴³

Though the discussion between the Arminians and the Calvinists will probably continue unabated until Jesus comes, the point at issue here is double predestination and its perseverance in the annals of church history, especially in Western Christianity. The supralapsarian position of Beza (God decreed double predestination before the creation and fall of man) certainly was maintained by the Synod of Dort.

F. THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLIES (1643-49)

The primary focus here was not soteriological but ecclesiastical. Nevertheless, there was quite a discussion over the order of the decrees and universal versus limited atonement. Limited atonement won the day, and the wording regarding the decrees was such that either a supra- or infralapsarian could agree.⁴⁴

Regarding double predestination, their *Confession of Faith* (III. iii, 9) says some are "predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death." Those who are not elected to eternal life

⁴² It is interesting that modern day exponents of these five points explain irresistible grace as an extension of the efficacious call of God: "In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation [David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975), 18]. This was not at all the meaning Augustine meant for the phrase. It referred to the gift of perseverance.

⁴³ DeJong, 229-62.

⁴⁴ B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (1931), 56.

were passed by and ordained to dishonor and wrath to the praise of God's glorious justice. The number of both the elect and the reprobate "is so certain, and definite, that it cannot be either increased, or diminished."

G. SUMMARY

From the foregoing we can see that the Reformers capitalized on both revelation and reason. Following the lead of Augustine, they combined the revelation of Scripture with the reason of the Greek philosophers, namely Plato and Aristotle. As Alister McGrath notes, "Theology was understood to be grounded upon Aristotelian philosophy, and particularly Aristotelian insights into the nature of method; later Reformed writers are better described as philosophical, rather than biblical, theologians."⁴⁵ In search of Augustine's elect, the Reformers refined the doctrine of double predestination with the syllogistic reasoning and causality of Aristotle. In this quest they have obviated any possibility of assurance of salvation before physical death, since one must persevere in the faith until the end of his life to either find out (Calvinism) or determine (Arminianism) whether he is elect or not. But what are some of the other effects of Athens on Western Christianity?

VIII. SUMMARY

The purpose of this study has been to demonstrate some of the influence of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle on the landscape of Western Christianity. The influence of Plato came into the church primarily through Augustine. As he was deemed to be the greatest of the church fathers from the Carolignian Renaissance onward, the Reformers and their disciples leaned heavily upon him and his theology of the elect. Augustine's theology of the elect was an amalgam of his background in Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism with Christianity.

Augustine's theology of the elect was traced under the subject of Double Predestination through the teachings of Calvin, Beza, Perkins, and the Westminster divines. Some attention to Aristotle and his principles of logic was given as his philosophy was imbibed by Thomas Aquinas and Theodore Beza. The resulting introspection (contemplation) to determine if one were elect or not helped foster the detachment of prac-

⁴⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1997), 74.

ting Christians from involvement in helping to cure the ills of this world. The unbiblical emphasis in the West on getting souls to heaven as the end-all of life has caused a de-emphasis on discipleship and any concern for the underprivileged of this world.

Of course, the Bible does speak of the “salvation of the soul” (1 Pet 1:9) as the end (goal) of our faith. But this salvation is not the return of the soul to heaven in the sense that Plato, Mani, Plotinus, and Porphyry espoused. That “salvation of the soul” (1 Pet 1:9) would be more properly identified with the salvation set forth by Jesus in Matt 16:24-27, a salvation of one’s *life* (= time on earth—a common use of *psyche* in the NT, the word translated “soul” in 1 Pet 1:9) for both time and eternity (as revealed by the rewards rendered by the Lord when He returns in Matt 16:27). But that is another study.