

Saint Augustine's Doctrine on Grace (2)

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Redemption

Redemption is intimately connected in Augustine with his doctrine on original sin: because of man's fall, redemption was necessary. Augustine tackled the problem of redemption from a Christological and an anthropological point of view; with regard to the former he considered Christ as our redeemer and our mediator; with regard to the latter, which is what interests us here, he considered redeemed man with reference to his discussions with the Pelagians, who held that redemption was simply a process from good to better, and not from a state of evil to a state of goodness. The Pelagians spoke of redemption in the same way they spoke of the Baptism of infants: they admitted redemption and they admitted the Baptism of infants saying that both were necessary, but according to Augustine they were equivocating for they held that infants are baptised to obtain spiritual regeneration and so enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and through redemption man is elevated to a higher state. There is nothing wrong, in these statements, what is wrong is what the Pelagians deny, i.e. that Baptism frees infants from the hereditary sin and that redemption is a liberation from evil.

To refute the Pelagians, Augustine, as usual, takes his cue from the Scriptures: and continually stresses two aspects of redemption, a positive aspect, i.e. promotion to goodness, and a negative aspect i.e. liberation from sin. The Scriptures continually stress the fact that Christ saved and redeemed us from sin and death, liberated us from the slavery of the devil and enlightened the darkness in which we were walking on account of sin, because the Scriptures speak of Christ (i) as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, (ii) as the doctor who heals us from all our infirmities, (iii) as the Son of Man searching for those who had perished and calling not the just but sinners. He was called Jesus because he came into the world to save his people from their sins (Mt I, 21), and he died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15,3).

Because of his controversy with the Pelagians, Augustine insists more on the negative aspect of redemption (liberation from sin), although he does not lay aside

the positive aspect (man's divinisation or justification). Redemption brought reconciliation with God and Augustine develops this idea with reference to 2 Cor 5, 18-20: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."⁵⁸ And with reference to Rom 5, 10-11: "For, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."⁵⁹ If Christ reconciled us, says Augustine, then we must have been separated from God. The reference to Adam's sin in Augustine's argument is based on the fact that St Paul in Romans immediately after mentioning reconciliation through Christ, speaks of humanity's solidarity with Adam.

Once sin separated us from God, redemption was necessary.

i. *Christ is really our Redeemer, our unique Redeemer*; he became man for no other reason than to give us his most merciful grace.⁶⁰ Augustine often stressed this fact in his sermons v.g. "If man had not fallen into sin, the Son of man would not have come into the world"⁶¹; and again: "Why did Christ come into the world? To save sinners: there is no other reason for his coming into the world."⁶² Once this is true, those who do not need redemption, cannot belong to Christ.⁶³ If, as the Pelagians say, infants do not need redemption, they do not belong to Christ.

ii. Because of redemption, *there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus* (I Tim 2,5) for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4,12); outside the fellowship of Christ (*societas Christi*) there can be no salvation, for every person born in this world is

58. 2 Cor 5,18-20

59. Rom 9, 10-11

60. Non aliam ob causam nisi ut hac dispensatione misericordiosissimae gratiae (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,26,39)

61. Si homo non perisset. Filius hominis non venisset (*Sermo* 174,2)

62. Quare venit in mundum? Peccatores salvos facere. Alia causa non fuit quare venisset in mundum (*Sermo* 174,8)

63. Adistam Christi dispensationem pertinere non possint, qui vita soluti redemptione non indigent (*ibid*)

damned, and no person is free from damnation unless he is born again.⁶⁴ Because of our solidarity with Adam, all men are born in sin and therefore condemned, and therefore humanity, before being redeemed, was a mass of perdition (*massa perditionis*), a mass of sin (*massa peccati*).

Our redemption was not the good example Christ gave us so that we might lead a better life in contrast to the bad example given us by Adam – for Augustine this was the *horrendum virus* of the Pelagian heresy. Augustine does not deny Christ's good example – Christ is highest exemplar of the spiritual life – but insists that redemption is not just imitating Christ's good example, for redemption is much more than that, as Christ redeemed us through his death on the Cross, and sanctified us by giving us his Holy Spirit; the Pelagian doctrine, according to Augustine, is a subversion of the Christian faith, for if redemption and, consequently, sanctification, were the result of the imitation of Christ's example any just man could be a redeemed but only Christ is just and also justifies us⁶⁵ for Christ justified us not through good example, but by the hidden grace of his Spirit which he mysteriously gives both to the faithful and to infants.⁶⁶

Augustine fully develops his thesis that we are redeemed and sanctified by Christ's sacrifice on the cross in the *Confessions*, in *De Trinitate* and in *The City of God*, the city redeemed (*redempta civitas*). In *The City of God* Augustine shows that our justification through the cross of Christ is based on the mediation of Christ, the God man, and leads to our union with God in the Spirit, having received the remission of our sins.

In *De Trinitate* Augustine stresses God's love for us, his great love for us in spite of our condition of sinful beings,⁶⁷ a love which led him to the sacrifice of the cross, a true sacrifice, freely accepted and most perfect. This idea is also found in the *Confessions* where Augustine, speaking to the Father about Christ, says "He was for us both a victor and a victim; a victor because he was a victim; he was for us both a priest and a sacrifice, a priest because he was a sacrifice; changing our condition of servants to that of children, begotten from you and serving us."⁶⁸

64. *Omnis generatus damnatus; nemo liberatus, nisi regeneratus* (*Sermo* 294,16)

65. *Iustus et iustificans nemo nisi christus* (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,14,18)

66. *Sui Spiritus occultissiman gratiam (quam) ... fidelibus ... latenter ... infundit et parvulis (ibis)*

67. *Quantum nos dilexerit Deus et quales dilexerit*

68. *Pro nobis tibi victor et victima et ideo victor quia victima; pro nobis tibi sacerdos et sacrificum, et ideo sacerdos quia sacrificium, faciens tibi nos de servis filios, de te nascendo, nobis serviendo* (*Confessiones* 10,43,69)

Briefly, we are reconciled to God through the one grace of our very merciful Redeemer, through the one sacrifice of our very true priest,⁶⁹ a truth which in no way lessens the value of Christ's example for us, a truth which the Pelagians admitted, while excluding another great truth: Christ's death to redeem us from sin.

Christ died for all men, his death was the price of our ransom from sin. Augustine bases his arguments on the universality of redemption not only on this truth but also on the fact that our Redeemer's name was Jesus, so called because he came into the world to save his people from their sins (Mt 1, 21), and on the fact that at the end of time Jesus will judge all men. From these three premises Augustine arrives at these three conclusions: all died, all needed a redeemer, and all have been redeemed for Christ has died for all men, even infants. Because Christ died for all, then all were dead, dead through sin, even infants; and as regards infants the only sin from which they had to be redeemed was original sin. Augustine based his arguments on 2 Cor 5,15 "Christ died for all", which he quoted several times.

If Christ died for all, he died also for infants, and therefore infants must have been born in sin. Julian seems to have admitted that Christ had also died for infants, and so was faced with a dilemma: if Christ died also for infants, they are born in sin; if infants are not born in sin, as the Pelagians held, then Christ did not die for them.

The Baptism of infants

The Baptism of infants, during the Pelagian controversy, was intimately connected with the problem of redemption; although Augustine had already discussed this theme during his controversy with the Donatists, but, in this case, with reference to Church membership. If we consult the various writings where Augustine speaks of the Baptism of infants, we will notice that there was development in his ideas. The works in which Augustine discussed the problem are the following (listed in chronological order):

69. Per unam gratiam misericordiosissimi Salvatoris, per unam victimam verissimi sacerdotis (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,26,56)

i. *De quantitate animae* (year 387–388): in this work he considers the problem as a very difficult one, very obscure, leaving for a later time a deeper study of it, stating only that Baptism must be helpful to infants, otherwise the Church would not baptise them.

ii. In *De libero arbitrio*, book III (year 395) Augustine asks what benefit do infants obtain from Baptism.⁷⁰ In this treatise, Augustine mentions a specific difficulty: “What use is Baptism to infants who die before having committed one personal sin?” Trying to find an answer to this question he hints at the idea that infants are baptised in the faith of others, an idea which he fully developed in his controversy with the Pelagians.

iii. In the *Confessions* book I (year 391) Augustine complains because he received Baptism when growing-up: “How much better it would have been for me if I had been cured earlier ... and having received the salvation of my soul, it would have been fully safeguarded under your protection.”⁷¹ Here Augustine is insisting on the need of Baptism for the remission of sins (*in remissione peccatorum*); he was actually speaking of the remission of personal sins, but the principles he enunciates are general principles, and he insists on the need of Baptism when one is still young (*ut cito sanarer*).

iv. *De baptismo* (year 400): in this work Augustine develops the theology of Baptism against the Donatists who required the sanctity of the minister for the validity of Baptism. With reference to the Baptism of infants Augustine insists on three points: the Church's custom of baptising infants, a universal custom, and therefore, according to Augustine, of apostolic origin; the efficacy of the sacrament even if there is no personal participation of the subject in the liturgical action; the Baptism of blood is a substitute to the Baptism of water.

v. *Epist.* 98 (year 405–410): in this letter Augustine shows in a very clear manner the connection between infant baptism and original sin by stating (a) that Baptism removes what the infant inherited from Adam (*ex Adam traxit*); (b) the infant inherits guilt from Adam because of his solidarity with and in the person from whom he

70. *Baptismum Christi quid parvulis prodest?*

71. *Quando melius si cito sanarer ... ut recepta salus animae meae tuta esset tutela tui*

inherited sin,⁷² (c) Baptism is a spiritual rebirth by means of which the Holy Spirit takes away guilt (*reatus*), reconciling human nature with God; (d) rebirth is in the one Christ, as natural birth is the one Adam: “reborn in the one Christ he was born from one Adam”;⁷³ (e) the Church herself presents infants for Baptism: the whole fellowship of the saints and the faithful presents infants.⁷⁴ It is Mother Church who gives rebirth to all the faithful: “All this Mother Church does for she fully gives birth to all and to each single one of us.”⁷⁵

vi. In *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* (year 412) Augustine fully develops his doctrine on Baptism and original sin.

Both Augustine and the Pelagians admitted the Baptism of infants because such a Baptism is celebrated by the Church universal, and had been so since ancient times, being an ancient and certain rule of faith, an apostolic tradition.⁷⁶ For Augustine Baptism of infants was a pastoral necessity: no one should oppose a long standing Church custom,⁷⁷ he wrote to St. Jerome; Baptism of infants is fundamental (*fundata res est*), and he appeals to the Pelagians to have pity on infants: “May they spare infants ... may they admit that Jesus also belongs to infants.”⁷⁸

Augustine insists on the Baptism of infants not only because it is a Church custom, but primarily because it is necessary for the salvation even of infants.

As we have already seen, according to the Pelagians, infants are not born in sin, and therefore they do not need Baptism to be freed from sin; nevertheless infants should be baptised so that they might enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Pelagians distinguished between eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven: unbaptised children will obtain eternal life but will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

72. Traxit reatum quia unus erat cum illo et in illo a quo traxit (*Epis* 98,1)

73. In uno Christo qui generatus est ab uno Adam (*Ibid.*)

74. Offeruntur quippe parvuli ... ab universa societate sanctorum atque fidelium (*ibid*)

75. Tota hoc ergo Mater ecclesia facit ... quia tota omnes, tota singulos parit (*ibid*)

76. Universa frequentat ecclesia; antiquitus universa ecclesia retinet; ex antiqua et indubitata fidei regula et ab apostolis traditio (*De peccatorum meritis et remissioine et de baptismo, passim*)

77. Contra ecclesiae fundatissimam morem nemo sentiat (*Epist.* 166)

78. Tantum parvuli parcant ... concedat Iesum etiam parvulis esse Jesum (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2,35,60)

Refuting the Pelagians, Augustine begins by stating that the subject being the discussed is not the fact of the Baptism of infants, but the reason why (*non causa quaeritur, sed quare baptizandi sunt infantes*). Augustine rejects the distinction between eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven quoting together two Gospel texts to show that eternal life and the Kingdom of God are one and the same thing: the unbaptised person cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3,5), and without the Eucharist one cannot have eternal life. The identity of eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven is further evidenced from the fact that immediately after their Baptism the newly baptised receive the Eucharist.

But it was not enough for Augustine to prove the identity of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life; he had to show also that Baptism frees from sin and reconciles to God. Actually this is the same problem which has been already discussed with reference to redemption: Christ has redeemed us from sin; Baptism frees us from sin. Augustine proves this from the liturgy of Baptism. Baptism is administered for the remission of sins (*in remissione peccatorum*), and the baptismal rite has a number of exorcisms: this shows that those who receive Baptism are in sin, for otherwise exorcisms would be a lie; the exorcism of a person not subject to the devil but to God (as the Pelagians held infants to be) would be treason (*crimen maiestatis*) "You accuse the Catholic Church of treason" wrote Augustine to Julian of Eclanum⁷⁹ and speaking of the baptismal rite itself (*ipsa forma baptismi*) with its exorcisms, Augustine concludes that, if the Pelagian position is true, then infant Baptism is false and deceitful: "For those who have no sin, Baptism is something false, for Baptism is given for the remission of sin."⁸⁰

Augustine also makes use of an argument *ad hominem* against the Pelagians, who, while holding that infants are innocent of sin, refuse their admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven unless they are baptised. Augustine tells them that they are offending God's justice by doing so: "Why do you take away the Kingdom of Heaven from innocent infants?" he asks them.⁸¹

79. Tu ecclesiam catholicam crimine maiestatis accuses (*Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 6,23)

80. In eis, qui nullum habent peccatum falsus est baptismus qui in remissione traditur peccatorum (*De dono perseverantiae* 13,25)

81. Quare patrimonium regni coelorum abripis innocenti?

The Pelagians admitted a middle place (*locus medius*) for unbaptised infants. This *locus medius* is not the limbo of the Scholastics, who distinguished between the *poena damni* and the *poena sensus*, a distinction unknown at the time of Augustine. For Augustine there is no *locus medius*; for him unbaptised infants are condemned (*damnantur*). Augustine himself felt that this was a very harsh statement and he admits that the problem is a very difficult one and feels that he is unable to find a solution to it for the words of Saint Paul are quite clear: all, even infants, are condemned through Adam (*ex uno in condemnaftionem*), and adds that he is unable to find a good argument for this opinion, not because there is no such argument, but because he cannot find it.⁸²

Augustine tries to mitigate as much as possible his opinion saying that for the unbaptised infants the punishment would be very light, minimal, but nevertheless it would be a punishment;⁸³ and yet he cannot say what sort of punishment it is. To the objection that it would have been better for such infants not to have been born at all, he answered he did not dare say what would have been better for these infants.⁸⁴

We have already mentioned Augustine's statement that every person born in this world is damned, and no person is free from damnation unless he is reborn; Augustine insists on the fact that no one is freed from sin unless he is baptised; all the unbaptised are therefore *damnati*. But what does the term *damnatio* really mean for Augustine? *Damnatio* did not have for Augustine the meaning it has for us. The term in Augustine has the same meaning as the term *damni* has in the phrase of the Scholastics *poena damni*, which they defined an alienation from salvation and eternal life because of sin, a separation from Christ because of a lack of grace, a state of being deprived of God.⁸⁵

Our solidarity with Adam

To complete Augustine's doctrine of original sin, we must explain his opinion on man's solidarity with Adam, in contrast with the Pelagian position. According to Pelagius, quoted by Augustine, "those who are against the transmission of original

82. Non satis invenio drgnam causa, quia noninvenio, non uia non est (*Sermo* 294, 7).

83. Poena erit omnium mitissima, levissima, minima, non tamen nulla.

84. Non audeo dicere quod eis ut nulli essent, quam ibi essent, potius expedire.

85. Alienatio a salute et vita aeterna causa peccati; separatio a Christo quia gratia deest, privatio Dei.

sin (*contra traducem peccati*) try to refute it in this manner: If Adam's sin harms even those who do not sin, then Christ's benefits help even those who do not believe, therefore as Christ's justice does not benefit unbelievers, so Adam's sin does not harm those who do not sin."⁸⁶ In line with this opinion, Pelagius interpreted Saint Paul's statement that "death spread to ALL men because ALL men sinned" (Rom 5,12) by giving to the word ALL the meaning of MANY. "They say", Augustine wrote, "that the term ALL should not be always understood as meaning everyone, without leaving out any body. As one man's trespass led to the condemnation of all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to the justification of all men; but Christ's act of righteousness benefits not all men but only those who wanted to obey him and have been purified by his Baptism and in this way they have been justified."⁸⁷

Augustine refutes this opinion, clarifying the Apostle's words by stressing the following points:

i. unity of humanity on the natural level finds its expression and its confirmation on the supernatural level, in the mystery of salvation;

ii. the whole history of salvation can be summarized in Adam and Christ – *unus et unus* – all die in Adam (in Adam *omnes moriuntur*) and are thus a mass of damnation (*massa damnata*) while in Christ all are reborn (in Christ *omnes vivificantur*) and become a redeemed, a *massa redempta*.

iii. *Omnes* with reference to Christ cannot be understood as implying that numerically all are saved (from this fact, as we have seen above, Pelagians argued against the universality of original sin), but *omnes* is to be understood numerically with regard to Adam. In other words, Augustine here is distinguishing (although he does not say so explicitly) between universality of number and universality of cause, giving various examples: all die in Adam for all are generated from Adam; all have been redeemed by Christ but not all are saved as those who refuse salvation cannot be saved. To clarify this statement Augustine says: "Just as we correctly say that a

86. De peccatorum meritis et remissione 3,2,2

87 De natura et gratia 41,48

teacher in a city has been the teacher of all those living in the city, although not all the citizens of the city have gone to school, but that no one has received any teaching except those who had been taught by the city's teacher, so no one is justified, unless he has been justified by Christ."⁸⁸

iv. The involvement of all humanity in Adam's sin is an obscure mystery, which can only be understood in the light of Christ's universal redemption.

We have already referred to Augustine's *massa damnata* which has often been used to prove either that Augustine was a predestinationist, or that he invented original sin, and was unconsciously still a Manichee. Actually we should not take the phrase with reference to predestination, but with reference to his other phrase the *massa redempta*. The two phrases recall Augustine's two cities, the City of God and the City of the world.

To be continued

88. *Ibid.*