

Augustinian Understanding of Human Freedom and the Divine Predestination as the Phenomenon of the Medieval Culture*

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Abstract—The author considers the important problem of the Medieval culture relating to the interrelation between human freedom and divine predestination. This theoretical issue is presented throughout the history of Christianity but it was revealed and most actively discussed at the period of Patristics when the Western and the Eastern Church Fathers were elaborating the Christian creed. This paper focuses on the philosophical and theological doctrine of Augustine of Hippo about human's freedom and God's predestination stressing that thereafter the Augustinian viewpoint has been determining the evaluation of Western Christianity. At the same time, it also analyzes Augustine's point of view representing Western Patristics with the corresponding teaching of Eastern Patristics. Special attention is paid to the difference in understanding the role and importance of man in the relationship between personal freedom and the divine predestination.

Keywords—religious philosophy; Christianity; Western and Eastern Patristics; Christian anthropology

I. INTRODUCTION

The Christian theological system was being formed in the era of early Christianity and developed by the Church Fathers, belonging to the Western or Eastern doctrines of Christianity (4th-8th centuries). In the history of philosophy and culture, their works are known as the works of the Western and Eastern (or Greek-Byzantine) Church Fathers. Based on the previous traditions of ancient philosophy, they brought into the spotlight and solved the most urgent issues of the Christian worldview [1]. The most important of these issues is the ratio of freedom of will and its dependence on the divine predestination.

The doctrine of Augustine of Hippo laid the foundations for the Western Patristics tradition concerning free will and the divine predestination. The Western Christian consideration of this important orthodox problem differs

from the Eastern Church Fathers' discourse.

II. FREEDOM, FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND PREDESTINATION OF GOD AS THE TURNING POINT OF THE MEDIEVAL CULTURE

Saint Augustine endeavored to overcome extremes of the eastern religious teaching of Manichaeism that had contended an absolute sinful entity of every human being, and conception of Pelagius and his disciples, existing in direct contradiction to Manichaeism. Pelagius denied the concept of the original sin, advocating that the nature of man hadn't suffered under the original sin's effect to such extent that it could have led to the detriment of the integrated human essence. Free from the impact of the original sin, every individual is able to fight evil in all its forms, having chosen the path of virtue and morality. Pelagius and his followers didn't reject an action of God's grace completely, but it was nearly insignificant in the context of exaggerating the importance of a free will. This point opposed the developing Christian orthodoxy.

Contrary to Manichaeism, Saint Augustine doesn't deny a partial action of free will. Yet, criticizing Pelagius and his disciple, he stands for the idea of a crucial role of God's grace and predestination for person's path to salvation. Man is unable to ascend the acme of own deification lacking the Lord's help. Stressing the great significance of the Divine predestination, Augustine belittles possibilities of a person's will in order to avoid the absolutizing of human freedom. According to the theologian, God had created the *City of Earth* through His providence and then governed it only by the Heavenly will and power. Consequently, in his major work *The City of God* Augustine overemphasized the significance of God's grace which, in turn, enhances an individual's freedom of will on his path to salvation.

To quote Augustine, the essence of a human being as a moral creature embraces not only spiritual immortality but also freedom of will and freedom in general, allowing everyone to make a personal choice. It may be life's journey at the path of good with the spiritual ascension to God for

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one, and as the way of evil, with going away from the Lord for the second. Freedom of will is to cause contradictions in the earthly world, such as righteousness and sinfulness, virtue and vice, a reward for moral life and punishment for harm done. Human freedom involves choosing between two polarities. The Creator, possessing the absolute predestination, had known the first man's selection and his further loss of God's likeness. Yet He had incorporated freedom and a right of individual challenge between good and evil into the crown of His creation. St. Augustine wrote: "It is He who made also man himself upright, with the same freedom of will — an earthly animal, indeed, but fit for heaven if he remained faithful to his Creator, but destined to the misery appropriate to such a nature if he forsook Him. It is He who when He foreknew that man would in his turn sin by abandoning God and breaking His law, did not deprive him of the power of free-will" [2].

Thus the basic principle of Augustine's concept of the understanding of will and freedom is *antinomianism*. According to the theologian, an individual, having been granted free will, acquires the controversial essence that never ceases to grow in his lifetime. From the philosophical point of view, the notion of will has been shown as the most important phenomenon that determines and leads every human being in their personal desire to know God. Nonetheless, acquiring some irrational and negative meaning, the will in itself is able to lay the demonic origin of an individual. It reveals the possibility of will's transition into passionate and sinful willfulness which is completely different from the initial God-given will.

The theologian's understanding of free will achieves a balance in the context of his comprehension of the Christian doctrine about the Divine grace and predestination. Augustine provides an interpretation of the mentioned orthodox conception contending that human behavior appears to be independent of their will. A person can reach true freedom only after receiving God's grace, provided by Him to righteous people.

From the Christian soteriological perspective, salvation is possible only if God and a man are partakers in the development of deification and they are united through faith ascending to the crown and acme of deification, i.e. personal spiritual redemption. However, Augustine emphasizes the Maker's significant role, overarching the individual's intentions and activities on this path. "And evil is removed, not by removing any nature, or part of a nature, which had been introduced by the evil, but by healing and correcting that which had been vitiated and depraved. The will, therefore, is then truly free, when it is not the slave of vices and sins. Such was it given us by God; and this being lost by its own fault, can only be restored by Him who was able at first to give it" [3]. Thus, a person's will is becoming a peculiar mean of God's predestination. According to Augustine's conception, a life of an individual has not to be the subject of a rational explanation and prediction because it depends mostly on God's volition rather than on a person's behavior, will of choice, acts or desires.

The Augustinian's dichotomy when considering freedom and will is implemented to the great extent in his works. The thesis of the freedom of will is being transformed in the antithesis of will's non-freedom and then this logical contradiction is partially resolving in the Augustinian theoretical phenomenon of the *City of God*. It is the transcendental spiritual realm where God's grace, expressing the Divine love, liberates an individual from the very wish to do evil deeds and from the captivity of sin, in which the nature of a human has been imprisoned.

III. NOTIONS OF *SIN* AND *SALVATION* IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTINE

The term "sin" has a peculiar and precise theological meaning. The major significance of "sin" is something that severs a Man from God. Salvation, in its turn, is the total breakdown of the separation between human beings and God due to their Redeemer of Christ. Thus, sin is the antithesis of salvation.

Related ideas are associated with St. Augustine's philosophy, but they are also widely used by the Western Church Fathers. Alisher McGrath wrote in this sense: "For Augustine, human beings sin as a result of some intrinsic disposition towards sin, which he termed "original sin". Individual sinful actions or attitudes were the results of some inbuilt flaw within human nature, which inclined them towards sin. Sinful acts are thus the symptoms of a sinful condition. Salvation, for Augustine, must thus address this sinful disposition" [4].

Augustine of Hippo uses a number of images clarifying the ideas of sin and salvation. One of them is that the notion of sin is to be explored as a disease in which people have no chance to cure themselves. According to Augustine, the gospel and the Christian creed are able to heal humans from sinfulness and as a result, all the people might begin to exceed in their rejecting the natural inclinations towards sin and vice. Christian Church is like "a hospital, in which those who were damaged or wounded by sin could find healing and restoration" [5].

Human freedom is considered to be some kind of possibility of a sin which might be fulfilled in each period of life. However, it is the complete *lack* of *need* to sin that makes the personal way sinless and virtuous and what allows every person being heavenly guided to the City of God.

However, it is the complete *lack* of *need* to sin that makes the personal way sinless and virtuous and what allows every person being heavenly guided to the City of God. St. Augustine wrote in this context: "For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin. But the nature thus constituted, having sinned when it had the ability to do so, it is by a more abundant grace that it is delivered so as to reach that freedom in which it cannot sin" [6].

Consequently, personal freedom in the City of God signifies the very impossibility of committing sin as the

personal will is being kept in pursuance of achievement good, perfection, morality, partial cognition of God and the own *self*. However, all of these high qualities of human nature have been granted by the Creator and depended on His grace during the entire life of an individual.

On one hand, God's presence in human life was substantiated as Divine love and grace manifested towards a man. On the other hand, it was contended that the inherent weakness and servile fate of the human soul, were radically changed as the consequence of the original sin. Thereafter the Augustinian viewpoint will essentially distinguish the Western tradition of philosophy from its Eastern, or Greek-Byzantine, counterpart.

IV. WESTERN PATRISTICS VS EASTERN PATRISTICS: MIDDLE AGES UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION, DIVINE PREDESTINATION, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF A MAN

Let us point out that following the Greek Patristics thought, a human possesses freedom not only because the freedom of will was inherently incorporated in his entity but also because the likeness of God was the original spiritual state of the first Man. There dominated the understanding of a human being as an active and energetic person who is able to transform their lives and reach the high objectives themselves, including even the cherished salvation [7].

In Western Patristics salvation was regarded mostly as a dependency from God's grace, stressing the significance of the Divine predestination in personal preparation for redemption. On the contrary, Eastern Patristics designed the means and ways of individual self-perfection and self-development in the miraculous process of deification, simultaneously succeeding in the achievement of spiritual eternity. The moral catharsis of a person was considered as a part of the universal human nature that makes possible to substantiate both the phenomenon of salvation and issues of Christian gnosis, making them top priority.

Christian epistemology involved the elaboration of certain methods (even practices — for example, in Hesychasm) of knowing God-the Creator that meant the coinciding self-knowing of a human on the way of self-purification and on the rational ascending to God. Personal self-consciousness and extent of cognition of God are rising as high as a human being is elevating on the way of deification and obtaining self-perfection and freedom. Maximus the Confessor stated: "No one can truly bless God without sanctifying first the body with virtues and enlightening the soul with true knowledge" [8].

Following the Eastern Church Fathers' reasoning, God by His absolute freedom determines the freedom of the earthly, mortal world. However, this predetermination doesn't violate the creative self-development of an individual. Salvation in Eastern theology is "deserved", "earned" for leading a moral, spiritual, and religious life. In Western Patristics (such as Augustine's) the approach to salvation is given by God as grace [9].

Eastern Patristics doesn't deny the effect of God's grace. Yet here it stands out as an auxiliary force while achieving

immortality. Predetermination expresses not only the foresight of an individual's fate but also recognizes his role in achieving freedom and restoring the likeness of God.

V. CONCLUSION

However, despite the Eastern Church Fathers' focus on the justification of the harmony of God's grace and human actions, their teachings, just like Western Patristics, absolutize the divine part of that antimony, and at the same time underestimate the humanly part with its spiritual qualities.

Nevertheless, soteriology and the doctrine of freedom of will both in Eastern and Western Patristics are combined by the statement of an individual as an acting object, able to choose a virtuous path at any time of life, thus approaching God. Generally, the Byzantine tradition expresses this idea more clearly than the Western one, where the refrain in favor of justifying the greater power of Divine predestination.

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