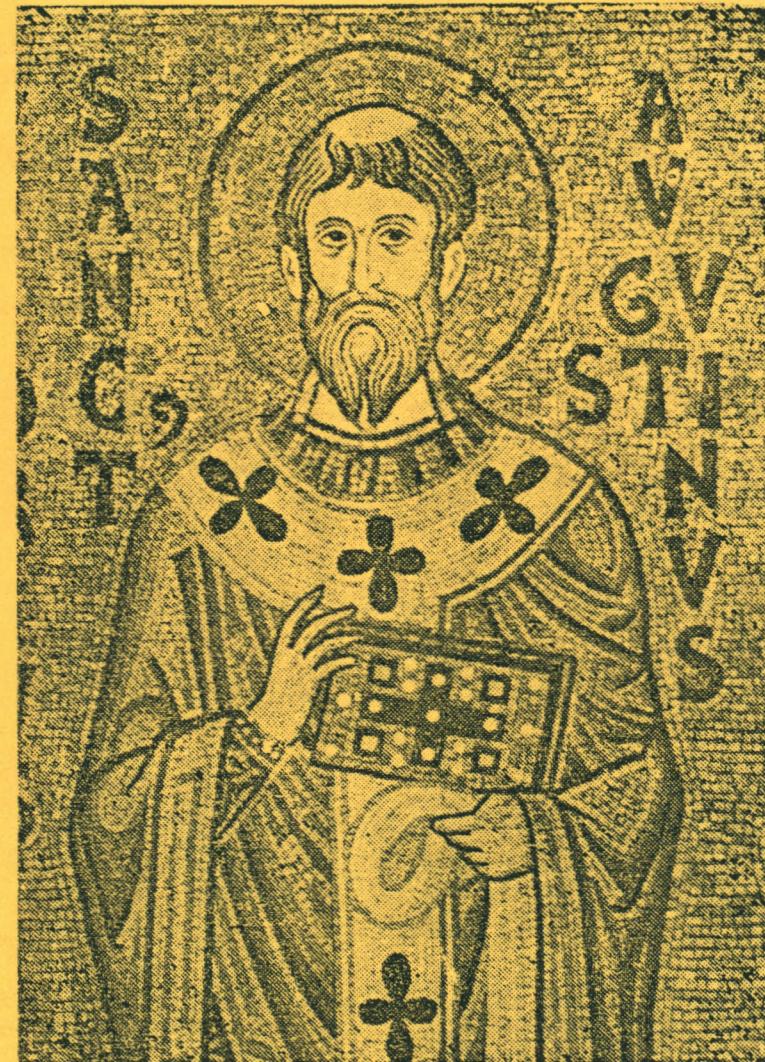


The Place of  
Blessed Augustine  
in the Orthodox Church



BY FR. SERAPHIM ROSE



Blessed Augustine, fresco of Meteora Monastery of Varlaam

## The Place of **BLESSED AUGUSTINE** in the Orthodox Church

This brief study of Blessed Augustine is presented first in book form at the request of a number of Orthodox Christians who said it would form in the Orthodox World (pp. 77 and 80, 1983) and asked it to have a portion for the Orthodox Church of today. It can make no claim to completeness in a study of orthodoxy on the subject being only an ecclilogical brief offering and free to anyone toambil, since the rest of the study is left to the reader. The author is most grateful to the simple Hieromonk Seraphim Rose for his permission to publish this paper.

There is nothing of which the author is more fond than the study of the history of the Orthodox Church in the West, perhaps because he has been born and raised in the Orthodox world, while the history and state of non-Orthodox Christians are so rarely remembered among Orthodox christians. While writing from the Orthodox attitude towards Blessed Augustine, the author has also had to turn to sources from all over the world's academic catalogues and maps to help first of all to set the and secondly, perhaps even more, to clarify again—for his understanding, if necessary—of how the saint died.

It is not long after the publication of the first volume of *Orthodox Christianity in Russia and America* (1980) that the author was invited to speak at the First International Congress of Orthodox Religious Books which took place in Moscow in 1981. There he was a kind of surprise guest, representing Alaska and the Orthodox Brotherhood of Saint Herman of Alaska, the former being the only Orthodox religious books publisher in North America.



SAINT HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD  
PLATINA, CALIFORNIA 1983

Copyright 1983  
by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

## Preface

This little study of Blessed Augustine is presented here in book form at the request of a number of Orthodox Christians who read it in its original form in *The Orthodox Word* (nos. 79 and 80, 1978) and found it to have a message for the Orthodox Christians of today. It can make no claim to completeness as a study of the theology of Blessed Augustine; only one theological issue (grace and free will) is treated here in detail, while the rest of the study is chiefly historical. If it has any value, it is in revealing the attitude of the Orthodox Church to Blessed Augustine over the centuries; and in trying to define his place in the Orthodox Church, we have perhaps thrown some light on the problem of being Orthodox in our contemporary world, where the feeling and savor of true Orthodox Christianity are so rarely encountered among Orthodox theologians. While setting forth the Orthodox attitude towards Blessed Augustine, the author has also had in mind to remove him as a "scapegoat" for today's academic theologians and thus to help free us all to see his and our own weaknesses in a little clearer light—for his weaknesses, to a surprising degree, are indeed close to our own.

These weaknesses of ours were vividly brought out for the author not long after the publication of the original study, when he met a Russian, a recent emigrant from the Soviet Union, who had become converted to Orthodoxy in Russia but still understood much of it in terms of the Eastern religious views which he had long held. For him Blessed Augustine also was a kind of scapegoat; he was accused of mistranslating and misunderstanding Hebrew terms, of teaching wrongly about "original sin," etc. Well, yes, one cannot deny that Blessed Augustine applied his over-logicalness to this doctrine also and taught a distorted view of the Orthodox doctrine of ancestral sin—a view, once more, not so much "un-Orthodox" as narrow and incomplete. Augustine virtually denied that man has *any* goodness or freedom in himself, and he thought that each man is responsible for the *guilt* of Adam's

sin in addition to sharing its consequences; Orthodox theology sees these views as one-sided exaggerations of the true Christian teaching.

However, the deficiencies of Augustine's doctrine were made by this Russian emigrant into an excuse for setting forth a most un-Orthodox teaching of man's total freedom from ancestral sin. Some one-sided criticisms of Augustine's teaching on original sin even among more Orthodox thinkers have led to similar exaggerations, resulting in unnecessary confusions among Orthodox believers: some writers are so much "against" Augustine that they leave the impression that Pelagius was perhaps, after all, an Orthodox teacher (despite the Church's condemnation of him); others delight in shocking readers by declaring that the doctrine of original sin is a "heresy."

Such over-reactions to the exaggerations of Augustine are worse than the errors they think to correct. In such cases Blessed Augustine becomes, not merely a "scapegoat" on which one loads all possible theological errors, justly or unjustly, but something even more dangerous: an excuse for an elitist philosophy of the superiority of "Eastern wisdom" over everything "Western." According to this philosophy, not only Augustine himself, but also everyone under any kind of "Western influence," including many of the eminent Orthodox theologians of recent centuries, does not "really understand" Orthodox doctrine and must be taught by the present-day exponents of the "patristic revival." Bishop Theophan the Recluse, the great 19th-century Russian Father, is often especially singled out for abuse in this regard: because he used some expressions borrowed from the West, and even translated some Western books (even while changing them to remove all un-Orthodox ideas) since he saw that the spiritually impoverished Orthodox people cou'd benefit from such books (in this he was only following the earlier example of St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain)—our present-day "elitists" try to discredit him by smearing him with the name of "scholastic." The further implication of these criticisms is clear: if such great Orthodox teachers as Blessed Augustine and Bishop Theophan cannot be trusted, then how much less can the rest of us ordinary Orthodox Christians understand the complexities of Orthodox doctrine? The "true doctrine" of the Church must be so subtle that it can "really" be understood only by the few who have theological degrees from the modernist Orthodox academies where the "patristic revival" is in full bloom, or are otherwise certified as "genuinely patristic" thinkers.

Yet, a strange self-contradiction besets this "patristic elite": their language, their tone, their whole approach to such questions—are so very *Western* (sometimes even "jesuitical") that one is astonished at their blindness in trying to criticize what is obviously so much a part of themselves.

The "Western" approach to theology, the over-logicalness from which, yes, Blessed Augustine (but not Bishop Theophan) did suffer, the over-reliance on the deductions of our fallible mind—is so much a part of every man living today that it is simply foolishness to pretend that it is a problem of *someone else* and not of ourselves first and foremost. If only we all had even a part of that deep and true *Orthodoxy of the heart* (to borrow an expression of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk) which Blessed Augustine and Bishop Theophan both possessed to a superlative degree, we would be much less inclined to exaggerate their errors and faults, real or imagined.

Let the correctors of Augustine's teaching continue their work if they will; but let them do it with more charity, more compassion, more *Orthodoxy*, more understanding of the fact that Blessed Augustine is in the same heaven towards which we all are striving, unless we wish to deny the Orthodoxy of all those Fathers who regarded him as an Orthodox Saint, from the early Fathers of Gaul through Sts. Photius of Constantinople, Mark of Ephesus, Demetrius of Rostov, to our recent and present teachers of Orthodoxy, headed by Archbishop John Maximovitch. At the least, it is impolite and presumptuous to speak disrespectfully of a Father whom the Church and her Fathers have loved and glorified. Our "correctness"—even if it is really as "correct" as we may think it is—can be no excuse for such disrespect. Those Orthodox Christians who even now continue to express their understanding of grace and ancestral sin in a language influenced by Blessed Augustine are not deprived of the Church's grace; let those who are more "correct" than they in their understanding fear to lose this grace through pride.

Since the original publication of this study there has been a Roman Catholic response to it: we have been accused of trying to "steal" Blessed Augustine from the Latins! No: Blessed Augustine has always belonged to the Orthodox Church, which alone has properly evaluated both his errors and his greatness. Let Roman Catholics think what they will of him, but we have only tried to point out the place he has always held in the Orthodox Church and in the hearts of Orthodox believers.

By the prayers of the holy Hierarch Augustine and of all Thy Saints, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us! Amen.

the words of St. Photius of Constantinople quoted.  
Hieromonk Seraphim  
Pascha, 1980

## CONTENTS

Preface	V
Introduction	1
A Brief Life of Blessed Augustine of Hippo	4
The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church	7
The Controversy over Grace and free Will	9
The Doctrine of Predestination	15
Opinions in Fifth-century Gaul	20
Sixth-century Opinion, East and West	25
The Ninth Century, St. Photius the Great	27
Later Centuries: St. Mark of Ephesus	29
Opinion of Blessed Augustine in Modern Times	32
A Note on the Contemporary Detractors of Blessed Augustine	37
Appendix	42

## INTRODUCTION

The late Hieromonk Seraphim was a man of surpassing gentleness and extremely retiring disposition. Although an excellent public speaker and ardent supporter and inspirer of missionary activity, he preferred, in true monastic spirit, the calm silence of his small forest cell on a mountain in northern California. There, working only by candlelight on an old, battered typewriter, he translated and produced some of the most important Orthodox writings available in the English language. He had acquired the spirit of otherworldliness to such an extent that I more than once heard him say, when asked to speak at some important gathering: "This really is not for me." Nonetheless, he of course always forced himself to "speak a word," and his "word" touched hearts and changed lives.

In his personal life he especially shrank from any kind of controversy or disturbance. Whenever passions were likely to be aroused, he wished to be far away. It is ironic, therefore, that this peaceful monk more than once found it necessary to speak out (with the printed word) in defense of an "underdog." An "underdog" was anything or anyone in Church life that he believed was being treated unfairly, uncharitably, arrogantly, or dishonestly, or made to serve the interest of petty politics.

I remember well that summer day in 1978 when Fr. Seraphim asked me to listen as he read aloud a lengthy essay he was preparing on the subject of Blessed Augustine. Comments about this particular Church Father had been appearing in some publications, the tone of which were often passionately immoderate. No one in the Church had ever before spoken of a Holy Father in this way. It alarmed Fr. Seraphim to see such a worldly and irreverent tone; he saw this as a sign of deep immaturity in Church life today: "We, the last Christians, are not worthy of the inheritance which they (the Holy Fathers) have left us;...we quote the great Fathers but we do not have their spirit ourselves." He asked for a spirit of humility, lovingness, and forgiveness in our approach to the Fathers of the Church, rather than "using" them in a hard and cold manner that showed disrespect and lack of understanding. "Let the test of our continuity with the unbroken Christian tradition of the past be, not only our attempt to be precise in doctrine, but also our *love* for the men who have handed it down to us." In the words of St. Photius of Constantinople, which Fr. Seraphim quoted, we must reject the errors but "embrace the men." Awareness of this principle must pervade all discussions about the Fathers of the Church.

"The basic question," Fr. Seraphim said to me when he was studying Blessed Augustine, "is, what should be the *Orthodox* approach to controversies?"—for controversies do occur in Church life from time to time, allowed by God for our growth and understanding. As the reader will see for himself. Fr. Seraphim found the answer to this question, and gave it clearly in the balanced and, above all, fair study of Blessed Augustine which follows. The Saint's strengths and weaknesses are examined, the opinions of other Holy Fathers on Augustine are consulted and given, and, above all, the spirit of the man—whom Fr. Seraphim regarded as a true "Father of Orthodox piety...who had a single deeply Christian heart and soul"—is clearly portrayed, perhaps for the first time in the English language.

Fr. Seraphim titled this essay, "The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church." He called it this because there are those today who wish to exclude Augustine altogether from the company of Church Fathers—a novel development, to say the least! Some writers boldly—and without justification (other than their own opinion)—call him a "heretic" and unfairly ascribe to him almost every subsequent error of Latin and Protestant Christendom. Fr. Seraphim, on the other hand, wanted nothing more than to give a sense of Orthodox perspective to this issue, explaining to those who seemed not to know that Blessed Augustine does indeed have a proper "place" in the Church—not, to be sure, among the great Fathers, but nonetheless a position of well-deserved recognition by other Holy Fathers.

In 1980, Fr. Seraphim wrote, in a memorial article about one of his own spiritual teachers, Ivan Kontzevitch, that "the poverty of the witness of true Christianity increases, the world grows darker, impiety at times already triumphs openly. Good impulses of the soul wither, sometimes without even being born." But in Blessed Augustine one finds an Orthodox Father who is "kin to all those who are clinging to true Christianity, Holy Orthodoxy, in our own days."

So important is this essay on Blessed Augustine that, when his spiritual father, Abbot Herman, visited Mount Athos, he was thanked by the Athonite monks for having published Fr. Seraphim's work. They were anxious that Orthodox Christians today know that Augustine has an important place in Orthodox theology.

Blessed Augustine was born in Numidia in northern Africa in 354 AD. His mother, St. Monica, tried to instill in him a love of virtue, but he was insensible to all but his own desires. As an adult he fell into the error of Manicheism but was later converted to Orthodoxy by another Holy Father, St. Ambrose of Milan. Ordained to the priesthood, he was consecrated

Bishop of Hippo in 395. For thirty-five years he ruled this African diocese wisely, participating in the great questions of his time and attending the councils of African hierarchs. He wrote at least 1,000 books, of which the *Confessions* and *The City of God* are justly renowned and still read today.

Fr. Seraphim often recommended the *Confessions* to his spiritual children—especially for Lenten reading—and himself reread the book at least once a year. He once told me that he had wept when he first read it because he was so inspired by the deep compunction and purity of Augustine's heart. Long before the recent criticisms of Augustine, Fr. Seraphim felt that the *Confessions* could speak to contemporary Orthodox Christians and help to "soften their hearts" grown cold with pride and passion. As few others had done, Augustine spoke feelingly of the soul's need to free itself from the enticements of the world before it could hope to grasp the things of the spirit. This was precisely Fr. Seraphim's own constant message to others. He understood it because he had himself experienced it through his much-suffering monastic labors.

This study of Blessed Augustine's "place" in Orthodoxy is part of Fr. Seraphim's legacy to Orthodox Christians today—a legacy that includes many, many books and articles over the years, and many other books and translations yet to be published. But more than anything else, this essay embodies the principle of respect for that which is holy—a principle rapidly disappearing from 20th century Orthodoxy. May the publication of this essay edify and instruct many thousands of good-hearted, searching people who understand something of the path which Blessed Augustine travelled, and who have heard his words and been changed:

"Narrow is the mansion of my soul; enlarge Thou it, that Thou mayest enter in...for without Thee what am I to myself except a guide to my own downfall?"

Fr. Alexey Young  
Repose of St. Sergius of Radonezh  
September 25/October 8, 1982

## A Brief Life of Blessed Augustine of Hippo 354 — 430 A.D.

The tremendously instructive and fruitful life of this Western Father of the Church began on November 13, 354, in a small town of Numidia (now Algeria) in northern Africa. His father, Patrick, did not become a Christian until the end of his life, but his mother, St. Monica, blessed her son with the sign of the Cross at his birth and for many years wept and prayed faithfully for his conversion to Christ.

As a youth, Augustine fell into a deeply sinful way of life, patterned after the pagan sensuality of his day. At the age of only 17 he took a concubine and fathered a son. He also possessed a brilliant mind and was easily able to master the pagan learning of his time. At 19 he discovered Cicero and at once conceived an intense longing for truth. But he was also ambitious, and sought to make a name for himself in the academic world. He became a professor of rhetoric in his home town, then moved on to Carthage, and finally took a position in Rome, the capital of the Western empire.

During his time in Carthage Augustine joined the heretical sect of Manichees (followers of the Babylonian, Mani, who had founded a Gnostic-type of dual religion), bringing a number of his friends with him into this sect. The Manichees led him to despise the Christian Scriptures and regard them as childish fables not to be taken seriously. When he assumed his professorship in Rome, however, he began to see through the Manichees, whose immorality exceeded even his own. He became disillusioned and withdrew from the sect. He began to feel that his search for truth would fail when he went to Milan in 384 to seek the position of provincial governor. He was now ready for God to act upon him. The Bishop of Milan at that time was the great Holy Father, St. Ambrose. He had once been the governor of northern Italy and was chosen Bishop by popular acclamation. His holy death in 397 produced such an out-pouring of faith that five bishops were not enough to baptize the number of converts that appeared the next day desiring the waters of life.

St. Ambrose was a gifte orator and gave homilies regularly in the cathedral. By God's providence Augustine was present during a whole series of homilies on the subject of Holy Scripture; this prompted him to seriously investigate Christianity—a true answer to his mother's prayers. This, and his almost simultaneous discovery of Plato's exalted *Dialogues*, inspired him to begin living a celibate life. Finally he came to St. Ambrose for Baptism, together with his son, on Great Saturday of the year 387. In the forty-three years that remained to him, he labored diligently in the Lord's vineyard and also saw to the careful tending of his own soul. The story of his conversion, movingly told in the *Confessions* (written ten years after his Baptism) is considered a "masterpiece of introspective autobiography, expressed in the form of a long prayer to God...exquisitely told." (Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*; Penguin Books, 1967; p. 219)

In 388, Augustine returned to Africa where he was soon ordained a priest by popular demand, and then, in 395, consecrated bishop. All of the writings he produced from this moment on show a special love for and preoccupation with Scripture, but he also composed further philosophical works as well as poems, and polemical, dogmatic, and moral and pastoral works, and about 363 sermons and 270 letters—an extensive body of work equalled only by St. John Chrysostom in the East.

As Bishop, Augustine faced and virtually ended the Donatist Schism, already in existence for 85 years, by means of several local Church Councils. The Council of Carthage in 411 also condemned the heresy of Pelagianism and Augustine was clearly recognized as the primary defender of the Orthodox view. Then he turned his attention to the growing problem of the disintegration of the Roman Empire resulting from the sack of Rome by the Goths. Most pagan citizens—and some Christians, too—believed that the fall of the Empire was because the pagan gods had been ignored by Christianity and were angry. To combat this temptation, Augustine spent fourteen years writing the monumental *City of God*, demonstrating that the Church does not exist for empires and governments, but for the salvation and the Kingdom of God.

In 426 Augustine retired as bishop but spent his last years in battle with Arianism. On August 28, 430, he died, surrounded by a great concourse of disciples. This man was of such princely heart and mind, and so zealous in the defense of Orthodoxy, that before death he did not fear to review all of his written works, making corrections of errors that had been brought to his attention, and submitting everything to the future judgment of the Church, humbly imploring his readers: "Let all those who will read this work imitate me not in my errors."

Blessed Augustine's message--the message of true Orthodox piety--is one for our times, as he himself wrote in the *Confessions*: "I was slow in turning to the Lord. My life in Thee I kept putting off from one day to the next, but I did not put off the death that daily I was dying in myself. I was in love with the idea of the happy life, but I feared to find it in its true place, and I sought for it by running away from it. I thought that I should be unbearably unhappy if I were deprived of the embraces of a woman, and I never thought of Thy mercy as a medicine to cure that weakness, because I never tried it....I sent up these sorrowful words: How long? How long?...Why not now?"

These words are as if written for us, the most feeble Orthodox Christians, for we, too, are in love with the "idea of the happy life," and we do not think of God's mercy, which is a medicine for our weaknesses. May we, being inspired by this good and true Father of the Church, step boldly on to the path which leads to salvation, repeating Blessed Augustine's words: "Why not now?"!

# *The Place of BLESSED AUGUSTINE in the Orthodox Church*

**B**Y GOD'S PROVIDENCE, in our own times Orthodox Christianity has been returning to the West which departed from it some 900 years ago. At first largely the unconscious work of emigrants from Orthodox lands, this movement has lately been recognized as a great opportunity for inhabitants of the West itself; for some decades this movement of Western converts to Orthodoxy has been increasing and it has now become quite a common phenomenon.

As Orthodoxy has thus gradually been sinking new roots in the West and becoming once again "indigenous" to these lands, among Western converts there has been a natural increase of awareness of the earlier Orthodox heritage of the West, and particularly of the Saints and Fathers of the early Christian centuries, many of whom are in no way inferior to their Eastern counterparts of the same centuries, and all of whom breathe the air and give off the fragrance of the true Christianity which was so tragically lost in the later West. The love and veneration of Archbishop John Maximovitch (+1966) for these Western Saints has especially served to awaken interest in them and facilitate their "re-absorption," as it were, into the mainstream of Orthodoxy.

With regard to most of the Saints of the West there have been no problems; as their lives and writings have been rediscovered, there has been only

rejoicing among Orthodox Christians to find that the full spirit of Eastern Christianity was once so much a part of the West. Indeed, this rediscovery only bodes well for the continued development of a sound and balanced Orthodoxy in the West.

But with regard to a few Western Fathers there have been some "complications," owing especially to some of the dogmatic disputes in the early Christian centuries; the evaluations of these Fathers have differed in East and West, and for Orthodox Christians it is essential to know their significance in *Orthodox* eyes rather than in later Roman Catholic eyes.

The most eminent of these "controversial" Fathers in the West is, without doubt, Blessed Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Regarded in the West as one of the most important Fathers of the Church, and as the paramount "Doctor of Grace," he has always been regarded with some reserve in the East. In our own days, especially among Western converts to Orthodoxy, there have arisen two opposite and extreme views of him. One view, influenced by Roman Catholic opinions, sees rather more importance in him as a Father of the Church than the Orthodox Church has given him in the past; while the other view has tended to underestimate his Orthodox importance, some even going so far as to call him a "heretic." Both of these are Western views, not rooted in Orthodox tradition. The Orthodox view of him, on the other hand, held consistently down the centuries by the Holy Fathers of the East and (in the early centuries) of the West as well, goes to neither extreme, but is a balanced appraisal of him with due credit given both to his unquestioned greatness and to his faults.

In what follows we shall give a brief historical summary of the Orthodox evaluation of Blessed Augustine, emphasizing the attitude of various Holy Fathers toward him and going into details of his controversial teachings only where this is necessary to make clearer the Orthodox attitudes towards him. This historical investigation will also serve to bring out the Orthodox approach to such "controversial" figures in general. Where Orthodox dogmas are directly attacked, the Orthodox Church and her Fathers have always responded quickly and decisively, with correct dogmatic definitions and anathematizations of those who believe wrongly; but where the matter is one (even though on dogmatic subjects) of differing approaches, even of distortions or exaggerations or well-meaning errors, the Church has always had a moderate and conciliating attitude. The Church's attitude toward heretics is one thing; her attitude toward Holy Fathers who happen to have erred in some point or other, is quite another. We shall see this in some detail in what follows.

#### THE CONTROVERSY OVER GRACE AND FREE WILL

THE MOST HEATED of the controversies surrounding Blessed Augustine, both during his lifetime and afterwards, was that of grace and free will. Without doubt, Blessed Augustine was led into a distortion of the Orthodox doctrine of grace by a certain *over-logicalness* which he possessed in common with the Latin mentality, to which he belonged by culture if not by blood. (By blood he was African, and he had something of the emotional "heat" of southern peoples.) The 19th-century Russian Orthodox philosopher Ivan Kireyevsky has well summed up the Orthodox view of this point, which accounts for most of the deficiencies of Blessed Augustine's theology. "No single ancient or modern Father of the Church showed such love for the logical chain of truths as Blessed Augustine . . . Certain of his works are, as it were, a single iron chain of syllogisms, inseparably joined link to link. Perhaps because of this he was sometimes carried too far, not noticing the inward onesidedness of his thinking because of its outward order; so much so that, in the last years of his life, he himself had to write refutations of some of his earlier statements."<sup>\*</sup>

Concerning the doctrine of grace in particular, the most concise evaluation of Augustine's teaching and its deficiencies is perhaps that of Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov in his textbook of Patrology: "When the monks of Hadrumetum (in Africa) presented to Augustine that, according to his teaching, the obligation of asceticism and self-mortification was not required of them, Augustine felt the justice of the remark and began more often to repeat that grace does not destroy freedom; but such an expression of his teaching changed essentially nothing in Augustine's theory, and his very last works were not in accord with this thought. Relying on his own experience of a difficult rebirth by means of grace, he was carried along by a feeling of its further consequences. Thus, as an accuser of Pelagius, Augustine is without doubt a great teacher of the Church; but in defending the truth, he himself was not completely and not always faithful to the truth."<sup>\*\*</sup>

Later historians have often emphasized the points of disagreement between Blessed Augustine and St. John Cassian (Augustine's contemporary in Gaul, who in his celebrated *Institutes* and *Conferences* gave for the first time in Latin the full and authentic Eastern doctrine of monasticism and spiritual life;

\* "On the Character of European Civilization," in *Complete Works of I. V. Kireyevsky*, Moscow, 1911, in Russian, vol. 1, pp. 188-189.

\*\* Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, *Historical Teaching of the Fathers of the Church*, in Russian. St. Petersburg, 1882. vol. 3. pp. 33-34.

he was the first in the West to criticize Blessed Augustine's teaching on grace); but such historians have often not sufficiently seen the deeper basic agreement between them. Some modern historians (A. Harnack, O. Chadwick) have tried to correct this shortsightedness by showing the supposed "influence" of Augustine on Cassian; and this observation, although it is also exaggerated, points us a little closer to the truth. Probably St. Cassian would not have spoken so eloquently and so in detail on the subject of God's grace if Augustine had not already been teaching his own one-sided doctrine. But the important thing to bear in mind here is that the disagreement between Cassian and Augustine was not one between Orthodox Father and heretic (as was, for example, the disagreement between Augustine and Pelagius), but rather one between two Orthodox Fathers who disagreed only in the details of their presentation of one and the same doctrine. Both St. Cassian and Blessed Augustine were attempting to teach the Orthodox doctrine of grace and free will as against the heresy of Pelagius; but one did so with the full depth of the Eastern theological tradition, while the other was led into a certain distortion of this same teaching owing to his overly-logical approach to it.

Everyone knows that Blessed Augustine was the most outspoken opponent in the West of the heresy of Pelagius, which denied the necessity of God's grace for salvation; but few seem to be aware that St. Cassian (whose teaching was given by modern Roman Catholic scholars the most unjust name of "Semi-Pelagianism") was himself a no less fierce enemy of Pelagius and his teaching. In his final work, *Against Nestorius*, St. Cassian closely connects the teachings of Nestorius and Pelagius (both of whom were condemned by the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431) and vehemently castigates them together, accusing Nestorius of "breaking out into such wicked and blasphemous impieties that you seem in this madness of yours to surpass even Pelagius himself, who surpassed almost everyone else in impiety" (*Against Nestorius*, V, 2). In this book also St. Cassian quotes at length the document of the Pelagian presbyter Leporius of Hippo wherein the latter publicly recants his heresy; this document, which, St. Cassian states, contains the "confession of faith of all Catholics" as against the Pelagian heresy, was approved by the bishops of Africa (including Augustine) and was probably written by Augustine himself, who was personally responsible for the conversion of Leporius (*Against Nestorius*, I, 5-6). In another passage of the same book (VII, 27), St. Cassian quotes Blessed Augustine as one of his chief Patristic authorities on the doctrine of the Incarnation (but with a qualification that will be mentioned below). Clearly, in defense of Orthodoxy, and in particular against the Pelagian heresy, Cassian and Augus-

tine were on the same side; it was only in the details of their defense that they differed.

The fundamental error of Augustine was his *overstatement* of the place of grace in Christian life, and his *understatement* of the place of free will. He was forced to this exaggeration, as Archbishop Philaret has well said, by his own experience of conversion, joined to the over-logicalness of his Latin mind which caused him to attempt to define this question too precisely. Never, however, did Augustine deny free will; indeed, when questioned he would always defend it and censure those who "are extolling grace to such an extent that they deny the freedom of the human will and, what is more serious, assert that on the day of judgment God will not render to every man according to his deeds" (Letter 214, to Abbot Valentinus of Hadrumetum). In some of his writings his defense of free will is no less strong than that of St. Cassian. In his commentary on Psalm 102, for example ("Who healeth all thy diseases"), Augustine writes: "He will heal you, but you must wish to be healed. He heals entirely whoever is infirm, but not him who refuses healing." The very fact that Augustine himself was a monastic Father of the West, founded his own monastic communities for both men and women, and wrote influential monastic Rules, certainly indicates that in actual practice he understood the significance of ascetic struggle, which is unthinkable without free will. In general, therefore and especially whenever he must give practical advice to Christian strugglers, Augustine does indeed teach the Orthodox doctrine of grace and free will — as well as he can within the limitations of his theological viewpoint.

But in his formal treatises, especially the anti-Pelagian treatises which took up the last years of his life, when he enters upon a logical discussion of the whole question of grace and free will, he is often drawn away into an exaggerated defense of grace which seems to leave little actual place for human freedom. Let us here contrast several aspects of his teaching with the fully Orthodox teaching of St. John Cassian.

In his treatise "On Rebuke and Grace," written in 426 or 427 for the monks of Hadrumetum, Blessed Augustine writes (ch. 17): "Will you dare to say that even when Christ prayed that Peter's faith might not fail, it would still have failed if Peter had willed it to fail? As if Peter could in any measure will otherwise than Christ had wished for him that he might will." There is an obvious exaggeration here; one feels that there is something missing from Augustine's description of the reality of grace and free will. St. John Cassian, in his words on the other chief of the Apostles, St. Paul, supplies this "missing dimension" for us: "He says: And His grace in me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, and yet not I, but the grace of God with

*me* (I Cor. 15:10). When he says *I labored*, he shows the effort of his own will; when he says *yet not I, but the grace of God*, he points out the value of Divine protection; when he says *with me*, he affirms that grace cooperates with him when he is not idle or careless, but working and making an effort" (*Conferences*, XIII, 13). Cassian's position is balanced, giving proper emphasis to both grace and freedom; Augustine's position is one-sided and incomplete, unnecessarily over-emphasizing grace and thus laying his words open to exploitation by later thinkers who did not think in Orthodox terms at all and could thus conceive (as in 17th-century Jansenism) of an "irresistible grace" which man must accept whether he will or not.

A similar exaggeration was made by Augustine with regard to what later Latin theologians were to call "prevenient grace" — the grace that "prevents" or "comes before" and inspires the arousal of faith in a man. Augustine admits that he himself thought wrongly on this subject before his ordination as bishop: "I was in a similar error, thinking that the faith whereby we believe on God is not God's gift, but that it is in us from ourselves, and that by it we obtain the gifts of God, whereby we may live temperately and righteously and piously in this world. For I did not think that faith was preceded by God's grace . . . but that we should consent when the gospel was preached to us I thought was our own doing and came to us from ourselves" ("On the Predestination of the Saints," ch. 7). This youthful error of Augustine is indeed Pelagian, and is the result of an over-logicalness in the defense of free will, making it something autonomous rather than something that *cooperates* with God's grace; but he incorrectly ascribes it to St. Cassian (who was also wrongly accused in the West of teaching that God's grace is given in accordance with human merit), and Augustine himself then fell into the opposite exaggeration of ascribing *everything* in the awakening of faith to Divine grace.

The true teaching of St. Cassian, on the other hand, which is the teaching of the Orthodox Church, was something of a mystification to the Latin mind. We may see this in a follower of Blessed Augustine in Gaul, Prosper of Aquitaine, who was the first to attack St. Cassian directly.

It was to Prosper, together with a certain Hilary (not St. Hilary of Arles, who was in agreement with St. Cassian) that Augustine sent his final two anti-Pelagian treatises, "On the Predestination of the Saints" and "On the Gift of Perseverance"; in these works Augustine criticized the ideas of St. Cassian as they had been presented to him in a summary made by Prosper. After Augustine's death in 430, Prosper stepped forth as the champion of his teaching in Gaul, and his first major act was to write a treatise "Against the Author

of the Conferences" (*Contra Collatorum*), also known as "On the Grace of God and Free Will." This treatise is nothing but a step-by-step refutation of St. Cassian's famous thirteenth Conference, where the question of grace is treated in most detail.

From the very first lines it is clear that Prosper is deeply offended that his teacher has been openly criticized in Gaul: "There are some bold enough to assert that the grace of God, by which we are Christians, was not correctly defended by Bishop Augustine of holy memory; nor do they cease to attack with unbridled calumnies his books composed against the Pelagian heresy" (ch. 1). But most of all Prosper is exasperated at what he finds to be a baffling "contradiction" in Cassian's teaching; and this perplexity of his (since he is a faithful disciple of Augustine) reveals to us the nature of Augustine's error.

Prosper finds that in one part of his thirteenth Conference Cassian teaches "correctly" about grace (and in particular about "prevenient grace") — i.e., just like Blessed Augustine. "This doctrine was not at the outset of the discussion at variance with true piety, and would have deserved a just and honorable commendation had it not, in its dangerous and pernicious progress, deviated from its initial correctness. For, after the comparison of the farmer, to whom he likened the example of one living under grace and faith, and whose work he said was fruitless unless he were aided in all things by the Divine succour, he introduced the very Catholic proposition, saying, 'From which it is clearly deduced that the beginning not only of our acts, but also of our good thoughts, is from God; He it is Who inspires in us the beginnings of a holy will and gives us the power and capacity to carry out those things which we rightly desire' . . . Again, later on, when he had taught that all zeal for virtue required the grace of God, he aptly added: 'Just as all these things cannot continually be desired by us without the Divine inspiration, likewise without His help they can in no way be brought to completion'" (*Contra Collatorum*, ch. 2:2).

But then, after these and similar quotations which do, indeed, reveal St. Cassian as a teacher of the universality of grace no less eloquent than Blessed Augustine (this is why some think he was "influenced" by Augustine), Prosper continues: "At this point, by a sort of inscrutable contradiction, there is introduced a proposition in which it is taught that many come to grace without grace, and that some also, from the endowments of the free will, have this desire to seek, to ask and to knock . . ." (ch. 2:4). (That is, he accuses St. Cassian of the same error which Blessed Augustine admits that he himself had made in his earlier years.) "O Catholic teacher, why do you forsake your profession, why do you turn to the cloudy darkness of falsity and depart from the light of the

clearest truth? . . . On your part there is complete agreement with neither the heretics nor the Catholics. The former regard the beginnings in every just work of man as belonging to the free will; while we (Catholics) constantly believe that the beginnings of good thoughts spring from God. You have found some indescribable third alternative, unacceptable to both sides, by which you neither find agreement with the enemies nor retain an understanding with us" (chs. 2:5, 3:1).

It is precisely this "indescribable third alternative" that is the *Orthodox* doctrine of grace and free will, later to be known by the name of *synergism*, the cooperation of Divine grace and human freedom, neither one acting independently or autonomously. St. Cassian, faithful to the fullness of this truth, expresses sometimes the one side (human freedom) and sometimes the other (Divine grace); to Prosper's overly-logical mind this is an "inscrutable contradiction." St. Cassian teaches: "What is it that is said to us, unless in all these (Scriptural quotations) there is a declaration both of the grace of God and the freedom of our will, because even of his own activity a man can be led to the quest of virtue, but always stands in need of the help of the Lord?" (*Conferences*, XIII, 9). "Which depends on which is a considerable problem: namely, whether God is merciful to us because we have presented the beginning of a good will, or we receive the beginning of a good will because God is merciful. Many, believing these individually and affirming more than is right, are caught in many and opposite errors" (*Conferences*, XIII, 11). "For these two, that is, both grace and free will, seem indeed to be contrary to each other; but both are in harmony. And we conclude that, because of piety, we should accept both, lest taking one of these away from man, we appear to violate the Church's rule of faith" (*Conferences*, XIII, 11).

What a profound and serene answer to a question which Western theologians (not only Blessed Augustine) have never been able to answer adequately! To *Christian experience*, and in particular to the monastic experience from which St. Cassian speaks, there is no "contradiction" at all in the cooperation of freedom and grace; it is only human logic that finds the "contradiction" when it tries to understand this question much too abstractly and divorced from life. The very way in which Blessed Augustine, as opposed to St. Cassian, expresses the difficulty of this question, is a revelation of the difference in the depth of their answers. Augustine merely acknowledges that this is "a question which is very difficult and intelligible to few" (Letter 214, to Abbot Valentinus of Hadrumetum), hereby indicating that for him it is a puzzling *intellectual* question; whereas for St. Cassian it is a profound mystery whose truth is known

in experience. At the end of his thirteenth Conference St. Cassian indicates that in his doctrine he follows "all the Catholic Fathers who have taught perfection of heart not by empty disputes of words, but in deed and act" (such references to "empty disputes" are the closest he allows himself to come to actual criticism of the eminent Bishop of Hippo); and he concludes this whole Conference on the "synergy" of grace and freedom with these words: "If any more subtle inference of man's argumentation and reasoning seems opposed to this interpretation, it should be avoided rather than brought forward to the destruction of the faith; for how God works all things in us and yet everything can be ascribed to free will cannot be fully grasped by the mind and reason of man" (*Conferences*, XIII, 18).

#### THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

**T**HE MOST SERIOUS of the exaggerations into which Blessed Augustine fell in his teaching on grace is to be found in his idea of *predestination*. This is the idea for which he is most often attacked, and it is the one idea in his works which, when grossly misunderstood, has produced the most frightful consequences in unbalanced minds no longer restrained by the orthodoxy of his thought in general. It should be kept in mind, however, that for most people today the word "predestination" is usually understood in its later Calvinistic meaning (see below), and those who have not studied the question are sometimes inclined to accuse Augustine himself of the same monstrous heresy. It must be stated at the outset of this discussion, then, that Blessed Augustine most certainly did not teach "predestination" as most people understand it today; what he did — as with the rest of his doctrine on grace — was to teach the *Orthodox* doctrine of predestination in an exaggerated way which was easily liable to misinterpretation.

The Orthodox concept of predestination is found in the teaching of St. Paul: *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son . . . and whom He predestined, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified* (Rom. 8:29-30). Here St. Paul speaks of those foreknown and fore-ordained (predestined) by God for eternal glory, it being understood, in the whole context of Christian teaching, that this predestination involves also the free choice of the one being saved; here again we see the mystery of synergy, the cooperation of God and man. St. John Chrysostom writes in his *Commentary* on this passage (Homily 15 on Romans): "The Apostle here speaks of foreknowledge in order that not everything should be ascribed to the calling . . . For if the

calling alone was sufficient, then why have not all been saved? Therefore he says that the salvation of the called is accomplished not by the calling alone, but also by foreknowledge, and the calling itself is not compulsory or forcible. Thus, all were called, but not all obeyed." And Bishop Theophan the Recluse explains yet further: "Concerning free creatures, (God's predestination) does not obstruct their freedom and does not make them involuntary executors of his decrees. Free actions God foresees as free; He sees the whole course of a free person and the general sum of all his actions. And seeing this, he decrees as if it had already been accomplished . . . It is not that the actions of free persons are the consequence of predestination, but that predestination itself is the consequence of free deeds" (*Commentary on Romans*, chapters 1 to 8, in Russian, Moscow, 1890, p. 532).

However, Augustine's over-logicalness required him to try to look too closely into this mystery and "explain" its seeming difficulties for ordinary logic. (If one is in the number of the "predestined," does he need to struggle for his salvation? If he is not in their number, can he give up struggling altogether?) We need not follow him in his reasonings, except to note that he himself felt the difficulty of his position and found it often necessary to justify himself and qualify his teaching so that it would not be "misunderstood." In his treatise "On the Gift of Perseverance," indeed, he notes: "And yet this doctrine must not be preached to congregations in such a way as to seem to an unskilled multitude, or a people of slower understanding, to be in some measure confuted by that very preaching of it" (ch. 57) — surely a remarkable admission of the "complexity" of basic Christian doctrine! The "complexity" of this doctrine (which, incidentally, is often felt by Western converts to the Orthodox faith, until they have acquired some experience in actual living according to Orthodoxy), resides only in those who have tried to "resolve" it intellectually; the Orthodox teaching of the cooperation of God and man, of the necessity of ascetic struggle, and of the certain will of God that *all* may be saved (I Tim. 2:4), is sufficient to dissolve the unnecessary complications which human logic introduces into this question.

Augustine's intellectualized view of predestination, as he already realized, tended to produce erroneous opinions concerning grace and free will in the minds of some of his hearers. These opinions had apparently become common within a few years of Augustine's death, and one of the great Fathers of Gaul found it necessary to combat them. *St. Vincent of Lerins*, a theologian of the great island monastery off the southern coast of Gaul that was noted for its fidelity to Eastern doctrines in general, and to St. Cassian's teaching on grace in particular, wrote his *Commonitory* in 434 in order to combat the "profane nov-

particular, wrote his *Commonitory* in 434 in order to combat the "profane novelties" of various heresies which had been attacking the Church. Among these novelties, he censured the view of one group who "dare to promise in their teaching that in *their* church — that is, in their own small circle — is to be found a great and special and entirely personal form of divine grace; that it is divinely administered, without any pain, zeal, or effort on their part, to all persons belonging to their group, even if they do not ask or seek or knock. Thus, borne up by angels' hands — that is, preserved by angelic protection — they can never dash their foot against a stone, that is, they never can be scandalized" (*Commonitory*, ch. 26).

There is another work of this time which contains similar criticisms: "The Objections of Vincent," which may possibly be the work of the same St. Vincent of Lerins. This is a collection of "logical deductions" from statements of Blessed Augustine which, to be sure, every right-believing Christian would have to oppose: "God is the author of our sins," "repentance is useless for one predestined to death," "God has created the greater part of the human race for eternal damnation," etc.

If the criticisms of these two books were directed against Augustine himself (whom St. Vincent does not mention by name in the *Commonitory*), they are manifestly unfair. Augustine never taught *such* a doctrine of predestination, which simply destroys the whole meaning of ascetic struggle; he himself, as we have seen, found it necessary to come out against those who "are extolling grace to such an extent that they deny the freedom of the human will" (Letter 214), and he would certainly have been on St. Vincent's side against those whom the latter criticized. St. Vincent's criticisms are indeed valid, however, when they are directed (and rightly so) against the immoderate followers of Augustine — those who distorted his teaching in an un-Orthodox direction and, neglecting all of Augustine's explanations, taught that God's grace is effective without human effort.

Unfortunately, however, there is one point of Augustine's teaching on grace, and in particular of predestination, where he fell into a serious error which has given fuel to the "logical deductions" which heretics have made from his doctrine. In Augustine's view of grace and freedom, the Apostle's statement that God *wills all men to be saved* (I Tim. 2:4) cannot be *literally* true; if God "predestines" only some to be saved, then He must *will* only some to be saved. Here again, human logic fails to understand the mystery of Christian truth. But Augustine, faithful to his logic, must "explain" the passage of Scripture in a way consistent with his whole teaching on grace; and thus he says: "*He wills all men to be saved* is so said that all the predestined may be understood by it, because

every kind of man is among them" ("On Rebuke and Grace," ch. 44). Thus, he does actually deny that God wills all men to be saved. Worse, he is carried so far by the logical consistency of his thought that he even teaches (although only in a few places) a "negative" predestination — a predestination to eternal damnation, something totally foreign to the Scriptures. He speaks clearly of a "class of men which is predestinated to destruction" ("On Man's Perfection in Righteousness," ch. 13), and again says: "To those whom He has predestinated to eternal death, He is also the most righteous awardee of punishment" ("On the Soul and its Origin," ch. 16).

But here again we must be careful not to read into Augustine's words the later interpretations of them which Calvin made. Augustine in this doctrine does not at all maintain that God determines or wills any man *to do evil*; the whole context of his thought makes it clear that he believed no such thing, and he often denied this specific accusation, sometimes with evident exasperation. Thus, when it was objected to him that "it is by his own fault that anyone deserts the faith, when he yields and consents to the temptation which is the cause of his desertion of the faith" (as against the teaching that God *determines* a man to desert the faith), Augustine found it necessary to make no reply except: "*Who denies it?*" ("On the Gift of Perseverance," ch. 46). Some decades later the disciple of Blessed Augustine, Fulgentius of Ruspe, in interpreting this teaching, states: "In no other sense do I suppose that passage of St. Augustine should be taken, in which he affirms that there are certain persons predestinated to destruction, than in regard to their *punishment*, not their sin: not to the evil which they unrighteously commit, but to the punishment which they shall righteously suffer" (*Ad Monitum*, I, 1). Augustine's doctrine of "predestination to eternal death," therefore, does not state that God *wills* or determines any man to desert the faith or to do evil, nor to be condemned to hell by God's arbitrary will, quite apart from a man's free choice of good or evil; rather, it states that God wills the condemnation of those who, of their own free will, do evil. This, however, is not the Orthodox teaching, and Augustine's doctrine of predestination, even with all its qualifications, is still all too liable to mislead people.

Augustine's teaching was expressed well before St. Cassian wrote his *Conferences*, and it is obvious whom the latter had in mind when, in his thirteenth Conference, he gave the clear Orthodox answer to this error: "For if He willeth not that one of His little ones should perish, how can we imagine without grievous blasphemy that He does not generally will *all* men, but only *some* instead of *all* to be saved? Those then who perish, perish against His will" (*Conferences*, XIII, 7). Augustine would not be able to accept such a doctrine,

because he has falsely *absolutized* grace and can conceive of nothing that can happen against the will of God, but in the Orthodox doctrine of synergy, a truer place is given to the mystery of human freedom, which can indeed choose not to accept what God has willed for it and constantly calls it to.

The doctrine of predestination (not in Augustine's restricted sense, but in the fatalistic sense it was given by later heretics) had a lamentable future in the West. There were at least three major outbreaks of it: in the mid-5th century, the presbyter Lucidus taught an absolute predestination both to salvation and damnation, God's power irresistibly impelling some to good and others to evil — although he repented of this doctrine after being combatted by St. Faustus, Bishop of Reginum, a worthy disciple of Lerins and of St. Cassian, and being condemned by the provincial Council of Arles in about the year 475; in the 9th century, the Saxon monk Gottschalk started the controversy anew, affirming two "absolutely similar" predestinations (one to salvation and one to damnation), denying human freedom as well as God's will to save all men, and thus arousing a violent controversy in the Frankish empire; and, in modern times, Luther, Zwingli, and especially Calvin taught the most extreme form of predestination: that God has created some men as "vessels of wrath" for sin and eternal damnation, and that salvation and damnation are granted by God solely at his pleasure without regard to men's actions. Although Augustine himself never taught anything like these gloomy and most un-Christian doctrines, still the ultimate source of them is clear, and even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911 edition, which was careful to defend the orthodoxy of Augustine) admits it: "The origin of heretical predestinarianism must be traced back to the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of St. Augustine's views relating to eternal election and reprobation. But it was only after his death that this heresy sprang up in the Church of the West, whilst that of the East was preserved in a remarkable manner from these extravagances" (vol. XII, p. 376). Nothing can be clearer than that the East was preserved from these heresies precisely by the doctrine of St. Cassian and the Eastern Fathers who correctly taught on grace and freedom and left no room for "misinterpretations" of the doctrine.

The exaggerations of Blessed Augustine in his teaching on grace were, therefore, quite serious and had lamentable consequences. Let us not, however, exaggerate ourselves and find him guilty of the extreme views which obvious heretics, as well as his enemies, have ascribed to him. Nor must we place on him all the blame for the arising of these heresies; such a view overlooks the actual nature of the course of intellectual history. Even the greatest thinker does not exert influence in an intellectual vacuum; the reason why extreme predestinarianism broke out at different times in the West (and not in the East) was due

first of all, not to Augustine's teaching (which was only a pretext and a seeming justification), but rather to the overly-logical mentality which has always been present in the peoples of the West: in Augustine's case it produced exaggerations in a basically Orthodox thinker, while in the case of Calvin (for example) it produced an abominable heresy in someone who was far indeed from orthodoxy in thought or feeling. If Augustine had taught his doctrine in the East and in Greek, there would have been no heresy of predestinarianism there, or at least none with the widespread consequences of the Western heresies; the non-rationalistic character of the Eastern mind would not have drawn any consequences from Augustine's exaggerations, and in general would have paid less attention to him than the West did, seeing in him what the Orthodox Church today continues to see in him: a venerable Father of the Church, not without his errors, who ranks rather behind the greatest Fathers of East and West.

But to see this more clearly, now that we have examined in some detail the nature of his most controversial teaching, let us turn to the opinions of the Holy Fathers of East and West with regard to Blessed Augustine.

#### OPINIONS IN FIFTH-CENTURY GAUL

THE OPINION of the Fathers of 5th-century Gaul must be the starting place for this enquiry, for it is there that his teaching on grace was first and most sharply challenged. We have seen the sharpness of the criticism of Augustine's teaching (or that of his followers) by St. Cassian and St. Vincent; how, then, did they and others at this time regard Augustine himself? In answering this question we shall have to touch a little more on the doctrine of grace itself, and also see how the disciples of Augustine themselves were compelled to modify his teaching in answer to the criticisms of St. Cassian and his followers.

Historians of the controversy over grace in 5th century Gaul have not failed to notice how mild it was in comparison with the disputes against Nestorius, Pelagius, and other obvious heretics; it was always seen as a controversy *within the Church*, not as a dispute of the Church with heretics. Never does anyone call Augustine a heretic, nor does Augustine apply this name to those who criticized him. The treatises written "Against Augustine" are solely the work of heretics (such as the Pelagian teacher Julian), not Orthodox Fathers.

Prosper of Aquitaine and Hilary, in their letters to Augustine informing him of the views of St. Cassian and others (published as Letters 225 and 226 in the works of Augustine), note that although they criticize his teaching on grace and predestination, in other matters they agree with him entirely and are

great admirers of his. Augustine in his turn, in publishing his two treatises answering these criticisms, refers to his critics as "those brethren of ours on whose behalf your pious love is solicitous," whose views on grace "abundantly distinguish them from the error of the Pelagians" ("On the Predestination of the Saints," ch. 2). And in the conclusion of his final treatise he offers his opinions humbly to the judgment of the Church: "Let those who think that I am in error consider again and again carefully what is here said, lest perchance they themselves may be mistaken. And when, by means of those who read my writings, I become not only wiser, but even more perfect, I acknowledge God's favor to me" ("On the Gift of Perseverance," ch. 68). Blessed Augustine was certainly never a "fanatic" in his expression of doctrinal disagreements with his fellow Orthodox Christians; and his gracious and generous tone was generally shared by his opponents on the question of grace.

St. Cassian himself, in his book *Against Nestorius*, uses Augustine as one of his eight chief Patristic authorities on the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation, quoting from two of his works (VII, 27). It is true that he refers to Augustine not with words of great praise such as he reserves for Sts. Hilary of Poitiers ("a man endowed with all virtues and graces," ch. 24), Ambrose ("that illustrious priest of God, who never leaving the Lord's hand, ever shone like a jewel upon the finger of God," ch. 25), or Jerome ("the teacher of the Catholics, whose writings shine like divine lamps throughout the whole world," ch. 26). He calls him merely "Augustine the priest (sacerdos) of Hippo Regiensis," and there can be little doubt that he does this because he regards Augustine as a Father of less authority than they. Something similar may be seen in the later Eastern Fathers who distinguish between the "divine" Ambrose and the "blessed" Augustine, and this is indeed why Augustine is usually called "blessed" in the East to this day (a name that will be explained below). But the fact remains that St. Cassian did regard Augustine as an authority on a question where his views on grace were not involved — that is, as an Orthodox Father and neither a heretic nor a person whose teaching is dubious or can be disregarded. Similarly, there is an anthology of Augustine's teaching on the Trinity and the Incarnation which has come down to us under the name of St. Vincent of Lérins — another indication that Augustine was accepted as an Orthodox teacher on other questions even by those who opposed his teaching on grace.

Shortly after the death of Blessed Augustine (early 430's), Prosper of Aquitaine made a journey to Rome and appealed for an authoritative opinion from Pope Celestine against those who were criticizing Augustine. The Pope gave no judgment on the dogmatic issues involved, but he did send a letter to the bishops of southern Gaul with what seems to be the prevailing as well as

the "official" view of Augustine in the West at that time: "With Augustine, whom all men everywhere loved and honored, we ever held communion. Let a stop be put to this spirit of disparagement, which unhappily is on the increase."

Augustine's teaching on grace did indeed continue to cause disturbance in the Church of Gaul throughout the 5th century. However, the wisest minds on both sides of the controversy spoke moderately. Thus, even Prosper of Aquitaine, the leading disciple of Augustine in the first years after the latter's death, admits in one of his works in defense of him ("Answers to the *Capitula Gallorum*," VIII) that Augustine spoke too harshly (*durius*) when he said that God did not will that all men should be saved. And his later work (about 450), "The Call of All Nations" (*De votacione omnium gentium*), reveals that his own teaching mellowed considerably before his death. (Some have doubted the traditional ascription of this book to Prosper, but recent scholarship has confirmed his authorship — see the translation of Prosper by de Letter). This book sets as its aim "to investigate what restraint and moderation we ought to maintain in our views on this conflict of opinions" Book I, 1), and the author really does try to express the truth of grace and salvation in such a way as to satisfy both sides and put an end to the dispute, if possible. In particular, he emphasizes that grace does not *compel* man, but acts in harmony with man's free will. Expressing the essence of his teaching, he writes: "If we give up completely all wrangling that springs up in the heat of immoderate disputes, it will be clear that we must hold for certain three points in this question. First, we must confess that God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. Secondly, there can be no doubt that all who actually come to the knowledge of the truth and to salvation, do so not in virtue of their own merits but of the efficacious help of divine grace. Thirdly, we must admit that human understanding is unable to fathom the depths of God's judgments" (Book II, 1). This is essentially the "reformed" (and considerably improved) version of Augustine's doctrine which finally prevailed at the Council of Orange 75 years later and brought an end to the controversy.\*

The chief of the Fathers of Gaul after St. Cassian to uphold the Orthodox doctrine of synergy was St. Faustus of Lerins, later bishop of Rhegium (Riez). He wrote a treatise "On the Grace of God and Free Will" in which he attacked both the pernicious teacher Pelagius" on the one hand, and the "error of predestinarianism" (having in mind the presbyter Lucidus) on the other. Like St. Cassian, he saw grace and freedom as parallel, grace always cooperating with the human will for man's salvation. He compared free will to "a certain small

\* See Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of All Nations*, translated by P. de Letter, S.J., The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland, 1952.

hook" that reaches out and seizes grace — an image not likely to pacify strict Augustinians who insisted on an absolute "prevenient grace." When writing about the books of Augustine in a letter to the deacon Graecus, he notes that even "in the most learned men there are things that may be considered to be suspect"; but he is always respectful to the person of Augustine and calls him *beatissimus pontifex Augustinus*, "the most blessed hierarch Augustine." St. Faustus also kept the feast day of Blessed Augustine's repose, and his writings include a homily for this feast.

But even the mild expressions of this great Father were found objectionable by strict Augustinians such as the African Fulgentius of Ruspe, who wrote treatises on grace and predestination against St. Faustus, and the long-smouldering controversy continued. We may see the Orthodox view of this controversy at the end of the 5th century in the collection of biographical notes of the presbyter Gennadius of Marseilles, *Lives of Illustrious Men* (a continuation of Blessed Jerome's book of the same name). Gennadius, in his treatise *On Ecclesiastical Dogmas*, shows himself to be a disciple of St. Cassian in the question of grace and free will, and his comments on the leading participants in the controversy give us a good idea of how the defenders of St. Cassian in the West regard the question some fifty or more years after the death of both Augustine and Cassian.

About St. Cassian, Gennadius says (ch. 62): "He wrote from experience, and in forcible language, or to speak more clearly, with meaning back of his words and action back of his speech. He covered the whole field of practical directions, for monks of all sorts." There follows a list of his works, with all the Conferences mentioned by name, which makes this one of the longest chapters in the book. Nothing is said specifically of his teaching on grace, but St. Cassian is clearly presented as an Orthodox Father.

About Prosper, on the other hand, Gennadius writes (ch. 85): "I regard as his an anonymous book against certain works of Cassian which the Church of God finds salutary, but which he brands as injurious; and in fact, some of the opinions of Cassian and Prosper on the Grace of God and on free will are at variance with one another." Here the Orthodoxy of Cassian's teaching on grace is specifically declared, and Prosper's teaching is found to be at variance with it; his criticism of Prosper, nevertheless, is mild.

About St. Faustus, Gennadius writes (ch. 86): "He published an excellent work, 'On the Grace of God through Which We Are Saved,' in which he teaches that the grace of God always invites, precedes and helps our will, and whatever gain freedom of will may attain for its pious effect is not its own desert, but the gift of grace." And later, after comments on his other books:

"This excellent teacher is enthusiastically believed in and admired." Clearly, Gennadius defends St. Faustus as an Orthodox Father, and in particular defends him against the charge (often made against St. Cassian as well) that he denies "prevenient grace." The followers of Augustine could not understand that the Orthodox doctrine of synergy does not at all deny "prevenient grace," but only teaches its *cooperation* with free will. Gennadius (and St. Faustus himself) made a special point of stating this belief in "prevenient grace."

Now let us see what Gennadius has to say about Augustine himself. It should be remembered that this book was written in the 480's or 490's, when the controversy over Augustine's teaching on grace was some sixty years old, when his exaggerations of the doctrine had been exposed and abundantly discussed, and when the painful consequences of these exaggerations were evident in the already-condemned predestinarianism of Lucidus.

Augustine of Hippo, bishop of Hippo Regiensis, a man renowned throughout the world for learning both sacred and secular, unblemished in the faith, pure in life, wrote works so many that they cannot all be gathered. For who is there that can boast himself of having all his works, or who reads with such diligence as to read all he has written?" To his praise of Augustine some manuscripts add at this point a criticism: "Wherefore, on account of his much speaking Solomon's saying came true that *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin*" (ch. 39). This criticism of Augustine (whether it belongs to Gennadius himself or to a later copyist) is no less mild than that of Sts. Cassian and Faustus, merely pointing out that the teaching of Augustine was not perfect. Clearly, the spokesmen of the fully Orthodox teaching on grace in 5th-century Gaul did not regard Augustine as anything but a great teacher and Father, even though they found it necessary to point out his errors. This has continued to be the Orthodox attitude towards Augustine right up to our own day.

By the beginning of the 6th century the controversy over grace had become concentrated in a criticism of the teaching of St. Faustus, whose "little hook" of free will continued to trouble the still overly-logical followers of Augustine. The whole controversy finally came to an end largely through the efforts of one man whose position especially favored a final reconciliation of the two parties. St. Caesarius, Metropolitan of Arles, was an offspring of the monastery of Lerins, where he was the strictest of ascetics, and a follower of the monastic teaching of St. Faustus, whom he never ceased to call a saint; but at the same time he greatly admired and dearly loved Blessed Augustine, and in the end he was to obtain the request he made of God that he might die on the day of Augustine's repose (he died on the eve, August 27, 543). Under his

presidency, the Council of Orange was called in 529, with 14 bishops present, and approved 25 canons which gave a somewhat modified version of the teaching of Blessed Augustine on grace. Augustine's exaggerated expressions on the almost irresistible nature of grace were carefully avoided, and nothing whatever was said of his teaching on predestination. Significantly, the doctrine of "predestination to evil" (which some had derived as a mistaken "logical deduction" from Augustine's "predestination to death") was specifically condemned and its followers ("if there are any who wish to believe so evil a thing") anathematized.\*

The Orthodox doctrine of St. Cassian and St. Faustus was not quoted at this Council, but neither was it condemned; their teaching of synergy was simply not understood. The freedom of the human will, of course, was maintained, but within the framework of the overly-logical Western view of grace and nature. The teaching of Augustine was corrected, but the fullness of the profounder Eastern teaching was not recognized. That is why the teaching of St. Cassian comes today as such a revelation to Western seekers of Christian truth — not that the teaching of Augustine, in its modified form, is "wrong" (for it teaches the truth as well as it can within its limited framework), but that the teaching of St. Cassian is a deeper and fuller expression of the truth.

#### SIXTH-CENTURY OPINION, EAST AND WEST

ONCE THE CONTROVERSY over grace had ceased to trouble the West (the East paid little attention to it, its own teaching being secure and not under attack there), the reputation of Augustine remained fixed: he was a great Father of the Church, well known and respected throughout the West, less known but still respected in the East.

The opinion of him in the West may be seen in the references to him by St. Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome, an Orthodox Father recognized in East as well as West. In a letter to Innocent, Prefect of Africa, St. Gregory writes (having in mind, in particular, Augustine's commentaries of Scripture): "If you desire to be satiated with delicious food, read the works of the blessed Augustine, your countryman, and seek not our chaff in comparison with his fine wheat" (*Epistles*, Book X, 37). Elsewhere St. Gregory calls him "Saint Augustine" (*Epistles*, Book II, 54).

In the East, where there was little reason to discuss Augustine (whose writings were still little known), the opinion of Blessed Augustine can be most clearly seen on the great occasion in this century when the Fathers of East and West came together — at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, which met at Constantinople in 553. In the Acts of this Council the name of Augustine is mentioned several times. Thus, during the First Session of the Council, the letter of Emperor St. Justinian was read to the assembled fathers, containing the following passage: "We further declare that we hold fast to the decrees of the Four Councils, and in every way follow the holy Fathers, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Constantinople, Cyril, Augustine, Proclus, Leo and their writings on the true faith" (*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Eerdmans ed., p. 303).

Again, in the final "Sentence" of the Council, when the fathers invoke the authority of Blessed Augustine on a certain point, he is referred to in this way: "Several letters of Augustine, of most religious memory, who shone forth resplendent among the African bishops, were read . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 309).

Finally, the Pope of Rome, Vigilius, who had been in Constantinople but had refused to take part in the Council, in the "Decretal Letter" which he issued some months later (while he was still in Constantinople) at last accepting the Council, took as the example for his own retraction Blessed Augustine, whom he spoke about in these terms: "It is manifest that our Fathers, and especially the blessed Augustine, who was in very truth illustrious in the Divine Scriptures, and a master in Roman eloquence, retracted some of his own writings, and corrected some of his own sayings, and added what he had omitted and afterward found out" (*Ibid.*, p. 322).

It is evident, then, that in the 6th century Blessed Augustine was a recognized Father of the Church who is spoken about in terms of great praise — praise that is not lessened by recognition of the fact that he sometimes taught imprecisely and had to correct himself.

In later centuries the passage in the letter of Emperor St. Justinian, where he numbers Augustine among the leading Fathers of the Church, was quoted by Latin writers in theological disputes with the East (the text of the Acts of this Council having been preserved only in Latin), with the intention precisely of establishing the authority of Augustine and other Western Fathers in the Universal Church. We shall see how leading Eastern Fathers of these centuries accepted Blessed Augustine as an Orthodox Father, and at the same time handed down to us the correct Orthodox attitude towards Fathers like Augustine who have fallen into various errors.

\* J. C. Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History*, New York, 1922, p. 475.

## THE NINTH CENTURY: ST. PHOTIUS THE GREAT

THE THEOLOGY of Blessed Augustine (but no longer his theology of grace) became controversial in the East for the first time late in the ninth century in connection with the famous argument over the *Filioque* (the teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds "also from the Son" and not from the Father alone, as the East has always taught). This marked the first time that any part of Augustine's theology had been subjected to careful examination by a Greek Father (St. Photius) in the East; the Fathers of Gaul who opposed him on grace, although they taught in the Eastern spirit, all lived in the West and wrote in Latin.

The 9th-century *Filioque* controversy is a vast subject about which an informative book has recently been published.\* Here we shall only be concerned with the attitude of St. Photius to Blessed Augustine. This attitude is basically the same as that of the 5th-century Fathers of Gaul, but St. Photius gives a more detailed explanation of what the Orthodox view is with regard to a great and holy Father who has erred.

In one work, his "Letter to the Patriarch of Aquileia" (who was one of the leading apologists for the *Filioque* in the West under Charlemagne), St. Photius answers several objections. To the statement: "The great Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and certain others have written that the Holy Spirit Proceeds also from the Son," St. Photius replies: "If ten or even twenty Fathers have said this, 600 and a numerous multitude have not said it. Who is it that offends the Fathers? Is it not those who, enclosing the whole piety of those few Fathers in a few words and placing them in contradiction to councils, prefer them to the numberless rank (of other Fathers)? Or is it those who choose as their defenders the many Fathers? Who offends holy Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose? Is it not he who forces them to contradict the common Master and Teacher, or is it he who, doing nothing of the sort, desires that all should follow the decree of the common Master?"

Then St. Photius presents an objection typical of the all-too-often narrowly-logical Latin mentality: "If they taught well, then everyone who considers them as Fathers should accept their idea; but if they have not spoken piously, they should be cast out together with the heretics." The answer of St.

\* Richard Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians*, Nordland, Belmont, Mass., 1975.

Photius to this rationalistic view is a model of the depth, sensitivity, and compassion with which true Orthodoxy looks on those who have erred in good faith: "Have there not been complicated conditions which have forced many Fathers in part to express themselves imprecisely, in part to speak with adaptation to circumstances under the attacks of enemies, and at times out of human ignorance to which they also were subject? . . . If some have spoken imprecisely, or for some reason not known to us, even deviated from the right path, but no question was put to them nor did anyone challenge them to learn the truth — we admit them to the list of Fathers, just as if they had not said it, because of their righteousness of life and distinguished virtue and their faith, faultless in other respects. We do not, however, follow their teaching in which they stray from the path of truth . . . We, though, who know that some of our Holy Fathers and teachers strayed from the faith of true dogmas, do not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but we embrace the men. So also in the case of any who are charged with teaching that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, we do not admit what is opposed to the word of the Lord, but we do not cast them out from the rank of the Fathers."\*

In his later treatise on the subject of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, the *Mystagogia*, St. Photius speaks in a similar vein regarding Augustine and others who have erred regarding the *Filioque*, and again defends Augustine against those who would falsely make him stand against the Church's tradition, urging the Latins to cover the mistake of their Fathers "using silence and gratitude" (*Photius and the Carolingians*, pp. 151-3).

Blessed Augustine's teaching on the Holy Trinity, like his teaching on grace, missed the mark not so much because it was in error on any specific point; if he had known the full Eastern teaching on the Holy Trinity he probably would not have taught that the Spirit proceeds "also from the Son." He rather approached the whole dogma from a different — a "psychological" — viewpoint that was not as adequate as the Eastern approach in expressing the truth of our knowledge of God; here, as on grace and other doctrines also, the narrower Latin approach is not so much "wrong" as "limited." Several centuries later the great Eastern Father, St. Gregory Palamas, was able to excuse some of the Latin formulations of the Procession of the Holy Spirit (as long as it was not a matter of the Procession of the *Hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit), adding: "We must not behave in unseemly fashion, vainly quarreling about words."\*\*

\* *Photius and the Carolingians*, pp. 136-7; some passages added from the Russian translation in Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 254-5.

\*\* See Rev. John Meyendorf, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, The Faith Press, London, 1964, pp. 231-2.

But even those who taught incorrectly about the Procession of the *Hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit (as St. Photius believed Blessed Augustine had taught), if they taught in this way before the issue was thoroughly discussed in the Church and the Orthodox doctrine was clearly presented to them, are to be treated with leniency and "not cast out from the rank of the Fathers."

Blessed Augustine himself, we should add, was fully deserving of the loving condescension which St. Photius showed in regard to his error. In the conclusion of his book *On the Trinity* he wrote: "O Lord the One God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in these books that is of Thine, may they acknowledge who are Thine; if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by Thee and by those who are Thine."

In the 9th century, then, when another serious error of Blessed Augustine was exposed and became a matter of controversy, the Orthodox East continued to regard him as a Saint and a Father.

#### LATER CENTURIES: ST. MARK OF EPHESUS

IN THE FIFTEENTH century, at the "Union" Council of Florence, a situation similar to that of St. Photius' time presented itself: the Latins cited Augustine as authority (sometimes incorrectly) for their teaching on doctrines as various as the *Filioque* and purgatory, and a great theologian of the East answered them.

In their first statement to the Greeks in support of the cleansing fire of purgatory, the Latins brought forward the text of the letter of Emperor St. Justinian to the fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (already quoted above) in order to establish the ecumenical authority in the Church of Blessed Augustine and other Western Fathers. To this St. Mark answered (in his "First Homily on Purgatorial Fire," ch. 7): "First of all you have cited certain words of the Fifth Ecumenical Council which define that in everything one should follow those Fathers whose utterances you intend to quote, and completely accept what they have said; in this number are Augustine and Ambrose who, supposedly, teach more distinctly than others about this cleansing fire. But these words are not known to us, for we do not have the book of Acts of that Council, which is why we request you to present it if you have it written in Greek. For we are quite astonished that in this text Theophilus also is numbered with the

other Teachers; he is known everywhere not for any kind of writing, but for an evil renown because of his madness against Chrysostom."\*\*

It is only Theophilus, not Augustine or Ambrose, that St. Mark protests against receiving as a Teacher of the Church. Later in this treatise (chs. 8, 9) St. Mark examines the citations from the "blessed Augustine" and "the divine Father Ambrose" (a distinction which is often retained by Orthodox Fathers in later centuries), refuting some and accepting others. In other writings of St. Mark at this Council he uses the writings of Augustine themselves as an Orthodox source (evidently from the Greek translations of some of his works which had been made after the time of St. Photius). In his "Replies to the Difficulties and Questions of the Cardinals and Other Latin Teachers" (ch. 3), St. Mark quotes from the *Soliloquies* and *On the Trinity*, referring to the author as "blessed Augustine" and using his words effectively against the Latins at the Council (Pogodin, pp. 156-8). In one writing, the "Syllogistic Chapters Against the Latins" (ch. 34), he even refers to "divine Augustine" when again quoting favorably from his *On the Trinity* (Pogodin, p. 268). It should be noted that when St. Mark quotes any later Latin teachers who have no authority in the Orthodox Church, he is careful not to give them any title of praise, whether "blessed" or "divine"; thus, Thomas Aquinas for him is only "Thomas, the Latin teacher" (Ibid., ch. 13; Pogodin, p. 251).

Like St. Photius, St. Mark, seeing that the Latin theologians were quoting the errors of certain Fathers against the teaching of the Church itself, felt it necessary to state the Orthodox teaching regarding Fathers who have erred on some point. He does this in a way similar to St. Photius', but with reference not to Augustine — whose errors he tries to justify and place in the best possible light — or to any other Western Father, but to an Eastern Father who fell into an error certainly no less serious than any of Augustine's. Here is what St. Mark writes:

"With regard to the words which are quoted of the blessed Gregory of Nyssa, it would be better to give them over to silence, and not at all compel us, for the sake of our own defense, to bring them out into the open. For this Teacher is seen to be clearly in agreement with the dogmas of the Origenists and to introduce an end to torments." According to St. Gregory (St. Mark continues), "there will come a final restoration of all, and of the demons themselves, 'that God,' he says, 'may be all in all,' as the Apostle says. Inasmuch as these words have also been quoted, among others, at first we shall reply regarding

\*\* Archimandrite Amvrossy Pogodin, *Saint Mark of Ephesus and the Union of Florence*, in Russian, Jordanville, N.Y., 1963, pp. 65-6. Further references here are to this book, which contains full Russian translations of St. Mark's writings.

them as we have received it from our Fathers. It is possible that these are alterations and insertions by certain heretics and Origenists . . But if the Saint was actually of such an opinion, this was when this teaching was a subject of dispute and had not been definitely condemned and rejected by the opposite opinion, which was brought forward at the Fifth Ecumenical Council; so that there is nothing surprising in the fact that he, being human, erred in precision (of truth), when the same thing happened also with many before him, such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Dionysius of Alexandria and others . . . Thus, these utterances, if they were actually said by the marvellous Gregory concerning that fire, do not indicate a special cleansing (such as purgatory would be — *ed. note*), but introduce a final cleansing and a final restoration of all; but in no way are they convincing for us, who behold the common judgment of the Church and are guided by the Divine Scriptures, but not beholding what each of the Teachers has written as his personal opinion. And if anyone else has written otherwise about a cleansing fire, we have no need to accept it" ("First Homily on Purgatorial Fire," ch. 11; Pogodin, pp. 68-9).

Significantly, the Latins were shocked at this reply and commissioned their leading theologian, the Spanish Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (uncle of the famous Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition) to answer for them, which he did in the following words: "Gregory of Nyssa, without doubt most great among Teachers, handed down in clearest fashion the teaching of purgatorial fire . . . But what you say in answer to this, that being human he could err, seems to us very strange; for Peter and Paul also, and the other Apostles, and the four Evangelists were likewise human, not to mention that Athanasius the Great, Basil, Ambrose, Hilary and others great in the Church were likewise human and consequently could err! Do you not think that this reply of yours oversteps proper bounds? For then the whole of faith wavers, and the whole of the Old and New Testaments, handed down to us through men, are subjected to doubt, because, if one follows your assertion, it was not impossible for them to err. But what then will remain solid in the Divine Scripture? What will have stability? We also acknowledge that it is possible for a man to err in so far as he is human and does anything by his own powers; but in so far as he is guided by the Divine Spirit and tested by the touchstone of the Church in those things which relate to the common faith of dogmatic teaching, then what is written by him, we affirm, is absolutely true" ("Answering Theses of the Latins," ch. 4; Pogodin, pp. 94-5).

The logical end of this Latin search for "perfection" in the Holy Fathers is, of course, Papal infallibility. The logic of this position is exactly the same as that of those who had protested to St. Photius that if Augustine and

others had taught incorrectly on any point they should be "cast out together with the heretics."

St. Mark, in his new reply to these statements, repeats the Orthodox view that "it is possible for one to be a Teacher and all the same not say everything absolutely correctly, for what need then would the Fathers have had for Ecumenical Councils?" — and such private teachings (as opposed to the infallible Scripture and Church Tradition) "we must not believe absolutely or accept without investigation." He then goes into great detail, with many citations from his works, to show that St. Gregory of Nyssa actually did teach the error ascribed to him (which is nothing less than the denial of eternal torment in hell, and universal salvation), and gives the final authoritative word on this matter to Augustine himself.

"That only the canonical Scriptures have infallibility is testified by Blessed Augustine in the words which he writes to Jerome: 'It is fitting to bestow such honor and veneration only to the books of Scripture which are called "canonical", for I absolutely believe that none of the authors who wrote them erred in anything . . . As for other writings, no matter how great was the excellence of their authors in sanctity and learning, in reading them I do not accept their teaching as true solely on the basis that they thus wrote and thought.' Then, in the letter to Fortunatus (St. Mark continues in his citations of Augustine) he writes the following: 'We should not hold the judgment of a man, even though this man might have been orthodox and had a high reputation, as the same kind of authority as the canonical Scriptures, to the extent of considering it inadmissible for us, out of the reverence we owe such men, to disapprove and reject something in their writing if we should happen to discover that they taught other than the truth which, with God's help, has been attained by others or by ourselves. This is how I am with regard to the writings of other men; and I desire that the reader will act thus with regard to my writings also'" (St. Mark, "Second Homily on Purgatorial Fire," chs. 15-16; Pogodin, pp. 127-132).

Thus, the last word on Blessed Augustine is that of Augustine himself; the Orthodox Church down the centuries has in fact treated him exactly as he desired.

#### OPINION OF BLESSED AUGUSTINE IN MODERN TIMES

THE ORTHODOX FATHERS of modern times have continued to regard Blessed Augustine in the same way as did St. Mark, and there has been no particular controversy associated with his name. In Russia, at least as early

as the time of St. Demetrios of Rostov (early 18th century), the custom of referring to him as "Blessed Augustine" had become well established. Here let us say just a word about this title.

In the early centuries of Christianity, the word "blessed" with reference to a man of holy life was used more or less interchangeably with the word "saint" or "holy". This was not the result of any formal "canonization" — which did not exist in those centuries — but was based, rather, chiefly on popular veneration. Thus, St. Martin of Tours (4th century), an unquestioned saint and wonderworker, is referred to by early writers such as St. Gregory of Tours (6th century) sometimes as "blessed" (*beatus*) and sometimes as "saint" (*santus*). And so, when Augustine is referred to in the 5th century by St. Faustus of Lerins as "most blessed" (*beatissimus*), in the 6th century by St. Gregory the Great as "blessed" (*beatus*) and "saint" (*santus*), in the 9th century by St. Photius as "holy" (*agios*), these different titles all mean the same thing: that Augustine was recognized as belonging to the rank of those outstanding for their sanctity and teaching. In the West during these centuries his feast day was kept; in the East (where no special feast would be kept for Western saints) he was simply regarded as a Father of the Universal Church.

By the time of St. Mark of Ephesus the word "blessed" had come to be used for Fathers of somewhat less authority than the greatest Fathers; thus, he refers to "blessed Augustine" but "divine Ambrose," "blessed Gregory of Nyssa" but "Gregory the Theologian, great among the saints"; but he is by no means entirely consistent in this usage.

Even in modern times the word "blessed" remains somewhat vague in its application. In Russian usage "blessed" (*blazhenny*) can refer to great Fathers around whom there has been some controversy (Augustine and Jerome in the West, Theodoret of Cyrus in the East), but also to fools for Christ (canonized or uncanonized) and to the uncanonized holy persons of recent centuries in general. Even today there is no precise definition of what "blessed" means in the Orthodox Church (as opposed to Roman Catholicism, where "beatification" is a whole legal process in itself), and any "blessed" person who has a recognized place in the Orthodox calendar of saints (as do Augustine, Jerome, Theodoret, and many fools for Christ) could also be called "saint." In Russian Orthodox practice one seldom hears of "Saint Augustine," but almost always of "Blessed Augustine."

In modern times there have been numerous translations of the writings of Blessed Augustine into Greek and Russian, and he has become well known in the Orthodox East. Some of his writings, to be sure, such as his anti-Pelagian treatises and *On the Trinity*, are read only with caution — the same

caution with which Orthodox believers read St. Gregory of Nyssa's "On the Soul and the Resurrection" and some other of his writings.

The great Russian Father of the late 18th century, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, quotes from the writings of Blessed Augustine (chiefly from the *Soliloquies*) as of an Orthodox Father — although of course his main Patristic sources were the Eastern Fathers, and above all St. John Chrysostom.\* Augustine's *Confessions* occupied a respected place among Orthodox spiritual books in Russia and even had a decisive effect on the renunciation of the world by the great recluse of the early 19th century, George of Zadonsk. When the latter was in the military service in his youth and was leading an increasingly withdrawn life in preparation for entering a monastery, he was so attracted by a certain colonel's daughter that he had decided to ask her to marry him. Remembering then his cherished desire of abandoning the world, he came to a crisis of indecision and perplexity, which he resolved to end by appealing to the Patristic book he was then reading. As he himself describes this moment: "I was inspired to open the book which lay on the table, thinking to myself: I will follow whatever it opens to at once. I opened the *Confessions* of Augustine. I read: 'He who marries is concerned for a wife, how to please a wife; but he who does not marry is concerned for the Lord, how to please the Lord.' See the rightness of it! What a difference! Reason soundly, choose the better way; do not tarry, decide, follow; nothing hinders you. I decided. My heart was filled with unutterable rejoicing. My soul was in joy. And it seems that my mind was entirely in a heavenly ecstasy."\*\* This experience strongly reminds one of Blessed Augustine's own experience of conversion, when he was inspired to open the Epistles of St. Paul and follow the advice of the first passage on which his eyes fell (*Confessions*, VIII, 12). It should be noted that the spiritual world of Blessed George of Zadonsk was entirely that of the Orthodox Fathers, as we know from the books he read: the Lives of Saints, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Patristic commentaries on Scripture.

In the Greek Church in modern times the situation has been much the same. The 18th-century Greek theologian Eustratius Argenti, in his anti-Latin works such as the *Treatise on Unleavened Bread*, uses Augustine as a Patristic authority, but he also notes that Augustine is one of the Fathers who fell into some errors — but without thereby ceasing to be a Father of the Church.\*

\* See Nadejda Gorodetsky, *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk*, Crestwood, N.Y., 1976, p. 118.

\*\* Bishop Nikodim, *Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, in Russian, Moscow, 1909, Sept. volume, pp. 542-3.

\* See Timothy Ware, *Eustratius Argenti*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 126, 128.

At the end of the 18th century, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain included the Life of Blessed Augustine in his Synaxarion or Collection of Lives of Saints, whereas before this time he had not been included in Eastern calendars and collections of Saints' Lives. This in itself was nothing remarkable; Augustine was but one of many hundreds of names which St. Nicodemus added to the very incomplete Orthodox Calendar of Saints out of his zeal to give greater glory to God's saints. In the 19th century, out of a similar zeal, the Russian Church took the name of Augustine from St. Nicodemus' Synaxarion and added it to its own calendar. This was not any kind of "canonization" of Blessed Augustine, for he had never been regarded in the East as anything other than a Father and a Saint; it was merely a matter of the enlargement of the Church's calendar to make it more complete — a process that is still going on today.

In the 20th century the name of Blessed Augustine is to be found in the standard Orthodox Calendars, usually under the date of June 15 (together with Blessed Jerome), but sometimes under the date of his repose, August 28. The Greek Church, as a whole has perhaps regarded him with less reserve than the Russian Church, as may be seen, for example, in the official calendar of one of the "Old-Calendarist" Greek Churches today, where he is called, not "Blessed Augustine" as in the Russian Calendar, but "Saint Augustine the Great" (*agios Augustinos o megas*).

The Russian Church, however, has great love for him, even while not according him the title of "great". Archbishop John Maximovitch, when he became ruling bishop of Western Europe, made it a point of showing special reverence for him (together with many other Western Saints); thus, he commissioned the writing of a special church service in his honor (which until then had not existed in the Slavonic Menaion), and this service was officially approved by the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church outside of Russia under the presidency of Metropolitan Anastassy. Archbishop John celebrated this service every year, wherever he might happen to be, on the feast day of Blessed Augustine.

Perhaps the most balanced critical appraisal of Blessed Augustine in recent times is to be found in the Patrology of Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, which has been quoted several times above. "He had the very widest influence on his own and subsequent times. But in part he was not understood, in part he himself did not express his thoughts precisely and gave occasion for disputes" (vol. III, p. 7). "Possessing a logical mind and an abundance of feeling, the Teacher of Hippo did not, however, possess in the same abundance a metaphysical mind; in his works there is much ingenuity but little originality

in thought, much logical strictness but not many especially exalted ideas. One likewise cannot ascribe to him a thorough theological erudition. Augustine wrote about everything, just like Aristotle, whereas his excellent works could only be and only were his systematic examinations of subjects and his moral reflections . . . The highest quality in him is the profound, sincere piety with which all his works are filled" (*Ibid.*, p. 35). Among his moral writings which Archbishop Philaret regards most highly are his *Soliloquies*; his treatises, letters and sermons on monastic struggle and the virtues, on care for the dead, on prayer to the saints on the veneration of relics; and of course his justly-renowned *Confessions*, "which without doubt can strike anyone to the depths of his soul by the sincerity of their contrition and warm one by the warmth of the piety which is so essential on the path of salvation" (*Ibid.*, p. 23).

The "controversial" aspects of Blessed Augustine's dogmatic writings have sometimes taken up so much attention that this other, moral side of his works has been largely neglected. But his main benefit to us today is probably precisely as a *Father of Orthodox piety* — something with which he was filled to overflowing. Modern scholars, indeed, often find it disappointing that such an "intellectual giant" should have been such "a typical child of his age, even in matters where we should not expect him to be so," that "strangely enough, Augustine fits into a landscape filled with dreams, devils and spirits," and that his acceptance of miracles and visions "reveals a credulity which to us today seems incredible."\* Here Blessed Augustine parts company with the "sophisticated" students of theology in our own day; but he is one with the simple Orthodox faithful, as well as with all the Holy Fathers of East and West who, whatever their various failings and differences in theoretical points of doctrine, had a single deeply Christian heart and soul. It is this that makes him unquestionably an *Orthodox Father* and creates an impassable abyss between him and all his heterodox "disciples" of later centuries — but makes him kin to all those who are clinging to true Christianity, Holy Orthodoxy in our own days.

But in many points of doctrine also, Blessed Augustine reveals himself as a teacher for the Orthodox. Especially there should be mentioned his teaching on the Millenium. After being himself attracted to a rather spiritualized form of chiliasm in his earlier years as a Christian, in his mature years he became one of the leading combatters of this heresy which has led astray so many heretics in ancient and modern times who read the *Apocalypse* of St. John in an overly-literal way and not according to the Church's tradition. In the true Orthodox interpretation, which Blessed Augustine taught, the "thousand years"

of the *Apocalypse* (ch. 20:1-6) is the whole time from the First Coming to the Second Coming of Christ, when the devil is indeed "bound" (greatly restricted in his power to tempt the faithful) and the saints reign with Christ in the grace-given life of the Church (*City of God*, Book XX, chs. 7-9).

In iconography the features of Blessed Augustine are quite distinctive. Perhaps the earliest surviving icon of him, a 6th-century fresco in the Lateran Library in Rome, is unmistakably based on a portrait from life; the same emaciated, ascetic face and sparse beard appear in a 7th-century icon showing him together with Blessed Jerome and St. Gregory the Great. The icon in an 11th-century manuscript of Tours is more stylized, but still obviously based on the same original. Later Western paintings lose all contact with the original (as happened with most early saints in the West), showing him merely as a medieval or modern Latin prelate.

#### A NOTE ON THE CONTEMPORARY DETRACTORS OF BLESSED AUGUSTINE

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY in the 20th century has been undergoing a "patristic revival." Beyond doubt there is much that is positive in this "revival." Some of the Orthodox textbooks of recent centuries have taught certain doctrines with a partially Western (especially Roman Catholic) vocabulary and slant, and have failed to properly appreciate some of the profoundest Orthodox Fathers, especially of more recent times (St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Gregory the Sinaite). The 20th-century "patristic revival" has at least partially corrected these shortcomings and has freed the Orthodox academies and seminaries of some of the unnecessary "Western influences" that had been present in them. Actually, this has been a continuation of the modern movement of Orthodox self-awareness which was begun in the 18th and early 19th centuries by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, St. Macarius of Corinth, Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, and others both in Greece and Russia.

But there has been a negative side also of this "patristic revival." For one thing, in the 20th century it has been and remains very largely an "academic" phenomenon: abstract, remote from actual life, bearing the stamp of some of the petty passions of the modern academic world — superiority, smugness, lack of charity in criticizing the views of others, the formation of parties or cliques of those who are "in-the-know" and are aware of which views are "in fashion" and which are not. Some students have such an excessive zeal for the "patristic

revival" that they find "Western influence" everywhere they look, become hypercritical of the "Westernized" Orthodoxy of the past several centuries, and have an extremely disdainful attitude towards some of the most respected Orthodox teachers of those centuries (as well as of the present day, and even of antiquity) because of their "Western" views. Little do such "zealots" suspect that they are thus cutting away the Orthodox ground from under their own feet and reducing the unbroken Orthodox tradition to a little "party-line" which a small group of them shares (supposedly) with the "great Fathers" of the past. In this case the "patristic revival" comes perilously close to a kind of Protestantism.\*

Blessed Augustine in recent years has become a victim of this negative side of the "patristic revival." The increased *theoretical* knowledge of Orthodox theology in our times (as opposed to the theology of the Holy Fathers, which was inseparably bound up with Christian life) has produced much criticism of Blessed Augustine for his theological errors. Some theological students even specialize in "tearing to pieces" Augustine and his theology, leaving it scarcely possible for one to believe that he can still be a Father of the Church. Sometimes such students come into open conflict with Orthodox theological scholars of the "old school," who in seminary have been taught some of the defects of Blessed Augustine's theology, but accept him as one Father among many, paying no special attention to him. These latter scholars are closer to the Orthodox opinion of Blessed Augustine down the centuries, while the former are guilty of exaggerating Augustine's faults rather than excusing them (as the great Fathers of the past have done), and in their academic "correctness" often lack that certain inward humility and refinement that mark the authentic transmission of Orthodox tradition from father to son (and not merely from professor to student). Let us look at just one example of this wrong attitude towards Blessed Augustine of some modern students of theology.

An Orthodox priest and professor at a theological school which has experienced the "patristic revival" is giving a lecture on the differences between the mentality of East and West. In discussing the "disastrous distortions of Christian morality" in the modern West, and in particular a false "puritanism" and sense of "perfection," he states: "I cannot trace out the origin of this notion. I only know that Augustine was already introducing it when, if I am not mistaken, he said in his confessions that after his baptism he had no sexual thoughts. I hate to question Augustine's honesty, but it is absolutely impossible for me

\* For a criticism of one such result of the "patristic revival," see Fr. M. Pomazansky, "The Liturgical Theology of Fr. A. Schmemann," *The Orthodox Word*, 1970, no. 6, pp. 260-280.

to accept his statement. I suspect that he made the statement because he already had the notion that since he was a Christian, he was not supposed to have any sexual thoughts. The understanding of Eastern Christianity at the same time was entirely different" (*The Hellenic Chronicle*, Nov. 11, 1976, p. 6). Here Augustine has become, quite simply, a scapegoat on which to pin any views which one finds "un-Orthodox" or "Western"; anything rotten in the West must come from him as its ultimate source! And it is even considered possible, against all laws of fairness, to look into his mind and ascribe to him the most primitive kind of thinking, not to be found even among the freshest converts to Orthodoxy today.

In actual fact, of course, Blessed Augustine never made any such statement. In his *Confessions* he is quite frank in speaking of the "fire of sensuality" which was still in him, and of "how I am still troubled by this kind of evil" (*Confessions* X, 30); and his teaching on sexual morality and the battle against the passions is in general identical with the teaching of the Eastern Fathers of his time — both of which are very different from the modern Western attitude which the lecturer rightly sees as mistaken and un-Christian. (In actual fact, however, the grace of being freed from sexual temptations has been given to some Fathers — in the East if not in the West; see *The Lausiac History*, ch. 29, where the ascetic Elias of Egypt, as a result of an angelic visitation, was granted such freedom from lust that he could say, "Passion comes no more into my mind.")

We do not need to be overly harsh ourselves in judging such distortions of the "patristic revival"; so many inadequate and conflicting ideas, many of them truly foreign to the Church, are presented today in the name of Christianity and even of Orthodoxy that one can easily excuse those whose Orthodox views and evaluations are sometimes lacking in balance, as long as it is truly the purity of Christianity that they are sincerely seeking. This very study of Blessed Augustine, indeed, has shown us that precisely this is the attitude of the Orthodox Fathers with regard to those who have erred in good faith. We have much to learn from the generous, tolerant, and forgiving attitude of these Fathers.

Where there are errors, to be sure, we must strive to correct them; the "Western influences" of modern times must be combatted, the errors of ancient Fathers must not be followed. With regard to Blessed Augustine in particular, it cannot be doubted that his teaching missed the mark in many respects: with regard to the Holy Trinity, grace and nature, and other doctrines; his teaching is not "heretical," but it is exaggerated, and it was the Eastern Fathers who taught the true and profound Christian doctrines on these points.

To some extent the faults of Augustine's teaching are the faults of the Western mentality, which on the whole did not grasp Christian doctrine as profoundly as the East. St. Mark of Ephesus makes a particular remark to the Latin theologians at Ferrara-Florence which might be taken as a summary of the differences between East and West: "Do you see how superficially your teachers touch on the meaning, and how they do not penetrate into the meaning, as for example do John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian and other universal luminaries of the Church?" (*First Homily on Purgatorial Fire*, ch. 8; Pogodin, p. 66). Some Western Fathers, to be sure, such as Sts. Ambrose, Hilary of Poitiers, Cassian — do penetrate deeper and are more in the Eastern spirit; but as a general rule it is indeed the Eastern Fathers who teach most penetratingly and profoundly of Christian doctrine.

But this in no way gives us grounds for any kind of "Eastern triumphalism." If we boast of our great Fathers, let us beware of being like the Jews who boasted of the very prophets whom they stoned (Matt. 23:29-31). We, the last Christians, are not worthy of the inheritance which they have left us; we are unworthy of even beholding from afar the exalted theology which they both taught and lived; we quote the great Fathers but we do not have their spirit ourselves. As a general rule, it may even be said that it is usually those who cry the loudest against "Western influence" and are the least forgiving of those whose theology is not "pure" — who are themselves the most infected by Western influences, often of unsuspected kinds. The spirit of disparagement of all who do not agree with one's "correct" views, whether on theology, iconography, church services, spiritual life, or whatever subject, has become far too common today, especially among new converts to the Orthodox Faith, in whom it is particularly unfitting and often has disastrous results. But even among "Orthodox peoples" this spirit has become too prevalent (obviously as a result of "Western influence"!), as may be seen in the unfortunate recent attempt in Greece to deny the sanctity of St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, a great wonderworker of our own century, because he has supposedly taught incorrectly on some doctrinal points.

Today all we Orthodox Christians, whether of East or West — if only we are honest and sincere enough to admit it — are in a "Western captivity" worse than any our Fathers in the past have known. In previous centuries, Western influences may have produced some theoretical formulations of doctrine that were wanting in precision; but today the "Western captivity" surrounds and often governs the very atmosphere and tone of our Orthodoxy, which is often theoretically "correct" but wanting in true Christian spirit, in the indefinable savor of true Christianity.

Let us then be more humble, more loving and forgiving in our approach to the Holy Fathers. Let the test of our continuity with the unbroken Christian tradition of the past be, not only our attempt to be precise in doctrine, but also our love for the men who have handed it down to us — of whom Blessed Augustine was certainly one, as was also St. Gregory of Nyssa, despite their errors. Let us be in agreement with our great Eastern Father St. Photius of Constantinople, and "not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but we embrace the men."

And Blessed Augustine has something indeed to teach our "precise" and "correct" — but cold and unfeeling — generation of Orthodox Christians. The exalted teaching of the Philokalia is now "in fashion"; but how many who read this book have first gone through the "ABC's" of profound repentance, warmth of heart, and genuine Orthodox piety that shine through every page of the justly-renowned *Confessions* of Augustine? This book, the history of Blessed Augustine's own conversion, has by no means lost its significance today; fervent converts will find in it much of their own path through sin and error to the Orthodox Church, and an antidote against some of the "convert temptations" of our own times. Without the fire of authentic zeal and piety which the *Confessions* reveal, our Orthodox spirituality is a sham and a mockery, and partakes of the spirit of the coming Antichrist as surely as the doctrinal apostasy that surrounds us on all sides.

"The thought of Thee stirs man so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises Thee; for Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts find no peace until they come to rest in Thee" (Blessed Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1).

## A P P E N D I X

### Standard description of Blessed Augustine

" St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo,

St. Augustine was born in Tagaste in the province of Numidia in 354 A.D. His pious mother Monica tried to give him a Christian education. Although he was gifted with a cheerful and talented mind, in his youth he was reluctant to follow his mother's exhortations. He was already of a mature age when he was baptized by St. Ambrose of Milan. After his mother's death, he distributed all his wealth to the poor, embraced monasticism, and for three years labored in solitude and severe struggles. In 391 A.D., Valerian, Bishop of Hippo, ordained him to the priesthood (against his will), and in 395 Valerian insisted that Augustine be consecrated his vicar bishop. Valerian died and Augustine continued for 35 years to be the most active pastor of Hippo. With his sermons and writings he defeated the heretic Pelagius.

St. Augustine died peacefully on August 28, 430 A.D. in the 76th year of his life. He was a great teacher and fruitful writer of the church, as he was called at the 7th Ecumenical Council.

(Based on the Greek Menaion, and The Historical Textbook of the fathers of the Church, by Philaret, Archbishop of Chernigov, part III, pg. 18)."1

1 Myesyastoslov of the Orthodox Catholic Church, May 15, compiled by Iv. Kosolapov, 2nd ed., I.G. Anychina, Simbirsk, 1880, p. 277.



Blessed Augustine as interpreter  
of the Psalms  
11th-century manuscript of Tours



The earliest surviving icon  
of Blessed Augustine  
(6th-century fresco in the  
Lateran Library, Rome)