

THE BOOK OF MOSES AS A PRE-AUGUSTINIAN TEXT: A NEW LOOK AT THE PELAGIAN CRISIS

Terryl L. Givens

Coming from a tradition that has labored under the pejorative label of heretics for almost two centuries, Latter-day Saints should be especially attuned to the historical formation of such categories and to revolutions in recent scholarship over the meaning and validity of such labels as they are deployed in Christian historiography. I want to situate the Book of Moses in the midst of such developments, since they give us powerful new grounds for seeing the text as both authentically Christian in its themes and pre-Augustinian in its doctrine.

Walter Bauer, in his classic study of orthodoxy and heresy, made the argument that “orthodoxy” is just the heresy that won out. According to this view, we had a number of competing factions in early Christianity, and the winner wrote the narrative of Christianity.¹ More recent scholars have challenged that interpretation. Alister McGrath, in his recent study on the topic, argues something close to the opposite: “Heresy is best seen as a form of Christian belief that...ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying the core of Christian faith.”²

This definition strikes me as consummate question-begging, and it ignores rather than refutes Bauer’s position. Such conceptions, which dominate the writing of Christian history, have an implicit providentialist bias. They presuppose that where Christianity arrived, in general terms, is where God intended, so orthodoxy becomes synonymous with whatever precedes the end result. Anything that is seen, *retrospectively*, to challenge that normative

strain is adjudged heresy. But the core of Christian faith is precisely what is being contested in the formative fourth century of Christian development in particular.

Although Paul is generally credited as the author of Christianity understood as a system of thought, it is actually Augustine who first erects an interconnected set of precepts into a tightly organized system that serves as the foundation of Christian development for the next 1,600 years. As B. R. Rees notes, as the 4th century ends, “in the Western Church” there does not even exist a “coherent body of doctrine tried, tested, and refined in the furnace of controversy.”³ Disputes in that century over *homoiousios* (which means “similar” and refers to the idea that God the Son was of a similar substance to God the Father) and *homoousios* (which means “of one substance” and refers to the idea that God the Son and God the Father were of the same substance), like disputes over the meaning of the Eucharist in the 16th century, are quite clearly debates between advocates of competing interpretations of a sparse New Testament record, not occasions where a “core” of biblical truth is under assault by theological barbarians.

So I want to look at several simultaneous or near-simultaneous developments that do not cause Augustine to *defend* the core of Christian faith but to *create* a new core of Christian faith, in two instances by actually abandoning what were arguably core tenets of early Christian thought—premortal life and moral agency. In order to make all his pieces fit together, Augustine only at this juncture elaborates a systematic structure that will *become* Christian orthodoxy. Again, to quote Rees, “What Augustine did was to build original sin and its transmission, infant baptism, grace and predestination into a coherent theological system, while carrying the first and the last of these to extremes hitherto inconceivable.”⁴

I want to revisit the context out of which this new system emerges for a few reasons. First, because by doing so, the pre-Augustinian theological world is revealed as demonstrably consonant—to a remarkable degree—with the theological foundations laid out in the Book of Moses. While this does not establish the provenance of that book of scripture as authentically ancient, the comparison does establish that at the early date of late 1830, Joseph Smith produces

a text that is consistent in its radical reconstruction of Christian theology along the lines of its pre-Augustinian complexion.

And second, I want to merely note that the doctrines it expounds are demonstrably consonant with contemporary theological developments and reconsiderations of the Christian past. This project of elucidating the gospel of Moses comes at a remarkable moment in modern Christian history. A growing chorus of scholars are lamenting what I call the Augustinian triumph. In one typical formulation, the twin condemnation of Pelagius and Origen, writes Elizabeth Clark, ensured the supremacy “of a Christian theology whose central concerns were human sinfulness, not human potentiality; divine determination, not human freedom and responsibility; God’s mystery, not God’s justice. *Christianity was perhaps poorer for their suppression.*”⁵

The chain of events leading to the greatest doctrinal reconstruction in Christian history begins in the early fifth century. As B. R. Rees writes, citing Irenaeus by way of illustration, “The emphasis [with him] is not on a Fall in the past but upon a growth in the future.” The *imitatio Christi* takes center stage.⁶ Abruptly, in the early fifth century, Adam, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the fruit thereof become the obsessive concern of Augustine and the subsequent tradition.

The upheavals begin in Carthage, in North Africa, when in 411 Caelestius—a figure about whom little is known—is put on trial for heresy. The charge was that he denied the still emerging doctrine of original sin. According to transcripts of the trial, he had written that “at their births, infants are in that state [of innocence] which Adam was before his transgression.” He is asked if he is denying that “the guilt of the [original] transgression” is inherited at birth, and he affirms that he is. Significantly, he points out that at this time, “many within the Catholic Church argue against it and some others defend it, inasmuch as it is open to discussion and not a matter of heresy.”⁷

In spite of there being no orthodoxy on the subject, Carthage is within the sphere of Augustine’s influence, and Caelestius is summarily anathematized. Further proof that this verdict is a reflection of Augustine’s influence and no settled consensus is the fact that six years later (in 417), Caelestius appeals to Pope

Zosimus, affirming in writing that he maintains that “original sin binds no single infant....Sin is not born with a man,” and if infants are baptized, the purpose of that sacrament is not to counter any implied transmission of sin from parent to child.⁸ Zosimus clears Caelestius of the taint of heresy. But Caelestius’s teacher Pelagius is similarly summoned, in 415, to a conventum in Jerusalem then to a synod in Diospolis where he is required to answer a series of charges concerning his teachings on original sin and free will. He is exonerated. The historical circumstances lend legitimacy to Pelagius’s own claim that, in Henry Chadwick’s words, Pelagius was “a traditionalist, defending the true faith against the innovations of Augustine.”⁹ It is generally recognized among scholars that just as Origenism was a construct only tangentially related to Origen’s original teachings, so did Augustine erect Pelagius into a bogeyman that lent greater credibility to his own effort to depict himself as the defender of orthodoxy against dangerous innovations—when the opposite was closer to the truth. Ali Bonner, for example, argues in a recent study that “Pelagius did not invent anything: all the teachings in his writings had already been widely disseminated,” while no less a figure than Jerome accused Augustine on one occasion of “introducing heresy into the Church.”¹⁰ Further evidence that this is really the case is noted by Rees. When monks not only in faraway Marseilles but even in Roman Africa read Augustine’s words on original sin and free will, “they were deeply shocked.”¹¹ Augustine was not expounding orthodoxy—he was creating it. Dennis Groh agrees: “Many people beside the Pelagians smelled something very new in [Augustine’s] interpretation of St. Paul....But his continuous tracts against the Pelagians carried the day and convinced the Church that this was what it had always taught.”¹²

Augustine makes it his life’s mission to extirpate the teachings of Caelestius and the larger body of teachings of his mentor Pelagius. The task consumes him and elicits a huge corpus of works dedicated to that objective. In 418, the battle is largely over. Augustine succeeds in securing the triple condemnation of Pelagius and Caelestius by Emperor Honorius, another council in Carthage, and a persuaded Pope Zosimus.

In what follows, I will briefly review the doctrinal assertions clearly made in the Book of Moses that were lost under the direct

or indirect influence of Augustine. In each case, I will identify the Restoration scripture that enunciates a key doctrine, and then I will provide a brief explication of its fourth century defender as well as its demise at Augustine's hands.

1. Sin and Baptism

"The Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world" (Moses 6:54).

Critics of the Book of Mormon have alleged that doctrines in that scripture are suspiciously relevant to 19th-century debates. That may be true. But in the case of the Book of Moses, we find a constellation of doctrines even more germane to the controversies of the late fourth and early fifth century. In this regard, original sin and the baptism of infants were the two explosive issues that precipitated the Pelagian controversies of that era. According to Stuart Squires, "the baptism of infants...became the primary battlefield on which the fight over original sin, as well as the meaning of baptism, were fought."¹³

We saw earlier how Caelestius roiled those waters with his challenge to the Augustinian view of child baptism as a counter to inherited original guilt. Both Caelestius and Pelagius accepted infant baptism—unenthusiastically—for the same reasons that Luther and the Reformers did. Diarmaid MacCulloch notes that both Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther could not defend the practice based on scripture but were "in danger of being forced back unhappily towards saying that there were some things in the life of the Church that had been proved by their long usage."¹⁴ In other words, they had to compromise their biblicism to avoid being tarred with the radical Anabaptist brush. Similarly, Pelagius and his cohorts found ample reason to reject the *rationale* for infant baptism, which was new, but stopped short of dismissing the *practice*, because it was too deeply entrenched by now.

Of course, in the absence of original sin, Pelagius's rationale for infant baptism disintegrated. His problem was not his unorthodoxy—but his failure to throw the baby out with the baptism water by questioning the practice itself. In other words, if

he had been willing to deny original sin *and* the baptism of infants, his theology would have been fully self-consistent. As it was, his halfway position was incapable of sustaining the assaults of the Augustinian contingent. This is doubly unfortunate when one realizes that the need to rethink baptism almost took him to an early Christian emphasis in harmony with Restoration teachings. The effects of baptism, Pelagius rightly wrote, are that the baptized “become adopted sons and daughters of God.”¹⁵ In the primitive Catholic Church, often converts were baptized in large groups at Easter, since the significance of both baptism and Easter was birth to a new life.¹⁶ In Latter-day Saint thought, children under eight are incapable of sin, and yet eight-year-olds are baptized. This practice illustrates the principal significance of the ordinance as an ordinance of adoption, as does the covenantal language of taking a new name upon us (See 2 Nephi 31:3). This covenantal language, in the Book of Mormon especially, is explicitly associated with what Noel Reynolds describes as baptism’s witnessing function, attesting to our willingness to follow Christ.

It has been noted that Moses 6:55, with its reference to children “conceived in sin,” evokes shades of original sin. However, the clear assertion that children are “whole from the foundation of the world” (verse 54) suggests only one possible meaning of that phrase: children are born into a world, into a hostile environment, where sin’s fruits—“the bitter” (verse 55)—are everywhere in evidence.

2. Agency

“They are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32).

Scholars have long noted what some call the Restoration’s “almost obsessive...concern for free moral agency.”¹⁷ Arminianism, which emphasized human free will rather than divine predetermination in human salvation, was already gaining strength in Joseph Smith’s America, but the Book of Moses added a kind of double etiology—or origin story—behind this gift. First, the Latter-day Saint cosmology puts the contest over human agency at the very beginning of the Creation story. Even before the earth is formed, the Father’s plan is challenged by Lucifer’s project to “destroy the agency of man”

(Moses 4:3). A few chapters later, we read that “the Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32). Many Saints reading this passage wonder how individuals possessing agency in the premortal existence can be awarded it in the garden. In fact, Joseph revised that verse to read, “in the Garden of Eden man had agency.”¹⁸ In any case, God did prepare the conditions in the garden in terms of oppositions from which man could freely choose, quickening that gift of agency as we experience it in this mortal life. As Lehi will elaborate, “Man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).

Pelagius uses the word *posse* to frame the principle of God-given agency. Squires describes *posse* this way: “*Posse* [“to be able” in Latin] is the ability to choose either good actions or evil actions. As we are not burdened by original sin, our ability is not hampered in any way. This *posse* is entirely a gift from God.”¹⁹ According to his biographer, Pelagius believed and taught that this human will “was itself a form of interior grace,” the grace essential to salvation.²⁰ Elaine Pagels goes so far as to say, “Many Christian converts of the first three centuries...regarded the proclamation of αὐτεξουσία—the moral freedom to rule oneself—as virtually synonymous with ‘the gospel.’ Yet with Augustine,...the message changed.”²¹

Augustine had at one time been a fervent defender of free will. Indeed, the early Augustine wrote a work titled *De libero arbitrio* (“The Freedom of the Will”). Although some scholars try to harmonize his positions there with his later insistence on predestination, Augustine himself acknowledged he made a paradigm shift when he said, “I, indeed, labored in defense of the free choice of the human will; but,” he said tellingly (and “with a shudder,” writes Robert O’Connell), “the grace of God conquered.”²²

And so, in Augustine’s *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, he writes that “the grace given by God does not simply allow one to believe, but that it makes one believe.”²³ In that logic, as subsequent authorities like Fulgentius of Ruspe wrote, predestination “was the only reasonable conclusion to the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace.”²⁴

3. Premortal Existence

God “called upon our father Adam by his own voice, saying: I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh” (Moses 6:51).

This verse hardly seems like the basis for a Restoration doctrine of premortal existence; however, the evidence suggests this was a pivotal seed that immediately bore rich fruit. These Enoch texts were not published until 1833, but it is clear that they were circulating earlier and had profound impact, as two documents illustrate. In the first document, dated March 1832 and titled “A Sample of Pure Language Given by Joseph the Seer,” the name of God is given as “Awman,” or “the being which made all things in all its parts,” and the “children of men” are said to be “the greatest parts of Awman.”²⁵ The phrasing itself might not have suggested a premortal genealogy; together with a second revelation, however, the text points quite clearly to a conception of human spirits as emanating from God, with the teaching traceable to Enoch.

Little is known of the context in which this second revelation, dated 27 February 1833, was pronounced. An undated broadside of a poetic rendering of the revelation indicates that the original revelation was “sung in tongues by Elder D. W. Patton...and interpreted by Elder S[idney] Rigdon.”²⁶ Recorded in the hand of Frederick G. Williams, this translation of an instance of singing in tongues is clearly based on the 1830 prophecy of Enoch. For in this song, which we will call the hymn of Enoch, Enoch, as in Smith’s version, “saw the begining [*sic*] the ending of man he saw the time when Adam his father was made and he saw that he was in eternity before a grain of dust in the ballance [*sic*] was weighed he saw that he emenated [*sic*] and came down from God.”²⁷ The cross-fertilization of the “Awman” revelation and the Enoch hymn emerged when an anonymous writer, perhaps W. W. Phelps, published in the May 1833 Church paper a poetic celebration of premortal existence, bearing clear phrasing from these two sources:

Before the mountains rais’d their heads
Or the small dust of balance weigh’d.

With God he [Enoch] saw his race began,
 And from him emanated man,
 And with him did in glory dwell,
 Before there was an earth or hell.²⁸

Tellingly, Smith unambiguously affirmed the eternal premortal existence of human spirits early this same month, declaring that “man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29). Yet Phelps published his poetic declaration borrowing its language not from the definitive revelation of Smith but from the hymn of Enoch, showing the infiltration of the Enoch text into Latter-day Saint culture in these earliest years.

In the early fifth century, sadly, free will is not the only casualty of Augustine’s theory of grace. So, too, is the early Christian belief in premortal existence. The logic runs this way: the early Augustine felt perfectly safe in arguing that “evil deeds...would not be punished justly if they were not performed voluntarily.”²⁹ That, of course, was to imply a powerful argument for premortal existence, because life seems self-evidently unfair, and if we don’t choose the circumstances of our birth, they must be tied to premortal conditions. Similarly, Origen had argued that only a premortal life could explain the variations of blessedness and—more commonly—misery associated with this mortal life.³⁰ The details may have been wrong, but Origen and the young Augustine alike sensed that *something* must have transpired before birth to make greater sense out of God’s justice.

Premortal existence had been espoused by several church fathers because it addressed not only the justice of God but also the mystery of human embodiment and suffering, the sensitivity of the soul to spiritual truth, and the quest for what seemed a dimly remembered happiness that was sensed but not known in or from this world. Origen is the best-known proponent of the view, but it was a familiar carryover from Jewish thought; was familiar to the Essenes; was found in the Gospel of Thomas, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the *Exegesis on the Soul*; and was expressed by Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Evagrius Ponticus, Didymus the Blind, Synesius of Cyrene, and others. By the late fourth century,

a general state of uncertainty regarding the doctrine prevails. Augustine describes the options he is contending with:

There are four views about souls: (1) they come into being by propagation [traducianism]; (2) they are created individually for each person who is born [creationism]; (3) they already exist elsewhere and are sent by God into the bodies of those who are born ["sent" preexistence]; (4) they sink into bodies by their own choice ["fallen" preexistence, Origen's idea].³¹

Three reasons explain why, at this point, Augustine is still committed to the doctrine of premortal existence. The first reason is that Augustine finds that premortal existence aptly accounts for our search for happiness. We cannot search for what we have never known. He gives the analogy of the woman searching for her coin, who presupposes that she once knew it (see Luke 15).

Second, the alternatives are highly problematic. Creationism, the view that God creates the soul at birth, is repugnant to Augustine because it implies that God creates a corrupt soul to match a fallen body. Traducianism, the other alternative, is little better because it holds that a fallen human is capable, through the sexual act, of generating an immortal soul.

Third and most compellingly, premortal existence frees God of the charge of capriciousness or injustice. As Augustine explains, if souls "come to inhabit bodies by their own choice, it is quite easy to see that the ignorance and difficulty that result from their own wills are in no way to be blamed on their Creator. For he is completely without fault even if he himself sends souls to dwell in bodies."³²

So what changed? The young Augustine struggled to defend God's justice. However, if we are saved by grace, then we are predestined by God's choice regardless of our own actions and will. If this is the case, then clearly we cannot apply human categories of justice to God, and Augustine abandons the enterprise altogether. It is not for us, Augustine suggests, to use reason to salvage God's honor. Free will is not worth defending if such defense compromises God's ability to choose whom, how, or when He will and makes God's sovereignty subordinate to our own choices. The human perception of God's apparent injustice must surrender to the mysterious workings of the divine. So our perplexity in the

absence of any theodicy becomes a sign both of our abject humility and of God's radically other sovereignty. Or as Augustine puts it more briefly, "What kind of 'justice,' then, is this? The inscrutable justice proper to God's dealings with human creatures," Augustine replies, "a justice beyond both our understanding and our right of complaint."³³

Once Augustine, the most influential Christian thinker of the fourth century, abandoned premortal existence (he opted instead for traducianism—which only the Lutherans espouse today), the church followed suit. Origenism, the set of beliefs centered on premortal existence and universal salvation, undergoes its first anathema in a long line of anathemas by councils and emperors.

4. God of Passions

"And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it" (Moses 7:28).

Joseph then revised the text to indicate that Enoch is in this scene weeping with God and is surprised when he sees God joining in his grief: "And he beheld, and lo, the heavens wept also and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the Mountains."³⁴ Though "heavens" stands in here for "God" in poetic metonymy, it is clearly God who weeps and who personally responds to Enoch's twice-expressed amazement: "How is it thou canst weep?"³⁵ Significantly, Enoch refers to him as the Father. The Divine Being declares himself to be "God; Man of Holiness" (with Christ referred to as "Son of Man" throughout the narrative).³⁶

As Augustine has exempted God from human categories of justice, in his *Confessions* he deprives God of any semblance of human emotions as well. "Who can sanely say that God is touched by any misery?" says Augustine in a typical formulation.³⁷ Anselm will later explicate Augustine's views of God's "pity" and "love" in terms distinctly different from their parental counterparts: "How art thou at once pitiful and impassible?...When Thou lookest upon us in our wretchedness we feel the effect of Thy pity, Thou feelest not the effect. And therefore Thou art pitiful, because Thou savest the wretched,...[but] Thou art touched by no fellow-suffering in that wretchedness."³⁸ Leading scholars such as Nicholas Wolterstorff

are unambiguous in their assessment: “The Augustinian God turns out to be remarkably like the Stoic sage: devoid of passions, unfamiliar with longing, foreign to suffering, dwelling in steady bliss.”³⁹ Joseph Campbell’s summation in this regard is pertinent: Augustine’s conversion to Christianity represented his repudiation of “the Manichaeic doctrine of the immanence of divine light” for “the Christian doctrine of the absolute transcendence of divinity.”

5. Salvation as a Cooperative Project

“For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

“Thou hast made me [Jesus Christ], and given unto me a right to thy throne” (Moses 7:59).

The Book of Moses presents human exaltation as a joint project initiated by God, requiring human consent and cooperation. (This is made even more evident in Abraham’s account of the Grand Council in Abraham 3:22–26.) Pelagius saw salvation in just such terms. He said that “we always stand in need of God’s help,” but he gives to us the gift of moral agency: “Man always is in a state that he may sin, or may not sin, so as to own ourselves always to be of a free-will.”⁴⁰ Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the Augustinian revolution, and one corrected by the Book of Moses, is the loss of understanding salvation as a cooperative, transformative venture. The implications of what Augustine reconceived receive their fullest expression at the hands of Luther and the Reformers. The historian B. B. Warfield wrote, “The Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace.”⁴¹ That doctrine represents a complete rewriting of the early Christian understanding, and it is based on Augustine’s misreading of what it means to be saved, or in his terms, “justified.” This is how it happens: “The word ‘justification’...in Latin literally means *the making of someone to be righteous*. In Luther’s understanding it rather meant the *declaring* of someone to be righteous: God ‘imputes’ the merits of the crucified and risen Christ through grace to a fallen human being, who remains without inherent merit and who, without this ‘imputation,’ would remain unrighteous.”⁴² No longer are we engaged on a journey planned from before our creation, a journey

intending the schooling of God's children through the educative experiences of mortality and envisioning our growth into beings like our Divine Parents. Instead we are merely human detritus of an Adamic catastrophe. God punished Jesus for the sin that accrues to all humans. God has deigned to "save" some of us before our birth for his own glory.

Augustine's reformulation was met with initial resistance because, as the Pelagians pointed out, his "insistence on the absolute priority of the divine initiative in the work of human salvation appeared...to have led him to adopt an extreme position which threatened to undermine the whole foundation of the Christian life as an active and loving co-operation between God and man."⁴³

Other developments roughly contemporaneous with the Augustinian controversies compounded the reshaping of Christian theology: the demise of universalism as the default position, the creedal obfuscation of the nature of God, monasticism as a reorientation of a public framework to a private framework for spirituality, and many others. My purpose, however, was not to rehearse one more version of what Latter-day Saints have labeled "the Apostasy." My focus, rather, has been to demonstrate the particularity of the Moses text as a compilation of those doctrines specifically impaired in the confrontation between Augustine and those labeled Pelagians in the early fifth century. Latter-day Saints should recognize the truth of the verdict of R. F. Evans, who writes, "Pelagius is one of the most maligned figures in the history of Christianity."⁴⁴

Discussion

Kent P. Jackson:

We now have some time for some remote questions and answers. Thank you, Terryl, for your fantastic presentation. Terryl, if humans have real agency, then that means that there is something in the universe that is not subject to God's sovereignty. Did Augustine ever use that argument?

Terryl Givens:

You know, I don't know that he did. If I were a betting man, I would bet that he did, because that certainly comes out so powerfully and explicitly in Calvin, who is simply a reincarnation of Augustine on crack. But I can't think exactly where I would locate that in Augustine.

Kent:

Thank you for telling us that Calvin was the reincarnation of Augustine on crack. I've always believed that. In fact, Luther was an Augustinian monk, and Calvin was the ultimate, ultimate admirer of the writings of Augustine. He tells us that Augustine's words were completely within him.

Terryl:

Reformation scholars like Diarmaid MacCulloch, for example, say that the Reformation was essentially the reinvention and amplification of Augustine. I think that's pretty much a truism in Reformation studies.

Kent:

I have become aware recently that there are a lot of Evangelicals, and I'm not talking only about scholars but also about seminary professors and average folks, who are pushing against the Augustinian Calvinism that is so strong within the Evangelical community. And they push against it because they believe that Augustinian Calvinism is incompatible with the Bible, as well as

incompatible with the character of God and Jesus as depicted in the Bible. Do you see this as a movement that has a future within Orthodox Christianity or that will have a future impact?

Terryl:

This is a great question. I'm really, really glad you asked this for a couple of reasons. One, because this sense has actually taken on a coherent form in the movement called the "New Perspective on Paul," whereby any number of Reformation scholars are asking the question. In fact, there's even a paper in a collection of essays under that rubric, and the title of the presentation was "Was the Reformation a Colossal Mistake?" Because it's coming to be recognized that not only is the nature of the God that Calvin and Augustine depict a slander against any benevolent, gracious God, it's also not consistent with a careful textual reading of the book of Romans. And again, it's become a virtual truism among all biblical scholars that Augustine, who didn't know Greek, is relying on a bad reading of Romans to textually found his whole doctrine of original sin.

David Bentley Hart says it most irreverently when he says the whole Reformation was predicated on the fact that a demented African demigod didn't know how to read Greek, which is a little harsh. But, I mean, the point is that, yes, they got it wrong textually as well as theologically. But the larger point I want to make is that there's been a huge watershed—and this is part of what I was trying to touch on in my paper—a watershed in the way that theologians and historians of Christianity are coming to reevaluate and reinterpret those fourth and fifth centuries. They're recognizing that Augustine and his followers are actually the heretics. The figures excluded from the canon of Orthodox writers and thinkers (Origen, Pelagius, and Caelestius) are so much more in harmony with the early Christian writers as well as a modern theological sensibility. I mean, that's clear if you read popular writers like Hart, Timothy Keller, Richard Rohr, or N. T. Wright—all of whom come to mind in this regard, right?

They don't sound like Augustine—they sound like Pelagius, and so do most theologians writing today. So my sense is that all of the elements are virtually in place for a radically reconstituted

Christian historical narrative, and that needs to be undertaken at some point. It was not that long ago that Richard Mouw wrote an article, which became a little famous, called “Mormons Approaching Orthodoxy,” in *First Things* (May 2016), in which he was telling his fellow Evangelicals, “Just be patient, just be patient with the Mormons. They’re coming along. They’ll be closer to orthodoxy in a little while.” When in actual fact, the last 50 years have shown that the Christian world, especially Evangelicals, are moving closer to Latter-day Saint theology. They’re talking about theosis. They’ve completely abandoned original sin. They’ve abandoned predestination. So that was a long answer. Sorry.

Kent:

I’ve also become aware recently that there is a growing youth movement among Evangelicals toward embracing Calvinism. Can you explain to me what the attraction is to Calvinism? I don’t see it.

Terryl:

Yes, I’m not a psychologist, but I’ll give you two theories. One is that a number of really astute social critics have noted in the last few years that this current generation is a generation that isn’t even rebelling against authority because they’ve never known what it’s like to live in a culture where authority was valued or privileged. And so, one explanation is that people are just desperate for a kind of standard, a kind of implacable, immovable standard that they can cling to as a fixed point in the universe, and the Calvinist god certainly gives you that. Another explanation for the resurgence of Calvinism is given by Elaine Pagels, who devotes her entire book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* to asking the question “How on earth did Augustine’s doctrine of original sin triumph when”—as I was pointing out—“it flew in the face of all the orthodoxy of the day?”

But original sin triumphed against what one would think are the better inclinations of the human heart. And her explanation is that we would rather feel guilty than perplexed. And I thought that was a pretty marvelous insight. That if there’s a benevolent God, how do you explain the Holocaust? Right? I mean, we struggled to make sense out of pain and misery and suffering, if there’s a benevolent God. And so we’re confronted with this indecipherable

universe. But if instead I offer you, well, there's this God, he's kind of psychopathic. He predetermined ahead of time who would be damned and who would be saved for his own glory, and you're not to question it. OK, well, that's an explanation. It might not be satisfying, but I'm no longer stupefied. So that was her explanation.

Kent:

A final question. Would you be willing to give us your very short version of what you alluded to about the Protestant Reformation not laying the foundation for the Restoration of the gospel?

Terryl:

Briefly? Let me take a stab at it.

Catholicism is predicated on priesthood authority manifests in their intense sacramentalism (the absolute need for saving ordinances). So is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. By contrast, the Protestants utterly repudiate the necessity of sacraments. The very first change made to the Catholic Book of Common Prayer was to take out all prayers for the dead because the Protestants believed that the living and the dead are discrete realms. We have no bearing on their salvation, they have none on ours. Our whole temple theology is complete repudiation of all of that. Calvinism, and the Westminster Confession explicitly, affirms depravity. We reject that. They affirm predestination. We reject that. They deny that humans have the capacity to become like God without a righteousness that is "imputed." We believe we can literally become as our Heavenly Parents are. There isn't a single theological innovation of the Reformation that takes us closer to Restoration teachings. In every single case, they take us further and more emphatically away.

A New York native, Terryl Givens did his graduate work in intellectual history (Cornell) and comparative literature (UNC Chapel Hill). He is professor emeritus of religion and literature at the University of Richmond, where he held the Bostwick Chair. Givens's work has been called "provocative reading" by the New York Times and includes some twenty titles, including a two-volume history of Mormon thought: Wrestling the Angel, and Feeding the Flock, a study of the Pearl of Great Price released in 2019 and a volume on 2 Nephi released in 2020. Professor Givens has also been a commentator on CNN, NPR, and in the PBS/Frontline documentary, The Mormons. As of June 2020 he is the Neal A. Maxwell Senior Research Fellow at the BYU Maxwell Institute in Provo, Utah.

Notes

1. See Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).
2. Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 11–12.
3. B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 1991), 10.
4. Rees, *Pelagius*, 9–10.
5. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 250; emphasis added.
6. Rees, *Pelagius*, 57.
7. Augustine copies portions of the council transcript into his work *De Gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (“The Grace of Christ and Original Sin,” 2.3.3–4). Quoted in Stuart Squires, *The Pelagian Controversy: An Introduction to the Enemies of Grace and the Conspiracy of Lost Souls* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 60.
8. Caelestius, “Written Statement of Belief,” trans. Daniel R. Jennings, Patristics in English Project, Sean Multimedia, http://www.seanmultimedia.com/Pie_Coelestius_Written_Statement_of_Belief.html.
9. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 122. Quoted in Rees, *Pelagius*, 132.
10. Ali Bonner, *The Myth of Pelagianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 111, 168.
11. Rees, *Pelagius*, 2:10.
12. Dennis E. Groh, “The Religion of the Empire: Christianity from Constantine to the Arab Conquest,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 287.
13. Stuart Squires, *The Pelagian Controversy: An Introduction to the Enemies of Grace and the Conspiracy of Lost Souls* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 204.
14. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003), 144–45.
15. Squires, *Pelagian Controversy*, 192.
16. See Marcellino D’Ambrosio, *Who Were the Church Fathers? From Clement of Rome to Gregory the Great* (London: SPCK, 2015), 14.
17. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 52.

18. Moses 7:32 (Old Testament Manuscript 2). Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 618 (hereafter cited as JSNT).
19. Squires, *Pelagian Controversy*, 191.
20. Rees, *Pelagius*, 129.
21. Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent: Sex and Politics in Early Christianity* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 99.
22. The expression was *sed vicit Dei gratia*, in Augustine, *The Retractions*, trans. Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 2.27 (p. 120); Robert J. O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 305.
23. Squires, *Pelagian Controversy*, 282.
24. Squires, *Pelagian Controversy*, 283.
25. "A Sample of Pure Language Given by Joseph the Seer," in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of The Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 265.
26. "Mysteries of God, as Revealed to Enoch," Frederick G. Williams, undated broadside, photocopy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
27. "Kirtland Revelation Book 2," in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of The Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 509.
28. "Songs of Zion," *The Evening and the Morning Star*, May 1833, 96; emphasis added.
29. Augustine, *Reconsiderations*, in *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 1.9.3 (p. 125).
30. A growing chorus is reinterpreting Origen's conception of premortal existence as ideational rather than substantive, preformed in God's mind rather than having actual existence. For two examples, see John Behr, trans., *Origen: On First Principles; A Reader's Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019). I think the older reading makes more sense of the stratification of angels and humans that Origen is at pains to explain, though he clearly appears to want it both ways at times.
31. Augustine, *On Free Choice* 3.21 (p. 111).
32. Augustine, *On Free Choice* 3.20 (p. 110).

33. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*. Paraphrased by Robert J. O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 91.
34. Moses 7:28 (JSNT, 618).
35. Moses 7:32 (JSNT, 618).
36. Moses 7:35 (JSNT, 618). Cf. Moses 7:24, 47, etc.
37. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 2.2, quoted in Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in *Augustine's Confessions: Critical Essays*, ed. William E. Mann (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 122.
38. Anselm, *Proslogion* 8, quoted in Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," 120.
39. Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," 120. Some critics assert that any allegation of a "passionless God" doesn't mean God is unfeeling. I would argue that, first, the consensus of religious scholars is that an enormous shift toward a "suffering God" took place in the late 19th century. Such a shift would have been redundant if a suffering God were already standard orthodoxy. Second, what is most germane is the simple inference that average Christians would draw from creedal language—"without passions"—not scholastic distinctions made by theologians.
40. Pelagius, "Confession of Faith," trans. William Wall, Patristics in English Project, Sean Multimedia, http://www.seanmultimedia.com/Pie_Pelagius_Confession_Of_Faith.html.
41. B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 332, quoted in MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 108.
42. MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 115.
43. Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (1968; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 66, quoted in Rees, *Pelagius*, 128.
44. Rees, *Pelagius*, x.