

In the six through tenth centuries Augustine becomes the greatest of the four Western “doctors of the Church” (with Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory I). His writings decisively shape many of the essential features of the medieval west, even as some teachings are taken in directions Augustine would not have taken himself. We will begin with Gregory’s use of Augustine, then move to the Carolingian era.

*Gregory.* When people ask you, “When was the first Pope?” the best answer is probably Gregory I, bishop of Rome from 590 to 604. The father of the “Gregorian reforms,” he was also “the father of the medieval papacy.” After Gregory, the Catholic Church really *looks* “Catholic.”

Gregory inherited an Italy even more devastated than in Augustine’s time, while challenges from Constantinople threatened Rome’s position as first among equals. Gregory met both crises with an astonishing career: (a) The Byzantine east had taken Ravenna in 540. Gregory set aside the authority of its exarch (representative of the eastern emperor) and made his own peace with the Lombards in 592. Face! (b) Gregory also appointed governors in Italian cities and provided war materials, making the papacy a temporal power. (c) His claims for papal supremacy repeatedly upset the east. (d) His book *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (*Book of Pastoral Rule*) “became the textbook of the medieval episcopate.” (e) His *Dialogues*, telling the stories of Benedict and other early Latin saints, “served as a model to most medieval hagiographers.” (I have been quoting the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.) (f) According to Henri de Lubac, his *Moralium* on Job “initiated” the classical formula of the fourfold allegorical method after the pattern of Augustine’s own biblical interpretation. (g) He took important steps towards bringing monastic orders under papal control. (h) He fathered the musical tradition of plainsong (“Gregorian chant”). That’s a lot of influence! And (i) Gregory is a fulcrum, “one of the chief links between Augustine and the Middle Ages” (Fitzgerald 402):

Gregory ... looks both backward and forward. He is the last great figure in the procession of Latin fathers, while in his government of the city of Rome and his missionary energy he is the harbinger of the half religious, half secular papal monarchy of the Middle Ages. In his writings, also, there is the double thread. On the one hand he uses and does not fear to adapt the teaching of Augustine and other great men of the past, while on the other hand he shows an unmistakable lack of theological profundity and of stylistic distinction when compared with a Leo or a Jerome, and his *Dialogues* show all the characteristics of a medieval, rather than a classical, mentality (Cunliffe-Jones 229-230).

By Gregory’s time, the Council of Orange had moderated Augustine’s predestinarianism, while condemning both Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism. So Gregory offered a moderate (or maybe incoherent) Augustinian synergism: A “saved” life is one of *perfect* penitence – a monastic life. God’s judgments are severe, so life should be ceaseless, even “supererogatory” (extra), penitence. Gregory is more explicit that humanity must cooperate with God, yielding good works. God’s grace is “assisting grace,” without which we would be powerless; but human cooperation is required for one to be “predestined to salvation” (Olson 288). Good works are credited as righteousness, but these can also produce pride and new condemnation. So human life is inherently unstable, alternating between grace and wrath, virtue and vice, pride and despair (Fitzgerald 403). Yet while these poles were dialectical for Augustine, for Gregory they are cyclical, producing a kind of manic depression. So Church ministries should “comfort the afflicted, and afflict the uncomfortable.” (Dorothy Day got this from Gregory.)

Gregory also appropriated Augustine's Church-centered spirituality. The Church is the place of sacrifice – in the Mass where sins are remitted (remember the Donatists?), in the community where justice reigns (remember *City of God*?), and in the heart where God is contemplated (remember *On the Trinity*?). The Church is center-stage in medieval life.

Carole Straw's article praises Gregory for adapting Augustine "to a later era when the church and its sacraments would be at the very center of human society," systematizing his thought "so that the complementarity and interdependence of human divine, carnal and spiritual, external and internal elements are clearly understood" in ways that depart from Augustine, but "in ways more useful to a later society that needed to integrate earthly realities with spiritual ends" (Fitzgerald 404-405). But Protestants *detest* this "adaptation" as a deformation. "When Luther joined the Augustinian monastery seeking a gracious God, it was Gregory's version of Augustinianism that he was taught. ... In large measure Luther's Protestant theology was a reaction against Gregory's doctrine of salvation" (Olson 289).

*Carolingians.* Gregory looked west, not east, for political help against the Lombards. Frankland (modern France, Belgium, and the Rhineland) assisted the Pope, and Rome returned the favor. Western Europe became the future of Latin Christendom during the Carolingian era (named after Charlemagne, crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800). Charles took a very active role in church affairs. In fact, sometimes imperial theologians would act unilaterally, without reference or even in opposition to papal policy (Cunliffe-Jones 236). Charles and his fellow rulers wanted to create a biblical, Christian society, and the range of Augustine's writings lent themselves to the task. Augustine was the favorite theologian even of Charles himself (Fitzgerald 124). But because library holdings were incomplete, because the progression of his life was no longer appreciated, because people tended to use only the aspects of Augustine that helped their causes, and because Augustine's world of late antiquity was gone forever, his thought was inevitably pressed into new forms.

As a result, though Augustine was neither European nor medieval, his work became a "virtually inexhaustible storehouse" of raw material for defining a medieval "Christian European culture" (Fitzgerald 126). A few highlights:

- Hincmar of Reims opposed King Lothar II's divorce with extensive appeals to Augustine, showing both how weighty Augustine's authority was, and how Augustine's visions of marriage, family, and state were forming Carolingian sensibilities.
- Augustine's theological, textual, and philosophical methods were remembered and adapted, teaching a civilization how to think and act.
- Both the rulers and ruled looked to *City of God* for political advice, aspiring to create the Christian commonwealth that is as close as worldly states come to establishing justice (*Civ. Dei* 11.19, 5.19, 5.24).
- Gottschalk, a priest and former monk, reignited the controversy over predestination by reasserting Augustine's claim of total depravity and double predestination, against theologies that had lost (or never grasped) Augustine's concern that God is not the cause of sin. Their exchange was basically repeated in the Calvinist-Arminian debate that would come 850 years later.

Thanks to the power of Gregory, Charles, *et al.*, this Augustinian theological vision would reign in Europe for a thousand years. Then, in dying, it would be replaced by Catholic and Protestant worlds that were no less Augustinian, though in profoundly different ways.