

## Pelagius vs. Augustine

*This elf has been interested to note several blogs posting on an important doctrinal issue: the apparent support for Pelagian doctrine by some Episcopal clergy. Here are some excerpts from the blog posts I've seen on this topic:*

**Fr. Dan Martins** has [“On Heresy”](#)

In this context, I found the following comment on the HoB/D listserv more than telling:

*It occurs to me that this is deja vu all over again. History is repeating itself. We are in the midst of the Pelagian Controversy—the Celtic Catholic monk who had a high doctrine of human nature and the fiery North African Bishop who saw the world through the lens of ‘original sin’.*

The author of these remarks is an experienced rector of an Episcopal parish. She has an M.Div. from an accredited seminary. She's no slouch. Could she have meant to make herself such an easy target?

Some quick background: Pelagius believed that human nature is a little tainted, but not completely corrupted, by Sin. So we need a boost, a hand up, from God, but once we get some momentum, we can bridge the gap on our own. Jesus is, then, not so much a Savior as a motivational speaker. Augustine countered with his developed doctrine of Original Sin. Pelagius was ultimately declared a heretic; Augustine of Hippo was declared a saint and doctor of the Church.

What continues to amaze me is that a pastor under ordination vows can adopt even a neutral attitude toward the Pelagian controversy, let alone one that appears to favor the heretic. A professor at a public university can do that. A Christian priest doesn't have the option.

**Brad Drell** has this: [The Episcopal Church Is The Pelagian Heresy Redux](#)

For Augustine, Jesus was Savior. For Pelagius, Jesus was mere teacher, as He is for the Muslims and the secular humanists. I need a Savior. I am personally convicted of my own sinfulness and my own need for Christ's redemption. I think that such a conviction is quintessential to being Christian. With all due respect, I frankly think that if someone is not so convicted, they are not a Christian. I think Augustine felt similarly.

**Fr. Matt Kennedy** has an article [“Embracing Pelagius” at Stand Firm](#)

The ease with which the scientific argument has been accepted and incorporated by orthodox Anglicans has been somewhat disconcerting to proponents of same sex blessings and supporters of non-celibate homosexual clergy.

I think it explains the recent implicit and explicit resurgence of Pelagianism on the Anglican left.

[Pelagius](#) was a 4th century British monk who argued that human nature is essentially untouched by original sin. Man, argued Pelagius, has the capacity apart from divine grace, to fulfill God's commands and, on the basis of his own righteousness, to earn salvation.

St. Augustine of Hippo, the doctor of grace, rose up to defend the biblical doctrine of the Fall, demonstrating our natural depravity on the one hand and our utter dependence upon the grace of God for life and for salvation on the other.

As orthodox Christians have acknowledged the possibility of inborn homosexual impulses and attributed them, with St. Paul, to humanity's original turning away from the Creator toward created things, the left has grown increasingly uncomfortable with Paul, St. Augustine and the doctrine of the fall.

As I argued [here](#), the Presiding Bishop's support for homosexual behavior is founded on an implicit if unconscious embrace of a Pelagian worldview which permits her to argue that if an impulse is inborn it must, necessarily, be "created" and if it is created it must, necessarily, be "good."

Update: **Nick Knisely** has a post on this, following up from what we posted here this morning. You can [read it here](#).

This entry was posted on Thursday, March 8th, 2007 at 12:33 pm and is filed under [THEOLOGY](#), [TEC/ECUSA](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

## 51 Responses to "Pelagius vs. Augustine"

1. *Irenaeus* Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:07 pm](#)

Martins, Drell, and Kennedy make legitimate points but the Pelagian analogy needs qualification.

Didn't Pelagius believe orthodox teaching about divine grace (e.g., by Augustine) fostered complacency and MORAL LAXITY?

Since when have ECUSA revisionists become concerned about moral laxity?

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From a different angle . . .

“We need a boost, a hand up, from God, but once we get some momentum, we can bridge the gap on our own”

Gap? What gap? I'm special. I'm wonderful. I'm OK just as I am. Everyone says so. Just as I am, without any guilty plea or any primitive, dysfunctional self-loathing.

2. *Just Another Liberal Anglican Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:12 pm](#)

Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin is well beyond me. I post only to note that the East indeed takes exception to it in similar but not the same way that Pelagius did. I have heard it characterized by an Orthodox scholar that we bear the full burden of Original Sin, but without the implicit 'original guilt' that Augustine associates with it. The implications of this are substantial, and relate not only to what part we play in our own salvation but how God works within us. I heard one prominent Orthodox scholar refer to it as 'semi-pelagianism.' Certainly, this is a far cry from the fully Pelagian views implicit in the actions of the leadership of TEC.

3. *Matt Kennedy+* Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:13 pm](#)

Irenaeus,

I am very specifically speaking of Pelagius' anthropology, not his ethics nor even his soteriology.

4. *Truth Unites ... and Divides Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:19 pm](#)

I kinda lump pelagianism in the same category box as modern liberalism and secular humanism.... they're all (hu)man-centered, and elevate humanity as the center along with human reasoning.

Too much pride.

As a bible-believing, faithful, historically orthodox follower of Christ, I've been regenerated to place God at the center of my life and of the universe. Only He can be on the throne.

Conflict between worldviews is unavoidable.

5. *Truth Unites ... and Divides Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:27 pm](#)

Matt, thanks again for your essay on “Embracing Pelagius”. It’s brilliant. I also liked your series on epistemology. And even though I post almost exclusively on T19, IMHO, Stand Firm is the best Anglican blog out on the web. Brilliant articles, brilliant contributors, funny-as-all-get-out commenters, nice layout, etc....

Just excellent in every way. You, Sarah, Greg, David Ould, are simply wonderful. Fight the good fight and the Lord will bless your faithfulness.

(And I hope that taomikael never oils his way over to T19. Keep him over there!)

God Bless You All!

6. *Alan Jacobs Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:42 pm](#)

#2, nothing could be farther from the truth than to say that the Orthodox position on original sin resembles Pelagius’s. Pelagius believed that we have perfect and absolute freedom to obey all God’s commandments, that we always have the option of achieving moral perfection, and if we do not reach moral perfection we have no one to blame but ourselves. Pelagius believed that the vast majority of Christians, past, present, and future, are going to end up in Hell because we fail to achieve moral excellence. This is light-years away from the Orthodox view that (as much as Augustine’s) makes us radically dependent on God’s grace. The Orthodox and Augustinians have different ideas about how Adam’s sin affects us, but they don’t doubt the reality and power of that sin, and they don’t believe that salvation is reserved only for the morally heroic.

7. *Dale Rye Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:48 pm](#)

Re ##1 and 6: Precisely. The Pelagians were moral rigorists. Augustine’s struggle against them was a natural extension of his earlier contest with the Donatists. Casting modern libertines as disciples of Pelagius and modern puritans as disciples of Augustine reverses their actual roles.

It was the Pelagians and Donatists who argued that it was possible for a human person to avoid sin in this life. Augustine knew better. (Jesus [and arguably Mary] is a special case, due to the intimate association of the human nature with a divine Person). It was the Pelagians and Donatists who argued that some sins are so bad as to foreclose the possibility of reconciliation to the Church in this life or salvation in the next. Augustine had experienced otherwise. For the Bishop of Hippo, the Christian life was not about being perfect, but about being forgiven. He would be more likely than the Pelagians, not less, to regard same-sex attraction as a force that could overwhelm the free will. He would also be more likely, not less, to regard such moral lapses as something that did not bar someone from the Church and salvation in perpetuity, regardless of subsequent repentance.

Contrary to his current image, Augustine was not opposed to people having fun (including even lawful sexual pleasure). In his historical context, he was actually one of the Church Fathers who was the most favorable towards marriage and sex. He constantly fights the notion that physical sex is necessarily spiritually polluting and spends a significant time near the beginning of *The City of God* defending the Christian matrons and maidens who chose “dishonor” over death during the sack of Rome in 410.

Augustine was clearly suspicious of those who claimed that pleasure was an evil that Christians could and should suppress by the exercise of their God-given free will. The Pelagian rigorists were equally suspicious of him for views they found supportive of antinomian hedonism (“Love, then do as you will”). Again, the efforts by both reasserters and reappraisers to turn the current conflict into a rerun of the Augustinian/Pelagian controversy involve miscasting Augustine and Pelagius in one another’s roles.

8. [\*The Anglican Scotist\* Says:](#)  
[March 8th, 2007 at 1:59 pm](#)

Please note as well that after Augustine’s death there was a sustained reaction against his anthropology in the Latin West (the East never having gone so far as Augustine did), especially in Southern Gaul. Debate culminated in the Synod of Orange (529), which tried to find an, umm, via media between Pelagius and Augustine which we might call semi-Pelagianism or semi-Augustinianism. Pope Felix IV approved, and that diluted version of Augustine became the western Church’s teaching.

9. [rob roy](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 2:03 pm](#)

I, too, appreciated the post. I am merely a rank amateur theologian in comparison to the erudite who regularly post here. The post was informative and evocative. In mathematics and medicine, half the battle or more is learning the lingo. The same seems to be true of theology.

10. [Arthur](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 2:42 pm](#)

Matt Kennedy writes with an Anglican flourish for rhetoric and his argument makes sense as far as it goes. But the appeal to ancient heresies to describe a present one reveals a fundamental problem. Never in the history of the Church has a party within the Church advocated for a change of the teaching on homosexuality. There is no precedent. (Oh, it’s something new alright and not from the Spirit who is holy.) Yet, bright, educated Anglicans everywhere are falling over themselves to tack the present heresy with an ancient label. Why?

I would suggest a couple of reasons. First, this is something new but it is broader than just homosexuality. If I were to name it, I would call the new heresy “Relativism.” And relativism has its tendrils all over human sexuality and a bunch of other places to boot. This relativism says a person’s own personal feelings are all important and not fundamentally immoral. Traditional Christianity is always suspect of sexual impulses outside of sacramental marriage or which frustrate the procreative dimension of sexuality based on natural law arguments. Traditional Christianity has always seen sexuality as either depraved (in the wrong context) or a participation in the divine mystery of creation.

Anglicanism back in the 1930’s (?) already gave into relativism by approving contraception and consequently, though not intentionally, the contraceptive mentality. The contraceptive mentality is the judgment that there is a third category of sexual expression: mutual gratification or diversion. This mentality has led to all kinds of evils: the devaluing of women, the treatment of human life as a commodity (fertility clinics), abortion, and yes the popular acceptance of homosexuality. As sexuality is now divorced in the popular mind from procreation homosexuality now makes sense. And, now that procreation is divorced of sexuality there are all kinds of ways for gay couples to get children. All of this is, of course, a perversion of the natural order. “Orthodox” Anglicans naturally want to avoid any connections between contraception and homosexuality. But, there it is.

Secondly, the tendency to appeal to ancient heresies is a result of the inability of Anglicanism to actually name the new heresy. Catholicism by nature does not like to mix its heresies and comes up with new labels as necessary. Modern examples include: modernism, Feenyitism, Americanism, millenarianism, etc. Disappointingly, the CC has failed to come up with a new heresy label for this one. JPII preferred the rhetorical over the technical in his *Evangelium Vitae* which posited the “culture of death” — accurate, evocative but analytically weak.

Thirdly, Anglicanism tends to pull contrasting ideas and parties together rather than separate them out, choosing sides and coming up with a new label. In short, Anglicanism is not in the habit of defining heresy.

So, while Matt Kennedy demonstrates well his knowledge of early church history and makes interesting parallels as have others with their claims of gnosticism and montanism, we need to recognize there is something new here, a heresy in its own right. Call it relativism or something else.

11. *Tom Says:*  
[March 8th, 2007 at 2:58 pm](#)

I agree with much of what you’ve written, Arthur, but I also think there is great value in demonstrating that the current heresies are spawned of ancient ones long refuted by the Councils of the Church. However, as I believe you pointed out, we are not dealing with strict pelagianism and certainly not in its origin. What is

going on in TEC has shades of pelagianism, gnosticism, antinomianism and a whole host of other “isms.” If we are going to create a new term to deal with the current situation I would call the present heresy “episopalianism.”

12. [Rick in Louisiana](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:02 pm](#)

Perhaps I am wrong but I discern the makings of an actual consensus in the comments. That yes reappraisers (liberal Anglicans) appear to assume one of the core convictions of Pelagius. But appear to disagree with Pelagius and his buds on many other points (moral rigor? anyone going to hell? you get the idea). In short - that there is overlap. But not much more than that. To what extent therefore is it accurate/helpful to talk of Pelagianism among EC leadership?

That having been said Paul Zahl in multiple sermons/writings has argued that evangelicals are “Augustinian in theology, but semi-Pelagian in practice”. That many orthodox/conservative/evangelicals function as if you can expect Christians to obey the commandments/teachings of God once they know what those are. “This is what you should do. Now do it.” And presto they can and will.

And what do we get with this “Nike (Just do it) Theology”? Similar rates for divorce, premarital/extramarital sex, substance/pornography addiction, and so on. Christians are apparently... sinners. Well dang!

I struggle with whether and to what extent I agree with Zahl. (I lean mostly toward agreement.) Have been teaching Romans lately and using Paul Achtemeier (who got his PhD with Paul, pretty sure) as one of my resources. Achtemeier seems to conclude (contra Zahl) that yeah sure human beings cannot save themselves and powerless to break the hold of sin on/in their lives... but “after the power of sin is broken, and that means only after the lordship of God has been restored - and it has been with Christ’s death and our baptism into it - does it make sense to give admonitions on how one is to live so as to avoid sin... Only after God’s act in Christ has restored his gracious lordship so that the power of sin is broken in principle and only after our baptism into Christ has restored that lordship so that the power of sin is broken in actuality will it do any good to urge someone to do good and avoid sin” (Romans, Interpretation, 17). To paraphrase that (assuming I understand Achtemeier correctly) Christians are not sinners. They are saints. Who happen still to sin sometimes.

And then there are texts like Genesis 4:1-7 which appear to teach that yeah as a matter of fact human beings do have the ability to “master” sin when it “crouches at the door”. My theology prof Elizabeth Barnes emphasizes that even in Genesis 4:1-7 it appears to be “able to master sin in \*partnership\* with God”. Which as far as I can tell is almost pure Pelagius. Right?

Still trying to figure this out.

13. [\*Rick in Louisiana\*](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:04 pm](#)

Excuse me: “got his PhD under the \*apostle\* Paul”. I quickly realized it looked like I meant Paul Zahl.

14. [\*Matt Kennedy+\*](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:23 pm](#)

If you read my piece you will note that one of the reasons it is necessary to speak of Pelagius, and helpful, is that he is explicitly being praised by the more radical reappraisers specifically for his, shall we say “positive” anthropology.

I would definitely consider “relativism” a heresy, but what I am arguing is that what we are seeing with regard to Pelagius is far more than a coincidently overlap.

The very foundation of Pelagius’ thought was his denial that Adam’s sin affected the rest of humanity. When Augustine prayed, “Lord grant what you command” Pelagius blew a gasket precisely because he believed that acting in accord with the divine commands was something we have the capacity to do. Our natures are unblemished.

This is why he has been embraced by the left.

It is true that he would most likely be a far more stern ethicist than most reappraisers and that they would probably not embrace his soteriology, but it is also irrelevant.

If I accept Marcion’s doctrine of revelation, for example, but reject his ecclesiology, I have still embraced Marcion’s doctrine of revelation which was, after all, one pillar of his thought. Someone pointing out that I had accepted a Marcionite revelation could not be properly accused of dredging about for ancient heresies because, in fact, I would have accepted the Marcionite view of revelation.

15. [\*Just Another Liberal Anglican\*](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:37 pm](#)

Mr Jacobs (or is it Dr. Jacobs?),  
I said “similar, but not the same as....”

Valerie A. Karras in “Beyond Justification” deals extensively with the issue of Original Guilt.

She also points out that free-will was not lost in the fall in the Orthodox view. She says, “The question of the *imago Dei* is significant because it is here that East and

West disagree on a second important element of theological anthropology: free will. While Orthodoxy maintains that free will is a constitutive element of the *imago Dei*, both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism – sharing an Augustinian heritage – assert that one of the aspects of original sin is the loss of free will with respect to humanity’s orientation toward God. Human freedom was one of the issues at the heart of the fifth-century Western Christian debate over faith and works, i.e., over the relative divine and human contributions to salvation. The Western Christian historical context has caused many theologians, particularly evangelical Protestant theologians, to experience great difficulty thinking “outside the box” of the Western either/or approach to this topic. For instance, at a 1999 conference sponsored by the Society for the Study of Evangelicalism and Eastern Orthodoxy, J. I. Packer distributed a copy of some course materials. I noted that under the topic of faith and works he listed the Orthodox as ‘semi-Pelagian’. He was “semi-right”. As Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia proclaimed at the beginning of his address for the 1998 Bellarmine Lecture at Saint Louis University, “I suppose I should tell you straightaway that I am an Arminian.” Ware’s comment was amusing but also truthful because, in Eastern Christian soteriology, human freedom plays an important role, but not as Pelagian foil to Augustinian determinism.”

The error was my commenting in this thread in the first place. I am very much the amateur.

16. *Arthur* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 3:41 pm](#)

14. Matt. Point well taken. I was not trying to diminish your contribution. My point is that there are aspects of this new “episcopalism” or “relativism” that all of us moderns have to look at with new eyes. I think the teaching on homosexuality has roots in a deeper, modern error that many of do not see, do not want to see, or sometimes do see but do not want to bring to light. We are now so far removed in time and mentality from historic Christianity’s teaching on human sexuality that it is hard for any of us to claim absolute orthodoxy on the matter, myself included. I believe that God is calling us to an even higher standard than the one advocated by “orthodox” Anglicans. Having read JPII’s *Theology of the Body*, I can say I am thoroughly convinced of his correctness, even if I rarely live up to it completely.

11. Tom. “episcopalism?” I would not have dared go there. But now that you have made me chuckle, I pray I am not too infected of the malady myself.

17. *John scholasticus* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 3:42 pm](#)

Original Sin. The Fall. I don’t understand (I mean, I really don’t understand) how these matters can be debated in the 21st century without at least fleeting consideration of evolution.

18. [AnonymousCoward](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:45 pm](#)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagius>

has a couple of interesting things.

First, by Matt's arguments, anyone who fails to believe that *Children dying without baptism are excluded from both the Kingdom of heaven and eternal life* is a Pelagian.

Second, Pelagius *Pelagius became concerned about the moral laxity of society. He blamed this laxity on the theology of divine grace preached by Augustine, among others.*

So - frankly - Pelagius would most certainly have supported the most severe correction (indeed - the traditional remedy) for everyone we would consider a "reappraiser" - without question or appeal,

19. [Arthur](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:49 pm](#)

17.

Good question.

My best answer as a Catholic who is an evolutionary creationist is that these are theological categories unrelated to the scientific means by which God made multiple species. Catholicism is not opposed to evolution, but understands that God drives the process. We understand Genesis as a theological text rather than a scientific one.

I cannot say for sure what the Anglicans here believe, but I suspect it would not be too different. Though I could be wrong.

20. [Arthur](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 3:55 pm](#)

15. Catholicism is also semi-Pelagian or as some have said early-Augustinian. Catholics read early Augustine on freedom while Protestant tend to read late Augustine on predestination. There-in lie the 16th Century polemics on Faith v. Works. In reality Catholicism and Orthodoxy both recognize the role of human will and action in salvation while never negating that it all comes from grace. Hope that is helpful.

21. [Truth Unites ... and Divides](#) Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 4:43 pm](#)

#17. Scholasticus, we agree!!!

As a creationist-intelligent design advocate, I clearly dispute evolution as a scientific \*fact\*.

But as you're correct to point out, if one posits evolution as their doctrine of origins, then theological concepts such as "Original Sin" and "The Fall" lack theological integrity.

22. *Arthur* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 6:26 pm](#)

21. "But as you're correct to point out, if one posits evolution as their doctrine of origins, then theological concepts such as "Original Sin" and "The Fall" lack theological integrity."

This is completely false. The CC has no trouble with evolution AND creation. Evolution answers how. Creation answers Who. Of course, we are not biblical fundamentalists, which makes it easier to think these things through without an ideology to uphold.

23. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 6:46 pm](#)

#22. Arthur, I'm unclear as to how the CC reconciles macro-evolution with the concept of Original Sin and the Fall.

I invite correction here. Original Sin has to do with Adam and Eve, no? Or is Adam and Eve a symbolic, figurative, representative, perhaps mythical human beings in Genesis?

Or does the CC doctrine of Original Sin refer to something else? A good evolution turned bad?

With a hat tip to Scholasticus, how does the CC explain and maintain doctrinal consistency between Original Sin and evolution?

24. *Arthur* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 7:23 pm](#)

23. Truth Unites...

What an excellent technical question. I will try to answer it without sounding like KJS, because the CC is anything but vague on these matters. Still, from a fundamentalist POV, it may sound indefinite.

A few points on the Fall and Redemption:

1. We don't know if there were precisely two people called Adam and Eve.
2. We do believe that the fall was real. How it happened we cannot say. But sinful disobedience entered the world and has subsequently twisted human freedom into a tendency toward rebellion and self-seeking.
3. Christ is the new Adam, that is he undoes the work of Adam's disobedience and selfishness through his obedience and self-sacrifice.
4. Mary is the new Eve, that is, she undoes the work of Eve's yes to evil by her yes to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
5. The penalty of the fall is concupiscence and the loss of eternal life. Baptism opens the door to the life of grace but does not violate human freedom to turn from God. Baptism removes the penalty of the fall but not the concupiscence so we remain always attracted to sin.

So theologically, the CC is rooted in Genesis, but not as a science text book. I suppose you could say the CC believes in what happened (the fall) without specifying HOW it happened. This I have heard is how some Anglicans view transubstantiation and real presence. They believe in the what (Real Presence) without defining the how (transubstantiation).

I hope this is helpful.

25. *Truth Unites ... and Divides Says:*

[March 8th, 2007 at 7:52 pm](#)

#24. Thank you Arthur. Your post is helpful in terms of increasing my understanding of where you and the CC stand.

However, I am not a \*fundamentalist\* by the modern usage and understanding of that word. I prefer to be perceived as a Bible-believing follower and disciple of Christ.

Your point #1 confuses me on several counts. Jesus in Matt 19:4 and Mark 10:6 refers to Genesis 1:27. Furthermore, the apostle Paul refers to a literal Adam and Eve in 1 Tim 2:13-14.

So it appears to me that Jesus and Paul are validating the literal account of Adam and Eve.

How does the CC exegete these passages within context, of course?

Your point #2 is obviously substantiated by Rom 5:12.

Again, I appreciate you taking the time to elucidate your position. In humble transparency, I still see holding to both Original Fall and Evolution as being intellectually tenuous.

Lastly, we're going rather afield from the original blog topic.

Blessings and Peace.

26. *Jim Elliott* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 8:29 pm](#)

\*Warning: what follows is my opinion and mine alone, and does not represent any official teaching of any denomination\*

I think that evolution (within species — there is no evidence for transitional evolution from one species to another) can fit with Genesis, one can take each “day” to be an ‘age’ (an acceptable translation of ‘yom’), and at one point, God intervened and breathed a soul into one of those species, choosing to work with that species as His representative on the planet (In His Image — He guided evolution to that point).

Adam and Eve became, as it were, the elected (by God) representative of humanity on Earth. What choices they made became applicable to the entire population (like the laws passed by representation in government become effective for all citizens). Thus when Adam and Eve sinned, the consequence of death passed to everyone.

That's my theory of how to combine the two. 😊

27. *TAM* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 9:16 pm](#)

I don't see the incompatibility between evolution and the doctrine of original sin. Genesis teaches us that there is a difference between man and the rest of creation. Made in the image of God, we have the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Why would it be impossible that at a given point in evolutionary time, God created a new thing. A creature who could know good and evil and choose between them. Can't we accept evolutionary theory and still believe that we are their descendents?

28. *rob roy* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 10:13 pm](#)

I think that one of the most heavenly places in the world is Assisi. There are pilgrims from all over the world and you can sit at a cafe sipping the best coffee in the world (with fat friars in the table next to you eating ice cream) watching these pilgrims go by. In the evening, you can go to beautiful vespers services at St. Clares. You can wear your Christianity on your sleeve there.

I would love to sit there with Matt K, Truth, Arthur, and even John Scholasticus(!), etc. sipping a latte with all of you discussing these matters. Want to set a date?

Pax et bonum (Peace and health, which is the greeting Franciscans use with each other.)

29. *rob roy* Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 10:20 pm](#)

Truth and Arthur, I think that you would both find the wikipedia article on the Mitochondrial Eve interesting. You can find it [here](#).

30. *Bob from Boone* Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 11:10 pm](#)

As someone who has made an extensive study of Pelagius' theology, including reading Latin texts such as portions of his Commentary on Paul's Letters, I want to assert that most of the charges against Pelagius in comments here and elsewhere are absolutely untrue. He is one of the most maligned theologians among the early Fathers, mainly because subsequent thinkers took Augustine's and Jerome's criticisms of Pelagius as fact; but they were not.

Pelagius had a doctrine of grace that was comprehensive, and he had good reasons to criticize Augustine's flawed doctrine of free will. Yes, he rejected the doctrine of original sin, but so did the eastern Church, and his views on free will were accepted by a council of eastern bishops held in Ephesus at which he was present. For Pelagius, free will was itself a grace, given by God, and he would never say that one can earn eternal life by one's own efforts. Christ as more than just an example to him. He believed in justification by faith ("sola fide"), another grace, and he believed that the teachings and examples of Christ were effectual graces. We sin in imitation of Adam, not, pace Augustine, because we inherit sin through sexual intercourse and reproduction, but because we have the graces of free will, justification, and Christ's teaching and examples, we can work toward a life of moral perfection. Pelagius simply said that it was possible for a person not to sin, nothing more and nothing less.

It doesn't surprise me that Kallistos Ware would describe himself as Arminian. I think that any Orthodox theologian would not have a problem with that.

Pelagius would not recognize himself in so many of the comments made about him in this discussion.

31. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:  
[March 8th, 2007 at 11:13 pm](#)

[#28] Assisi sounds like a really cool place to hang out, pray, debate humbly yet with soft intensity, tell stories, laugh uproariously, and enjoy God's creation with fellow image-bearers of Christ.

Alas, I'm married with a 5-year old daughter. So we'll have to get together virtually.

BTW, I did go to the bookstore to consider purchasing Bonhoeffer's book. I'm too cheap. So I'll go to the library and check it out.

Aloha braddah. Hawaiian pidgin expressing warmth and peace to each other.

32. *Bob from Boone* Says:

[March 8th, 2007 at 11:28 pm](#)

Having reread the comments by Fr. Kennedy and Fr. Martins, I would suggest they go back to seminary and study what Pelagius actually wrote. Mr. Drell might join them. To say that Pelagius didn't believe that Jesus was his Savior, but merely a teacher or a motivational speaker is utterly false. And never did Pelagius think that he could achieve perfection and salvation apart from divine grace.

A lot of the trashing of Pelagius in this whole thread sounds to me like Pelagius is being used as a substitute for striking out at the PB and other Episcopalians, and all over the homosexual issue. I cannot but be indignant over the way the historical truth about Pelagius is being abused on this matter, but then he has suffered in this way for centuries. There have been a few, like John Wesley, who recognized that Pelagius was misunderstood, but most have unthinkingly parroted the old canards. A shame.

33. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 1:26 am](#)

#26 Jim Elliott writes: "...I think that evolution (within species — there is no evidence for transitional evolution from one species to another)..."

What you've just described is micro-evolution. That is way different from macro-evolution which I contend is false.

Macro-evolution says that species evolve into other species. I.e., Man evolved from primordial soup.

I say no way, no how.

—

Glad I'm not familiar with the Augustine and Pelagius history. Btw Bob from Boone and the SFIF thread....I know I don't want any part of that discussion!

34. [Matt Kennedy+](#) Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 4:22 am](#)

Bob from Boone

Pelagius' has a "comprehensive" understanding of "grace"?

I don't think those words mean what you think they mean.

Perhaps you are confusing pelagianism with semi-pelagianism.

BTW: the orthodox are NOT pelagian. While more optimistic with regard to the human ability to respond to God, they do have a fairly robust concept of the fall that is far more "comprehensive" than that of Pelagius.

35. [Bob from Boone](#) Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 7:00 am](#)

Matt+, I know the difference between semi-Pelagianism and the teachings of Pelagius (I won't say "Pelagianism" because that popular concept is not Pelagius'). I did not imply that the Orthodox are Pelagian; I merely pointed out that his doctrine of free will was deemed in accord with the views of some eastern bishops at the council I referred to.

You put the word "grace" in quotes, as if you think Pelagius did not have a doctrine of grace. Let me refer you to a good overview of Pelagius' theology in Robert Evans' book *Pelagius: Enquiries and Reappraisals* (Seabury, 1968, o.p.) Pelagius' Commentary on Romans, if my memory is correct, is the source of his view that grace is a process of God's giftedness that is historical. He divides the history of salvation into the time of Nature, the time of the Law, and the time of Grace. In the first, God gives free will as a grace—thus, when we freely choose the good we are doing so with God's grace; but most have not done so. In the second, God's gracious gift is the Mosaic Law (that's Pauline, right?), but again people fail to keep it. In the third, we receive the grace of justification by faith in Christ's redeeming sacrifice on the Cross (yes, Pelagius DID believe that Christ was his savior), and then the teaching and example of Christ, by which, with free will and faith, one is enabled to live a life pleasing to God, and work toward moral perfection. (This historical division, by the way, is also in Ambrose.)

Again, Pelagius NEVER held that one can achieve perfection merely by the exercise of free will without grace; free will is gracious and every choice of the good gives glory not to Pelagius but to God. Pelagius simply held that one is capable of not committing a sin, nothing more. Eternal life for him is a gift of God, not something we achieve by his own efforts. That view is a distortion of Pelagius' thought.

If suppose that if one defines grace strictly according to the Augustinian notion of an infused power, then Pelagius' comprehensive concept would fall short. But I think the problem is with Augustine's, not Pelagius'

36. *Bob from Boone* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 7:04 am](#)

I forgot to add in my last paragraph that Orthodox theologian Fr. Thomas Hopko once said to me that he thought Augustine was a brilliant rhetorician but a terrible technical theologian. Unfortunately, Augustine's doctrine of double predestination and infused grace was taken by the reformers, especially Calvin, to their logical conclusion. I can live with semi-Pelagianism, but not the damnable doctrine of predestination which Calvin took further than I think Paul intended.

37. *Pam* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 7:09 am](#)

Although this thread may drop off the page very soon I want to contribute something from an excellent book translated from the Spanish that I came by a few years ago, called 'Grace and the Human Condition' and written by a Jesuit. He attributes Pelagianism to the infiltration of Stoic practise which was very common in the waning classical world of the first centuries after Christ. The Stoic ideal possessed real moral force and therefore appeal, but was incomplete as far as effecting salvation. Pelagius (Morgan) mingled that ideal with Christian spirituality and thus as a spiritual director 'polluted the stream'. Augustine's grasp of concupiscence, on the other hand, gave him deep understanding of man's real fallenness and God's healing grace.

38. *john scholasticus* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 7:42 am](#)

Good-tempered discussion on evolution. Since I believe in evolution (including cosmic evolution), I think there are necessary consequences for the doctrines of Original Sin and The Fall. I'm not quite sure I think they have become untenable, but I do think they require substantial modification. Perhaps they should be understood not diachronically (= chronologically) but synchronically (i.e. as applying at any given 'now'). Perhaps we also need to factor in Aeschylus' notion of a developing God. But then I'm a pagan (as you all know).

39. *Matt Kennedy+* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 9:02 am](#)

I put "grace" in quotation marks because Pelagius' doctrine of grace is a sham and a weak one at best.

Everyone agrees that creation itself is a matter of grace as is life, sustenance etc. That has never been the question or part of the dispute. Augustine et al acknowledged that Pelagius held to this.

No one, at least to my knowledge, suggests that Pelagius' denied Christ's atoning sacrifice.

You seem to think that these have something to do with the matter at hand.

The problem with Pelagius is that he believed the common grace of creation remains not just largely intact, but wholly intact. We do not need then to be regenerated or freed by the spirit from the power of sin because we are not naturally sinners. We are sinners by choice.

The sacrifice of Christ, according to Pelagius, does indeed atone for the sins we commit, but we are not by nature sinners and we do not need God's regenerative grace to do good. Creation and human nature retains its original goodness.

This is why "St. Pelagius" as he has now, apparently, been canonized by the HoBD, has become so suddenly popular in revisionist circles. His rejection of the fall, if true, would mean that a naturally occurring sexual orientation is then part of the created order, not one twisted result of a fallen one.

Pelagius was and remains a heretic because he denies the clear biblical revelation that we are "sinners from the moment our mothers conceived us" (Psalm 51:5) and that we are very far gone from our original creation.

40. *Bob from Boone* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 9:32 am](#)

A few more comments before this thread disappears. I think it is unfair, Matt+, to characterize Pelagius' doctrine of grace as a sham. Also, Pelagius held that free will remained intact, but he also held that most human beings lost that knowledge, or the knowledge that they could exercise that will freely: a fact that any psychologist would affirm—talk to any obsessive/compulsive. So, he did have a doctrine of the fall, but it was not Augustine's. The will was rusted, so to speak, and it took the saving grace of Christ to enable us to scrape off the rust. When someone states that Pelagius didn't believe that Jesus was his savior, then how can I not think they are denying that he believed in Christ's atoning sacrifice?

Of course we are sinners by choice: how else? When I commit a sin, I choose to do so. Whether I am born with an innate condition of sinfulness about which I can do nothing by myself, is a matter of debate. I am not an Augustinian or a Calvinist, and I do not believe I inherited a state of sinfulness from my parents. Augustine may have taken the Psalmist's cry as a technical dogmatic statement of

his human condition, but it is not the only or necessary way to understand the statement in context.

41. *Arthur* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 9:35 am](#)

Matt,

Catholicism and Orthodoxy are semi-Pelagian. They take the middle ground. Faith AND Works.

42. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 10:07 am](#)

#41: "Catholicism and Orthodoxy are semi-Pelagian. They take the middle ground. Faith AND Works."

As an interested bystander, I'd like to see a no-holds-barred, free-for-all melee on the Doctrine of Justification. 😊

43. *Fr Alvin Kimel* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 10:07 am](#)

Re #41: I must disagree with Arthur when he writes that "Catholicism and Orthodoxy" are semi-Pelagian." Semi-Pelagianism is a heresy that was authoritatively rejected by the Second Synod of Orange. This rejection was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent. See my two part article "[Is Catholicism Semi-Pelagian?](#)" I cannot speak for Orthodoxy, which has never had to wrestle with the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian heresies at any depth; but I do know with a certainty that Catholicism emphatically rejects Semi-Pelagianism.

I think that what Arthur meant to write is "Catholicism and Orthodoxy are synergistic." Both traditions believe that God gives the baptized a freedom in the Spirit to cooperate with the grace of God until final salvation. Many people, particularly of a Reformed bent, confuse synergism and Semi-Pelagianism. St Augustine rejected Semi-Pelagianism but affirmed synergism (see Phillip Cary, "[Augustine and the Varieties of Monergism](#)").

44. *HowieG* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 10:13 am](#)

It looks like the pro-Pelagian group has really fallen into the Genesis 3 trap: deception. Original Sin refers to our loss of God's Grace due to the transgression of Adam and Eve (I don't care if you call them real or metaphorical. The point remains.) We "choose" to sin because this transgression set up the "curse" that was the result of the transgression. It's all there in Genesis 3 and continues with the story of Cain and Abel, etc.

Arthur (#41) You are in error there. Works grows out of Faith.

45. *Jim Elliott* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 11:15 am](#)

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

(Romans 8:9-10, ESV)

Sounds like they go hand in hand to me. 😊

46. *Matt Kennedy+* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 11:17 am](#)

Arthur,

Not sure where we disagree. I simply said there is huge gulf between semi-pelagianism and pelagianism.

Bob From Boone,

Not sure why you consistently bring up the atonement. That is not part of our discussion and as I pointed out above, no one has denied Pelagius held to it. That doesn't make him any less a heretic.

Yes, sin is a choice but it is also a part of our nature. As fallen beings, we are oriented from conception away from God and toward the self. We are, in other words, fallen. This orientation bears fruit in actual sin when we reach moral maturity. We choose to sin, but that choice is conditioned by our fallenness. God brings his regenerative grace to bear on us in order to free our faculties and turn them toward their original orientation.

Pelagius denied that we are fallen and thus we are in no need of regenerative grace. His understanding of the "fall" is something akin to our modern sense of low self-esteem. We just need someone to come along and tell us that we can do it.

The bible and Tradition both consistently reject this conceptualization. Every human faculty has been damaged or twisted by the fall.

47. *Arthur* Says:

[March 9th, 2007 at 11:28 am](#)

43. Thank you. I stand corrected.

48. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 12:44 pm](#)

#45. Thanks for the levity Jim.

BTW, I use the ESV translation myself and greatly enjoy it.

49. *John scholasticus* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 3:40 pm](#)

#42, 48

Thanks for your graciousness earlier. There was an absolute mammoth, all-time record discussion about justification months ago on T19. Google 'justification, Titus, Kimel' (or some such) and you'll get it.

50. *Truth Unites ... and Divides* Says:  
[March 9th, 2007 at 7:07 pm](#)

Thanks John. That thread has something like 560 comments!!!!

Being a 3-4 month-old newbie to this blog... I just kinda guessed that something like the Doctrine of Justification would bring in all the heavy-hitters, but I never imagined that it would be that big!