

Human Nature, Free Will, & Grace

Dr. Pastor Trevor Thomas

Early Church Fathers and Theologians

- Human Nature, Free Will, & Grace
- The development of ideas about human nature, free will, and grace before Augustine can be traced through early Christian thought and philosophical influences. These concepts were not fully formed or systematized until Augustine's work, but they had important precursors.

Augustine (354-430)

- Human Nature
- Augustine believed that human beings were created good by God but became corrupt through the Fall, as described in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.



Augustine (354–430)

- Free Will
- Augustine had a nuanced understanding of free will. He argued that while humans still possess free will, their capacity to choose the good has been diminished because of original sin.



Augustine (354–430)

Grace

Grace is central to Augustine's thought and is essential for salvation. He argued that human beings, due to their fallen nature, cannot attain salvation or righteousness on their own.

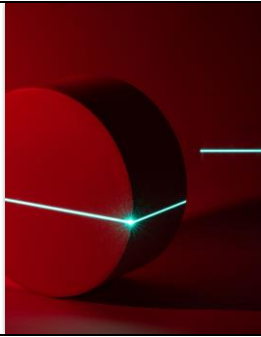
Pelagius (c. 360–418)

- Human Nature
- Pelagius held a more optimistic view of human nature compared to Augustine. He believed that humans were created inherently good, with the capacity to choose good and avoid evil.



Pelagius (c. 360–418)

- Free Will
- Pelagius strongly emphasized the concept of free will. In his view, humans have the inherent ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, without the need for divine intervention.



Pelagius (c. 360–418)

- Grace
- Pelagius had a very different understanding of grace compared to Augustine. While Augustine viewed grace as necessary to heal the will and enable people to choose good, Pelagius saw grace more as a moral example and guidance provided by God, rather than an inner, transformative power.



Pelagius (c. 360–418)

- Pelagianism and the Church's Response
- Pelagius' views were considered controversial because they implied that human beings could achieve salvation through their own efforts, which was seen as undermining the necessity of divine grace.



Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

- Human Nature
- Aquinas, like Augustine, believed that human beings were created by God in a state of original goodness but were affected by original sin. However, Aquinas introduced a more nuanced understanding of human nature by incorporating Aristotelian ideas about the human soul, intellect, and will.

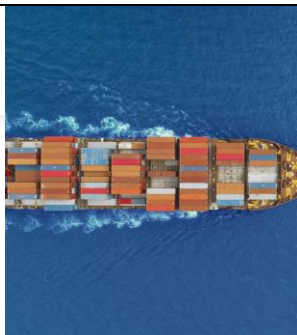
Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

- Free Will
- Aquinas, like Augustine, held that human beings have free will and that it is central to moral responsibility. However, he differed from Augustine in how he framed the relationship between human free will and divine grace.



Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

- Grace
- Aquinas' view of grace was central to his theology, and he emphasized that grace is necessary for salvation. However, his view of grace was somewhat more optimistic than Augustine's, as he believed that grace works in cooperation with human free will, rather than overwhelming or irresistible.



Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- Human Nature
- Luther shared a basic Christian belief in the inherent goodness of human nature at creation. However, he firmly believed that original sin had thoroughly corrupted human nature and that this corruption rendered human beings incapable of choosing good on their own.



Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- Free Will
- Luther's understanding of free will was a core part of his theological innovation. His views on free will are best understood in opposition to the medieval Scholastic understanding of free will, particularly the views of Aquinas.



Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- Grace
- For Luther, grace was the only means by which human beings could be saved, as human nature had been so thoroughly corrupted by original sin. His doctrine of grace was deeply influenced by his study of Scripture, especially the Pauline epistles, and it was central to his break from the Catholic Church.




John Calvin

- Human Nature
- For Calvin, human nature was thoroughly corrupted by original sin. He drew heavily on the Pauline epistles, particularly the idea that sin has affected all aspects of human existence.


John Calvin

- Free Will
- Calvin's view of free will is one of the key areas where his theology stands in contrast to more optimistic views of human freedom, such as those found in Pelagianism or even the theology of Thomas Aquinas.




John Calvin


Grace



Grace is at the heart of Calvin's theology. He understood grace as God's unmerited favor that is essential for salvation. Without God's grace, human beings would remain in bondage to sin and spiritually dead.



John Wesley




Human Nature

John Wesley believed in the doctrine of original sin, similar to traditional Christian views, but with his own important nuances in how he understood its impact on human beings.

John Wesley

Free Will

Wesley's understanding of free will was one of his most distinctive theological contributions, and it remains a cornerstone of Methodism and Arminian theology.



John Wesley

- Grace
- John Wesley's understanding of grace was central to his theology and his understanding of salvation. Grace was, for Wesley, the key to both salvation and personal transformation. His views on grace emphasized its necessity, universality, and transformative power.

Seventh-day Adventist Church

- Human Nature
- The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of human nature is shaped by the belief that human beings were created by God in His image but fell into sin, leading to a fundamental shift in human nature.



Seventh-day Adventist Church

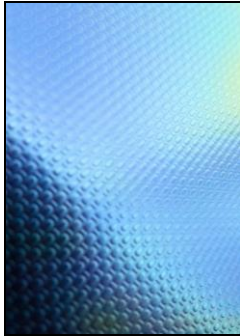
- Free Will
- The doctrine of free will is central to the SDA understanding of salvation, responsibility, and the relationship between humans and God.



Seventh-day Adventist Church

- Grace
- Grace is a foundational concept in Seventh-day Adventist theology, closely tied to the doctrines of salvation, justification, and sanctification.






Seventh-day Adventist Church


Summary

The SDA Church teaches that human nature was created good but became fallen through sin. Humanity retains the ability to choose between good and evil, but its nature is weakened by sin. Through Christ's atoning work, human nature can be restored, and believers can live victorious lives over sin.



M. L. Andreasen

- Last Generation Theology
- M. L. Andreasen's concept of the perfection of the last generation, as presented in his book "The Sanctuary Service" (1937, 1947), is a key component of his Last Generation Theology. According to Andreasen, the final generation of believers will achieve a state of sinless perfection, playing a crucial role in God's plan for the end times.



Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White Perspective

Ellen G. White's writings present a nuanced view of human perfection and the role of believers in the last days, which diverges from M. L. Andreasen's Last Generation Theology (LGT). While Andreasen emphasized the necessity of a sinless perfect last generation to vindicate God's character and usher in Christ's return, Ellen White's perspective places greater emphasis on divine grace and Christ's atoning sacrifice rather than human achievement.

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