

# **In God's Image: The Mystery of Creation**

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## **Unit 4 Lecture Text**

### **1. Manichaeism and St. Augustine of Hippo (353-429)**

Augustine will afford us our second more detailed look at a carefully theologially elaborated doctrine of creation. His doctrine was also developed in response to a gnostic-type religion of late Antiquity, namely, Manichaeism. The religion is named after its founder, Mani, a Persian who lived from 216-274 (or 277). It was comprised of elements drawn from different religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism (Mani had traveled to India). What bound it together overall was a myth of alienation and fragmentation of the divine into matter and bodies, and followed by deliverance. The crucial moment in the drama is the imparting of the knowledge of one's true identity as divine and as alienated into a world of darkness, matter and evil from which one can be released by following the precepts of the Manichaean religion. The Manichees, if anything, were more pervasively dualist than the gnostics of the second and third centuries. The Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness are eternally existent and opposed, and the incursion of the Prince of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light initiated a commingling (a mixture) from which we are still not free, though one day the kingdoms will again be decisively separated. Like the gnostic sects of earlier centuries, the Manichees rejected the Old Testament as crass and materialistic and the Creator God to whom it testifies as inferior and evil. His only design in fashioning human beings was the lust and greed of imprisoning the divine Light for himself. The Manichaean view of the physical universe was not, however, quite as negative as the classic gnostic view, for the Kingdom of Light had sent emissaries which had been able to found a system of delivery of the fragments of light, liberated in various

ways from its imprisonment in matter by the actions of the more advanced Manichees called the Elect. The Elect engaged in ascetic practices based upon their knowledge of their true nature. The lower order of Manichees was comprised of the “Hearers,” who did not have to engage in the same ascetic regime as the elect. They could, for example, marry and engage in sex, but they were discouraged from procreation, since procreation, as in the older gnostic religions, was the continuing means of entrapment the Creator God had devised to suit his own selfish purposes. The ills of this life as we know it are the result of the Creator’s work.

St. Augustine was himself a Manichee for many years before he was baptized a Catholic Christian in 388. As he explains in the *Confessions*, his autobiography, the attraction of Manichaeism for him was that it explained the origin of evil (*Conf.* 5), and really not just its origin but its ubiquity, its seeming stranglehold on creation. Manichaeism made it clear that the problem WAS creation itself, and that such a state of affairs had arisen because the true God, the Father of Light, had been violated by the Prince of Darkness and his legions, among them the Creator. Not only was the true God not a Creator, but he was not omnipotent. He was vulnerable to injury and unable to fend off the direct assault of darkness, and, though the Good will conquer ultimately, the conquest is not one of elimination of evil but of separation of the Good, the Light, from the Darkness, the Evil, which will remain in its own Kingdom from then on.

All of Augustine’s early written works are in some way concerned with refuting these Manichaean beliefs, and much of his later work is still informed by these same concerns as his thought grew into maturity. In a way Augustine’s whole life was spent in a sustained defense of the doctrine of creation, though, as with Irenaeus, such a defense entailed exploration of every other truth of the Catholic faith, and of course we cannot in a short lecture encompass them all. I will try to provide the elements of Augustine’s position in its maturity, especially during the time of the writing of his *magnum opus* (as he himself calls it), the *City of God* (written in the period 412-427).

## **1.1 Elements of a Doctrine of Creation**

The basics of Augustine's doctrine are probably familiar and I do not want to spend much time on them. He insists in the first place on a very strong doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing, as a way of emphasizing the omnipotence of the Creator who depends on nothing else to create. One of the hallmarks of the goodness of creation for Augustine is its order. There are greater goods and lesser goods, but everything that exists, insofar as it exists, is good. There is room in creation for flies and mosquitos as well as for human beings and angels, and the greatest good is the way in which everything fits together into an organically unified whole. The cosmos, as a true whole and synergy of countless beings of greater or lesser intensity of being, is the most perfect expression of God's goodness; and it is a reflection of God's essential and irreducible simplicity, his Oneness. As a whole its primary characteristic is not only its goodness but its beauty, a beauty that cries out its testimony to the beauty of the One it mirrors.

In this cosmos as created there is no "thing" which can be called evil, no substance which has existed from all eternity to challenge God in any way, nor can there ever be a substance or being which is evil in its very being, by nature. Goodness and being are identical in this doctrine of creation, since any being, having been called out of nothingness by God, is good and insofar as it has being, is a testimony to God's power and to God's love. Evil is rather the absence, or (even better) the *corruption* of the good, not itself a being or a substance but a defacement or deprivation of the good. Evil is a deficiency, not a substance of any sort, for that would mean it was a good, only an evil kind of good, if that means anything.

This is a doctrine characteristic of Augustinian theology from its inception as we know it. It may seem to be a weak depiction of evil, until we consider its flip side, as it were. The Augustinian creation is, in a sense, so good and so beautiful that it is easy to mar or disfigure it, just as it would be easy to mar a priceless painting with only a small smear of the wrong color. This does not mean that the essential order of the universe, by which God has set it into being, can be undone. Evil defaces the one who causes it, and so the order of being is, in a sense vindicated. One cannot change it or will to change it

without at the same time willing oneself to be less than one was created to be—since the order of creation constitutes one’s very being.

Yet that having been said, there is a way in which the creation in Augustine’s system is characterized by a fragility which corresponds to the exquisite degree of its beauty. The Creator, if he wishes to respect the integrity of the beauty which mirrors his own in time and space, cannot remedy this fragility, part of which is not only the harmony of physical things, but also the harmony of wills. The cosmos is suffused with freedom, the freedom of the angels and of the human beings who are its crowning glory. How easy it would be for any of these intensely beautiful creatures to “opt out” of the whole, to become aware of their own beauty as an isolated good, and seize it, so to speak, as leverage against the rest of creation, and thus against God! There is no flaw in creation, rather, such ravishing beauty that each creature, becoming aware of its own self as exquisite, is tempted to rest in that good as though it were a private good, as though it had not been given, as though one had generated oneself, and then to exercise it to draw attention, to fascinate others, less beautiful in their own right but still beautiful in their place in the whole.

In other words, the temptation is to set oneself up as, in effect, God. That is the sin which Augustine calls “pride,” and which is the essence of original sin. What is important to point out here is that “pride” (*superbia* in Latin) is a rejection of one’s status as a created being and of the whole idea of creation. It is, in Augustine’s view, a sin visible and thematized in the Manichaean religion, since the Manichees literally believe they are divine; but it is also present at the bottom of every particular sin. In a way, each actual sin is the form that pride takes in the present, if a deficiency can even be said to have a form. It is rather the particular way in which the formlessness of pride, its “marring” effect on the beauty of creation, is realized ever anew.

We are all of us complicit, in Augustine’s view, in the rejection of the doctrine of creation, not as the explicit rejection of the doctrine, as with the Manichees, but by the way we love. We order our loves as though God did not exist, and so in effect as though we were God, self-originate, uncreated. This is the supreme “marring” of God’s beautiful work in creating free beings to enjoy God in the way possible to them, namely, in the

beauty of the whole of creation. By playing a part against the whole, the creature sadly loves an order of being which is alien to his or her own constitution, becomes addicted to it, as it were, and in that addiction becomes less beautiful, less him or her self, and so, most crucially, less and less free. The Creator, for his part, is also less free, in a sense, for if he is to remedy the situation, he must address himself to the narrowed and restricted conditions under which freedom now operates, the fallen world.

## **1.2 A foray into the texts: the original state of humankind**

One further note before examining some texts. A doctrine of evil as “corruption” of the good or as deficiency may not seem commensurate with our experience of evil as powerful. But in fact, it is a very potent doctrine of evil, for it pictures as active agents in the world good beings who have marred themselves, actors in the cosmos with great power (i.e. great freedom) who begin to exercise that power in deformed ways. It is as though the free beings of the universe have caught a disease and are acting in a “sick” manner, like a computer program that, good in itself, has been infected by a virus and so sets about its proper work as a program but in a destructive way. A universe of fallen creatures is a cosmic disharmony or clash of competing wills, each trying in some way to assert itself as an independent good, or else attaching itself to one of these other actors in subservience. So this is hardly a “weak” form of the doctrine of evil.

Some of the themes we have just considered can be seen in Augustine’s exegesis of the story of creation and fall in Genesis 1-3. For the purposes of brevity I am not going to examine texts which discuss the original creation of the universe and of evil as the absence of the good, but I will simply assume these doctrines and concentrate on Augustine’s commentary on the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3, with its accompanying commentary on the original state of human beings as created by God before sin. These texts all come from the *City of God* and most of them from Books 12 or 14.

Augustine first comments on the creation of humankind from one individual. By choosing this manner of creation, Augustine comments, the unity appropriate to the human race would be emphasized. Augustine distinguishes this unity not only from the

condition of animals who by nature prefer solitude, but also from animals who naturally associate themselves in flocks and herds. The unity of the human race is something *essential* or *natural* to human being, for we are all “kin” in virtue of our single common ancestor:

It is not hard to see how much better it is that God multiplied the human race from the one man whom he created first, than it would have been had he originated it from several. As to the other animals, he created some solitary ... and ... others he made gregarious, and these congregate together and prefer to live in company. ... But in neither case did God produce these from a single individual. ... Humankind, however, whose nature was to be in a manner intermediate between angels and beasts ... God created [from] only one single man: not, certainly, that he might be alone and bereft of human society, but that, by this means, the unity of society and the bond of concord might be commended to him more forcefully, humankind being bound together not only by similarity of nature, but by the affection of kinship (*City of God* 12.22).

Note that Augustine’s interpretation of the creation of humankind from one individual is not essentially biological or scientific, rather, he locates the significance in the narrative as pointing to a solidarity among humans which is not “added on” to our nature, but precisely *constitutive* of our nature. As for the creation of woman from the first man: “the fact that the woman was made for him from his side signifies clearly enough how dear the union between a man and his wife should be” (*City of God* 12.28). The union of husband and wife is itself the primary locus of, and primary symbol of, the natural unity of the whole of the human race.

Humankind, created between the beasts, who have no free will in the genuine sense, and the angels, who exercise their freedom fully in their first act and are thereafter fixed in praise of God or in pride, can choose whether it will become less and less free, like the beasts, or more and more free, like the good angels. Augustine comments:

God created humankind...in such a way that, if he remained subject to his Creator as his true Lord, and if he kept His commandments with pious obedience, He should pass over into the company of the angels and obtain, without suffering death, a blessed immortality without end. But if he offended the Lord his God by using his free will proudly and disobediently, he should live, as the beasts do, subject to death, the slave of his own lust... (*City of God* 12.22).

### **1.2.1 More from the texts on the original state of humankind**

Augustine comments later in the text about life in Paradise. He concentrates not only on the exterior features of paradisiacal life, but also on the interior features. He comments on a situation which, in a way, is beyond our imagination at present, or at the borders of it. The first couple lived without fear or pain. Augustine asks:

For who can be called happy if they are afflicted by fear and pain? Moreover, what was there to bring fear or pain to those human beings where there was such an abundance of good things, where there was no danger of death or any bodily sickness, and where nothing was absent that a good will might seek, nor anything present that might injure humankind in flesh or mind as they lived their life of felicity? (*City of God* 14.10).

Not only was there no fear or pain, or indeed nothing to fear or to injure, but positively speaking the solidarity between the man and woman was part and parcel of their beauty as human beings and as a pair. It was a fellowship that they shared in joy, because it was part of their love of God, or was founded in the love of God. Augustine says:

The love of the pair for God and for one another was undisturbed, and they lived in a faithful and sincere fellowship which was the source of an immense gladness for them, for what they loved was always at hand for their enjoyment (*City of God* 14.10).

Note that the terms of enjoyment here are not primarily physical, though that is not denied, but rather, it is a kind of joy at the beauty of fellowship, and in the beauty of a being so created that it can share fellowship. That IS loving the Creator, not a separate act from loving the Creator. Joy in true solidarity IS joy in the awareness of our created state and so joy in the Creator. Augustine comments:

How happy, then, were the first human beings, neither troubled by any disturbance of the mind nor pained by any disorder of the body! And the whole universal fellowship of humankind would have been just as happy had our first parents not committed that evil deed whose effect was to be transmitted to their posterity (*ibid.*).

After humankind had multiplied to the appointed number (for Augustine, it was the number of the angels who had fallen), the whole human community would have been delivered to the destiny of the blessed angels, where Augustine comments:

...there would have been the certain assurance that no one would sin and no one would die, and the life of the saints, without any previous experience of labor, pain or death, would have been already what it is now to become after all these experiences, when our bodies are restored to incorruption at the resurrection of the dead. (*Ibid.*).

One thing to note here with regard to our work in the last lecture is a contrast already peeking out here, as it were, with the view of Irenaeus. Labor and pain seem to be on the agenda for any created being in virtue of its initial state of “infancy;” “growing pains,” one might say, are inevitable for Irenaeus. It’s not clear at all that Augustine is thinking that way. For him, human beings are created fully mature, as it were, if not actually perfected. They are created way ahead, developmentally speaking, of Irenaeus’s first humans. Augustine’s married couple could have had sex anytime they wanted to (though they sinned first, unfortunately, *City of God* 14.26). They are fully adults BEFORE the Fall. It may be that Irenaeus’s first pair could have had sex, but it is significant that it is never mentioned in the hundreds of pages that comprise his *magnum opus*. Their hallmark characteristic is their youthfulness, meaning innocence in the sense of inexperience. We do not get an “inner report” on the motives for the Fall in Irenaeus, only the sense that as “innocent” i.e. inexperienced they were easily fooled by the serpent and disobeyed as children would. We will see that this is not the case for Augustine’s first pair.

### 1.3 An “inner history” of the Fall

For Augustine, the suffering characteristic of the world as we know it is not part of the Creator’s plan, but comes in as a result of sin. In particular, he believes that original sin damaged human nature, caused it to be deficient, and, because of its inherent solidarity which is not just accidental but constitutive of humanity, the whole of human nature inherits this deficiency, or “vitiating [corrupted] nature” as he will call it. The



problem with the Manichees is that they judge the Creator's intent solely on the basis of the vitiated nature we now experience, in an external world which has itself been affected by the Fall. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Why is it, Augustine asks, that this sin should have had such far reaching consequences? After all, it was only a simple gesture of eating a fruit. However forbidden the fruit was, isn't the vitiation of all of human nature a high price to pay for that one little slip? The trouble with looking at it that way, however, is that in effect one is transferring Irenaeus's view of the Fall into the equation. For Irenaeus, the Fall was a kind of stumble, the first mistake of a childlike being, culpable indeed, and even a participation in "apostasy" as he calls it, but not fully willed in the sense that, though chosen, it was chosen by the untried, inexperienced will of a baby creature.

Augustine's view is totally different on this point. He remarks:

Someone may be moved to ask why other sins do not change human nature in the way that it was changed by the transgression of the first two human beings. For, because of that sin, human nature was made subject to all the great corruption that we see and feel, and so to death also. What is more, humankind came to be distracted by turbulent and conflicting emotions, and so became very different from what he had been when he dwelt in Paradise (*City of God* 14.12).

The answer to the question is in the nature of the sin, and the crucial difference here is in the nature of the freedom the original pair enjoyed:

Anyone who ... is moved to ask this question should not regard what was done by Adam and Eve as light and trivial. Certainly, it involved a piece of food which was not evil or hurtful other than because it was forbidden. ... But God's command required obedience ... and, where there was so great an abundance of other foods, the command prohibiting the eating of one kind of food was as easy to observe as it was simple to remember, and it was given at a time when desire was not in opposition to the will: such opposition arose later, as a punishment of the transgression (*City of God* 14.12).

In other words, this was an utterly free act. There was no passion goading them on, there was no necessity because there were plenty of alternative foods available. It was a simple and pure sin, a pure act of malice, fully conscious and fully embraced.

An analogy might be someone who wins the jackpot in the state lottery, and does not follow the proper procedures to collect his winnings not because he disagrees with the

procedure or thinks they are improper but because he did not write the procedures himself. It's a foolish act which deprives him of millions of dollars that by right were his. Or, maybe a better analogy would be the following, since in the lottery one is actually owed one's winnings as a result of paying for a ticket. In creation we have no claim on our own being, which we possess only as a gift. Suppose someone were to unexpectedly receive a visit from a wealthy stranger who has been busy buying up all the property, municipal and private, in New York City. He presents you with a deed to the whole city to have and to hold in perpetuity. There is one codicil on the deed: the owner would like to maintain the use of a small one bedroom apartment on the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor of a building overlooking Central Park, and he wants the light left on though the door is always open and you have the use even of this apartment. It would be as if you took the deed, then ran to New York, found the building overlooking Central Park, ran as fast as you could up to the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor and turned off the light switch.

The evil act is so irrational and so deeply willed that one, in effect, becomes fixed in it in Augustine's view. But it is important to realize that the evil one becomes fixed in is not essentially the picking of the fruit, but the malice which led to it. Augustine says: "It was in secret that Adam and Eve began to be evil, and it was because of this that they were then able to fall into overt disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act had an evil will not preceded it" (*City of God* 14.13). And, there is a simple name for this evil will, or for its origin—pride—"for ... 'pride is the beginning of sin'" (*ibid.*, quoting Sirach 10.13 as Augustine knew it). Again,

...and what is pride but an appetite for a perverse kind of elevation? For it is a perverse kind of elevation indeed to forsake the foundation upon which the mind should rest, and to become and remain, as it were, one's own foundation. This occurs when a human being is too well pleased with himself, and he is too well pleased with himself when he falls away from that immutable good with which he ought rather to have been pleased than with himself. This betrayal occurs as an act of free will (*ibid.*).

Pride is a betrayal because instead of being pleased with oneself IN the Creator, or on the foundation of love of the Creator, one delights in oneself INSTEAD of the Creator. Adam and Eve picked the fruit because they rejoiced in their own power as

though it were independent of God, something self-standing and in effect in competition with God. The example of the gift of New York City is an imperfect analogy because it doesn't quite get at the sense of betrayal involved in the first sin. It is as though I turn my joy in my own being and in the being of my spouse, and in the beauty of our fellowship and of all the beautiful and harmonious things around me, and I say—it is mine, not yours who gave it all to me, mine, not simply in virtue of the giving of it, but by right. I can take whatever I want to. I would note in passing that Augustine's interpretation, distinguishing the essence of the sin from the actual act, is not dependent upon a literal interpretation of the text, yet it is a very close reading of the text, for it takes into account the essential features of the narrative. It exhibits the "inner history" of the Fall.

#### **1.4 The Consequences of Pride**

The consequences of the first sin have already been mentioned. But to sum up, it is the world as we know it now, characterized by death, by the suffering leading up to death—old age, sickness, etc.—and by the external features of the world which are no longer garden-like, but which present the circumstances that threaten death. All of this, besides the disharmony of wills and the depravity we see revealed in social situations of oppression and of the corruption of the original solidarity that is part of our nature. For we ARE still in solidarity, only now it is solidarity in sin, solidarity in the incoherent rebellion against ourselves as creatures. This is the world the Manichees see and blame on the Creator, the world which is "fallen," the world which is the work of those who have rejected the Creator almost as much as it is the work of the Creator. And it does look like the Manichees have a point. God seems vulnerable.

If creation is God's, and it is as vulnerable to corruption as we see, then he does seem just as vulnerable to evil as his work is. Augustine comments that the existence of the will as a "nature" is due to its creation by God, but its falling away from its nature is due to its creation out of nothing (*City of God* 14.13), that is, the possibility of its fall is inherent in its being not-God but still authentically free. God, in a way, is vulnerable to the very freedom he created, not in the sense that his own nature is damaged or

compromised, as in Manichaean doctrine, but in the sense that he must not force obedience, but must deliver creation up to the consequences of the abuse of freedom, otherwise there really was no real creation out of nothing with all the beauty it entails. Part of the beauty IS its fragility, its being hung on the hair's breadth of the free choice of a person tempted by something so intimate as his or her own beautiful self.

God's problem is to find a way to appeal to those who have lost a taste for the beauty of the whole, without destroying human freedom. How, without forcing the issue, can we be returned to a love of the order of creation? God must resort to drastic measures. The very order of creation itself must be made visible. What would that look like? For the fallen, we might suppose it would look harsh, a power competing with us come to make us heel to, come to impose itself on us, for that is the way pride has constructed creative power.

But what actually appears is a human being who is fully conformed to and in fact personally united to the Word, the Wisdom, by whom the cosmos was created. He IS the Order of creation. What do we see? In the first place a human being who laid down his life for his friends. We see someone unjustly accused, betrayed, condemned, executed, yet who loved to the end. We see, in other words, a use of freedom that corresponds to God's original intention, only now under the conditions of fallen existence. From the perspective of the Resurrection and the faith of the church, we see even more. We see the absolute vulnerability of God.

Augustine here takes over, but also radically transforms, the Manichaean paradigm. God's nature is not vulnerable to injury, as the Manichaeans believe. Such vulnerability only generates myths, such as any Roman would be familiar with from the stories of the gods. The only vulnerability which is real, Augustine seems to be saying, is that of a being created from nothing, the vulnerability of real persons in time and space, and furthermore that is the only vulnerability that we as creatures know. And we suffer it under fallen conditions, which exacerbate it with ambiguity and ignorance. God comes to us under precisely those circumstances. He subjects himself to the conditions of existence we have created. The Incarnation is an image and enactment of God's vulnerability before the freedom he created. The Incarnation displays the humility, and

even the humiliation, of God. And going back to human terms, Christ, joined to the person of the Word, is a sinless man. Because of his sinlessness he does not deserve death, but that means that the freedom with which he throws his lot in with his friends and remains in solidarity with them even in the face of death, is a freedom and a love deeper than any other.

### **1.5 God's judgment**

We may not like what we see. While we may be glad the omnipotence of the Creator was not revealed as a force greater than and competing with our own, we may wish for something greater, at least a little more force-like. But there is no power in the universe greater than this love (or perhaps one could say there is no greater power in the universe which is separate from, or without the form of, this love). In a way, pride WANTS there to be something greater. But God is banking on the hope that the visibility of this love will be moving enough to make us want to love back, to enter into solidarity with the one who loved us to the end, and so recover our awareness of the truth about God's creative power and our own very being as the gift of this power, as loved into being, one might say.

Alas, it is a mark of the depth to which pride has committed us that people can look on the moving spectacle of someone who offers his life in place of his friends, who suffers in solidarity to the end, who without guilt stands in for them so they won't be killed—and not be moved. In fact we can even cause such deaths to happen. Augustine believes that God's grace is necessary in order for us to be moved even by this spectacle of heroic love. This has caused some to comment that Augustine's Creator doesn't "back off" enough in the same way that Irenaeus's Creator does; that Augustine's God influences us directly, by grace, from within. But I think that is the wrong emphasis.

The Incarnation, in a way, also reveals the depth of evil in the human heart, imaging the imageless (evil) in a very simple way: it is the refusal to be moved by someone laying down their life for you. It is to be too proud to be moved even by that. We want something greater, in the end, something like a force that will scare us into

submission against our wills or despite them. As a race we have sunk so low that God has to supply help even to permit the spectacle of his own perfect humiliation in the image of a human being refusing to break solidarity even in the face of death to move us. But grace does not operate independently of the moving spectacle of the Incarnate love in Christ. It has no meaning or effect apart from this spectacle. It is an aid to being moved by the Creator's utter abasement before the freedom he has created. It enables us to accept the fact that "all there is is love," not force.

As an aside, we can see the justice of God's judgment in condemning original sin from the image of original sin on *this* end of time, the other side of the Fall, if the image of sin in the narrative of Genesis wasn't enough. It looks considerably more ugly in the Passion narrative, where we see it in the beating and execution of an innocent person. The depth of the evil will which in the midst of ease produced disobedience in the Garden is almost beyond our imagination; but here is an image of it, projected, as it were, across all of human history, whereby the imagination is aided a little. We see hearts (our own) hard enough to torture and kill the innocent, or at least to sit back and watch it happen without protest. If death and the other consequences of original sin seemed excessive for eating an apple, it may seem less excessive to consider that a race capable of routinely beating and killing the innocent should live in a world where the love they have abandoned is not readily visible. The world we have is a perfect exterior match for the evil within.

## **2. Which is Better?**

Irenaeus's view of creation emphasizes the "infant" status of the newly created, and its consequent need for growth to maturity. The Fall is a kind of bump along the way, a way of discipline and nurturing that is already laid out in advance, leading up to the Incarnation as the full revelation of God the Creator's intentions (destiny) for human beings. The Fall is a big bump—it means that the way of discipline will now include death and other misfortunes in life associated with it. All of these are now part of God's disciplining care. Yet the Incarnation is in essential continuity with God's nursing of the

youthful creatures who must be accustomed to communion with God before they grow fully into it.

Augustine's view is less optimistic. He emphasizes the perfect freedom of the newly created, and thus their maturity. He emphasizes their initial communion with God as something they already enjoyed fully, or nearly so. The Fall for Augustine is not a bump along the way, but the undoing and destruction of a perfection. The state of child-like ignorance comes AFTER the Fall, not before, and it is culpable, not innocent. The Incarnation is not so much the revelation of a destiny as it is the recovery of one. God is always in control in the sense that God can draw good out of evil but it is an evil that remains squarely evil. The Incarnation is a great good, and the Resurrection is also a great good, but both are goods which God brings out of evil. The suffering of the innocent Christ is *in itself* the unmitigated evil of innocent suffering. It would not have been necessary without human sin. In Augustine's system, metaphors of healing predominate. Though present in Irenaeus, they are subordinated to the other metaphors of cultivation and parenting; healing is just a part of that. In Augustine, healing is the major metaphor, and nurturing and parental persuasion metaphors are governed by it.

Which is better? Irenaeus's view of Creation develops into the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic position and spirituality, as we know them now. Augustine's comes to shape Western or Latin Christian tradition. It is fashionable to play these off, one against the other. Irenaeus's optimism is made to cast Augustine's more pessimistic view into dark shadow, to the point where its departure from this more ancient optimism is regarded as by its critics as heretical or at least as a reckless novelty. On the other hand, Latin Christians sometimes view the Eastern tradition as "Pelagian," that is, as placing too much optimism on the power of created freedom to restore itself apart from the special help of God's grace. But it is better to stop using these differing but complementary approaches each as a way of caricaturing the other.

The *Catechism* in fact uses both. You can see that the metaphor of creation "journeying towards perfection" comes from Irenaeus's way of looking at the matter (#310). Side by side with that is a more Augustinian strain which speaks the language of God permitting evil because he knows he can bring good out of it (##311-12). It is

probably best to follow this lead, and to let the Church breathe “with both lungs,” to use the words of John Paul II (meaning with both the Eastern and the Western sources of inspiration).

The Eastern optimism is in some ways an important corrective to the Augustinian vision, which can tend to become so pessimistic at the depth of evil in the world that it loses hope that any more than a minority of the human race can be saved. This may not seem to give the doctrine of the goodness of creation sufficient scope. On the other hand, in a century such as the one we have just lived through, where genocide, the killing of the innocent *en masse*, from the Holocaust of the Jews to the massacres of peoples in Africa, it may be, oddly enough, that it is the Augustinian view which affords more hope. These genocides hardly seem like the mistakes of infants, but staggeringly mature evil, and one wants a way to say that these events are absolutely evil in every way, not “teachable moments,” but also that the Creator can still derive good, even from them, without having to call these evils in ANY way “goods.” They are horrible corruptions of the good which precisely as deficiencies can never have any use and can never be in any way “goods.” God’s bringing good out of evil is an exercise in the creative power of bringing good out of nothing.

In the end, both ways of thinking about the doctrine of creation, and hence the rest of Christian doctrine which is founded on the doctrine of creation, are both ways of thinking about the creative power of God as a kind of divine self-limitation. Both see that “making room” imaged and revealed most fully in the Incarnation. But where Irenaeus sees the Incarnation as the establishment of full communion between God and humankind in such a manner that all may be drawn into that intimate fellowship with God (“divinization” in the later Eastern tradition), Augustine sees it as God’s attempt to *restore* such communion. Irenaeus’s view highlights the durability of creation; Augustine’s its fragility. Irenaeus’s God limits himself by a kind of “making room” for creation; Augustine’s Creator limits himself more by “self-emptying,” if such a distinction can be drawn here, by making himself personally vulnerable to the abuses of human freedom.



One can think of Irenaeus's Creator as a better Creator because his self-limitation is more "limiting" of his options. And it is true that Irenaeus does not picture God operating directly on the human will, as Augustine does with God's grace being poured into our hearts. Irenaeus's Creator seems to have more faith in his creations, or at least in himself as Creator. But Augustine's God does not apply grace apart from his dramatic self humiliation at our feet. In a way it is a more profound self-limitation than the one undertaken by Irenaeus's God, and we are inclined not only to not be impressed by such a God, but even to be disgusted by it. What kind of a Creator is that? Just the kind we DON'T want. Grace lets this dramatic gesture of God move us to love instead, and so to trust that God is present somewhere, even where it appears impossible because the apparent absence so great. Creation is not abandoned by, but is a function of, God's "making room," (with Irenaeus) and even of God's "self-emptying" or "humiliation" (with Augustine). In Christ both are manifestations of God's original creative *power* to love things into being out of nothing.