

THE RECEPTION OF PELAGIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

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SUMMARY: I. *Rejection of Original Sin*. II. *Unrestricted Freedom*. III. *Sexuality*. IV. *Soteriology in the Theological Disputes of the Fourth Century*. V. *Soteriology in the Christological Disputes of the Fourth Century*. VI. *Soteriology in the Anthropological Disputes of the Fifth Century*. VII. *Conclusion*.

Since the middle of the last century, a popular trend in scholarship has attempted to retrieve the thought of Pelagius and the Pelagians. Many scholars—while publishing important historical scholarship that has helped clarify Pelagians thought—have made it clear that they ultimately side with the Pelagians. One biographer of Pelagius, B.R. Rees, has claimed that he was ‘no less orthodox’ than Augustine.¹ Making a bolder claim, Elizabeth Clark views the Pelagians as ‘heroes,’² while C.B. Armstrong even went as far as declaring both Augustine and Pelagius equally as ‘saints.’³ John Ferguson argued that Pelagius had made several important contributions to Christian thought and that he sides with Pelagius; he looks ‘with sympathy but ultimately negatively at Augustine’s views, and with no sympathy at all at his policies,’⁴ and elsewhere he said that ‘it is not certain that any statement of his [Pelagius] is totally irreconcilable with the Christian faith or indefensible in terms of the New Testament. It is by no means so clear that the same may be said of Augustine.’⁵ Even Gerald Bonner who, in 1963, said that ‘it is possible that the pendulum has swung too far and that the heresiarch now enjoys a more favorable reputation than he deserves’⁶ changed his mind and,

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¹ Cfr. B. REES, *Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic in Pelagius: Life and Letters*, I, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1998, 132. Also 22, 34-35, 83, and 131.

² E. CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992, 10.

³ C. ARMSTRONG, *St. Augustine and Pelagius as Religious Types*, «Church Quarterly Review» 162 (1961) 155. Also 164.

⁴ J. FERGUSON, *In Defence of Pelagius*, «Theology 83» (1980) 114-115.

⁵ J. FERGUSON, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, W. Heffer & Sons, Cambridge 1956, 182-183.

⁶ G. BONNER, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, S.C.M. Press, London 1963, 316.

in 2007, said that the Pelagians ‘deserve more sympathy than they have generally received down through the ages.’⁷

It seems that Pelagian thought has become quite fashionable today,⁸ as the list of scholars wishing to ‘recover’ the Pelagians is extensive.⁹ This sentiment even has spilled out of the academic world when, in 2011, a resolution was proposed by Rev. Benno D. Pattison at the 105th Annual Council of The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta asking for the Council to appoint a committee ‘to honor the contributions of Pelagius and reclaim his voice.’¹⁰

Why is contemporary scholarship so enamored of the Pelagians? If only one or two individuals found comfort in Pelagian thought, then we could assume they were on the margins of the mainstream. But, something deeper—some fundamental shift of thought—is happening. What is in the soil that encourages such a radical shift after 1600 years such that Pelagius would be much more comfortable in our time than Augustine? Or, to ask it another way, why is our age more com-

⁷ G. BONNER, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine’s Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2007, ix–x, 72.

⁸ Cfr. S. LANCEL, *Saint Augustine*, S.C.M. Press, London 2002, 342.

⁹ Cfr. G. DE PLINVAL, *L’Heure est-elle Venue de Redécouvrir Pélage?*, «Revue des Études Augustiniennes» 19 (1973) 158, 162; P. BARCLIFT, *In Controversy with Saint Augustin: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin*, «Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale» 58 (1991) 20; T. BOHLIN, *Die Theologie des Pelagius und Ihre Genesis*, Almquist, Uppsala 1957, 5; G. BONNER, *How Pelagian Was Pelagius? An Examination of the Contentions of Torgny Bohlin*, «Studia Patristica» 9 (1966) 351–352; R. EVANS, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals*, The Seabury Press, New York 1968, 66; FERGUSON, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, 182–183; R. HAIGHT, *Notes on the Pelagian Controversy*, «Philippine Studies» 22 (1974) 27, 31, 36, 38; M. LAMBERIGTS, *Le Mal et le Péché. Pélage: la Réhabilitation d’un Hérétique*, «Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique» 95 (2000) 111; J. LUCAS, *Pelagius and St. Augustine*, «Journal of Theological Studies» XXII/1 (1971) 73, 84; J. O’DONNELL, *Augustine: A New Biography*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York 2005, 276; W. PHIPPS, *The Heresiarch: Pelagius or Augustine?*, «Anglican Theological Review» LXII/2 (1980) 133; É. REBILLARD, *Sociologie de la Déviance et Orthodoxie: Le Cas de la Controverse Pélagienne sur la Grâce*, in S. ELM (ed.), *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire*, École Française de Rome, Rome 2000, 225; A. SELL, *Augustine Versus Pelagius: A Cautionary Tale of Perennial Importance*, «Calvin Theological Journal» 12 (1977) 117–118; H. WOLFSON, *St. Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy*, in *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays*, The Belknap Press, Cambridge 1961, 176; A. BONNER, *The Myth of Pelagianism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018. Other scholars wish to place Cassian as a corrective alternative to both Augustine and the Pelagians. M. AZKOUL, *Peccatum Originale: The Pelagian Controversy*, «Patristic and Byzantine Review» 3 (1–2) (1984) 39–53; A. CASIDAY, *Rehabilitating John Cassian: An Evaluation of Prosper of Aquitaine’s Polemic against the Semipelagians*, «Scottish Journal of Theology» 58 (2005) 270–271; C. HARRISON, *Truth in Heresy? 1. Pelagianism*, «The Expository Times» 112.78 (2000) 82.

¹⁰ The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta 105th Annual Council. ‘Resolutions submitted by 10/5/2011.’ The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, https://www.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/Resolutions_submitted_by_10_5_2011.asp [accessed April 17, 2013].

fortable with Pelagius than Augustine? This article will attempt to address these questions. First, it will demonstrate that Pelagian anthropology is more in harmony with the assumptions about the human person in our postmodern, secular age¹¹ than Augustine's anthropology by investigating three points of commonality: the rejection of original sin, the unrestricted nature of the free will, and the goodness of sexual impulses.¹² Second, this article will review recent scholarship that states that the Theological and Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries were not fundamentally about the nature of God or the person Jesus Christ, but were about the salvation of humanity. Third, it will make the argument that the Pelagian Controversy also was soteriological at its core. To rehabilitate Pelagianism based on anthropological similarities with postmodernity, then, would be a mistake because it skews the Christian doctrine of salvation.

I. REJECTION OF ORIGINAL SIN

One of the central positions of the Pelagians was their rejection of original sin. Prior to the Pelagian Controversy, Pelagius had written commentaries on all of St. Paul's letters and, in reference to Romans 5:12 ('therefore, just as through one person sin came into the world, and through sin death'), which became the most contested verse during the entire fight,¹³ Pelagius said that sin came into the world by Adam's 'example or by pattern.'¹⁴ In other words, he believed that when people sin, they do so not because they are compelled by a postlapsarian condition,¹⁵ but that people sin out of *imitatio* of Adam.¹⁶ An individual sinful action then develops into a *habitus*, which may fool us into believing in original sin. In his letter to the young Demetrias, who had broken her engagement in order to live as a consecrated virgin, Pelagius said that there is no 'reason why it is made difficult

¹¹ For an excellent discussion on the secular age: C. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, The Belknap Press, Cambridge 2007.

¹² There are other points of contact between the Pelagians and our contemporary intellectual climate, such as radical individualism and an emphasis on the laity, among others. For the sake of length, however, we will not explore these parallels.

¹³ Cfr. T. DE BRUYN, *Pelagius's Interpretation of Rom. 5:12–21: Exegesis within the Limits of Polemic*, «Toronto Journal of Theology» 4 (1989) 30–43; S. LYONNET, *A Propos de Romains 5:12 dans l'Oeuvre de S. Augustin*, «Biblica» 45 (1964) 541–542; IDEM, *Rom. V, 12 Chez Saint Augustin: Note sur l'Élaboration de la Doctrine Augustinienne du Péché Originel*, in *L'Homme Devant Dieu: Mélanges Offerts au Père Henri de Lubac*, Aubier, Paris 1963.

¹⁴ PELAGIUS, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, T. DE BRUYN (translated by), Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, 5.12.

¹⁵ Cfr. P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2000, 367; EVANS, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals*, 97.

¹⁶ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Pecc. mer.* 1.9.9. All translations for Augustine come from the New City Press series.

for us to do good other than that long habit of doing wrong which has infected us from childhood and corrupted us little by little over many years and ever after holds us in bondage and slavery to itself, so that it seems somehow to have acquired the force of nature.¹⁷ But, this *habitus* may be broken by the force of the free will such that, if we wanted it badly enough, we could live perfectly sinless lives.¹⁸

Such a positive view of the human person could be claimed today by any postmodern. This rejection of original sin is one of the marks of the postmodern world that continues since the Enlightenment.¹⁹ Shorn of its overly optimistic flavor of progress towards perfection of the Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson,²⁰ the goodness of humanity continues to be affirmed in all spheres of life. The philosopher and novelist Irish Murdoch accurately diagnosed the intellectual climate of our times, and critiqued it, when she said that ‘briefly put, our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin.’²¹ This ‘grand’ understanding of the human person is not confined to philosophers, but has found favor outside the academic world. The 1970s pop-psychology book *I’m OK—You’re OK*, with its assertions that we need to shed our negative perceptions of ourselves, is a symptom of this thought. The contemporary vision, then, champions the goodness of the human person and bristles at any argument that the human person is turned *incurvatus in se*.

II. UNRESTRICTED FREEDOM

Because the Pelagians rejected the idea of original sin,²² they believed that the individual has a will that is entirely free,²³ which Pelagius defined as the ‘choice

¹⁷ PELAGIUS, *To Demetrias*, in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, B. REES (translated by), The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1998, 8.3. Also 17.3; *On the Christian Life*, in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, B. REES (translated by), The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1998, 13.2.

¹⁸ Cfr. S. SQUIRES, *The Pelagian Controversy: An Introduction to the Enemies of Grace and the Conspiracy of Lost Souls*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene 2019, 186-188.

¹⁹ Cfr. J. SMITH, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, Baker Academic, Ada 2006, 26.

²⁰ Cfr. E. GAUSTAD, *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids 1996, 262.

²¹ I. MURDOCH, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, Routledge, New York 2001, 46.

²² Cfr. D. CRESWELL, *St. Augustine’s Dilemma: The Conflict between Eternal Law and Grace, its Resolution in Double Predestination, and its Effect on Freedom in the Late Pelagian Controversy*, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul 1991, 143; BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 350; EVANS, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals*, 94.

²³ Cfr. D. OGLIARI, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the*

between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based, it is in this that the whole honour of our nature consists...²⁴ and was echoed later by Julian of Eclanum when he psaid that it is ‘nothing but the possibility of sinning and of not sinning, which is not subject to any violence from either side, but which has the ability to move by its spontaneous judgment to the side which it will.’²⁵ The Pelagian claim that the will must be free to choose either good or evil, which was developed in contrast to the Augustinian cry for divine assistance,²⁶ was founded on a simple syllogism: if human beings are responsible for their actions (as all Christians believe), and to hold individuals responsible for deeds for which they are not totally in control would be unjust, and God is clearly just, therefore human beings must have the ability to choose.²⁷ Augustine believed that even though the free will was not lost because of the sin of Adam and Eve, our freedom to choose the Good was compromised such that, left unaided by God, we only will choose evil.²⁸

Although the syllogism—from which the Pelagians conclude the necessity of the free will—certainly is not acceptable to the postmodern mind, the final conclusion that humans have an unfettered will is shared by both groups. The complete autonomy of the will, in fact, is *the* defining anthropological marker of our time. Unencumbered by original sin, out from under any form of religious obligation or obedience, and disconnected from any sense of the Good, the contemporary individual sees life as a cafeteria menu with unlimited options from which the will may choose freely in order to consume whatever satisfies his physical, psychological, or spiritual impulses.

III. SEXUALITY

I doubt that at any time before or after the first few centuries of Christianity were celibate men so concerned with sex. While debates about sex were often restricted to issues of asceticism, they found their way into the lives of married men and women. Was sexual desire itself sinful? When is it acceptable for married couples to engage in sex? Did Jesus have sexual desire and, if so, what does that tell us

Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2003, 231-232; FERGUSON, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, 138.

²⁴ PELAGIUS, *To Demetrias*, in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, 3.1.

²⁵ AUGUSTINE, *C. Iul. imp.* 6.9.

²⁶ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Persev.* 20.53.

²⁷ Cfr. CRESSWELL, *St. Augustine's Dilemma: The Conflict between Eternal Law and Grace, its Resolution in Double Predestination, and its Effect on Freedom in the Late Pelagian Controversy*, 153.

²⁸ For example: AUGUSTINE, *C. Iul. imp.* 6.19.6. Also: BONNER, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*, 72.

about the goodness of sex? A variety of voices offered visions of sexuality and marriage on different points of a spectrum.²⁹ On the one end, Jerome—while praising marriage as a good—believed that its sole good was to produce future virgins.³⁰ On the other end, Jovinian³¹ placed married couples on the same level as virgins.³² That the Pelagian Controversy confronted issues of sex is not shocking, but it is surprising that it wasn't until Julian's contribution to the fight in the 420s that it became a serious point of contention.

Julian believed that sex was good, and he rested this belief on several important foundations.³³ First, he was ensconced in the Roman aristocratic world that had different attitudes towards sex than did renunciants such as Augustine, Jerome, and Cassian.³⁴ It was common at the time for aristocratic Christians to come into positions of power in the Church and to pass those positions to their children.³⁵ Julian was the son of a bishop, had married the daughter of a bishop, and it was expected that they would have a son who would most likely become a bishop.³⁶ There is no evidence, however, that they had any children, and by the time he had locked horns with Augustine he was continent.³⁷ Such pressures to continue the family lineage and dynasty, as well as the burdens of wealth and political power as Peter Brown has noted, were more pressing than nagging sexual desires: 'compared with the truly sinister pressures placed on aristocrats by their social status, the sexual eddies of the body seemed a small matter.'³⁸ Unlike Augustine, whose *Confessions* tell of his keen insight into the grip that *concupiscentia* had on

²⁹ Peter Brown's book offers an excellent survey of the ways that sexuality was envisioned in the Early Church: P. BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York 1988.

³⁰ Cfr. JEROME, *Ep.* 49.19-20; J. KELLY, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody 2000, 101-103.

³¹ For a good description of the fight between Jerome and Jovinian, Also: D. HUNTER, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

³² Cfr. JEROME, *Ad Jov.*, 3.

³³ Peter Brown's section discussing the dispute between Julian of Eclanum and Augustine is foundational for my understanding of the Julian's understanding of sexuality. Cfr. BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 408-420.

³⁴ Cfr. P. BROWN, *Sexuality and Society in the Fifth Century A.D.: Augustine and Julian of Eclanum*, in E. GABBA (ed.), *Tria Corda: Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano*, New Press, Como 1983, 55.

³⁵ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 68.

³⁶ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 54.

³⁷ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 67.

³⁸ BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 410.

his own life,³⁹ Julian never fully understood the danger of the sexual urge—there were more pressing challenges at hand.

The second foundational argument emerges out of the rejection of original sin because of the fall of Adam and Eve that was addressed earlier.⁴⁰ As Barclift has noted, ‘everything in Julian’s philosophy... hangs on his understanding of the inherent goodness of nature.’⁴¹ If humanity did not change as a result of the sin of our first parents, then it follows that sexual urges must be good.⁴² To Julian, Augustine’s insistence that *concupiscentia* was a result and symptom of the fall clearly betrayed his Manichean worldview.⁴³ Looking even more closely at the story of Adam and Eve, moreover, Julian noted the command of God to ‘be fertile and multiply’ (Gen 1,28) and ‘the two of them become one body’ (Gen 2,24) shows that God ordained the sexual act prior to Genesis 3.⁴⁴ How, Julian asked, could a good humanity that is created by a good God and was commanded by that God to reproduce be punished for obeying Him?

Third, Julian argued that if humanity is not fallen, and if every human being experiences *concupiscentia* (including Jesus),⁴⁵ then we must conclude that it is ‘natural.’⁴⁶ Augustine took great pleasure in ridiculing Julian for his perception of him as a sexual libertine for this view. ‘Is then this evil, or this good of yours,’ he taunted Julian ‘not reined in by married couples? I suppose that married couples lie down together, whenever they like, and enter each other whenever the desire moves them. This desire for intercourse is not postponed even for an hour; rather,

³⁹ Augustine’s famous prayer to God ‘*da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo*’ summarizes Augustine’s struggle with sexual desire: *Conf.*, 8.7.17.

⁴⁰ Cfr. BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 412–3.

⁴¹ BARCLIFT, *In Controversy with Saint Augustine: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin*, 6. Also: M. LAMBERIGTS, *Julian and Augustine on the Origin of the Soul*, «Augustiniana» 46 (1996) 244; M. RACKETT, *Sexuality and Sinlessness: The Diversity among Pelagian Theologies of Marriage and Virginity*, Duke University, Durham 2002, 244.

⁴² Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Nupt. et conc.* 2.9.21; *C. Iul. imp.* 4.26.

⁴³ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Nupt. et conc.* 2.9.22. This is a unique critique from Julian that cannot be found in the works of his Pelagian colleagues. RACKETT, *Sexuality and Sinlessness: The Diversity among Pelagian Theologies of Marriage and Virginity*, 235.

⁴⁴ Cfr. RACKETT, *Sexuality and Sinlessness: The Diversity among Pelagian Theologies of Marriage and Virginity*, 238–239.

⁴⁵ The debate between Augustine and Julian over Jesus’ sexuality is one of the most surreal moments of the entire Pelagian Controversy: *C. Iul. imp.* 4.45–4.87. Also: M. LAMBERIGTS, *Competing Christologies: Julian and Augustine on Jesus Christ*, «Augustinian Studies» 36 (2005) 168.

⁴⁶ AUGUSTINE, *Nupt. et conc.*, 2.7.17; *C. Iul.*, 4.2.7; 4.8.52; *C. Iul. imp.*, 3.142.2; 5.5. Also: BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 413; BARCLIFT, *In Controversy with Saint Augustine: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin*, 8; RACKETT, *Sexuality and Sinlessness: The Diversity among Pelagian Theologies of Marriage and Virginity*, 243.

the union of their bodies is seen as permissible at the very moment when this natural good of yours is spontaneously aroused.⁴⁷ It was not the drive itself that was evil, Julian insisted, but its misuse. A man and a woman must harness the sexual drive in the bonds of marriage, and it must never be allowed to run in excess.⁴⁸ Julian also saw homosexual acts as an inappropriate use of the drive;⁴⁹ but, even though it is sometimes misused, he always maintained that it was a natural and good part of the human condition.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the command to ‘be fertile and multiply’ (Gen 1,28)⁵¹ would be impossible to achieve without the natural ‘heat’ (*calor genitalis*) of *concupiscentia*.⁵² This heat was a necessary prerequisite for the procreative act and, therefore, must be good and natural.⁵³

Fourth, Julian argued that because humanity did not fall as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, sexual desire is still under the control of the will. ‘And so this [sexual] appetite is not sinful,’ Julian said, ‘in its genus or in its species or in its moderation but in its excess, because its genus and species pertain to the work of the creator, while its moderation pertains to morally good choice and its excess to the defect of the will.’⁵⁴ This belief in the dominance of the will over sexual desire, as Brown has noted, was in harmony with the best thinking at that time. ‘Julian’s essentially physiological view of sexuality,’ Brown says, ‘went hand in hand with an ancient faith that sexuality, like any other instinctual drive, was amenable to the will. This meant, in fact, that sexuality could be constrained with little difficulty into following the dictates of society.’⁵⁵ If the sexual impulse were not under the control of the will, the individual could not be held responsible and any punishment due to sexual sin would render God unjust. For Augustine, on the other hand, this medical thinking was deficient. The clearest sign that *concupiscentia* is a result of our postlapsarian nature is that it rebels against the will. ‘If the moderation of this appetite pertains to morally good choice,’ Augustine

⁴⁷ AUGUSTINE, *C. Iul.*, 3.14.28.

⁴⁸ Cfr. *Ibidem*. Also: LANCEL, *Saint Augustine*, 420.

⁴⁹ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Nupt. et conc.*, 2.19.34; *C. Iul.*, 3.20.39.

⁵⁰ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Nupt. et conc.*, 2.6.16; *C. Iul.*, 4.13.63; 5.8.31; *C. Iul. imp.*, 3.167; 3.212; 4.38.5; 4.40-42.

⁵¹ Cfr. BARCLIFT, *In Controversy with Saint Augustin: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin*, 7-8.

⁵² Cfr. LANCEL, *Saint Augustine*, 419-20.

⁵³ Cfr. LAMBERIGTS, *Competing Christologies: Julian and Augustine on Jesus Christ*, 167.

⁵⁴ AUGUSTINE, *C. Iul.*, 3.13.27. Also: 3.14.28; 3.21.42; 4.2.8; 5.4.16.

⁵⁵ BROWN, *Sexuality and Society in the Fifth Century A.D.: Augustine and Julian of Eclanum*, 63. Also: BARCLIFT, *In Controversy with Saint Augustin: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin*, 11; LAMBERIGTS, *Julian and Augustine on the Origin of the Soul*, 248; BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 413.

asks, ‘would the choice of any good spouses will that this appetite be aroused at any time except when it is needed? And yet they cannot do what they will.’⁵⁶

Although current metaphysical arguments are not exactly the same as Julian’s metaphysical arguments, our contemporary intellectual climate, coming out of the sexual revolution, believes, like Julian, that sexuality is natural and must not be impeded or restricted in anyway (short of pedophilia or rape). As Allan Bloom has noted, ‘sexual liberation presented itself as a bold affirmation of the senses and of undeniable natural impulses against the puritanical heritage, society’s conventions and repressions, bolstered by Biblical myths about original sin.’⁵⁷ Today, not only is sex viewed as natural, but it is viewed as intrinsically good precisely because it is natural.⁵⁸ Just as freedom has lost its orientation toward the Good, sex has lost its procreative *telos*⁵⁹ and is viewed as good regardless of how it is ordered. Sex, now, has a variety of goals and definitions, all of which are constructed by the individual. As noted in one recent sociological survey, ‘the new narrative, which has come to define our broader Western culture, is that of the individualist: sex is about me. In the individualist narrative, sexuality is about personal satisfaction...the rules of individualist sexual encounters are self-defined. The highest goals of sex are not just pleasure, but freedom and self-expression.’⁶⁰ Sexual experiences may now be had without the possibility of bringing a new life into the world. Divorced from the responsibilities that come with procreation, sex has become good for its own sake.

IV. SOTERIOLOGY IN THE THEOLOGICAL DISPUTES OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

Now that we have established that Pelagian anthropology and postmodern anthropology are similar and, therefore, why so many scholars desire to rehabilitate the Pelagians, I now want to argue that, despite these anthropological similarities, a recovery of the Pelagians would be problematic. In this last section, I first will review the Theological and Christological controversies of the fourth century

⁵⁶ AUGUSTINE, *C. Jul.*, 3.13.27.

⁵⁷ A. BLOOM, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Simon and Shuster, New York 1989, 98; also: P. MARIN, *A Revolution’s Broken Promises*, in K. SCOTT (ed.) *Perspectives on Marriage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, 141.

⁵⁸ Augustine, and the Catholic Church, believed that sex is only good when it is rightly ordered towards its *telos* of procreation. At the beginning of Book II of his *Confessions*, Augustine says of his younger self that ‘I could not have been wholly content to confine sexual union to acts intended to procreate children, as your law prescribes, Lord.’ (2.2.3.).

⁵⁹ Cfr. BLOOM, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 234.

⁶⁰ D. KINNAMAN, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids 2011, 155.

and—using Athanasius as a focus for our Theological conversation and Gregory of Nazianzus for our Christological conversation—I will highlight that many recent scholars have argued that both controversies at root were soteriological. I then will argue that the fifth-century anthropological fights, likewise, fundamentally were about soteriology. To resurrect Pelagianism would be a grave error because, like Arianism and Apollinarianism, it warps the Christian claim of salvation.

Many recent scholars have pointed to the soteriological foundation of the Theological controversies in the fourth century.⁶¹ John Meyendorff has said that ‘doctrinal conflicts between the various theologies from the fourth to the sixth century cannot be understood until their soteriological aspects are taken into consideration. During the Arian controversy, St. Athanasius and the Cappadocians firmly established that salvation was accomplished in the real meeting between God and man.’⁶² Gerald O’Collins has claimed that ‘right from the outset the driving force behind theological inquiry and official teaching about Jesus was clearly the experience of salvation.’⁶³ Donald Winslow has also stated that ‘with few exceptions, the major arguments and formulations concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Christ rested directly upon a variety of soteriological principles.’⁶⁴ Frances Young has concurred that ‘the issues [between Arians and Nicenes] were less Trinitarian, as older textbooks suggested, than soteriological, ethical and Christological.’⁶⁵

Athanasius’ Theology and Christology were fundamentally soteriological after 325 in his attacks on Arius and, if his *De incarnatione* was written before 325, then his soteriological concerns even predated Nicaea.⁶⁶ Thomas Weinandy has claimed that ‘from the onset of his theological career, Athanasius was concerned with demonstrating that the whole of economy, from creation to the second coming of Christ, was an economy of salvation. Athanasius’ later writings, almost all of which were written in the heat of controversy, do not depart from his

⁶¹ Although, as it has been noted, soteriology was ‘only rarely the direct focus of attention until well into the 360s.’ L. AYRES, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, 78.

⁶² J. MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood 1975, 14-15.

⁶³ G. O’COLLINS, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, 154.

⁶⁴ D. WINSLOW, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, Mercer University Press, Macon 1979, v.

⁶⁵ F. YOUNG, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, Baker Academic, Second Edition, Grand Rapids 2010, 46.

⁶⁶ There is a dispute about when *De incarnatione* was written. Young claims that it may or may not have been written prior to Nicaea: *Ibidem*, 52-56; Weinandy, however, believes that it was written after Nicaea. T. WEINANDY, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Ashgate, Burlington 2007, 3.

earlier soteriological concerns.⁶⁷ Basil Studer has said that ‘the question of the meaning of salvation through the Son of God is in fact predominant not only in his treatise *De incarnatione* but is basic to the whole of his theological work, most of which involves polemics against the Arians.’⁶⁸ William Rusch also has said that ‘for Athanasius, the major issue in the quarrel with Arius was the nature of salvation.’⁶⁹ Young also has declared that Athanasius’ ‘fight against the ‘Arians’ would be motivated by soteriological concerns.’⁷⁰

A few examples from his *De incarnatione* will make Athanasius’s soteriological preoccupations clear. He claimed that ‘the supreme object of His coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument to His victory over death, the assurance to all that he had Himself conquered corruption and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt.’⁷¹ Elsewhere, he claims that salvation was ‘the first cause of the Saviour’s becoming Man.’⁷² By becoming human, Christ brought about the possibility of deification of humanity.⁷³ Athanasius says that ‘this [sacrifice] He did that he might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection.’⁷⁴

Later in his expressly anti-Arian texts, Athanasius expanded his soteriological vision.⁷⁵ He insisted that the Logos must be fully divine or else humanity cannot be saved. Adolf von Harnack distilled the essence of Athanasius’ theo-soteriological claims when he said that ‘our fellowship with God, our adoption as sons of God, would be unaccomplished, had not Christ imparted to us what was his own to give,’⁷⁶ and this was later echoed by Meyendorff when he said that ‘the incarnate Word was truly God, not a creature, for God alone could reconcile fallen mankind to himself.’⁷⁷ More recently, John McGuckin said that ‘Athanasios’s concept of the incarnation of a perfect divine Logos as the only sure way to secure

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, vii.

⁶⁸ B. STUDER, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, T&T Clark, Collegeville 1993, 116.

⁶⁹ W. RUSCH, *Introduction*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1980, 22.

⁷⁰ YOUNG, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, 55. Also: 63-64, 163.

⁷¹ ATHANASIUS, *On the Incarnation*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood 1953, 4.22.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 2.10. Also: 4.21.

⁷³ Cfr. STUDER, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, 116-118.

⁷⁴ ATHANASIUS, *On the Incarnation*, 2.8. Also: 2.7 and 2.10.

⁷⁵ Cfr. YOUNG, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, 64.

⁷⁶ As quoted in the introduction to the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers volume of Athanasius’ works. A. ROBERTSON, *Introduction*, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody 2004, 304.

⁷⁷ MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 14-15.

the concept of redemption of the whole human race,⁷⁸ and Ayres has reinforced this saying that ‘Athanasius emphasizes God’s unmediated action in the material world, and sees the Arian/Eusebian emphasis on the intermediate nature of the Logos as serving to prevent this connection.’⁷⁹

The most concentrated discussion from Athanasius discussing the necessity of the divinity of the Logos for the assurance of human salvation comes from the second of his four⁸⁰ discourses in the *Orationes contra Arianos*.⁸¹ For the sake of brevity, only a few examples will be offered here. First, Athanasius said that ‘if, as they [Arians] hold the Essence of the Word being of created nature, therefore He says, ‘The Lord created me,’ being a creature, He was not created for us; but if He was not created for us, we are not created in Him; and, if not created in Him, we have Him not in ourselves but externally; as for instance, as receiving instruction from Him as from a teacher.’⁸² Later, Athanasius states that ‘for if, being a creature, He had become man, man had remained just what he was, not joined to God; for how had a work been joined to the Creator by a work? Or what succor had come from like to like, when one as well as other needed it? And how, were the Word a creature, had He power to undo God’s sentence, and to remit sin, whereas it is written in the Prophets, that this is God’s doing?’⁸³ Shortly after this, we see Athanasius say that ‘for man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father’s presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body...For therefore the union was of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure.’⁸⁴ Here, we see the clearest connection for Athanasius between the salvation and deification of humanity dictated by the assumption that the Logos must be truly God. For Athanasius, then, as Weinandy has stated, ‘the whole of Athanasius’ theological programme is thoroughly soteriological...For soteriological reasons, Athanasius insists not only that the Son is truly God, but also that he has truly come to exist as a genuine human being.’⁸⁵

⁷⁸ J. MCGUCKIN, *Gregory of Naziansus: An Intellectual Biography*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood 2001, 45.

⁷⁹ AYRES, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, 77.

⁸⁰ There is a debate over the authenticity of the fourth oration.

⁸¹ The translation of Athanasius’ four *Orationes contra Arianos* comes from the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series.

⁸² ATHANASIUS, *Orat.* 2.20.56.

⁸³ ATHANASIUS, *Orat.* 2.21.67.

⁸⁴ ATHANASIUS, *Orat.* 2.21.20. Also: 1.12.49; 2.20.54; 2.20.55–6; 2.21.69–70.

⁸⁵ WEINANDY, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, vii.

V. SOTERIOLOGY IN THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DISPUTES OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

Early Christological controversies, like the Theological controversies, were fundamentally about soteriology. Although the battles over Christ's humanity were fought on such fronts as the existence of Jesus' body and rational soul, always lurking behind these fights and dictating their answers was the issue of salvation. Aloys Grillmeier recognized this, and said that 'soteriology remained the actual driving force behind theological inquiry, even—as we shall see especially in the period from the third to the fifth century—behind reflection on the identity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.'⁸⁶ Studer later echoed this and said that 'in the development of the christological question we must not lose sight of the soteriological point of view. In all the stages of the development of this question, soteriological, i.e. pastoral and spiritual, concerns stood in the foreground...Only from this soteriologically directed development can the Christological question be fully understood.'⁸⁷

Gregory of Nazianzus' critique of Apollinarius' Christology came out of his soteriological anxieties.⁸⁸ In fact, Gregory's entire vision of God and Christ were saturated by his vision of salvation.⁸⁹ As Winslow has argued, 'Gregory was primarily a soteriologist; perhaps more than any of the Greek Fathers his writings testify to the fact that triadology and Christology have their roots in soteriology.'⁹⁰ While Apollinarius' soteriology dictated that Jesus could not have had a rational soul, Gregory's did just the opposite. Gregory believed that it was essential that Jesus must have a rational soul, or else the rational soul of every human being could not be saved. This can be seen best in Gregory's most famous dictum that was originally directed against Arius but then turned against Apollinarius:⁹¹ 'for what has not been assumed [by the Logos] has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that has been saved.'⁹² In this short statement, Gregory's entire understanding of God, Jesus, and salvation has been summarized. Christopher Beeley has commented on Gregory's insight by saying that Gregory 'believes that

⁸⁶ A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, JOHN BOWDEN (translated by), 1, John Knox Press, Atlanta 1975, 9.

⁸⁷ STUDER, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, 197.

⁸⁸ Cfr. C. BEELEY, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, 127-128.

⁸⁹ Cfr. MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 15; WINSLOW, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, 79.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, vi. On p. 79 of the same text, Winslow would qualify this by stating that Gregory's theological and soteriological identification are 'taken for granted in Gregory and therefore seldom spelled out in detail.'

⁹¹ Cfr. STUDER, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, 195.

⁹² GREGORY, *Ep.* 101.7.32.

Apollinarius has lost sight of the true nature of sin and the basic purpose of the incarnation...Apollinarius' exclusion of the human mind therefore undermines what Gregory takes to be the most important aim of the character of the incarnation. So Christ assumed flesh for the sake of flesh, soul for the sake of soul, and mind for the sake of mind—a complete human existence in order to heal us from sin in our totality.⁹³ Christology and soteriology, then, are 'inseparably involved with each other and in a sense amount to the same thing.'⁹⁴

VI. SOTERIOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISPUTES OF THE FIFTH CENTURY

With such extensive scholarship revealing that the Theological and Christological controversies of the fourth century were fundamentally soteriological, it is surprising that no scholar has made an argument, as I will do here, that the Pelagian Controversy was soteriological at its core as well. Although Augustine never writes one text—or even one section within a text—that offers a condensed soteriological analysis of Pelagian anthropology (this lacuna, undoubtedly, is the cause for the scant attention paid to this issue by scholars), he returns time and again to soteriology from the beginning of the controversy to the end.

Let us begin by returning to our earlier point that Pelagian and the postmodern anthropology reject the notion of original sin. At the beginning of the controversy, Augustine responded to an inquiry from the tribune Flavius Marcellinus who posed to Augustine a set of questions that included multiple quotations from an unknown Pelagian.⁹⁵ The anonymous author said that babies are not baptized for the forgiveness of original sin, because original sin does not exist and babies have not committed any personal sins in any way. The nature of children is inviolate and babies are only baptized so that 'through spiritual procreation, they might be created in Christ and become partakers of the kingdom of heaven, and in the same way children and 'heirs of God, coheirs with Christ' (Rom 8,17).⁹⁶

Augustine's response to Marcellinus, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione peccatorum et de baptismo parvulorum*, was that babies do have original sin, that they are baptized to remove the guilt (*reatus*) of original sin although they have not committed any personal sins,⁹⁷ and their salvation depends on it. Augustine asked:

⁹³ BEELEY, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, 290. Also: Gregory, *Ep.* 101.

⁹⁴ Cfr. BEELEY, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, 122.

⁹⁵ Cfr. W. DUNPHY, *Rufinus the Syrian: Myth and Reality*, «Augustiniana» 59/1 (2009) 131.

⁹⁶ AUGUSTINE, *Pecc. mer.* 1.18.23.

⁹⁷ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 1.24.34.

who then would dare to claim that little ones can attain eternal salvation without this rebirth [baptism], as if Christ did not die for them? After all, 'Christ died for sinners' (Rom 5,6). But if they are not held by any bond of sinfulness stemming from their origin, how did Christ, who died for sinners, die for these infants who obviously have done nothing sinful in their own lives? If they are not afflicted by the disease of original sin, why do those caring for them bring them out of a holy fear to Christ the physician, that is, to receive the sacrament of eternal salvation? Why are they not told in church, 'take these innocents away; 'it is not those who are in good health who need a physician, but those who are sick' (Mt 9,12). Christ did not come 'to call the righteous, but sinners' (Lk 5,32)? No one ever said, no one ever says, and no one ever will say something as false and contrived as that in the Church of Christ!⁹⁸

For Augustine, the Pelagian claim that babies do not have original sin, and therefore do not need baptism for the forgiveness of original sin, strikes at the heart of the Christian claim of the necessity of Christ's sacrifice.

Almost twenty years later, just before his death in 430, Augustine returned to the question of the goodness of nature, this time in opposition to Julian, despite the fact that he was bored of having to repeat himself.⁹⁹ Like the anonymous author, Julian claimed that God's creation must be considered good and uncorrupted.¹⁰⁰ Once again for Augustine, such claims continued to question Christ's purpose:

if the reign of sin collapsed when the law was given, then righteousness comes through the law. 'If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ has died in vain' (Gal 2,21). This is the apostle's statement, not mine. Now come out into the open, you enemies of the cross of Christ! Why are you afraid of the great people of Christ and not afraid of the great judgment of Christ? Say it openly: we could be justified by nature; we could be justified by the law; Christ has died in vain. But because you are afraid of the great number of Christians, you substitute your Pelagian expression, and when they ask you why Christ has died if nature or the law makes us righteous, you reply: so that this may be done more easily—as if it could still be done, though with more difficulty, either by nature or by the law.¹⁰¹

We see here that the most important scriptural passage for Augustine that he repeatedly cited to underline his soteriological point was Paul's letter to the Galatians: 'if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ has died in vain' (2,21).¹⁰² Using this Pauline insight, Augustine continually hammered the Pela-

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 1.18.23.

⁹⁹ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *C. Jul. imp.* 2.44.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. *Ibidem*, 1.90.

¹⁰¹ AUGUSTINE, *C. Jul. imp.* 2.198.

¹⁰² Augustine quoted this passage to the Pelagians throughout the controversy: *Spir. et litt.* 29.50; *Nat. et gr.* 1.1, 2.2, 9.10; *Perf. ius.* 7.16; *Gest. Pel.* 6.20; *C. ep. Pel.* 3.7.22, 4.5.10; *C. Jul.* 4.3.17; *C. Jul. imp.* 2.70, 2.188, 2.198-199.

gians with the claim that their view of the human person has left Christ's sacrifice on the cross moot.

The second point from earlier in this essay—the Pelagian claim that the will is not restricted in any way—also has serious soteriological implications for Augustine. Augustine believed that there would be no need for Christ to help the individual choose the Good if the free will was unimpeded and could choose good or evil on its own. The possibility of righteousness would be in the purview of the individual. If the free will decides to be sinless, then the individual, in effect, has won his or her own salvation, rather than receiving it through Christ. In his *De natura et gratia* of 415, Augustine addressed this issue. Speaking about Pelagius, he asked:

Or does free choice and the natural law suffice for one to know this [how to live a good life] as well? This is the worldly wisdom that does away with the cross of Christ. But the apostle said, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise' (1Cor 1,19), because this cross cannot be done away with. This wisdom is, of course, overthrown by the foolishness of the preaching which brings salvation to those who believe. After all, if one's natural ability through free choice is sufficient for knowing how one ought to live and of living a good life, 'then Christ has died in vain' (Gal 2,21); 'then the scandal of the cross has been done away with (Gal 5,11). Why should I too not cry out? Indeed, I will cry out and scold these people because of the pain I feel as a Christian, 'you have been removed from Christ; you who are justified by nature have fallen away from grace' (Gal 5,4). For not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish your own, you are not subject to the righteousness of God. For, just as Christ is the end of the law, so he is the savior of corrupt human nature for righteousness for everyone who believes.¹⁰³

Later in his *Contra Iulianum* of 421, Augustine made a similar claim—once again relying on Galatians 2—that if the will has the freedom to choose without divine assistance, salvation remains with the individual:

And then Christ has died in vain, if without faith in Christ human beings attain by any other means or in another way true faith, true virtue, true righteousness, or true wisdom. For as the apostle said of the law with perfect truth, 'if righteousness comes from the law, Christ has died in vain' (Gal 2,21), so it is perfectly true to say: if righteousness comes through nature and the will, then Christ has died in vain. If righteousness of any sort comes through the teachings of human beings, then Christ has died in vain.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ AUGUSTINE, *Nat. et gr.* 40.47.

¹⁰⁴ AUGUSTINE, *C. Jul.* 4.17.

These quotations should be sufficient to demonstrate that underneath Augustine's attacks on Pelagian anthropology were soteriological fears.¹⁰⁵ If human nature is unsullied by original sin, and the free will may choose the Good without restriction, then the necessity of Christ is called into question.

VII. CONCLUSION

We have seen that Pelagian anthropology and postmodern anthropology are similar in many ways. Because of these similarities, it is not surprising that many scholars are calling for a rehabilitation of Pelagian thought. But, any such rehabilitation would be a misstep because, as we also have seen, the Pelagian Controversy, at its core, was not about the human person but about how the human person is saved—just as other important controversies were during the same period. The fundamental mistake that the Pelagians made was to offer an unreasonably optimistic anthropology that evaporated the necessity of Christ as savior. Why did the Logos become incarnate if an unstained person may choose to be sinless through the movement of the free will? The Pelagian answer that Christ was an example to imitate was never convincing to Augustine, or to the Council of Ephesus of 431.¹⁰⁶ It now should be evident that Ferguson's claim, which we saw at the beginning of this essay, that 'it is not certain that any statement of his [Pelagius] is totally irreconcilable with the Christian faith'¹⁰⁷ is erroneous, and to reclaim Pelagianism today would not be an act of theological bravery, but would negate the foundational Christian claim of salvation through Christ.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ There are other examples throughout Augustine's writings against the Pelagians that could be discussed here in addition to the earlier quotations of Galatians 2:21, but will not be so because of time: *Pecc. mer.* 1.9.10, 1.20.26; *Nat. et gr.* 6.6, 9.10; *Gr. et pecc. or.* 2.26.31; *C. ep. Pel.* 1.2.5; *C. Jul. imp.* 2.101.

¹⁰⁶ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *C. Jul. imp.* 2.146; PELAGIUS, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 5.10; 5.12; 6.14.

¹⁰⁷ FERGUSON, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, 182–183.

¹⁰⁸ Although Vatican II has nuanced the Christian understanding of salvation through the Church, it also reaffirmed that 'the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions [Hinduism, Buddhism, and 'other religions']. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 1,6).' *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

ABSTRACT

Over the past 75 years, many modern scholars have argued for a “recovery” of Pelagian thought. This paper investigates why this trend has become so fashionable. By comparing three issues—the rejection of original sin, the belief in the unrestricted free will, and sexuality—this paper intends to show that Pelagian anthropology is closer to the contemporary modes of thinking about the human person than Augustinian thought. The paper continues to show that the conclusions of the two other most important theological controversies in the first 500 years of Christianity (Trinitarian and Christological) were ultimately settled because of their soteriological implications. In conclusion, I argue that any recovery of Pelagian thought is flawed because, although the Pelagian anthropological similarities with the current thinking are clear, Pelagianism fails to meet the Church’s soteriological test.