



Augustine's Theological Method and Contribution to The Christian Theology

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Abstract: Today, the world is influenced by many views, such as secularism and atheism, which affect many people, so they are far from God. Because of them, moral and ethical standards are not based on the belief of God, but just on the humanity standard. For Christianity, the views cause many of God's believers to leave the Scripture's truths. To solve the problem, Christians must learn from the Christian theologian who has a significant contribution to Christian theology. One of the Christian theologians is Augustine. Augustine was one of Christian's famous theologians, in which his theology/thoughts are influenced Christian theology today. This research uses a library research method to explore Augustine's ideas. The books that expose about Augustine's views are used to find Augustine's theology. The result of the research is that Augustine's theology is necessary and relevant to Christian's theology today to confront the world's views so that the people of God do not live far from God.

Keywords: Augustine, Secularism, Atheism, Theology, God, Scripture, Christology

Abstrak: Dunia masa kini dipengaruhi oleh banyak pandangan yang menyebabkan manusia jauh dari Tuhan. Pandangan-pandangan tersebut, misalnya sekularisme dan ateisme, yang mengakibatkan standar moral dan etika manusia tidak didasarkan kepada kepercayaan kepada Allah, tetapi kepada standar moral dan etika dalam pikiran manusia semata. Bagi kekristenan, pandangan-pandangan tersebut telah menyebabkan banyak orang Kristen yang meninggalkan kebenaran Alkitab. Untuk menghadapi masalah tersebut, umat Kristen perlu belajar dari teolog-teolog yang telah berjasa meletakkan dasar iman Kristen yang kuat, yang didasarkan kepada kebenaran firman Tuhan. Salah satu teolog yang telah memberikan kontribusi bagi teologi Kristen itu adalah Agustinus. Artikel ini didasarkan kepada penelitian yang menggunakan metode study literatur. Buku-buku yang membahas tentang Agustinus dan teologinya menjadi bahan utama untuk membahas topik ini. Hasil dari penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa Agustinus telah mengajarkan kebenarann-kebenaran yang sangat penting, yang didasarkan kepada kebenaran Alkitab.

Kata kunci: Agustinus, Sekularisme, Ateisme, Teologi, Tuhan, Kitab Suci, Kristologi

Introduction

Augustine was the highest name in Christian theology, both Catholic and Protestant (Potter, 1958, p. 233). His life and thoughts gave some significant contributions to Christian theology and had a high impact in Christian church both in past and present times. Augustine's thoughts and theology are substantial for the world today because the world is influenced by many views, such as secularism and atheism, which affect many people, so they are far from God. The moral and ethical standards are based on the belief of God, but just on the humanity standard. For Christianity, the views cause many of God's believers to leave the Scripture's truths. They leave the churches and do not believe in God anymore. Many churches are closed because there are no church members anymore. Augustine has significant contributions to Christianity to understand the basics of the Bible's truths. His thoughts are substantial to be recognized for Christians today so that God's believers stand firm on the Christian's

faith. Therefore, it is imperative to understand Augustine's theology as a source for doing theology to face secularism and atheism, which are influencing the world, especially to God's people today. The main problem of this article is that Augustine's theology is able to strengthen the Christians' faith, so they have a strong understanding of the Bible to face many views of the world that are able to estrange from the truths of God's Word.

Augustine was born on November 13, 354 A.D. in Thagaste, North Africa. He had a brother, Navigius, and a sister, traditionally known as Perpetua (Ryan, 1960, p. 19). Augustine studied in a Christian school and was a brilliant student. He was educated to become a master of the spoken Word (Brown, 2000, p. 36). He was interested in studying the Latin language, and he enjoyed studying it, but he had a problem to study Greek. He did not like to study Greek. He hated Greek. He said, "I still cannot quite understand why I hated the Greek," (Warner, 1963, p. 30). Perhaps, it was caused by his teacher because his teacher often beat him if he could not understand the Greek lesson. (Smith 1980:14) Also, at that time, the education system had a goal for students at that early stage: perfection in the use of words. The students were educated to use every Word in writing and speaking correctly. It was not easy for Augustine. He was praying to God that God gave him such skill in writing and such power in framing words (Smith, 1980, p. 15). At fifteen, Augustine was sent to study in Madaura until 369 AD. Then, Augustine continued his study in Carthage in 371, at the age of 17.

Augustine's father was Patricius Hercules, who was a pagan. He was a member of "the very honorable municipal council," a decurion, full citizen of the Roman Empire, entitled to wear the impressive toga. Augustine confessed that his father, "a modest citizen of Tagaste," did not have wealth. In later years Augustine spoke himself as "poor, and who is the son of poor parents," (Smith, 1980, pp. 9–10). Patricius was forty-six when Augustine was born. Augustine's mother was Monica. She was a significant force in the family. Patricius' marriage to Monica had been arranged, as custom demanded. Monica was born into a Christian home with parents of godly, faithful backgrounds. She was "brought up in modesty and temperance." It was a militant Puritanism, and the sole flaw in her childhood seems to have been a fondness for wine. Monica set out to be both model wife and exemplar Christian. She would convert Patricius. Even though he was unfaithful to her, but Monica has such great patience so that their marriage could be maintained. She was a female with a resolve. Augustine had a remarkable mother (Smith, 1980, p. 11).

It took much time for Augustine to believe in God. Many influences had been working on him both. Some factors supported his conversions, such as his mother's prayers, the impact of Bishop Ambrose, and Paul's Epistles. However, Augustine recognized that the merry mendicant of Milan, which had the credit of his conversion. The story of Augustine's confession had happened when he was with his friend Alypius. He knew that he was a sinner before God. At that time, Augustine heard a child's voice chanting in the sing-song a game, "Tolle, lege. Tolle, lege." (Take up and read). Augustine received it as a divine command. Augustine remembered the Bible, especially in Romans 13:13-14, he opened and read the verses. He was shocked, and he understood that God warned him by the verses (Potter, 1958, pp. 233–234).

Augustine told that story in his book, Confession that was at the end of the summer of 386. It signed the transition of his life. He was baptized in 387. In 391, he was made a presbyter and in 395 Bishop of Hippo. Augustine died and was buried on August 28, 430.

Method

The author analyzes the library by utilizing many relevant library sources that discuss Augustine. The results of the analysis, then the authors present thematically descriptive. Books that discuss Augustine and his theology are the primary material for discussing this topic.

Summary of the Content Augustine's Works

Augustine was very productive to write some books that were very important for Christian theology development. Augustine produced many works during his life, including 113 books and treatises, over 200 letters, and over 500 sermons. His book "The Confessions" discussed some critical topics. In the first nine books, Augustine told the autobiographical material. At the same time, in the last four, he considered such questions as the nature of our knowledge of God. He has presented the mysterious character of the memory and the quality of time. It was written in the closing years of the fourth century and published probably about 400 or 401 A.D. it contains a compelling and intimate self-portrait of the great Doctor of Grace.

"The Soliloquies" is Augustine's first work as a Christian, which he wrote in 387 A.D. This work is essential because it is the first seeds of his famous doctrine of "Divine Illumination," which lies at the heart of Augustine's thought. In "On The Immortality of the Soul," Augustine reproduces arguments that derive from Plato. It may be regarded as a sequel to the Soliloquies and was also composed in 387 A.D.

Augustine's work "Concerning the Teacher" presumably grew out of conversations between himself and his son, Adeodatus. In action, the father and son address themselves to the questions of the extent to which one can learn from a teacher. It was composed in about 389 A.D. "Concerning the nature of Good" was a short work, published in 405 A.D. It was one of the most argumentative and challenging of the writings against the Manichaeans. "On The Grace of Christ and On Original Sin" was composed by Augustine as the exposition of his views concerning grace and original sin, and at the same time to refute in detail the heretical doctrines of Pelagius himself and his close associate, Coelestius. Augustine composed "The Enchiridion" in 421 A.D., in response to a request by a certain Laurentianus that might have a short work on how God is to be worshipped. Augustine composed "The Enchiridion," to which he usually refers by its sub-title On Faith, Hope, and Love. The treatise is among the most remarkable in the Augustinian corpus.

Augustine wrote the treatise "On Grace and Free Will," He attempts to show that a robust doctrine of grace by no means denies the validity of a free will. "On the Predestination of the Saints," was written in 428 or 429 A.D., to stem a sudden up-surge of semi-Pelagianism. It reveals Augustine's calm and ripe wisdom as he opposes this subtle variant of the Pelagianism, which he had attacked with such unrestrained in the past. Augustine began to write "The City of God," about 413 and finished about 426. The last-named, starting with an apologetic purpose, takes on later the form of the City of God from its beginnings.

Analysis of Augustine's Theological Method

God

In his Confession, Augustine expressed his views about God. "And I...sought to conceive of Thee, the sovereign and only true God, and I did in my innermost heart believe that Thou art incorruptible,

inviolable, and unchangeable,” (Augustine, 1876; Brown, 2019; Warner, 1963, p. 91). God is the supreme, the sole, and the true God. God is the Supreme who has the full authority upon His creation. God is Omnipotent, who alone does great wonders and from whom are all things (Warner, 1963, pp. 53–54). Augustine conceived God, the life of his life. God is infinite, who has authority absolutely upon the earth and heaven. God is the Creator of humans being, all creatures, and all things (Westerholm, 2019). Augustine acknowledged the goodness of God, “He is God, and what He wills is good, and Himself is that good,” (Warner, 1963, pp. 93–94).

Trinity

Augustine believed the Trinity of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost-the the Creator of all creation (Warner, 1963, p. 231). God is one and never in three Persons. All three are equal Persons. Augustine said, “In this Trinity, there is absolute equality. In divinity, the father is not greater than the son, nor are the Father and the Son together greater than the Holy Spirit, nor is any single Person of the three less than the Trinity itself (Smith, 1980, p. 107). In other words, there is one God Who is Trinity, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are at once distinct and co-essential, numerically one in substance. The unity of the Trinity is thus set squarely in the foreground. Its subordination as of every kind being rigorously excluded. Whatever is affirmed of God is affirmed equally of each of the three Persons (Kelly, 1978, p. 272; Timani, 2019). Augustine realized that human is impossible to understand the Trinity precisely; humans' finite mind cannot comprehend the mystery of the Trinity. He said that “the Trinity appears unto me in an enigma...” (Warner, 1963, p. 230).

Christology

Augustine acknowledged Christ is “...my God and my salvation, my defender...” (Warner, 1963, pp. 32, 108) Also, Augustine believed the humanity of Christ,

...my Lord Christ as of a man of great wisdom, to whom no man could be equaled, especially since being wonderfully born of a virgin....I acknowledged a perfect man to be in Christ-not the body of a man only nor with the body a sensitive soul without a rational, but a very man; who, not only as being a form of truth but for a certain great excellency of human nature and perfect participation of wisdom (Warner, 1963, p. 106).

Augustine called Christ as “my helper and my redeemer.”(Augustine, 1876; Ryan, 1960, p. 205) Jesus has set him free from all of his feared. Regarding the two natures of Christ, Augustine affirmed that “For as man He was Mediator; but as the Word, He was not between, because equal to God, and God with God, and to-gether with one God,” (Augustine, 1876; Warner, 1963, p. 181). In other words, Christ is one Person who consists of two natures being both God and man. Christ was Mediator between God and man. He, at the same time, is God and man. In Christ, there are two substances, but one Person. The humanity was real, and of cour-se, complete; there was a human soul in Christ. His soul was a rational soul, indeed, which provided the point of union between the Word and the flesh. Christ took the visible form of a man. It was the real human body. Even though He made the human body. It did not diminish His divinity. Regarding the death of Christ in the cross, Augustine affirmed that “for us, He unto Thee both Victor and Victim, and the Victor as being the Victim for us was He unto Thee both priest and sacrifice, and Priest as being the Sacrifice; of slaves making us Thy sons, by being born of Thee, and serving us,” (Warner, 1963, pp. 181–182).

Scripture

Augustine believed the authority of the Scripture, and he said, “I now began to believe...authority throughout the whole world to that Scripture...” (Augustine, 1876; Ryan, 1960, p. 139). Augustine acknowledged that the Scripture is useful for faith growth of believers because, through the Scripture reading, believers will get truth within a deeper meaning. Besides that, Augustine taught the attitude in the study of Scripture. He said, “I believe, it was Thy pleasure that I should fall before I studied Thy Scriptures, that it might be impressed on my memory and how it was affected by them,” (Oates, 1948, p. 107). Augustine stressed that “Because of its divine authority, all of us must bow down unreservedly before Scripture,” (Polman, 1961, p. 64).

Original Sin

God created the first human, Adam and Eve, perfectly. God gave them freedom, not in the inability to sin, but of the ability not to sin. They chose to sin against God. Therefore, God punished them because of their rebellion. God’s punishment is death. Their resistance affected all humans being. Augustine believed that all humans are bounded in the “...original sin whereby we all die in Adam,” (Augustine, 1876; Warner, 1963, p. 66). Because of sins, humans face death. Augustine confirmed that “I was now passing away and perishing,” (Augustine, 1876; Warner, 1963, p. 67). Humans’ fall is clear from Augustine’s account that the fault was entirely their own. God could not be blamed, for He had given him every advantage. Augustine does not doubt the reality of original sin. Genesis apart, he finds Scriptural proof of it in Ps.51, Job and Eph.2,3, but above all in Roma.5,12 and John 3,3-5 (Cumming, 2020; Kelly, 1978, p. 362).

God’s Grace

This topic has a close relationship with the argument about Free Will. In his *on Grace and Free Will*, Augustine stated: “It is, however, to be feared lest all these and similar testimonies of Holy Scriptures in the maintenance of free will, be understood in such a way as to leave no room for God’s assistance and grace in leading a godly life and a good conversation,” (Oates, 1948, p. 739). Augustine criticized Pelagian, who stressed free will and ignore God’s grace. For Augustine, grace was an absolute necessity because without God’s grace we could not do any good thing. Free will cannot overcome the temptations of this life...Before we can even begin to aspire to what is right, God’s grace must be at work within us (Kelly, 1978). Augustine confirmed that every believer should consider both the gift of God and free will. Augustine affirmed, “...a man is assisted by grace, so that his will may not be uselessly commanded,” (Oates, 1948, p. 741). Augustine, also, proved out of Paul that grace is not given according to men’s merits. There were some passages that pointed out about that, such as “But by the grace of God I am what I am,” (I Cor.15:10), “We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,” (II Cor.6:1). “But be thou a co-laborer with the gospel...-not according to our works, but according to His purpose and grace,...” (II Tim.1:8,9). Augustine stressed that faith is the gift of God; he stated, “The spirit of grace...causes us to have faith, so that through faith, we may, on praying for it, obtain the ability to do what we are commanded. Augustine emphasized that human deeds cannot save humans. Humans cannot help themselves so that they will get justification from God. Salvation is God is God’s grace.

Predestination

This topic has a close connection with the issue of grace. Augustine said, "...I ought first to show that the faith by which we are Christians is the gift of God..." (Oates, 1948, p. 779). Predestination cannot apart from God's Grace even though there is a difference between grace and predestination. Augustine said, "...that predestination is the preparation for grace, while grace is the donation itself," (Oates, 1948, p. 795). God determines or elects someone to be saved based on His grace. Therefore, a human cannot pride himself if God selected him to be avoided because it is not his works. This topic also has a relationship with "mercy and judgment." Augustine said that "...mercy towards the election which has obtained the righteousness of God, but judgment to the rest which have been blinded. And yet the former, because they will, believed; the latter, because they did not will be believed not," (Oates, 1948, p. 788) Augustine believes based on Scripture, from all eternity. The number of the elect is strictly limited. Therefore, Augustine believed that God wills the salvation of all the elect, among whom men of every race and type are represented. God's choice of those to whom grace is to be given in no way depends on His foreknowledge of their future merits; for whatever good deeds they will do, they will be the fruit of grace. God has mercy on those he wishes to save, and justifies them; He hardens those upon whom He does not want to have compassion, not offering them grace in conditions in which they are likely to accept it (Kelly, 1978, p. 369).

Augustine's Contributions to Christian Theology

Augustine's works gave a significant contribution to Christian theology. Augustine influenced churches throughout the world.

Doctrine about God

Secularism has dramatically influenced human life until now. Because secularism is an understanding that separates or rejects religious thought from human experience (Zaluchu, 2018). This understanding emphasizes human reason/ratio as a determinant in human life. Not surprisingly, people who are influenced by this understanding tend to reject God, because the knowledge of God cannot be fully understood in the human mind. Secularism is related to atheism because atheism changes "theocentric to anthropocentrism," (Snijders, 2004). Theocentric, God is seen as a supreme, omniscient, and all-powerful person, in contrast to anthropocentrism, where humans are seen as supreme, all-knowing, and omnipotent. Secularism produces atheism because human secularism is kept away from God, so people slowly do not trust God, the Creator of everything. The doctrine of God developed by Augustine made a significant contribution to Christianity because the doctrine was formulated and developed based on the truth of God. Augustine's theology strongly emphasizes the existence of God. God as the Highest who created man and the entire contents of this world. Augustine's doctrine then lives in the church tradition that was followed from the past until now. Church tradition has laid the framework for the church to interpret the Bible correctly (Reynaldi, 2019, p. 6). Augustine lays the foundation for the formation of church traditions that teach the truth of God's word that God exists that always cares for humans and other creatures.

Doctrines about the Scriptures

Secularism and atheism, directly and indirectly, have prompted doubts about the Bible as God's word. Critical studies of biblical texts have found that both the OT and NT copies of the Bible contain text

errors (Jatmiko, 2017). For some Christian theologians, that fact becomes a reason for not believing the Bible as an authoritative book in believers' lives. Augustine has a strong belief in authority as God's word, which is the source of truth in the lives of believers. For Augustine, the Scriptures have power in the lives of believers, which is very useful for growing true faith in God. Augustine acknowledged the truths in the Scriptures, which confirmed the basic teachings of Christianity that were very useful for believers' lives. Augustine wrote many books that based his honesty on the Bible. Ford explained that Augustine consistently used the Scriptures as the basis of truth in his writings (Ford, 2018, p. 241). That proves Augustine's determination to make Scripture the foundation of truth in his works. This contribution is beneficial for the church today because Augustine's teachings have inspired many Christian theologians to compile a theology that is following today but does not violate the truth of God's word. Augustine's thoughts become a reference for today's theologians in dealing with theological issues that are developing, including the influences of secularism and atheism growing in the world today.

Doctrine of Christ

The doctrine of Christ also experienced harsh criticism from Liberal theologians who were influenced by Secularism and Atheism. In his lifetime, Augustine had faced false teachers who did not recognize Christ's divinity and humanity. But Augustine could still maintain his teaching, which acknowledged the humanity and divinity of Christ. In Augustine Christology, he discovered "... imago trinitatis in human beings," (Robertson, 2019). The statement confirms Augustine's belief that Christ is God in human form. Theological debates about the divinity and humanity of Christ continue to emerge in the history of Christianity. Augustine has laid a solid foundation for the church and believers to hold the church's tradition, which recognizes that Christ is God and is a real human being. Augustine accepted Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of sinful humans. Augustine's debate with Pelagius about humans before God proves the firmness of his doctrine about Christ. Augustine held to the truth that humanity had fallen into sin and could not possibly save himself. Only Christ can keep people from sin. Augustine's view became the official teaching of the church (Kaligis & Manogu, 2020, p. 104). Augustine's theology of Christ strengthens the church to face heresies that do not recognize Christ's divinity or humanity.

Conclusion

Augustine's thought and theologies are very relevant for Christian theology today to oppose the unbeliever's thoughts that influence the world. Augustine theology based on the truths of the Scripture. Augustine believed that the Scripture is the Word of God. Augustine acknowledged God as The Creator. God has created the world and humans. He is the Sovereignty of God. He has absolute power upon the human and the universe. Augustine believed Christ as savior and redeemer. He thought the divinity and humanity of Christ. God in Christ has grace upon the man and woman, so everyone who believes in Christ will be saved and have eternal life with God in heaven. Every Christian has to understand Augustine's theology for growing faith in Christ.

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