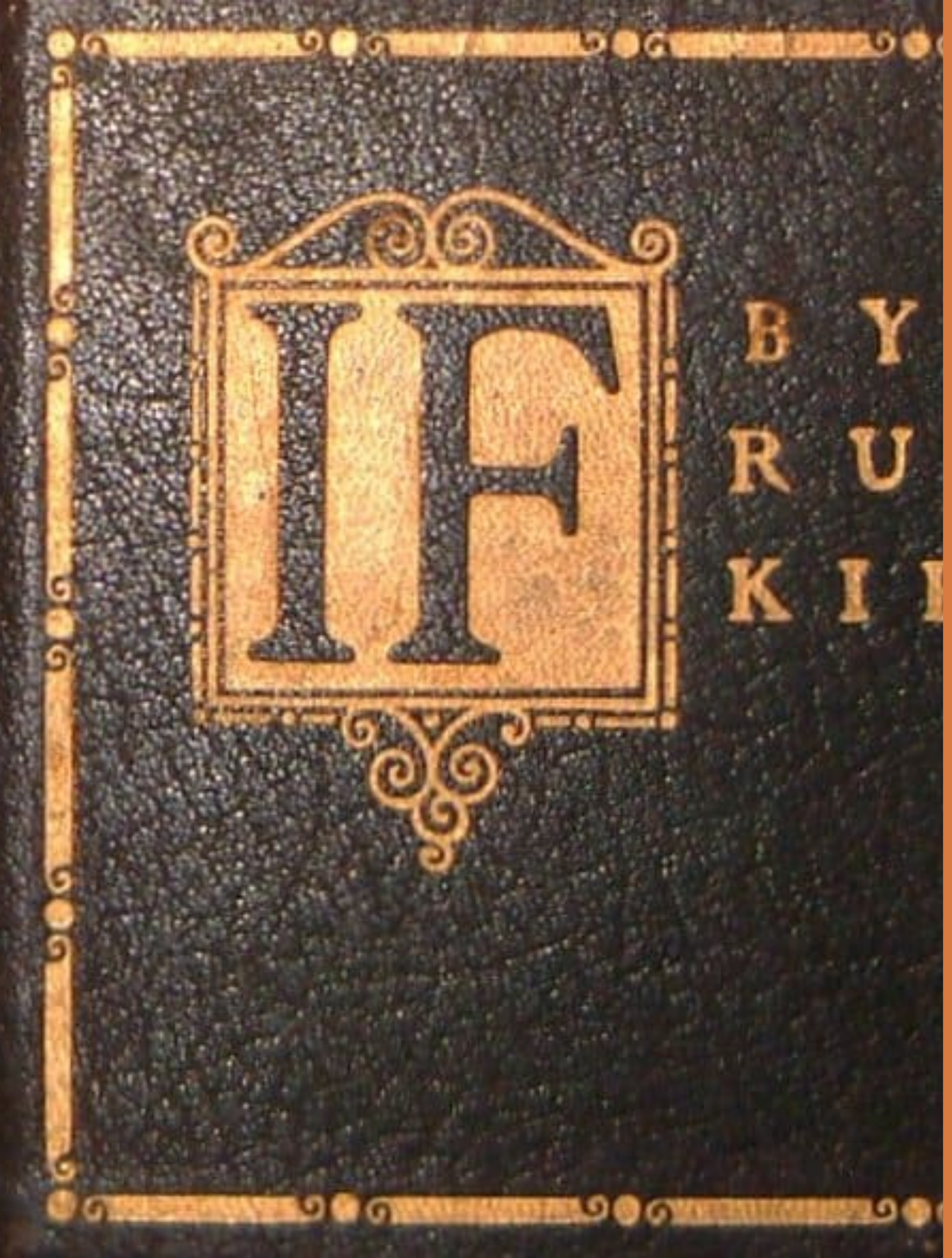
CHURCH HISTORY: THE THIRD AGE (312-591)

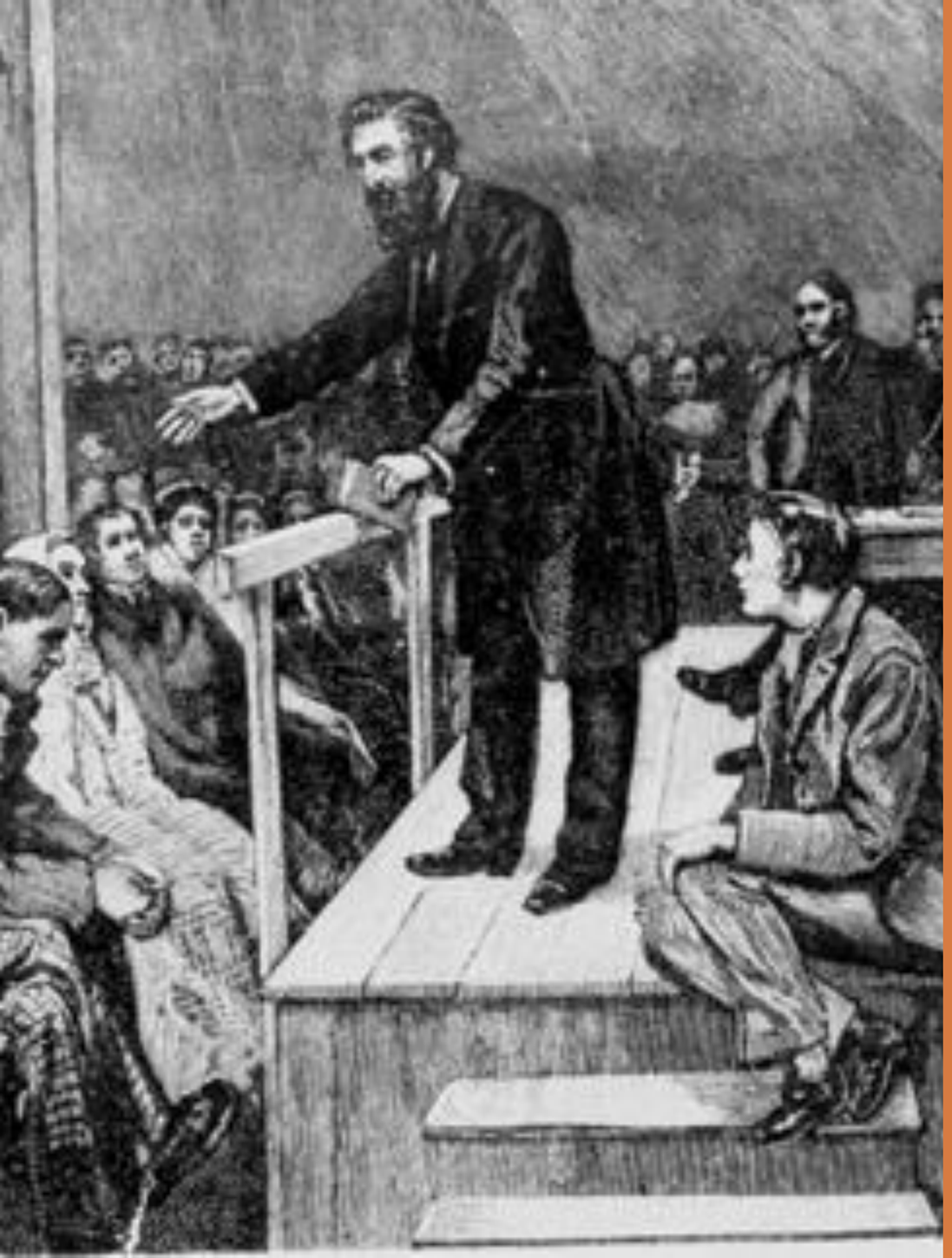
AUGUSTINE & PELAGIANISM



If you can keep your head when all about you
    Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
    But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
    Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
    And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

–A selection from If

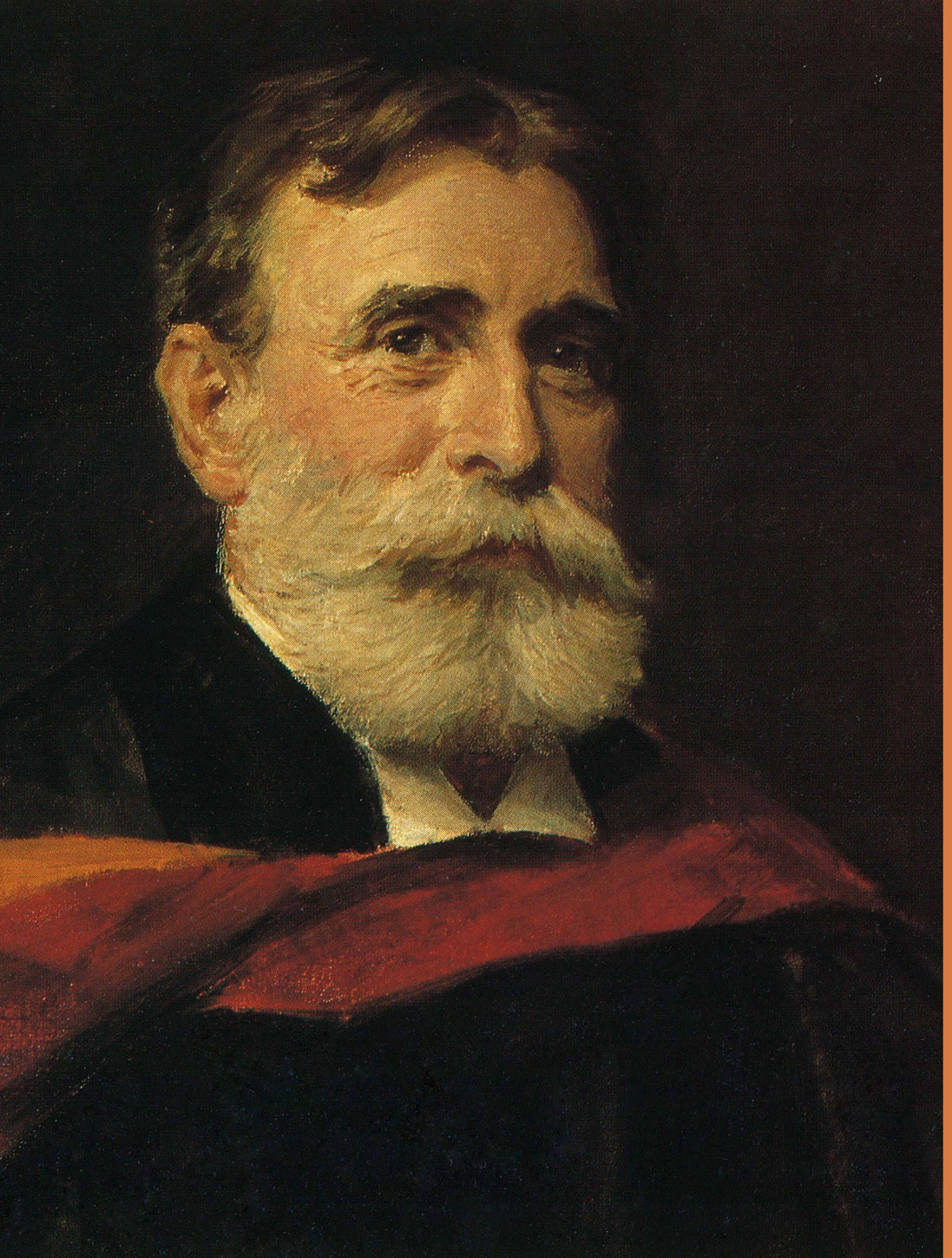
Rudyard Kipling



If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,

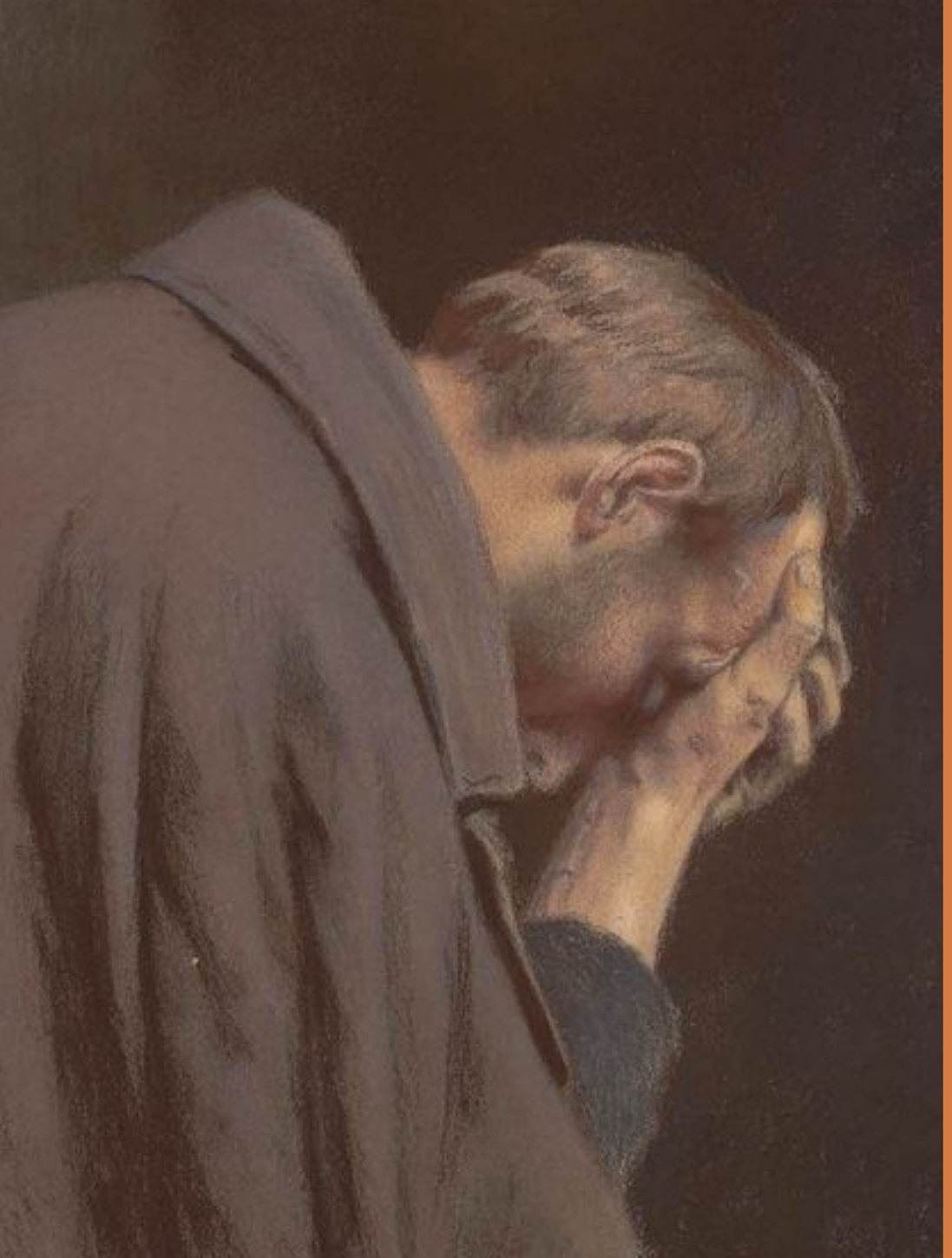
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

–A selection from If
Rudyard Kipling



THERE ARE AT BOTTOM BUT TWO TYPES OF RELIGIOUS THOUGH IN THE WORLD…THERE IS THE RELIGION OF FAITH; THERE IS THE ‘RELIGION’ OF WORKS…ALL OTHER FORMS OF ‘RELIGIOUS TEACHING WHICH HAVE BEEN KNOWN IN CHRISTENDOM ARE BUT UNSTABLE ATTEMPTS AT COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE TWO.

–B.B. Warfield, ‘What is Calvinism?’



OH GOD, YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE MINDS THAT KNOW YOU, THE LIFE OF THE SOULS THAT LOVE YOU, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE WILLS THAT SERVE YOU. HELP US SO TO KNOW YOU THAT WE MAY TRULY LOVE YOU, SO TO LOVE YOU THAT WE MAY FULLY SERVE YOU, WHOM TO SERVE IS PERFECT FREEDOM, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

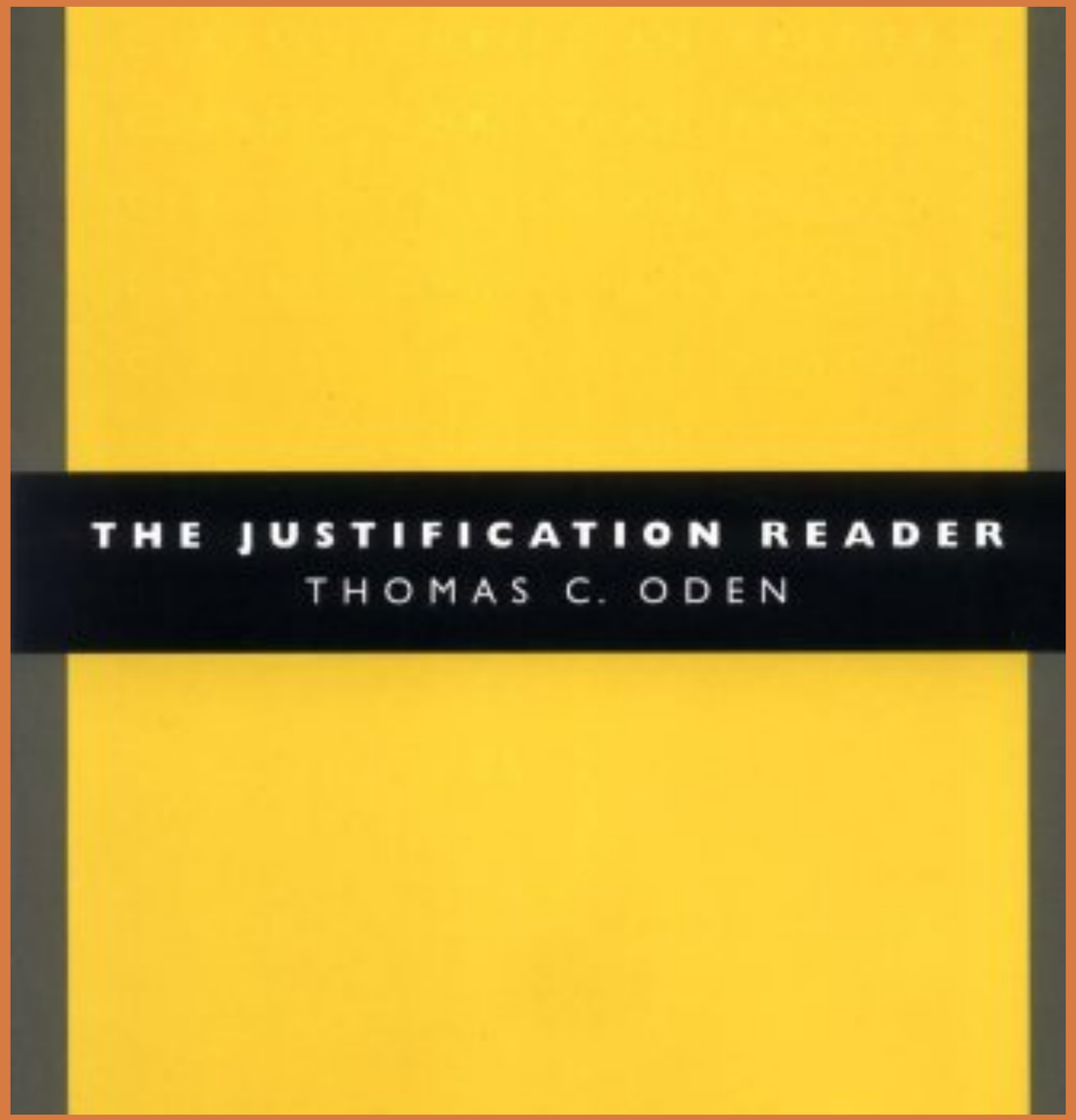
–Augustine, a prayer

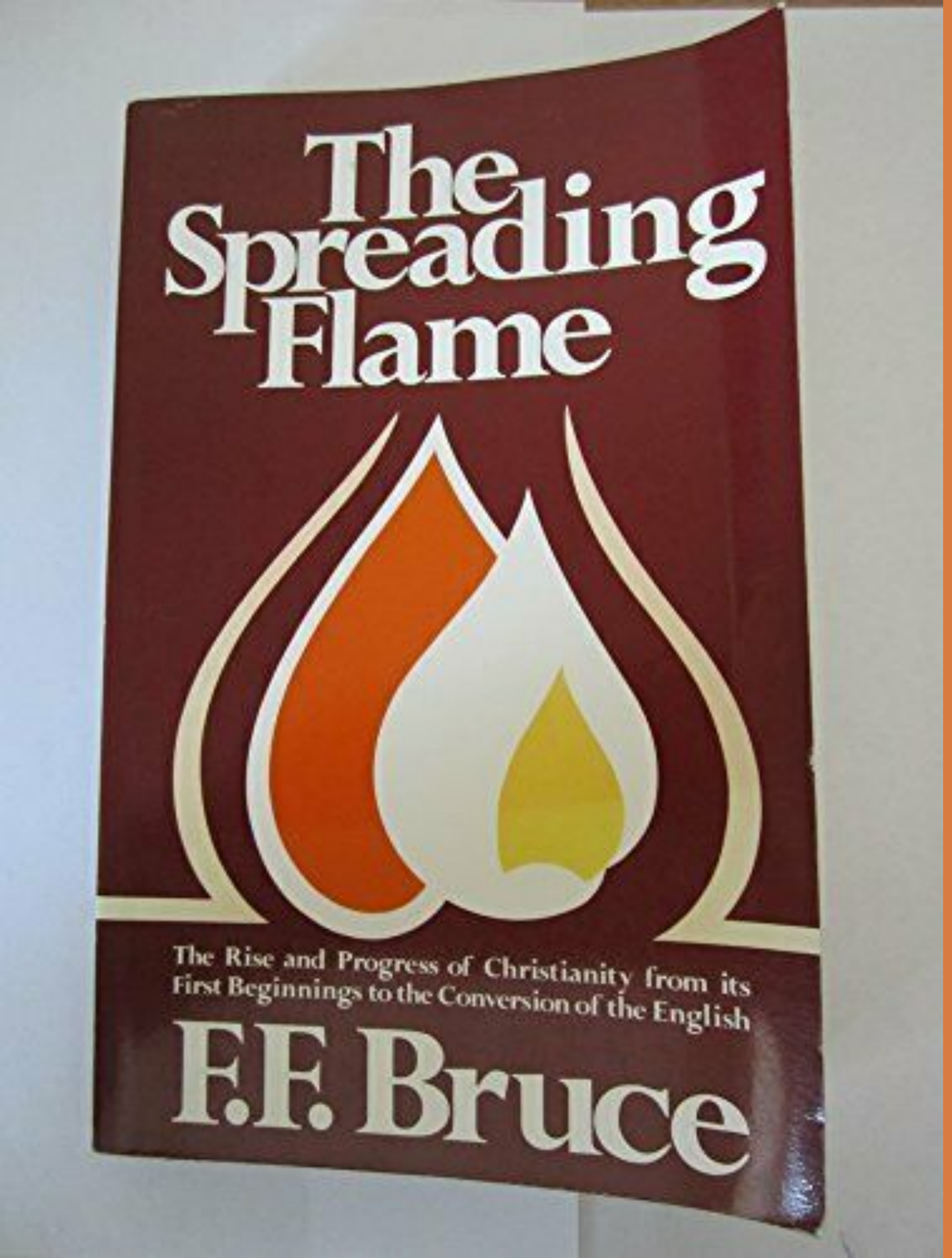
8 FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH.
AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF
GOD, 9 NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY
BOAST.

Ephesians 2:8–9

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE

- There is not much emphasis on the doctrine of grace prior to Augustine
  - It’s present in the Bible, it’s present in Paul
- There are some glimmers in Tertullian, Athanasius, Ambrose, etc.
- The Emphasis, however, is not there like we see in Paul, Augustine, and the Reformers





THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF GRACE SEEMS ALMOST TO GO UNDERGROUND IN THE POST-APOSTOLIC AGE, TO REAPPEAR ONLY WITH AUGUSTINE.

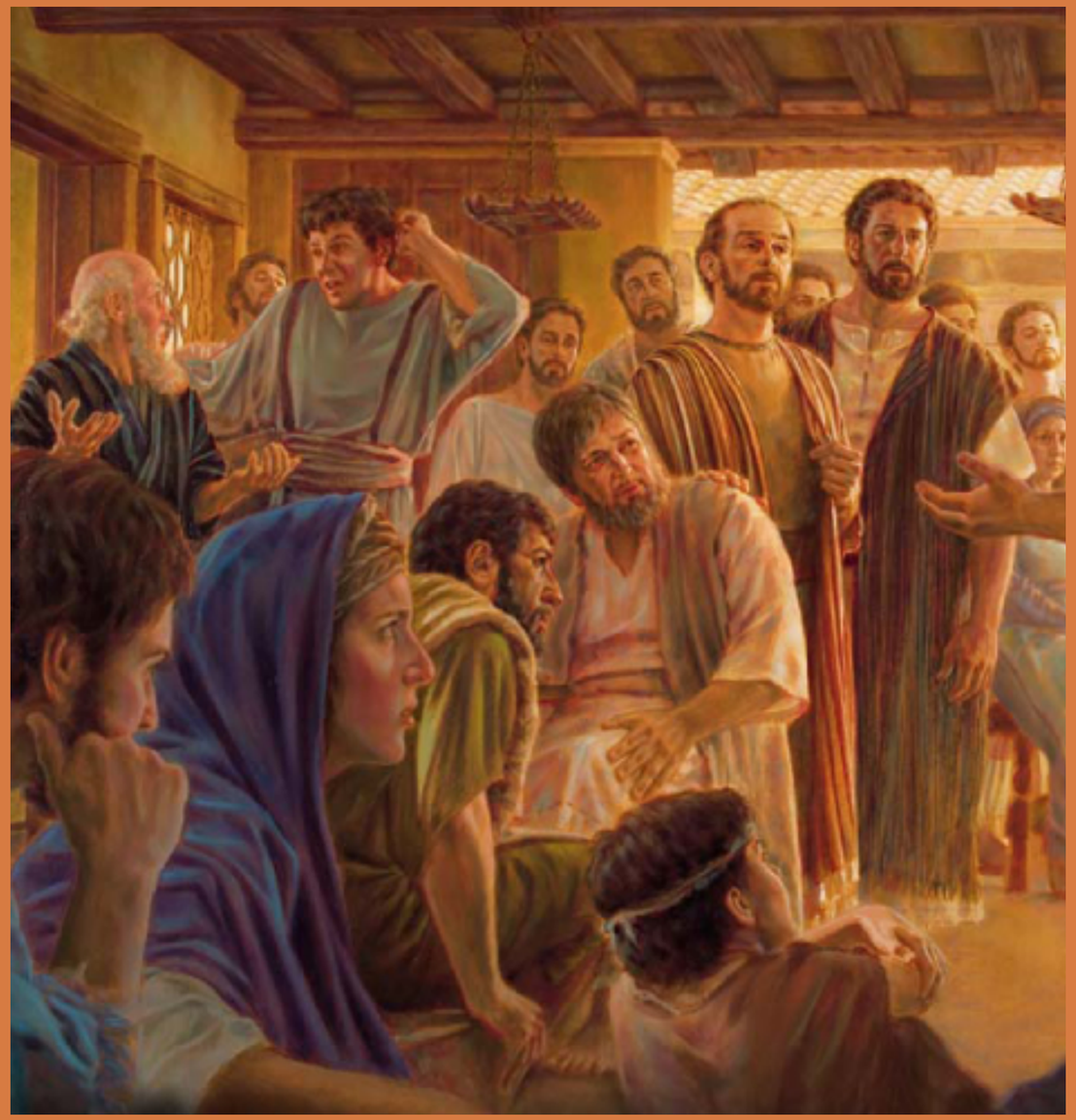
–F.F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame

THERE IS NO SUCH GULF IN THE HISTORY OF HUMAN THOUGHT AS THAT WHICH IS CLEFT BETWEEN THE APOSTOLIC AND THE IMMEDIATELY SUCCEEDING AGES.

B.B. Warfield, on the doctrine of Grace in the Early Church

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS & ARTICULATION

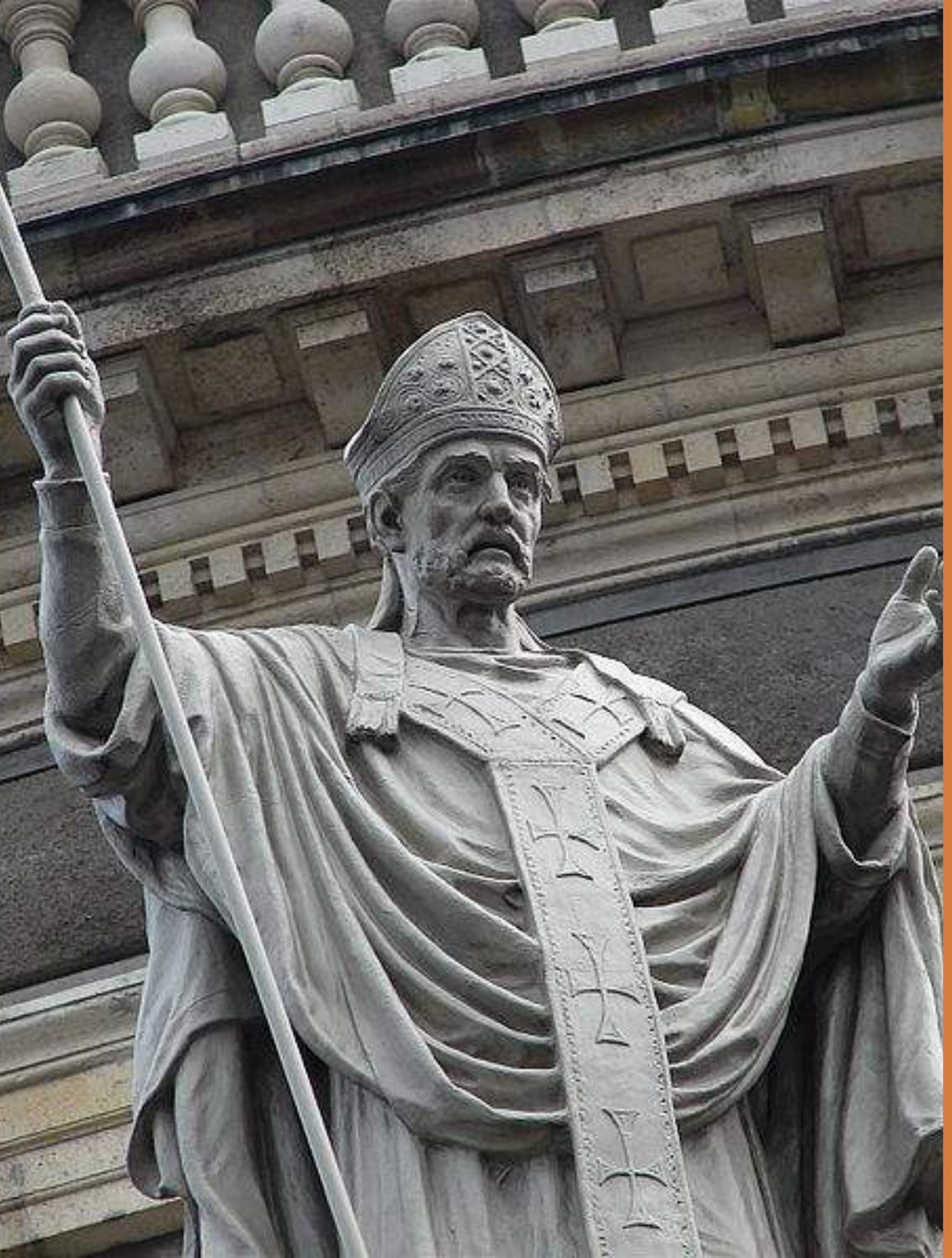
- Augustine was not the first to ‘believe in grace’
- Many people who came to the Lord believed in grace
  - They were sinners
  - They needed God’s help in order to be saved
  - They believed that they must live good, holy, and godly lives



CHRISTIAN BELIEFS & ARTICULATION

- The Trinity, before The Council of Nicea in 325, was believed in
  - It lacked the clarity and articulation that the Arian Controversy thrust upon it
- The two natures of Christ (Christ is fully God and fully man) was believed before the Council of Chalcedon
  - It was clarified and expressed clearly after the Nestorian and Monophysite controversies



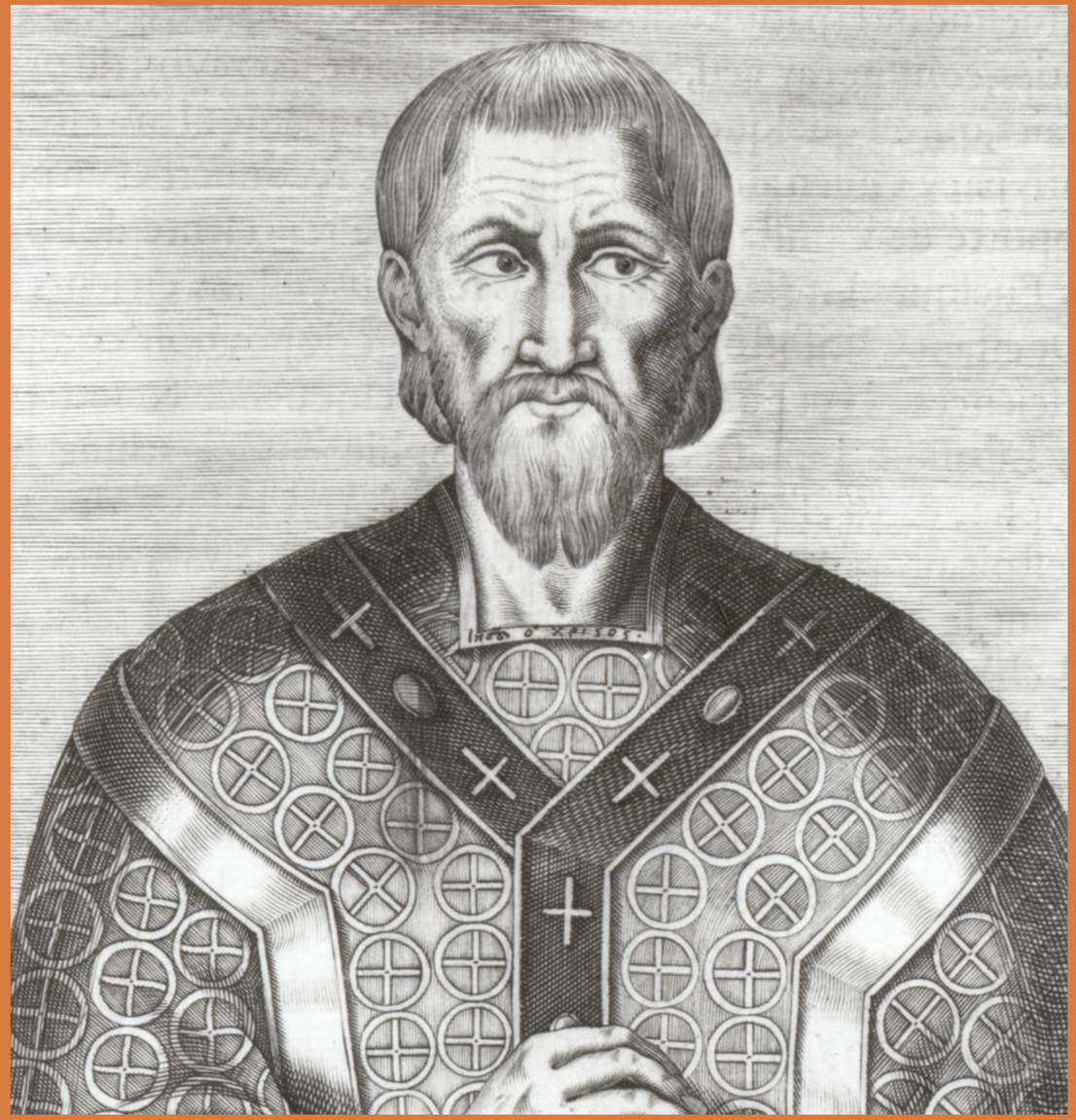


ALL DEPENDS INDEED ON GOD, BUT NOT SO THAT OUR FREE WILL IS HINDERED. GOD DOES NOT ANTICIPATE OUR CHOICE, LEST OUR FREE WILL SHOULD BE OUTRAGED, BUT WHEN WE HAVE CHOSEN, THEN GREAT IS THE ASSISTANCE HE BRINGS TO US.

–John Chrysostom

PREACHING OF GRACE BEFORE AUGUSTINE

- Chrysostom was one of the church fathers contemporary to Augustine (though slightly older)
  - His teaching on Grace and Free Will was common
  - We do what we can, use our free wills to turn to God, God turns to us and helps us
- Augustine said ‘No, God is our power, not our helper.’



AUGUSTINE AND GRACE

- Augustine was not the first person to believe in it, but he was the first to clearly teach it (apart from Paul)
  - He learned much of his thinking from Ambrose
    - He gave Ambrose credit for his understanding of it
- Augustine’s experience led him to the emphasis on the doctrine’s of Grace



AUGUSTINE'S TESTIMONY

- Augustine's journey to salvation was arduous and dramatic
  - He struggled for years to find answers and peace
  - God miraculously brought him to himself
- Augustine's experience was one of fleeing God and God continuing to pursue him
  - Thagaste to Carthage to Rome to Milan
- He did not have a good life that got better and better, but rather he was a rebel until God turned him around and made him his own son



AUGUSTINE'S STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

- Augustine's testimony was confirmed by his study of the scriptures
  - He was captured by sin, and he could not break with it (even if he wanted to)
    - "Give me chastity…but not yet."

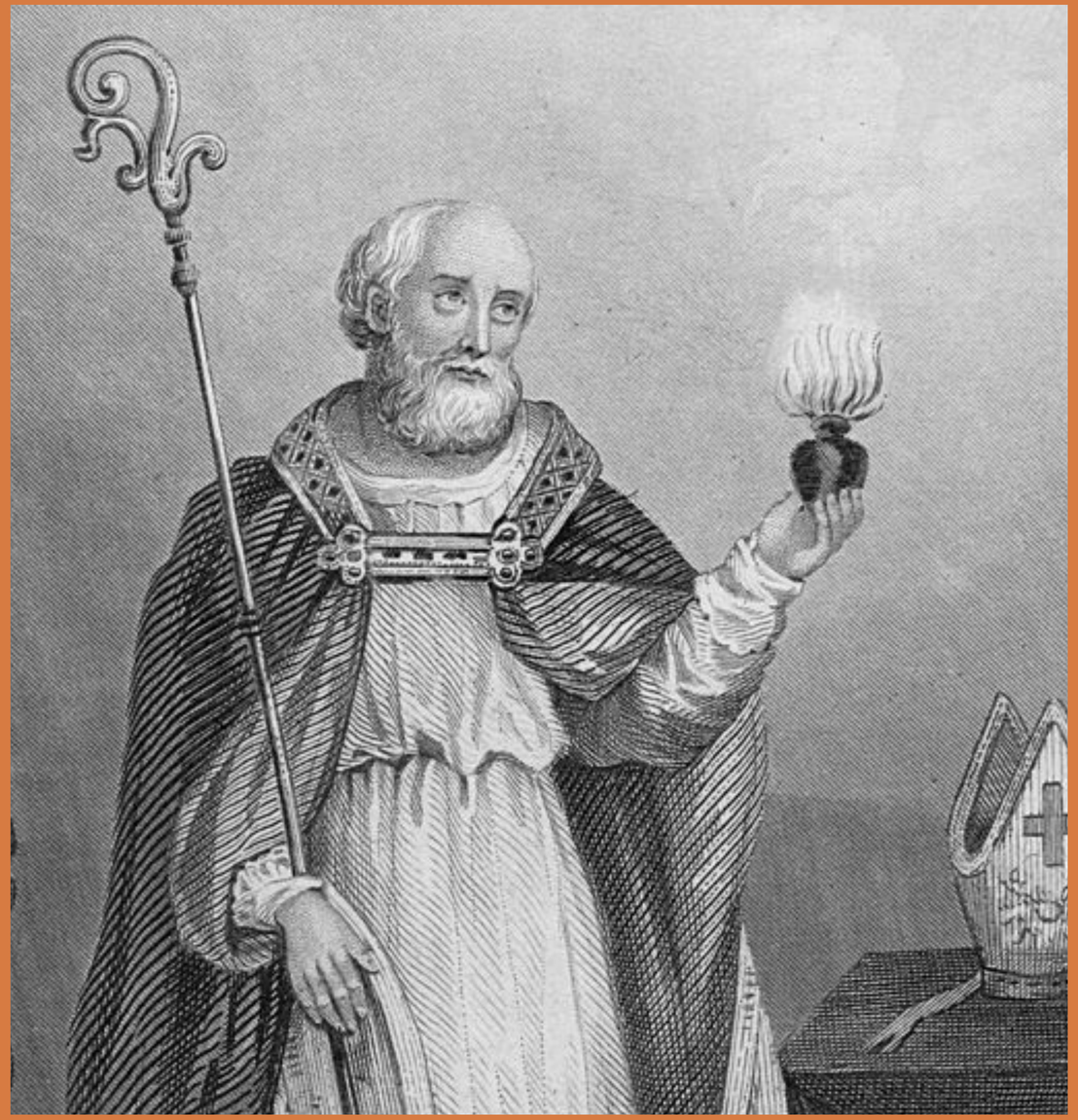


FOR WHEN YOU WERE SLAVES TO SIN, YOU WERE FREE IN REGARDS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Romans 6:20

AUGUSTINE'S STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

- He found in the Bible that God came into the world to save sinners (not the righteous)
  - God saves by faith, and faith itself is a gift of God
  - Belief itself is a gift of God

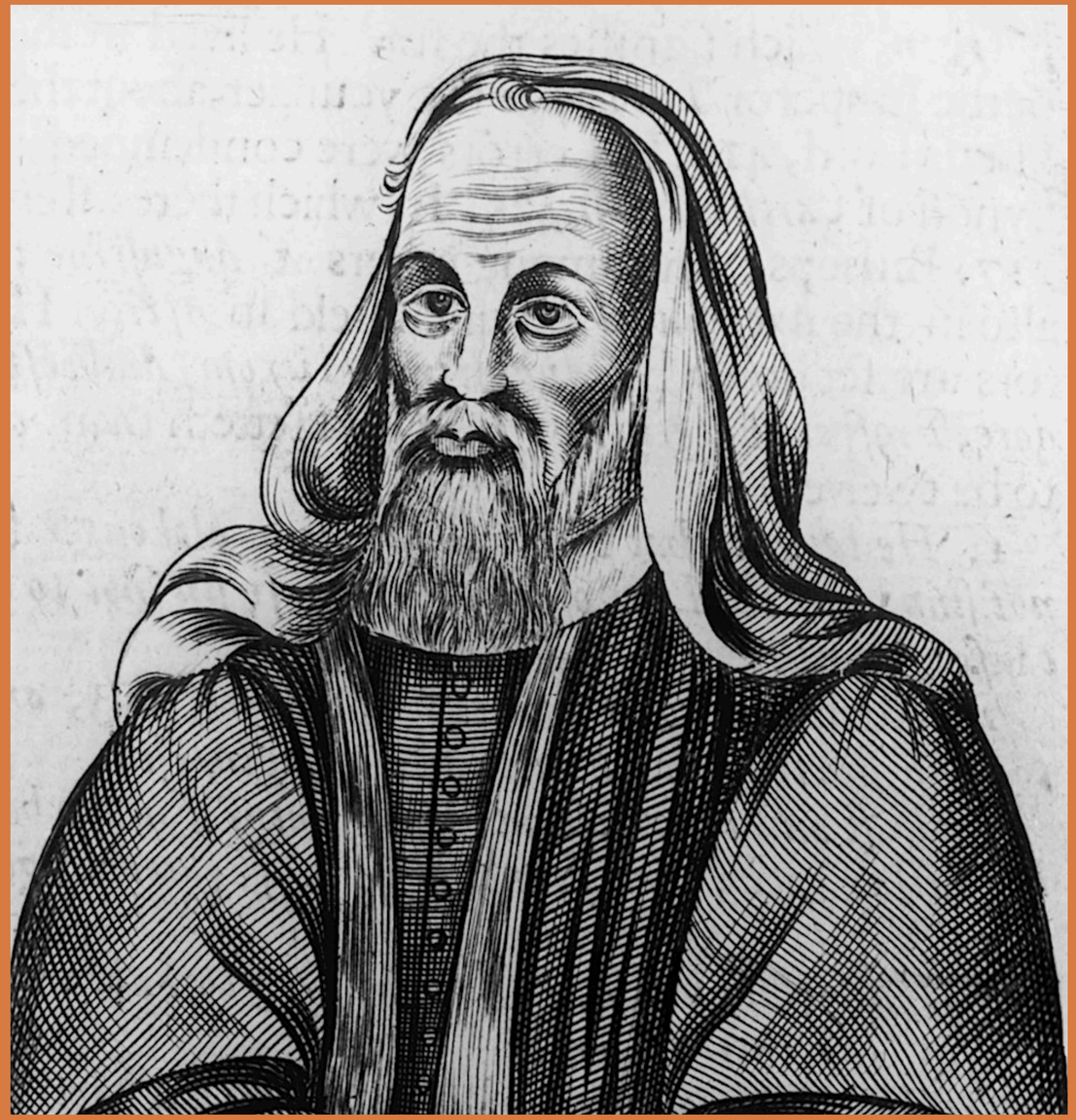


8 FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH.
AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF
GOD, 9 NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY
BOAST.

Ephesians 2:8–9

PELAGIUS

- Pelagius was a monk from the British Isles
  - Augustine respected him for his piety and good works
- He arrived in Rome, and began to work with the urban poor and dockworkers
  - He was shocked by two things
    - ‘Christians’ in the city did not act like Christians
    - Augustine’s *Confessions*



GIVE ME THE GRACE TO DO AS YOU COMMAND, AND THEN COMMAND ME TO DO AS YOU WILL.

Augustine

PELAGIUS ON AUGUSTINE

- If you start telling people that they cannot do what God commands until God gives them grace and strength to obey, then people will not obey
- It’s an excuse for passivity
- He wanted to challenge people’s lives, not give them an excuse for their sins
- You can indeed do good if only you would



PELAGIUS ON ORIGINAL SIN

- Everyone born into this world is born neutral
  - We are not born sinners
  - We become sinners because we choose to sin
    - You choose sin because there are so many bad examples around



PELAGIUS ON FREE WILL

- We actually can do good
  - We have the possibility within us to do both good or bad
- He called it the ‘grace of free will’
  - God gave us the ‘gift of free will’
  - the ‘gift’ of the commands of scripture
  - the ‘gift’ of the lives of the saints
- These gifts give us examples to help us make good choices
- Adam’s sin never affected us (except that it was a bad example)



AUGUSTINE ON ORIGINAL SIN

- We are both unwilling and unable to do good
  - Adam was created perfect, but in his sin he lost the freedom of his will
  - After Adam's sin, he could only choose evil
    - Free will is there, but it is a will enslaved to evil
- Adam's sin nature was passed down to us
  - We are born corrupt and guilty because of our relationship to Adam



AUGUSTINE ON ORIGINAL SIN (CONT.)

- Our original sin comes from Adam either as a representative man (federal headship) or as a real man (natural headship) passing on genes and DNA
  - Augustine puts forth both, but doesn't decide on which it is
- Adam's sin was passed down to us, we are not born neutral
- We are born sinners and therefore we sin

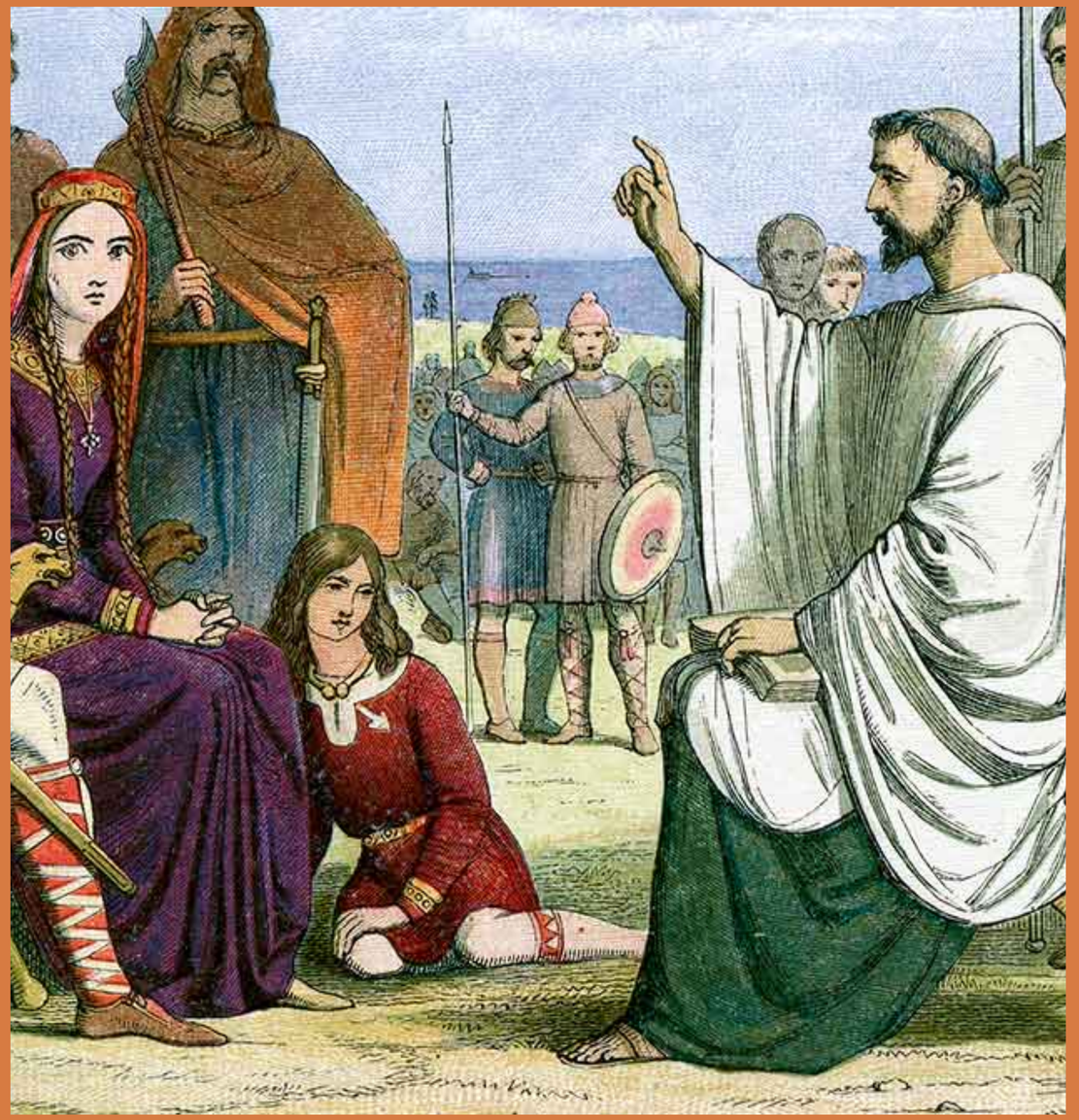


THEREFORE, JUST AS SIN CAME INTO THE WORLD THROUGH ONE MAN, AND DEATH THROUGH SIN, AND SO DEATH SPREAD TO ALL MEN BECAUSE ALL SINNED—

Romans 5:12

AUGUSTINE ON GRACE

- Augustine never tired of talking about ‘gratis’ or free grace
- The bleak news of original sin, is countered by the ‘free grace of God’ that truly delivers us from evil
  - Grace is not there to merely help us, it’s there to save us.
- God’s grace is a gift given to those who do not deserve it, nor earn it
  - We cannot boast of God’s grace
  - He does not foresee our faith and then give grace in response
    - He gives freely out of his mercy





The Descent of the Dove

Charles Williams

BENEDICTION CLASSICS

GOD, AS IT WERE, DETERMINED AND PREDESTINATED HIMSELF TO DO GOOD IN CERTAIN LIVES. THIS IS HIS GRACE. AND WHAT OF THE LIVES IN WHICH HE DOES NOT DETERMINE AND PREDESTINATE HIMSELF TO DO GOOD? WELL, HE DOES NOT. THOSE LIVES ARE THEN LOST? WELL, YES. GOD SAVES WHOM HE CHOOSES AND THE REST ARE LOST.

–Charles Williams, ‘Descent of the Dove’

GOD'S WISDOM, EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND ACTS ARE ALL SO SECRET THAT THEY ARE BEYOND THE REACH OF ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

Augustine

PELAGIUS TO AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF GRACE

- Does this mean, that since God gives us grace and predestines those who receive it by faith, then we can do whatever we want?
  - Augustine says No. Christian conduct is rooted in a lifelong response of love for God and obedience to his will.
  - A true Christian will grow in grace.



PELAGIUS VS. AUGUSTINE

- Pelagius believed Christianity should be more like a big monastery, full of super-Christians, living perfect or almost perfect lives
- Augustine compared it to a hospital
  - All are sick and injured, but we are all getting better, slowly and painfully



REACTION BY THE CHURCH

- Pelagianism was condemned and the Augustinian view was accepted at the Synod of Carthage, 418
- Despite official approval, there was a significant revolt against Augustine
  - It came primarily from the monasteries
    - They said it was ‘new teaching’

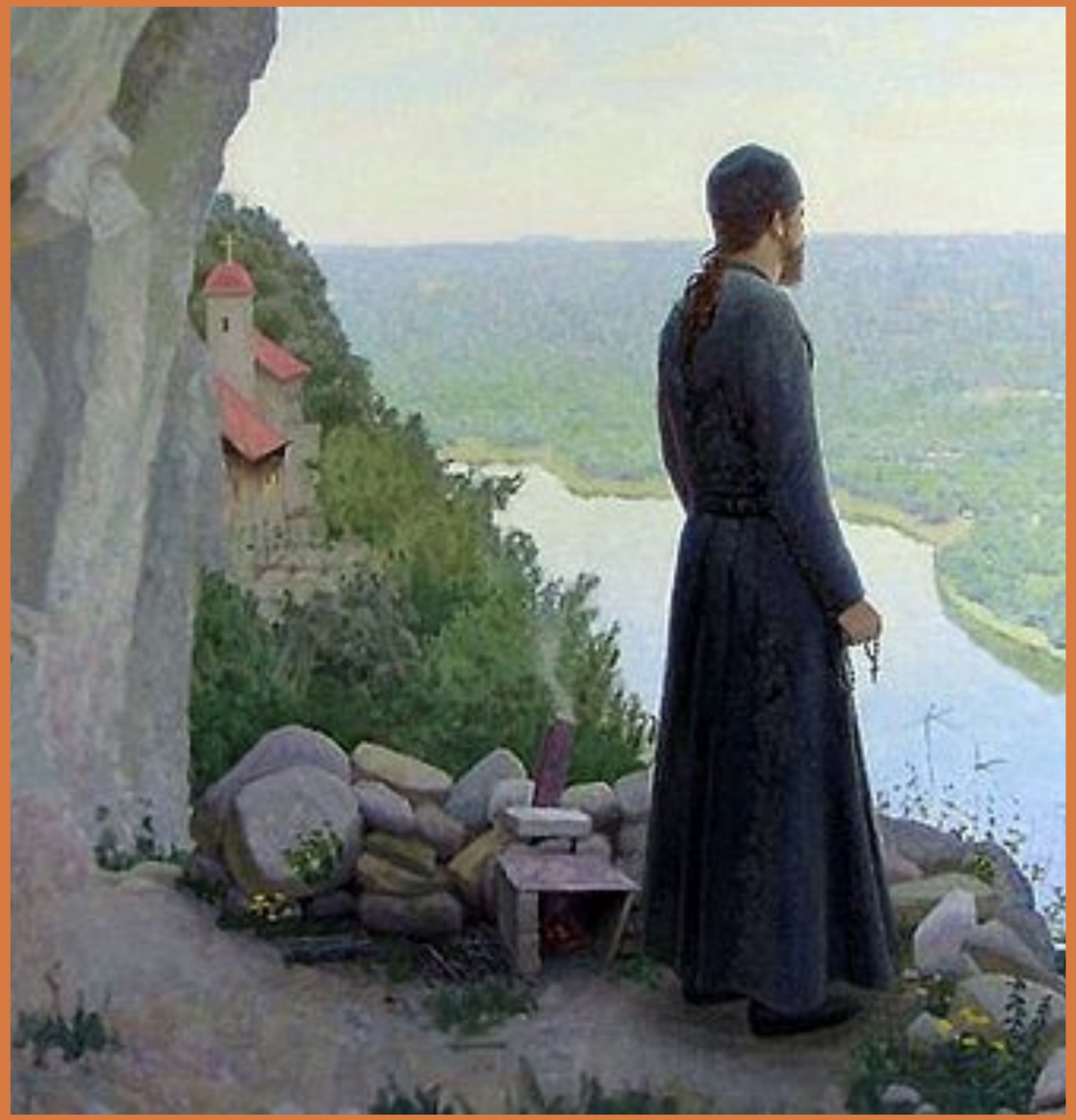


“THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BELIEVED EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS, AND BY ALL.”

Vincent of Lerins

REACTION BY THE MONASTERIES

- Monasteries were full of people who were working to ‘earn credit’ with God towards salvation
  - Zeal, denial of food/water, comforts of life, punishments even were practiced
- If Augustine was right, then why were they living that way?



THE REFORMATION

- The reformation was a revival of Augustinianism (and really Biblical theology)
- Justification by Faith, and faith as a gift
  - Not of works, not of sacramental faithfulness
- Augustine vs. Augustine
  - Augustine's view of salvation by grace
  - Augustine's view of the authority and efficacy of the church

