



The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works

Robert J. O'Connell

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This book rounds off the study of St. Augustine's view of the human condition which Fr. O'Connell began in *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391*, and continued in *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*. The central thesis of that first book, and the guiding hypothesis of the second, proposed that Augustine thought of us in "Plotinian" terms, as "fallen souls," and that he interpreted, in all sincerity, the teachings of Scripture as reflecting that same view. O'Connell sees the weightiest objection to his proposal as stemming from what scholars generally agree is Augustine's firm rejection of that view in his later works.

The central contention here is that Augustine did indeed reject his earlier theory, but only for a short while. He came to see the text from Romans 9, 11 as apparently compelling that rejection. But then his firm belief that all humans are guilty of original sin would have left him traducianism as his only acceptable way of understanding the origin of sinful human souls. The materialistic cast of traducianism, however, always repelled Augustine. Hence, he struggles to elaborate a fresh interpretation of Romans 9,11, and eventually he finds one that permits him to return to a slightly revised version of his earlier view. That theory, O'Connell argues, is encased in both the *De Civitate Dei* and the final version of the *De Trinitate*.

This terse summary barely hints at the richness of detail contained here: O'Connell begins with a minute analysis of the third book of the *De Libero Arbitrio*, then of the letters and works ostensibly supporting rival chronological patterns which he must overturn in order to make his case. Finally, in the light of his findings, he offers fresh interpretations of Augustine's three mature masterpieces, *On Genesis*, *The Trinity*, and *City of God*. These, along with Fr. O'Connell's contention that Augustine's anti-Pelagian *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione* must have seen publication no earlier than A.D. 416/17, will doubtless fuel scholarly debate for some time to come. Indeed, Pelagianism made the question of the soul's origin so pivotal for Augustine, that few of our current interpretations of Augustine are likely to remain unaffected by the results of O'Connell's searching and provocative study.

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