

A HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 9:6-13 IN THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the church, Romans 9 has been a difficult text for interpreters and lay-people in the church, both for its ambiguous language and its use to support a doctrine of predestination. Our thesis provides a history of interpretation of Romans 9:6-13 in the patristic period—including figures like Irenaeus, Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, and Pelagius—as a way to better understand how subsequent readings of the chapter arose. We seek to understand both how *and why* patristic interpreters read 9:6-13 the way they did. Our approach involves looking at (1) the *assumptions* patristic interpreters brought to 9:6-13, (2) the *polemical context* in which these verses were interpreted, (3) the prior *traditions* used by interpreters, and (4) the *exegetical decisions* made for individual elements in 9:6-13. In general, we conclude that the patristic interpretation of 9:6-13 highlights some of the ambiguities and possibilities of interpreting elements in the passage; that the patristic predestinarian approach to this text was indebted to influences from gnostic and Manichaean Christianity; that Origen's interpretation of these verses had an significant influence on subsequent readings in the Greek and Latin traditions; that Augustine's final reading of this passage did not develop simply by "a more careful and honest reading of Paul"; and that the patristic appeal to cognate passages in Paul's letters (i.e. passages containing similar words and ideas) indicates a promising way forward in the interpretation of these verses.

## **PREFACE**

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, John Moon.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885-1887. 10 vols. Repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953—.
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna: Tempsky, 1886—.
- FC *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947—.
- Hom.* Nils-Arne Pedersen. *Manichaean Homilies*. Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum, Series Coptica 2. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006.
- Keph.* Gardner, Iain Gardner. *The Kephalaia of the Teacher: The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary*. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 37. Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1995.
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)
- NPNF<sup>1</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1*. Edited by Philip Schaff. 1886-1889. 14 vols. Repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- NPNF<sup>2</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 1890-1990. 14 vols. Repr. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.
- PG Patrologia graeca. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857-1886.
- WSA *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Hyde Park: New City Press, 1990—.

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*To my wife, Joanna*

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the church, few texts have been more hotly debated than Paul's ninth chapter to the Romans. Origen and his gnostic Christian opponents (3<sup>rd</sup> c.), Augustine and Pelagius (5<sup>th</sup> c.), Calvin and Arminius (16<sup>th</sup> c.), and modern interpreters alike have all debated and disagreed upon the interpretation of the chapter. What is at stake is the very character of God in the way he has chosen his people. Has God broken his promise to save Israel only to fulfill that promise in the Church? Or has God's plan all along been to save only some and not others? Does he predetermine the fates of individuals, predestining some to salvation and others to damnation? If so, then is God unjust for punishing those he has rejected? Or is he simply acting in a mysterious way? And if God predetermines people's eternal destinies, then why does Paul later speak as if human choice matters in receiving salvation (e.g. Rom. 11:22-23)? Is Paul inconsistent? Or is Romans 9 not really about predestination at all? These are some of the questions that have been raised by Romans 9.

Given the diversity of opinions on Romans 9, a history of interpretation would be a useful, and hopefully interesting, exercise. How, and why, have interpreters read this chapter so differently over the years? This is the main question we wish to answer in our history of interpretation, and by answering it we wish to better understand the issues that differentiate one interpretation from another. To answer this question, we have chosen four general questions to guide us throughout our history. (1) What *assumptions* did various interpreters bring to the text? Did they have philosophical or theological commitments that guided their reading? (2) What was the *polemical context* in which this text was interpreted? Was the interpreter being influenced by an opponent? (3) What *traditions* did interpreters draw from? Were interpreters reproducing previous interpretations? And (4) What *exegetical decisions* were being made? By paying

attention to each interpreter's decisions on key issues, we hope to appreciate the possibilities and ambiguities of reading Romans 9. With these four questions in mind, we wish to better understand how the interpretation of Romans 9 took the shape that it did.

There have been previous histories of interpretation on Romans 9, but usually one or more of the four elements listed above are missing to make these otherwise useful histories incomplete. (1) In 1895, William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam provided a history of interpretation on Romans 9:6-29 in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>1</sup> While they were concise and insightful, they skipped over a number of exegetical positions by each interpreter, and they were perhaps too concise for the non-specialist to see how exactly the myth held by various gnostic Christians influenced their reading of Romans 9. Moreover, given their view of Origen's late and limited influence in the Latin West, one misses the full significance of gnostic Christianity's influence on Origen. And finally, they gave no consideration to how the Manichaean context might have influenced Latin Nicene interpretations of Romans 9. (2) In 1956, Karl H. Schelkle masterfully organized the patristic interpretation of Romans 1-11 in *Paul, Teacher of the Fathers: The Patristic Interpretation of Romans 1-11 (Paulus Lehrer der Väter: Die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer 1-11)*.<sup>2</sup> While Schelkle provided more detail on exegetical positions than did Sanday and Headlam, his topical arrangement of the material makes it difficult for a reader to grasp the flow of each exegete's interpretation. Moreover, whereas Sanday and Headlam at least mentioned the early gnostic interpretation while saying nothing about the Manichaeans, Schelkle failed to mention both.

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<sup>1</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 5 ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 269-75.

<sup>2</sup> Karl H. Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter: Die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer 1-11* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1956).

Thus, while we have helpful predecessors for our history of interpretation, we believe there is still more work to do and new insights to be gained.

Due to the limits of space, we have decided to limit the scope of our history of interpretation in two ways. First, we will limit our treatment to the Patristic period, since the patristic interpretation of Romans 9 would determine the interpretation of later centuries. And within the Patristic period, we will only be able to focus on some of the more prominent interpreters. And second, we will limit our attention to Romans 9:6-13. The reason for this is that these verses go a long way in affecting how one reads the rest of the chapter.<sup>3</sup> When Paul deals with the question of God's justice in 9:14-18, he is looking back at what he said in 9:6-13, so that if we misconstrue 9:6-13, we will likely misconstrue 9:14-18. That being said, the focus of our history will be 9:6-13, but we will also comment on 9:1-5 and 9:14-18 in so far as this helps us to understand 9:6-13.

In Chapter 1 of our history, we will treat each interpreter in turn. Since the interpretation of Paul flourished first in the Greek East, and then in the Latin West, our history will treat the Greek and Latin traditions in that order. By proceeding in a chronological order, our history hopes to place each interpreter's reading of 9:6-13 in its historical context, and to appreciate each interpreter's continuous reading of these verses. Then in Chapter 2, we will summarize our chronological history by topic in order to consider various issues with greater focus. Most of the topics were chosen by considering key issues in subdivisions of Paul's argument (vv. 1-6, 7-9, 10-13, 14-18), while other topics deal with more general issues that are more or less frequently discussed in relation to 9:6-13 (Paul's relation to Judaism, predestination, and cognate passages). Throughout our history, we will argue five general points: (1) the patristic interpretation of Rom.

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<sup>3</sup> So also John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 16.

9:6-13 highlights some of the ambiguities and possibilities of interpreting this passage; (2) the patristic predestinarian reading of 9:6-13 was indebted to influences from gnostic and Manichaean Christianity; (3) Origen's interpretation of these verses had a significant influence on subsequent readings in the Greek and Latin traditions; (4) Augustine's final reading of this passage did not develop simply by "a more careful and honest reading of Paul"; and (5) the patristic appeal to cognate passages in Paul's letters (i.e. passages containing similar words and ideas) indicates a promising way forward in the interpretation of 9:6-13. Since our history will make frequent reference to Romans 9, we will assume that the reader has carefully read through this chapter and is familiar with the basic flow of Paul's argument. Since patristic interpreters used their own versions of Scripture, we will use their versions as translated by their translators.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Greek and German are my own.

# 1. ROMANS 9:6-13 IN THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

## 1.1 The Greek Tradition

### 1.1.1 Gnostic Christians (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c. C.E.)

The earliest extant interpretation of Romans 9:6-13 came from a group of gnostic Christians in the late second to early third century.<sup>1</sup> Early gnostic religion was an incredibly diverse phenomenon, making it difficult to define, but nevertheless, it was unified by the concept of γνῶσις (*gnōsis*, “knowledge”), an inner enlightenment that liberated a person from the material world and returned them to the divine.<sup>2</sup> Gnostic forms of Christianity eventually developed and were opposed in the second and third centuries. But against such opposition, many gnostic Christians supported their ideas through the letters of Paul and became the first systematic interpreters of the apostle. Their interpretation of 9:6-13 is preserved for us indirectly through Origen’s anti-gnostic work, *On First Principles* (*De principiis*) (early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), where he summarizes the followers of the second century figures, Marcion,<sup>3</sup> Valentinus, and Basilides.<sup>4</sup> And although bias could lead him to misrepresent their views, we will soon see that Origen’s summary is consistent enough with what we find in both gnostic and non-gnostic sources. To better understand how these gnostic Christians interpreted 9:6-13, we will first give a probable outline of their myth of the cosmos, since their myth determined the direction of their

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<sup>1</sup> For possible allusions to Romans in both the later New Testament and in the Apostolic Fathers, see Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, lxxiv-lxxxv.

<sup>2</sup> See Roelof van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Whether or not Marcion himself was a gnostic can be debated, but his followers seem to have taken on more gnostic elements (Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* [trans. Brian McNeil; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 451).

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.5 (ANF 4:291).

interpretation. In particular, we will focus on a second century form of the “Valentinian”<sup>5</sup> myth.<sup>6</sup> While different Valentinians gave different versions of the myth, gnostic and non-gnostic descriptions of the myth share the same general contours,<sup>7</sup> and it is these general contours that we will now consider.

In the Valentinian myth, God is the Ultimate Being. In the beginning, he contained within himself Thought and Silence, which generated Mind and Truth, which in turn generated Word and Life, and so on. And as each pair formed further reality, a total of thirty beings were generated, with Wisdom being the last. The entirety of this perfect divine world was called the *Pleroma*, and each inhabitant of the Pleroma was called an *aeon*. Everything was harmonious in the Pleroma, until finally a disruption occurred. Wisdom, through no fault of her own, and certainly through no fault of God, desired to know God, to know her origin, even though this was deemed impossible. Through a series of events, the disruption was calmed, but the end result was that a now-tainted version of Wisdom was expelled from the Pleroma, while a pure version of Wisdom remained within. Expelled Wisdom, called “Achamoth,” went on to generate the Demiurge, the Creator of the physical universe, and the Demiurge created a universe that consisted of a *psychic element* (soul) and a *material element* (matter). From the Demiurge’s

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<sup>5</sup> According to Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 4-5, the term “Valentinian” was a term used by their opponents. As far as we know, they did not use this term for themselves. Thomassen cites Justin Martyr, the first to have used the term, and says that Justin himself admits that they called themselves Christians (*Dialogue with Trypho* 24:2.6).

<sup>6</sup> Our summary of the Valentinian myth is drawn from M. Eugene Boring’s accessible summary in *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 158-162. Also consulted were Broek, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity*, 136-20, and Thomassen’s comprehensive work on the Valentinians, *The Spiritual Seed*.

<sup>7</sup> A gnostic text that usefully preserves the main contours of the Valentinian myth is *The Tripartite Tractate* from Nag Hammadi Codex I/5, which Thomassen (*The Spiritual Seed*, 505) dates to the second half of the third century C.E. (see summary of the text and discussion in Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 166-187). See also Klauck’s summary of the Valentinian myth based on the Coptic Apocryphon of John from Nag Hammadi Codex II/1, whose Greek antecedent Klauck places in the second century C.E. (*Religious Context*, 461-98, p. 462 for the date). For a second century non-gnostic description of the Valentinian myth and its varieties, see Book 1 of Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies*.

creation of everything, including the devil, the Valentinians went on to explain the origin of evil and suffering.

How did humans fit into this grand story? The Valentinians explained that most humans are composed of only matter and soul. This means that they are happily of this world and will ultimately perish with this world. Others, however, are not so happy. In fact, they feel a deep sense of alienation. And the explanation for this is that when Wisdom was expelled, she unintentionally carried with her some of the *pneumatic element* (spirit) of the Pleroma which then trickled down into the Demiurge and into the inner selves of only some human beings. As a result, these humans—the “pneumatics” (i.e. “spirituals”)—have an inner sense that they really belong to another world, and this is why they are not happy in the present world. It is only through *gnōsis*—knowledge of one’s origin and of one’s ultimate destiny—that they can “see the big picture” and learn to transcend the material world. Thus, according to the Valentinians, salvation was not from sin through faith, but from ignorance through knowledge. This knowledge, however, could not be gained through rational inquiry, but only through revelation. Thus, when the pre-existent Christ, one of the aeons from the Pleroma, descended into the material world as Jesus, he revealed this saving knowledge to trusted disciples who then passed it on to the pneumatics.

Thus, according to the Valentinian myth, humanity is divided at birth into the pneumatics and the non-pneumatics. Certain people are, by their very nature, destined for salvation while others are not. And it was precisely this belief that guided the reading of Rom. 9:6-13 by a group of gnostic Christians. Although Origen opposed these gnostics, it appears that he was generally correct in his summary of their position. Origen said, “there are numerous individuals” from the schools of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides “who . . . have heard that there are souls of

different natures.” Moreover, these gnostic Christians argued from 9:6-13 that “a happier lot by birth is the case with some rather than with others; as [Isaac], e.g., is begotten of Abraham, and born of the promise; [Jacob], too, of Isaac and Rebekah, and who, while still in the womb . . . is said to be loved by God before he is born.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, these gnostic Christians held that Isaac and Jacob were predestined for blessing because they were born with pneumatic natures, while Ishmael and Esau were rejected because of their non-pneumatic natures.<sup>9</sup> After making this observation, these gnostic Christians made a critical interpretive move. For them, the predestination of the patriarchs in 9:6-13 was not an incidental detail of the text. Nor was the patriarchal predestination unique to the patriarchs. Instead, the predestination of the patriarchs was paradigmatic for the way that *all* human beings are predestined. *All* human beings are born as either pneumatics or non-pneumatics, just as the patriarchs were. These gnostic Christians thus assumed that 9:6-13 was about the predestination of all humanity, and this assumption was necessary if these verses were going to support their myth.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, a predestinarian reading of 9:6-13 arose as various gnostic Christians attempted to use these verses to support their myth. As we continue with our history, we will argue that their assumption about 9:6-13—that it concerns predestination—would influence many throughout the

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<sup>8</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.5 (ANF 4:291).

<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Pharaoh in Rom. 9:14-18 was incapable of salvation because of his ruined nature (Ibid., 3.1.8 [ANF 4:308]).

<sup>10</sup> Elaine H. Pagels provides a plausible reconstruction of how the Valentinians might have understood Rom. 9:1-13 (*The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], 37-38). According to her reconstruction, Paul, in Rom. 9:1-5, expressed his concern for the non-pneumatics (“Israelites”), while acknowledging that both he and the Christ, though they are pneumatics, were generated, like the non-pneumatics, from the Demiurge (i.e. they both descended from the Israelites [9:3, 5]). The present situation of the non-pneumatics does not mean that the “logos of God” has failed (9:6), for not all who appear to be non-pneumatic (“from Israel”) are actually non-pneumatic (“Israel”). While the non-pneumatic “children of the flesh” are not really children of God, the pneumatic “children of promise” come from the Demiurge and can thus sometimes go unnoticed. To account for the different kinds of offspring the Demiurge has created, Paul offered the allegory of Jacob and Esau.

Patristic period. Two interpreters who consciously read 9:6-13 in opposition to these gnostic Christians are Irenaeus and Origen, and it is to their interpretations that we now turn.

### *1.1.2 Irenaeus (ca. 130 – ca. 202 C.E.)*

As bishop of Lyons in France,<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* (*Adversus haereses*) during the 180s C.E., a five-volume work aimed at the exposition and refutation of the various forms of gnostic Christianity. In the fourth volume, he provided the first known quotation of Rom. 9:10-12. The Marcionites had argued that the angry Creator-god of the Old Testament was an entirely different being from the loving god of the New Testament,<sup>12</sup> and in response, Irenaeus offered a string of arguments to show that the gods of the two testaments were in fact one and the same. To this end, he used 9:10-12 to show that Christianity was prefigured in the Old Testament: just as Abraham’s faith foreshadowed the faith of Christians (Gal. 3:5-9), so also the births of Jacob and Esau (Rom. 9:10-12) had a future significance.<sup>13</sup>

According to Irenaeus, Jacob and Esau in 9:10-13 were not symbolic of all humanity, but of two nations in particular: the Church and Israel. He arrived at this conclusion by looking at the original context of Paul’s quote of Gen. 25:23 in Rom. 9:12. Paul quoted the tail end of the verse, saying “. . . the elder shall serve the younger,” but the verse began with God telling Rebecca, “Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people are in your body; and the one people shall overcome the other . . .”<sup>14</sup> After quoting this additional material, Irenaeus identified the two nations with the Church and Israel: “[Jacob] received the rights of the first-born, when his brother looked on them with contempt; even as also the younger nation [i.e. the Church] received

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<sup>11</sup> Little is known about Irenaeus’ biographical history. For a brief discussion, see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2-7. A helpful timeline is given by Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, eds., *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), xv.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.27.2 (*ANF* 1:352).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.21.1-2 (*ANF* 1:492-3).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.21.2 (*ANF* 1:493). In our quotation of translations, we will update any archaic language (e.g. “your” instead of “thy,” “he knows” instead of “he knoweth,” etc.).

Him, Christ, the first-begotten, when the elder nation [i.e. Israel] rejected Him, saying, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ [John 19:15].”<sup>15</sup> As a result, “the latter people has snatched away the blessings of the former from the Father, just as Jacob took away the blessing of this Esau.”<sup>16</sup> By identifying the twins with the Church and Israel, Irenaeus was able to argue that as the twins had one and the same father, so also the Church and Israel shared one and the same God: the God of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>17</sup>

Irenaeus did not mention a gnostic interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13, as Origen will, but nevertheless, he precluded any notion of election that negated free-will. For Irenaeus, the reason why God loved Jacob and hated Esau (9:13) was because God is the one “who knows all things before they can come to pass.”<sup>18</sup> What does God foreknow? Presumably, he foreknows if a person will choose to believe or not. Elsewhere, Irenaeus said of Pharaoh in 9:14-18 that God does not cause people to sin, but “God, knowing the number of those who will not believe, since he foreknows all things, has given them over to unbelief, . . . leaving them in the darkness which they have chosen for themselves.”<sup>19</sup> God accepts or rejects people based on his foreknowledge of their own choices, and one might expect a similar explanation of God’s foreknowledge in relation to Jacob and Esau in 9:10-13. Yet, it is curious why Irenaeus felt the need to explain God’s prenatal distinction of the twins at all, since Jacob and Esau symbolized two nations, not all individual human beings. It is probable that Irenaeus, who knew the gnostic doctrine of natures,<sup>20</sup> was safeguarding against how a gnostic Christian might understand this passage. This anti-gnostic polemic against the doctrine of natures is made explicit in the case of Origen.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.21.3 (*ANF* 1:493).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 4 21.2 (*ANF* 1:493).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4.29.2 (*ANF* 1:502).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.37 (*ANF* 1: 518-21).

### 1.1.3 Origen (185-254 C.E.)

Born and raised in Alexandria, Origen began teaching grammar and Christian catechism at the age of eighteen.<sup>21</sup> Shortly before leaving his hometown in 231 C.E., he wrote a book on Christian doctrine, *On First Principles (De principiis)*,<sup>22</sup> and during his subsequent residence at Caesarea in Palestine, he wrote his magisterial *Commentary on Romans (Commentarii in Romanos)* sometime between 246 and 248 C.E.<sup>23</sup> Both of these works are strongly anti-gnostic and are concerned to defend free-will.<sup>24</sup> In them, we have our main sources for Origen's interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13. They are preserved for us in a few Greek fragments, but we possess them mostly through the Latin translations by Rufinus in the early fifth century.<sup>25</sup> Given the influence of Origen on later commentaries on Romans, we will lay out his views in some detail. Moreover, since his *Commentary* treats 9:6-13 and its context sequentially, we will use his

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<sup>21</sup> For biographical details on Origen's life, see Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-66; see also Frederick Crombie's introductory note to the works of Origen in *ANF* 4:224-30.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.24 (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup> 1:272) says that *On First Principles* was written before Origen's departure from Alexandria, which occurred in 231 C.E.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas P. Scheck, introduction to *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5*, by Origen (trans. Thomas P. Scheck; FC 103; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> We have already seen Origen summarize a deterministic gnostic interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13 in *On First Principles* (2.9.5) for the purpose of refuting it (see section 1.1.1). As for his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen says in his preface that the interpretation of Romans is especially difficult because, with respect to numerous passages, "the heretics [i.e. gnostic Christians] . . . are accustomed to add that the cause of each person's actions is not to be attributed to one's own purpose but to different kinds of natures. And from a handful of words from this letter they attempt to subvert the meaning of the whole of Scripture, which teaches that God has given man freedom of will" ("Preface [of Origen]" in *FC* 103:53).

<sup>25</sup> While scholars once viewed Rufinus's translations as unfaithful, the growing consensus is that they are generally reliable. For the history of scholarship on the reliability of Rufinus's translation of *On First Principles*, see Ronnie J. Rombs, "A Note on the Status of Origen's *De Principiis* in English," *VC* 61 (2007): 21-24. See also Rufinus's prologue to *On First Principles* (*ANF* 4:237-38) for his own statement on his translation method. As for the reliability of Rufinus's translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, see Scheck, "Introduction," 10-19; Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 443-48. On the reliability of Rufinus as a translator in general, see Ronald E. Heine, introduction to *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, by Origen (trans. Ronald E. Heine; FC 71; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 30-39 (esp. pp. 34-35, where Heine summarizes the kinds of changes Rufinus made when translating). In any case, as we will see below, Origen's distinctive ideas on Romans 9 (e.g. the pre-existent merits of the soul; predestination based on foreknowledge) can be corroborated either by his other works or by the subsequent commentary tradition based on his works.

*Commentary* to structure our summary of Origen’s reading while adding perspectives from *On First Principles* where appropriate.

Origen explained in his *Commentary* that Paul expresses his sincere grief in 9:1-5 over his Israelite kin: having rejected the Messiah,<sup>26</sup> they are lost and damned. He could wish that he himself were cut off from Christ for their sake (9:3), since they are Israelites, God’s chosen people who inherited numerous gifts, including the promise of blessing given to Abraham (9:4-5).<sup>27</sup> And herein lies the problem: if God promised to bless Israel, then why, in the messianic age, is Israel not being blessed? Did God break his promise?

To the contrary, Paul says in 9:6a that “the word of God has not failed”: Origen’s *Commentary* understands this to mean that “the promise that was made to [the Israelites] was not in vain.”<sup>28</sup> For that promise has *always* been passed on not in those who are merely Israelites by birth, but in those who are “truly of Israel” (9:6b).<sup>29</sup> For Origen, “true Israel” consists of those who see—that is, believe in—God, just as Jacob became Israel after seeing God (Gen. 32:28, 30).<sup>30</sup> And so also in the messianic age, “the one who has not seen the one who said, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father as well’ [John 14:9] cannot be called Israel.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, when Paul listed Israel’s privileges in 9:4-5, he was listing the privileges of true, believing Israel, not the privileges of every Israelite by birth. Those Israelites who prove to be faithless were effectively disinherited of these privileges.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.13.4 (FC 104:106).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.13.6-8 (FC 104:107-8).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.14.2 (FC 104:110).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.14.2 (FC 104:110-11).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.14.2 (FC 104:111).

<sup>32</sup> For this reading of Origen, cf. *Ibid.*, 7.13.7 (FC 104:108), where Origen says that throughout Israel’s history, sin caused the Israelites to be rejected and disinherited, and as often as God was propitiated, they were again recorded as heirs. See also 7.13.8 (FC 104:108), where Origen defined the “promises” in Rom. 9:4 as “those that were made to the fathers and that are hoped to be given to those who, *through faith*, are called Abraham’s sons” (italics mine). The promises and privileges in 9:4-5 were *always* given to the Israel of faith. For a similar reading of

In his *Commentary*, Origen saw the same point being made in 9:7-8, but now through Israel's founding narratives. According to Origen, Paul said in 9:7a that not all of Abraham's physical children are heirs to the promise of blessing, for this was not even the case in Abraham's own day.<sup>33</sup> Origen explains that although Abraham had many children, Isaac alone, the so-called "child of promise," was counted as his heir (9:7);<sup>34</sup> and so likewise in the messianic age, it is in "the children of promise" (τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, *ta tekna tēs epaggelias*) that the promise is being passed on (9:8). What does it mean to be a "child of promise"? Origen drew on the description of Abraham's heirs in 4:12-13 and said that "the children of promise according to Isaac" are the "[children] of that faith through which Abraham merited to receive the promise of the future inheritance."<sup>35</sup> That is, they are those like Isaac who received the promise by following Abraham's example of faith (cf. Gen. 26:1-6). Or more simply, they are those who believe the promise.<sup>36</sup> Thus, according to Origen's reading of 9:7-8, Paul reinforced his point in 9:6b that the promises were given to those who believe; in 9:6b the believers were called "true Israel," in 9:8 they are called "the children of promise."

A further similarity between Isaac and Abraham's heirs in the messianic age is that they are generated by the word and power of God.<sup>37</sup> When Paul quotes God's promise of Isaac in 9:9, Origen says the following:

He is saying, therefore, it is not by the course of a fleshly birth that Isaac is born, since Abraham was already considered to have a dead body and Sarah's womb was dead, as it was said above [Rom. 4:19]. But it is through the power of him who said, "At this time I will come and Sarah will have a son" [Gen. 18:10, 14; Rom. 9:9]. Therefore, he is called

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Origen, see Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* (SBEC 4; New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 76-77.

<sup>33</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.3 (FC 104:111).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 7.14.3-7.15.2 (FC 104:111-12).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 7.14.3 (FC 104:111). Cf. 7.13.8 (FC 104:108), where Origen says that the promises made to Abraham "are hoped to be given to those who, through faith, are called Abraham's sons."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 354.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.2 (FC 104:111-12); Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 354.

a son by merit, not of the flesh, but of God, who is born out of the arrival and discourse of God.<sup>38</sup>

Although Rom. 9:9 used the promise of Isaac in Gen. 18:10, 14 to explain that Isaac was a child of *promise*, Origen used it to explain that Isaac was a child of *God*.<sup>39</sup> According to Origen, Abraham's heirs have always been children of God like Isaac, in that they are born by the word and power of God.

Romans 9:10-13, for Origen, reinforced the same point in 9:6-9, but this time through the story of Jacob and Esau. Their story taught that election is "not by works but by the one who calls" (9:11), which meant for Origen that it is not "those who are sons of the flesh, but those who are sons of God who are reckoned as descendants."<sup>40</sup> Whereas in 9:8 "the sons of the flesh" signified Abraham's physical descendants, here Origen applied the term to signify those who rely on their works for salvation. "The son of God," on the other hand, are those who are called according to God's purpose, which Origen spells out through 8:29-30: God's purpose is to call those whom he foreknew and predestined.<sup>41</sup>

As we have already seen (section 1.1.1), Origen was fully aware that many gnostic Christians were using 9:6-13 to support their predestinarian doctrine of natures. And as far as we can tell, his earliest response to them in *On First Principles* was not to give an alternative interpretation that already existed in Christian circles, but to supply his own original answer developed in direct response to his opponents. In formulating his response, however, he readily accepted their assumption that 9:6-13 was about the predestination of all human beings. This is

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<sup>38</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.2 (FC 104:111-12).

<sup>39</sup> One might argue that for Origen, being a child of God is part of what it means to be a child of promise, so that "the children of promise" can be described as those who are born by the promise and power of God as Isaac was. However, this would lead to an equivocation in Origen's understanding of the children of promise: are they children who *believe* a promise or children *born* by promise? Origen gives no indication that he intends both meanings.

<sup>40</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.3 (FC 104:112).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 7.15.4 (FC 104:112-13).

not surprising, as Origen had received much else from his gnostic opponents. According to Peter Gorday, much of Origen's anti-gnostic polemic in *On First Principles* was already found in figures like Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus,

. . . but the specific and careful use of Scripture, particularly of passages from Romans, is new and reflects the already existent Valentinian use of such passages. It is perhaps at this juncture in the development of his thought that Origen can most justly be described as a "gnostic" himself, i.e. as one whose primary concern is to describe the redemptive process by which the soul fallen into materiality and obtuseness can by illumination find its way back to its heavenly, spiritual origin. What keeps him from falling essentially into the gnostic camp, however, is the conviction of the indomitable "goodness" and unity of the biblical God and the conviction of radical free will in the human sphere.<sup>42</sup>

Origen was influenced by his opponent's reading of Romans generally, and the assumption that 9:6-13 concerns predestination was a specific instance of that influence. Instead of calling this assumption into question, he readily accepted it after summarizing his opponent's position. As we shall see, Origen's primary interest in *On First Principles* was not so much a reading of Paul on his own terms, but rather the refutation of his gnostic opponents and the preservation of free-will. To this end, a predestinarian approach to 9:6-13 was inconsequential, but only if it could be explained in a way that preserved free-will. And indeed, this is the approach Origen took. Yes, God predestines all people at birth, but on what *basis* does he make that predestination? Over the course of his career, Origen gave two different answers that allowed him to preserve free-will.

In his earlier works, Origen proposed that God's prenatal choice was based on *the merits of the pre-existent soul*. In *On First Principles*, Origen rejected the gnostic view that the world's diversity could be explained by people having different natures, a view they supported from Rom. 9:6-13.<sup>43</sup> Instead, Origen, influenced by the Platonic notion of the pre-existent soul (see, e.g., *Phaedo* 72e-73a; *Meno* 81b-d; *Republic* X 617d-618b), held that all souls, in a prior

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<sup>42</sup> Gorday, *Principles*, 97.

<sup>43</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.5 (*ANF* 4:291).

disembodied state, used their free-will to move either toward or away from God.<sup>44</sup> Then, when God created the physical world, he gave these souls different bodies depending on the merits of their prior life. In this way, before Jacob was born or did anything good or bad, “he was worthily beloved by God, according to the deserts of his previous life.”<sup>45</sup> The same explanation is given in Book 2 of Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (*Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*):<sup>46</sup> “If we, then, do not pursue the works, prior to this life, how is it true that there is no injustice with God when the older serves the younger and is hated, before he has done things worthy of servitude and hatred?”<sup>47</sup> This theory of pre-existent merits moves far beyond anything found in Paul’s letters, reiterating the point that Origen’s primary interest was not a reading of Paul on his own terms, but the preservation of free-will. As a result, he could easily accept a predestinarian approach to 9:6-13, as long as it could accommodate free-will. Moreover, this theory of pre-existent merits certainly raises questions about how Origen interpreted Paul’s remark that election is “not by works” (9:12),<sup>48</sup> but nevertheless, it gave him a free-will reading of 9:6-13.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.9.6 (*ANF* 4:292).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2.9.7 (*ANF* 4:292).

<sup>46</sup> Books 1-32 of Origen’s *Commentary on John* were composed throughout a large portion of Origen’s life, in both Alexandria and Caesarea-Palestine. Book 2, however, was probably written sometime in 230-231 C.E., around the same time as *On First Principles*. For the dating of the parts of the commentary, see Ronald E. Heine’s introduction to *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1-10*, by Origen (trans. Ronald E. Heine; FC 80; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 4-5.

<sup>47</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.191-192 (*FC* 80:146-47).

<sup>48</sup> Did Origen take “not by works” to exclude only those works *after* a person was born? Or did he take the phrase to exclude only the works of the Jewish law (e.g. circumcision, Sabbath, food laws)? We do not know, but whatever the case, it appears that he did not take the phrase to exclude works in principle.

In his later *Commentary on Romans*, Origen changed the basis of God's election to his *foreknowledge of a person's works*.<sup>49</sup> As far as we know, Origen was the first to explicitly interpret the predestinarian theme in 9:6-13 through 8:29-30:<sup>50</sup>

For what we already explained above [in Rom. 8:29-30] is likewise fulfilled in them [i.e. Isaac, Jacob, and the children of God]: "Those whom he foreknew, these he also predestined; and those whom he predestined, these he also called; and those whom he called, these he also justified; and those whom he justified, these he also glorified" [Rom. 8:29-30].<sup>51</sup>

Thus, according to Origen, Isaac and Jacob were predestined for glory because God "foreknew" them, while Ishmael and Esau were rejected because they were not "foreknown." What does it mean to be "foreknown"? In his comments on Rom. 8:29, Origen explains that God foreknowing people does not mean he knows certain things about them in advance, but that he has already set his affection on them.<sup>52</sup> God's "knowing" here is an intimate knowledge, which Origen parallels to biblical examples like Gen. 4:1 ("Adam knew his wife Eve") and 2 Tim. 2:19 ("The Lord knows those who are his").<sup>53</sup> Thus, God predestined Isaac and Jacob for glory simply because he intimately knew and loved them before they were born. But because this still sounds too deterministic, Origen adds that God loved them before they were born *because he knew what sort of persons they would be*.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Origen bases God's affectionate foreknowledge on his factual foreknowledge: God knows which individuals will exhibit a "good will . . . toward

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<sup>49</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 336-37 raises the question of whether Origen changed his views or whether Rufinus altered the commentary. It seems more likely, as Schelkle suggests, that Origen changed his views as his philosophical system in *On First Principles* gave way to a more careful interaction with Paul's letters. Moreover, the fact that the commentary tradition stemming from Origen explained God's election through foreknowledge suggests that this view came from Origen himself.

<sup>50</sup> If Rom. 9:6-13 is about predestination, one can easily understand Origen's appeal to 8:28-30, which talks about the same theme. Moreover, notice that 9:1-13 follows soon after 8:28-30, and that the two passages share many similarities in vocabulary (cf. "purpose" [8:28; 9:11], "elect"/"election" [8:33; 9:11], "call" [8:30; 9:12]).

<sup>51</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.4 (FC 104:113).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 7.8.3 (FC 104:88-9).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Origen literally says "because he knew what sort of persons they were" (italics mine) (*Commentary on Romans* 7.8.3 [FC 104:89]), but that he means to refer to God's knowledge of the future is made clear by his discussion on Rom. 1:1, where he appeals to 8:29-30 (1.3.1-4).

the worship of God”<sup>55</sup> so that in the end, “the cause of each person’s salvation is . . . one’s own purpose and actions.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the reason why Paul was “set apart for the gospel” (Rom. 1:3) was because “God foresaw that [he] was going to labor harder than all the others in the gospel.”<sup>57</sup> By explaining predestination in 9:6-13 through 8:29-30, Origen shed his philosophically driven theory in *On First Principles* and developed an explanation that was more Pauline, and thus more biblical.

As a result of his reading of 9:6-13, Origen understood 9:14-19 as further discussion on the theme of predestination. Given the deterministic tone in 9:14-19, he struggled to preserve a free-will reading, but he eventually settled upon two mutually inconsistent interpretations. First, in his *Commentary on Romans*, he placed 9:14-19 in the mouth of an imaginary opponent instead of Paul’s.<sup>58</sup> According to this reading, the opponent, reacting to 9:6-13, asked if God is not unjust (9:14) since, as Scripture implies (9:15, 17), he arbitrarily shows mercy and hardens whomever he wishes (9:16, 18). Moreover, how could God blame those whom he hardens (9:19)? Paul finally answers in 9:20, “Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?” In this way, Origen pinned

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.8.4 (FC 104:89).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 7.8.6 (FC 104:91). With the grounding of salvation in a person’s actions/works, the Reformers (e.g. Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, etc.) accused Origen of being the precursor to Pelagius. But as many scholars have cautioned, we must recognize that Origen was engaged in different problems than those of later times. By grounding God’s predestination in human free-will and works, Origen was opposing the gnostic doctrine of natures, not the notion that salvation is completely from God. Moreover, Origen has statements that sometimes affirm and sometimes reject “justification by faith alone,” so that he does not easily fit into the categories of subsequent debates. For more on Origen’s view of justification, see Scheck, “Introduction,” 29-41; idem, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen’s Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 13-62.

<sup>57</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 1.3.1-4 (FC 103:64-6). Given Origen’s understanding of election by the foreknowledge of works, it appears that he did not understand Paul’s insistence that election is “not by works” in Rom. 9:12 to exclude works in principle. Nor was he excluding the works of righteousness that result from faith. It is possible that he was excluding the Jewish works of the law (e.g. circumcision, food laws, etc.) (so also Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 337; cf. Scheck, “Introduction,” 41-42, who cites sections 3.6 and 8.9 in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* as two passages where Origen views the works that do not justify as the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish law), although this would create tension with Paul’s exclusion of *any* deeds whether good or bad (9:11).

<sup>58</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.16.3-4 (FC 104:114-15).

the seemingly predestinarian language of 9:14-19 onto Paul's opponent while Paul remained a proponent of free-will.

On a second reading of 9:14-19, found in both *On First Principles* and the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen explained that when these verses are properly understood, they do not negate free-will at all. This, however, raises the question of why Origen felt the need to relegate these apparently deterministic verses to an imaginary opponent.<sup>59</sup> According to Origen, God shows mercy and hardens whomever he wants (9:15, 18) not arbitrarily, but in the sense that he has chosen to show mercy to those who comply with his will and to harden those who do not.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, salvation is "not of the one who wills or runs but of God who shows mercy" (9:16), not because human willing and effort have no part to play in salvation, but because God's mercy takes priority.<sup>61</sup> As parallels to this idea, Origen appeals to Psa. 127:1 ("Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it have labored in vain") and 1 Cor. 3:6-7 ("I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow, so that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who makes things grow").<sup>62</sup> And finally, God's raising up of Pharaoh to make

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<sup>59</sup> While we consider Origen's two explanations of Rom. 9:14-19 as mutually inconsistent, Gorday, *Principles*, 77, is more generous and considers them complementary. By creating an imaginary opponent to speak 9:14-19, Gorday says that the challenge was posed for Origen (and Paul) to explain how the biblical quotes contained in these verses could be understood in a way that preserved free-will. But if Origen was doing nothing more than providing alternative interpretations of the biblical quotes, then why did he feel the need to provide an alternative interpretation of 9:16, which was not a biblical quote but the imaginary opponent's interpretation? A more accurate assessment seems to be that Origen was providing an alternative interpretation of 9:14-19 *in case these verses really were spoken by Paul*. Origen's two interpretations of 9:14-19 thus reveal a desperate effort to preserve free-will through whatever means possible.

<sup>60</sup> In *On First Principles* 3.1.10 (ANF 4:310), Origen appeals to Heb. 6:7-8 and likens God's mercy to the rain, which falls equally on all, leaving the responsibility to the ground to produce either good fruit or thorns. In the same way, humans must use their free-will to respond to God's mercy in either obedience or disobedience. Thus, "by one operation God has mercy upon one man while He hardens another." In the *Commentary on Romans* 7.16.8 (FC 104:118), Origen says that "[i]t is not . . . that God hardens whom he wants, but the one who is unwilling to comply with patience is hardened." Moreover, "that we may be good or evil depends on our will; but that the evil man should be appointed for punishments of some sort and the good man for glory of some sort depends on the will of God."

<sup>61</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 3.1.18 (ANF 4:320-23); idem, *Commentary on Romans* 7.16.5 (FC 104:115-16).

<sup>62</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.5 (FC 104:115-16).

a display of him does not mean that God creates certain people to be evil, but that God, foreknowing that Pharaoh would use his free-will for evil, prudentially punished Pharaoh so that others might be saved.<sup>63</sup> In this way, Origen offered a second free-will approach to 9:14-19.

To sum up, Origen's exegesis of 9:6-13 in his *Commentary on Romans* was the earliest extant attempt to interpret these verses in the light of Paul's anguish over unbelieving Israel. Yet, his interpretation also took place alongside his debate with his gnostic opponents. As a result, he read 9:6-13 as a text about predestination and strove to preserve free-will, offering a solution based on the soul's pre-existent merits in *On First Principles*, and then a solution based on the foreknowledge of works in his *Commentary*. As we will see, Origen's *Commentary* exerted an enormous influence on later commentators on Romans, and as a result, many of its elements will reappear.

#### *1.1.4 From Acacius (d. 366 C.E.) to Gennadius (d. 471 C.E.)*

Given our ignorance of how Origen's work passed to later writers, and given the preservation of his *Commentary on Romans* in Latin, it is often difficult to know if a later Greek writer had direct access to Origen.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Schelkle, after examining the early interpretation of Romans 1-11, has concluded that "many significant elements entered from the interpretation of Origen into the continuing tradition."<sup>65</sup> These elements are found, for example, in Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 C.E.), Eusebius of Emesa (d. ca. 359 C.E.), Acacius of Caesarea (d. 366 C.E.), Apollinaris of Laodicea (ca. 310-392 C.E.), Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296-373 C.E.), the Cappadocian Fathers, Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 C.E.), and Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376-444 C.E.). In the Antiochian school, Origen's interpretations continued in Diodore of Tarsus

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 7.16.6-7 (FC 104:116-17).

<sup>64</sup> So Gorday, *Principles*, 103.

<sup>65</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 414.

(d. ca. 392 C.E.), Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.), and the champion of the school, John Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.). Chrysostom, in turn, became determinative for the subsequent Greek tradition, which sometimes reproduced even his wording. This later tradition included Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393 – c.a. 458 C.E.), who was a student of Chrysostom, Severian of Gabala (d. after 409 C.E.), Gennadius of Constantinople (d. 471 C.E.), Photius I of Constantinople (ca. 820-891 C.E.), Oecumenius (10<sup>th</sup> c. C.E.) Theophylact of Ohrid (d. 1107 C.E.), Euthymius Zigbenus (12<sup>th</sup> c. C.E.),<sup>66</sup> and many others.

On Romans 9:6-13, much of the early Greek interpretation from Acacius of Caesarea to Gennadius of Constantinople is preserved for us in fragments.<sup>67</sup> John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Romans* are an exception, but given his prominence in the Greek tradition, we will comment more fully on his views later. Overall, the interpretation of 9:6-13 from Acacius to Gennadius reproduced Origen's approach. Given the fragmentary nature of this evidence, we will summarize their observations under four headings.<sup>68</sup>

(1) *Romans 9:7-9: Isaac and the children of promise*. Like Origen, Diodore of Tarsus viewed "the children of promise" as those patterned after the type of Isaac. But unlike Origen, Diodore did not define them as "those who inherit the promise by faith"; rather, they are those God promises as heirs because he foreknows they will imitate Isaac's piety and righteousness.<sup>69</sup> Thus, "the children of promise," for Diodore, did not refer to those who believe a promise, but to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 270.

<sup>67</sup> Many of these fragments are preserved for us in Karl Staab, *Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche: Aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt und herausgegeben* (NTA 15; Münster: Aschendorff, 1933).

<sup>68</sup> I am particularly indebted here to Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 336-61, for the organization of this material.

<sup>69</sup> Diodore says, "*In Isaac your seed will be called*, that is, through promise according to the type of Isaac, who was righteous and a type of the righteous" (Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 97: "ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα, τοῦτ' ἔστι δι' ἐπαγγελίας κατὰ τὸν τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ τύπον, ὃς ἦν δίκαιος καὶ τύπος δικαίων."). Moreover, this promise regarding the children of promise was God's eternal predestination based on foreknowledge: "the promise of God was given according to foreknowledge" (Ibid. "κατὰ πρόγνωσιν ἢ ἐπαγγελία τοῦ θεοῦ . . .").

those who come into being by a promise. Chrysostom also saw Isaac as a paradigm for the children of promise, but he will understand the group differently.

(2) *The patriarchs as types of the Church and Israel.* As we saw above, Irenaeus saw Jacob and Esau respectively as the Church and Israel. According to Schelkle, Ephraim of Syria thought this interpretation was self-evident.<sup>70</sup> Diodore of Tarsus hinted at the typology briefly: “the promise was given according to a just decision, and as it was for Isaac, so also for the Gentiles.”<sup>71</sup> Chrysostom also relates 9:6-13 to the Gentiles and Israel.

(3) *Predestination based on the foreknowledge of works.* Acacius of Caesarea rejected Origen’s early view that predestination was based on the merits of the pre-existent soul. Instead, he followed Origen’s later view that God chose Jacob on the basis of the foreknowledge of works: “. . . he placed and preferred Jacob over Esau because he knew in advance the works of both, as Paul himself said above: those whom he foreknew, he also predestined [Rom. 8:29].”<sup>72</sup> As we saw with Diodore of Tarsus, God foreknows a person’s righteousness and piety.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, an appeal to the foreknowledge of works was made by Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>74</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>75</sup> Chrysostom,<sup>76</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus,<sup>77</sup> and Gennadius of Constantinople.<sup>78</sup> Like Origen, many of these writers (e.g. Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom) do not conceive of “works” as simply the external deed, but as the result of a right heart:

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<sup>70</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 356.

<sup>71</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 97: “ἡ δὲ ἐπαγγελία κατὰ δικαιοκρισίαν, καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰσαάκ, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν.”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 54. “προέθετο γὰρ καὶ προέκρινε τοῦ Ἡσαῦ τὸν Ἰακώβ διὰ τὸ προγινώσκειν ἀμφοτέρων τὰ ἔργα, ὡσπερ αὐτὸς ὁ Παῦλος φησιν ἀνωτέρω ὅτι οὗς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>74</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 74:836).

<sup>75</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 143-44.

<sup>76</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464-66).

<sup>77</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio epistolae ad Romanos* (PG 82:153).

<sup>78</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 390.

Chrysostom says, “For it is not a mere exhibition of works that God searches after, but a nobleness of choice and an obedient temper besides.”<sup>79</sup>

Consistent with a predestination based on God’s foreknowledge of works, various writers understood the “purpose” in 9:11 to refer not to God’s purpose, but, as Origen understood the word in 8:28, to a human’s intention to conform to God’s will. So Diodore of Tarsus says that “God has not chosen one but rejected the other according to his own purpose, . . . but he carries out the election according to the purpose of each.”<sup>80</sup> “The purpose of God according to election” (ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ) is thus equivalent to “the election according to their purpose” (ἡ κατὰ πρόθεσιν ἐκείνων ἐκλογή).<sup>81</sup> Chrysostom says something similar (see below). And Theodoret of Cyrus likewise understands under “purpose” the purpose of human individuals.<sup>82</sup>

(4) *Romans 9:14ff. does not represent Paul’s position.* Origen’s view that 9:14-19 was spoken not by Paul but by an imaginary opponent was followed by Diodore of Tarsus,<sup>83</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>84</sup> Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>85</sup> and Gennadius of Constantinople.<sup>86</sup> Chrysostom also does not regard 9:14ff as expressing Paul’s own point of view, but nevertheless he views the speaker of these verses as Paul, not an opponent.

As we can see, Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* exerted a strong influence on the subsequent interpretation of Romans 9 in the Greek tradition. John Chrysostom would likewise

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<sup>79</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:466).

<sup>80</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 97-98: “οὐ γὰρ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν πρόθεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὸν μὲν ἐξελέξατο, τὸν δὲ ἀπίωσατο . . . ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἐκατέρου τούτων πρόθεσιν τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἐποιήσατο.” The authorship of this fragment on Rom. 9:11 is not entirely certain, but Staab assigns it to Diodore on the basis of style, content, and the name to whom the comment is attributed (“Theodul” [Θεοδούλου]; Diodore sometimes appears under the name of “Theodore”).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio epistolae ad Romanos* (PG 82:153).

<sup>83</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 144-47.

<sup>85</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 74:836).

<sup>86</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 391.

determine the Greek tradition after him, and given his own unique contributions, we now turn to his interpretation of 9:6-13.

#### *1.1.5 John Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.)*

John Chrysostom delivered his *Homilies on Romans* sometime between 386-397 C.E., while he served as a presbyter in Antioch and before he became the bishop of Constantinople.<sup>87</sup> He was a student of Diodore of Tarsus, who was himself a student of Eusebius of Emesa, and so it is not surprising that he followed the Greek tradition on Rom. 9:6-13 at various points. Nevertheless, his interpretation added a number of new elements.

Similar to Origen, Chrysostom saw the problem in Romans 9 as why the non-Jews attained salvation while the Jews did not: “It was to the forefathers of the Jews that he made the promises, and yet he has deserted their descendants, and put men, who never at any time knew him, into their good things.”<sup>88</sup> God had said to Abraham, “I will give this land to you and to your seed” (Gen. 12:7), and the privileges of Israel in 9:4-5 indicated that “God willed them indeed to be saved.”<sup>89</sup> So then how has Israel missed salvation in the messianic age? Some were accusing God, “He promises to one, and gives to another.”<sup>90</sup>

Paul answers in 9:6a that it is “not as though the word of God had taken no effect,” where “the word of God,” according to Chrysostom, refers to God’s promise to bless Abraham’s heirs.<sup>91</sup> Chrysostom’s understanding of why God’s word remains true is the same as Origen’s:

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<sup>87</sup> Charles Marriott, preface to Chrysostom’s *Homilies on Romans* in *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:331. For an account of the life of Chrysostom, see Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4-11.

<sup>88</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:461).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:462)

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:461)

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:460).

God never gave the promise of blessing to *all* Israelites;<sup>92</sup> he only ever gave it to “true Israel” (9:6b) who have seen God (Gen. 32:28, 30).<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Chrysostom says that when we consider the character of Abraham’s heirs, as Paul does in 9:7-13, we see that God never promised to bless all of Abraham’s physical children.<sup>94</sup>

In 9:7-9, Chrysostom saw Paul “blending the former things with the present,”<sup>95</sup> so that Isaac was a type of Abraham’s heirs in the messianic age. According to Chrysostom, Abraham’s heirs were called “in Isaac” (9:7b) so that “one may learn that they who are born after the fashion of Isaac, these are in the truest sense Abraham’s children. In what way was Isaac born then? Not according to the law of nature, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the power of the promise.”<sup>96</sup> Chrysostom thus defines “the children of promise” (9:8) as those who are born like Isaac by the power of God’s promise. As Isaac came from God’s promise, so the children of promise in the messianic age come from God’s promise spoken through the prophets (cf. 9:25-29).<sup>97</sup> As Isaac was born by God’s power in the old age of Sarah, so the children of promise are born by God’s power in “the old age of sins.”<sup>98</sup> As Isaac was born in the chilled womb of Sarah, so the children of promise are born in the waters of baptism.<sup>99</sup> And as Isaac was born by the power of the promise, so the children of promise are born by the power of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 4:28-29).<sup>100</sup> Thus, by speaking about baptism, the Spirit, and the promise spoken through Israel’s prophets, Chrysostom’s definition of “the children of promise” applies in the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:463-64).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:464).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:462).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:463).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

messianic age only, not in the previous age under the Mosaic covenant. His definition of the parallel concept of “true Israel” (9:6b), however, applied across both the old and new eras.

In 9:10-13, Jacob and Esau likewise foreshadowed Abraham’s future heirs. Following his predecessors, Chrysostom explained that God foreknew which child would be good and which child would be evil.<sup>101</sup> And so likewise in the messianic age, God knew beforehand which Israelites would believe and saved them accordingly.<sup>102</sup> Consistent with this interpretation, Chrysostom replaced “the purpose according to election” (ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις) in 9:11 with “the election according to foreknowledge” (ἡ ἐκλογὴ ἡ κατὰ πρόγνωσιν γενομένη).<sup>103</sup> Thus, it is likely that Chrysostom understood the “purpose” in 9:11 as Origen did in 8:28, as a *human’s* purpose to conform to God’s will.<sup>104</sup>

In 9:14, Chrysostom understood the charge against God’s justice as a charge against his arbitrary predestining activity (so also Origen). More specifically, he understood it as a charge against arbitrarily choosing the idol-worshipping non-Jews over the law-abiding Jews. According to Chrysostom, Paul met this objection in 9:14-18 with even harder cases of biblical election which the objector, who is a Scripture-revering Jew, could not explain, proving that there are some things a human being simply cannot understand about God.<sup>105</sup> For example, Chrysostom explained that while one could argue that Jacob was good and Esau was bad, in the case of the golden calf episode (Ex. 32), from which Paul gets his quote in Rom. 9:15, *all* the Israelites were found guilty and yet only some were punished. Why? God says that he has mercy on whom he has mercy (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15), indicating that he alone knows how to judge the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid. (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464-65).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:465).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:466).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 15 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:453).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:466-67).

human heart. Thus, unlike Origen, Chrysostom did not place 9:14-19 in the mouth of Paul's opponent.<sup>106</sup> But nor did he place these verses in the realm of Paul's convictions. Instead, they were meant to intensify the charge of God's injustice so as to make his Jewish opponent buckle under the weight of authoritative Scripture.

Chrysostom's interpretation of 9:6-13 expressed many elements that could be traced back to Origen, but at the same time he added novel elements of his own. As we said earlier, Chrysostom had a major influence on the rest of the Greek tradition, and so with him, we conclude our treatment of the early Greek tradition.

To briefly summarize our treatment of the early Greek interpretation of Romans 9:6-13, we have now seen a good amount of variety on the interpretation of key elements like "the children of promise"; we have argued that a predestinarian approach to the passage arose from gnostic Christian readings of the text which had a formative influence on Origen; and we have argued that Origen's *Commentary on Romans* had a determinative influence in the rest of the Greek patristic tradition. We may now turn our attention to the Latin West.

## *1.2 The Latin Tradition*

### *1.2.1 The Manichaean Context*

The Latin interpretation of Paul flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries, and this was largely due to the attempt by both Manichaean and Nicene Christians to claim Paul as their own. Manichaeism was a neo-gnostic form of Christianity that traced its roots to the Persian prophet Mani (216-76 C.E.), while Nicene Christianity defined itself by the Nicene Creed, developed during the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. as the standard of orthodox belief. Having spread rapidly in the ancient world, Manichaean Christianity provided *the* major challenge against

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<sup>106</sup> Contra Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 343.

which Nicene commentators interpreted Paul. In our treatment of the Latin tradition, we will focus on four major Nicene figures (the Manichaeans did not provide an interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13)—Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, and Pelagius. But in order to understand the significance of Manichaean Christianity on their readings of Rom. 9:6-13, we will first outline the Manichaean myth.

Unlike the Valentinian myth of the second century, the Manichaean myth posited two coeternal powers, good and evil, behind the universe.<sup>107</sup> According to the myth, evil made an attack upon the good before the creation of the world. Unsettled by evil's attack, God, who lives in the realm of light, sent forth emanations of his essence—known as the “First Man” and his “Five Sons” (a.k.a. the “vulnerable Jesus”)—to be consumed by the realm of darkness in order to dilute and debilitate evil's power.<sup>108</sup> But in order to ultimately recover this sacrificed light while keeping evil debilitated, God created the universe in such a way that when light was teased apart from darkness, light would be liberated while evil would remain imprisoned in the material world. As more light becomes liberated and as more darkness becomes imprisoned, the hope is that evil will be permanently disabled.

As Nicholas J. Baker-Brian comments, it is this loss of the divine essence to the darkness and its eventual recovery that not only constitutes the heart of the Manichaean myth, but also determines the shape of the Manichaean account of human beings and salvation.<sup>109</sup> When the First Man and his Five Sons were sent to the realm of darkness, their fragments were scattered and would eventually constitute “the stuff of souls”—whether this stuff was contained in trees, in

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<sup>107</sup> Our account of the Manichaean myth is drawn from Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (New York/London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 110-18, and Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* (2 vols; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012-2013), passim (esp. 1:75-96).

<sup>108</sup> As Jason BeDuhn notes, “the Manichaeans transferred to a primordial event the same salvational sacrifice of God's ‘son’ posited in mainstream Christian belief” (BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 1:80).

<sup>109</sup> Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 111.

food, or in the human body. Thus, when the first humans Adam and Eve were created, they contained a mixture of both good and evil: their souls were essentially good, but they were encased in bodies that were oppressively bad. A result of this dualistic constitution is that humans are at war with themselves, contending with evil forces that run contrary to their essentially good natures. However, the evil component is dominant over the fragmented soul, so that from birth the soul of each individual is in slumber, morally incompetent, and unable to achieve its own liberation. Yet, human beings are born with different levels of good and evil, determining the degree to which evil rules in their lives, as Ephraim of Syria testifies in the fourth century:

But if [the Manichaeans] say that there are Bodies which are more evil than other Bodies, and Corporeal Frames which are fouler than others, . . . such Souls as chance upon perturbed Bodies are more perturbed than others who happen to come into gentle bodies.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, before humans have any choice in the matter, evil is made to be an inevitable part of their experience. For this reason, Augustine understood Manichaeism to absolve him from any responsibility for his personal wrongdoings,<sup>111</sup> even though the Manichaeans themselves held to practices like confession and repentance and recognized the soul awoken by God as a responsible agent.<sup>112</sup>

Given the debilitated state of the human soul, the soul's salvation, according to the Manichaeans, had to be initiated unilaterally by God. Throughout human history, God has been sending apostles to liberate those souls that have a higher concentration of light. But before these apostles and their "church" are born, each apostle pre-selects which souls will be liberated. This

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<sup>110</sup> Ephraim of Syria, *Fifth Discourse Against the False Teachings*, cxviii (Mitchell).

<sup>111</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 5.10.18.

<sup>112</sup> So BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 1:143-44; cf. Augustine, *A Debate with Fortunatus* 21.

doctrine of predestination can be found, for example, in *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, an early Manichaean document dating to the late third century:<sup>113</sup>

Now, this is how it is for you to understand (about) the souls of the [ele]/ct and the catechumens that shall receive the hop[e of]<sup>114</sup> God and enter the land of the living. / So that their forms could be chosen in the heights: before / he is born in this human flesh and befo[re the a]/postle is manifested in the flesh, still abid[ing . . . ] he shall choose the forms of his entire church and make th[em] / free, whether of the elect or of the catechume[ns]. / Now, when he chooses the forms of the elect and [the] / catechumens, and makes them free from abov[e], afterwards he shall come down immediately and choose them.<sup>115</sup>

After a soul is pre-selected for salvation, it had to be efficaciously awoken from its slumber through an act of divine intervention.<sup>116</sup> (This spiritual awakening involved the acquisition of knowledge of oneself, i.e. *gnosis*, which is why Manichaeism is classed as a neo-gnostic religion.) In *The Nature of the Good (De natura boni)*, Augustine describes this doctrine of an “effective awakening” which he had learned as a Manichaean:

[T]he divine nature is dead and Christ resuscitates it. It is sick and he heals it. . . . It is conquered and captive and he sets it free. . . . It has lost feeling and he quickens it. It is blinded and he illumines it.<sup>117</sup>

Or in *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* we read:

[ . . . The] Light / [Mind] comes and finds the soul . . . He shall loosen the m[ind of the soul and relea/se] it from the bone. He shall release the th[ought of the soul] from the sinew; and s[o] bind the thought [of the sin in] the sinew. . . . This is how he shall release the members of the soul, / and make them free from the five members of sin. . . . He shall set right the members of the soul; form / and purify them, and construct a new man of them, a child [o]f righteousness.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Iain Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher: The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* (NHMS 37; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1995), xix.

<sup>114</sup> Lit. “word.”

<sup>115</sup> *Keph.* 90, 224.28–225.5 (Gardner; material in brackets is original to Gardner). See also 1, 10.8–11.2; 1, 11.35–12.8; 9, 40.24–33; *Hom.* 3:24–28.

<sup>116</sup> For further discussion, see BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:288–302 (esp. 291–97).

<sup>117</sup> Augustine, *The Nature of the Good* 41 (Burleigh); see also idem, *Confessions* 7.2.3.

<sup>118</sup> *Keph.* 38, 96.8–97.27 (material in brackets is original to Gardner). See also 56, 142.12ff.; 86, 215.1–4.

Those who have their souls “awoken,” or “set right,” then become the Manichaeans “Hearers” and the “Elect,” the former becoming the latter upon further spiritual progress. The Hearers were not guaranteed final salvation at death, but they could attain final liberation by adopting the lifestyle of the Elect, which involved, among other things, strict ascetic practices designed to increase the amount of light residing in their bodies (e.g. the Elect abstained from meat, which was considered to have a high concentration of dark matter).<sup>119</sup> Those souls that attain a sufficient amount of light finally return to the realm of light, whereas those souls that remain fragmented break apart at death and are later incorporated into new bodies. As light is recycled in this manner over many generations, the cycle of pre-selection, divine awakening, and cosmic struggle continues until more and more of the divine essence is reclaimed. While some light will remain permanently tied to evil, thereby keeping it disabled, most of the light will be reclaimed.

This was the myth through which the Manichaeans interpreted the New Testament. Puzzling, however, is the fact that they did not claim Rom. 9:6-13 as their own, even though, at first glance, it seemed like it would provide strong support for their myth. God’s prenatal selection of Isaac and Jacob apart from their deeds could have easily supported the Manichaean view of predestination and human powerlessness. But as Jason BeDuhn suggests, the portrayal of God in Romans 9 as a seemingly all-powerful, arbitrary, and even evil-producing God (cf. the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart) did not fit well with the Manichaean view of God,<sup>120</sup> who was reasonable, all-good, and striving to achieve the salvation of all. Moreover, the Manichaeans had a low view of the patriarchal narratives (as well as the Old Testament more generally), as they were filled with questionable stories of child sacrifice, polygamy, deception, and so on.<sup>121</sup> As a

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<sup>119</sup> On the Manichaean use of the body as a “light redeeming factory,” see Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body: In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>120</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:283-84.

<sup>121</sup> See, e.g., Augustine, *Answer to Faustus* 22.5 (*WSA* I/20: 299-300).

result, Nicene exegetes did not have to counter a Manichaean interpretation of 9:6-13, simply because there was none.

Although the Manichaeans did not, as far as we know, provide a reading of 9:6-13, we would nevertheless argue that the Latin Nicene interpretation of this passage was influenced by Manichaeism. The Manichaean myth spoke of humans born with different levels of good and evil, an election before birth, and a divine call that unilaterally awoke some and not others. A reader familiar with the Manichaean myth could have easily read these elements into 9:6-13, just as many gnostic Christians had done with their myth in the second and third centuries. It is not very surprising then that we find Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine (a former Manichean), and Pelagius each responding explicitly to Manichaean elements in their interpretation of 9:6-13.

In Ambrosiaster's commentary on the rejection of Esau in 9:10-13, he claims that Saul and Judas Iscariot—people rejected by God as Esau was—can in fact be “good” for a season, showing that God never rejected them because they were created with an evil nature (i.e. an evil substance), but because they made bad choices with their own free-will. In the earliest (*alpha*) recension of his commentary,<sup>122</sup> Ambrosiaster said:

It is not to be wondered at that these men were considered good, because all nature is good and no substance is evil, but rather transgression, which arises from the will [*sic*]. It is the will which is betrayal by error.<sup>123</sup>

Ambrosiaster's insistence that transgression is to be attributed to one's will, rather than to one's nature, would have easily been seen as an anti-Manichaean statement. As Julian of Eclanum said

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<sup>122</sup> We will discuss the recensions in section 1.2.2 below.

<sup>123</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans 9:13* (Bray). In the second (*beta*) recension of his commentary, the text reads as follows: “It is not possible for the good in anyone to be totally wiped out, for nature itself cannot be changed but only the will, yet even then not in everything, because there remains in human nature something which continues to bear witness to the Creator” (Ibid., n. 7 [Bray]). In both recensions, Ambrosiaster preserves the nature/will distinction and insists on the freedom of the will to do good or evil.

to Augustine, “This was always the biggest difference between the Manichees and the Catholics. . . . For we ascribe every sin to an evil will, but they ascribe it to an evil nature.”<sup>124</sup>

In a similar vein, Jerome, discussing 9:10-13 in his commentary on Gal. 1:15, found it relevant to refute the gnostic doctrine of natures held by Origen’s opponents almost two centuries earlier. He said the following on 9:10-13:

Here a foothold is gained by the heretics who fancy two different but interdependent natures, one spiritual and redeemable, the other material, animal-like, and destined to perish. It could never be the case, they argue, that a righteous man is chosen by God before doing good or that a sinner is despised before sinning, unless the damned and the saved had different natures.<sup>125</sup>

As Andrew Cain observes, “Jerome’s argument” at this point “undoubtedly comes directly from the pages of Origen.”<sup>126</sup> And in all likelihood, he found it relevant to address the gnostic doctrine of natures because of its similarity to ideas in what his contemporary Nicene colleagues considered to be the most dangerous heresy, Manichaeism. Jerome mentioned the doctrine of natures again on Gal. 6:1, where he observed how “the heretics” used the good and bad trees of Matt. 7:17 (par. Luke 6.43) to support their doctrine.<sup>127</sup> Augustine noted the same use of Matt. 7:17 by the Manichaeans,<sup>128</sup> suggesting that Jerome, while addressing Origen’s opponents, probably had his own Manichaean opponents in mind as well.

Like Ambrosiaster and Jerome, Augustine, in his *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68 (one of his earliest writings on Romans 9), ruled out the possibility that Esau was unjustly rejected because he was determined by an evil nature:

God does not do anything unjustly, nor does any nature exist that is not indebted to God for its existence, because to God is owed all its dignity and beauty and harmony of its

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<sup>124</sup> Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 1.24 (WSA I/25:65, Teske).

<sup>125</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians* 1.1.15-16a (FC 121:83, Cain).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. (FC 121:83, n. 134, Cain). Cain points to passages like *On First Principles* 2.9.5; 3.1.6; *Commentary on Romans* 1.3.3; 2.4.7; 2.10.2; 4.12.1; 8.8.7; 8.11.2.

<sup>127</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians* 3.6.1 (FC 121:247).

<sup>128</sup> Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount* 2.24.79.

parts, and if you have analyzed this [i.e., the dignity, beauty and harmony of a given nature] and removed every element of it down to its final traces, there is nothing that remains.<sup>129</sup>

Against the Manichaeans,<sup>130</sup> Augustine asserts that there was no evil nature in Esau that caused him to be rejected, because all natures are good, since all natures come from God. Similarly, a few years later in *To Simplician*, Augustine precluded the possibility that Jacob and Esau were differentiated on the basis of different natures:

Were they perhaps somehow of different natures? Who could claim this, inasmuch as they had the same father and the same mother, came from a single act of intercourse and the same creator? As the same creator brought forth from the same earth different living and self-reproducing beings, did he from the same union and embrace of [two] human beings bring forth different offspring in twins, one whom he loved and another whom he hated?<sup>131</sup>

Since Jacob and Esau shared essentially the same origin, Augustine found no basis for the claim that they had different natures.

Finally, according to Pelagius, the objection in Rom. 9:14 came from one who thought Paul was saying in 9:6-13 that “God makes some good, others evil.” This person objected that “it [is] unjust to punish those who had not sinned of [their] own free will.”<sup>132</sup> Pelagius’s language of a person being made good or evil and of free-will certainly sounds as if he had Manichaeism in mind.

Thus, it appears that Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, and Pelagius, in their comments on 9:6-13, argued explicitly against the Manichaean idea that some humans are created with an evil nature that predestines them for destruction. Yet, as we shall see, these Nicene interpreters,

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<sup>129</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.6 (*WSA* I/12:121, Ramsey; material in brackets is original to Ramsey).

<sup>130</sup> Augustine referred to the Manichaeans earlier in his response to question 68 as well, when he spoke of “some heretics and adversaries of the law and the prophets” (Ibid. 68.1 [*WSA* I/12:116, Ramsey]). As we mentioned earlier (section 1.2.1), the Manichaeans had a low view of the Old Testament.

<sup>131</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician* 2,4 (*WSA* I/12:188-89, Ramsey).

<sup>132</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14 (material in brackets is original to de Bruyn).

like Origen, held that 9:6-13 was a passage about predestination. This perspective was no doubt partly encouraged by their consideration of the Manichaean myth. However, again like Origen, the route they took to preserve free-will was to base predestination on divine foreknowledge.

In considering the relevance of Manichaeism for Nicene readings of 9:6-13, we should also situate the free-will reading of this passage in the context of the broader free-will debate of the late fourth century. As Jason BeDuhn puts it, “From their considerable common ground within the Christian tradition, Manichaeism and the emergent mainstream orthodoxy had in part developed and come to define themselves in distinction from one another on this subject [i.e. free-will].”<sup>133</sup> Before the debates between Augustine and Pelagius in the early fifth century, any mention of the free-will/determinism issue among Christians in the late fourth century would have been situated in the debates between Manichaean and Nicene Christianity. Moreover, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, and Pelagius *repeatedly* argued against the Manichaean denial of free-will, so that when we arrive at their free-will interpretation of 9:6-13, it is almost impossible to not view this as another instance of their anti-Manichaean polemic.

We have argued that Latin Nicene exegetes were consciously aware of and influenced by Manichaean beliefs as they interpreted Rom. 9:6-13. The Manichaean myth encouraged a predestinarian approach to the passage and compelled the Nicene interpreters to respond. But we should not suppose that the Manichaeans were the only major influence on the Nicene reading of 9:6-13. After all, the entire Greek tradition from Origen onward had already defended a free-will reading of the passage against a gnostic tradition that shared many similarities with Manichaeism. Thus, after examining the Latin Nicene interpretation of 9:6-13, we will return to

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<sup>133</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 1:270.

the question of whether or not the Latin exegetes show evidence of influence from their Greek counterparts (section 1.3).

### 1.2.2 Ambrosiaster (fl. 370s-380s C.E.)

The earliest Latin commentary on Romans was written by Marius Victorinus in Rome during the 360s C.E., but only his commentaries on Galatians, Philippians, and Ephesians have survived to this day.<sup>134</sup> For the earliest extant Latin commentary on Romans, we must turn to an anonymous author who produced a set of *Commentaries* on the Pauline letters and *Questions on the Old and New Testaments* (*Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*).<sup>135</sup> After Ambrosian authorship of the *Commentaries* was overturned by humanists in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.,<sup>136</sup> our anonymous author was named “Ambrosiaster” (i.e. “pseudo-Ambrose”) in the 17<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>137</sup> He was most likely a

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<sup>134</sup> Victorinus also wrote commentaries on 1 and 2 Corinthians. For more on Victorinus, see the introduction by S.A. Cooper in *Marius Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>135</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas* (CSEL81); idem, *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (CSEL 50). For English translations of the commentaries, see idem, *Commentaries Romans and 1-2 Corinthians* (trans. and ed. Gerald L. Bray; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009); idem, *Commentaries on Galatians-Philemon* (trans. and ed. Gerald L. Bray; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>136</sup> The Augustinian authorship of the *Questions* would not be questioned until the 17<sup>th</sup> c., but it would not be until 1905 that Alexander Souter definitively proved that the *Commentaries* and the *Questions* were written by the same author (Alexander Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster* [Texts and Studies 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905], 23-160.).

<sup>137</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the development of Ambrosiaster's pseudonymous identity, see Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29-32. While a number of attempts have been made to discover the real identity of Ambrosiaster, none have been successful, leading many to consider the search a futile endeavor. See *Ibid.*, 33-62 (esp. 33-44) for a number of proposals and their problems.

presbyter<sup>138</sup> in Rome,<sup>139</sup> and given various temporal references in his works,<sup>140</sup> his use of Victorinus's Pauline *Commentaries*,<sup>141</sup> and his contacts with Jerome in the 380s C.E.,<sup>142</sup> most agree that his writings belong in the 370s and 380s C.E.<sup>143</sup>

Ambrosiaster's *Commentary on Romans* exists in three principal recensions, listed in the CSEL edition<sup>144</sup> as *alpha* ( $\alpha$ ), *beta* ( $\beta$ ), and *gamma* ( $\gamma$ ). Work on this *Commentary* was probably underway in the 370s C.E., with part of the *beta* recension responding to criticisms levelled by Jerome in his *Letter 27* of 384 C.E.<sup>145</sup> There is a growing consensus that Ambrosiaster himself was responsible for all three recensions,<sup>146</sup> just as other early Christian writers edited and reissued their works.<sup>147</sup> The style of the *alpha* recension is "more like a series of lecture notes

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<sup>138</sup> Ambrosiaster is knowledgeable, for example, about customs related to church office; many of the *Questions* appear to be homilies addressing an audience in the second person; he is critical of Roman deacons; etc. For further discussion, see David G. Hunter, "On the Sin of Adam and Eve: A Little-Known Defense of Marriage and Childbearing by Ambrosiaster," *HTR* 82 (1989): 285-6; Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 83-86.

<sup>139</sup> Ambrosiaster suggests in various writings that he is writing from Rome. His *Commentary on Romans* 16:4 provides one example: "For one understands that all the people whom Paul greets as a way of giving the Romans stability, were present here, that is, at Rome" (translated by Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 16; "nam ad confirmationem Romanorum hi omnes quos Salutatur, hic, id est Romae, fuisse intelleguntur" [*gamma* recension]). For more examples, see David G. Hunter, "On the Sin of Adam and Eve," 284-85; Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 12-17, 44-62.

<sup>140</sup> For example, Ambrosiaster mentions in his *Commentary on 1 Timothy* 3.15 that the church's ruler at the time was Damasus, whose reign lasted from 366-384 C.E. For more examples of temporal references, see Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 12-15.

<sup>141</sup> On Victorinus's influence on Ambrosiaster, see Cooper, *Marius Victorinus' Commentary*, ch. 6.

<sup>142</sup> See David G. Hunter, "The Significance of Ambrosiaster," *J ECS* 17 (2009): 6-7, 9-13.

<sup>143</sup> Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 16, places Ambrosiaster's works in the 370s and 380s C.E. Hunter, "The Significance of Ambrosiaster," 7, opts for the early 380s.

<sup>144</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas* (CSEL 81).

<sup>145</sup> So Heinrich Vogels, "Ambrosiaster und Hieronymus," *RBén* 66 (1956): 14-19, cited in Hunter, "The Significance of Ambrosiaster," 10. Hunter summarizes Vogel's conclusion, noting that it has gained wide acceptance: "Ambrosiaster first criticized Jerome's biblical revisions [i.e. Jerome's revision of the New Testament based on Greek codices] in the *alpha* version of the commentary, then Jerome had responded in *Letter 27*, and then Ambrosiaster reissued the *beta* version with his more well developed defense of the Old Latin text."

<sup>146</sup> See Heinrich Vogels, preface to CSEL 81, pp. xxi ff; Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 15; Hunter, "The Significance of Ambrosiaster," 9.

<sup>147</sup> The classic study on patristic authors editing and reissuing their works is Gustave Bardy, "Éditions et rééditions d'ouvrages patristiques," *Rbén* 47 (1935): 356-80, cited in Hunter, "The Significance of Ambrosiaster," 9, n. 27.

than a finished commentary,”<sup>148</sup> while the *beta* and *gamma* recensions try to clarify obscurities. Some of the more extensive revisions reveal “a writer deeply engaged with current events and willing to adapt or expand his exegesis in the light of new situations or new information.”<sup>149</sup> On Rom. 9:6-13, however, a comparison of the recensions shows no major changes. Having introduced Ambrosiaster and his *Commentary on Romans*, we may now turn to his exegesis.

On Rom. 9:1-5, Ambrosiaster explained that Paul grieved over his Jewish kin “who have deprived themselves of [the] eternal and saving blessing by their unbelief,” and have lost the privileges listed in 9:4-5: “by not accepting the Savior they lose the privilege of their fathers and the merit of the promises.”<sup>150</sup>

According to Ambrosiaster, Israel’s unbelief does not mean that God’s word has failed (9:6a), for God’s word said, “In Isaac your seed will be called” (9:7b).<sup>151</sup> For Ambrosiaster, 9:7b spoke about the future, and it indicated that Abraham’s heirs in the messianic age would be “those who accepted the faith by which Isaac was born.”<sup>152</sup> Ambrosiaster reasons that just as Abraham was blessed by believing what God said about Isaac, so Abraham’s future heirs are those who share his faith and believe what God said about Christ (cf. Rom. 4:18-25).<sup>153</sup> The parallel is established because “Isaac was born as a type of the Savior,” for “Abraham was told that all the nations would be blessed in his offspring,” but “[t]his did not happen in Isaac, but in

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<sup>148</sup> Gerald L. Bray, introduction to *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, by Ambrosiaster (trans. Gerald L. Bray; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>149</sup> Hunter, “The Significance of Ambrosiaster,” 9-13.

<sup>150</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:1-5 (Bray).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 9:6-7.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* (Bray).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

him who was promised to Abraham in Isaac, that is, Christ” (cf. Gal. 3:16).<sup>154</sup> As Schelkle observes, Ambrosiaster jumped quickly to a christological reading.<sup>155</sup>

Paul made the implications of 9:7b explicit in 9:8 by naming “the children of promise” as Abraham’s heirs. Ambrosiaster defined “the children of promise” as those “whom God foreknew would receive his promise, whether they are Jews or Gentiles,”<sup>156</sup> and for him, the promise that must be believed is the promise of Christ (the type of Isaac) to Abraham for the salvation of all nations.<sup>157</sup> Two observations can be made about this definition. First, this definition is very similar to Origen’s. Like Origen, Ambrosiaster held that “the children of promise” are “those who accepted the faith by which Isaac was born.”<sup>158</sup> Also similar to Origen’s definition of “true Israel,” Ambrosiaster held that “the children of promise” are “the ones who deserve to be called Israelites, that is to say, those who have seen God and believe.”<sup>159</sup> A second observation is that Ambrosiaster seems to have seen a correlation between “the children of promise” and 8:28-29, where he gave the same definition for God’s elect. In 8:28, Ambrosiaster commented, “Those who are called according to the promise [instead of Paul’s word, “purpose”] are those whom God knew would be true believers in the future.”<sup>160</sup> Or again, he commented on 8:29, “Those whom God foreknew would believe in him he also chose to receive the promises.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. (Bray). Cf. Ambrosiaster’s comments on Rom. 9:9: “This prefigures Christ, because Christ was promised to Abraham as a future son, in whom the word of the promise would be fulfilled, that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him. For when the promise was made to Abraham and he heard that *in your seed shall all the nations be blessed*, Christ was also promised to him in the descent of Isaac, in whom we see this promise fulfilled.”

<sup>155</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 355.

<sup>156</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans 9:6-7* (Bray).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. (Bray): “Thus whoever believes that Christ Jesus was promised to Abraham is a child of Abraham and a brother of Isaac. Abraham was told that all the nations would be blessed in his offspring. This did not happen in Isaac, but in him who was promised to Abraham in Isaac, that is, Christ, in whom all the nations are blessed when they believe.”

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 9:6-7 (Bray).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. (Bray).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 8:28 (Bray).

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 8:29 (Bray).

Like his Greek predecessors, Ambrosiaster based God's predestination on foreknowledge, but unlike his predecessors he spoke of the foreknowledge of faith and not of works. For example, we have just seen that Ambrosiaster defined "the children of promise" (9:8) as those "whom God foreknew would receive his promise."<sup>162</sup> And given Ambrosiaster's correlation of 9:8 and 8:28-29, "receiving" the promise is done by faith. So also with Jacob and Esau (9:10-13), God predestined one and not the other to salvation "knowing what each of them would become."<sup>163</sup> Yet, Ambrosiaster also imbued Jacob and Esau with national significance, recalling the interpretation of Irenaeus:<sup>164</sup> "Jacob and Esau were born as types of two peoples, believers and unbelievers, who come from the same source but are nevertheless very different."<sup>165</sup>

Given 9:6-13, the charge against God in 9:14 had to do with God loving some and hating others before they were born. Unlike Origen and the subsequent Greek tradition, Ambrosiaster was the first to view the voice and point of view in 9:14ff. as Paul's own.<sup>166</sup> And consistent with his approach to 9:6-13, he read 9:14ff. through the lens of foreknowledge. For example, Pharaoh was condemned because God knew in advance that he would not reform.<sup>167</sup> Or again, 9:15 really means, "I will have mercy . . . on the one whom I know in advance that I will show mercy to, because I know that he will be converted and remain with me."<sup>168</sup> Otherwise, Ambrosiaster read 9:16 ("So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy") in a manner

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 9:6-7 (Bray).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 9:11-13 (Bray).

<sup>164</sup> So also Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 356.

<sup>165</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:10 (Bray).

<sup>166</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 271.

<sup>167</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 9:15 (Bray).

similar to Origen: “Rightly so, because it is not the will of the one who asks but the decision of the one who gives what there is to be given.”<sup>169</sup>

Ambrosiaster thus shares many similarities with the Greek tradition, but he also adds a number of distinct elements to the interpretation of 9:6-13.

### 1.2.3 Jerome (ca. 347-420 C.E.)

After Ambrosiaster, the next major commentator on Paul was the ascetic, translator, and biblical scholar Jerome. Although he did not write a commentary on Romans, he wrote four Pauline commentaries within a span of four months in 386 C.E. (Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians, and Titus) which would shortly after find their way into the hands of Augustine. As we said in section 1.2.1, Jerome discussed Rom. 9:10-13 in his *Commentary on Galatians* and drew directly from Origen.<sup>170</sup> We note his early interpretation of 9:6-13 as a clear example of someone who transmitted Origen’s ideas to the Latin West.

In his interpretation of Gal. 1:15, where Paul says he was set apart by God from the womb, Jerome recalled the similar case of Jacob and Esau in Rom. 9:10-13. Jerome says “the heretics” take this passage to support their doctrine of natures, and as we said earlier (section 1.2.1), “the heretics” probably represent a conflation of Origen’s gnostic opponents in the early third century and Jerome’s Manichaean opponents in the late fourth century. In response to these opponents, Jerome appealed to Origen’s use of foreknowledge to explain 9:10-13:

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 9:16 (Bray).

<sup>170</sup> Jerome made clear in the preface to Book I of his commentary that he was most indebted to Origen: “I . . . have followed the commentaries of Origen. He wrote five extraordinary volumes on Paul’s epistles to the Galatians and rounded out the tenth book of his *Miscellanies* with a brief section expounding it. He also produced various homilies and scholia that would be sufficient all by themselves” (*Commentary on Galatians*, preface to Book I [FC 121:57, Cain]). He goes on to mention other influences from the Greek commentary tradition (Didymus the Blind, Apollinaris of Laodicea, “the ancient heretic Alexander,” Eusebius of Emesa, and Theodore of Heraclea), but his most substantial debt was owed to Origen. For further discussion on the various ways Origen influenced Jerome’s *Commentary on Romans*, see Andrew Cain, introduction to *St. Jerome: Commentary on Galatians*, by Jerome (trans. Andrew Cain; FC 121; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 27-30. In the words of Cain, “[Origen’s] presence can be felt on virtually every page” (p. 27).

There is an easy solution to this conundrum. God's foreknowledge allows him to love whom he knows will be righteous even before they emerge from the womb, and to hate whom he knows will be sinners even before they ever commit a sin.<sup>171</sup>

Moreover, Jerome rejected the solution of the merits of the pre-existent soul, which could be traced back to Origen.<sup>172</sup> Thus, in more ways than one, Jerome's interpretation of 9:6-13 was influenced by Origen.

#### 1.2.4 Augustine (354-430 C.E.)

With Augustine, we come to what is arguably the most significant interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13 during the Patristic period, for his general approach to Romans 9 would reign supreme in the West throughout the Medieval and Reformation periods. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that his interpretation of the chapter developed over a long period of time and in the heat of intense debate. As a result, it would be a major mistake to overlook the context in which his interpretation arose<sup>173</sup> and to neglect a careful study of how exactly his views took the shape that they did. With this in mind, we will approach Augustine's treatment of 9:6-13 under three general headings: (a) early writings on Romans 9:6-13 (394-395 C.E.); (b) Augustine's letter *To Simplician* (396-397 C.E.); and (c) later writings on Romans 9:6-13 (398-430 C.E.).

But before we begin, we would like to acknowledge our indebtedness to Jason BeDuhn's work, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*,<sup>174</sup> which has masterfully placed Augustine's developing thought in the context of his interaction with the Manichaeans. In particular, we have found both helpful and thorough his treatment of Augustine on Paul up to and including his response to Simplician in 396-397 C.E.<sup>175</sup> For a more comprehensive treatment of Manichaeism's

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<sup>171</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians* 1.1.15-16a (FC 121:83, Cain).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. (FC 121:84).

<sup>173</sup> Cf. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:192.

<sup>174</sup> Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* (2 vols; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012-2013).

<sup>175</sup> See BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:192-238, 274-313.

influence on Augustine's reading of Paul, we can only point to the work itself.

#### 1.2.4.1 Early Writings on Romans 9:6-13 (394-395 C.E.)

After spending more than a decade as a Manichaean,<sup>176</sup> Augustine was baptized as a Nicene Christian in 387 C.E. and ordained as a priest of Hippo in 391 C.E. Only a year later he was asked by a group of Catholics and Donatists to publicly debate a local Manichaean leader by the name of Fortunatus,<sup>177</sup> and it would be this debate, more than anything, that sparked Augustine's intense engagement with Paul.<sup>178</sup> At this point in Augustine's career, Scripture was still largely unfamiliar terrain to him,<sup>179</sup> so that when Fortunatus cited text after text from Paul (e.g. Eph. 2:1-18; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:23-25) to support the Manichaean emphasis on the powerless, enslaved situation of the human will, Augustine was caught off guard. Prior to the debate, Augustine had held to an optimistic view of the will, where the will was unencumbered by sin and free to pursue the good it desired,<sup>180</sup> but Fortunatus seriously disturbed this view by presenting Augustine with a set of biblical texts that he had not yet pondered or even known.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Augustine claims to have been a Manichaean for only nine years (see *Confessions* 4.1.1), but this number reflects the period in which Augustine held to Manichaean beliefs with conviction. As BeDuhn observes, it ignores the three years after his disappointing meeting with Faustus in 382 C.E. during which Augustine continued to "go through the motions" and associate with the Manichaean community (*Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 1:148-49).

<sup>177</sup> For a detailed discussion of Augustine's debate with Fortunatus, see BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:122-63.

<sup>178</sup> So Malcolm E. Alflatt, "The Development of the Idea of Involuntary Sin in St. Augustine," *REA* 20 (1974): 132-34; Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *JTS* 37 (1986): 22; BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:192-93. W. S. Babcock's suggestion that Augustine's study of Paul was motivated by a desire to prepare himself as a priest and bishop of Hippo is true but inadequate as it neglects Augustine's debate with the Manichaeans ("Augustine and Paul: the case of Romans IX," *StPatr* 16.2 [1985]: 479).

<sup>179</sup> Augustine indicates as much in his letter to Valerius in 391 C.E. when he said that instead of being preoccupied with priestly duties, he had hoped to have a season of freedom to better acquaint himself with Holy Scripture (*Letter* 21.2).

<sup>180</sup> See, for example, Augustine, *True Religion* 15.29 (Burleigh), written in 391 C.E.: "For divine providence has so moderated our punishment that even in this corruptible body it is permitted to us to work towards righteousness, to lay aside all pride and submit to God alone, not to trust in ourselves but to commit ourselves to be ruled and defended by him alone"; see also 14.28; idem, *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* 1.3.6.

<sup>181</sup> As BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 193, observes, Augustine had read Paul at the time of his conversion (cf. *Confessions* 7.21.27; *Against the Academics* 2.2.5) and even as a Manichaean, given the way he

Shaken by the debate, and in an attempt to reclaim Paul for Nicene Christianity, Augustine turned his attention to Paul.

To aid his study of the apostle, Augustine gathered as many exegetical resources on Paul as he could. He acquired the Pauline commentaries by Marius Victorinus,<sup>182</sup> Jerome,<sup>183</sup> and “Hilary” (whom modern scholarship now identifies as “Ambrosiaster”).<sup>184</sup> Although he made a request to Jerome for translations of Origen’s commentaries in 394-395 C.E. (*Letter 28, 2*), his request never reached Jerome. He also acquired an exegetical handbook, *The Book of Rules*, by the Donatist Tyconius, and he may have received a Latin translation of an anti-Manichaean work by Titus of Bostra.<sup>185</sup> In the summer of 394 C.E., during the Catholic conference in Carthage, Augustine was ready to begin discussions with his colleagues on the interpretation of Paul.<sup>186</sup> These discussions yielded, in 394-395 C.E., the *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos*); an *Exposition to the Epistle to the Galatians* (*Expositio epistolae ad Galatas*); the *Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (*Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*); questions 66-74 of his *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* (*De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*); and the final additions to *Free Choice* (*De libero arbitrio*), which made significant use of Paul. It is in the *Propositions* and in question 68

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uses Pauline texts in *The Morals of the Catholic Church*, written in 388 C.E. But Fortunatus brought to light new elements from Paul’s letters.

<sup>182</sup> For Augustine’s likely dependence on Victorinus, see Eric Plumer, introduction to *Augustine’s Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes*, by Augustine (trans. Eric Plumer; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7-33.

<sup>183</sup> Augustine had been carefully reading and evaluating Jerome’s commentary on Galatians by 394-395 C.E., when Augustine wrote to Jerome criticizing a position the latter took in his commentary (*Letter 28, 3*).

<sup>184</sup> In Augustine’s *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, completed in 421 C.E., he mentioned an interpretation by “the holy Hilary.” The interpretation, however, came straight from Ambrosiaster’s commentary on Romans. It is difficult to know if Augustine had access to Ambrosiaster’s commentary in 394-396 C.E., but we slightly favor the conclusion that he did (see section 1.3.2 below).

<sup>185</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:194.

<sup>186</sup> Augustine, *Revisions* 1.23.1 (*WSA I/2:91*).

of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* that we find Augustine's earliest exegesis of Rom. 9:6-13.

In Augustine's earliest writing on Paul, the *Propositions*, he indicates the purpose of his interpretation in a comment on Rom. 3:20. Regarding Paul's statement that "through the Law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20), Augustine said that "[s]uch statements must be read with great care, so that the Apostle seems neither to condemn the Law nor to take away man's free will,"<sup>187</sup> and this indeed was his concern throughout the *Propositions*.<sup>188</sup> Augustine's exegesis can thus be characterized as anti-Manichaeism, since, as we said earlier (section 1.2.1), the Manichaeans both disparaged the Old Testament and spoke of the will's powerlessness to do good. And to combat the Manichaeans, Augustine had a rich free-will tradition to draw from. In the words of BeDuhn:

Behind Augustine's efforts stood the established tropes of late fourth-century Nicene interpretation of Paul, which could trace their antecedents back more than a century earlier to Origen, who had confronted Gnostic readings of Paul similar to the Manichaean challenge in their denial of an absolute freedom of the human will. Augustine's contemporaries and near-contemporaries all toed the free will line, and he initially offered little that was new. This should not surprise us, given both his inexperience as an exegete and the fact that texts such as *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* and even *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* amount to summaries of opinions developed collectively with his Catholic colleagues in Hippo and Carthage. We can understand his reluctance to call the existing lines of interpretation into question, since there seemed such broad consensus on them and they so closely matched the views into which he had been indoctrinated as a Catholic.<sup>189</sup>

As BeDuhn indicates, Augustine's early free-will interpretation of Paul shared much in common with his contemporaries and predecessors, having readily absorbed the Nicene free-will approach to Paul after his troubling debate with Fortunatus. And with that, we may now turn to Augustine's earliest interpretation of 9:6-13.

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<sup>187</sup> Augustine, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* 13-18 (Fredriksen Landes).

<sup>188</sup> So Paula Fredriksen Landes, introduction to *Augustine on Romans*, by Augustine (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), ix-xi.

<sup>189</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:196.

Augustine's earliest mention of Jacob and Esau in Romans 9 occurred in his *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>190</sup> He reports that because of 9:11-13, some were led to think that Paul had done away with free-will, as God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born. But like Origen and Ambrosiaster, Augustine explained that "God did this by his foreknowledge, by which he knows the character even of the unborn."<sup>191</sup> Yet, it was not a person's works that God foreknew, since Paul explicitly said, "not by works" (9:12). So then on what basis did God choose? As Augustine will state throughout his works, "no choice can be made between absolutely equal things."<sup>192</sup> Something must have differentiated Jacob from Esau, otherwise election would be arbitrary and unjust. And so Augustine argued, like Ambrosiaster, that God elects by his foreknowledge of faith. And in this way, Augustine preserved free-will because "[b]elief is our work" while "good deeds are his who gives the Holy Spirit to believers."<sup>193</sup> Augustine then explained that ascribing belief to the power of free-will does not make salvation a human accomplishment. Rather, salvation is by grace, since without God's call, a person would never have the occasion to believe in the first place. And so with the sequence of call–faith–Spirit–works, Augustine maintained the priority of grace while preserving free-will. At the same time, he was able to reach a compromise with Fortunatus on the limited ability of

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<sup>190</sup> Augustine, *Propositions* 60. There is some uncertainty over the order of the *Propositions* and question 68 of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*. On the one hand, Babcock, "Augustine and Paul," 476, placed question 68 before the *Propositions*, assuming that Augustine's short treatment of Jacob and Esau in question 68 indicated his lack of experience with the passage. On the other hand, Paula Fredriksen, "Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul Against the Manichaeans and the Pelagians," *RA* 23 (1988): 90, n. 13, and Dominic Keech, *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo, 396-430* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 109, placed the *Propositions* before question 68, since Augustine's "mass of sin" (*massa peccati*) is absent from the *Propositions* and develops in question 68 and his later work, *To Simplician*. On this ordering, Augustine's short treatment of Jacob and Esau in question 68 would indicate a retreat from his interpretation in the *Propositions* and a period of transition toward *To Simplician*. We prefer Keech and Fredriksen's ordering and thus place the *Propositions* first and question 68 of *The Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* second.

<sup>191</sup> Augustine, *Propositions* 60 (Fredriksen Landes).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. (Fredriksen Landes).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. (Fredriksen Landes).

the will: though the will is unable to do good works, it can nevertheless believe in God who grants the ability to do good works.

Given his interpretation of 9:6-13, Augustine read 9:14-18 as Paul's answer to those who considered God unjust for arbitrarily predestining Jacob and Esau. Paul's answer, according to Augustine, is that God does not do anything arbitrarily. After all, God says in 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I will have had mercy,"<sup>194</sup> which means, for Augustine, that God grants the Holy Spirit ("I will have mercy") on those who have used their free-will to accept his call ("on whom I will have had mercy"). As Fredriksen Landes points out, "Augustine's exegesis" on 9:15 "demands strict attention to [the] Latin sequence of tenses."<sup>195</sup> As for 9:16, where Paul says that "it depends not on man's willing or running, but on God's mercy," Augustine is similar to Origen and says that while it is up to us to will and to run, our activity is futile without the help of God.<sup>196</sup> And in 9:17, Pharaoh was punished because he chose not to believe. Thus, 9:14-18 shows that God does not dispense his mercy in a way that negates free-will.

In Augustine's next treatment of Romans 9 in question 68 of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*, he began by reiterating a free-will reading of the chapter. On 9:21, although all humans are sinners who belong to a single mass of sin, those who turn to God are made into vessels of mercy, while those who persist in evil are made into vessels of wrath.<sup>197</sup> And on 9:17, Pharaoh was deservedly hardened because of his prior demerits for oppressing the Israelites.<sup>198</sup> Thus, God is not unjust, since he shows mercy based on a person's "most hidden merits"<sup>199</sup> (i.e.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 61 (Fredriksen Landes).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 61, n. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>197</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.4.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. Augustine's comments regarding the "most hidden merits" seem to share some superficial similarities with Origen's discussion on the merits of the pre-existent soul (see section 1.1.3). Augustine says the following about the "most hidden merits": ". . . even though sinners themselves form a single mass on account of the universal sin, there is nonetheless a degree of diversity among them. There is something, then, that is already

merits obtained by a person's prior faithfulness to God).<sup>200</sup> Augustine then repeated his interpretation of 9:16,<sup>201</sup> as well as his assertion that while humans can accept or reject God's call, no one can take credit *that* they are called.<sup>202</sup> In question 68, Augustine thus maintained a free-will reading of 9:14-23.

But in his interpretation of 9:10-13 at the end of question 68, Augustine made a significant shift: he abandoned his theory of election by foreknowledge. Although he said that God's call could be accepted or rejected by free-will, Augustine also admitted that God's call "is part of a lofty and profound plan," a plan that allows for God to love Jacob and reject Esau before they are born.<sup>203</sup> Previously, Augustine resolved this tension through God's foreknowledge of faith, but probably because Paul excluded the post-birth actions of Jacob and Esau (9:11), he now refrained from such an appeal. It appeared, then, that God differentiated Jacob and Esau in a way that negated free-will. Aware of how a Manichaean might interpret this, Augustine excluded the possibility that Esau was rejected because of an evil nature.<sup>204</sup> But unaware of how to reconcile free-will with God's prenatal election, Augustine concluded, "It cannot be comprehended . . ."<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, "God does not do anything unjustly."<sup>206</sup> Thus, in

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present in [some] sinners, by which they are made worthy of righteousness even though they have not yet been made righteous, and in the same way something is already present in other sinners that makes them worthy of punishment" (*WSA I/12:119*, Ramsey). Like Origen, Augustine speaks of merits of the soul prior to conversion that explain a degree of diversity among people and determines whether or not God shows them mercy. But unlike Origen, Augustine seems to place these merits not in a prior life but in a person's current life. How Augustine might have related the "most hidden merits" with God's treatment of Jacob and Esau is uncertain: before they were born, what were their most hidden merits that caused one to be accepted and the other to be rejected?

<sup>200</sup> Augustine already said that merit is obtained by faith (68.3), and his description of Pharaoh's hardened heart as a *hidden* obstinacy (68.5) indicates that the "most hidden merits" refer to the rewards that result from believing God in one's heart.

<sup>201</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.5.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.6 (*WSA I/12:120-21*, Ramsey).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* See above (section 1.2.1) for Augustine's quote denying the existence of a nature that has not derived from God.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.6 (*WSA I/12:121*, Ramsey).

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* (*WSA I/12:121*, Ramsey).

question 68 of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*, Augustine's foreknowledge reading of 9:6-13 had been abandoned, but it would not be until a few years later in his letter *To Simplician* that he would arrive at a truly novel reading.

#### 1.2.4.2 Augustine's Letter To Simplician (396-397 C.E.)

Shortly after becoming the bishop of Hippo in 396 C.E., Augustine received a letter from a priest and mentor in Milan named Simplician, requesting Augustine's interpretation on a handful of biblical texts, among which was Romans 9.<sup>207</sup> In reply, Augustine wrote the *Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician (De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum)* over the winter of 396-397 C.E. To be sure, Simplician, who himself became bishop of Milan in 397 C.E., was a more experienced interpreter of the Bible than Augustine was, having played an integral role in the catechizing of such figures as Victorinus, Ambrose, and Augustine himself,<sup>208</sup> but it was Augustine's knowledge of Manichaeism that had led Simplician to seek Augustine's perspective.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, as indicated by Augustine's reply, all of Simplician's questions had to do with Manichaean-related issues in the New Testament (Book 1, dealing with Romans 7 and 9) or the Old Testament (Book 2, dealing with questionable depictions of God in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings).<sup>210</sup>

Augustine's interpretation of Romans 9 underwent a seismic change in *To Simplician*. In the first question of Book 1, dealing with the interpretation of Romans 7, Augustine still

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<sup>207</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 37, 3.

<sup>208</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 8.2.3.

<sup>209</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:274.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 2, observes that the six questions from book 2 are related by the Manichaean religious sensibilities they offend: 1 Sam. 16:14 ("And there was an evil spirit of the Lord in Saul"); 15:11 ("I regret having made Saul king"); 28-7-19 (paraphrased as "the unclean spirit that was in the necromancer was able to bring it about that Samuel was seen by Saul and spoke with him"); 2 Sam. 7:18 ("King David went in and sat down before the Lord"); 1 Kgs. 17:20 ("O Lord, witness of this widow . . . you have acted badly by killing her son"); 22:19-23 (paraphrased as "the spirit of lying" in the prophets "by which Ahab was deceived").

maintained that fallen humanity had the free-will to accept or reject God's call.<sup>211</sup> But midway through Augustine's treatment of Romans 9 in the second question of Book 1, the decision of who would believe or not was transferred to God. How did Augustine come to interpret Romans 9 so differently?

Jason BeDuhn observes that "in previous studies of Augustine, his sudden shift in thinking has been attributed variously to his own conversion experience or darkening introspection, to the text of Paul itself forcing certain readings upon him, or to the inexorable logic of his commitment to divine omnipotence."<sup>212</sup> However, BeDuhn continues, "[m]odern researchers have shown little inclination to take up the charges of Manichaean influence made by several of Augustine's own contemporaries" not only because of their high regard for Augustine's originality, but also because of their lack of knowledge of the Manichaean teaching on grace. The result has been to understand Augustine's reading of Paul in isolation, devoid of context. But BeDuhn is correct to insist that this is a mistake:

If either his own self-examination or the self-contained logic of his premises supplied the principal force behind his transformation in the mid-390s, it is astonishing that such personal and private factors led him closer in key respects to Manichean positions at precisely the time his public life was devoted almost exclusively to combating them, and within the very works through which he conducted that combat.<sup>213</sup>

In other words, it was not the case that Augustine's conversion experience or his theological premises just so happened to lead him to a Manichaean-shaped reading of Paul. Rather, Manichaeism itself provided the major impetus for Augustine's new reading of Paul.

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<sup>211</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.1.11.

<sup>212</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:281.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

Likewise, appeals to “a more careful reading of Paul”<sup>214</sup> are insufficient as explanations for Augustine’s new reading. For we must realize that this careful reading was done in dialogue with Manichaeism.

Since nearly everything he wrote in the years immediately before and after *To Simplician* involved an active engagement with Manichaeism, and since *To Simplician* itself was composed with an eye on Manichaean positions, we might plausibly propose that those Manichaean positions supplied Augustine with the primary focus and discussion partner of his ruminations on Paul. He had labored to defend a free-will reading of Paul against only one rival interpretation throughout the previous decade. . . . Now Augustine adopted a new reading of Paul that shifted in the direction of, while not adopting wholesale, the position of his principal hermeneutical nemesis. One can scarcely deny, therefore, the circumstantial case that Augustine’s “discovery” of grace owed something to the fact that he had been bombarded with such a reading of Paul for more than twenty years by the Manichaeans.<sup>215</sup>

A further problem with the view that Augustine simply discovered Paul’s true meaning is the implication that anyone reading the apostle faithfully enough would have arrived at the same interpretation that Augustine did.<sup>216</sup> But the fact is that Christian exegetes had been carefully reading Romans 9 for centuries and managed to arrive at conclusions quite different from Augustine’s.<sup>217</sup> Take, for example, Augustine’s changing interpretation of Rom. 9:16 (“It is not a

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<sup>214</sup> J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980), 29-30, remarks that “Neo-Platonic Christianity had liberated Augustine from Manichaean dualism and materialism but some of its assumptions were gradually undercut in his new situation . . . shattered on the rock of Paul’s epistles.” Similarly, Babcock, “Augustine and Paul,” 479, gives primary importance to Paul: “Whatever other factors may have been involved in these tremendous transformations of thought, the most obvious is precisely that intensive study of the Pauline text itself . . .” In a later publication, however, Babcock acknowledges that “[s]imply to point to Augustine’s repeated reading of Paul between 394 and 396 . . . is not enough to explain the extraordinary shift in Augustine’s views that took place during that period” (“Comment: Augustine, Paul, and the Question of Moral Evil,” in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, [ed. W. Babcock; Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990], 256).

<sup>215</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 282.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* 2:281-82.

<sup>217</sup> So Fredriksen, “Beyond,” 102: “Historians will point to Augustine’s constant reading of the epistles in these years as an implicit explanation for Augustine’s radical new theology of grace, as if Paul’s Augustinianism were there all along, waiting for Augustine, finally, to perceive it.” However, “Christian theologians had been reading them for centuries . . . but no one had ever formulated an interpretation like the one Augustine offered in 396. Nor, until 396, did Augustine.” Fredriksen seems to abandon this insight in a later publication, however, citing Augustine’s reading of Galatians as the reason for his transformation in *To Simplician* (“Augustine and Israel: *Interpretatio ad Litteram*, Jews, and Judaism in Augustine’s Theology of History,” in *Engaging Augustine on Romans: Self, Context, and Theology in Interpretation* [ed. Daniel Patte and Eugene TeSelle; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002], 94-95). See also Babcock, “Comment,” 256-57: “To account for Augustine’s break with

matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God”) and Phil. 2:12-13 (“For it is God who, for the sake of a good will, works in you both the willing and the working”). Neither demands the deterministic interpretation Augustine would eventually give in *To Simplician*. Augustine had explained Rom. 9:16 to mean that willing and running without divine aid are useless,<sup>218</sup> and he had explained Phil. 2:12-13 to mean that God is responsible for a good will because a good will can only arise in response to his call, a call that can be either accepted or rejected.<sup>219</sup> In neither case did God determine a person’s decision. When Augustine had these plausible interpretations in hand, why did he abandon them at such a cost to free-will? Appealing to a more careful reading of Paul simply does not explain this drastic change. As BeDuhn remarks, “against the background of the almost limitless hermeneutical freedom a person such as Augustine enjoyed, historians have much to explain if they refuse to consider the possible relation of his particular interpretive choices to similar readings in his immediate environment.”<sup>220</sup> Taking this comment seriously, we will pay careful attention to Augustine’s Manichaean context as we try to understand his changing interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13 in *To Simplician*.

Augustine’s letter *To Simplician* is a text that allows the reader “to overhear Augustine as he (literally) thinks out loud. We witness, by following him, the birth of an idea.”<sup>221</sup> As Augustine struggles with Romans 9 and comes to a new position, his thoughts are “kinetic,” “repetitious,” and “fatiguingly dialectical.”<sup>222</sup> But as a result of this struggle, Augustine would

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the classical tradition, it is not enough merely to observe that he read Paul. It was quite possible to read Paul carefully and well—as Origen and many others did—and still to draw him into the classical scheme of things human and divine. Why was Paul, for Augustine, a port of exit from rather than a port of entry into the classical tradition?”

<sup>218</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.5.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:194.

<sup>221</sup> Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>222</sup> Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 175.

say of the endeavor three decades later that he “strove on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God’s grace conquered.”<sup>223</sup>

As Augustine began his treatment of Romans 9 in *To Simplician*, he repeated many of the same positions he held in question 68 of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*. Throughout Romans, said Augustine, Paul has argued that no one should boast in their good works, for works result from grace through faith, and even faith is inspired by the grace of “an internal or an external urging” [i.e. a call].<sup>224</sup> Accordingly, Paul used the examples of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau in 9:7-13 to exclude an election by works, since God, after all, made his choice before they did anything good or bad.<sup>225</sup> But as Augustine asked before, so he asks now, “how is a choice righteous or of any quality at all when there is no distinction [between persons]?”<sup>226</sup> He excluded the possibility that Jacob and Esau were somehow of different natures.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, he excluded the possibility that God foreknew Jacob’s faith, since this would negate the force of Paul’s “when they were not yet born” (9:11).<sup>228</sup> Nevertheless, he still held that a person retained the power to believe or not believe (“no one believes except by free will”),<sup>229</sup> while quickly reminding the reader of the priority of grace because “no one believes who is not called.”<sup>230</sup> Turning to 9:16, Augustine then pondered the possibility that if Esau had been willing to receive God’s call, then God would have shown him mercy. But, Augustine responds, Esau was rejected

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<sup>223</sup> Augustine, *The Revisions* 2.1.1 (*WSA* I/2:110, Ramsey).

<sup>224</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician*, 1.2.2 (*WSA* I/12:185, Ramsey).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.3.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.4 (material in brackets is original to Ramsey).

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.5. At this point in the argument, Augustine still held to a theory of election by foreknowledge—he said, “I do not see how these words, *God chose us before the foundation of the world* [Eph. 1:4], could have been said if not with foreknowledge”—but he did not think this theory applied in Rom. 9:10-13 (1.2.6 [*WSA* I/12:190, Ramsey]).

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.5 (*WSA* I/12:189, Ramsey).

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.7 (*WSA* I/12:191, Ramsey).

before he was born, when he could not will anything.<sup>231</sup> So again, why was he rejected? With this question, Augustine finds himself in the same dilemma he was in at the end of the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.6: on what basis was Jacob loved and Esau hated before birth? Thus, up until this point in *To Simplician*, Augustine's reading of Romans 9 offered little that was new.

In *To Simplician* 1.2.12, however, Augustine's interpretation of Romans 9 took a radical turn. Without leaving the topic of Esau's prenatal rejection, Augustine took a few steps back in his argument to reconsider 9:16 ("It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God"), and he did so in light of Phil. 2:12-13 ("For it is God who, for the sake of a good will, works in you both the willing and the working"). In the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.5, Augustine understood Rom. 9:16 to indicate that humans cannot attain what they choose unless helped by God, and he understood Phil. 2:12-13 to indicate that God is responsible for a good will because a good will arises only in response to his call which can be accepted or rejected. Augustine seems to repeat this interpretation of Phil. 2:12-13 in *To Simplician* when he says that "even a good will . . . comes about in us through God's working," but that he now means something very different by this statement is indicated by his explanation of it via Rom. 9:16:

Here [in Phil. 2:12-13] [Paul] shows clearly that even a good will itself comes about in us through God's working. For if it is only said that it is not a matter of willing but of a merciful God, because the human will does not suffice for us to live in rectitude and righteousness unless we are aided by God's mercy, it can therefore also be said that it is not a matter of a merciful God but of human willing, because God's mercy alone does not suffice unless our will's consent is joined to it. But . . . I do not know how it may be said . . . that God is merciful to no avail unless we will. For if God is merciful, we also will.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 1.2.10.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. 1.2.12 (*WSA* I/12:194, Ramsey).

In other words, Rom. 9:16 now indicates the omnipotent quality of God's mercy, not responding conditionally to a good will, but irresistibly creating that good will in whomever he chooses. In other words, if God chooses to show mercy to a person, that person will automatically be saved. As a result, Phil. 2:12-13 now indicates that God creates a good will not by issuing a general call that people can accept or reject, but by issuing an exclusive call that can only be accepted. Thus, in a drastic interpretive shift, Augustine seems to have sacrificed human free-will under the banner of an all-powerful, all-controlling divine will that predetermines the human will. How did such a shift occur?

Although we cannot be certain about what exactly led Augustine to change his mind, a significant factor seems to have been his ongoing critique of Manichaeism's weak and impotent God. According to Manichaean dualism, God struggled against a coeternal principle of evil to save humanity and was unable to save all (cf. section 1.2.1), prompting Augustine to criticize the Manichaean God as powerless and less than divine. When Augustine converted to a nondualist Nicene monotheism, he came to see God as the Supreme Being of the universe who had no rival, a view that other Nicene thinkers were able to place alongside their free-will reading of Paul. But according to BeDuhn, Augustine's deliberations on divine power in *To Simplician* 1.2.12 were intensified and this may very well have been motivated by Fortunatus's critique of Augustine's free-will position:

Fortunatus had repeatedly charged that Augustine's free-will position was vulnerable to the same criticisms Augustine leveled against the Manichaean position, namely, that God failed to realize his desire to save all because of an opposing will he could not overpower. Just as some fragments of soul eluded liberation at the hands of the Manichaean God due to their corruption by contact with evil, so in the Nicene scenario some souls exercised their free will to reject God's call. In either case, something other than God provided the decisive factor in determining salvation.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:283.

For Augustine, then, a pivotal issue was the power of God. In *To Simplician* 1.2.12, Augustine came to hold that “[n]o one and nothing could resist God’s will, and God could not be *responding* to something initiated by any other and be wholly free; these were in his eyes the very defects in the Manichaean view of God.”<sup>234</sup> With Augustine’s new understanding of Rom. 9:16 and Phil. 2:12-13, he had a new framework within which he could understand the story of Jacob and Esau: God did not choose Jacob in response to anything in Jacob; to the contrary, Jacob had a good will and Esau had a bad will simply because God willed it. The key element in Augustine’s new reading of Romans 9, then, was a God defined in terms of absolute power, who, unlike the Manichaean God, flawlessly and irresistibly achieves salvation and creates cosmic order by choosing some and rejecting others.<sup>235</sup> With this new reading, Augustine firmly rejected the Manichaean view of God, but, whether he recognized it or not, he took a step closer to their deterministic understanding of salvation.

Having changed his perspective on Rom. 9:16 and Phil. 2:12-13, Augustine now needed to reinterpret other passages and ideas that once supported his free-will reading of Paul. The first idea Augustine reconsidered was the idea of God’s “call,” which Paul refers to in Rom. 9:11 (“not by works but by the one who calls”). Since God’s call to repent is a display of mercy, Augustine came to hold that God’s call, like his mercy, “brings about a good will in such a way that everyone who has been called follows it.”<sup>236</sup> In other words, everyone who is called is

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good* (PS 2; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 63, who explains Augustine’s doctrine of predestination in terms of God’s omnipotent creation of order and the Manichaean view of the cosmos: “In his supreme existence, . . . God is also the guarantor of order expressed in both the act of creating and the role of governing, so that the Good or the beauty of the universe may be preserved in harmony. . . . In governing, God puts things in their proper places . . .” For example, just as God separated the sea and the dry land in Genesis 1, “the *massa damnata* . . . is being contained in order that life may grow in the elect . . .” Thus, Lee concludes, “[t]he notion of cosmic order is actually the framework of Augustine’s doctrine of predestination, and is his response to the Manichaean view of the universe as a mixture of good and evil.”

<sup>236</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.13 (*WSA* I/12:194, Ramsey).

automatically saved. No one can reject God's call. After all, if it were possible to reject God's call, then a person could say that "it is not a matter of God's being merciful but of man's willing and running, because the mercy of him who calls is insufficient unless there follows the obedience of the one who has been called."<sup>237</sup> So then, God's call is always effective. But if this is the case, then how can it be true, Augustine asks, that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16)?<sup>238</sup> Here, some people reject God's call. Augustine responds by saying that because nothing is too hard for God, it was entirely within his means to call in such a way that faith would necessarily result.<sup>239</sup> If a person rejects God's call, it is only because God never wanted that person to be saved and therefore gave them a call that was ill-suited to their dispositions. The Bible speaks, then, of two kinds of calls: one that is "congruent" (i.e. agreeable to the recipient), and one that is not. All of this may sound as if Augustine had rendered the human soul into a passive puppet being pulled by God's will, but at this point in Augustine's career, he still thought he believed in a free and autonomous human will—a concept that was crucial to his ongoing anti-Manichaean efforts. When the congruent call is correctly understood, "God does not move the will itself, but creates a circumstance in which the will responds via self-movement."<sup>240</sup> As J. Patout Burns observes, it is not until Augustine's later, anti-Pelagian

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:289, summarizing Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 41 and n. 177. In *To Simplician* 1.2.14, Augustine provides various examples where external circumstances are used to move the will (e.g. the words spoken to Nathaniel in John 1:48, the miracle at Cana in John 2:1-11, and so on). See also Augustine's comments in 1.2.21: "But who can believe without being touched by some call—that is, by the evidence of things? Who has it in his power for his mind to be touched by such a manifestation as would move his will to faith? Who embraces in his heart something that does not attract him? Who has it in his power either to come into contact with what can attract him or to be attracted once he has come into contact? When, therefore, things attract us whereby we may advance towards God, this is inspired and furnished by the grace of God" (*WSA* I/12:205, Ramsey); and again, 1.2.22: ". . . wills are chosen. But the will itself, unless it comes into contact with something that attracts and beckons the soul, can by no means be moved. But that it may come into contact with this is not in a person's power. What did Saul want to do but attack, seize, enchain and kill Christians? What a rabid, raging, blind will! Yet at a single voice from heaven he fell prostrate . . ." (*WSA* I/12:206, Ramsey).

writings that Augustine develops an interior, operative grace that acts directly on the will to bring it to faith. In *To Simplician*, then, Augustine reinterpreted God's call so that, at least in Augustine's mind, absolute divine power and human free-will could be held side by side.

Although Augustine's idea of the congruent call might seem to have derived solely from his newfound commitment to absolute divine power, the congruent call had an important antecedent in Manichaeism. Although Augustine attempted to maintain the freedom of the will, the fact that a congruent call necessarily produces faith and an incongruent call could never do so makes any talk of free-will seem problematic.<sup>241</sup> With the congruent call, the fate of each individual was determined essentially by God. As BeDuhn observes, "[i]n the immediate environment in which Augustine was working, only Manichaeism stood for this level of determinism."<sup>242</sup> As we saw in section 1.2.1, the Manichaean myth held that a soul was predetermined for salvation and was then irresistibly activated by God. BeDuhn offers *Kephalion* 56, 142.12ff.<sup>243</sup> (Gardner) as further evidence for this unilateral activation by God:

. . . if and wh[en] the Light Mind comes, it shall tu[rn i]n / to the orifices of the body. The rulers, who [a]re the door gua[rds], / shall h[in]der and restrain it from en[ter]ing. They shall bind the circu[it] of the body so that the foreign[er] can not / enter it. Nevertheless, the Light Mind / by its wisdom and awe and diligence shall hum/ble the guards who are set at the body's orifices. / When it finishes humbling them it shall take fr[o]m them bolts to all the orifices of the body. Now, the orifices that had been ope/ned before to the parades of lust . . . whoever stops receiving th[is] in, / his heart and mind shall follow after. So, now, bec[ause] / the b[olt]s to the body of the righteous person are in the hands of / the Light M[in]d within, he is open [to receive] / i[n] all that is pleasing to God.

Here, the Light Mind irresistibly disarms a person's "orifices" (i.e. sensory organs) so that their heart and mind are transformed and become pleasing to God. Moreover, BeDuhn observes that although Manichaeism spoke of a "call" and "response," there was nothing synergistic about this

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<sup>241</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:290.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 2:291. See pp. 291-96 for an extended discussion on the Manichean background for Augustine's concept of the congruent call.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 2:292.

language since the soul, having the same nature as God, responds automatically to God’s call<sup>244</sup>—just as in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring, infused with Sauron’s spirit, automatically answers back to Sauron. BeDuhn observes that other Nicene leaders besides Augustine had also noted the determinative nature of the divine call in the Manichaean theory of salvation.<sup>245</sup> And in his debate with Fortunatus in 392 C.E., Augustine had been exposed to the idea that Christ gives birth to willing and responsibility (“But now, after I have come and have spoken to them and after they have refused to believe me, they shall not have pardon for their sin” [John 15:22]).<sup>246</sup> We may thus conclude that while Augustine and Manichaeism differed on their views of the congruent call (e.g. Manichaeans explained congruence through a pantheistic model, while Augustine explained it through divine power), the congruent call for both elicited a predetermined response.<sup>247</sup> Thus, when Augustine developed his notion of the congruent call, while he did not slavishly borrow from his opponents, he was expressing an idea that had its closest neighbor in Manichaeism.

With his new deterministic approach to Romans 9, Augustine sensed some lingering problems. Why was Esau not congruently called?<sup>248</sup> And again, on what basis did God differentiate Jacob and Esau?<sup>249</sup> For without distinction, election is arbitrary and unjust. As Paul asked in Rom. 9:14, “Is there injustice with God?” Augustine answered an emphatic no.<sup>250</sup> But in

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 2:295. See, e.g., *Keph.* 16, 54.9ff.; 18, 59.29f.; 19, 63.2f.; 28, 81.1ff; 72, 178.1f.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 2:294. BeDuhn mentions John Chrysostom, *Homily on John* 46 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 14:162) on the Manichaean use of John 6:44 (“No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him”): “The Manichaeans spring upon these words, saying, ‘that nothing lies in our own power.’” BeDuhn also mentions Ephraim of Syria, *Fifth Discourse*, cii, cxviii (Mitchell), who explained that according to the Manichaeans, the human soul cannot overcome “the Pollution of Error” “unless sweet Floods have come from their Home a second time” (cxviii) in the form of a power “whose nature cannot be overwhelmed by ‘the Floods of Evil’” (cii).

<sup>246</sup> Augustine, *A Debate with Fortunatus* 21 (WSA I/19: 157, Teske).

<sup>247</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:296.

<sup>248</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.14.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 1.2.15.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 1.2.16.

the end, he was unable to explain how God differentiated the twins and appealed to God's "most secret justice":

. . . to those to whom he is not merciful he judges, with a most secret justice that is far removed from human understanding, that mercy must not be shown. For *inscrutable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways* (Rom. 11:33).<sup>251</sup>

Nevertheless, Augustine attempted to provide a partial account of God's justice. In essence, this account stated that everyone deserves God's punishment since everyone sins as a result of their lineage from Adam:

. . . all human beings—since, as the Apostle says, *all die in Adam* (1 Cor. 15:22), from whom the origin of the offense against God spread throughout the whole human race—are a kind of single mass of sin owing a debt of punishment to the divine and loftiest justice, and whether [the punishment that is owed] be exacted or forgiven, there is no injustice.<sup>252</sup>

At this point in Augustine's career, he has not yet developed his notion of "original sin," where a person is born with the *guilt* of Adam's sin. Instead, he is referring here to the fact that all humans inherit a fallen, mortal body from Adam which makes sinning inevitable. Thus, given the fact that Esau would sin, Augustine explained that God could reject Esau in perfect justice, even though this contradicted Paul's statement that God's election was apart from works (9:11). Moreover, God could do with Esau whatever he wanted. In the words of BeDuhn, "Augustine spoke as if, once God foregoes carrying out strict justice in universal punishment, anything else he might do escapes assessment in terms of justice."<sup>253</sup> God could harden Pharaoh's heart and use the vessels of wrath created for destruction as an object lesson for his vessels of mercy. And if in any of this we find God's arbitrary use of power disturbing, Paul's answer, according to

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid. (*WSA* I/12:198, Ramsey).

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. (material in brackets original to Ramsey).

<sup>253</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:299. Moreover, it did not matter how many God condemned. Cf. the sentiment in *Letter* 190, 3.9, 12, written in 418 C.E.: God created those he foreknew would be condemned to show his anger and power for the benefit of the vessels of wrath (3.9), and "by the very multitude of those rejected he showed that *it is of no importance in the sight of the just God how great is the number of those justly condemned*" (3.12; italics mine) (*WSA* II/3:267-68, Teske).

Augustine, is “O man, who are you that you talk back to God?”<sup>254</sup> “[W]hen pushed to the limits of rational justification, Augustine could always opt to understand God’s right to act within an authoritarian ethos, the premise of the absolute right of power, which did not have to answer to any consideration of equity or fairness.”<sup>255</sup> With this partial account of God’s justice, Augustine concluded his dramatic reversal in his approach to Romans 9.

#### 1.2.4.3 Later Writings on Romans 9:6-13 (398-430 C.E.)

From 398 to 430 C.E., Augustine returned again and again to Romans 9 to discuss the relationship between God and humanity in salvation. He fluctuated on some of the positions he developed in *To Simplician*, but as Paula Fredriksen has correctly observed, “Augustine’s views change[d] more drastically between 394 and 396/8 than between 398 and 430.”<sup>256</sup> Given the fluctuation and stability of these years, we will first address his changing views on divine grace and human free-will, and then we will summarize the stable elements from his various works.

Up until 417 C.E., during his early debates with Pelagius, Augustine downplayed, and sometimes even turned back on, various elements of his deterministic approach to Romans 9 developed in *To Simplician*.<sup>257</sup> Burns observes that in various discussions on Romans 9, Augustine kept a low profile on the issues of divine sovereignty and the irresistibility of grace.<sup>258</sup> He often gave the impression that each person had the free-will to ultimately determine whether

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<sup>254</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.17 (WSA I/12:198, Ramsey).

<sup>255</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:299.

<sup>256</sup> Fredriksen, “Beyond,” 89.

<sup>257</sup> So J. Patout Burns, “The Interpretation of Romans in the Pelagian Controversy,” *AugStud* 10 (1979): 52; James F. McCue, “Augustine and the Strange Career of Romans 9:10-29,” in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 176-82.

<sup>258</sup> Burns, “The Interpretation of Romans,” 52. See, e.g., the discussion of Romans 9 in Augustine, *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.21.30-22.31, 2.5.6 (411-412 C.E.); *The Spirit and the Letter* 33.58, 34.60 (413 C.E.); *The Perfection of Human Righteousness* 19.40, 20.43 (415 C.E.); *Letter* 175, 3 (416 C.E.); *Letter* 176, 2 (416 C.E.); *The Deeds of Pelagius* 14.37 (417 C.E.).

they would believe or not,<sup>259</sup> only once alluding to the congruent call.<sup>260</sup> He returned to his earlier interpretation of 9:16, asserting that human willing and running are unsuccessful without divine aid.<sup>261</sup> And he even appeared to reiterate a doctrine of election by foreknowledge, where God does not congruently call any person at any time in history but rather accommodates to human choice.<sup>262</sup>

Beginning in 416 C.E., however, during his ongoing debates with Pelagius and his followers, elements of Augustine's deterministic reading of Romans 9 not only began to resurface, they began to intensify. In particular, he intensified his understanding of the basis of Esau's rejection and the nature of the divine call. As a result, God's control over human salvation became more pervasive, while human decision became more irrelevant. First, the basis of Esau's rejection. In *To Simplician*, Augustine held that Esau was rejected on the basis of his own sin, made inevitable by the sinful flesh he inherited from Adam. But by 416 C.E., Augustine had arrived at his mature notion of original sin and, appealing to Rom. 5:12, he held that Esau was rejected because he was born condemned, having inherited the very guilt of Adam.<sup>263</sup> Esau's actions were now a complete non-factor in God's rejection of him.

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<sup>259</sup> See, e.g., Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 33.58 (413 C.E.): "The free choice which the creator has given to the rational soul as part of its nature is a neutral power that can either turn to faith or fall into unbelief. . . . God wills that all human beings be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, but not so that he deprives them of free choice, since they will be judged with perfect justice according to their good or bad use of it" (*WSA I/23:190*, Teske); *Nature and Grace* 64.77 (416 C.E.): "it pertains to choice to listen to and to believe him who calls and to beg from him in whom one believes the help not to sin" (*WSA I/23:265*, Teske).

<sup>260</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 34.60 (413 C.E.).

<sup>261</sup> Augustine, *The Perfection of Human Righteousness* 19.40 (415 C.E.); *Letter* 186, 9.33, 10.36 (416 C.E.).

<sup>262</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 102, 14 (409 C.E.): "What reply, then, will they make to us, if . . . we say . . . that Christ willed to reveal himself to human beings and willed that his teaching be preached among them when he knew and where he knew there would be people who were going to believe in him? For he foreknew that in the times and in the places in which his gospel was not preached they would all react to the preaching of the gospel just as many, but not all, reacted when he was physically present, that is, those who refused to believe in him even when he raised the dead" (*WSA II/2:27-28*, Teske).

<sup>263</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 5.13-15, 6.21 (416 C.E.); see also *Letter* 190, 3.9 (418 C.E.); *Letter* 194, 8.34 (418 C.E.).

Second, Augustine intensified his understanding of the nature of the divine call.

According to Burns, Augustine, in 418 C.E., stopped describing the gift of faith as “the granting of the opportunity for a person to believe”; nor did he describe it as “a persuasive vocation” (i.e. a congruent call), as he did in *To Simplician*. In either case, the unassisted will retains the natural ability to produce a good response, and this, for Augustine, conceded too much to the Pelagians. Moreover, Augustine came to believe that if the task of believing was left to humans, then faith would effectively become a “work” humans had to perform in order to merit grace.<sup>264</sup> So instead, Augustine “explained the gift of faith as an operation of the Holy Spirit within the will of the elect which produces his assent to the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>265</sup> Augustine spoke for the first time of an interior, operative grace, where God acts directly on the will to produce faith.<sup>266</sup> To be sure, this conception arose in response to the Pelagians, but, as Burns shows, it also had antecedents in his prior debates with the Donatists,<sup>267</sup> where he expressed the view that grace was imparted without consent to infants during baptism,<sup>268</sup> and that the goal of salvation justified the imperial coercion of Donatists to become Catholics.<sup>269</sup> With God’s direct, coercive action on the will to produce faith, one could no longer speak of an autonomous will responding to God’s

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<sup>264</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 194, 3.9 (418 C.E.): “. . . it remains, I repeat, that we not attribute faith itself to human choice, which they extol, or to any preceding merits, because any merits there are begin from faith, but rather that we admit that it is a gratuitous gift of God, if we have in mind true grace, that is, without any merits” (*WSA* II/3:292, Teske).

<sup>265</sup> Burns, “Interpretation of Romans,” 52-53.

<sup>266</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 194, 3.9 (418 C.E.): faith is a gratuitous gift from God, “[f]or . . . *God imparts to each a measure of faith* (Rom 12:3). Good works are, to be sure, produced by a human being, but faith is produced in a human being”; 3.15: “he would not have faith if he had not received the Spirit of faith”; 4.18 “For, when he does not yet dwell in a person, he helps him to become a believer” (*WSA* II/3:292-96, Teske).

<sup>267</sup> Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 53-88, esp. pp. 75-77, 82-85.

<sup>268</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 98, 2.5 (408 C.E.).

<sup>269</sup> Augustine argued that the imperial persecution of the Donatists was the work of God (*Letter* 87, 7, 8 [405 C.E.]), who uses persecution to move sinners toward the truth (*Letter* 93, 1.1, 5.16, 6.20 [408 C.E.]; *Against the Letters of Petilian* 2.85.186 [400 C.E.]). Such coercion is justified because of the joy with which many Donatists converted to Catholicism (*Letter* 93, 1.3, 5.6, 18). Moreover, while Augustine previously emphasized the enlightening aspect of Paul’s conversion (*To Simplician* 1.2.22), he now focused on the themes of violence and coercion (*Letter* 93, 2.5).

call in Rom. 9:11. Instead, God directly moves the will of some to faith. By 418 C.E., then, Augustine's deterministic reading of Romans 9 had grown stronger in the heat of debate with the Pelagians. God's control over human salvation became more pervasive, while human decision became more irrelevant.

Having traced the regression and intensification of Augustine's discoveries in *To Simplician*, we may now turn our attention to some of the more stable elements of Augustine's interpretation of 9:6-13. As Gorday observes, "Paul's compassion for his Jewish kinsmen [in 9:1-5] evoked very little comment from Augustine."<sup>270</sup> Instead, Augustine passed at once to 9:6ff., focusing on the issue of salvation by grace apart from human willing.

When Paul says in 9:6b that "not all from Israel are Israel," Augustine understood the second Israel to refer to all of Abraham's heirs under the new covenant (i.e. the Church).<sup>271</sup> The Jews who have fallen away from faith have been deservedly disinherited.<sup>272</sup>

According to Augustine, Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9:7b ("From Isaac your offspring will have its name") foreshadowed that Abraham's new covenant heirs would be children born by promise (Rom. 9:8), and this relation was made clear by Gal. 4:21-31.<sup>273</sup> "The children of promise" are the children of God's own doing, since "[God] promises what he himself is going to do."<sup>274</sup> They are children of grace, since "what God promises we do not accomplish by choice or by

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<sup>270</sup> Gorday, *Principles*, 167-68.

<sup>271</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 24.40 (413 C.E.); *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 3.41 (427-430 C.E.).

<sup>272</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 84, 4.

<sup>273</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 140, 19.47 (411-12 C.E.); see also *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153 (427-430 C.E.): "Isaac, of course, who is the son promised to Abraham, prefigured not those who would make themselves righteous, but those whom God would make righteous" (*WSA* I/25:231, Teske).

<sup>274</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 140, 19.48; see also *The Spirit and the Letter* 24.40 (413 C.E.); *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153, 158.1 (427-430 C.E.).

nature.”<sup>275</sup> It is they who are being “gathered together in Christ.”<sup>276</sup> Understood through Rom. 8:28-30, “the children of promise” were individually promised and predestined in eternity past to become Abraham’s heirs.<sup>277</sup> Or, on one occasion, Augustine said they were promised in Isa. 45:8 LXX (cf. Isa. 45:9 LXX and Rom. 9:20-21): “God said to the whole Church through the prophet, *For I am the Lord, who made you [Is 45:8 LXX].*”<sup>278</sup> And on another occasion, Augustine said they were promised in Gen. 21:12, which Paul quotes in Rom. 9:7b: “It is through Isaac that posterity will be yours.”<sup>279</sup> For the most part in Augustine’s writings, “the children of promise” are “children who are promised,” but on one occasion he identified them as Origen did, as “members of Abraham’s race, not by carnal descent but through kinship with him in faith.”<sup>280</sup>

An interesting feature of Augustine’s interpretation of Rom. 9:7-9 is that he reads this passage alongside many others where Paul deals with similar themes. In *Letter* 140, the calling of Abraham’s heirs in Isaac (9:7b) foreshadowed that believers in Jesus would become heirs (Gal. 3:29), since Isaac’s manner of birth foreshadowed the new covenant mode of salvation (Gal. 4:21-31) where those like Isaac, the children of promise, are made heirs (Rom. 9:8-9).<sup>281</sup> In *Letter* 186, the children of promise (Rom. 9:8) are those who have been predestined and called according to God’s purpose (8:28-30).<sup>282</sup> In *The Deeds of Pelagius*, Augustine interpreted Paul’s understanding of “the children of the flesh” and “the children of promise” in both Gal. 4:21-31

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<sup>275</sup> Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 1.30.31 (418 C.E.; *WSA* I/23:419, Teske); see also *Letter* 140, 20.50 (411-12 C.E.); *The Spirit and the Letter* 24.40 (413 C.E.).

<sup>276</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 16.32 (420 C.E.; Wiesen, LCL).

<sup>277</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 7.25 (416 C.E.); *Letter* 190, 3.12 (418 C.E.); *Rebuke and Grace* 9.20 (427 C.E.).

<sup>278</sup> Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153 (427-430 C.E.; *WSA* I/25:231, Teske).

<sup>279</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 118 (10<sup>th</sup> sermon), 3 (*WSA* III/19:383-84, Boulding). Cf. *Letter* 196, 3.10, where Augustine says that Christians were promised to Abraham in Gen. 17:5: “I have made you the father of many nations” (*WSA* II/3:314, Teske).

<sup>280</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 84, 4 (*WSA* III/18:206, Boulding).

<sup>281</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 140, 19.47 (411/412 C.E.).

<sup>282</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 7.25 (416 C.E.).

and Rom. 9:8 as fundamentally consistent.<sup>283</sup> In *Letter* 196, Augustine quoted a number of passages that distinguished the physical and spiritual Jew: Rom. 2:25-29; 4:9-12, 16-17; Gal. 3:6-9, 15-16, 28-29; Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 4:21–5:1; Rom. 9:10-13.<sup>284</sup> The common thread in these passages is that the spiritual Jew (i.e. believing Jews and non-Jews) are defined by categories like “Spirit,” “faith,” and “promise.” Interestingly, the concept of predestination is absent in Augustine’s discussion of any of these verses. In his *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian*, Julian’s mention of God’s promise to Abraham in Rom. 4:13-22 prompted Augustine to discuss the children of promise in 9:6-8.<sup>285</sup> And finally, in his *Expositions of the Psalms* 71, the promise that the nations would be blessed in Abraham’s seed (Gen. 22:18) was kept in Christ (Gal. 3:16) so that it is not Abraham’s physical children but the children of promise who are counted as his heirs (Rom. 9:8). Thus, Augustine saw strong thematic parallels between Rom. 9:7-9 and Gal. 3; 4:21-31; Rom. 2:25-29; 4; and 8:28-30. Yet, he never engaged in an in-depth comparison of these passages, leaving his juxtapositions somewhat superficial.

Moving on to Rom. 9:10-13, Augustine continued to see the story of Jacob and Esau as a powerful demonstration that election is not by human works or willing but by divine grace. Accordingly, he denied the theory of election by the foreknowledge of faith or works.<sup>286</sup> Instead, God’s grace “does not discover those to be chosen but makes them such.”<sup>287</sup> Thus, “[I]et not Jacob be arrogant,” for “[h]e was foreknown, predestined, and chosen in advance [8:29-30]: not chosen for his merits but found by God’s grace and given life.”<sup>288</sup> Furthermore, as we said earlier, Augustine incorporated his mature notion of original sin into 9:10-13, so that Jacob and

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<sup>283</sup> Augustine, *The Deeds of Pelagius* 5.15 (417 C.E.).

<sup>284</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 196, 3.10-11 (418 C.E.).

<sup>285</sup> Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153-158 (427-430 C.E.).

<sup>286</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 194, 8.35 (418 C.E.).

<sup>287</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 5.15 (416 C.E.; *WSA* II/3:216, Teske).

<sup>288</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 134, 8 (*WSA* III/20:197-98, Boulding).

Esau were born guilty with Adam's sin, deserving of God's condemnation.<sup>289</sup> As for why God chose Jacob and rejected Esau, Augustine continued to believe this was a divine mystery, but he now buttressed the point by appealing to infant baptism: why is it that in God's providence some infants who die are saved through baptism while others are not?<sup>290</sup> The failure to distinguish people by their merits, making God's election appear arbitrary and partial, is what prompted the question in 9:14: "Is there injustice with God?"<sup>291</sup> To this Paul, and Augustine, answered, "By no means!"

Jacob and Esau also possessed a national significance in a number of Augustine's writings. Respectively, they could represent Israel and Edom, or the Church and unbelieving Israel, or spiritual and carnal humanity more generally. This is clearly illustrated in his discussion of 9:10-13 in *Letter* 196:

Likewise, in terms of the origin of the flesh the people of the Edomites belong to Esau, who was also called Edom, but the people of the Jews belong to Jacob, who was also called Israel. But in terms of the mystery of the Spirit the Jews belong to Esau, and the Christians belong to Israel. In that way, of course, the scripture is fulfilled: *The older will serve the younger* (Gen. 25:32), that is, the older people of the Jews will serve the younger people of the Christians.<sup>292</sup>

In the same way, Augustine said a few lines earlier that "in terms of the origin of their flesh the Jews . . . belong to Sarah, but the children of Ishmael belong to Hagar. But in terms of the mystery of the Spirit the Christians belong to Sarah and the Jews to Hagar."

Augustine's general approach to Romans 9, as developed in *To Simplician* and his later works, would go on to deeply influence the interpretation of the chapter by figures like Thomas

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<sup>289</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 5.13-15, 6.21; *Letter* 194, 8.34 (418 C.E.).

<sup>290</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 194, 7.31-32 (418 C.E.); *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 2.7.14-15 (421 C.E.); cf. *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.21.30-31 (411-412 C.E.).

<sup>291</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 6.16 (416 C.E.); *Letter* 194, 8.35 (418 C.E.); *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4.6.16 (421 C.E.).

<sup>292</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 196, 3.13 (418 C.E.; *WSA* II/3:316-17, Teske); see also *Expositions of the Psalms* 118 (28<sup>th</sup> sermon), 4-5 (*WSA* III/20:197-98); 134, 8 (*WSA* III/20:197-98); 136, 18 (*WSA* III/20:237).

Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. But one person who would repudiate these views was Augustine's rival Pelagius, whose interpretation will conclude our treatment of the patristic interpretation of 9:6-13.

### 1.2.5 Pelagius (ca. 354 – ca. 420 C.E.)

Born in west Britain, Pelagius arrived in Rome in the early 380s C.E. and became a teacher to the Christian aristocracy at Rome. It is in this capacity that he wrote his *Commentary on Romans*, beginning the work after 405/6 C.E. and completing it before 410 C.E., when he left Rome at the arrival of Alaric's army.<sup>293</sup> Like his Nicene predecessors, a major concern in Pelagius's commentary was the refutation of the Manichaean interpretation of Paul,<sup>294</sup> and for this goal Pelagius had a rich tradition to draw from. He made use of Augustine's early writings on Paul, agreeing with him until *To Simplician*.<sup>295</sup> Moreover, he made use of the Romans commentaries by Ambrosiaster,<sup>296</sup> the "Budapest Anonymous" who wrote between 396 and 405 C.E.,<sup>297</sup> and even Origen (through Rufinus's Latin translation of 406/7 C.E.<sup>298</sup>).<sup>299</sup> Alongside

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<sup>293</sup> Theodore de Bruyn, introduction to *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, by Pelagius (trans. Theodore de Bruyn; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10-11.

<sup>294</sup> de Bruyn, "Introduction," 16: "Again and again in the comments on Romans Pelagius contradicts the Manichaean interpretation of 'the flesh' because of the determinism it entails [see Pelagius's comments at Rom. 5:10; 6:19; 7:15, 17, 18; 8:3, 7, 8]." Pelagius also contests the Manichaean disjunction between the Old and New Testaments (see his comments at Rom. 1:2; 7:7; and 9:5). More generally, de Bruyn observes that "Pelagius appears to have developed his theological tenets precisely to counter Manichaean (or virtually Manichaean) notions of creation, sin, redemption, and beatitude" (based on Torgny Bohlin, *Die Theologie des Pelagius und ihre Genesis* [Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1957], 12-14 and *passim*).

<sup>295</sup> Pelagius appears to have been familiar with Augustine's *Propositions*, *Unfinished Commentary*, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*, and *To Simplician*. See Alfred J. Smith, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," *JTS* 20 (1918): 55-65; Alexander Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul* (Texts and Studies 9; 3 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922-1931), 1:187; Alfred Smith, "Pelagius and Augustine," *JTS* 31 (1929-1930): 21-35.

<sup>296</sup> See Alfred J. Smith, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," *JTS* 19 (1918): 167-230.

<sup>297</sup> This commentary can be found in H. J. Frede, *Ein neuer Paulustext und Kommentar* (AGLB 7-8; Freiburg: Herder, 1973-1974). For Pelagius's use of this commentary, see 7:196-205.

<sup>298</sup> Scheck, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>299</sup> Alfred J. Smith, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," *JTS* 20 (1918): 127-177. Smith (p. 127) observes that although Pelagius knew Greek and could have read Origen's *Commentary on Romans* in Greek, his parallels are with Rufinus's Latin translation. De Bruyn,

Jerome, then, Pelagius represents another clear example of a Latin commentator combating Manichaeism with Origen. Nevertheless, Pelagius maintained his own voice on Rom. 9:6-13.

Pelagius began his interpretation of Romans 9 by making clear that Paul was proceeding against the Jews.<sup>300</sup> He did not proceed in hate, however, but in love, because it pained him to see them cut off from Christ (9:1-3).<sup>301</sup> The pain was particularly acute since they once possessed the blessings listed in 9:4-5.<sup>302</sup>

Despite Jewish unbelief, Paul stated that “the word of God . . . did not fail” (9:6a), which Pelagius took to mean that God did not lie to Abraham.<sup>303</sup> God did not lie because Abraham’s heirs are those who believe, not those who do not believe.<sup>304</sup> And although not all from Israel believed (a fault of their own), some still did (9:6b). Pelagius then inverted Paul’s statement that “not all from Israel are Israel” (9:6b) and said that not all true Israelites are from the nation of Israel, for non-Jews “in whom there is no guile” (cf. John 1:47) are also included.<sup>305</sup>

Even in the past, not all of Abraham’s descendants were his heirs. His heirs were restricted to Isaac’s line (Rom. 9:7b),<sup>306</sup> since “Ishmael was born of a maidservant by sexual intercourse (cf. Gal. 4:23),” whereas “Isaac was begotten beyond natural means from old people by the promise of God.”<sup>307</sup> So also in Paul’s day, “the promise now makes Christians sons of Abraham—the promise which [his] faith merited—so that he is indeed the father of many nations

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“Introduction,” 3, following H. J. Chapman (“Pélage et le texte de s. Paul,” *RHE* 18 [1922]: 472-3), qualifies Smith by saying that Pelagius’s Greek was not very strong at the time of writing his *Commentary on Romans*.

<sup>300</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:1-2.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.* 9:6. Pelagius says the privileges of Rom. 9:1-5 “*had belonged to them [i.e. the Israelites]”* (italics mine), implying that they no longer do.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* 9:6-7.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.* 9:7.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.* 9:8 (de Bruyn).

(cf. Rom. 4:17-18)” (Rom. 9:8).<sup>308</sup> What is the promise that now makes Christians heirs? Given Pelagius’s allusions here to Rom. 4:17-18, he seems to have in mind Gen. 15:5 (“So shall your offspring be” [i.e. as numerous as the stars]). Thus, Abraham’s heirs have the characteristic of deriving from promise, and the reason why Paul quotes the promise of Isaac (Gen. 18:10, 14) in Rom. 9:9 is to show that “the people who came afterwards belonged to the promise after the manner of Isaac.”<sup>309</sup>

Like Isaac and Ishmael, “Jacob and Esau too . . . were separated in God’s sight before they were born on account of their [subsequent] faith, so that God’s purpose for choosing the good and resisting the evil existed already in foreknowledge”<sup>310</sup> (9:10-13). In like manner, “he has now chosen those whom he foreknew would believe from among the Gentiles, and has rejected those whom he foreknew would be unbelieving out of Israel.”<sup>311</sup> Appealing to Ezek. 33:14-15 (“If I say to a sinner: ‘You shall surely die’, and he, having repented, does what is right, he shall surely live and shall not die”), Pelagius argued that God’s foreknowledge would have been different if a person had chosen differently.<sup>312</sup>

As a result of his reading of Rom. 9:6-13, Pelagius understood the charge of God’s injustice in 9:14 as deriving from his disregard for racial prerogatives and from the appearance that “God makes some good, others evil”<sup>313</sup> before they are born. To remove Paul from such a strong predestinarian view, Pelagius placed the scriptural quotes in 9:15, 17 in the mouth of Paul’s Jewish opponents, while 9:16, 18-19 represented Paul’s rebuttal.<sup>314</sup> For Pelagius, Paul clearly believes in the importance of willing and running (he quotes Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:20-21;

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid. (de Bruyn; material in brackets original to de Bruyn).

<sup>309</sup> Ibid. 9:9 (de Bruyn).

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. 9:10 (de Bruyn; material in brackets original to de Bruyn).

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. 9:12.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. 9:14.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. 9:14 and n. 13.

4:7; 1 Cor. 9:24), and so in 9:16 “he takes on the voice of one who questions [and refutes], rather than of one who denies” the role of willing and running in salvation.<sup>315</sup> Pelagius thus followed Origen’s general approach in 9:14-18 by placing Paul’s words in the mouth of his opponents.

With Pelagius, we conclude our treatment of the early Latin interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13, and we may now summarize the general results of our investigation. We have argued that Latin Nicene interpreters were consciously aware of predestinarian elements in Manichaeism as they interpreted 9:6-13, and that this awareness encouraged Nicene interpreters to approach this passage as a text about predestination. Moreover, we have found that Augustine’s reading of 9:6-13, a reading that would exert a great amount of influence in subsequent centuries, changed not merely by a more “careful” and “honest” reading of Paul, but by a reading of Paul that took place in dialogue with his Manichaean and Donatist opponents. And although new exegetical positions were introduced in the Latin tradition, particularly by Ambrosiaster and Augustine, the Latin tradition shared many of the positions already found in the Greek tradition. With this last observation, we may now return to the question we asked at the end of section 1.2.1 of whether or not the Latin tradition was influenced by its Greek predecessors.

### *1.3 Greek Influence on the Latin Tradition*

As we have now seen, the Latin tradition repeated the general contours of the free-will reading of Rom. 9:6-13 that was already developed in the Greek tradition. Does this repetition indicate influence or coincidence? By answering this question, our goal is to better understand why the Latin interpretation of 9:6-13 took the shape that it did. In the case of Jerome and Pelagius, it is undisputed that they were heavily influenced by Origen. But what about

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid. 9:16.

Ambrosiaster and the early Augustine? We will argue below that they too were influenced by the Greek tradition, and to narrow our focus, we will limit our attention to their use of Origen.

A problem with claiming Origenian influence on Ambrosiaster and the early Augustine is the fact that unlike Jerome, they did not know Greek.<sup>316</sup> And unlike Pelagius, they wrote before Rufinus made his Latin translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* in 406/7 C.E.<sup>317</sup> Joshua D. Papsdorf concludes from Ambrosiaster's ignorance of Greek that he made no significant use of anyone from the Greek tradition, including Origen,<sup>318</sup> and the same has been said of Augustine also.<sup>319</sup> How then can we claim Origenian influence on their reading of 9:6-13? We will consider the case for Ambrosiaster and the early Augustine in turn, but the evidence seems to suggest that they were familiar with Origen's interpretation of 9:6-13 through incomplete translations and other channels of transmission.

### 1.3.1 Origen's Influence on Ambrosiaster

In Alfred Smith's study, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" (1918), he concluded that there is "a strong family resemblance between Ambrosiaster, Origen-Rufinus, and Pelagius in their comments on certain

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<sup>316</sup> On Ambrosiaster as an author with mono-lingual competence in Latin with limited usage of Greek loan-words and phrases, see Lunn-Rockcliffe, *Ambrosiaster's Political Theology*, 39-40. As for Augustine, he was virtually ignorant of Greek in his young age and relied on Latin translations of Greek works (in 392 C.E., he wrote to Jerome asking for translations of Greek commentaries on the Bible, especially those of Origen [*Letter* 28, 2.2], but this request was never fulfilled); only after 420 C.E., when confronted by a Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum, did Augustine show evidence of having learned some Greek at an elementary level (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* [Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969], 36, 271, 412).

<sup>317</sup> Scheck, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>318</sup> Joshua D. Papsdorf, "Ambrosiaster's Theological Anthropology: Nature, Law, and Grace in the Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles and the *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti CXXVII*" (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 2008), 7-8, n. 14. So also Bray, "Introduction," 21: "He could have known Origen's biblical commentaries but apparently did not, presumably because Rufinus had not yet translated them into Latin."

<sup>319</sup> Keech, *Anti-Pelagian Christology*, 134: "That Augustine could not have had access to any work by Origen before the 390s, in virtue of his lack of good Greek and the paucity of Latin translations within his ambit, was the standard argument of those investigating this issue throughout the twentieth century." Notice that Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 270, in their history of interpretation of Rom. 9:6-29, make no mention of Ambrosiaster or Augustine in their section on Origen's subsequent influence.

passages in ‘Romans.’”<sup>320</sup> But because Ambrosiaster knew little to no Greek, Smith explained that Ambrosiaster did not borrow from Origen; instead, either (1) Rufinus, using “the utmost freedom” in translating Origen, incorporated elements from Ambrosiaster, or (2) elements from Rufinus’s translation of Origen were added to later recensions of Ambrosiaster’s commentary. Schelkle, on the other hand, in his study of the early interpretation of Romans 1-11, concluded that “the commentary of Ambrosiaster surely draws from the tradition” stemming from Origen.<sup>321</sup> So, who is right?

Smith’s proposal that the similarities between Ambrosiaster and Origen-Rufinus are explained by Rufinus’s incorporation of Ambrosiastrian elements needs major qualification. First, as Schelkle’s study shows, it is possible to trace some of the similarities between Ambrosiaster and Origen-Rufinus to either Greek fragments of Origen’s commentary or to the Greek tradition stemming from Origen.<sup>322</sup> This means that Ambrosiaster and Origen-Rufinus are sometimes similar not because Rufinus is relying on Ambrosiaster, but because Rufinus is translating directly from the Greek Origen while Ambrosiaster, writing before Rufinus, somehow already had access to Origen. Second, the fact that Rufinus’s translation successfully fulfilled Heraclius’s request to abbreviate Origen’s 15-volume *Commentary on Romans* by about half<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Smith, “Latin Sources,” 19:168.

<sup>321</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 414: “Der Kommentar des Ambrosiaster schöpft wohl aus der Überlieferung, ist aber auch nicht selten eigenartig und unabhängig, scharfsinnig und geschichtlich orientiert.”

<sup>322</sup> For example, Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 104-5, observes that on Rom. 3:20, Origen-Rufinus asked how the law could produce knowledge of sin in those who sinned prior to the giving of the law. Origen-Rufinus answered by distinguishing the Law of Moses and the natural law indwelling every human being, claiming that Paul had the latter in mind in 3:20. The same question and answer were found not only in Ambrosiaster’s treatment of the same passage, but also in a Greek fragment of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*. The fragment is contained within a “chain of extracts” (i.e. a collection of extracts drawn from various Greek patristic commentaries) (Scheck, “Introduction,” 17), which has been critically edited by A. Ramsbotham, “Documents: The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans,” *JTS* 13 (1912): 209-21, 257-68; 14 (1913): 10-22. The fragment containing Origen’s commentary on Rom. 3:20 (Fr. XIV) is located in *JTS* 13 (1912): 220. For an example showing our ability to trace a similarity between Ambrosiaster and Origen-Rufinus to the Greek tradition stemming from Origen, see our discussion below on the interpretation of “true Israel” in Rom. 9:6b.

<sup>323</sup> Preface of Rufinus to Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* (2); Scheck, “Introduction,” 12-13.

makes it difficult to imagine Rufinus preoccupied with adding elements from Ambrosiaster at the expense of Origen's own theologically rich comments. And if Rufinus *did* add Ambrosiastrian elements to improve Origen's commentary, why not also add elements from Chrysostom, Victorinus, Augustine, and others? The fact that Rufinus felt overwhelmed by the task of abridgement<sup>324</sup> suggests a disposition *against* adding non-Origenian material. And third, while Rufinus certainly took some liberties in his translation of Origen, the kinds of liberties he took do not suggest a desire to fill Origen's commentary with Ambrosiaster or any other author, but a desire to recover Origen's authentic voice. According to Ronald E. Heine, Rufinus suppressed contradictory elements; he attempted to remove corrupt elements by appealing to *Origen's* other writings; he clarified obscure points by appealing to *Origen's* other writings; he translated the sense of Origen, not word for word; and he abbreviated the Greek text.<sup>325</sup> None of these changes betray a habit of injecting Ambrosiaster into Origen.

On the other hand, Smith's alternative proposal that elements from Rufinus's translation of Origen were added to later recensions of Ambrosiaster is improbable for two main reasons. First, as we indicated above (section 1.2.2), the three recensions of Ambrosiaster's commentary (*alpha*, *beta*, and *gamma*) were produced before the end of the fourth century,<sup>326</sup> well before Rufinus produced his translation, so that we cannot speak of interpolations being made during this period. And second, there is currently no evidence to suggest that interpolations were made to later manuscripts of the three recensions.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Preface of Rufinus to Origen's *Commentary on Romans* (2-3).

<sup>325</sup> Heine, "Introduction to *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*," 34-5 (see pp. 27-39 for further discussion on the reliability of Rufinus as a translator).

<sup>326</sup> According to Bray, "Introduction," 16, Ambrosiaster's commentary became a standard work of Latin biblical study by the end of the fourth century.

<sup>327</sup> Bray, "Introduction," 17, observes that there is some cross-pollination among later manuscripts of the three recensions, but no mention is made of an attempt to add Origenian elements.

How then shall we understand the similarities between Ambrosiaster and Rufinus's translation of Origen? While it remains possible that Rufinus added *some* elements from Ambrosiaster, the more probable explanation is given by Richard N. Longenecker, that "[Ambrosiaster] knew Origen, as well as some of the other Greek commentators," but "only through Latin catenae of quotations drawn from their writings," so that "he refers to their interpretations only in fragmentary fashion."<sup>328</sup> And in the case of Romans 9, there is clear evidence that Ambrosiaster was influenced by Origen. As we saw earlier, Ambrosiaster, Chrysostom, and Origen-Rufinus all interpreted "true Israel" in 9:6b quite distinctly as those who have "seen God,"<sup>329</sup> and the best explanation for this is that Ambrosiaster and Chrysostom derived this view from Origen,<sup>330</sup> while Rufinus faithfully translated Origen's commentary. In addition, given the fact that Ambrosiaster must have had Origen's interpretation of 9:6b in context, it would not be surprising if Ambrosiaster was influenced by Origen on other points as well. Like Origen, Ambrosiaster identified "the children of promise" (9:8) as those who receive God's promise through a faith like Abraham's (9:7-8),<sup>331</sup> and he also based God's predestination on foreknowledge.<sup>332</sup> Thus, given Ambrosiaster's access to translated fragments of Origen's commentary, as well as good evidence that Ambrosiaster knew at least some of Origen's views

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<sup>328</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 293.

<sup>329</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7; Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464); Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2 (FC 104:110).

<sup>330</sup> The possibility that Ambrosiaster was the source of this interpretation for Chrysostom is highly unlikely. According to Dr. Wendy Mayer in an e-mail correspondence (December 2015), although Chrysostom probably knew Latin as part of his secular education in Antioch (cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998], 7), there is currently no evidence to suggest that Chrysostom made use of Latin or Western patristic literature. Virtually all of his influences derive from the Greek tradition.

<sup>331</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7; Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2-3 (FC 104:110-11).

<sup>332</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:11-14; Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.4 (FC 104:113) (cf. 1.3.2-4 [FC 103:64-66]).

on Romans 9, we may conclude that Ambrosiaster's interpretation of 9:6-13 was influenced by Origen.

### 1.3.2 Origen's Influence on the Early Augustine

If we are correct that Ambrosiaster knew Origen through an intermediary, it is quite possible that Augustine did as well. In fact, we know of a few cases where Augustine probably had a partial translation of Origen before the relevant work's full translation. For example, Berthold Altaner discovered that Augustine's *On Genesis Against the Manichaeans* (388-389 C.E.) depended on Origen's *Homilies on Genesis* and *Leviticus*, even though the latter were translated by Rufinus more than a decade later.<sup>333</sup> And more significantly, Dominic Keech has argued that in Augustine's *Sermon 273*, dating from January 21, 396 C.E., his phrasing and combination of elements (Rom. 8:3; Luke 1:35; and the motif of the sinless virgin birth) betray an awareness of Rufinus's translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* at Rom. 8:3.<sup>334</sup> Rufinus's translation was not fully completed until 405/6 C.E., and so Keech argues that Augustine could have received early extracts of Rufinus's translation through Simplician, Augustine's mentor and ongoing discussion partner, since Simplician arguably belonged to the same community of Origenian readership of which Rufinus was a part.<sup>335</sup> The point is that Augustine could have acquired portions of Origen's works through channels of which we are not fully aware.

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<sup>333</sup> Berthold Altaner, "Augustinus und Origenes: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung," *HJ* 70 (1950): 24-28. Altaner concluded that Augustine must have had access to Origen through an intermediary and speculates mediation through Hilary of Poitiers's lost Latin translation of Origen's *Homilies on Job*, his *Commentary on the Psalms*, or Eusebius of Vercelli's lost translation of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Commentary on the Psalms*.

<sup>334</sup> See Keech, *Anti-Pelagian Christology*, 106-41 (esp. 130-4).

<sup>335</sup> Keech, *Anti-Pelagian Christology*, 135-140. Keech builds off the work of György Heidl, *Origen's Influence on the Young Augustine: A Chapter of the History of Origenism* (ECS 3; New Jersey: Notre Dame University, Louaize and Gorgias Press LLC, 2003), 27-36, who also saw Simplician as a possible mediator of Origen to Augustine.

Moreover, we should not suppose that Rufinus was the only source through whom Augustine could have received Origen. There are in fact a number of intermediaries through whom Augustine could have received Origen's interpretation of Romans 9. These include (1) Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310-367 C.E.), who not only knew Origen's writings, but also spoke of God's prenatal rejection of Esau by foreknowledge in his homily on Psalm 57:3 LXX;<sup>336</sup> (2) Ambrosiaster, whose position that God foreknows a person's faith and not a person's works is exactly that of the early Augustine;<sup>337</sup> (3) Ambrose, who was deeply influenced by Origen and whose sermons Augustine would have heard as a catechumen in Milan from 385-387 C.E.,<sup>338</sup> and (4) Jerome, whose Pauline commentaries were available to Augustine by 394-395 C.E.,<sup>339</sup> in which he repeated Origen's explanation of Rom. 9:6-13 through foreknowledge (see section 1.2.3). We could also mention (5) Augustine's colleagues in Milan, whose Nicene Neo-Platonic Christianity drew from Origen; (6) Augustine's colleagues in Carthage, whose discussions with Augustine led to his early writings on Paul;<sup>340</sup> and (7) a number of other intermediaries who are simply unknown to us. In the words of C. P. Bammel, "[w]hen one remembers how often Origen

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<sup>336</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus Super Psalmos* (CCSL 61:168-69). I am dependent here on Schelkle's reading of the Latin text (*Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 338).

<sup>337</sup> Smith, "Latin Sources," 20 (1918): 55. It is uncertain whether Augustine possessed Ambrosiaster's *Commentary on Romans* at the time of writing his own. For a brief summary of the history of the debate, see Keech *Anti-Pelagian Christology*, 107-15, who ultimately accepts Smith's conclusion that Augustine possessed Ambrosiaster's commentary before writing the *Propositions*. We prefer the conclusion that Augustine possessed Ambrosiaster's *Commentary on Romans* while writing his early works on Paul.

<sup>338</sup> It is unclear when Augustine became familiar with Ambrose's writings, but Gorday (*Principles*, 142, n. 15), following Giuseppe Ferretti, *L'influsso di S. Ambrogio in S. Agostino* (Faenza: Fratelli Lega, 1951), 39, suggests that Augustine seems to have acquired some of his compositions by 405 C.E.

<sup>339</sup> In *Letter 28*, 3, Augustine's criticism of a position found in Jerome's commentary on Galatians indicates that he had been reading the commentary by 394-395 C.E., which is when Augustine wrote to Jerome. C.P. Bammel supposes that Augustine acquired the commentary by 393 C.E. ("Augustine, Origen and the Exegesis of St. Paul," *Augustinianum* 32 [1992]: 341-43; repr. in *Tradition and Exegesis in Early Christian Writers* [Aldershot: Variorum, 1995]).

<sup>340</sup> Augustine describes the genesis of the *Propositions* many years later in his *Revisions* 1.23.1 (*WSA* I/2:91, Ramsey): "While I was still a presbyter, it happened that the Apostle's Epistle to the Romans was read among us who were together at Carthage, and I was asked some things by the brothers. When I responded to them as well as I could, they wanted what I said to be written down rather than be spoken without being recorded. When I acceded to them, one book was added to my previous works."

repeats himself and how often he is plagiarised by later writers, the hypothesis of influence via some such source which is unknown to us or has not so far been noticed seems most plausible.”<sup>341</sup> Through such an unknown intermediary, Augustine may have adopted from Origen “the concern to affirm the justice of God’s call” and, in the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68, “the suggestion that [God’s call] may be preceded by hidden merits of souls (*animarum occultissima merita*)”<sup>342</sup> (cf. Origen’s early notion of pre-existent merits). It is difficult to be certain which intermediary Augustine was more or less influenced by since Augustine rarely identifies his sources and is too independent a thinker to follow anyone slavishly.<sup>343</sup>

Nevertheless, the evaluation of Eric Plumer is worth noting:

[I]n general with regard to the ancient Latin commentators on Paul, we see undeniable signs of a surprisingly complex network of influence, even though most of the specific lines of influence cannot be traced directly from author A to author B. This total impression needs to be borne in mind when we look at the admittedly rather meagre results we obtain from our attempts to establish definite links between any two commentators.<sup>344</sup>

The numerous similarities between Augustine and his contemporaries cannot be reduced to mere coincidence; rather, they are indicative of channels of influence of which we are not yet fully aware. Thus, a number of possible intermediaries exist through whom Augustine could have obtained Origen’s interpretation of Romans 9.

In assessing Origen’s influence on Augustine’s reading of Romans 9, we should also keep in mind the pervasive influence of Origen in the Latin West. Before Augustine even acquired the translations of Origen by Rufinus, the structure of his early thought had already

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<sup>341</sup> Bammel, “Augustine, Origen and the Exegesis of St. Paul,” 347.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. 355.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. 347.

<sup>344</sup> Plumer, “Introduction,” 55-56.

replicated Origen's.<sup>345</sup> This was no doubt due to the fact that when Augustine converted to Nicene Christianity, he converted to the Neo-Platonic brand in Milan which drew on Origen's Platonic Christianity. Moreover, as we have now seen, fourth-century Nicene interpreters made good use of Origen's free-will reading of Paul, as his debate with gnostic Christians in the early third century shared many similarities with the Nicene debate with the Manichaeans in the late fourth century.<sup>346</sup> Thus, when Augustine offered an interpretation of Paul that looked very much like that of his contemporaries and like Origen's, again, this is not coincidence but dependence. When Augustine, as a novice exegete, consulted his contemporaries and predecessors to combat the Manichaean reading of Paul, he had picked up a number of elements from Origen, whether he knew it or not. Thus, given Augustine's access to partial translations of Origen, his access to numerous intermediaries who could have conveyed Origen's interpretation of Romans 9, and the pervasive influence of Origen on the Latin West, it is highly probable that Augustine's early interpretation of Romans 9, which looked very much like Origen's, was either directly or indirectly influenced by him.

We may thus conclude that when some of the most prominent Latin Nicene exegetes in the late fourth century interpreted Rom. 9:6-13, they were consciously contending against Manichaean predestinarian elements and were able to make good use of Origen, who had already combated similar elements in gnostic Christian interpretations of the passage a couple centuries earlier. Origen's pervasive influence in the patristic Greek and Latin traditions is an important reason why there is a degree of uniformity in the patristic reading of 9:6-13.

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<sup>345</sup> Bammel, "Augustine, Origen and the Exegesis of St. Paul," 342, 347-48. Bammel notes that both Origen and the early Augustine valued the material world while subordinating it to the spiritual world as part of their anti-heretical stance; both endowed the soul with free-will and gave an account of its fall and return to God as part of their theodicy; and both saw the return to God as a progress involving the transfer of affections from earthly to heavenly things.

<sup>346</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, 2:196.

## 2. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the patristic exegesis of Romans 9:6-13, interpreters struggled not only with the predestinarian elements of the passage but also with the ambiguity of Paul's dense prose. We will now organize the patristic interpretations by topic in order to concentrate our focus on various issues. As we said in our introduction, most of the topics were chosen by considering key issues in the course of Paul's argument (2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6), while others were chosen because of their general relevance to the passage (2.1, 2.5, 2.7). Our goal in this section is to display with greater clarity the points of unity and diversity; to summarize how the predestinarian approach to 9:6-13 in the Patristic period arose, how it was propagated, and how it transformed; and to ponder new possibilities for the interpretation of 9:6-13.

### *2.1 Paul and the Jews*

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have argued that Paul's remarks in Rom. 9:6-13 were generally "Jewish friendly."<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is based on the view that Paul, in 9:6-29, recounts the story of Israel (from the patriarchs [9:6-13] to the exodus [9:14-18] to the exile [9:19-29]) in a way that any devout Jew in the first century would have heartily affirmed. They would have had no objection to the line of election from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, and to biblical statements like "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." And the reason why Paul recounts the story of Israel in this way is because he is teaching the Jews that an implication of their own story of election is to accept God's inclusion of the non-Jews, and/or because he is defending the Jewish doctrine of election against non-Jewish Christians who believe their own election has nothing to do with Israel's.

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 774-80; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2:1184-87.

Most patristic interpreters, however, felt that Paul was speaking *against* unbelieving Jews. For most patristic interpreters, Paul was writing to Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Rome, but in Romans 9, Paul wanted the church in Rome to “listen in” on his dialogue with unbelieving Jews who thought Christianity implied the failure of God’s promise to bless Israel. In the course of this dialogue, Paul was not defending the Jewish doctrine of election in 9:6-13, but *critiquing* it. In the messianic age, just because an individual is a physical descendant of Israel (9:7-9) who observes the law (9:10-13) does not guarantee salvation for that individual! This was the view of Origen.<sup>2</sup> Chrysostom explicitly said of 9:6-13 that “it was against the Jews that he was contending.”<sup>3</sup> For Ambrosiaster, Paul listed Israel’s privileges in 9:4-5 “in order that others [i.e. non-Jews] grieve for them as well.”<sup>4</sup> But on 9:11-13, he said that “[t]hese things are said of the Jews, who defend their privilege of being the children of Abraham.”<sup>5</sup> In the case of Augustine, Paul’s remarks against the Jews in 9:6-13 were applied against Jewish-Christians in Rome who boasted in their works.<sup>6</sup> And Pelagius prefaced his entire treatment of Romans 9 by saying that “[Paul] intends to proceed against the Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Romans 9:1-6: The Problem and Solution

Of the patristic interpreters we covered, all who say anything on the matter agree on the basic problem raised by 9:1-6: God promised to bless Israel; most Israelites are not being saved in the messianic age; and so has God broken his promise? Origen and Chrysostom interpreted the

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<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2 (FC 104:110-11). Gorday, *Principles*, 84, suggests that Origen may have viewed Paul’s imaginary opponent in Rom. 9:14ff. as a Jewish rabbi, given the citations of Scripture. It is difficult to imagine a Jewish rabbi quoting Scripture to argue that God is unjust (9:14), but then again, Pelagius held this view as well. Was it the case that Origen and Pelagius simply did not think through their views?

<sup>3</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464).

<sup>4</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:4-5 (Bray).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 9:11-13 (Bray).

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Propositions* 60.

<sup>7</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:1 (de Bruyn).

“promises” of Israel in 9:4 as the promise of blessing made to Abraham.<sup>8</sup> And in 9:6a, “the word of God” that had not fallen was similarly understood. Origen defined it as “the promise that was made to [the Israelites],” which was the promise of blessing made to Abraham.<sup>9</sup> Chrysostom said it was God’s promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:7, “I will give this land to you and to your seed.”<sup>10</sup> Ambrosiaster understood “the word of God” as Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9:7, “In Isaac shall your seed be called.”<sup>11</sup> And for Pelagius, the question of whether God’s word had fallen is the question, “Did God then lie to Abraham?”<sup>12</sup> Augustine, despite his numerous writings on Romans 9, said little about Paul’s grief over Israel’s unbelief and its possible implications for God’s word. As for the source of the objection that God’s word had fallen, Chrysostom explicitly placed it in the mouth of unbelieving Jews: Paul pleaded for unbelieving Jews in Rom. 9:3 “[t]hat they may not say . . . that the promise of God has fallen to the ground.”<sup>13</sup>

The reason why God’s word has not fallen is because “not all from Israel are Israel” (9:6b). According to Origen,<sup>14</sup> Chrysostom,<sup>15</sup> Ambrosiaster,<sup>16</sup> and Pelagius,<sup>17</sup> Paul was saying that throughout history, God has *always* given the promise of blessing not to every Israelite by birth, but to those who believe; so in the messianic age (now also adding the perspectives of Irenaeus<sup>18</sup> and Augustine<sup>19</sup>), unbelieving Jews have been disinherited of the promise, while believing Jews and non-Jews alike have inherited it.

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<sup>8</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.13.8 (FC 104:108); Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:460).

<sup>9</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2 (FC 104:110); 7.13.8 (FC 104:108).

<sup>10</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:460).

<sup>11</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6 (de Bruyn).

<sup>13</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:460).

<sup>14</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2-3 (FC 104:110-11).

<sup>15</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:463-64).

<sup>16</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-8.

<sup>17</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.21.3 (ANF 1:493).

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 84, 4 (WSA III/18:206).

In 9:6b, “true Israel” was generally seen as a category that could include both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. Origen,<sup>20</sup> Chrysostom,<sup>21</sup> and Ambrosiaster<sup>22</sup> distinctly interpreted “true Israel” as those who have “seen God”—that is, those who believe in God. Origen made a christological application of this principle: “the one who has not seen the one who said, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father as well’ [John 14:9] cannot be called Israel.”<sup>23</sup> Augustine included in “true Israel” all the children of the new covenant.<sup>24</sup> And Pelagius said, “if not all Israelites are from Israel, then some ‘[true Israelites] in whom there is no guile’ are [also] from the Gentiles (cf. John 1:47).”<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3 Romans 9:7-9: The Children of Promise

Paul continued his defense of God’s word by defining “true Israel” in terms of Abraham’s true heirs (Rom. 9:7-9). The patristic interpreters sought to explain why Abraham’s true heirs are called “in Isaac” (9:7b), wherein Isaac served as the pattern for “the children of promise.”

In general, “the children of promise” (τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας) were understood in two ways: (1) children who believe in the promise, and (2) children who are born by promise.<sup>26</sup> Under the first option, Origen defined “the children of promise according to Isaac” as the “[children] of that faith through which Abraham merited to receive the promise of the future inheritance.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the typological similarity between Isaac and the children of God

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<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2 (FC 104:110-11).

<sup>21</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464).

<sup>22</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7 (Bray).

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.2 (FC 104:111).

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 24.40 (413 C.E.); *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 3.41 (427-430 C.E.).

<sup>25</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6b-7 (de Bruyn).

<sup>26</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 354-55, provides an excellent summary of the patristic interpretation of “the children of promise,” but he says nothing about Augustine’s understanding of the term.

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.3 (FC 104:111).

involved being born not by the flesh, but by God's word and power.<sup>28</sup> For Ambrosiaster, 9:7b indicated that Abraham's heirs, "the children of promise," are "those who accepted the faith by which Isaac was born."<sup>29</sup> Isaac was a type of Christ, so that as Abraham believed what God said about Isaac, so his heirs are those who believe what God said about Christ. Although Augustine's tendency was to view the children of promise as those who are promised by God, on one occasion he defined them as "members of Abraham's race, not by carnal descent but through kinship with him in faith."<sup>30</sup>

Under the second option, Diodore of Tarsus understood the children of promise as those God promised in eternity past as heirs because he foreknew that they would imitate Isaac's piety and righteousness. Chrysostom said that Abraham's heirs were called "in Isaac" (9:7b) so that "one may learn that they who are born after the fashion of Isaac, these are in the truest sense Abraham's children."<sup>31</sup> Isaac was born "not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the power of the promise."<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the children of promise are those promised by Israel's prophets who have been born by the power of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 4:28-30). For Pelagius, "Isaac was begotten beyond natural means from old people by the promise of God. So [too] the promise now makes Christians sons of Abraham." Pelagius likely understood the promise as Gen. 15:5.<sup>33</sup> And for Augustine, Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9:7b foreshadowed Abraham's new covenant heirs as children born by promise (Rom. 9:8).<sup>34</sup> He defined the children of promise as the children of God's own doing, since "[God] promises what he himself is going to do."<sup>35</sup> On various

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 7.15.2 (*FC* 104:111-12).

<sup>29</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7 (Bray).

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 84, 4 (*WSA* III/18:206, Boulding).

<sup>31</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:463).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:8 (de Bruyn).

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 140, 19.47 (411-12 C.E.).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 19.48; see also *The Spirit and the Letter* 24.40 (413 C.E.); *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153, 158.1 (427-430 C.E.).

occasions, Augustine said they were individually promised and predestined in eternity past (cf. Rom. 8:29).<sup>36</sup> Or, on one occasion, they were promised in Isa. 45:8 LXX.<sup>37</sup> And on another occasion, Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9:7b was the relevant promise.<sup>38</sup> What the patristic interpretation of “the children of promise” shows is that this term can be understood and nuanced in a number of ways.

Before proceeding to Jacob and Esau, we will pause now to make a further observation about the way patristic interpreters understood the course of Paul’s argument. As we saw above, Origen, Chrysostom, and Pelagius understood Rom. 9:6b to mean that God has *always* given the promise of blessing to those who believe. Would they understand Paul’s parallel statements in 9:8 similarly? That is, has God *always* given the promise of blessing to the children of promise? If so, one wonders how their definitions of “the children of promise” (Chrysostom, Pelagius) or “the children of God” (Origen) would apply before the time of Christ. In all their definitions, there is an allusion to the idea of resurrection which is more apt for spiritually reborn Christians than for Israelites under the old covenant.

#### *2.4 Romans 9:10-13: Jacob and Esau*

Paul gave further support for his claim that “not all from Israel are Israel” (9:6b) by using the case of Jacob and Esau to show that true Israel is chosen “not by works but by the one who calls” (9:12). Paul’s exclusion of works was handled in various ways during the Patristic period. Origen did not think Paul was excluding works in principle. In *On First Principles*, he based God’s election on the works of the pre-existent soul.<sup>39</sup> And later in his *Commentary on Romans*,

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<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 186, 7.25 (416 C.E.); *Letter* 190, 3.12 (418 C.E.); *Rebuke and Grace* 9.20 (427 C.E.).

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153 (427-430 C.E.; *WSA* I/25:231).

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 118 (10<sup>th</sup> sermon), 3 (*WSA* III/19:383-84).

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.7 (*ANF* 4:292).

election was based on the foreknowledge of works resulting from faith.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Origen understood “not by works” to exclude only the Jewish works of the law (e.g. circumcision, food laws, Sabbath observance, etc.),<sup>41</sup> although Paul’s exclusion seems to extend to *any* deeds, good or bad. The view that God’s election took place according to the foreknowledge of works was repeated in the Greek tradition by Acacius of Caesarea,<sup>42</sup> Diodore of Tarsus,<sup>43</sup> Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>44</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>45</sup> John Chrysostom,<sup>46</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus,<sup>47</sup> and Gennadius of Constantinople.<sup>48</sup> Ambrosiaster in the Latin tradition identified faith alone, not works, as the object of God’s foreknowledge.<sup>49</sup> The early Augustine<sup>50</sup> and Pelagius<sup>51</sup> followed this position, with Augustine making explicit Paul’s rejection of works in principle.

Furthermore, Jacob and Esau were often viewed with national significance. Irenaeus appealed to the original context of Paul’s quote in 9:12 to argue that Jacob and Esau were symbolic of two nations, respectively the Church and Israel.<sup>52</sup> Thus, whereas 9:6-9 was frequently understood by patristic commentators to distinguish true and false Israel throughout history, Irenaeus understood 9:10-13 to distinguish old and new Israel between the ages.<sup>53</sup> Ephraim thought the typology of Jacob and Esau as Church and Israel was self-evident.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.8.6 (FC 104:91); cf. 1.3.1-4 (FC 103:64-6).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 337; Scheck, “Introduction,” 41-42.

<sup>42</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

<sup>44</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 74:836).

<sup>45</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 143-44.

<sup>46</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464-66).

<sup>47</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio epistolae ad Romanos* (PG 82:153).

<sup>48</sup> Staab, *Pauluskomentare*, 390.

<sup>49</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 8:28-29; 9:6-7, 11-13.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *Propositions* 60.

<sup>51</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:10.

<sup>52</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.21.2-3 (ANF 1:493).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 355, who cites Leonhard Goppelt against the opinion of Irenaeus (*Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* [trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 140, n. 43): in Rom. 9:6-13, Paul “sketches the longitudinal section that the prophets saw between true and false Israel, not the typological cross section between the old and the new Israel that divides the ages.”

<sup>54</sup> Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 356.

Diodore of Tarsus briefly mentioned the typology: “the promise was given according to a just decision, and as it was for Isaac, so also for the Gentiles.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Chrysostom aligned Isaac and Jacob with the non-Jews, and Ishmael and Esau with the Jews.<sup>56</sup> Ambrosiaster held a position quite similar to Irenaeus:<sup>57</sup> “Jacob and Esau were born as types of two peoples, believers and unbelievers, who come from the same source but are nevertheless very different.”<sup>58</sup> And finally, Augustine thought that Jacob and Esau could represent Israel and Edom, or the Church and unbelieving Israel, or even spiritual and carnal humanity.<sup>59</sup> He interpreted the national significance of Isaac and Ishmael in a similar manner.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the patriarchs in 9:6-13 were frequently interpreted as symbolic of corporate entities; but alongside this element, they were also used to support a doctrine of individual predestination.

### *2.5 Romans 9:6-13: Predestination*

Throughout the Patristic period, all interpreters took 9:6-13 as a passage about the predestination of individuals. This perspective has endured to the present day, but how did such a view arise? Is a predestinarian reading of 9:6-13 inevitable for any reader of this text? We have argued throughout our history of interpretation that the earliest interpreters of Paul in the Greek and Latin traditions, respectively gnostic and Manichaean Christians, played an important role in shaping the predestinarian reading of 9:6-13 during the Patristic period.

According to the myth held by Origen’s gnostic Christian opponents (late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), humans are born with a good or evil nature that predestines them for either salvation or destruction. Branded as heretics, these gnostic Christians sought to support their myth from

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<sup>55</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:463-65, passim).

<sup>57</sup> So also Schelkle, *Paulus Lehrer der Väter*, 356.

<sup>58</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:10 (Bray).

<sup>59</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 196, 3.13 (418 C.E.; *WSA* II/3:316-17); see also *Expositions of the Psalms* 118 (28<sup>th</sup> sermon), 4-5 (*WSA* III/20:197-98); 134, 8 (*WSA* III/20:197-98); 136, 18 (*WSA* III/20:237).

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 196, 3.13 (418 C.E.; *WSA* II/3:316-17).

Scripture, and when they came to 9:6-13, they readily found support for their predestinarian doctrine of natures.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the predestination of the patriarchs was not taken as an incidental detail of Paul's argument, but it was elevated as a universal paradigm for the way God predestines *all* human beings. Without critically analyzing 9:6-13, they simply *assumed* that Paul was talking about the predestination of all humanity.

Mainstream Christians like Irenaeus and Origen found the gnostic negation of free-will in 9:6-13 theologically unacceptable, and so somehow, a free-will reading had to be developed. In their responses, however, they readily accepted the assumption of their gnostic opponents that 9:6-13 was about the predestination of all human beings. As long as they could preserve free-will within a predestinarian framework, that framework itself did not need to be questioned. As is usual in debate, opponents not only disagree with one another but they also learn from one another and make concessions. Irenaeus and Origen learned and conceded the predestinarian framework of their opponents, but where they differed was in their explanation of the *basis* of predestination. Here the free-will flag was planted.

Irenaeus (ca. 120 – ca. 202 C.E.) viewed Jacob and Esau as symbolic of two nations,<sup>62</sup> not of every individual human being, and yet to preclude the gnostic doctrine of natures, he based God's predestination on the foreknowledge of faith.<sup>63</sup> This appeal to foreknowledge will be repeated in all patristic interpreters, even though in 9:11 Paul explicitly excluded all actions post-birth from the basis of God's election.

In *On First Principles*, Origen (185-254 C.E.) explicitly mentioned the interpretation of 9:6-13 by his gnostic Christian opponents,<sup>64</sup> and he readily adopted their predestinarian

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<sup>61</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.5 (ANF 4:291).

<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.21.2 (ANF 1:493).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. 4.29.2 (ANF 1:502).

<sup>64</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.5 (ANF 4:291).

perspective on the passage. But unlike Irenaeus, Origen explained the basis of God's predestination by appealing to the merits of the pre-existent soul (i.e. the merits of a prior life).<sup>65</sup> By all appearances, this was not an existing interpretation rehashed by Origen, but an original interpretation developed in direct response to his gnostic opponents. In his later *Commentary on Romans*, Origen changed the basis of predestination to the foreknowledge of works,<sup>66</sup> perhaps because he abandoned his philosophical approach in *On First Principles* for an approach that appeared more biblical (cf. 8:29).

Origen's *Commentary on Romans* would exert an enormous influence on the rest of the Greek tradition, and his predestinarian approach to 9:6-13, based on foreknowledge, would be followed in patristic figures like Acacius of Caesarea (d. 366 C.E.),<sup>67</sup> Diodore of Tarsus (d. ca. 392 C.E.),<sup>68</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376-444 C.E.),<sup>69</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.),<sup>70</sup> John Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.),<sup>71</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393 – ca. 458 C.E.),<sup>72</sup> and Gennadius of Constantinople (d. 471 C.E.).<sup>73</sup>

In the Latin tradition, the attempt by Manichaean Christians to claim Paul as their own sparked a renaissance in the interpretation of Paul in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The Manichaean myth spoke of humans born with varying levels of good and evil, an election before birth, and a divine call that irresistibly awoke some and not others. As far as we know, they did not provide an interpretation of 9:6-13. But as the Valentinian myth had done in the second

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<sup>65</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 2.9.6-7 (ANF 4:292); cf. idem, *Commentary on John* 2.191-192 (FC 80:146-47).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 1.3.1-4 (FC 103:64-6).

<sup>67</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 74:836).

<sup>70</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 143-44.

<sup>71</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:464-66).

<sup>72</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio epistolae ad Romanos* (PG 82:153).

<sup>73</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 390.

century, the Manichaeian myth encouraged Nicene Christians to approach 9:6-13 as a text about universal predestination. Nicene Christians felt that such an approach was benign as long as free-will could be maintained. Thus, rather than question the predestinarian approach, the Nicenes based God's predestination on the foreknowledge of faith.

The predestinarian approach by Latin Nicene Christians was also encouraged by their Greek predecessors. Given the similarities between Origen's debate with his gnostic Christian opponents and the Nicene debate with Manichaeian Christianity, the Nicenes made good use of Origen's free-will reading of Paul. As a result, we were able to detect clear evidence of Origenian influence in the interpretations of 9:6-13 by all the Latin Nicene interpreters we considered.

With Augustine's letter *To Simplician* (396-397 C.E.), the predestinarian understanding of 9:6-13 underwent a major shift. Already in the *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.6 (394-395 C.E.), he rejected the theory of predestination by the foreknowledge of faith.<sup>74</sup> Then in *To Simplician* 1.2.12, he began to develop his radically new understanding of predestination. Augustine concluded that God's election depended on nothing in the human, but he did not arrive at this stark conclusion by simply pondering the implications of 9:11. Augustine realized that his free-will position was vulnerable to the same criticisms he had of the Manichaeian view of God—namely, that something impeded God's attempt to save, revealing him as weak and impotent—and so in his anti-Manichaeian reconsideration of Rom. 9:16 and Phil. 2:12-13, he concluded that when God willed to have mercy on a person, his will was not responding to anything from the human.<sup>75</sup> That is, God's predestination was absolutely unconditioned by human choice or actions. Furthermore, influenced by the Manichaeian notion of divine "calling,"

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<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.6 (WSA I/12:120-21).

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.12 (WSA I/12:194).

Augustine concluded that whomever God wanted to save, he called “congruently” (i.e. in a way agreeable to its recipient) so that they would *necessarily* believe.<sup>76</sup> Whomever he did not want to save, he called in a way ill-suited to the recipient so that they *could not* believe. So then with Jacob and Esau, God’s predestination of them was not based on anything in them, but on his own mysterious will. Given this way of understanding Augustine’s radical shift in *To Simplician*, we argued that this shift did not result from nothing more than a “close reading” of Paul, but a reading of Paul that was influenced by his interaction with Manichaeism. It was precisely in an anti-Manichaean work, *To Simplician*, that Augustine’s reading of Paul took on a level of determinism that was rivaled in the contemporary intellectual landscape by only Manichaeism. Thus, we could not agree more with the assessment of K. E. Lee: “Put in historical context, Augustine’s doctrine of predestination (and hence, soteriology) is not merely a distillation of Pauline theology”; rather, “the strong determinism (lacking in the teachings of Ambrose and other contemporary Church fathers) in Augustine’s mature view of grace emerges out of his struggle with the Manichaean view of the cosmos.”<sup>77</sup>

Augustine’s later writings rounded out his views on predestination. In *Letter 186* (416 C.E.), Augustine came to hold that God justly rejected Esau because Esau was born with the very guilt of Adam’s sin.<sup>78</sup> Thus, before Jacob and Esau were born, God was free to predestine for salvation whomever he wished. And in *Letter 194* (418 C.E.), Augustine, continuing the theme of “coercive grace” from his debates with the Donatists, rejected his theory of the congruent call (in which God manipulates a person’s external environment to irresistibly produce faith) for an

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 1.2.13 (*WSA* I/12:194-95).

<sup>77</sup> Lee, *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good*, xii.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *Letter 186*, 5.13-15, 6.21.

inner, operative grace (in which the Holy Spirit acts directly on a person's will to produce faith).<sup>79</sup>

Given our account of the patristic interpretation of predestination in Rom. 9:6-13, we may now draw the following conclusions:

(1) *The predestinarian approach to Rom. 9:6-13 in the Patristic period owed in large part to the influence of gnostic and Manichaean Christianity.* By coincidence, it is possible that the gnostic and Manichaean myths actually *helped* patristic interpreters see a predestinarian emphasis that Paul actually intended in 9:6-13. But in case their myths did not have such a fortuitous function, it must be acknowledged that they skewed the reading of 9:6-13 by raising the predestination of the patriarchs to the level of a paradigm for the way God predestines all humanity. One can only wonder what the interpretation of 9:6-13 would have looked like if the historical context had been different. Given the complexities of 9:6-13, is there an interpretive context more relevant than the gnostic and Manichaean myths in which some of the ambiguities can be clarified? We will return to this question below (section 2.7) when we consider the relationship between 9:6-13 and cognate passages.

(2) *Origen played a major role in propagating a predestinarian approach to Rom. 9:6-13 in both the Greek and Latin traditions.* The reason why a predestinarian reading prevailed in the Patristic period was not necessarily because the Pauline text made it inevitable for each reader. Rather, it was because there was a great degree of interdependence among the patristic interpreters. In particular, Origen's approach to 9:6-13 exerted a strong influence on subsequent Greek and Latin interpretations of the text.

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<sup>79</sup> Augustine, *Letter 194*, 3.9.

(3) *The traditional Augustinian reading of Rom. 9:6-13 did not simply arise from a “careful reading” of Paul.* Some interpreters in the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition may feel that their reading of 9:6-13 is the obvious reading of the text. But the fact is that Augustine’s own reading, which strongly influenced Calvin’s, was deeply influenced by debates with gnostic, Manichaean, and Donatist Christians. Without these polemical contexts, it is doubtful that Augustine’s reading of 9:6-13 would have taken the shape that it did.

#### *2.6 Romans 9:14-18: “What then shall we say?”*

Having defined “true Israel” in 9:6-13, Paul reflected on what he said and asked, “What then shall we say? Is there injustice with God?” (9:14). As a result of their predestinarian reading of 9:6-13, all patristic interpreters understood the charge of injustice as relating to the injustice of unconditionally predestining individuals for either salvation or damnation.

In his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen placed the seemingly predestinarian language of 9:14-19 in the mouth of Paul’s opponents, not Paul himself.<sup>80</sup> This strategy was followed by Diodore of Tarsus,<sup>81</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>82</sup> Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>83</sup> Gennadius of Constantinople,<sup>84</sup> and Pelagius.<sup>85</sup> Besides this strategy, Origen also tried to preserve free-will by arguing that 9:14-18, properly understood, does not negate free-will at all. On 9:15, 18, God shows mercy and hardens based on a person’s prior response to God. On 9:16, salvation is “not of the one who wills or strives, but of God who shows mercy,” not in the sense that free-will is negated, but in the sense that human willing and running are futile unless complemented by

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<sup>80</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.16.3-4 (FC 104:114-15).

<sup>81</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 98.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-47.

<sup>83</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 74:836).

<sup>84</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 391.

<sup>85</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14 and n. 13.

divine mercy. And on 9:17, God punished Pharaoh because he foreknew his wickedness.

Origen's concern in 9:14ff. is clear: to preserve free-will.

John Chrysostom also understood the charge against God's justice (9:14) as a charge against his arbitrary predestining activity. But more specifically, it was a charge against arbitrarily choosing the idol-worshipping non-Jews over the law-abiding Jews. Unlike Origen, Chrysostom did not place 9:14-18 in the mouth of Paul's opponents, but these verses still did not belong in the realm of Paul's convictions. Instead, they were put forth by Paul as harder cases of biblical election meant to silence the Scripture-abiding Jew.<sup>86</sup>

Turning to the Latin tradition, Ambrosiaster was the first patristic author to recognize 9:14-18 as Paul's own position.<sup>87</sup> As he had done in 9:6-13, he read 9:15, 17 through the lens of foreknowledge, and he followed Origen on the interpretation of 9:16.<sup>88</sup> Throughout his career, Augustine viewed the charge against God in 9:14 as a charge against his arbitrary, predestining activity in 9:6-13. According to his early reading of 9:14-18, Paul explained that God shows mercy and hardens people based on their prior response to God,<sup>89</sup> while later in *To Simplician*, Augustine saw Paul re-emphasizing his deterministic perspective on election.<sup>90</sup> Pelagius related the apparent injustice of 9:14 to the appearance in 9:6-13 that "God makes some good, others evil," but also to the fact that God ignores racial prerogatives in making his election.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, in the patristic period 9:14-18 represented some sort of response to the issue of predestination in 9:6-13. But as we suggested earlier, if the predestinarian emphasis of 9:6-13 was a foreign element imposed onto the text, what happens to these readings of 9:14ff. which are

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<sup>86</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:466-67).

<sup>87</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 271.

<sup>88</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14-16.

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Propositions* 61-62 (Fredriksen Landes); *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* 68.4.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *To Simplician* 1.2.12.

<sup>91</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14.

focused on the issues of determinism and free-will? If the charge against God in 9:14 was not a charge against deterministic predestination, what was the charge against? A rereading of 9:6-13 would thus necessitate a rereading of 9:14ff. as well.

### *2.7 Romans 9:6-13 and Cognate Passages*

We have argued that the predestinarian reading of 9:6-13 most likely began as a gnostic Christian creation. Moreover, we have argued that in the Patristic period, such a reading caused 9:14ff. to be read in terms of the issues of determinism and free-will—a concern that is somewhat removed from the issue Paul began with in Romans 9. We also wondered if, given the knotty issues in 9:6-13, there might be a better context in which to untangle these issues than the early gnostic and Manichaean myths. We would like to conclude our thesis by submitting that the patristic interpreters themselves indicate such a context through their appeal to cognate passages in Paul's letters (i.e. passages containing similar words and ideas). We will not list all the cognates mentioned by the patristic interpreters, but only those that recur or seem particularly relevant. As we will indicate below, one set of cognates seems especially promising.

(1) *Romans 8:28-30*. Since the patristic interpreters viewed 9:6-13 as a passage about predestination, it is not surprising that they turned to 8:28-30 as a cognate, where predestination was based on divine foreknowledge. As Origen indicated (section 1.1.3), God's "foreknowledge" of people need not refer simply to his prior factual knowledge about people, but instead, it can refer to his prior intimate knowledge of or affection for people. Most patristic interpreters took the former approach to foreknowledge and based God's predestination in 9:6-13 on his foreknowledge of a person's faith and/or works.

Origen and Acacius of Caesarea explicitly quoted 8:29-30 in their explanations of 9:6-13, saying the former explained the latter.<sup>92</sup> Chrysostom's replacement of "the purpose according to election" (ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ) in 9:11 with "the election according to foreknowledge" (ἡ ἐκλογὴ ἡ κατὰ πρόγνωσιν γενομένη) appeared to be influenced by Origen's understanding of "purpose" and "foreknowledge" in 8:28-29.<sup>93</sup> Ambrosiaster and Augustine both related "the children of promise" to 8:28-30. For Ambrosiaster, "those whom God foreknew" in 8:29 and "the children of promise" in 9:8 were defined as those "whom God foreknew would receive his promise." As for Augustine, "the children of promise" were often described by 8:29 as those promised and predestined in eternity past to become Abraham's heirs.<sup>94</sup>

In the patristic period, 8:28-30 was an especially attractive cognate because of its close proximity to 9:6-13 and its many similarities in vocabulary—notice the use of "purpose" (8:28; 9:11), "elect"/"election" (8:33; 9:11), and "call" (8:30; 9:12). A good reading of 9:6-13 should therefore carefully compare its ideas with those of 8:28-30.

(2) *Romans 2:25-29*. In *Letter 196*, Augustine related 9:6-13 and 2:25-29 as two passages that spoke about the outward Israelite/Jew and the inward Israelite/Jew.<sup>95</sup> In 2:25-29, the inward Jew was the one whose heart was circumcised by the Spirit, and as a result, even non-Jews who possessed the Spirit could count as inward Jews. If 2:25-29 truly is a cognate, it could be that "true Israel" in 9:6b includes Spirit-filled non-Jewish believers<sup>96</sup> and not just a subset of Jewish believers.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.15.4 (FC 104:112-13); Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, 54.

<sup>93</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 16 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:466).

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *Letter 186*, 7.25 (416 C.E.); *Letter 190*, 3.12 (418 C.E.); *Rebuke and Grace* 9.20 (427 C.E.).

<sup>95</sup> Augustine, *Letter 196*, 3.9-13 (418 C.E.).

<sup>96</sup> So also N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans* (NIB 10; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 636.

<sup>97</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 574.

(3) *Galatians 3*. In *Letter 196*, another cognate mentioned by Augustine was *Galatians 3*, where Paul defined Abraham’s children not “according to the flesh,” but “according to the spirit of faith”<sup>98</sup>—similar to *Rom. 9:7a*. In *Gal. 3:6-9*, Abraham’s spiritual heirs were defined by faith. Moreover, believers united with Christ were described as Abraham’s heirs “according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:28-29*; cf. *3:15-16*)—does this language relate to “the children of promise” (*Rom. 9:8*)? And in *Letter 140*, Augustine related *Rom. 9:7b* and *Gal. 3:29*, since both described Abraham’s heirs in the messianic age.<sup>99</sup> So in *Galatians 3*, Augustine recognized an earlier attempt by Paul to define Abraham’s heirs in the messianic age, and he did so in terms of faith. We would also add that *Galatians 3* is a chapter that mentions the word “promise” eight times,<sup>100</sup> and that the faith that defines Abraham’s spiritual heirs is the same faith by which the promise of Isaac was received (*Gal. 3:6*; *Gen. 15:6*). The conceptual similarities with *Rom. 9:6-13* are certainly present, but can they be used to help uncover the meaning of *Rom. 9:6-13*?

(4) *Galatians 4:21-31*. This passage also identifies the character of Abraham’s heirs, and it does so in a manner that is strikingly similar to *Rom. 9:6-9*. It appeals to the stories about Ishmael and Isaac and even describes Christians as “children of promise” (*ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα*). Not surprisingly, patristic interpreters used *Gal. 4:21-31* to clarify the meaning of *Rom. 9:6-9*.

Chrysostom used Paul’s interpretation of “the children of promise” in *Gal. 4:28* to define them in *Rom. 9:8* as children born according to the Spirit.<sup>101</sup> In *Letter 140*, Augustine built the typological bridge between Isaac in *Rom. 9:7b* and the children of promise in *Rom. 9:8* through *Gal. 4:21-31*.<sup>102</sup> In *The Deeds of Pelagius*, he viewed Paul’s understanding of “the children of the

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<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *Letter 196*, 3.10 (418 C.E.; *WSA II/3:315*, Teske).

<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *Letter 140*, 19.47 (411-12 C.E.).

<sup>100</sup> *Gal. 3:14, 16, 17, 18 (x2), 21, 22, 29*.

<sup>101</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 16* (*NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 11:463).

<sup>102</sup> Augustine, *Letter 140*, 19.47 (411-12 C.E.).

flesh” and “the children of promise” in Gal. 4:21-31 and Rom. 9:8 as fundamentally consistent.<sup>103</sup> And on Rom. 9:7b-8, Pelagius appealed to Gal. 4:23 to explain why Abraham’s heirs were called in Isaac, not Ishmael, and to associate God’s promise with his supernatural power.<sup>104</sup>

(5) *Romans 4*. This is another passage that identifies Abraham’s true heirs through faith and even mentions Abraham’s faith in the promise of Isaac (Rom. 4:19). Origen seemed to define the “children of promise” through Rom. 4:12-13, where Abraham’s heirs were described as those who receive God’s promise through faith.<sup>105</sup> He also interpreted Paul’s quote of Gen. 18:10, 14 in Rom. 9:9 through Rom. 4:19, where Abraham was said to have a dead body and Sarah a barren womb. By doing so, he associated the promise of Isaac with the power of God.<sup>106</sup> Like Origen, Ambrosiaster viewed the children of promise as those who imitate Abraham’s faith and believe what God says about Christ, similar to what Paul says in Rom. 4:23-25.<sup>107</sup> In his *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian*, Augustine juxtaposed Rom. 4:13-22 and Rom. 9:6-8 as passages that identified Abraham’s heirs.<sup>108</sup> And Pelagius seemed to allude to Rom. 4:17-18 in his explanation of the “promise” that now makes the children of promise (i.e. Christians) Abraham’s heirs.<sup>109</sup>

To sum up, the most important cognates to Rom. 9:6-13 in the Patristic period were Gal. 3; 4:21-31; Rom. 2:25-29; 4; and 8:28-30. And as we mentioned earlier, we would like to conclude our thesis by highlighting one set of cognates as potentially providing a promising context for the interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13. In particular, we have in mind those passages

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<sup>103</sup> Augustine, *The Deeds of Pelagius* 5.15 (417 C.E.).

<sup>104</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:8.

<sup>105</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 7.14.3 (FC 104:111).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 7.15.2 (FC 104:111-12).

<sup>107</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 9:6-7.

<sup>108</sup> Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.153-158 (427-430 C.E.).

<sup>109</sup> Pelagius, *Commentary on Romans* 9:8.

where Paul uses the patriarchal narratives to define Abraham's heirs in the messianic age (Galatians 3, 4:21-31, and Romans 4). These cognates share a number of similarities with Rom. 9:6-13 in both ideas and vocabulary, and yet they occur in different rhetorical contexts in Paul's letters. How exactly do they relate? Is there a coherence to these chapters so that they can mutually complement one another? If so, how does Paul understand the word "promise" in these chapters? And how do Abraham's heirs relate to this promise? Or is the difference between these chapters so great that one must be cautious of, say, using Gal. 4:28 to interpret "the children of promise" in Rom. 9:8? Why do these chapters, despite their similarities, have so many differences? With these questions in mind, it is immediately apparent that the patristic juxtaposition and comparison of these passages is somewhat meagre and superficial. A promising question for the interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13 is thus the question of how exactly Paul used the patriarchs in Galatians 3, 4 and Romans 4, 9. This is a question worthy of further research.

### *2.8 Final Summary*

The patristic interpretation of Rom. 9:6-13 has shown some of the ambiguities and possibilities of interpreting Paul's statements. Interpreters generally agreed on the problem Paul faced in Romans 9 vis-à-vis unbelieving Israel. But they varied greatly on their interpretation of "the children of promise"; they differed on their treatment of Paul's statement that election is "not by works"; some viewed Jacob and Esau as types of two nations while at the same time seeing them as types of all human individuals; and all interpreters wrestled with the predestination of the patriarchs.

We argued that a predestinarian approach to Rom. 9:6-13 arose among gnostic Christians in and second and third centuries. In the interest of supporting their myth, they raised the

predestination of the patriarchs to the level of a universal paradigm. Their approach then determined the approach of Origen, who in turn had an enormous influence on subsequent interpreters in the Greek and Latin traditions. In the Latin tradition, Manichaean Christianity further encouraged a predestinarian perspective on Rom. 9:6-13, leading many Nicene Christians to readily adopt Origen's free-will reading. Augustine was one such interpreter, but as a result of his debate with the Manichaeans, he came to a reading of predestination in Romans 9 that precluded free-will and made God the sole decision-maker in the process of salvation. His later debates with the Donatists and Pelagians only served to solidify this reading.

Due to gnostic and Manichaean influence on the reading of Rom. 9:6-13, early interpreters also read 9:14ff. through the lens of predestination. But what happens when we separate 9:6-13 from this early polemical context? What happens to our reading of 9:6-13 and the rest of the chapter? The patristic interpretation appealed to a number of cognate passages, including those where Paul appeals to the patriarchs in a manner similar to the way he does in Romans 9. We have suggested that an in-depth comparative analysis of these passages would be a worthy topic for further research in an effort to better understand Paul's meaning in 9:6-13.

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