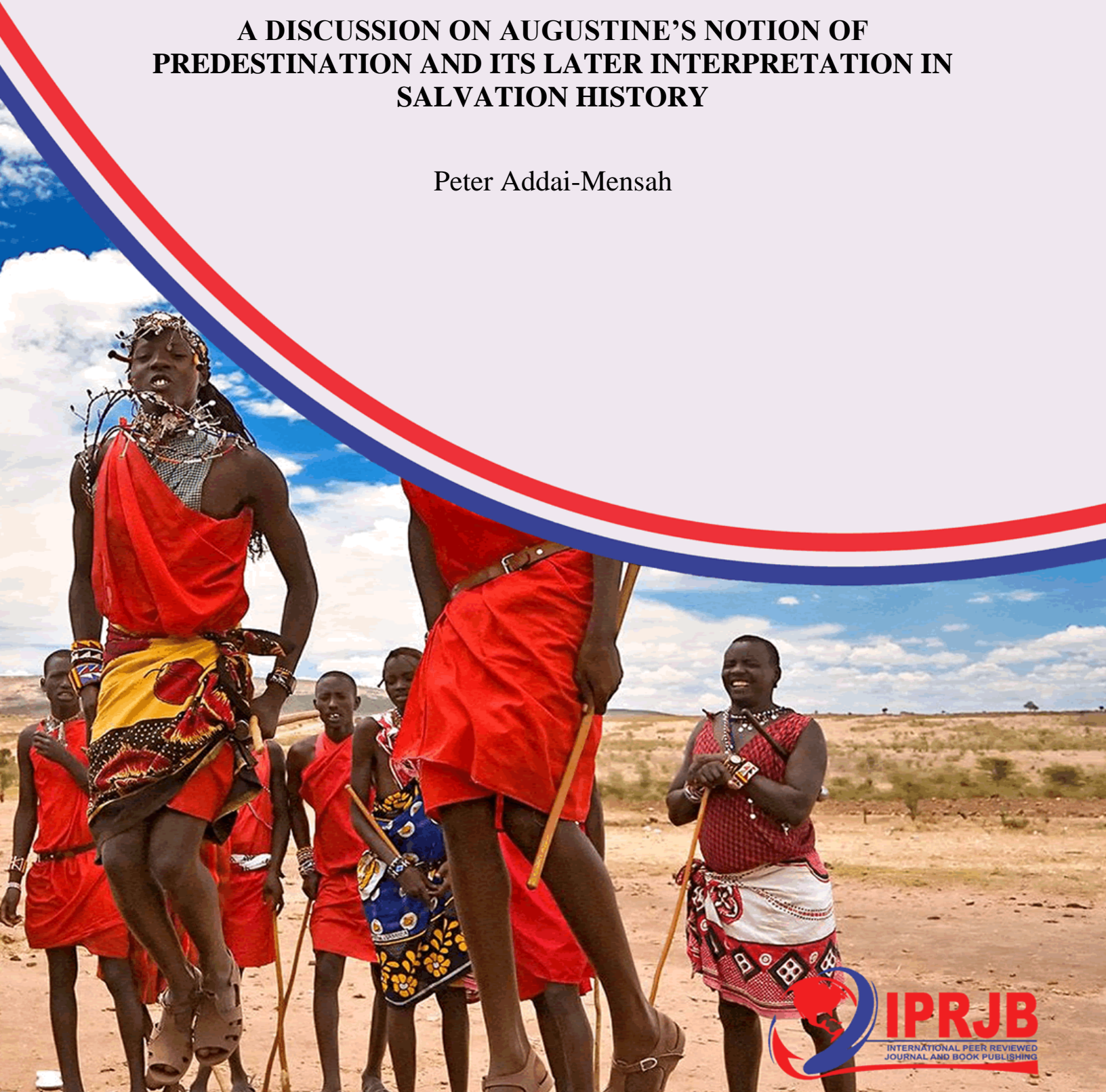


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## A DISCUSSION ON AUGUSTINE'S NOTION OF PREDESTINATION AND ITS LATER INTERPRETATION IN SALVATION HISTORY

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## **A DISCUSSION ON AUGUSTINE’S NOTION OF PREDESTINATION AND ITS LATER INTERPRETATION IN SALVATION HISTORY**

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### **Abstract**

*Salvation is at the core of Christianity. It is something that can be bought. Rather, it is offered gratuitously by God out of love. However, each and every person has to make his/her own this salvation. In other words, one has to make his/her own this salvation offered by God. This article discusses the doctrine of Predestination as seen by Augustine and its later interpretation by other theologians. In the opinion of Augustine God has the intention to save all human beings – cf. I Tim. 2:4. God has destined this from the beginning of creation. However, this salvation is not on a silver platter. One has to make a conscious effort to make his/her own this salvation. Furthermore, the article examines how later theologians have looked at the doctrine of Predestination. Finally, the article posits that later interpretations have not been faithful to the mindset of Augustine. It concludes that it is the intention of God to save all. God’s foreknowledge does not mean predetermination. One has to make good use of one’s Free will and choose the salvation offered by God in order to be saved. If one misses salvation, it means one made a wrong use one’s Free will. In writing this article the author uses the literary approach that is library sources.*

**Key words:** *Predestination, Interpretation, Salvation History*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Looking at this beautiful world and all that is in it shows the handy-work of a master planner who is a great architect. The seas, the rivers, the waters down here below and in the heavens above, the trees, birds that fly and those who do not, all other animals, and all the seen and the unseen things which were ever made were made by the greatest designer who ever had been in history. The Lord God Almighty made them all according to the scriptures for his own pleasure created the heaven and the earth and all that is in them (Revelations 18:11).

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). This creation story is what the Bible begins with as it declares at the onset that God is the creator, and recaps this understanding throughout the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Scripture thus puts it emphatically that “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For, he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.” (Ps. 24:1). Shirley C. Guthrie (1994: 147) affirms that “The creation in the first chapter of Genesis says this in explicit detail: God is the Creator of day and night (and therefore of time), the earth and seas, plants and trees, sun and moon, birds and fish and animals of all kinds and finally of human beings.” There is thus nothing according to Guthrie which was ever made which did not pass through ‘his hand’s’ in creation. The scripture again declares all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3). Everything in the world and life in them as well originated from the Lord who is its source and this is what Tokuboh Adeyemo (2006: 10) asserts when he writes that within the creation story God was uniquely involved in all the creation or the origin of the sky and the earth.

God created the world out of love and his creative power. Because God is all powerful God created the world without any toil. According to the creation story, all that the Lord made is good (Genesis 1:10). It is very important to note how this good God created things including the human person and how God declared that all that he had created was good including the human being. The emergence of sin tainted the human person and damaged the goodness that he/she was originally created with. There is therefore the need to restore the original goodness in the human person and thus the plan of God’s salvation concerning the human being. Would a good God who created human beings in his image save some and destroy others? This is seen in the doctrine of Predestination which tries to consider the plan of God towards the human person whether to save some, or intended to save all.

### Definition of Predestination

*The Cambridge Advance Learners’ Dictionary* (2008) third edition defines predestination as “the belief that people have no control over events because these things are controlled by God or by fate.” This thus refers to something that one does not have any control over. *The Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* (1996) also sees predestination as “the doctrine that whatever is to happen has been unalterably fixed by God from the beginning of time, especially with regard to which souls are to be saved and which damned.” This puts destiny to a fixed situation that cannot be altered. Emmanuel Asante (2014: 67) citing John Calvin explains Predestination to mean an eternal decree or ruling of God out of which God determines what should befall every human person. In other words Asante means it is God who has determined what should happen to everyone.



From the various sources quoted above it is imperative to note various components of the definitions given above. In all three, God appears to be the one who prefixes what one should go through. This might perhaps stems from the fact that God is omnipotent, all powerful and can do whatever God so wills. Again, in the definitions above it is clear all human beings have their future in the will of God. What is clear therefore is that sovereignty lie with God when it comes to what holds for the future of every soul. We can see in the Predestination of human beings that God is eternal since God is in existence before every human person. All human beings from Adam have gone through God's hands and have died but God still remains determining the destiny of everyone else. We can moreover see God having a foreknowledge or fore knowing everything in God's attribute has omniscient God, thus knowing what everyone should be in life. It suggests that God holds the means of salvation.

Herbert Lockyer (1997: 151) takes it from a different angle and explains that when it comes to God's sovereignty in determining the future of everyone, three main words are crucial, namely, foreknowledge, election and predestination. He cites C. I. Scofield's (1997: 151) description of these three words:

*The divine order is foreknowledge, election, predestination. That foreknowledge determines the election or choice is clear from 1 Peter 1:2, and predestination is the bringing to pass of the election. Election looks back to foreknowledge: predestination forward to the destiny. But Scripture nowhere declares what it is in the divine foreknowledge which determines the divine election and predestination. The foreknown are elected, and the elect are predestined, and this election is certain to every believer by the mere fact that he believes (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5).*

The foreknowledge indicates the fact that God has knowledge of everything before it happens in God's attribute as an omniscient God. It also means that nothing can be in the dark side of God or better still nothing can be hidden from God. God has clear and full knowledge of everything. The second word election also shows that God in his infallibility and sovereignty chooses persons who would not perish. Finally Predestination acknowledges God's infiniteness to freely do as God wishes or likes. Thus God through Predestination brings to pass the very things which were before determined by him in the past. Lockyer (1997: 151) summarizes, "Predestination is the exercise of divine sovereignty in the accomplishment of God's ultimate purpose or decree" Predestination therefore is the plan of God for the world.

### **Augustine's notion of Predestination**

Augustine was born on November 13, 354 in Thagaste in North Africa. He was a theologian and a philosopher who later on became the Bishop of Hippo. He died on August 28, 430. As a theologian, Augustine propounded many theories. One of them was Predestination. He wrote a book titled *Predestination of the Saints and Free will* (426-427). In the consideration of Augustine's theory on Predestination works like: foreknowledge and Election come into play. In the opinion of Augustine Predestination refers to God's foreknowledge of those who through God's grace would be saved. It means that these people have been elected and destined for salvation. Augustine's assertion is based on Paul's statement in the letter to the Ephesians:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us – Eph. 1: 3-8.*

For Augustine, in talking about the foreknowledge of God does not mean predetermination. He believed that it is the intention of God to save – cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pt. 3: 19. Therefore, God offers grace in view of the original sin that has corrupted and tainted the original state of the human person created in the image and likeness of God – cf. Gen. 1: 26. He pointed out that those who go to hell choose to exclude themselves from God and God’s kingdom. Ralph Blumenau writing on Augustine’s Free will and Predestination notes that God, being omniscient, foresees, but does not determine who will accept His grace and who will not. ([www.philosophynow.com](http://www.philosophynow.com)).

### **Augustine on Free will**

Augustine believed that God has elected human beings and destined them for salvation. Accordingly, God offers human beings grace in view of the fallen state of human beings. In addition to that God has given the human person Free will. This Free will is supposed to help human beings to choose God. In the opinion of J. M. Rist (1969: 420), even though God is omnipotent, God does not force anybody as far as choice is concerned.

According to the teaching of Augustine, God is the author of life. Since human life emanated from God, it means that all movements of the human person must be towards God – the author life. The moment that a person turns his/her back to God – the author of life – it means that the person is heading towards death and destruction. The Free will given to human beings is supposed to be used to choose God so that one will live – cf. Deut. 30: 15-19. Therefore, if one is not saved, even though God knows it before hand, it is not God who did not save the person. Rather, it is the wrong use of the Free will that has landed the person outside salvation.

In sum, it is the opinion of Augustine that it is the intention of God to save all – cf. 1 Tm. 2:4. Therefore, God does not determine and send anyone into damnation. It is the individual who uses his/her Free will wrongly. As he noted, “the God who created us without our cooperation will not save us without our cooperation” - ([www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)).

Furthermore, it must be stated categorically that Augustine in his expose on Predestination and Free will talked only about those who are to be saved by the grace of God. He refused to discuss those who are not saved. For him, that will tantamount to Double Predestination.

### **Later Interpretations of Predestination**

One of the theologians who wrote and made some interpretations on Predestination is John Calvin. He was born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, France. He was a French Renaissance Humanist and a Reformation theologian. He played a leading role in the Protestant Reformation. At the age of 27, he put his theological thoughts together and came out with two (2) books titled Institutes of Christian Religion Book 1(1536) and Book 2 (1539). The books were addressed to Francis 1, the king of France at the time. In it, he tried to explain to him what true Religion

was/is (1960:9). Secondly, he wrote to plead for the Evangelicals who were being persecuted (1960:11). Furthermore, he demonstrated that the Evangelical movement that had sprung up in the empire was nothing new. It was an affirmation of Christ himself and his gospel. Therefore, to demand miracles from them was a dishonest act because they were forging a new gospel (1960:16). John Calvin's thoughts influenced a lot of people and came to be known as Calvinism. His main theological thoughts hinge on the Sovereignty of God in all areas of life and Predestination.

### **John Calvin on Predestination**

Calvin was greatly influenced by Augustine in his discourse on Predestination. However, Calvin took it a step higher. He defined Predestination as "eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man" (1960:3.21.5). He goes on to say: "All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" (1960:3.21.5).

Calvin based his understanding of Predestination on some scriptural passages such as; Deut. 7:7-8, Malachi 1:2-3 and Rom. 9:15. On Predestination, Calvin is quoted to have said: "God preordained, for his own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation" – ([www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)).

A critical analysis of his statement on Predestination by John Calvin means that human beings are not created equally. It portrays that while some are created to enjoy eternal glory; others were created and destined for damnation. Thus, Calvin denies the equality of human beings. Furthermore, his definition of Predestination does not leave room for the exercise of Free will and good works. Juxtaposing Calvin's position to what Augustine taught on Predestination, it shows that Calvin was not faithful to Augustine who influenced him. What he advocated for amounted to Double Predestination something that Augustine avoided. In addition to that what Calvin taught did not leave room for Free will and good works which Augustine stood for. It is against this backdrop that Tom Nash could say, "Augustine had it right: Calvin did not" ([www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)).

This point on Predestination advocated by Calvin was adopted by his later followers – The Calvinists. This view the Calvinists hold asserts that God has right from the onset chosen some specific people to bring into eternal communion with himself. This suggests from the Calvinists view that the rest who are not caught by the "net" of God's grace for salvation are ordained for eternal damnation

### **Interpretation of God's intention to save all - 1 Timothy 2:4 in Salvation History**

A careful journey through scripture shows that God would rather save all human beings than predetermining some for salvation and others for eternal damnation. God's choice of Jacob or the nation of Israel over Esau or the Edomites would have to be understood in the light that God would use Israel to reach out to the rest of the nations. If the Edomites did not attain the salvation of God, it should not be hurriedly concluded that they were not selected and therefore meant predestined for eternal damnation but rather that the supposedly selected nation Israel's failure to

do the mediation work. Moreover God's provision for human beings after The Fall in the Garden was for both Adam and Eve and for that matter all humanity. If the progeny of Adam and Eve were all affected by The Fall in the Garden, why not all benefit from the remedy provided by the creator who took the first step to clothe them from their nakedness. According to scripture, when it comes to the will of God concerning damnation, the will of the Father is that none should perish - (Matt. 18:14).

Again in the light of John 3:17 God's provision for salvation is to save the world. Thus God does not intend to condemn the world through Christ but rather to save the world through him. The world here is constituted of the entirety of humanity rather than the physical structures on the earth. The individual would have to believe and accept God's plan and salvation. Based on 1 Timothy 2:3-4 therefore it is revealing to note that what is acceptable in the sight of God is that all people be saved. This is in consonance with John 3:17 and Matthew 18:14 where God's salvation is meant for all and his predetermined damnation meant for none.

What we should not fail to acknowledge is that although salvation is meant for all, there is the responsibility of the one who is saved to believe and accept the salvation plan of God and work on his salvation in other not to fall into eternal damnation. Dom M. John Farrelly beautifully explains it below:

*According to our understanding of Scripture and particularly of St. Paul, while God wants all men to be saved, he has predestined all those whom he has justified through union with Christ. As a result of this predestination he works by grace the will and performance of their Christian lives, and he will complete the work of salvation that he has begun in them. While the Christian is still in this life, however, he may cease to believe or to act in accord with his belief; if he does, he will be rejected, as the Jews were rejected. Thus while predestination and the grace that is its effect are antecedent to man's saving acts and cause all that is good in these acts, as antecedent they can be frustrated by the resistance of man's will. If man continues till death to reject the merciful initiative of God, he will in tum be reprobated (1964:163).*

Farrelly brings out the fact that God wants to save all men according to Paul but then everyone who would have to be saved will have to make the move to qualify for the grace of God to enjoy the selection failure of which would land the one in eternal damnation. Farrelly's explanation brings out one truth which is the fact that choice or free will to choose lies with everyone to decide which way to go. It is unrepentance that determines one's involvement in eternal damnation. Even if God rejected the Jews according to Farrelly, then God can equally reject anyone who does not rely and trust in the salvation of God. Moreover Farrelly makes it clear that if one who is already in the salvation in this life fails to continue to believe in Christ, he will lose the salvation. Thus, human beings responsibility results in predestination and grace and continual resistance of the person of God's grace to save him/her can frustrate his/her salvation.

### **Conclusion**

God who is the owner of all creation and who is omniscient and omnipotent in God's attribute had a plan right from the beginning to repair the damage that was caused through the original sin

of Adam and Eve. God made provision for salvation through God's grace. Although some including John Calvin and Calvinists believe that those who are to be saved and those to be condemned are already predetermined through the grace of God and predestination based on certain portions of scriptural references, it is undeniably true that God would have all people saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and that none of human beings were from beginning destined for damnation. It is only as a matter of choice and the Free will which calls for responsibility on the part of human person. In this life, belief in Christ leads to one's salvation but the discontinuation of belief in him would end one in damnation.

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