

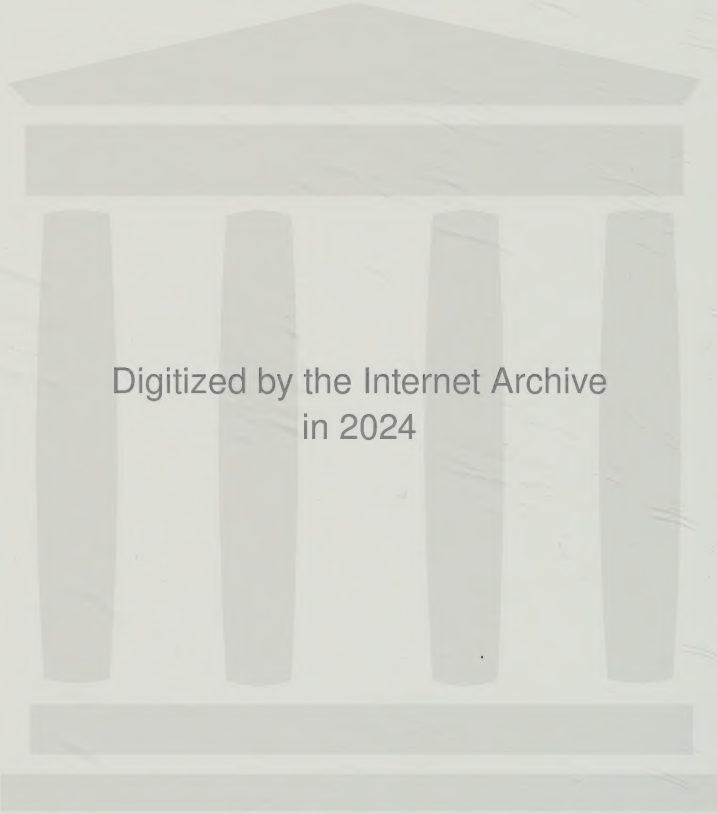


ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

FATHER OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

by

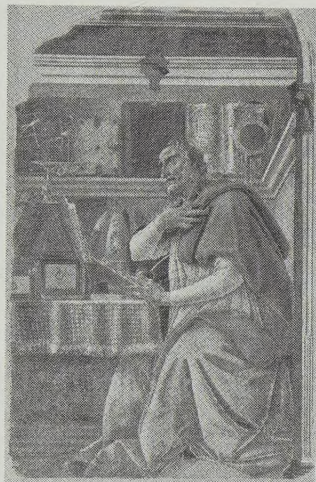
CHARLES RIVER EDITORS



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St. Augustine of Hippo: Father of the Christian Church

By Charles River Editors



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Introduction



St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

"You are known throughout the world; Catholics honor and esteem you as the one who has established anew the ancient Faith" – St. Jerome in a letter to Augustine, 418

The Christian Church has no shortage of revered figures and saints, but it is difficult to find one that had a more decisive impact on the course of the Church's history than Augustine of Hippo. Augustine was a bishop of Hippo Regius in Africa, but his works, sermons and writings helped hold the Church together even as the Western Roman Empire was in its death throes, to the extent that every major branch of Christianity recognizes him today. The Catholic Church has venerated him as a saint and a Doctor of the Church, Orthodox Christians also consider him a saint, and Protestants and Calvinists cite him as one of the fathers and inspirations of the Protestant Reformation. In many respects, Augustine has provided the theological bedrock for Christians for nearly 1600 years, and as theologian John Leith noted in 1990, "Augustine, the North African of Berber descent, is today the spiritual father of multitudes who are remote indeed from him racially, politically, and culturally."

Augustine's voluminous writings also had the effect of making him one of antiquity's most influential philosophers. Though he will always be remembered within the context of Christianity, Augustine studied the works of Virgil, Cicero, and the ancient Greek philosophers, providing a critical bridge between religious and secular philosophy that would in turn inspire St. Thomas Aquinas and similar thinkers. In addition to framing the concept of original sin, it was Augustine who first wrote at length on the theory of just war. Paul Henry, S.J. noted, "In the history of thought and civilization, Saint Augustine appears to me to be the first thinker who brought into prominence and undertook an analysis of the philosophical and psychological concepts of person and personality. These ideas, so vital to contemporary man, shape not only Augustine's own doctrine on God but also his philosophy of man..."

Augustine's legacy would have been impressive for anybody to accomplish, but it was made all the more amazing by the fact that he spent most of his early years living irreverently. Though raised a Christian, he abandoned his faith until he was in his early 30s, and one of his prayers would become notorious: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet" He was teaching rhetoric in Africa before a series of experiences led to his conversion back to Christianity in 386, thus spending the last 45 years of his life in the service of God.

St. Augustine of Hippo: Father of the Christian Church chronicles the life, writings, and legacy of the influential Christian saint. Along with pictures, a list of quotes, a bibliography, and a Table of Contents, you will learn about St. Augustine like you never have before, in no time at all.

St. Augustine of Hippo: Father of the Christian Church

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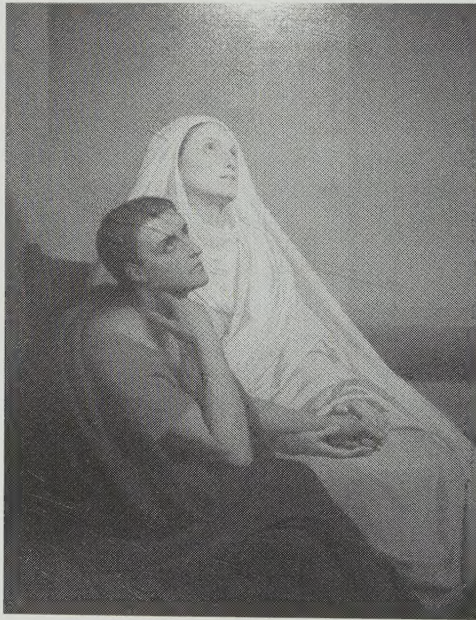
A List of Augustine's Major Works

Bibliography

Chapter 1: Early Years

Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis was born on November 13, 354, in the municipium of Thagaste (present day Algeria) in Roman Africa to a middle-class family. He would become known as Augustine because the nomen Aurelius merely indicated he was a Roman citizen and was thus more of a surname than anything.

Few details are known about his parents, but his father Particius was a minor landowner of the curial class with little wealth and few social connections, although he was a member of several of his community's governance councils. While Particius was a pagan until late in life, Augustine's mother Monica was a pious Christian who invariably instilled in her son a reverence for "the name of Christ" from his early childhood.



Augustine and his mother, St. Monica

Although no reliable documents of Augustine's childhood survive, it is known he grew up between two Africas: the more Romanized coastal region, with its thriving port cities and cosmopolitan society, and the country-oriented, olive-growing interior that was less consciously dignified than proper Roman society. Born in the market town of Thagaste, nestled in a green

valley surrounded by mountains and forests, the young boy apparently never saw the sea as a child, later writing how he imagined it “compared to a glass of water.”

Years later, in *The City of God*, Augustine would write of the pagan societies he witnessed as a young boy: “When I was a young man, I used to go to their spectacles of sacrilege and their ‘pagan’ games, to watch the priests in their frenzies and listen to the music. I got a thrill out of the disgusting shows enacted in honor of their gods . . . looking back and forth from the virgin goddess to the crowd of whores, worshipping the one and reveling in the filthiness of the other...”¹

Given his family background, Augustine was not among the higher classes of society, making him and his family dependent on the generosity of friends and more affluent landowners to provide financial resources, but fortunately he displayed uncommon intelligence and ambition from a very early age. As a child, it’s believed that he attended primary school in his home city of Thagaste, which was part of the Roman Empire but thoroughly Catholic by the time he was born. Though the native language of Thagaste was Berber, an ancient language spoken by tribes of North Africa for centuries, he apparently never learned to speak it.

¹ O’Donnell, James J. *Augustine, a New Biography*. Page 19.



Renaissance artist Benozzo Gozzoli's portrait of Augustine at the school of Taghaste

At the age of 11, Augustine was sent to school at Madauros (near present-day Mdaourouch), a small Numidian city about 19 miles south of Thagaste, where he went through the usual secondary schooling. It was there that he became familiar with Latin literature, particularly Virgil, learned Greek, and studied pagan beliefs and practices. He would discuss these studies in Chapter I of *Confessions*, as well as what he considered certain problems with the way studies were being taught, writing:

“But why did I so much hate the Greek, which I studied as a boy? I do not yet fully know. For the Latin I loved; not what my first masters, but what the so-called grammarians taught me. For those first lessons, reading, writing and arithmetic, I thought as great a burden and penalty as any Greek. And yet whence was this too, but from the sin and vanity of this life, because I was flesh, and a breath that passeth away and cometh not again? For those first lessons were better certainly, because more certain; by them I obtained, and still retain, the power of reading what I find written, and myself writing what I will; whereas in the others, I was forced to learn the

wanderings of one Aeneas, forgetful of my own, and to weep for dead Dido, because she killed herself for love...

Why then did I hate the Greek classics, which have the like tales? For Homer also curiously wove the like fictions, and is most sweetly vain, yet was he bitter to my boyish taste. And so I suppose would Virgil be to Grecian children, when forced to learn him as I was Homer. Difficulty, in truth, the difficulty of a foreign tongue, dashed, as it were, with gall all the sweetness of Grecian fable. For not one word of it did I understand, and to make me understand I was urged vehemently with cruel threats and punishments. Time was also (as an infant) I knew no Latin; but this I learned without fear or suffering, by mere observation, amid the caresses of my nursery and jests of friends, smiling and sportively encouraging me. This I learned without any pressure of punishment to urge me on, for my heart urged me to give birth to its conceptions, which I could only do by learning words not of those who taught, but of those who talked with me; in whose ears also I gave birth to the thoughts, whatever I conceived. No doubt, then, that a free curiosity has more force in our learning these things, than a frightful enforcement."

As he continued to display exceptional intellectual promise, his family invested the majority of their meager earnings in securing him an academic career that would ultimately qualify him for government service. At about the age of 17, Augustine was sent to Carthage to continue his education in rhetoric, the vocation of orators, largely through the generosity of the wealthy landowner Romanianus, an older family friend and benefactor who held the title flamen (priest) in a local Pagan sect. By some accounts, he was related to Augustine's family.

Chapter 2: Manichaeism

After attending secondary school at Madauros and studying rhetoric at Carthage, Augustine moved away from Christian teachings and began following the Manichaean religion, a Persian philosophy combining the teachings of the Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. The religion professed to appeal to reason rather than blind authority. As Augustine would later explain, the faith of the Church seemed "much too unphilosophical for any man of culture to embrace."

In Augustine's time, Manichaeism claimed to be the true Christianity. Accounting for the nature of the world as the product of a conflict between the forces of light and dark (which existed before the creation of the world), and the soul of man as an element of the light entangled in the dark, Manichaeism claimed Jesus as the "redeemer" who enables the "imprisoned particles of light" to return to their own realms. By this system, Jesus is treated as the second component of the trinity, the "Light" communicating the "Father" to those below. While the higher order of their church were strictly ascetic and celibate, young men like Augustine typically joined the lower order as a "hearer," a position permitting marriage and sex as a "concession to human weakness." This concession undoubtedly appealed to Augustine as a young adult, and he would

later confess to living a hedonistic lifestyle during that time. It was during this period of his life that Augustine uttered his famous tongue-in-cheek prayer, "*da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo*" ("Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.").² In *Confessions*, he would allude to this time, writing, "But what marvel that I was thus carried away to vanities, and went out from Thy presence, O my God, when men were set before me as models, who, if in relating some action of theirs, in itself not ill, they committed some barbarism or solecism, being censured, were abashed; but when in rich and adomed and well-ordered discourse they related their own disordered life, being rebpraised, they gloried?"

Augustine associated with other young men who boasted of their sexual conquests, and he maintained a number of sexual relationships, including one with a woman named "Una". Una was a woman of low birth from Carthage with whom Augustine would share a bed for nearly 15 years and produce a son, Adeodatus. Augustine was extremely bright, but he was taken aback by his own son, later noting, "The grandeur of his mind filled me with a kind of terror." He would write about Una in *Confessions*, "For this space of nine years (from my nineteenth year to my eight-and-twentieth) we lived seduced and seducing, deceived and deceiving, in divers lusts; openly, by sciences which they call liberal..."

According to legend, Augustine's turn away from Christianity greatly upset his mother Monica, nearly leading to a permanent estrangement between mother and son. However, as the Catholic Encyclopedia put it, "At Carthage Augustine had become a Manichean and when on his return home he ventilated certain heretical propositions she drove him away from her table, but a strange vision which she had urged her to recall him. It was at this time that she went to see a certain holy bishop, whose name is not given, but who consoled her with the now famous words, 'the child of those tears shall never perish.'" Her persistence would eventually pay off and help make her a saint in the Catholic Church, but it would take several years for Augustine to return to the Christian fold.

Augustine's life didn't consist of all play and no work, however. During this period, he discovered Cicero's (now lost) dialogue *Hortensius*, which he later described as "leaving a lasting impression" and a desire to seek "the wisdom of eternal truth". These studies instilled in Augustine an enthusiasm for philosophy which to him equated not just to a devotion to the pursuit of truth but a conviction to the superiority of life (*vita contemplativa*) over any simple secular ambition. As historian Norman Cantor would point out in *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, "[Augustine] was a genius — an intellectual giant — and he received a thorough classical education. He was not much of a linguist (his Greek was poor, and he never learned Hebrew) but he was a master of Latin rhetoric; certain passages in *The City of God* equal the writings of Cicero in complexity and eloquence."

By this time, Augustine had already become an aspiring writer, and ironically his earliest

² Augustine. (Trans. Henry Chadwick). *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. Page 145.

writings were, in a sense, erotica. His writings were a fusion of the original sin story from *Genesis* and a chronicle of his own sexual exploits, which had begun at age 16 with the woman he refers to as “Una.” In fact, one Augustine historian, Peter Brown, has gone so far as to speculate that Augustine most likely “cruised” churches in his youth intending to pick up women. About his life in Carthage, he wrote, “I came to Carthage, where all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves. As yet, I had never been in love and I longed to love . . .”³

In about 374, Augustine returned to his hometown of Thagaste, where he taught grammar at a small institute until 376, all the while striving to convert his students to Manichaeism. He then moved back to Carthage, where he worked as a freelance professor of rhetoric for the next several years and cultivating a reputation as a Manichaean activist.

In the year 380, Augustine published his first book, the now lost *The Beautiful and the Appropriate*. Though he continued to argue in favor of Manichaean cosmology, he also admitted his doubts that his religion’s own cosmic myths were informed by the emerging science of the day. Following a disappointing meeting with the Manichean Bishop, Faustus of Mileve, in 382, Augustine became even more disturbed by the disrespectful behavior of the students in Carthage and further disillusioned by his religion’s inability to answer his mounting list of questions. That year, at the age of 28, Augustine left Carthage for Rome, where he expected to find a more intellectual selection of students.

Chapter 3: Conversion

In 383, Augustine arrived in Rome with Una, his son Adeodatus, and a staff of servants befitting his growing social status. Though increasingly disillusioned with Manichaeism, and even known to tease fellow sect members over what he considered its “farfetched tenets), Augustine continued to align himself with Manichaeans, mutually benefiting from their relationship; they benefited from his increasing prominence, while he benefited from their far-reaching social connections.

After he had come to the Eternal City, Augustine was disappointed to discover that Roman students were no more excited about learning than their Carthaginian counterparts and habitually fled at the end of semesters rather than pay their tuition fee. But just as Augustine was reconsidering his decision to move to Rome, he met Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a distinguished Roman senator who had just been appointed prefect (governor) of the city of Rome. Symmachus had been charged with finding a professor of rhetoric (court orator) for the Imperial Court at Milan, the residence of the Emperor of the West, Theodosius the Great. After three discouraging experiences as a teacher in Thagaste, Carthage, and Rome, Augustine was about to come into his own in one of the most cultured and influential cities in the world.

³ Augustine. (Trans. Henry Chadwick). *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. Page 35.



An ivory sculpture believed to depict Symmachus

In late 384, 30 year old Augustine accepted the job of court orator and headed north to assume his position, the most visible academic position in all the Roman world, at a time when such posts typically launched lucrative and powerful political careers. As with other men of his status, he was provided a staff of slaves, stenographers to catch his every utterance, and copyists to commit his every thought to paper. Despite their near falling out years earlier, Monica joined Augustine in Italy, and though Una and Adeodatus may well have been residing there also, his mother followed custom by arranging her son's engagement to a Christian heiress, who was probably just 10 years old at the time, as dictated by custom. Some accounts suggest that Augustine even dismissed Una and sent her back to Africa around the same time, after which Una became celibate, but in his *Confessions* he expresses remorse over not being able to keep her around and referred to her in his work as "The One".

Though by this time Augustine had abandoned the doctrines of Manichaeism, he continued to retain the materialistic predispositions, leaving him a spiritual skeptic with no satisfying way to resolve the unanswered questions now dominating his mind. For Augustine, the "being of God" and the "nature and origin of evil" remained as unresolved as ever. By fate or happenstance, it would be Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan and thus the most eminent Christian leader of the day, who would lead Augustine to the answers he sought. Though Augustine would claim he was unimpressed by Ambrose's delivery, it was through his sermons that Ambrose introduced Augustine to Neoplatonic mysticism as presented in the works of the Greek philosopher Plotinus (204-270). Plotinus was Neoplatonism's greatest advocate, and the founder of the system of philosophical theory supporting the contention that there are three principles of spiritual

existence: the *One*, the *Intellect*, and the *Soul*.



A mosaic believed to depict St. Ambrose

According to the Neoplatonic perspective, a view contending that reality is one unitary organic whole with no independent parts, the universe exists as a series of emanations from absolute unity. From the transcendent "One" arises the self-conscious "Intellect" (or "Mind"), and from the "Intellect" comes the "Soul" (or "Life"). The "Soul" is the intermediary between the realms of the "Spirit" and of "Sense". Matter is the lowest and last product of this absolute unity, and since the "One" is also the *real* and the *good*, the potentiality of evil is identified with unformed matter as the point of maximum departure of the "One". Thus, evil is the least real of all things because it is simply the absence of good.

Neoplatonic mysticism relies on the principle that the inward is superior to the outward, and to reach the *good* (which is the *real*), people must return to themselves, for it is the "Spirit" at the heart of man's innermost self that links him to absolute unity. Augustine would have much to say about this philosophy in years to come.

Augustine praised Plotinus in *Confessions*, but there were stark differences between the two. As one 20th century Jesuit, Richard Clarke S.J., noted in "St. Augustine and Cosmic Redemption":

"Towards Neoplatonism there was throughout his life a decidedly ambivalent attitude; one must expect both agreement and sharp dissent, derivation but also repudiation. In the matter which concerns us here, the agreement with Neoplatonism (and with the Platonic tradition in general) centers on two related notions: immutability as primary characteristic of divinity, and likeness to divinity as the primary vocation of the soul. The disagreement chiefly concerned, as we have said, two related and central Christian dogmas: the Incarnation of the Son of God and the resurrection of the flesh."

As Augustine would later describe in Book VII of *Confessions*, it was during an act of introspection in 386 that he first found God, the "Changeless Light" at once "both imminent and transcendent", which he immediately recognized as the source of every intuitive truth and goodness. More than just the conclusion of a process of reasoning as he'd expected it to be, his discovery of God proved to be a mystical experience: a vision and sensation that came and went. Hearing a voice singing "Take up and read" to him, Augustine described what led him to his conversion:

"I threw myself down somehow under a certain figtree, and let my tears flow freely. Rivers streamed from my eyes, a sacrifice acceptable to you and (though not in these words, yet in this sense) I repeatedly said to you: 'How long, O Lord? How long, Lord, will you be angry to the uttermost? Do not be mindful of our old iniquities.' For I felt my past to have a grip on me. It uttered wretched cries: 'How long, how long is it to be?' 'Tomorrow, tomorrow.' 'Why not now? Why not an end to my impure life in this very hour?'

As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again 'Pick up and read, pick up and read.' At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children's game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. For I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read: 'Go, sell all you have, give

to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'. By such an inspired utterance he was immediately 'converted to you' (Ps. 50.15). So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts'.

I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled."

While the experience of finding God manifested itself in hearing a voice that came and went, it nonetheless spontaneously answered the questions that had long troubled Augustine. And while he believed that the Manichaeans were correct in their belief that God is light and evil is darkness, he was now able to fill in the missing links: the pure changeless light of God is pure spiritual being, while evil is non-entity and merely the "absence of light." To Augustine, this revelation would be life-changing.

Although Augustine's mystical experience, his intuitive awareness of God, was ultimately life-changing, at the time it was also momentary. He later reasoned that this was due to the fact that he had not yet "made for himself the total identification of supreme value of spirit." Essentially, he was still a "man of the flesh" who harbored sexual lust in his heart and soul. He now understood that like the principles of Manichaeism, Neoplatonism also supported the principle that the way to God must be through escape of the corporal body, and to him, this meant an immediate disconnect from sexual desire.

Though the earliest of Augustine's works, the dialogues on epistemology and ethics written in late summer of 386, reflected little upon the struggles and inner-turmoil he undoubtedly experienced during this period of his life and contained surprisingly few Christian themes, scholars assume that he considered his domination over his sexual nature the final phase of his pursuit of the philosophic life he envisioned for himself since first reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. And though it is unknown when, precisely, his conversion to Christianity was complete, it is assumed that he was Christian *in intention* when he received baptism from Bishop Ambrose in the spring of 387. Returning to Milan by the beginning of Lent, an observance lasting for a period of approximately six weeks leading up to Easter, Augustine and the other baptism candidates received instruction in Bible Scripture as presented by Ambrose, a highly disciplined course all Christians of the time were compelled to undergo. All through Lent, candidates refrained from bathing, wore only penitential hairskins, and labored in designated areas of the Church. On Easter Eve, Augustine and the others prayed throughout the night, renounced Satan at dawn, turned towards the sun, and were led to the baptistry (an octagonal pool) at the

Cathedral of Milan. Then and there, Ambrose received Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis as Christian, and Augustine would express his immortal conversion to Catholicism in Book VIII of *Confessions*.

Chapter 4: A New Path

As a Christian convert, Augustine set out to make a clean break with his former life. Una was already gone, and he voiced his intention to give up his court post citing ill health, which seems to have been somewhat true. He claimed in *Confessions*, “it had at first troubled me that in this very summer my lungs began to give way, amid too great literary labour, and to breathe deeply with difficulty, and by the pain in my chest to show that they were injured, and to refuse any full or lengthened speaking...”

Augustine then retreated to the seclusion of a friend's villa to prepare for the life of an ascetic, taking his three most prized pupils and servants with him. At 32 years old, he had completed relatively few written works by this point, but now he proceeded to write four dialogues in four months and outlined several more, using his pupils, friends, and relatives to flesh-out the raw material for dialogues on a number of subjects. These dialogues discussed order in the universe, refutation of skepticism, and happiness in this life.

Shortly after his baptism, Augustine left Milan with his mother and a group of friends and returned to Africa, but tragically his mother died during the journey. He would later write of guiding his mother through a final discussion on the Neoplatonic view of ascent from this world to the next shortly before her death, a conversation he discussed at length in *Confessions*. Though it appears he had for many years discounted his mother's spiritual insight, her final observations seem to have affected him profoundly:

“[W]hen we were speaking of these things, and this world with all its delights became, as we spake, contemptible to us, my mother said, ‘Son, for mine own part I have no further delight in any thing in this life. What I do here any longer, and to what I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished. One thing there was for which I desired to linger for a while in this life, that I might see thee a Catholic Christian before I died. My God hath done this for me more abundantly, that I should now see thee withal, despising earthly happiness, become His servant: what do I here?’...”

On the ninth day then of her sickness, and the fifty-sixth year of her age, and the three-and-thirtieth of mine, was that religious and holy soul freed from the body. I closed her eyes; and there flowed withal a mighty sorrow into my heart, which was overflowing into tears; mine eyes at the same time, by the violent command of my mind, drank up their fountain wholly dry; and woe was me in such a strife! But when she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus burst out into a loud lament; then, checked by

us all, held his peace. In like manner also a childish feeling in me, which was, through my heart's youthful voice, finding its vent in weeping, was checked and silenced. For we thought it not fitting to solemnise that funeral with tearful lament, and groanings; for thereby do they for the most part express grief for the departed, as though unhappy, or altogether dead; whereas she was neither unhappy in her death, nor altogether dead. Of this we were assured on good grounds, the testimony of her good conversation and her faith unfeigned.

What then was it which did grievously pain me within, but a fresh wound wrought through the sudden wrench of that most sweet and dear custom of living together? I joyed indeed in her testimony, when, in that her last sickness, mingling her endearments with my acts of duty, she called me 'dutiful,' and mentioned, with great affection of love, that she never had heard any harsh or reproachful sound uttered by my mouth against her."

With winter's inclement weather now threatening to cut off his return to Carthage, Augustine planned his return to Rome. By this point, he was pumping out theological writings at a furious pace, and he would need the libraries there to support his works. Upon his return, he found himself surrounded by Rome's Christian community for the first time, but for Augustine, "the man who had given up a court orator's post to be baptized by Ambrose," his dealings with the papacy would always be formal and distant at best. While there, he finished one dialogue, *How to Measure the Soul*, began another, *Freedom of Choice*, and wrote the treatise *Catholic and Manichean Moral Systems*.

Later in 388, as autumn approached, Augustine set off for Africa. Returning to Thagaste, Augustine settled on his father's property, where he and his companions elected to form an ascetic community devoted to religious life, one of contemplation, introspection, study, and philosophical discourse. As most scholars concur, by this point in his life Augustine felt two duties now incumbent upon him: to expound the whole width and breadth of knowledge in Christian terms, and to refute other common schools of thought both within and outside of Christianity.

In addition to a number of other works, Augustine made his first attempt to address the Bible symbolically in *Genesis in Answer to the Manicheans*, in which he shows that even the "crude" Jewish account of creation makes more sense than the "obscene" cosmology presented by the Manicheans. At the same time, many have noted that Augustine took a naturalistic approach to interpreting Genesis and the creation story. For example, Augustine cast doubt upon man's creation of the Creation story, writing, "Let us, then, omit the conjectures of men who know not what they say, when they speak of the nature and origin of the human race. For some hold the same opinion regarding men that they hold regarding the world itself, that they have always been... They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the

history of many thousand years, though, reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6000 years have yet passed.” In *Science and Faith*, Aubrey Moore wrote, “Augustine distinctly rejected Special Creation in favor of a doctrine which, without any violence to language, we may call a theory of Evolution.” Henry Fairfield Osborn went even further, asserting, “If the orthodoxy of Augustine had remained the teaching of the Church, the final establishment of Evolution would have come far earlier than it did, certainly during the eighteenth instead of the nineteenth century, and the bitter controversy over this truth of Nature would never have arisen.”

In 391, Augustine chose to move to the African port city of Hippo Regius, Numidia (modern Nigeria) and set up a monastery, but once he arrived his path took an unexpected turn towards what theologians consider his destiny. According to popular accounts, Augustine had never considered entering the priesthood and had, in fact, avoided cities in which an episcopacy election was possible (cities ruled by Bishops who could “appoint” church positions). But while praying in a church in Hippo for a friend who’d sought his intercession, a number of people suddenly gathered around him, cheered him, and begged regional bishop Valerius to raise him to the priesthood. While this account may have been a later construct to emphasize Saint Augustine’s *predestination*, according to his own narrative, it was Bishop Valerius who had recognized the limitations of his own Latin delivery and decided he needed a man of more eloquent rhetoric to deliver scripture. In spite of Augustine’s initial objection that as a newly-baptized Christian he needed to study the faith before preaching it, he was obliged to yield to episcopacy election and was thus ordained as an assistant priest to Valerius.



Renaissance painter Jaume Huguet's *The Consecration of Saint Augustine*

With Valerius's approval, church property was put at Augustine's disposal, a garden adjacent to the church, which enabled him to establish a monastery. And though oral ministry was traditionally restricted to bishops, Valerius urged Augustine to disseminate the *word*, and his priestly ministry proved extremely fruitful over the next five years.

Valerius died in 396, and upon his death Augustine assumed his position as bishop, entering the episcopate in which he would labor ceaselessly for the Church for the remainder of his life. As historical documents indicate, in Roman Africa during the 5th century, a bishop was not just the pastor (the teacher and preacher of a parish) but also the presiding judge in a bustling court of summary jurisdiction in civil court cases. At the time of Augustine's appointment as bishop,

there were almost 700 bishops in Africa alone. Thus, in addition to assuming the responsibility of crafting effective and thought-provoking sermons, of which more than 500 surviving sermons attest to Bishop Augustine's gift of spiritual conveyance, a bishop in this time was compelled to address any number of diverse philosophical and theological queries that reached his office each month. In Augustine's case, over 200 such letters have survived. And of course, the bishop was expected to publish theses and treatises on issues of theological significance.

Diminishing health forced Augustine to rely on the constant services of stenographers, a perk common to his office, and he certainly kept them busy. Bishops had to hear appeals, but Augustine had to hear an even greater number of appeals for solutions to a wide range of issues because of his growing reputation and his own works. For example, Augustine continued his tireless criticism of the Manichaeans, as well as the Donatists, a Christian sect holding that the Church must be a church of saints, not sinners, and that sacraments such as baptism when administered by traditores were invalid. He also discussed the Pelagians, who viewed humanity as inherently good and morally unaffected by the so-called "fall" of Adam and Eve.

In the course of doing all this, Augustine became one of the most prolific writers of his time. Scholars point to his Scripture commentaries, homilies of the Psalms, and his tracts on the Gospel and First Epistle of Saint John for insight into real "Augustinianism", which they view as a decisive turn in his thinking brought about by his being foisted into the priesthood.

Chapter 5: Later Years

In 397, after Augustine had been a priest for six years and a bishop for two, an outpouring of writings took place that some scholars have likened to an "implosion of his mind", reflecting the deep introspection Augustine was experiencing as a bishop. The best known among these writings was *The Testimony (Confessions)*, written in an intimate form of writing quite different from the sermons, pamphlets, and letters he typically dispensed, and which scholar Garry Willis described as "an implosion of his mind, down into himself, back into his past, as the place where God could be found."⁴ In Augustine's own words, "You were inside me, I outside me...deeper in me than I am in me." The resulting 13 books, completed in 401, are viewed today as a masterpiece that provides invaluable insight into Augustine's personal and spiritual being, as well as ideas that would shape the face of Christianity.

In *Confessions*, Augustine insists that true knowledge of the soul's nature can only be based on the "immediate deliveries of the self-consciousness," and that the soul's awareness of itself is of a trinity in unity that reflects "as in a glass darkly the being of its 'Maker.'" Augustine confesses that his knowledge of his own being, thinking, and will were unquestionably a product of ego, cognition, and conation, but that in none of these aspects is the ego "self-sufficient or independent," nor can it maintain its own being, produce its own knowledge, or satisfy its own

⁴ Willis, Garry. *Saint Augustine*. Page 88.

desires. Augustine believed he had learned from the Platonists to discover and identify God as “the author of all existences, the illustrator of all truth, the bestower of all beatitude,”⁵ but as his contemporaries and modern scholars emphasize, his cosmology, epistemology, and ethical perspective were all his own creation.

“I do not know how to explain the odd fact that we do not know certain things,”⁶ he wrote. Yet for all the questions *Confessions* poses and then confesses to be unable to answer, Augustine presents all the themes that would ultimately come to dominate his later works: time, memory, the inner dynamic of the self, the inner dynamic of God, and the continual activity of God in the soul. These themes would establish him as one of the greatest thinkers in history, and while it had long been assumed that the proverbial “fire and brimstone” of his sermons could not be translated to the written word, *Confessions* demonstrated otherwise.

With his studies and introspection now diverted from philosophy to Scripture, the realities of ministering to “imperfectly” Christianized people of an African seaport, along with a veritable barrage of new Biblical topics to consider, made it impossible for Augustine not to see the glaring differences between Neoplatonism and traditional Pauline Christianity. It would be these differences that Augustine clearly struggled to resolve internally and frequently addressed in his writings. For the Neoplatonists, the soul's likeness to God is that of a “depotentiated divinity”, deprived of potency or power, while for the Christian it is that of a “temporal and mutable image (prone to change) of the Eternal and Changeless.” While wending his way through such difficult religious and philosophical issues, Augustine declared that it is the task of Christian philosophy, guided by Scriptural revelation, to seek God through his image in the soul, and it was this path that he would pursue in his great treatise, *De Trinitate (On the Trinity)*.

Augustine placed *De Trinitate* in his *Retractions* among the works written [meaning begun] in 400. In letters dated 410, 414, and at the end of 415, it is referred to as still unfinished and unpublished, but a letter of 412 states that friends were at that time asking him to complete and publish it. Other letters suggest that it was still in hand in the year 416.

In the year 410, the Visigoth leader Alaric, a devout Arian Christian, captured the city of Rome, striking fear throughout Christendom and sending countless Romans fleeing into Roman-occupied Africa. Though both Roman Emperors continued to rule from their royal courts at Ravenna (in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy) and Constantinople, Catholics in and around Rome were uncertain of their fate under Visigoth rule, prompting Augustine to respond from what would be considered the darker side of his teaching by reemphasizing the importance of “human will”, a touchy subject for the Church. While working on three major theological works simultaneously, Augustine met his Church tasks, joined ongoing councils held in Carthage to discuss Church reforms, and dealt with the seemingly endless controversy concerning the

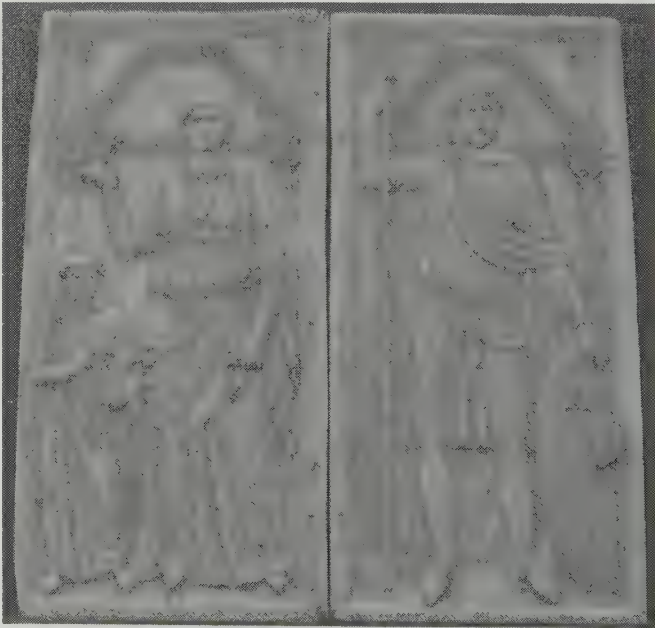
⁵ New Advent.org website, *City of God*, “Book VIII.”

⁶ Wills, Garry. *Saint Augustine*. Page 98.

Donatists and the so-called “Donatist Schism.”

For the first 15 years of his ministry, Augustine's efforts were often distracted by the tedious and exhausting struggle to resolve the Donatist Schism in the African Church that had by this time persisted for nearly a century. The Donatists outnumbered Catholics in many areas of the African countryside, and they claimed to be the only true Church because their ministry was the only one whose succession had not been stained by apostasy (formal renunciation) during the Great Persecution of 303-313. Imperial attempts to suppress the schism had led to martyrdom and increased violence, while the Donatists drew increasing support from the native African population, whose complaints were more socio-economic than ecclesiastical.

The protests and violence culminated with Gildo's African Revolt against the Roman Empire in the year 398. In response, Stilicho, the imperial minister at Ravenna, issued the Edict of Unity in 405, denouncing Donatists as “heretics.” Though Augustine fundamentally rejected the use of force to bring about adherence, he was nonetheless compelled to enforce Stilicho's policy in Hippo (his writing of this time reflecting his increasing intolerance toward civil disorder and religious dissent).



Ancient depiction of Stilicho (right) and his wife and son

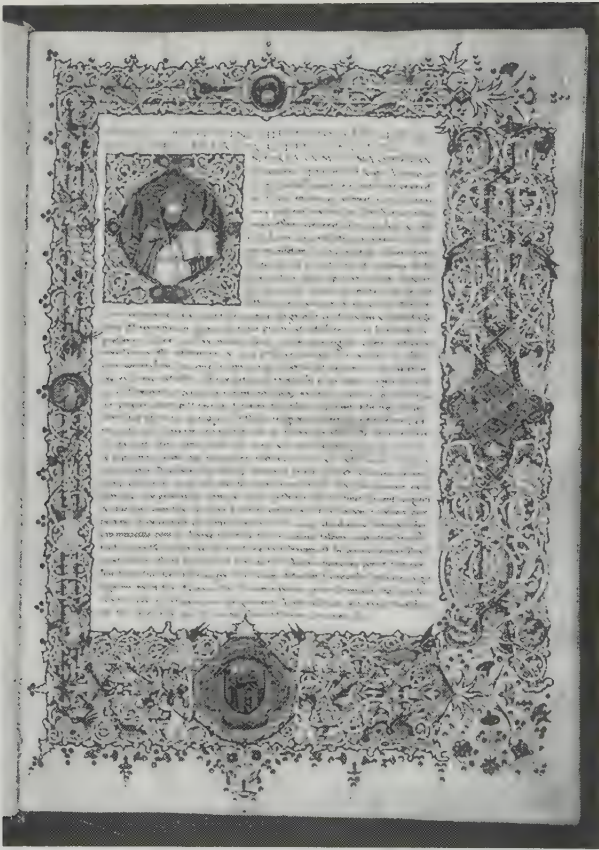
In 411, Catholic bishops were directed to meet their Donatist counterparts at Carthage in what was termed the “Confrontation”. The bishops were to address the rise in fanatical violence and charges of heresy, ultimately resulting in the imposition and enforcement of legal penalties that ranged from fines to confiscation, torture to death. In reaction, Arian emperors suppressed Catholic views and ousted Orthodox Trinitarians who professed belief in the Doctrine of the Christian Trinity from their episcopal chairs. The Roman Emperors fueled the ongoing schism by doing the same to Arians, and Ambrose himself denied churches to Arians and synagogues to Jews. Religious intolerance and societal resentment began to spread throughout Christendom.

By the year 413, Augustine's observations regarding the severe disorientation Christians were experiencing due to the capture of Rome, which had been the epicenter of Christianity for nearly a century, became the theme of his *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), a two-part, 22-book treatise ultimately requiring 15 years to complete. In it, Augustine discusses the relationship between Christianity, pagan religions, philosophy, and Rome. Near the beginning of the work, Augustine explained the purpose for the work and explains its structure, writing:

“However, this great undertaking was at last completed in twenty-two books. Of these, the first five refute those who fancy that the polytheistic worship is necessary in order to secure worldly prosperity, and that all these overwhelming calamities have befallen us in consequence of its prohibition. In the following five books I address myself to those who admit that such calamities have at all times attended, and will at all times attend, the human race, and that they constantly recur in forms more or less disastrous, varying only in the scenes, occasions, and persons on whom they light, but, while admitting this, maintain that the worship of the gods is advantageous for the life to come. But that no one might have occasion to say, that though I had refuted the tenets of other men, I had omitted to establish my own, I devote to this object the second part of this work, which comprises twelve books, although I have not scrupled, as occasion offered, either to advance my own opinions in the first ten books, or to demolish the arguments of my opponents in the last twelve. Of these twelve books, the first four contain an account of the origin of these two cities—the city of God, and the city of the world. The second four treat of their history or progress; the third and last four, of their deserved destinies.”

Despite Christianity's designation as the “official” religion of the Empire, Augustine declared *The City's* message, which presents human history as a conflict between the “City of Man” and the “City of God”, to be spiritual rather than political, arguing that Christianity should be concerned with the “New Jerusalem” rather than mundane, earthly politics. The “City of God” is the realm in which the faithful are attuned with God's will and resist sin, while the “City of Man” is the realm of mankind's defective will, the result of the original sin perpetrated by Adam and Eve. Augustine is critical of pagans, but he also criticizes Rome even while describing its relationship with the Church, emphasizing that “Rome was never the city that could satisfy

human hearts. Only the City of God can do that.”⁷



15th century manuscript of Augustine's *The City of God*

Original sin was also a topic that Augustine discussed at length in several works, especially as he struggled to develop a framework through which to explain why original sin is inherited by all mankind. In *On the Sermon on the Mount*, Augustine tied it to man's selfish desires, writing:

“Moreover, if unbelief is fornication, and idolatry unbelief, and covetousness idolatry, it is not to be doubted that covetousness also is fornication. Who, then, in that case can rightly separate

⁷ Wills, Garry. *Saint Augustine*. Page 114.

any unlawful lust whatever from the category of fornication, if covetousness is fornication? And from this we perceive, that because of unlawful lusts, not only those of which one is guilty in acts of uncleanness with another's husband or wife, but any unlawful lusts whatever, which cause the soul making a bad use of the body to wander from the law of God, and to be ruinously and basely corrupted, a man may, without crime, put away his wife, and a wife her husband, because the Lord makes the cause of fornication an exception; which fornication, in accordance with the above considerations, we are compelled to understand as being general and universal..."

Augustine expounded on the concept of original sin in *On the Trinity*:

"Why therefore is it enjoined upon mind, that it should know itself? I suppose, in order that, it may consider itself, and live according to its own nature; that is, seek to be regulated according to its own nature, viz., under Him to whom it ought to be subject, and above those things to which it is to be preferred; under Him by whom it ought to be ruled, above those things which it ought to rule. For it does many things through vicious desire, as though in forgetfulness of itself. For it sees some things intrinsically excellent, in that more excellent nature which is God: and whereas it ought to remain steadfast that it may enjoy them, it is turned away from Him, by wishing to appropriate those things to itself, and not to be like to Him by His gift, but to be what He is by its own, and it begins to move and slip gradually down into less and less, which it thinks to be more and more."

Just as the "Donatist Schism" was reaching its conclusion, Pelagianism was beginning to threaten traditional Western Church doctrine regarding sin and redemption. In the year 413, the theologian Pelagius had declared his "dogma against the grace of Christ," setting himself against what he saw as slacking Christian moral standards that made excuses for those pleading "human frailty" as justification for their indiscretions. Pelagius insisted that God made every man free to choose and perform good, that avoiding sin and committing sin are both voluntary acts, and that man enters the world with as pure a nature as Adam had possessed in innocence. To Pelagius, if original sin was inherited, it meant that man did not have the freedom to avoid acts God forbids, and thus there would be no justice in God's punishments and rewards. With these teachings, Pelagius was directly challenging the Catholic doctrine of original sin and the practice of baptism for the "remission of sins" that babies inherit. Not surprisingly, Pelagianism was quickly branded as heresy.



PELAGIUS

*Account Pelagius with what false pretence
Durst thou excuse Mans foule Concupiscence :
Or say, as he saith originally, in that
The Love of God did Man predestinate .*

17th century Calvinist depiction of Pelagius

Though Augustine was reluctant to involve himself in this dispute, perhaps in part because Bishop Paulinus of Nola had voiced respect for Pelagius, and perhaps in part because he saw no point in appearing reactionary, he had already written two treatises in 413 refuting Coelestius' views without ascribing them to Pelagius. In 415, when Augustine read Pelagius's *Nature*, which argued that Adam's "fall from grace" did not cripple human nature, he recognized the potential danger of that work and countered with his own, *Nature and Grace*.

From Augustine's perspective, while the Pelagian position could be faulted for denying the virtue of Christian baptism, its primary fault was in presenting a fatal misconception regarding the relationship between man and God. Essentially, Augustine believed that Pelagius's assertion

mankind can achieve righteousness by its own volition contradicts the fundamental truth that “God is the provider of all good.” Accepting the premise that all men are complicit in Adam’s guilt and subsequent punishment, Augustine contended that this involvement is due to man’s own sexual passion, a conflict of “flesh against spirit” in which the “impotence of spirit to control flesh” is most evident.

In later years, Pelagian bishop Julian would charge that Augustine had lapsed into Manichaeism by equating man’s impulses with evil. Theologians, however, contend that Julian missed Augustine’s larger meaning: that the “fall” of man means that in all of us the “true order of love” has been violated. By this, Augustine is understood to have meant that by the act of self-love, man has departed from the love of God *above* to become subject to what is *below*. The subjugation of spirit to flesh is a kind of servitude that the will has no power to deliver itself from, meaning man cannot reverse the consequence of his *fall* by a similar exercise of will. Indeed, delivery can only occur by the “gracious descent of divine love to seat itself within the sinner”, the gospel of the Incarnation and of Pentecost. Pelagius, however, claimed to recognize the “grace of God” in creation and revelation, asserting that all men are created free to do what is right, and that Christians have already received moral enlightenment via Jesus Christ’s teachings and examples.

Recognizing what he perceived as the weakness of that argument, Augustine responded, “Men will not do what is right, either because the right is hidden from them, or because they find no delight in it . . . But that which was hidden may become clear, what delighted not may become sweet—this belongs to the grace of God which aids the wills of men.”⁸ Augustine insisted that without this delight in righteousness, there can be no true freedom in well-doing, only servitude to law. Accordingly, the love of God, the very motive of Christian life, must be free, but as Saint Paul wrote, “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us” (Romans 5:5).

Augustine found it increasingly difficult to leave room in his doctrine of grace for a genuinely free response to the Holy Spirit’s gifts on mankind’s part, maintaining that God alone is the cause of every human movement towards good. His ongoing studies of Saint Paul subsequently led him to conclude that no event in time can alter the eternal setting of God’s will toward any human soul; his elect were chosen “before the foundation of the world.” Thus, God knows in advance how each individual will respond to the particular form in which grace is offered to him over the course of time, and only the elect receive the grace that will garner their acceptance.

Ironically, in the spring of 418 Emperor Honorius granted the African bishops an edict banishing the Pelagian “heretics”, based in part on their view of original sin, but Augustine’s own works had expressed a view of original sin that did not fall completely in line with that of the Catholic Church of Rome.

⁸ Meyer, Paul W. *The Word in This World: Essays in New Testament Exegesis and Theology*.

In 418, Pope Zosimus, a proponent of Pelagianism who had been condemned by the preceding pope (Innocent I) and expelled from Constantinople, asked the 64 year old Augustine to lead a panel of African bishops to settle an ecclesiastical conflict in Caesarian Mauretania near present-day Algeria. Augustine addressed several pertinent issues there, including the terms of the Donatist settlement, but when he returned to Hippo five months later, Augustine was confronted by opposition from a very unexpected source. During his absence in Caesarian Mauretania, Bishop Julian of Eclanum (near present-day Benevento, Italy), a close family friend and outspoken Pelagian leader, had begun spreading word that Augustine was still a Manichaean and secretly wished to destroy the institution of Christian marriage.

Months before, when Roman bishops had been compelled to sign a ban condemning Pelagius, Julian had left his diocese in Eclanum to join supporters in northern Italy calling for an ecumenical council to reinstate Pelagius. In response, Augustine issued a treatise to Emperor Valerius vehemently denying any opposition to marriage, which Julian quickly countered with four treatments of his own. Not only did Augustine defend marriage, he thought it appropriate to legitimize sexual relations as part of God's intention for men and women, asserted that children are the first "good of marriage", and explained that women's purpose is to procreate. But while Augustine was successful in refuting Julian's attacks academically speaking, modern scholars point out that he gave the unfounded charges so much attention that he unwittingly gave them validity, which established an image of Augustine as being a man pessimistic about politics and other mundane human activity, burdened by a lingering Manichean awareness of the power of evil, and haunted by his own inescapable sexual past. It's also important to remember that this was happening at a time when the Church and several Eastern religions viewed women as temptresses who created conflicts in men between the realm of the spirit and world of the flesh.

Augustine's contention that mankind's sexual impulses are derived from Adam's "fall" did not come from Romans 5:12 ("Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned") but from a subjective reading of Scripture, Augustine's own view of the saving role of Jesus Christ, and the observation "that there is something askew in ordinary human nature". However, this made even his closest fellow clergymen begin to question the validity of his stance. More to the point, what set Augustine apart from all other theologians of his time was his assertion that sex, as part of the good human nature created by God, would have occurred in Eden even if there had been no "fall." This was wildly at odds with the prevailing theological perspective that without the "fall" there would have been no death in Eden, and thus no need to perpetuate the human race through sexual intercourse.

Augustine went even further by asserting that Jesus could have procreated if he had wanted to, and that Christ without virility (male sexual potency) would be without virtue. Christ's flesh was perfectly responsive to the spirit, meaning the question of having sex was not of capacity but of choice. Augustine even once argued that men can gain greater control over farting

(“some...odorless sounds, a kind of singing from the other end”) than over their erections.⁹

For the last decade of his life, Augustine, the man who had once discounted miracles and martyr cults, now discovered justification to embrace both. During the 420s, a new wave of reported “miracles” rippled across Africa, along with the appearance of various sacred relics from the Holy Land. Renouncing some of his earlier perspectives, Augustine argued that a God who chose to assume a visible and physical form was not above corporal wonders, as his former Neoplatonist self had once thought. He also sought to legitimize Donatists to the Church, which they had been compelled to join, and he even advocated that martyr cults were the authentic “African religion” Donatists were justifiably attached to.

Having essentially reassessed his own beliefs and product, Augustine undertook the laborious task of cataloging his own voluminous writings, creating *Reconsiderations* between 426 and 427. Meanwhile, Augustine's disciples, to whom his doctrine now seemed to make moral effort futile and praise and blame groundless, sought from him spiritual resolve, but Augustine would retract nothing. In his last completed treatises (“On Heresies,” “On the Predestination of the Saints,” “On the Gift of Perseverance,” and “On the Usefulness of Fasting”) he drew out the logic of predestination to its most severe conclusions. And while Augustine's dictum would never receive full Church approval, it would appear virtually verbatim in the works of both Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and John Calvin (1509-1564), considered by many the most critical thinkers of scholasticism and socio-religious reform in history.

On August 28, 430, 75 year old Augustine died in Hippo Regius, Africa. According to subsequent accounts, Augustine's body was later removed to Cagliari, Sardinia by Catholic bishops expelled from North Africa. Around 720, his remains were moved again by Peter, bishop of Pavia, to the Church of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro (Pavia, Italy) to protect them from Muslim raiders.

⁹ Wills, Garry. *Saint Augustine*. Page 139.



Augustine's tomb in the Church of San Pietro

Augustine was declared a saint even before the official canonization process was instituted in the Catholic Church in the 12th century, and in 1298, Pope Boniface VIII recognized Saint Augustine as a Doctor of the Church, marking his designated feast day as August 28.

Chapter 6: Augustine's Legacy

Considered by many scholars to be the greatest thinker of Christian antiquity, Saint Augustine is credited with fusing the religious principles of the New Testament with traditional Greek Platonic philosophy, then becoming the conduit by which that melding was conveyed to medieval Roman Catholicism and Renaissance Protestantism. Given the passage of so many

centuries and the way in which Christianity has branched out, that Augustine is hailed as so vital to every Christian is truly remarkable.

In addition to influencing how subsequent Christian philosophers thought, Augustine's writings provided an opinion on a countless number of social and religious issues, many of which continue to be hot button topics today. For example, Augustine "vigorously condemned the practice of induced abortion" but also differentiated between fetuses being "formed" and "unformed", which would seemingly put him at odds with the belief that life begins at conception. Augustine also expressed views on cosmology and astrology that were unusual for his time, likely because he spent so much time studying philosophy and secular topics. Augustine cautioned against the use of astrology and a reliance on the "science" behind astrology, writing, "Hence, a devout Christian must avoid astrologers and all impious soothsayers, especially when they tell you the truth, for fear of leading his soul into error by consorting with demons and entangling himself with the bonds of such association."

Augustine was also not afraid to question literal interpretations of the Bible, a stance that was quite remarkable considering that Christianity was still a relatively new religion. Most notably, he believed the Bible should be interpreted metaphorically and allegorically, as opposed to literally, a viewpoint that was way ahead of its time and even today remains more progressive than some Christians. For example, Augustine wrote about the Book of Genesis:

It not infrequently happens that something about the earth, about the sky, about other elements of this world, about the motion and rotation or even the magnitude and distances of the stars, about definite eclipses of the sun and moon, about the passage of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, of fruits, of stones, and of other such things, may be known with the greatest certainty by reasoning or by experience, even by one who is not a Christian. It is too disgraceful and ruinous, though, and greatly to be avoided, that he [the non-Christian] should hear a Christian speaking so idiotically on these matters, and as if in accord with Christian writings, that he might say that he could scarcely keep from laughing when he saw how totally in error they are. In view of this and in keeping it in mind constantly while dealing with the book of Genesis, I have, insofar as I was able, explained in detail and set forth for consideration the meanings of obscure passages, taking care not to affirm rashly some one meaning to the prejudice of another and perhaps better explanation...

With the scriptures it is a matter of treating about the faith. For that reason, as I have noted repeatedly, if anyone, not understanding the mode of divine eloquence, should find something about these matters [about the physical universe] in our books, or hear of the same from those books, of such a kind that it seems to be at variance with the perceptions of his own rational faculties, let him believe that these other things are in no way necessary to the admonitions or accounts or predictions of the scriptures. In

short, it must be said that our authors knew the truth about the nature of the skies, but it was not the intention of the Spirit of God, who spoke through them, to teach men anything that would not be of use to them for their salvation..."

One of Augustine's most important contributions to philosophy was his framing of the concept of just war. Given that Christian teachings emphasized pacifism, Augustine was careful to point out that his advocacy of just warfare was his own, writing, "What is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition. The sacred seat of virtue is the heart." However, he personally believed it was a sin to be a pacifist if the wrong could only be righted with violence, pointing out that holy war was sometimes necessary to further the interests of the Church: "The commandment forbidding killing was not broken by those who have waged wars on the authority of God, or those who have imposed the death-penalty on criminals when representing the authority of the state, the justest and most reasonable source of power... But, say they, the wise man will wage just wars. As if he would not all the rather lament the necessity of just wars, if he remembers that he is a man; for if they were not just he would not wage them, and would therefore be delivered from all wars." In other words, sometimes the best way to establish peace, and avoid further war, is to conduct war in the first place.

Though it may come as a surprise today, now that he is recognized as one of Christianity's most important thinkers, Augustine was mostly considered peripheral in his day. He resided in a province in North Africa on the margins of classical culture, and though he was a rhetorical master with Latin, he was a scholar who did not even speak Greek, which at the time was the language of the international intelligentsia. Thus, his primary influence did not come from his ecclesiastical rank but his writing. Naturally, far fewer people had access to those writings in Augustine's time than today, which is how a man whose works were so staggering in insight and quality could be overlooked among his own peers.

Of course, his voluminous body of work all but assured that some of what Augustine wrote would be controversial, and without question, the most controversial issue both in his lifetime and in subsequent centuries has been his position on "grace and free will." To reasonably assess these doctrines today, modern theologians stress the necessity of placing them within their proper context, pointing out that Augustine was reacting to Pelagianism and thus attempting to present a doctrine as true to Orthodox interpretation as possible within the limitations of his own theological perspective. As history and his own writing reflect, Augustine was the most outspoken opponent in the West of Pelagius, who denied the necessity of God's grace for salvation, making clear that Augustine believed it was his spiritual duty to direct the devout to the truth.

Ultimately, Orthodoxy considers the fundamental flaw in Augustine's thinking and writing to be his overstatement of the role grace plays in Christian life, and his understatement of free will. In their view, Augustine was inevitably driven to this "exaggeration" by his own experience of

conversion, and his propensity to define this question too precisely. And while the blatant denial of free will was never a real consideration for Augustine, since his founding of monastic communities to deal with ascetic struggles makes clear that he thought free will existed in some capacity, he certainly had an opinion that was not shared by most of his contemporaries. As demonstrated in his treatise "On Rebuke and Grace," Augustine wrote, "Will you dare to say that even when Christ prayed that Peter's faith might not fail, it would still have failed if Peter had willed it to fail? As if Peter could have in any measure will otherwise than Christ had wished for him that he might will."¹⁰

As scholars then and today observe, Augustine's position here is clearly one-sided, by unnecessarily overemphasizing grace while suggesting what might be considered "irresistible grace", which man must accept whether willed or not. Conversely, Orthodoxy has long held that there is no contradiction whatsoever in the cooperation of grace and free will, and that it is only human logic that finds the so-called contradiction when it tries to understand this question from an abstract perspective apart from real life. Thus, as an intellectual first and a Christian convert second, Augustine's attempt to resolve the issue and present it in a manner palatable to all 5th century Christians side-stepped the primary Orthodox teaching of the "cooperation of God and man," and of the necessity of ascetic struggle and the certain will of God that all may be saved.

Scholars today believe the most serious of Saint Augustine's exaggerations regarding grace and free can be found in his unique stance on predestination. While his view of grace and free will has itself been cause for much philosophical and theological debate, it is his conceptualization of predestination that has produced the most criticism from his detractors. Founded on the teachings of Saint Paul, the Orthodox view of predestination is as follows: "For whom He foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son . . . and whom He predestined, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8: 29 —30). In Saint Paul's words, predestination, regarding those foreknown and fore-ordained by God for eternal glory, involves the free choice of those being saved, and the cooperation of God and man as later known by the term *synergism* (a cooperation of Divine grace and human freedom, neither acting independently nor autonomously).

While scholars contend that Augustine most certainly did teach the accepted Orthodox view of predestination, he taught it in an exaggerated way (much like grace and free will) that was easily misinterpreted and invited scrutiny. From the Orthodox perspective, Augustine's view of predestination ignored the unknowable aspect of God. Admitting the complexity of attempting to solve this mystery with ordinary logic, Augustine asks, "If one is in the number of the 'predestined,' does he need to struggle for salvation? And, if he is not in their number, can he give up struggling altogether?" Essentially, Augustine was asking whether man could or should do anything if God has preordained the result ahead of time.

¹⁰ New Advent.org website, "On Rebuke and Grace."

Similarly, Augustine's pursuit of logical deduction led him to address the Apostles' statement that God wills all men to be saved (I Tim. 2:4), reasoning that this cannot be literally true. If God predestines only some to be saved, then he must will only some to be saved. In *On Rebuke and Grace*, Augustine writes, "He wills all men to be saved is so said that all the predestined may be understood by it, because every kind of man is among them."¹¹ To further qualify his perspective, he also writes of a "negative" predestination of eternal damnation (a concept not supported by the Scriptures), and of a class of men predestined to destruction, writing, "To those whom He has predestined to eternal death, he is also the most righteous awarder of punishment." Scholars emphasize that statements like these are easy to misinterpret as suggesting that God determines, or wills, man to do evil, which is certainly not what Augustine intended to imply.

Bible scholars today stress the importance of framing the modern view of Saint Augustine within an accurate historical context, accounting for the misinterpretations of Augustine's writing perpetuated by both proponents and opponents of Augustine's views, as well as subsequent criticisms (both intended and accidental) that have come to color the contemporary understanding of Augustine and his massive collection of work. Equally important is the need to place Augustine properly within his own time and place, framing him within the circumstances and events that came to define and guide his life. He grew up in a poorer class among parents with two religions in Africa, moved to Italy and subsequently adopted Manichaeism, before converting and becoming its most outspoken skeptic. Augustine invested much of his life in search of truth and purity, distracted by his own competing natures, but he ultimately found God while becoming both mystic and iconoclast. Furthermore, through the decades Augustine became a master of language and often used paradox to discuss complex issues that others would have had a hard time expressing.

At the heart of Augustine's message is his acknowledgement that for Catholicism, faith is strictly a personal response to God as "Revealer," an intellectual act rooted in the individual and ultimately driven by human will. Faith for the Catholic is a "free" assent to proposals revealed by God as true. In *Confessions*, he wrote, "I believe this is true, not because I see it by reason or direct experience, but because God tells me so; and God is an absolutely reliable authority who can neither deceive nor be deceived." Thus, he affirms his intimate knowledge that the act of faith takes place within the context of a personal life, and that it overcomes all the influences which would pull an individual away from his or her commitment to God. Given the life he led, nobody understood that concept better than Augustine.

On Film

In the 1972 made-for-TV movie *Augustine of Hippo*, Saint Augustine was portrayed by Dary Berkani.

¹¹ New Advent.org website, "On Rebuke and Grace."

In the 2010 mini-series *Augustine: The Decline of the Roman Empire*, Saint Augustine was portrayed by Franco Nero.

In Print

In the Flann O'Brian novel *The Dalkey Archive*, Saint Augustine appears in a surrealistic scenario in which he is summoned to an underwater cavern by an absurd scientist named De Selby, where the two discuss life in heaven and the characters of other saints.

Jostein Gaarder's book *Vita Brevis* is a translation of a letter Gaarder claimed to have found in a bookshop in Buenos Aires, Argentina, assumed to be a letter to Saint Augustine from his concubine after he became Bishop of Hippo.

In Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Saint Augustine is credited as possibly being the first to propose a theory of evolution.

In Song

Folk/Rock legend Bob Dylan recorded a song titled "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" on his 1967 album *John Wesley Harding*.

Rock musician Sting pays homage to Saint Augustine's struggles with lust in his song "Saint Augustine in Hell," which appears on his 1993 album *Ten Summoner's Tales*.

The Christian Rock group Disciple recorded "The Ballad of St. Augustine" for their 2010 release *Horseshoes and Handgrenades*.

The American Rock band Moe paid homage to Saint Augustine with "St. Augustine," on their 1994 release, *Headseed*.

The song "St. Augustine" appears on Girlyman's album, *Supernova*.

A List of Augustine's Major Works

All told, Saint Augustine wrote more than 93 books, nearly 300 letters, and over 500 sermons.

386 *Against the Academics*

386/387 *The Soliloquies*

386-429 *Letters*

387/389 *On the Catholic and the Manichaeian Way of Life*

388-395 *On Free Choice*

- 389/391 *On True Religion*
- 393 *On Faith and Creed*
- 393/394 *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis (unfinished)*
- 393-430 *Sermons*
- 397-401 *Confessions*
- 399 *On the Nature of the Good*
- 399-419 *The Trinity*
- 400/401 *On Baptism Against the Donatists*
- 401 *On the Good of Marriage*
- 410 *On the Destruction of the City of Rome*
- 412 *On the Grace of the New Testament (Letter 140)*
- 413-427 *City of God*
- 414/415 *On Nature and Grace*
- 417 *On the Proceedings concerning Pelagius*
- 418 *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*
- 419/420 *On Marriage and Concupiscence*
- 420 *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*
- 421 *Against Julian*
- 426/427 *On Grace and Free Choice*
- 426/427 *Retractions*
- 429-430 *Incomplete Works Against Julian*

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