

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine: From the Publisher

Agree or disagree, now or after reading this issue: After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity...

1987 marks the 1,600th anniversary of Augustine's conversion to Christ and baptism. The anniversary is noteworthy not only because of Augustine's influence on Christendom, for his pivotal role in history extends well beyond the ecclesiastical; it is noteworthy because he is one of the central pillars on which our entire Western civilization is built.

Time magazine acknowledged this in its September 29 issue of 1986, when it devoted a full page to a summary of and commentary on Augustine's life and influence. *Time* observed that Augustine, in each of the 16 centuries since his conversion, has continued to exert a "major intellectual, spiritual and cultural force."

Here at Christian History we have probably had more requests from readers for an issue exclusively devoted to Augustine than for anyone else. We thought this anniversary year was a perfectly appropriate time to present one.

There is no greater expression of human beauty, nor is there any greater exaltation of human nature, than when individuals or groups are humbled under, touched by, and made aware of the reality and presence of God's grace. And none, apart from the biblical writers and characters, did more to help us understand the supreme joy of life in God's grace than the man from North Africa treated in these pages.

He lived at a time when the waves of barbarians surging into the Roman empire must have created public anxiety similar to that experienced today because of the threat of nuclear holocaust. The barbaric Goths sacked Rome in 410 A.D., and the Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo even as Augustine, the city's bishop, lay on his deathbed. Smoke from Vandal-set fires was wafting through the windows of his room as he breathed his last.

During his life he also had to deal with the pagans' repeated attacks against Christianity and the church, and with divisions within the church sparked by heretics who used methods both physically violent and intellectually challenging. His time, like ours, was one of those moments in history when the potential destruction of our culture and civilization was more than an occasional nightmare—it was perceived as an imminent threat.

Augustine did many things in response to the crises of his 5th-century world, including write *The City of God*. Partially as a result of his efforts, paganism in that era was defeated, though never fully exterminated, and doctrines were developed to answer heresy. The barbarians eventually became Christianized, even if only nominally, and the church grew stronger, though not necessarily better. His resolute and intelligent responses to these crises have significantly influenced numerous sojourners in the city of man to establish their citizenship in the City of God. *When* and *how* we come through our crises (some would say if) is yet to be seen. But it wouldn't hurt to dust off *The City of God* and give it another look. Were Augustine alive today, might he not still write much the same?

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St. Augustine: Did You Know...

That in the modern sense of the term, Augustine's *Confessions* was the first autobiography ever written?

That one of Augustine's duties as bishop of Hippo was to arbitrate lawsuits?

That Bishop Augustine lived almost entirely on vegetables?

That he encouraged conversation at meals—but with a strictly enforced rule that the character of an absent person should never be negatively discussed? He had a warning to this effect carved on a plaque attached to his table.

That according to his biographer, Possidius, Augustine wrote more than 1,000 total works, including 242 books?

That Augustine set part of his written campaign against the Donatist heresy to verse? Around 394 A.D., Augustine composed a song he titled "An ABC against the Donatists," and encouraged that it be frequently sung by the orthodox churches in his diocese. It became quite popular.

That at one point early in his career, Augustine was a speechwriter for the Roman emperor?

That a rich pagan man chose the young Augustine to be his protege, in hopes the bright young philosopher would help turn the rapidly Christianizing Roman empire back to paganism?

That while Augustine was still alive, people in France began a movement to canonize his writings and put them on a par with Scripture? And this effort continued for nearly 100 years!

That when Augustine became bishop of Hippo, he was "unalterably fixed there for the rest of his life"? The African church had a rule strictly forbidding the transfer of its bishops.

That Augustine founded a religious order for women, but that all females, even his sister, were excluded from his house and could see him only in the presence of others?

That the pre-Christian Augustine lived with the same woman, out of wedlock, for more than 13 years, and claimed in his writings to have deeply loved her—yet never in his writings reveals her name?

That when the great European universities were formed in the 12th century, the curriculum they used was essentially the same as Augustine had outlined eight centuries earlier in *On Christian Doctrine*?

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Augustine's Life and Times

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He was born in Thagaste, a smallish town in North Africa. He came from an old Carthaginian family. His father, Patricius Augustinus, was a pagan who honored the old Punic gods. But his mother, Monica, was a devoted Christian, who persistently urged her religion on her children—and particularly on Aurelius, who showed brilliance.

Their family was a small part of a large and complex economy. Patricius scrimped to send Augustine to school, and still had to rely on the generosity of a wealthy patron, Romanianus. The very name **Patricius** suggests Augustine's father may have come from a proud, patrician family. But if he'd ever had wealth, it was apparently gone now. So, though the Augustinus family may have owned a substantial estate, it seems the Roman tax collectors had milked their fluid income dry.

As a boy, Augustine was sent to school in nearby Madaura. He made friendships there that would last all his life. But when he was 16 the tuition money ran out, and Augustine had to come home for a year while his family saved. In writing about this time in his **Confessions**, Augustine portrays himself as a lazy underachiever. Yet his superior intellect was probably already apparent to his family and friends. He seems to have outshone his older brother, Navigius, who tags along in later episodes of Augustine's life.

Fruits of Disobedience

During that 16-year vacation from his studies, Augustine took part in the famous pear tree incident (see *And a Saint in a Pear Tree...?*). To some this might seem like mere juvenile antics, just a bunch of rowdy boys ripping off pears and throwing them to the pigs—and that's probably how Augustine saw it at the time. But looking back on it later, as he reflected in the **Confessions**, he perceived it as sin most foul. In the **Confessions** he also notes his struggle with sexual passion, indicating that this too mushroomed during that 16th year. After that year we find him going off to school in Carthage, supported by Romanianus, who evidently saw Augustine's great potential and wanted this prodigy on his team.

Augustine in Carthage was the backwoods boy in the big city. Carthage was the queen of North Africa, sophisticated and worldly. Five hundred years earlier Carthage had been Rome's enemy. But the new Carthage had a solid place in the empire, basking in its Roman-civilization-with-Punic-twist.

The rowdy from Thagaste apparently continued sowing wild oats in Carthage. He doesn't relate the specifics of his sexual activity, but we do know that he took a concubine. He never names her; in that culture her name wouldn't have been important. He was a promising student-teacher, already making a name for himself in the school of rhetoric, on the first few rungs of the ladder of success; she was most likely from a lower-class family. He was 18 at the time.

His father had died a short time earlier, and possibly this made Augustine think about settling down and raising a family. But marriage at this point would impede his progress—he figured the sort of socially advantageous marriage he wanted would come later. Besides, taking a concubine was a socially acceptable thing at the time, not unlike unmarried couples living together today. One year later she bore him a son, and they named him Adeodatus—"a gift from God."

Light and Darkness

Two philosophical influences emerged as Augustine began to excel in Carthage, first as a student and then as a teacher. One was Cicero. The young African read the old Roman, and light dawned in his mind. The book was *Hortensius*, now long lost, but it must have been a beauty. It would form the basis for Augustine's rhetoric and philosophy for years to come. Even in Augustine's religious classics, we see traces of Cicero's influence.

The other influence was Manichaeism. In his search for philosophical truth, Augustine moved away from his mother's Christianity and the Bible, the Old Testament stories of which he dismissed as fables. He indicates he was longing for a system that made better sense of the world than the biblical system as he perceived it. Manichaeism, based on the teachings of a Persian named Mani, seemed to him to do that. It was a dualist corruption of Christianity that mocked the Old Testament like he did—and offered an easy answer for the problem of evil. That was all Augustine needed.

Mani's main emphasis was that two worlds actually existed: the world of light, love, mind and spirit; and the world of darkness, evil, hate and the flesh. Mani stressed that the two worlds were constantly at war with each other, and the young Augustine could not help but agree. He could feel them at war in himself, for example, every time he had to choose between studying Cicero and hopping into bed with his concubine. According to Manichaeism, some specially blessed people would be able to devote themselves entirely and unequivocally to the higher things in life. But for most people it would be an ongoing struggle.

Augustine took to Manichaeism with a sophomore intensity. When his studies in Carthage were completed, he returned to Thagaste to teach rhetoric—and some Manichaeism on the side, though he tried to keep his mother in the dark about that. But Monica found out he was promoting heresy and threw him out of her house, at least for a time. Augustine was so persuasive in his proselytizing that he even converted his patron Romanianus to Manichaeism. Later Augustine would have to convert Romanianus back to Christianity.

During this time in Thagaste, he was called to the bedside of a boyhood friend who had suddenly taken ill and was dying. A priest was also summoned to the deathbed, and much to the unbelieving Augustine's dismay, the priest proceeded to baptize the comatose young man. Augustine had shared with this buddy a disdain for Christianity, together they had mocked the church. And now, without Augustine's friend even knowing it, the priest was dragging the lad right into the church's arms.

Then the friend miraculously recovered. Later, as Augustine chatted with his friend, he began joking about this bogus baptism. But the friend became very serious. It was no laughing matter, he indicated: the baptism had been real.

His friend's change of attitude shook Augustine. But he was even more shaken when the friend suddenly died two weeks later. As he recounted it later in the *Confessions*, this seemed to mark the beginning of a reappraisal in Augustine's heart and mind. He could laugh at Christianity, but he was dumb in the face of death.

Roads to Rome

In 376, the 22-year-old Augustine returned to Carthage to teach. The widowed Monica followed him there. She had dreamt that Augustine would become a Christian, and she seemed to play "the hound of heaven" over the next several years, praying and pleading for his conversion.

The young professor was soon master of rhetoric in Carthage, and seemed eager to move on—to Rome, city of the great rhetorician Cicero. The Manichaeans could use him there as well—a gifted speaker like himself could restore that faith to a place of prestige. Besides, a professorship in Rome could do wonders

for Augustine's career. From there he might well rise to the senatorial class.

Soon, possibly through the influence of Romanianus, he was offered a professorship in Rome. But Monica got wind of it, and begged Augustine not to go. He reassured her; no, he would not leave. Then he sent her home and claimed he had to see a friend off on a journey. But he was the one taking the journey. He bundled up his mistress and little Adeodatus and set sail for Rome in the middle of the night, while Monica slept and dreamt.

Rome was almost more than Augustine could handle. He was wowed by the trappings of the high society that surrounded him. Suddenly he was hobnobbing with influential people—senators and the like! He was on the bottom rung of a ladder of success, enticed by what he saw at the top.

Augustine stayed with a Manichaean friend in Rome, but soon learned that Manichaeism was not politically helpful there. Christianity was the chosen faith in the imperial class—the executive branch of government, whose Italian headquarters were in Milan. And the traditional pagan religions—those of Jupiter and Juno and the rest of the pantheon—were the choice of the senatorial class in Rome. To them, Manichaeism was a low-class religion, an import from the sticks of North Africa. Thus in Rome, as Augustine struggles to shed his Punic accent and speak proper Latin, we find Manichaeism losing its hold on him. It offered the same answers it had in Carthage and Thagaste, but Augustine was asking different questions now that he was in the capitol of the Roman empire.

An empire which, not incidentally, was in deep trouble. Barbarians threatened its borders to the north and the west, and yet its chief defense was also in the hands of barbarians—mercenary Germans paid with Roman tax money to keep other Germans from crossing the Rhine and the Danube. Rome had built its empire with muscle and diplomacy; but now the barbarians had the muscle, and Roman diplomacy was dissolving amid competing special interests.

Religious conflicts were also rife. Despite Athanasius winning the day for orthodoxy at Nicea, Arianism was still alive and well. Many local congregations continued to hold that Christ was "similar" to God, not "of the same substance." And now, generations after Nicea, the groups still felt enmity toward each other.

In North Africa, Donatism was carrying on a similar feud with the official church. Maintaining that the Catholic Church had compromised itself during the persecutions of emperor Diocletian, the Donatists set up their own alternative, "pure" church. That conflict sometimes became violent. In Rome, the pagan religions were still promoting immoral traditions that had been popular in the city's pre-Christian days.

But then Ambrose, bishop of Milan, convinced the emperor to take measures against paganism. Why should the state pay for Vestal virgins? asked Ambrose. And why should the Senate chamber have a pagan altar to the goddess of Victory in it?

In the midst of this Altar of Victory controversy, Augustine landed in Rome. By order of the emperor, the statue of the goddess Victoria had been removed from the Senate. The senators were appalled. Symmachus, leader of the pagan party, fired off a letter to the emperor, arguing the merits of restoring the Altar of Victory. For centuries, he maintained, Rome had owed its success to its good relations with the gods. Now it was in danger of gravely offending them. Even if the empire was officially Christian, he argued, it should leave room for the worship of pagan gods. Bishop Ambrose published a masterful reply. During the year that Augustine was in Rome, Symmachus composed a second letter to the emperor on the same subject. The dispute continued.

All in all, it was not a good year for Augustine. He was sick for much of the time. There was a famine in the area, so the school was threatening layoffs, and some students refused to pay their bills. Yet the year was profitable in that Augustine attracted the attention of Symmachus, a prefect in Rome. Apparently the prefect was impressed by a speech Augustine gave, and expressed a desire to become his patron. It is

possible Symmachus even negotiated with Romanianus, who often visited Italy, to acquire the “rights” to Augustine.

As prefect, Symmachus was asked to recommend a professor for the chair of rhetoric in Milan. The job would entail a good bit of contact with the young emperor, Valentinian II, who was residing there. The professor would be sort of his press spokesman. Doubtless Symmachus saw this as a chance to get someone in Milan who would lobby for his side in the Altar of Victory controversy. He chose Augustine. Augustine was, after all, a college professor; he had a son not much younger than the emperor; and he regularly had a corps of bright young men following him. Augustine’s winning manner would surely sway Valentinian.

One wonders what Ambrose must have thought of the recommendation. He must have known Symmachus’s intentions—before becoming bishop Ambrose had been a savvy politician, and had certainly carried those skills into the holy see. He wielded such power in Milan that he would probably have to approve such an appointment. Did he perhaps anticipate that he and his God would sway Augustine to their side? Or did he just owe his cousin Symmachus a favor? Whatever, the appointment went through and Augustine moved to Milan.

Bishop and Rhetorician

Right away, Augustine was impressed by Ambrose. He was 30 when he arrived in Milan, and Ambrose was 44. He was attracted by Ambrose’s warm personality, and at the same time marveled at Ambrose’s deep thoughtfulness and his devotion to scholarly sermon preparation. In fact, the bishop’s preaching dazzled Augustine—not the style so much as the substance. Faustus the Manichaeon had been more fun to listen to, but in content, he couldn’t hold a candle to Ambrose. The bishop’s deft handling of Old Testament stories easily answered the Manichaeon objections. Ambrose’s famous sermons on Genesis may have been preached in Augustine’s hearing, and the bishop definitely taught the younger rhetorician to appreciate the Apostle Paul.

By this time, Augustine had become a spiritual mongrel. Raised a Catholic by his mother, he became a catechumen in Ambrose’s church—but initially at least, this was probably no more than a move of expediency made by many up-and-comers. At the same time, he was well-acquainted with the Punic paganism of his late father, and technically was still a Manichaeon, though he seems to have pressed the borders of that faith and moved beyond it. Also, Symmachus and Roman paganism were paying his bills. Then Ambrose and his chief counselor, Simplicianus, introduced a new element to this mix: Neoplatonism.

It was a sly move on their part. Neoplatonism synthesized the diverse elements of Augustine’s religious life in an appealing way. It was a highly rational philosophy, based on the teachings of Plato, which had been resurrected a century earlier by Plotinus. Augustine’s searching mind was eager for such discipline.

Neoplatonism offered Augustine middle ground. It was the philosophy of choice for a growing number of pagans in Rome and Christians in Milan. Whether one served a single God or many, Neoplatonism held forth certain transcendent principles, ideals to which all earthbound souls might aspire.

Simplicianus spent much time with Augustine, talking philosophy and sharing with him books by Plotinus, Porphyry and other Neoplatonists. Simplicianus had known Marius Victorinus, the Neoplatonist scholar who translated these books into Latin. On one occasion, the old counselor told Augustine this story about the translator:

Victorinus had confessed to Simplicianus, “In my heart I am a Christian.” The counselor replied, “I’ll believe it when I see you in church.” The philosopher retorted, “Do church walls, then, make a Christian?” In telling this story, the crafty Simplicianus was planting seeds in Augustine’s soul. Interestingly, Victorinus, an African man of letters just like Augustine, later did come forward to be baptized as a

Christian.

Augustine was being stretched in other ways as well. Monica had arrived in Milan. She immediately set about the task of finding her son a proper wife. Remember, his concubine was a lower-class woman, a convenient companion but an impediment to real social progress. When a marriage to a Christian heiress was arranged, Augustine was forced to send his concubine away, though he says he deeply loved her. The 13-year-old Adeodatus stayed with his father.

Monica regularly worshiped at Ambrose's church. In fact, Augustine relates how she would give him questions to ask the bishop. She was probably at the church during a most dramatic event—the church was surrounded by imperial soldiers.

The siege was instigated by Justina, mother of the young emperor. She followed the Arian heresy, which thrived in the hinterlands, but was shunned in the capitals of the empire. Determined to lead a resurgence of her faith, she demanded that Ambrose hand over his church building and another in Milan for use by Arian congregations. He refused, so she sent the imperial guard (as Gothic mercenaries, they would be mostly Arian themselves). Ambrose still refused to give in. The stage was set for a massacre: while the mercenaries awaited the order to attack, the bishop led his congregation in psalm-singing.

But the order never came. The troops withdrew. One suspects Ambrose sent word to emperor Valentinian that such an incident would arouse the ire of his "uncle" Theodosius, the mighty and devout Emperor of the East, ruling from Constantinople. Valentinian hadn't expected such strong opposition from the bishop. As he ordered the troops' withdrawal, the boy emperor joked that Ambrose's power was nearly equal to his own.

What impression might this have made on Augustine? More awe of Ambrose, no doubt, but perhaps also a sense of the interaction between state power and church power, the city of man and the City of God. And for a man clawing his way up the ladder of Roman success, it would come as a jolt to realize that the most powerful man in Italy was not a senator like Symmachus, but a man of the cloth.

A Changed Man

One day Augustine and Alypius received a visitor, Pontitianus, a fellow African and a member of the emperor's secret service. Pontitianus noticed a copy of Paul's epistles on Augustine's desk, and began talking about his own Christianity. He mentioned the story of St. Anthony, founder of an Egyptian monastery, who had entered a church in time to hear the Scripture: "Go and sell all you have..." Anthony had apparently heard God speaking to him in this chance occurrence, so he gave up his possessions and started a monastery. Two colleagues of Pontitianus, on finding a copy of St. Anthony's story by the roadside, determined to renounce the world as well.

Shortly after that visit, Augustine was walking in the garden of his house when he heard a child's sing-song voice repeating, "Take up and read."

(For the rest of this famous story see Augustine's own account, *Augustine's Conversion*.)

For all its fame, Augustine's conversion did not have the drama of a sawdust-trail altar call. Something went "click" in his mind, the lights went on, "and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

It may have been politically expedient for Augustine to pay lip-service to the church as a catechumen, but when he really got serious about Christianity, it uprooted his life. Suddenly ladder-climbing didn't make much sense. He no longer cared to be a senator, so what should he do? He could be a monk, maybe, like St. Anthony. Marriage, certainly, was out of the question. He was devoting himself entirely to God, sexuality and all. He broke his engagement.

He resigned his professorship, dashed off a note to Ambrose telling of his conversion, and retreated to a country villa in Cassiciacum. His friends followed him there. Monica, overjoyed at his newfound faith, ran the household. Augustine and Alypius discussed philosophy, and Augustine continued churning out philosophy books in a Neoplatonist vein.

Romanianus, his old patron and friend, occasionally joined him there, along with his 16-year-old son, Licentius, a long-time pupil of Augustine's. Licentius was a prodigy fascinated by music, particularly taken by the psalm-tunes Ambrose had pioneered. Once he offended Monica by singing a psalm in the bathroom. Adeodatus, a few years younger, showed academic promise as well. Later he would assist his father in the writing of *De Magistro (On the Teacher)*. Augustine's brother, Navigius, was there too, but he regularly complained of a bad liver and seemed to miss the point of most everything Augustine said. The whole arrangement was much like what Augustine had planned before his conversion—an enclave of philosophers, living a life of thoughtful leisure. But now it had a Christian twist.

After six or seven months, around Easter of 387, Augustine emerged from his retreat and returned to Milan. There, along with Alypius and Adeodatus, he was baptized by Ambrose.

The Prodigal Returns

Then Augustine decided to go home to Thagaste. The prodigal had tired of his wandering. There was no point in being anywhere else. Perhaps there he would start a monastery.

Europe was in turmoil anyway, not a place for quiet contemplation. Ambrose had recently returned from the northern imperial capital at Trier. There he must have learned about the weakening Roman defenses along the Danube. But the big news was in the west, where Maximus, general of the Roman armies in Gaul and Britain, had declared himself emperor. He had overrun Gaul and was threatening Italy. If Augustine was to escape a blockade of Italy's seaports, he would have to set sail for Carthage soon.

He didn't make it. He and his band of followers were detained in Ostia, Rome's seaport. There, he records, he and Monica shared a vision of "eternal wisdom." "We... did by degrees pass through all things bodily, even the very heaven whence sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth; yea, we were soaring higher yet, by inward musing, and discourse, and admiring of thy works; and we came to our own minds, and went beyond them, that we might arrive at that region of neverfailing plenty, where thou feedest Israel forever with the food of truth, and where life is the Wisdom by whom all these things are made..." Nine days later, Monica was dead. She had assured her sons they need not bury her alongside her husband, so they buried her at Ostia.

The group wintered in Rome. While there, Augustine possibly did some research on the monastic movement. Jerome had recently furloughed in Rome, acting as secretary to Bishop Damasus. He might have left behind some of the east's spiritual wisdom.

Eventually the sea blockade was lifted, and Augustine and friends traveled to Carthage and then Thagaste. It should have been big news in North Africa. Augustine and his yuppie friends from Milan had given up their high-powered positions and retired to a life of contemplation in tiny Thagaste. There they would serve the church, not as priests and bishops, but as writers and thinkers.

Soon after Monica's death, Augustine suffered more loss. His dear son Adeodatus, for whom he had great hopes, died shortly after their return to Africa. He also lost one of his inner circle of friends, Nebridius, about that same time. Though he still had a loyal group around him, he says he felt very much alone. Within a few years he had lost his mother, his son, his friend, and his beloved concubine. But the loss of these loved ones served to propel Augustine toward deeper, more-vigorous commitment and service.

Pressed into Service

In 391, Augustine learned that someone in Hippo—a former member of the secret service—was interested in joining a monastery. Though he didn't like to travel, Augustine hiked to Hippo, where he was warmly received. Perhaps too warmly. Seeing the renowned layman in church that Sunday, Bishop Valerius put aside his prepared sermon and preached on the urgent need for priests in Hippo. Who among them would be willing to give his life to the priesthood? The crowd spotted Augustine. In a scene amazingly similar to the sudden ordination of Ambrose 20 years earlier, Augustine was made a priest against his will. The people noticed him weeping, but thought it was because he wanted to be bishop, not just a priest. All in good time, they assured him.

Valerius was a shrewd Greek who knew what the church needed. Throughout North Africa, the Catholics were feuding—and sometimes losing—against the Donatists. The church needed a champion to argue down the Donatist arrogance, and Valerius saw Augustine as that champion. So the bishop gave Augustine the use of a house and garden near the cathedral, and Augustine brought his friends along to use the garden as a monastery.

Though in most of North Africa preaching was exclusively the task of bishops, Valerius gave his preaching duties over to Augustine. And when the bishops of North Africa convened in Hippo, Valerius let Augustine do the teaching. Wisely, the novice priest chose to carefully go over the creed, setting a pattern that would last for the next 37 years—Augustine teaching the church what it believed. In 395 Valerius convinced the bishop of Carthage to make Augustine co-bishop with him—even though this violated the canons of Nicea. A year later Valerius died, and Augustine became the sole bishop of Hippo.

Heresy-fighting topped the new bishop's agenda. Manichaeism was already on its way out, but Augustine dealt it a death blow. He knew this foe inside and out. At the public baths in Hippo (sort of the community assembly hall), Augustine debated Fortunatus, a former school colleague of his from Carthage days and now a leading Manichee. The bishop made quick work of the heretic, and Fortunatus left town in shame.

Donatism, however, was more firmly entrenched, supported as it was by many wealthy landowners. It was less of a doctrinal struggle than a political one. The Donatists had set up their own church in the early 300s as a "pure" alternative to the "compromised" Catholic Church (holding that a number of Catholic leaders had betrayed the church during the persecution of Diocletian). Several generations had grown up with this division, along with the violence and vandalism it provoked. It was Augustine's job to show that the Catholic Church was not compromised, that it was the valid continuation of the apostolic church. In his writing and preaching he began to shore up the Catholic tradition. The Donatists recognized the threat Augustine presented. And for the Donatist landowners, this was big business. They plotted to kill him.

Meanwhile, Augustine's band of meditative men was dispersing. Alypius became bishop of Thagaste; Possidius, bishop of Calama; Evodius, bishop of Uzalis. Augustine's conversion had given the church not only Augustine, but a whole cadre of bright young leaders. It was just what the church needed in its fight against Donatism.

As bishop, Augustine spent most of his time judging cases and resolving disputes in Hippo. He was a man of integrity who would not be bought off. He may have wanted to be writing theology or meditating on God's sovereignty, but his duties demanded he decide which farmer owned a certain plot of land. The press of Augustine's administrative duties makes his philosophical and literary output all the more remarkable. Where did he find the time to write the works that would shape Christianity for millennia to come?

Cities of Man and God

In 410, the barbarian general Alaric and his troops sacked Rome. Many upper-class Romans fled for their

lives to North Africa, one of the few safe havens left in the tempestuous empire. This would have been a time of some irony for Augustine. Once he had had trouble fitting in among the Romans; now Romans were coming to him for shelter.

Paganism was by now powerless, but its heart beat on in the murmurs of the refugees. Christianity had caused this tragedy, they said; the gods of Rome would have saved Rome if Rome still believed in them. So Augustine had a double task: to care for these homeless people, and to refute their anti-Christian charges. He began to develop his thinking about the cities of God and man.

In 411 the Donatist controversy came to a head. The failing empire, still trying to hold things together, convened a debate in Carthage to decide this troublesome Donatist-Catholic dispute once and for all. Flavius Marcellinus, the veteran diplomat sent to referee, requested that each group send seven bishops as delegates. The Donatists, suspecting that the deck was stacked against them, sent their full contingent of bishops. Hundreds of them, and their behavior was ornery throughout the proceedings.

For each town in North Africa, they presented their bishop and his credentials, then challenged the Catholics to put forward a legitimate bishop for that town. When it came time to debate, the Donatists requested more time to prepare their case. Colleagues like Alypius and Possidius said no, but Augustine, who emerged as the debate captain, confidently allowed it. When it came his turn, Augustine demolished the Donatist appeal. A master of rhetoric at work, he would have made Cicero proud. Marcellinus took little time to decide; the Donatists had no case.

In the ensuing years, Augustine struck up a friendship with Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner. The diplomat urged the bishop to put his thoughts concerning the city of man and the city of God into writing. Then suddenly Marcellinus was arrested. Heraclion, general in charge of Roman forces in North Africa, had revolted against the empire. The rebellion was squelched and its leaders executed. Marcellinus, falsely implicated, was sentenced to death. Augustine tried his best to win a reprieve, but to no avail. Marcellinus was killed.

What kind of sting must this have caused Augustine? Had he been an Ambrose, he might have been able to pull the strings necessary to save this innocent man. Ambrose, after all, had stood his ground against imperial troops. And another time Ambrose excommunicated Theodosius the Great and lived to see the mighty emperor trudge into church wearing sackcloth. Ambrose had wielded power in the city of God *and* in the city of man. But somebody had changed the locks on the city gates. The world was different now, and Augustine lost a friend.

Quietly, perhaps sullenly, Augustine continued his work on *The City of God*. It would appear in installments over the next 12 years, and would revolutionize Roman-Christian thought.

In 418, a new general arrived in North Africa. Boniface had held the line against the barbarians in Europe. Now he was stationed on the edge of the Sahara, guarding North Africa against marauding nomads. Augustine made friends with Boniface, no doubt happy such an able warrior was protecting his people. Boniface was a Christian, and had a very devout Christian wife. When his wife died in 420, Boniface even considered entering a monastery.

But Augustine and Alypius journeyed out to the desert to convince Boniface to stay at his post. Thirty years earlier, travel-shy Augustine had ventured to Hippo to talk someone into joining a monastery. Now he went out of his way to talk Boniface out of it. They needed a good general more than they needed another monk, thought Augustine.

Life's-End Challenges

Meanwhile, the bishop was weathering attacks from another quarter. Young Julian of Eclanum was taking

potshots at Augustine's theology—and his character. Julian was a Pelagian, not believing in original sin. Pelagius himself had been excommunicated in 417, and Julian, who had been a bishop in Italy, had been kicked out of his church shortly thereafter. But still he wrote, challenging the bishop of Hippo. Augustine was a **Manichee**, he charged (probably not as worried about Manichaean theology as about the low-class stigma attached to it). Augustine was an **African**, he trumpeted. Augustine and his African band of bishops had **taken over** Roman Christianity, he charged, probably hoping to arouse his Roman readers.

Augustine answered the junior ex-bishop in kind, pointing out Julian's high-class snobbery. Over the last 10 years of his life, Augustine published two collections of responses to Julian. It might have been better to let the matter drop. Surely Augustine had better things to do than bicker with this sophomoric hatchet-man.

But Augustine was arguing with a younger version of himself. That may be why he debated Julian so intensely. Like Julian, he too was once enamored with secular wisdom. And he too had resisted the idea that man is born in sin. But God had not given up on Augustine when **he** was a brash know-it-all with his head buried in heresy. Could Augustine so easily give up on Julian?

Problems other than Julian were pressing Augustine's people. Boniface had been steadily accruing power through the 420s. In 426, he visited the imperial court at Ravenna to assert his position as Count of Africa. He returned with a rich wife—an Arian woman—and a few concubines. The following year, he launched his revolt. Now he had to defend his position against both the barbarians and the Romans.

Augustine wrote to Boniface, chastising him for his actions. Confusion in North Africa, he suggested, would surely provide an entry to the Vandals who were already perched at Gibraltar, ready to overrun the continent. Augustine urged peace with the empire and a united front against the barbarians. But Boniface, who had anticipated support from Augustine and the other bishops, argued that his claims to power were legitimate. Nonetheless, Augustine turned a cold shoulder to him. The general came to visit the bishop once, but Augustine was apparently too tired to meet with him.

In the summer of 429, the Vandals invaded North Africa and met little resistance. The citizenry fled before them. Many to the fortified city of Hippo. There Augustine comforted and cared for the influx of refugees. Possidius, a charter member of his monastery at Thagaste, now a bishop with a congregation, also fled to Hippo, and helped Augustine organize his writings. Boniface was there too, valiantly defending the city.

In the third month of the Vandals' siege of Hippo, Augustine caught a sudden fever. For 10 days the 76-year-old bishop fought it. Then he died. But almost miraculously, his writings survived the Vandal takeover, allowing his influence to live on and on.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine: Christian History Timeline

Augustine

354 Is born at Thagaste, on Nov 13

365 Goes to school in Madaura

371 Goes to study rhetoric in Carthage

c. 371–373 His father dies, son Adeodatus is born

375 Returns to Thagaste to teach rhetoric

376 Begins teaching rhetoric in Carthage

376 "Unnamed friend" who was baptized dies

383 Sails to Rome with concubine and son

384 Becomes professor of rhetoric in Milan

386 Is converted, retreats to Cassiciacum

387 Returns to Milan, is baptized by Ambrose; at Ostia, he and Monica have "vision," Monica dies there

388 Goes to Rome

390 Returns to Carthage, then Thagaste; his son dies

391 Is ordained priest at Hippo

392 Writes to Jerome requesting Latin translations of Bible commentaries

392 Debates in Hippo with Fortunatus the Manichee

396 He becomes bishop of Hippo

c. 400 Writes his *Confessions*

c. 403–412 The Donatist controversy

410 For health reasons, spends winter at villa outside Hippo

412–421 Pelagian controversy

413–426 Writes *The City of God*, *On the Trinity*, and *The Enchiridion*

427 Writes his Retractions

430 Dies at Hippo, Aug 28

The Church

356 St. Anthony an early ascetic born 106 years earlier, dies

357 Athanasius writes the *Life of St. Anthony*

373 Athanasius, who was born in 296, dies

373 Ambrose becomes bishop of Milan

379 Basil of Caesarea dies

381 The Council of Constantinople, or the second ecumenical council, is convened

386 The Manichees at Carthage are purged

389 Gregory of Nazianzen, a theologian, dies

396 Simeon Stylites, later to become "Father of the Pillar Saints," is born

396 Gregory of Nyssa, a theologian and mystic, dies

397 Ambrose, born in 339, dies

398 John Chrysostom, nine years before his death, becomes Patriarch of Constantinople

c. 400 Jerome translates the Bible into the Latin Vulgate

411 The Council of Carthage mends the Donatist schism

417 Pope Innocent I condemns the Pelagian heresy

419 Jerome the great theologian, translator, and historian, born in 342, dies

431 The Council of Ephesus, the third ecumenical council, convenes

The Roman Empire

350 The Huns invade Europe

- 350** Constantius II persecutes non-Arians
- 360** Books begin to supercede scrolls
- 361–363** Constantine's nephew, Julian the Apostate, reigns as emperor
- 375** Valentinian I, the last great emperor in the West, who took control in 364, dies
- 378** Eastern emperor Valens is defeated by the Goths, dies at Adrianople
- 380** Theodosius I makes Christianity the state religion
- 383** Rome suffers a famine
- 384** Symmachus appeals for the re-recognition of paganism
- 391** A general edict against paganism is issued, and Theodosius orders all pagan temples closed
- 395** Theodosius, who took the throne in 379, dies; the empire is redivided, and the Huns invade the eastern empire
- 402** The Goths are defeated in Italy
- c. **404** Emperor Honorius abolishes man against-man gladiatorial contests
- 410** Roman rule in Britain ends, and Rome itself is sacked by Alaric and the Goths
- 418** The first schism between Rome and Constantinople occurs
- 421** A one-year war between Rome and Persia begins
- 429** The Vandals invade North Africa
- 430** The Vandals besiege Hippo

St. Augustine: A Gallery of Augustine's Influences

Monica

Augustine's mother, Monica, has to rank as one of the most well-known matriarchs in Christendom's history. She lived with her husband, Patricius, whom Augustine describes as a "poor free man" and a minor official in the North African town of Thagaste. Patricius was a pagan, worshiping the Punic gods of the region, but Monica was a devout Christian. However, her name is derived from that of a Punic god, Mon, so we might guess that she came from a pagan family and was a convert to Christianity.

Monica bore two sons and probably several daughters. She suffered through Augustine's growing pains, relentless in her determination to see that "the son of so many tears" would become a good Christian. She always clung to her belief—encouraged by a dream—that before she died she would see Augustine convert to Christianity.

When he took his professorship in Milan, Monica joined him there and set about finding him a high-society wife. In Milan, she attended the church of Bishop Ambrose; she may have seen in Ambrose a model of what Augustine could become—a successful politician-turned-churchman. Monica was overjoyed when Augustine told her of his conversion—it was quite literally a "dream come true." After his conversion, she seems to have managed the retreat house that Augustine set up in Cassiciacum with his close friends.

On their return to North Africa, Augustine and Monica and the friends with them were waylaid in Ostia. While there, Augustine relates, he and Monica shared a "vision of eternal wisdom," a foretaste of the life to come. Nine days later she died. Augustine and his brother buried her in Ostia; recently a fragment of her burial inscription was found there.

Alypius

Augustine's closest and most enduring friendship was with Alypius. Son of a leading family in Thagaste, Alypius was younger than Augustine, and was a student of his in Thagaste and in Carthage. Alypius moved to Rome shortly before Augustine did, and later the two were together in Milan.

Augustine credits Alypius for his decision not to marry. Alypius had an "innate love of virtue," and admired the Manichees for their chastity. He followed Augustine into Manichacism and later to Christianity. Alypius was present in the garden of Milan at Augustine's conversion, accompanied him on his post-conversion retreat to Cassiciacum, and was baptized by Ambrose along with Augustine and Augustine's son.

Vignettes of Alypius appear often in Augustine's Confessions, attesting to a genuinely close friendship. A lawyer by trade, Alypius later became the bishop of Thagaste. Solemn, courteous and obstinate, he has been described as Augustine's "alter ego."

Adeodatus, Concubine

Two important people in Augustine's life remain largely unknown to us: his concubine and his son. Around the time of his father's death, Augustine took himself a concubine—a common and accepted arrangement in that day. For at least 14 years the two lived together, and parented a son they named Adeodatus. But when Monica joined Augustine in Milan, she had plans for a career-advancing marriage for her son, so she insisted that he send his concubine away. So she went back to Africa, leaving Adeodatus with Augustine and Monica.

She vowed as she left "never to give herself to another man." Augustine must have loved her; he speaks of their mutual love, and the sad separation when she was "torn from my side." But he never reveals her name.

Adeodatus remained with his father, and was baptized with him on Easter of 387. Augustine reports that his son's talent was a source of awe to him, and once wrote Adeodatus that "you are the only man of all men that I would wish to surpass me in all things."

But such was not to be. Adeodatus died around 390, not yet 20 years old.

Ambrose

If one particular person can be said to have been instrumental in the conversion of Augustine, it would probably be Ambrose, bishop of Milan.

When Augustine first came under his influence, after being appointed professor of rhetoric in Milan, Ambrose had been bishop for 11 years.

Disillusioned with the Manichaean philosophy, Augustine was impressed by Ambrose's learned, up-to-date sermons, and the eloquent and convincing manner in which he defended the Old Testament against Manichaean criticisms.

According to Augustine, Ambrose welcomed him as a father would, being both kind and generous to him. After Augustine's conversion, Ambrose baptized him.

A contemporary, Basil of Caesarea, described Ambrose as "a man eminent for intellect, illustrious lineage, prominence in life, and power of speech, an object of admiration to all of his world."

However, Ambrose was perfectly capable of exerting a strong will when necessary, even when it meant going against the power of imperial Rome. In one case, Ambrose excommunicated the emperor Theodosius after he ordered what was basically a general massacre of 7,000 people in Thessalonica. The emperor eventually submitted to Ambrose's spiritual authority, performing public penance on Christmas Day in 390. Later the emperor would assert, "I have known no bishop but Ambrose."

Conservative churchmen criticized Ambrose for starting a craze for hymns; and in truth, one of his claims to literary fame is as the founder of Latin hymnody and rhyming stanzas for congregational singing.

Valerius

Valerius was the elderly bishop of Hippo who recognized the newly converted Augustine's talent and used group pressure to coerce Augustine into becoming a priest. When he saw Augustine in the congregation one day, he began preaching about the urgent need for priests. The congregation mobbed Augustine, and ordained him by force. For the next five years, Valerius nurtured Augustine in the ministry. Augustine soon took over the preaching, and in 395 was made co-bishop with Valerius. He died in 396, and Augustine succeeded him as bishop.

Possidius

Among the group of bright young men that gathered around Augustine upon his return to Africa was Possidius. Though not as brilliant as Alypius, Possidius is perhaps better known because he recorded most of what we know about Augustine.

When the members of Augustine's monastic band dispersed, becoming bishops throughout North Africa, Possidius went to Calama.

In 429–430, as the Vandals pillaged their way across North Africa, Possidius fled the ruins of Calama and ran to Hippo, a fortified city, where he joined Augustine. He appears to have been a secretary of sorts during Augustine's last days, handling correspondence and cataloguing his mentor's works. Very possibly it was Possidius who made sure the library of Augustine was saved from the flames of the Vandals. In succeeding years, Possidius, eking out a living among the ruins of North Africa, wrote the first biography of Augustine. He wrote of his friend as "Bishop Augustine ... a man predestinated ... brought forward in

our time ... a man among those who have gained their end, who have persevered up to the day of their death."

Jerome

Among the most distinguished of Augustine's correspondents, Jerome was one of the 4th-century church's greatest biblical scholars. Of the Latin fathers, he alone knew Hebrew. He finished his Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, or common version, around 400 a.d. It is still approved today as the authoritative Latin text.

Jerome spent four years in Syria as a hermit. He later became secretary to Bishop Damasus of Rome. Eventually he settled in Bethlehem, and remained there in monastic retirement for the last 35 years of his life. His circle of disciples included several noble Roman ladies. He maintained a correspondence with churchmen and women throughout the Roman empire.

Augustine considered Jerome one of the most learned men alive, and began corresponding with him specifically to discuss a point concerning Jerome's translation of Galatians. Unfortunately the letter got held up in Rome, where the contents were eagerly spread about. The letter itself was nine years in reaching Jerome, who concluded that it had all along been intended for public consumption.

"It is a sign of youthful arrogance," he wrote Augustine, "to try to build up a reputation by assailing prominent figures." They continued corresponding, Jerome alternately resentful and suspicious, and polite and affectionate. Although Augustine was disturbed by Jerome's readiness to take offense, he was still courteous and tactful, and the correspondence continued for 25 years, until Jerome's death in 420.

Simplicianus

When Augustine began seriously considering the claims of Christianity, he started meeting regularly with Simplicianus. This wise old philosopher was counselor to Bishop Ambrose. In fact, it is likely that Ambrose assigned his trusty Simplicianus the task of leading Augustine on the road to conversion.

Simplicianus used Neo-platonism, a philosophy compatible with both paganism and Christianity, to meet Augustine halfway. Augustine later wrote that Simplicianus "seemed to me a good servant of Thine; and Thy grace shone in him." When Ambrose died, it was Simplicianus who succeeded him as bishop.

True-Life Confessions: The Precedent-Setting Revelations of Augustine's Restless Heart

Our hearts are restless until they find their peace in you.

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Perhaps Augustine is best-known for these words from his *Confessions*, but they are far from being the only meaningful or intriguing words in this precedent-setting autobiography.

Though written nearly 1,600 years ago, it still remains one of the most widely read religious works in the Western world. It offers keen insights into Augustine's life and a sharp understanding of the human heart. Western theology and culture owe a great deal to this unique autobiography.

Augustine may have intended his *Confessions* as a consecration of himself for his work in the church. He wrote it between 397 and 401 A.D., shortly after being named bishop of Hippo. Repeatedly he reminds himself that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

A confession, by nature, brings an indictment against oneself before God. Appropriately, Augustine's *Confessions* takes the form of a prayer. Thus it is not merely a recital of his life story, nor does he melodramatically embellish the good in his life or deemphasize the evil. When we confess in prayer to God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, we are honest. And Augustine is painstakingly honest as he describes the profundities of the human heart. Sensitive readers will find, in his confession, a confession of their own.

The long prayer of St. Augustine consists of 13 books, or chapters, which may be divided into three major sections. Books 1–9 tell the story of Augustine's life up to his conversion and just afterward. Book 10 is a philosophical discussion of time and memory. Books 11–13 turn to the early verses of Genesis to explore the nature of God and creation and what it means to be human. Throughout each section, Augustine weaves together three major themes: the restlessness of human beings; the mystery of God; and human affection.

The Restless Heart

In the most-famous quotation from the *Confessions*, Augustine states his grand themes:

"And man wants to praise you, man who is only a small portion of what you have created and who goes about carrying with him his own mortality, the evidence of his own sin and evidence that you resist the proud Yet still man, this small portion of creation, wants to praise you. You stimulate him to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

Augustine begins his own story in the context of the restlessness endemic to human experience. Although he cannot relate from memory anything about his infancy, he knows these are important years. He observes the behavior of other infants, assuming that his own experience was similar. Like the psalmist, he describes himself as "conceived in iniquity," and in need of God's mercy. Only custom and reason prevent adults from holding restless infants accountable for their self-centeredness, tempers, and jealousies. At the

earliest ages, human beings crave what they cannot provide for themselves.

From his early educational experiences, Augustine discovers another aspect of restlessness, the false joy of receiving unearned awards. Like many students, he says he would not study unless driven to it. Reading, writing, and arithmetic he found boring. The only educational ventures he pursued with enthusiasm were those from which he could derive pleasure without having to work for it. He was swept away by vanity, lost in the darkness of his affections.

An even deeper restlessness emerges in Augustine's 16th year. He and some friends rob pears from a pear tree; the theft lives in the bishop's mind years later as if it had happened just the day before. For Augustine, the theft opens a window into the soul. Why did he steal? Why does anyone steal? As Augustine examines the common justifications for such an act, he realizes that they do not apply. He is not starving; he is not even hungry; and the food is not particularly tasty. He does note that, without the approval of his companions, he probably would not have done it. So why did he?

Eventually Augustine decides that his theft was a perverse imitation of God. It was not the pears he desired, but, in an arrogant spirit of truncated liberty, he tried to produce a darkened image of omnipotence.

The next decade of his life witnessed a flurry of frustrated affections, as he rehearses them in the **Confessions**. He sought the love of a woman, of the theater, of philosophy, and of a rational religion. It was a cauldron of at least four unholy loves, about which he tersely explains: "I was not yet in love, but I loved the idea of love."

Augustine gives us little historical information about the first unholy love, his relationship with his concubine. We do not even know her name. We do know they had a son, Adeodatus, and that they were together for several years. We also know that Augustine did not find this love satisfactory. When it came time to marry, he sent her away, and became engaged to another woman, one more suitable for his social standing. But before he could marry, Augustine was required to demonstrate his chastity for two years. He even failed at this. "... since I was not so much a lover of marriage as a slave to lust, I found another woman for myself—not, of course, as a wife." How does one live with oneself when intentionality is so weak?

This is a deep and persistent restlessness. Even years later, the bishop is still wrestling with his sexuality. While he is able to escape the temptation to be with a woman, he is unable to escape its influence in his mind and body. In addition, he learns that continence requires not only abstinence, but also appropriate devotion to one's neighbor.

Augustine's love of the theater, another in his cauldron of shameful loves, seems short-lived. At first, he loved to see the misery of others. But the inconsistency of rejoicing in others' misfortunes, which he would detest if they were his own, eventually drove him away. The theater was a life of fantasy which threatened to usurp the enjoyment of real life.

In what he calls "the lust of the mind," Augustine began to search for truth in reason. This led him to his third and fourth unholy loves—the fables of the Manichaeans and the skepticism of some philosophers. In all of these lusts, as Augustine recalls it, he despised the authority of the church and the teaching of Scripture.

Yet, by the grace of God, Augustine heard the gospel. He approached the truth in stages. First he learned to read the Old Testament symbolically rather than literally. Then he learned to think of evil as a privation of good rather than a substance in its own right. Finally, he learned, from Ambrose and others, the limitations of human reason. Faith and authority, he found, are necessary for true understanding.

The Mystery of God

The majestic mystery of God, the second grand theme in the *Confessions*, nearly gets lost in the dramatic exposition of human restlessness. But it is only against the backdrop of this mystery that the restlessness makes sense.

Augustine speaks of his restless lifestyle in terms of life and death:

"The arrogance of pride, the pleasure of lust, and the poison of curiosity are movements of a soul that is dead—not dead in the sense that it is motionless, but dead by forsaking the fountain of life and so engrossed in this transitory world and conformed to it."

The Word of God, and God himself, is this fountain of life for Augustine. "Seek the Lord, and your soul shall live, so that the earth may bring forth the living soul. Be not conformed to the world. Restrain yourself from it. The soul's life is in avoiding those things which are death to seek." It is God who made us and does not forget us, even though we wander far from him. It is God who redeems us and stills the heart.

"Who is this God?" and "How do I find him?" are legitimate questions for the troubled soul. In Book 1, Augustine has already inquired, "Do I call upon God to know him or must I know him to call upon him?" "How do I call upon him?" "What is my God?"

The initial answers Augustine provides reflect a biblical understanding of God. He writes:

"O highest and best, most powerful, most all-powerful, most merciful and most just, most deeply hidden and most nearly present, most beautiful and most strong, constant yet incomprehensible, changeless yet changing all things, never new, never old, making all things new, bringing the proud to decay and they know it not: always acting and always at rest, still gathering yet never wanting; upholding, filling and protecting, creating, nourishing, and bringing to perfection; seeking, although in need of nothing...."

Note the pairing of these attributes. Mercy and justice are linked, not in the sense that God is sometimes merciful and sometimes just, but fully both. Similarly, God is fully hidden while at the same time fully present, beautiful and strong, and so forth. God is described in paradox, mystery. And thus those beings that are made in his image might well be paradoxes to themselves as well. Against such a majesty as the divine being, it is no wonder that man is a riddle to himself. He cannot reduce his nature to any one thing, neither to the senses, nor to reason, nor even to himself. He is to some extent mystery to himself just as God is mystery to him.

Yet there is a crucial distinction: God's being is in himself; man's being is in God. Foolishly, man tries to be like God and find rest in himself. He cannot. But even his attempted flights from God are under God's sovereignty. And here the mystery of God seems to compound itself.

God shows his strength in weakness; he brings salvation through the death of his Son; he resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; he allows us the foolishness of our ways.

In his confession, Augustine prays to God as "the controller and creator of all things in nature, though of sin only the controller." Three very important insights are drawn from this claim. First, because God is good, his creation is good. The Manichaean notion of physical reality as evil must be rejected. Second, God is omnipotent and holy, so he chastens sinful mankind. Our experiences of lust do not go unnoticed in the world created by and for God. Third, God is able to use our own sinful ways to draw us to himself. "Inside me your good was working on me to make me restless until you should become clear and certain to my inward sight."

Augustine has discovered the majesty and mystery of God as the condition for interpreting human restlessness. We will either use the restlessness to love God or to avoid God by vainly worshiping and serving something else.

The Secret Affections

The third great theme we find here is affection. As Peter Brown has put it, "The *Confessions* are, quite succinctly, the story of Augustine's 'heart,' or of his 'feelings' his *affectus*."

The human soul, in all its mystery, experiences restlessness because it is alienated from the ground of its being, God. Thus God, in his affection for us, calls us to abandon our wanderings, to stop pursuing other affections, to give up our hope in ourselves, and find peace in him.

What assurance do we have that abandoning hope in ourselves will give us the peace we desire? "Experience," some would say. "Others have tried this and found peace." Augustine could argue this way, if he chose to. His conversion experience is marvelously recorded for us—he heard a voice in a garden urging him to read the Bible and he opened to Romans 13:14, "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in concupiscence." Immediately, he relates, his heart was filled with confidence. In a profound sense, the restlessness stopped, at least temporarily.

But it is not on this experience that Augustine grounds his assurance of salvation. In fact, he reports that his restlessness resumed after his conversion. Salvation needs grounding in God. Grounding anywhere else, even in the life of the redeemed person, is unreliable. For this reason, Augustine's post-conversion struggles are most significant.

Augustine keeps pointing the reader to God himself. "We have this promise; no one can alter or distort it: 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'" In light of the love of God, the reader is prepared to appreciate Augustine's emphasis on human love: "Things are moved by their own weights and go into their proper places.... My weight is my love; wherever I am carried, it is my love that carries me there."

To find rest, one must ground one's affections in God. Augustine writes, "Blessed is the man who loves you, who loves his friend in you, and his enemy because of you. He alone loses no one dear to him, for they are all dear to him in one who is not lost." In his early life, Augustine mourned deeply over the death of a friend. In the years immediately following his conversion, as though love itself were being tested, Augustine would grieve at the deaths of several friends, his son, and his mother. Now, however, alongside the sorrow was beatitude. Commenting on his mother's death, he says, "I found solace in weeping for her and for myself, on her behalf and on my own. So I allowed the tears... to fall, ... making them a pillow for my heart, and my heart rested on them, for only your ears could hear my lament...." Peace had come.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine wants to stimulate the reader's affections toward God. Thus the book is less of an autobiography and more of a theological anthropology. Like the Apostle Paul, he can testify, "Our flesh had no rest, without us were fightings, within us were fears." His restlessness acts somewhat as a schoolmaster, or compass, to steer him away from the love of himself and other people and objects of creation. It directs him toward faith in God, the Creator. This redirection is not a matter of intellectual sophistication for Augustine, or for anyone, but of trust and humility before God, who gives grace even to those who try to flee from him.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

And a Saint in a Pear Tree . . . ?

FRANK A. JAMES III

It was the kind of common mischief Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn found irresistible—a group of teenaged boys making a midnight raid on a neighbor's pear tree. But the incident has become uncommon because one of these boys was Augustine: saint-, philosopher-and father-of-the-church-to-be.

Augustine recounts the pear tree incident in the second volume of his *Confessions*, where he discusses in detail how he and his fellow mischief-makers stole bushels of pears from a neighbor's vineyard. "We took away an enormous quantity of pears," Augustine recalls—and "not to eat them ourselves, but simply to throw them to the pigs."

A Grievous Episode

For many, this youthful episode might evoke only mild amusement. But for the adult Augustine, as he makes evident in his *Confessions*, it held momentous significance. As the older and wiser bishop of Hippo, he looks back at these antics with a severely critical eye.

However, the mature Augustine is not so much concerned with the mere act of stealing pears. His real concern is with what was happening inwardly. As if prosecuting his adolescent self in a spiritual court of law, he proceeds in the *Confessions* to establish a motive for the crime. "Perhaps we ate some of them, but our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden."

What emerges from his musings is that there was no excuse for the sin committed. The theft was not prompted by need, nor by coercion, nor by anything other than a perverse love of sin. In phrases ringing with disgust, Augustine confesses, "The evil in me was foul, but I loved it."

How, we might ask, could such a seemingly minor prank evoke such heart-rending cries? Had Augustine's years and burdens of ministry brought on an overly morbid scrutiny of his youth? What brought on this torrent of critical self-chidings?

Well, his conversion and years of studying the Scriptures had enabled him to see his sin with different eyes. As he reflected on this adventure, he realized that hiding beneath a supposedly innocuous childhood prank was a dark and pernicious sin nature inherited from Adam.

Despite what his Pelagian opponent, Julian of Eclanum, charged, Augustine did not invent the doctrine of original sin. But he did give it classical formulation and a central place in his thought. Original sin for Augustine was both hereditary disease and crime. All men sinned in Adam, he believed, and so all share in Adam's guilt and punishment. Adam's fall recast the whole human race as a "mass or perdition."

Adam, in Augustine's conception, did not commit his offense in isolation from the rest of humanity. Not only was his human nature "transformed for the worse," but his progeny inherited the same sinful predisposition. Before the Fall, Adam lived in a state of freedom and was *posse non peccare* (able to avoid sin). After the Fall, Adam and his offspring were *non posse non peccare* (able only to sin).

Augustine went beyond his theological peers to insist that all humanity actually participated in Adam's fall.

He asserted that "all men were ... seminally in the loins of Adam when he was condemned." For this reason, no one is exempt from a sin nature, neither new-born infants nor mischievous 16-year-olds. His belief that every man actually participated in Adam's fall provided the theological backdrop for Augustine's distressed recollections of the pear tree incident.

Everyman's Pear Tree

Augustine apparently could have recounted any number of adolescent sins in the *Confessions*. But he seems to have chosen the pear tree incident by design.

For Augustine, the pear tree was his parallel to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was his personal reenactment of the Fall. His conviction that all humanity participates in Adam's sin found validation in his own experience. His orchard was Adam's garden; his peer pressure was Eve's seduction; his theft from a slumbering neighbor was Adam's disobedience while God was hidden from view. His stolen pears were the forbidden fruit. His guilt was Adam's guilt.

The heart-searching honesty Augustine demonstrates about the pear tree incident is only characteristic of the honesty seen throughout the *Confessions*. Even in the sections about the times after his conversion and ordination as a bishop, he is still open about struggling with sin. In volume 10 he writes:

"I cry out in joy, confessing your glory, like a man exultant at a feast. But my soul is still sad because it falls back again and becomes an abyss, or rather, that it is still a deep abyss."

Augustine was no ivory tower theologian. He spoke as a sinner to other sinners. From adolescent pear-stealing to occasional adult abyss, his intent was to strip away the smiling facade of sin and penetrate to the naked essence of sinful man standing alone and unmasked before the piercing gaze of almighty God.

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Augustine's Sex-Life Change: From Profligate to Celibate

To Carthage then I came Burning burning burning burning...

FRANK A. JAMES III

The lines were written by T. S. Eliot in his apocalyptic poem, *The Waste Land*. Partly famous because they were written by Eliot, they are also famous because of who and what they allude to: the sexual fires that burned in the youthful Augustine. From adolescence to the age of 32, as he later detailed in the *Confessions*, Augustine was a frequent loser in the battle with lustful passions.

However, his struggles with sexuality actually began before his arrival at the decadent North African metropolis of Carthage. He later wrote that it was at the age of 16 that "the frenzy gripped me and I surrendered myself entirely to lust."

Both his parents were aware that he was "floundering in the broiling sea of ... fornication," but each responded differently. His father, who seems to have also been entangled in extramarital affairs, was amused at his son's budding sexual interests. The prospect of grand children—legitimate or otherwise—appealed to Patricius. Monica, on the other hand, was caught in a dilemma. She did not suggest marriage for quelling the sexual fires, because she feared that a hurried marriage would hinder her gifted son's career opportunities. At the same time, she earnestly warned him about his lack of sexual restraint, saying, "above all [do] not seduce any man's wife."

As an 18-year-old student at Carthage, Augustine reveled in promiscuity. Sex had become an obsession for him. "From a perverted act of will," he wrote, "desire had grown, and when desire is given satisfaction, habit is forged; and when habit passes unresisted, a compulsive urge sets in."

After a year of promiscuity in that university city, Augustine settled down with a mistress. Although he never revealed her name, he remained with her for more than a decade. She bore him a son named Adeodatus.

The young scholar had become a professor of rhetoric in Milan when Monica, his ever-persistent mother, persuaded him to send his unnamed mistress away so that he might acquire the hand of a high-society Milanese girl. Part of the arrangement was that Augustine had to remain chaste for two years, that is, until the girl reached marriageable age. But his sexual passions prevented him from keeping his part of the bargain. Not long after sending away the mother of Adeodatus, he took another mistress. "I thought it should be too miserable," he lamented, "unless folded in female arms."

As he came to accept the truth of Christ, one great obstacle that deterred him from fully embracing Christianity was his sexual proclivity. Epitomizing this inner turmoil was his confused prayer, "Give me chastity... but not yet."

To Augustine's mind, converting to Christianity meant abandoning marriage altogether. As he records his conversion in the *Confessions*, he describes being torn between marriage and chaste devotion to God. He decided it could be only the latter for him.

After his conversion, he had much to say about sex and marriage. The fall of Adam, he taught, drastically affected human sexuality. In particular, human nature had fallen under the compulsive power of

concupiscence, or lust, which he understood as the passionate, uncontrolled element in sexuality. Augustine believed that all sexual intercourse—even within the bounds of Christian marriage—involved concupiscence.

But Augustine did not altogether disparage matrimony. It is “honorable and permissible,” he said. But to him, celibacy was better. The purpose of sex in marriage is procreation, he said, although it was “pardonable” if married persons enjoyed conjugal union without intending procreation. He even went so far as to recommend sexual abstinence for married couples—if they mutually agreed to it.

Over the years, the bishop of Hippo’s views on sex and marriage became the bases for many of the Roman Church’s teachings on these matters. If we look closely at the writings of Augustine, we can better understand why Roman Catholics believe that the chief end of marriage is procreation, that divorce and birth control are impermissible, and that continence is the ideal for sexual self-discipline.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine's Account of his Conversion

From the 1961 edition of Edward B. Pusey's translation of *The Confessions of St. Augustine*.

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This is Augustine's account of his conversion to Christ as it occurred in the garden in Milan in the spring of 386 A.D.

But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm within me, bringing forth a mighty shower of tears. So that I might pour this forth wholly, in expression unrestrained, I rose from Alypius. Solitude was suggested to me as fitter for the business of weeping, so I retired so far that even his presence could not be a burden to me. Thus was it then with me, and he perceived something of it; for something I suppose I had spoken, wherein the tones of my voice appeared choked with weeping, and so had risen up. He then remained where we were sitting, most extremely astonished. I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, though not actually in these words, yet to this purpose, I spoke much unto Thee, saying, "O Lord, how long? How long, Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up the sorrowful words: 'How long, how long, tomorrow and tomorrow?' Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?"

Thus was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, chanting and oft repeating, "Take up and read, take up and read." Instantly my countenance altered, and I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words; but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears I arose, interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: "Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." And by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence." No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

Then putting my finger between, or some other mark, I shut the volume and with a calmed countenance made it known to Alypius. And what was wrought in him, which I knew not, he thus showed me. He asked to see what I had read; I showed him. And he looked even further than I had read, and I knew not what followed. This followed: "Him that is weak in the faith, receive"; which he applied to himself, and disclosed to me. And by this admonition he was strengthened, and by a good resolution and purpose, and most corresponding to his character, wherein he did always very far differ from me for the better, without any turbulent delay he joined me. Thence we go into my mother; we tell her; she rejoiceth: we relate in order how it took place; she leaps for joy, and triumpheth, and blesseth Thee, Who are able to do above

that which we ask or think. For she perceived that Thou hadst given her more for me than she was wont to beg by her pitiful and most sorrowful groanings. For Thou convertedst me unto Thyself, so that I sought neither wife nor any hope of this world, standing in that rule of faith where Thou hadst showed me unto her in a vision so many years before.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Astrology

From the looks of many modern publications, the ancient “art” of astrology is still very much alive and well—there’s apparently something about the stars that still attracts human attention and superstition as much as it did the young Augustine.

But by the time he was older, his great mind had moved far from trusting in the stars, and had formulated some classic arguments against the validity of planning your life by horoscope.

In his youth, certainly, during his pre-conversion search for truth, he like many others of his age had eagerly consulted astrologers. In the *Confessions* he relates: “These impostors, whom they designate astrologers, I consulted without hesitation, because they used no sacrifices and invoked the aid of no spirit for their divination.” At that time, he says, he could not have been persuaded to forsake astrology.

Yet later, in both his *Confessions* and *The City of God*, he railed against the practice of astrology at great length—and with great insight. In one place, for example, he rhetorically asks: “Why, in the life of twins—in their actions, the events that befall them, their professions, arts, honors and other things pertaining to human life, as well as in their very deaths—is there often so great a difference that, as far as these things are concerned, many entire strangers are more like them than they are like each other, though separated at birth by the smallest interval of time but at conception generated by the same act and at the same moment?”

The mature Augustine had come to believe that human destiny is not shaped by lifeless stars, but by the living Lord of both stars and humanity.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

The City of God: Augustine's Timeless Classic About the Timeless City

Augustine's Timeless Classic About the Timeless City

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Rome's empire was collapsing. It had been a Christian empire for the better part of a century, but now the barbaric Goths were kicking in its doors. So Augustine tried to shore up the faith of his flock with a book he called *The City of God*.

Written more than 15 centuries ago, it is now an undisputed classic. Begun in 413 A.D. and appearing in installments over the next 13 years, Augustine's masterpiece has spawned innumerable other books and articles since. Later philosophers and theologians have been deeply influenced by it, with its impact being felt from literature and historiography. Its greatest influence has been within the Christian church itself, as one might expect of a book written by a bishop who was a great theologian as well as philosopher and administrator.

It was written in response to a particular historical context. In 410 A.D., Alaric and his Goths, Germanic barbarians from the north, sacked Rome. Since Rome had been undisputed queen of civilization for a millennium, her fall shocked the ancient world. As Jerome put it, "The whole world perished in one city." Josef Pieper notes, "To Augustine himself and to all with whom he dealt, Rome was nothing less than the symbol of order in the world." Many blamed Christianity for Rome's fall, suggesting that the pagan gods were angry because Christianity had been promoted by the empire. Augustine's answer was *The City of God*.

The book covers an astonishing range of topics. As one might expect from its title, it contrasts "the City of God" with "the city of men." But it also deals with creation, time, the origin of evil, human freedom, divine knowledge of the future, the resurrection of the body, final judgement, happiness, the Incarnation, sin, grace, and forgiveness (among others). The sheer *scope* of the work is impressive.

Equally impressive is the quality of Augustine's discussions. He offers broad, deep, rich, and generally clear analyses of very difficult topics—topics on which it is easy to write obscurely and foolishly. Even where one is inclined to disagree, one can still learn much from him.

Further, he is often simply eloquent. Consider, for example, his brief description of the core of Christianity: "God's son, assuming humanity without destroying his divinity, established and founded this faith, that there might be a way *for* man *to* man's God *through* God's man." To the suggestion that human beings can be saved from their sins by their own efforts, without God's grace, his terse reply is: "Without him, what have we accomplished, save to perish in his anger?" Concerning human suffering as evidence of God's non-existence or unconcern, he writes: "Our God is everywhere present, wholly everywhere; not confined to any place. He can be present unperceived, and be absent without moving; when he exposes us to adversities, it is either to prove our perfections or correct our imperfections; and in return for our patient endurance of the sufferings of time, he reserves for us an everlasting reward." These are pithy, thought-provoking answers to difficult questions. Not that these are the *only* answers, but it is clear that Augustine has something to say, and generally says it very well.

The basic reason for his perpetual influence is very simple: much of what Augustine offers his readers is a

very blunt statement of Christianity. He sees, and forcefully states, some of the most basic implications of the Christian gospel. That gospel, to use a contemporary term, is a message of "tough love"—and he sees no other sort of love that is really worth having.

Christianity has often been presented as a solution to the problem of success: everyone needs to succeed and God offers success to those who will believe. Success, in turn, tends to be defined in terms of power, financial security, and possessions. Presentations of this sort, parading as Christianity, abound in American culture. Augustine, like the New Testament itself, has no such "gospel." It is true that preaching that sort of message would make one sound a little shallow against the backdrop of the collapse of a civilization. But it was never Augustine's message, and what he said before the fall of Rome was not something he later had to modify in the face of the war, cruelty, poverty, and death that came with that fall. After all, regardless of what cities rise or fall, death and suffering face every human—both us now and those alive in 410 A.D. Any "gospel" worth hearing has to face this fact squarely.

Many lost all that they had to the conquering armies. To these people, Augustine wrote: "Our Lord's injunction runs, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' And they who have listened to this injunction have proved in the time of tribulation how well they were advised in not despising this most trustworthy teacher and most faithful guardian of their treasure. For if many were glad that their treasure was stored in places which the enemy chanced not to light upon, how much better founded was the joy of those who, by the counsel of their God, had fled with their treasure to a citadel which no enemy can possibly reach...those who are now repenting that they did not obey him have learned the right use of earthly goods, if not by the wisdom which could have prevented the loss, at least by the experience which follows it."

Augustine's concern here is with the question of value, and the human nature that lies behind it. If a person is no more than a biologically sophisticated animal that lives for a few years on earth and then no longer exists, it is not unthinkable that a man's or a woman's life, insofar as it is worthwhile, does consist in the abundance of what he or she possesses—that the whole point of life is one of acquiring and enjoying as many things as one can, of seeking wealth and pleasure and power to the fullest extent available. But if a person's life on this earth is but a small part of his overall existence, and if the purpose of life is fulfilled only if one loves God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength, and loves others as him or herself, then what Jesus said is appropriate.

People weigh the loss of possessions on different scales, depending on their view of human beings and human life. From Augustine's point of view, the real tragedy is not that one loses all of one's possessions, but that one has loved those possessions in the first place. And he suggests that if losing them cancels out one's love of them, then one has actually received a significant net gain.

Augustine's perspective here, surely, is simply that of Christianity. He has taken the New Testament seriously on this point, believed it, and followed out its implications. Thus he says: "They lost all they had? Their faith? Their godliness? The possessions of the hidden man of the heart, which in the sight of God are of great price? Did they lose these? For these are the wealth of the Christian to whom the wealthy apostle said, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.'" If Augustine is Christianly blunt about possessions, he is moreso about life itself: "But, it is added, many Christians were slaughtered, and were put to death in a hideous variety of cruel ways. Well, if this be hard to bear, it is assuredly the common lot of all who are born into this life. Of this at least I am certain, that no one has ever died who was not destined to die sometime. Now the end of life puts the longest life on a par with the shortest...That death is not to be judged an evil which is the end of a good life; for death becomes evil only by the retribution which follows it. They, then, who are destined to die, need not inquire about what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them." It is not that Augustine does not value life; it is that he values it, and death, from within a Christian framework.

In these areas, Augustine has looked squarely at what Christianity has to say about basic and difficult issues, seen it clearly, and communicated it forcefully. If there is a single reason for the continuing influence of his writings in a wide diversity of cultures and times, that is it.

As one might expect, Augustine was clearly aware of the existence and depth of evil. As can anyone who has eyes to see, he saw it both in his own heart and in the events of his day. He held that evil presupposed good in a way in which good does not presuppose evil; evil, he suggested, is good gone bad, but good is not evil reformed. He claimed that "... without doubt, wickedness can be a flaw or vice only where the nature previously was not vitiated. Vice, too, is so contrary to nature that it cannot but damage it. And therefore departure from God would be no vice, unless in a nature whose property it was to abide with God. So that even the wicked will is a strong proof of the goodness of the nature."

Why should anyone accept the values that Augustine embraced, or his theology? Augustine offers an answer in the passage just quoted. He implies, for example, that unless there is value in being human, there is nothing wrong in destroying human life: unless there is value in being a good person, there is nothing wrong with being an evil person. And there is value, even in an evil person; that a person is evil does not mean that he or she may be destroyed. Human nature has worth. Only so can taking human life be wrong, and only so can it be wrong to remain always childish. Tragedy is the compliment that evil pays to goodness, and the greater the tragedy, the greater the good that is presupposed. As there is no higher good for us than to have been created in God's image and redeemed by his love, there is no greater tragedy than the defacing of that image or the rejection of that love. Sin, even as it breaks God's law, in its own way also testifies to the existence and nature of God. Thus even evil itself, which by many is seen as evidence against either God's goodness or his existence, is for Augustine evidence that God exists and is good.

Earlier it was suggested that Augustine rightly saw the content of Christianity as a message of "tough love," containing no promise to Christians of all-comfortable lives nor freedom from suffering. This comes through particularly clearly when he writes, "And who is so absurd and blinded as to be audacious enough to affirm that in the midst of the calamities of this mortal state, God's people, or even one single saint, does live, or has ever lived, or shall ever live, without tears or pain ...?" Augustine did not forget, as so many have, that a servant is not better than his Lord.

Another demonstration of his humble spirit in this work, though it is easily lost in the mass of profundities, is his scholarly modesty. It is both charming and revealing. For example, concerning Paul's comments in 1 Thessalonians about the "mystery of iniquity," he says, "I frankly confess I do not know what he means," and goes on simply to tell us about interpretations that have been offered. Concerning the length of the "days" in Genesis, he writes, "What kind of days they were it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible for us to conceive, and how much more to say!" Willing to tackle the most difficult of topics, and able to do so with great skill, he is also able to admit ignorance and say that, for now anyway, he has gone as far as he can.

It would probably be wrong to not mention one other topic on which Augustine's views are justly famous. If one holds that God created the world at a particular time, then it seems that there must have been a long time before he created anything. One might easily wonder why the world was created when it was, not, earlier or later. Augustine did not hold that God created the world at some particular time (or at several sequential moments of time either). He held that time itself and the world were created together and wrote that "assuredly the world was made, not in time, but simultaneously with time."

The discussion of these themes, among many others, occurs in the overall context of a discussion of two cities. "**The City of God** we speak of is the same to which testimony is borne by that Scripture, which excels all the writings of all nations by its divine authority, and has brought under its influence all kinds of minds, and this not by a casual intellectual movement, but obviously by an express divine providential

arrangement. For there is written, 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, O City of God.'" Elsewhere he adds, "These two cities were made by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self unto the contempt of God, and the heavenly city by the love of God unto the contempt of self." It is important to keep in mind that the "contempt of self" Augustine mentions is not contempt of human nature that has been created in God's image and been restored in repentance and faith. Rather, it is contempt of the human nature that is asserting its independence of God. He says God "speaks to that part of man which is better than all else that is in him, and than which God alone is better. For since man is most properly understood (or, if that cannot be, then at least believed) to be made in God's image, no doubt it is that part of him by which he arises above the beasts, which brings him nearer to the Supreme. But since the mind itself, though naturally capable of reason and intelligence, is disabled by besetting and inveterate vices, not merely from delighting and abiding in, but even from tolerating his unchangeable light, until it has been gradually healed, and renewed, and made capable of such felicity, it had, in the first place, to be impregnated with faith, and so purified." It is a person who is "disabled by besotting and inveterate vices"—a self-love that loves others less and God less still—that Augustine describes as worthy of contempt, not merely by God but by himself.

All of this barely scratches the surface. Its point is not to try to discuss, even briefly, all the topics Augustine discusses in *The City of God*. Nor is there any intention to deny that Augustine was, as they say, "a man of his time" with the limitations, *and* advantages, that were his by virtue of being part of ancient Western culture and not some other. The point is that Augustine's theology and philosophy deal with various, even transcultural topics, problems and concerns. What he said then is relevant now. It is, frankly, far better reading than the books of many contemporary theologians and philosophers. Similar to the eternal City of God, it has stood when more superficial entities have fallen.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine's Millennial Views

FRANK A. JAMES III

Alaric, barbarian king of the Visigoths, was the straw that broke the Roman camel's back. On August 24, 410, Alaric and his troops entered Rome and pillaged the city for three days. He and his troops carried off vast amounts of booty and left behind a city of corpses and ruins. Alaric's deed signaled the end of the Roman empire.

Many Roman citizens blamed the sack on Christianity, which had displaced paganism as the state religion. Angry pagans argued that the old religion had been betrayed. Word spread quickly that defeat had come because the pagan deities were offended by all this Christianizing, and that Alaric was their chastisement.

To answer these accusations, Augustine composed his great treatise, *The City of God*. In the first part he reminds pagan accusers that Rome had suffered catastrophes long before the advent of Christianity. He suggests it was not Christianity that brought Rome to her knees, but decadence within.

However, Augustine's great work contains a good deal more than a simple response to accusations against Christianity. He seizes the opportunity to set forth a Christian philosophy of history. As he sets it forth, history is really the tale of two cities—the City of God, inhabited by God's people, and the earthly city, inhabited by sinners who reject God. The two cities and their citizens are combatants in the age-old struggle between righteousness and wickedness.

Though inhabited by God's people, Augustine's *City of God* is certainly not a physical city of bricks and mortar. It is a spiritual city, whose citizenship is determined by a personal relationship to God. This overarching conception of history governed Augustine's theological interpretation of the millennium.

Like other Christians of his day, Augustine had for a while anticipated that Christ would, after his return, establish an earthly millennial kingdom. It seemed fitting that the saints should enjoy a thousand-year Sabbath rest after the labors of 6,000 years. But he became disenchanted with this view after encountering the Chiliasts—extremist "Christians" who envisioned the millennium as a thousand years of reveling in "carnal" and "immoderate" pleasures. A Chiliast named Cerinthus said he was looking forward to an earthly kingdom of sensual pleasures characterized by "gratification of appetite and lust."

Disillusionment with the Chiliasts led Augustine to an intensive study of Revelation 20:1–10, the only passage in the New Testament that speaks directly about the millennium. For him, the significance of the millennial kingdom, like the City of God, lay in its spiritual character. He saw the millennial kingdom as being primarily the reign of Christ in the hearts of the faithful. He apparently came to believe that viewing the millennial kingdom as physical and political tended one toward the error of the Chiliasts.

However, Augustine's argument was not with those who said this passage referred to a literal 1,000 years. He acknowledged this as a possible interpretation. But he preferred a broader view of the thousand years, as a term marking an indefinite period of time between the first advent, when Christ's kingdom was established, and his second advent. During this span of time, writes Augustine, the devil is "prevented from the exercise of his whole power to seduce men" and the saints "reign with Christ" over his spiritual kingdom. When Christ returns, he will judge the living and the dead, and then will usher in

the eternal state.

Here, as in salvation theology and ecclesiology, Augustine's conclusions were very influential. His spiritual view of the millennial kingdom became the predominant view of the traditional church for the next 12 centuries. In fact, until the 17th century virtually every orthodox leader in Christendom held to an Augustinian view of the millennium. And today, numerous postmillennialists and amillennialists still look to Augustine as their forebear.

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One of the Best Teachers of the Church: Augustine on Teachers and Teaching

Augustine on Teachers and Teaching

ROBERT T. SANDIN Robert T. Sandin is provost and professor of philosophy at Mercer University, Atlanta, and author of *The Search for Excellence: The Christian College in an Age of Educational Competition*

The year after Augustine died, Pope Celestine I pronounced him “one of the best teachers of the church.” That assessment, Pope John Paul II said recently, “has been present ever since in the life of the church and in the mind and culture of the whole Western world.” Evidence that Augustine deserves such plaudits is abundantly present throughout his works, as well as through all the works he engendered by other authors. He was a teacher’s teacher; his life was permeated with education; he drastically influenced much of subsequent education structures.

His life-long vocation was that of a teacher. Before his conversion he was a teacher of rhetoric, and after it he became a teaching bishop. Comments on education appear everywhere in his writings, but are most fully set out in his work *On Christian Doctrine*. However, to better appreciate this work, one should also read some of his other philosophical and theological works, especially *On the Teacher*.

He began *On Christian Doctrine* in 396, around the time he became bishop of Hippo, some 10 years after his conversion. He completed it in 427, more than 30 years later. Yet the work, even though composed over such an extended period, is remarkably coherent and flowing—indicating the extraordinary discipline of Augustine’s educational thought and practice.

In it, Augustine outlines the preparations that will equip the would-be interpreter of scriptural truth to properly understand and communicate the message of the Christian church. The purpose of the work is to discuss “the kind of man he ought to be who seeks to labor in sound doctrine, which is Christian doctrine, not only for himself, but also for others.” The work defines a methodology for scriptural exposition and catechetical instruction, and establishes the curricular foundation that stood beneath virtually all theological education for centuries to come.

The treatise is in four books, but has two main divisions. The first three books deal with the discovery of the meaning of Scripture; the fourth treats the teaching of what has been discovered. For Augustine, the communication of Christian truth was based on analysis of the meaning of the written records of Scripture.

The Interpreter’s Preparation

For Martin Luther (an Augustinian monk), the principle *sola scriptura* led to an emphasis on the clarity of Scripture. But Augustine’s approach focused more on the educational and spiritual preparation that enables the interpreter to deal with the obscurities of Scripture, to discover the meanings hidden within its ambiguity.

The Christian message, says Augustine, was originally set forth in a language that encouraged it to spread throughout the world. But biblical language is sometimes figurative and ambiguous, he says, and this places special demands on the learning and imagination of the reader. “Against unknown literal signs the sovereign remedy is a knowledge of languages,” he writes. And against the obscurity of artfully

ambiguous or figurative language, he says, a "knowledge of things" is also required.

According to Augustine, students of Scripture must have knowledge of the natural world, of mathematics, and of music. They must have scientific educations in order to defend against superstitious or magical interpretations of scriptural narratives. A knowledge of history is particularly useful in helping them understand the biblical books, and mastery of the "science of disputation" (dialectics) is indispensable for following scriptural and theological arguments.

But no less important than these "liberal-arts" disciplines, he says, are the students' spiritual preparations. He reports that when he approached the reading of Scripture in a spirit of rationalism, he was repelled by "mysteries" that would have been welcomed by a spirit of faith. He says that students who approach the Scriptures, no matter how complete their educational and technical preparation, should always bear in mind the apostolic warning that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Humility before the Word of God is the key to understanding the truth of Scripture, he indicates. The Bible interpreter must love not controversy, but piety.

Augustine's respect for the Bible is well known. This is the feature of his thought that most attracted Luther. He declared both the inspiration of Scripture and its total reliability (though his concept of the canonical writings—listed in *On Christian Doctrine*—includes the five apocryphal books of Judith, the two books of Esdras, and two books of Maccabees). The most expert investigator of scriptural truth, Augustine maintained, must be familiar with the entire body of canonical Scripture.

The Scripture's Meaning

However, it was the cumulative meaning of this set of writings that was of greatest interest to him. The "heart" of Scripture, its coherent and fully harmonized meaning, should be the essential concern of biblical scholarship, he says.

His method of biblical exegesis allows the interpreter considerable liberty in reading a "scriptural interpretation" into a text. The interpreter may choose to accept any meaning that is "congruous with the truth taught in other passages of the Holy Scriptures," even if that particular meaning was not clearly intended by the one who wrote the passage. Indeed, a variety of interpretations only contributes to the richness of the meaning of a biblical passage, so long as each is an interpretation "which other no less divine witnesses approve."

The meaning of Scripture may be inferred from its intended use, he says, which is to inspire the love of God and the enjoyment of him. Love, he says, is the "heart" of Scripture:

"Whoever thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build up the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all ... Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way."

Most of the first book of *On Christian Doctrine* is devoted to expositing love as the central Christian doctrine, and thus as the basic law of biblical interpretation. Love is also central to Augustine's understanding of the spiritual preparation for Bible study. Also, he closely associates love as the desire for truth with faith and hope, the three virtues he places at the foundation of all knowledge.

The Intellect's Believing

To understand scriptural truth, Augustine says, you must have faith. "You are not required to understand in order to believe, but to believe in order to understand." He rejects both the fideism that despises reason and the rationalism that excludes faith. For Augustine there can be no separation of faith from

reason, of purification of the heart from illumination of the mind, of humble adherence to truth from total surrender to the peace of Christ.

The meaning of Scripture does not become clear without the intellectual effort of interpretation, he indicates, nor does it allow for superstitious constructions that presumptuously fly in the face of reason. Only reason is capable of belief, he says; and when it becomes aware of its limitations, true reason then asks for divine help to do what it cannot do alone.

In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine comments on two alternative readings (the ancient and the Vulgate) of one of his favorite passages, Isaiah 7:9: "If you will not believe you shall not understand," and "If you will not believe you shall not continue." Either reading, he says, contains something of value for the discerning reader. "Unless we walk by faith, we shall not be able to come to that sight that does not fail, but continues through a cleansed understanding, uniting us with truth."

The context in which faith seeks understanding is unavoidably limited by historical conditions. For Augustine it was Platonism that provided the framework for the intellectual synthesis to which his faith aspired. The Platonists, he declared, have said some things "which are indeed true and well accommodated to our faith." Hence they should not be feared or rejected; "rather, what they have said should be taken from them" and put to the use of Christian interpretations, in the same way the Israelites took vases and ornaments of gold and silver from the Egyptians when they fled, in order to put them to better use.

The Teacher's Function

The teacher of Scripture, says Augustine, must be the master not only of its meaning, but also of the method of communication. The wisdom and eloquence of the biblical authors were the primary bases of their persuasiveness, he suggests. The words of the interpreter, however, must exhibit an eloquence suited to the function of interpretation—without ostentation or display. Expositors of Scripture ought not speak in a manner that presumes the same authority as Scripture itself, he says; they should not offer themselves for interpretation.

The interpreter should be primarily concerned not with the eloquence of his teaching, Augustine writes, but with the clarity of it. He should take away all ornamentation without becoming merely vulgar. Augustine cites Cicero's dictum that "he who is eloquent should speak in such a way that he teaches, delights and moves." Of these three, comments Augustine, "that which is given first place, i.e. the necessity of teaching, resides in the things we have to say; the other two in the manner in which we say them."

For Augustine, instruction came before persuasion. When the essential matter has been learned, knowledge may so move the learner that the power of eloquent expression is not required to bring delight and persuasion. May the Lord deliver his church, Augustine prays, from the eloquence that prophesies falsehood, yet inspires the priests to clap their hands and the people to love their words (Jeremiah 5:30, 31). "May this madness never happen to us ... Let those things which are said be said less clearly, less pleasingly, less persuasively, but let them be said nevertheless; and may the just rather than the wicked be heard."

The Christian orator ought to speak truly of the just and the holy and the good, says the saint, and to "so act when he speaks that he may be willingly and obediently heard." The teacher's success in performing his function will be affected more by the piety of his prayers than by the proficiency of his oratory, says Augustine. The life of the speaker, furthermore, carries greater weight than his eloquence in determining whether or not he will be heard.

Augustine takes a strictly limited view of the role of the teacher. His thought here is dominated by Plato's

view that truth is latent within every individual, and that no teacher can be the decisive agent in its acquisition. If knowledge is to be sought, Plato suggests, the inquirer must already know what he is seeking. Similarly, Augustine argues, if linguistic signs are to convey any meaning, the recognition of that meaning must already be present in the one who interprets the signs.

We learn, Augustine suggests, not through words sounding in the ear, but through truth teaching us from within. "By means of words we learn nothing but words." To get beyond words to their meaning we must depend on a "knowledge of realities" that we already possess.

In matters discernible by the mind, if we cannot discern these for ourselves we will listen in vain to the words of someone who can, he says. On the other hand, anyone who can interpret the meaning and judge the truth of what some speaker says is already inwardly a disciple of truth. If anyone learns anything from the words of a teacher, he must already have possessed within himself the criterion of truth that enables him to judge the truth of what the teacher says.

"Who is so foolishly curious," asks Augustine, "as to send his son to school to learn what the teacher thinks?" When teachers have expounded, by their most eloquent words, all the scholarly disciplines they profess, the student is still left with the problem of judging, in the light of his own inward truth, the merit of what they say.

The true teacher, says the bishop, is the teacher within, not the external teacher—who is, after all, in the same position, in relation to the possession of the truth, as the pupil. The interior teacher, of course, is God, and the process of his teaching is illumination. The divine illumination, however, treats the mind not as merely passive, but as active. Augustine's view of education is thus based on profound respect for the capacity, latent within every human mind, of apprehending the truth. Truth is always within our grasp, he says, if we only pay attention to the master within.

The Saint's Impact

Despite the length of his discourses on education, Augustine's educational philosophy displays a tantalizing incompleteness—stemming from his understanding of the limits of all educational discourse.

Nevertheless, Augustinianism has had a profound impact on Western thought, and it retains a remarkable vitality after 15 centuries. But it has never been a metaphysics—it is only a method. This is why, as Gilson remarks, that every introduction to the study of Augustine creates an intense consciousness of futility, for such an introduction "has done nothing more than to enable others to understand him, but to have others follow him does not rest with man."

Albert the Great, the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, used to advise his disciples to follow Augustine in theology and Aristotle in philosophy. Aquinas, remarks Maritain, obtained the "scientific" equipment for his own intellectual synthesis from Aristotle, but received the substance of his "wisdom" from Augustine. Aquinas, says Maritain, showed greater fidelity to the wisdom of Augustine than to the logic of Aristotle. "He corrected Aristotle; he honored Augustine as a son honors his father."

Luther was more comfortable with the Augustinian temper than with the Thomistic. The Pauline influence on Augustine and the emphasis on the doctrine of divine grace held a powerful appeal for Luther. The other side of Augustinianism—the acceptance of the classical philosophical tradition—evoked from Luther the same hostility he directed toward all scholasticism.

In Luther, theocentric religion reasserted itself. Augustinian piety seemed to him a form of self-love that essentially changed the meaning of faith. Our fellowship with God, said Luther, rests not on the purification of our love, but on the sinfulness of our hearts.

Augustine's influence on medieval thought and education was enormous. His concept of education, combined with his personal reputation and administrative energies, produced a system of schools that was a powerful force in both church and culture for centuries. "More than a single writer," says Armand Mauer, "St. Augustine molded the medieval mind."

On Christian Doctrine was studied with particular care in medieval circles of education. Cassiodorus, in the 6th century, used it as the basis of his ***Institutes of Divine and Secular Letters***. He adapted Augustine's list of studies needed by well-prepared Bible interpreters into his classic formula of the seven liberal arts—the Trivium: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics; and the Quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy. Rabanus Maurus, in the 9th century, incorporated whole sections of ***On Christian Doctrine*** in his three-volume plan of education, ***De institutiones clericorum***. In the 12th century the work provided the inspiration for the ***Didascalion*** of Hugo of St. Victor, whose theological work as a whole has caused him to be known to history as a second Augustine. Finally, ***On Christian Doctrine*** provided the dominant themes and organizing principle of the ***Book of Sentences*** by Peter Lombard.

The curriculum of medieval education thus drew its inspiration from Augustine's outline of the studies essential to the preparation of the teacher of biblical truth. When the great European universities were founded in the 12th century, the program of studies was essentially the same as the curriculum outlined in ***On Christian Doctrine***.

The scope of such influence, as Battenhouse observes, was due to the breadth of Augustine's own outlook and the extraordinary discipline that he maintained over his thought: "He saw Christianity as a whole, with a completeness beyond anything any of his predecessors had known." His own education left him at home in all the liberal arts, and his own quest for spiritual wholeness give him a unique perspective on the dialectical and developmental aspects of Christian education. "By Christian inspiration he gradually forged from the salvaged resources of Hellenism a new philosophy, in which old problems were redefined and old concepts reshaped."

Augustine worked, as T.S.K. Scott-Craig says, as a representative of a new religion inside an old culture. He created a way to synthesize the new religious energy with the classical tradition of learning and culture, and thus assured the continued vitality of this religious perspective for centuries.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Fighting Isms and Schisms

With his natural brilliance, his training in rhetoric, and his position of church leadership, Augustine found himself the polemical leader in the church of his day. From his conversion to the time of his death, Augustine battled a succession of "isms" or schisms: first Manichacism, then Donatism, then Pelagiarism.

Manichacism

Manichaeism took its name from its founder, Mani, a Persian born around 216 A.D. The Manichees taught a basic dualism in nature: light and darkness were co-eternal, hostile systems in conflict with each other. Good was passive, darkness and evil were active.

As a gnostic religion, Manichacism appealed to the reason. For nine years Augustine followed the Manichees, but he gradually began to see their errors. When Faustus, reputedly the most brilliant of the Manichees, failed to answer his questions, Augustine's faith in the Manichees was irrevocably shaken.

Because he had been one of them and then was disillusioned, his opposition to the Manichees was that much stronger after his conversion. Much of his writing and speaking was directed against the Manichees. In Hippo, when he publicly debated the Manichee Fortunatus, Augustine so humiliated the man that he left the city and never returned.

Donatism

Donatism was more a localized and political threat. Early in Constantine's reign, the Donatists had withdrawn from the Catholic church for both political and doctrinal reasons. They said that during the recent persecution by emperor Diocletian, many of the Catholic leaders had betrayed the church. Such traitors did not deserve to remain as church leaders, they said.

The main disputing was in Carthage, where the Donatists claimed that the Catholic bishop had been ordained by a traitor, and thus his priesthood was invalid. So they set up their own "pure" bishop in Carthage—Donates, for whom they were named.

The Donatists held that they alone were the true church, and insisted on rigorous church discipline and excommunication of all members they deemed "unworthy." Their issue was separation: they believed the church was an exclusive community, and they were determined to keep it so. One faction of the group, called "circumcellions," went so far as to travel around the country violently terrorizing the traditional Catholic churches.

From 393 on, Augustine took the offensive against the Donatist church. His contempt for them was obvious: "The clouds roll with thunder, that the house of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth; and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak 'We are the only Christians!'"

The schism continued, and by order of the emperor the matter was brought to Carthage for arbitration in 411. Augustine was present at the council as one of the chief speakers. The controversy was settled in favor of the Catholics.

One result of the controversy with the Donatists was the development of Augustine's doctrine of the church: that the essence of the church is in the union of the whole church with Christ, not in the personal character of certain select Christians.

Pelagianism

No sooner had the Donatist controversy been settled than the battle against Pelagianism started up. Its significance lies in it leading Augustine to develop his doctrine of grace.

Pelagius, the founder of the movement, was a 4th-century British monk who rejected the idea of original sin. The tendency to sin is man's own free choice, he insisted, and not inherited from Adam. Following this reasoning, there is no need for divine grace; man must simply make up his mind to do the will of God.

The church excommunicated Pelagius in 417, but his banner was carried on by Julian, the bishop of Eclanum, whom Augustine refuted in detail in his volumes ***Against Julian***.

The Pelagian heresy was officially condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431, one year after Augustine's death.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine's Enchiridion: A Handbook for Earthy Christian Living A Handbook for "Earthy" Christian Living

PAUL DE VRIES Paul de Vries is an associate professor of philosophy at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL

Augustine grappled with many of the same ethical issues that concern us today. In *The Enchiridion*, basically his version of a "handbook of Christian living," he tells how we can maintain a balanced outlook on the issues that affect our lives.

Can a mature saint distill the essentials of earthy Christian living into a simple handbook? Augustine certainly tried. At age 66, in the middle of writing *The City of God*, he wrote a manual on the Christian life called *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*. Of Augustine's 93 major written works, this little *enchiridion* (Greek for "handbook") displays his most integrated picture of down-to-earth life before God.

The impetus behind this handbook was a man named Laurentius. He had implored Augustine to write a short work on the proper worship of God, the meaning and fulfillment of the chief purpose of our lives, and the proper foundation of Christian faith. He had explicitly asked for a "handbook": one to be carried in the hand, not left gathering dust on the shelf!

Just a year earlier, Augustine had restrained Laurentius's brother, a Roman tribune, from being overzealous in fighting the Donatist heresy. In view of the various prevailing heresies and accompanying confusion, Laurentius wanted a brief positive description of Christian living that he could carry with him on his Christian walk.

Though small in size, *The Enchiridion* certainly deserves its position as a classic in Christian writing. Its basic theme stems from the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. In 122 brief chapters, Augustine thoughtfully examines the needs of daily Christian living in the light of biblical truth and the Apostles' Creed. The threads that bind this manual together are the central themes of Augustine's own Christian philosophy: the hopelessness of evil, the triumph of good, the necessity of almsgiving, and the essential realism and skepticism of earthy Christian living.

The Hopelessness of Evil

Underlying this work is a consistent Christian optimism based on the sovereignty of God and an understanding of the radical dependency of evil upon the good that it perverts. Evil, writes Augustine, is finally a hopeless parasite: It does not exist in its own right, but only as a corruption of something good. He repeatedly claims that the vices of human life are "nothing but privations of natural good." In fact, as long as something is in the process of being corrupted, we can be confident that it still has some good "of which it is being deprived." Consequently, if corruption were complete in destroying all that is good in something, that thing and the corruption itself would disappear. So evil cannot last. In short, "nothing can be evil except something which is good," in spite of the fact that good and evil are genuine contraries.

The paradox Augustine develops here is the venerable doctrine of Creation and Fall that so defines our lives. The creation is good, and our sovereign God continues to sustain and control it well. Actually, only because God's creatures are good can sin corrupt and pervert them. This Augustinian claim makes sin especially reprehensible—for it is the corruption of God's very handiwork—while it makes redemption all the more believable—for God remains sovereign. By God's grace, we can seek what is good as the satisfaction of our real present needs, and as the restoration of our ultimate human "health."

Understanding evil as the privation of good was one of the most important steps in Augustine's conversion to Christ, and it remained a theme in many of his writings. A contemporary reemphasis on this doctrine could probably heighten our own awareness of the practical moral concerns of our own time. And by feeling less alienated from our needy world, we might become more actively involved in restoring what is good.

The Triumph of God

In *The Enchiridion*, Augustine fully embraces the logical implications of his concept of evil: he asserts that even the life and vital power of wicked angels and wicked people depend on the continuing gifts of God. Obviously, he says, God's purpose is to bring some great good out of evil; otherwise, he would not bother to sustain evil beings. In fact, God must think it is actually "better to bring good out of evil, than not to permit any evil to exist." After all, the end result of redemption will be greater than the original creation, for in the next life we will have a "more perfect immortality" free, finally, from the very desire for sin. So by God's sovereign grace, he concludes, our future is even better than our pristine beginning.

In a state of anticipation—that is how Augustine says the Christian must now experience this triumph of good. He affirms that God does not save us by good works, but that good works are always present in those who believe. Referring to Ephesians 2:8–10, he insists that God is now creating us anew not merely as people, but as good people, so that good works are now necessary. After all, *faith* in the truth of certain biblical claims is not enough, he says, since the devils also believe and tremble. He says what the devils lack—and we relish—is the hope of God's saving acts and the love that makes faith work.

Consequently, he says, cultivating good works in our present lives is an essential aspect of the divine triumph of good. We cannot pride ourselves in the good we do, for a good will itself is a gift of God's grace. Human free will by itself is prone to error, he says; thus it is no surprise that mankind fell. To maintain righteousness, it is necessary for God to impart additionally "a portion of his unchangeable goodness." After the Fall we needed all the more grace from God to free us from the bondage of sin, and with the additional grace in the future life we will no longer even desire sin.

The Need for Active Faith

Augustine wisely concludes that genuine faith requires good works now, and says this is especially accomplished in the giving of alms. Even though he affirms that salvation comes entirely through God's grace, he still insists that the evidence of that grace, in the giving of alms, propitiates God for past sins. Of course, continuing sin is not excused by regular almsgiving; almsgiving can never purchase for us a license to sin. Instead, he says, almsgiving is a necessary part of "suitable repentance." He points out that Jesus himself will decide who will enter the blessed kingdom on the basis of this very virtue (Matthew 25:31–36). The only special merit that Jesus will attribute to those who are eternally blessed, says Augustine, is that they abound in almsgiving—but not almsgiving in the conventional sense.

For Augustine, almsgiving is a multi-faceted virtue. For example, one way he suggests of giving alms to others is to give forgiveness. He interprets the Lord's Prayer as suggesting that we can ask God's forgiveness only as we forgive—Only as we "forgive from the heart a sin that has been committed against us." We may not yet attain to loving our enemies, but when we forgive those who sin against us, we fulfill Jesus' standard for our own forgiveness. And not only through the Lord's Prayer does Jesus teach that we should forgive others as we would have God forgive us; he reemphasizes it in his first statement immediately after the prayer:

"If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either" (Matthew 6:14, 15; The Jerusalem Bible).

Augustine comments that the “thunder of this warning” is so severe that it should “awaken even the dead” Christian to a life of forgiveness-giving.

Concerning almsgiving, Augustine teaches us that it also means giving alms to ourselves! We, too, are wretched and in great need of help, he suggests. Our greatest need is for the cleansing of our inward parts, which we obtain only if we give the gift of Christ to our own selves. This need is especially shown in the example of the Pharisees, he says. They certainly gave material alms on a regular basis. But their mistake was to give alms only externally. They did not give to themselves what their own inward parts needed most: Christ himself.

Augustine’s Realism

One of the greatest benefits of reading Augustine is catching the fresh realism and honesty of his highly Christian perspective. He does not pretend to be unaffected by sin; he is an earthy theologian. His writing does not smack of excessive self-confidence; he is honest about the doubts and uncertainties that infest the finite and fallible minds even of Christians.

The mercy of God, he insists, is necessary to convince us even of our need for repentance. He points out that before Peter wept bitterly, it was necessary for the Lord to turn and look upon him. Unfortunately, we are not often convinced of the seriousness of our own sins and the sins around us. Even the “great” sins, ones which would exclude someone from entering the kingdom of God, rarely arouse our concern. We tend to be blase Augustine points out, because we have been exposed to these sins for so long. Instead of the familiarity that breeds contempt, “constant familiarity lead to the toleration” of sins, “and habitual toleration leads to the practice of many of them.” Perhaps partly because of his early battles with sin, as well as because of his realistic Christian awareness of a continuing struggle with sin, Augustine is deeply alarmed about how comfortable sin can become.

Quite aware that ambiguous ethical choices often exist, and often because of human ignorance, Augustine is no perfectionist. In particular he suggests that while all lies are wrong, varying intentions make some lies worse than others. In fact, he argues that if a person lies to save another person from injury, that person could be justly commended. This deceit is still wrong, and it needs to be forgiven; Augustine never makes deceit morally right. Nevertheless, while all deceivers must seek God’s forgiveness, a well-intentioned deceiver can also be properly praised as well.

In a similar way, Augustine recognizes the challenging complexities of the problem of abortion. He states that a key question in his own time, as it is now, was “at what time the infant begins to live in the womb; whether life exists in a latent form before it manifests itself in the motions of the living being.”

With his typical candor, Augustine admits that he cannot assuredly say at exactly what point human life begins. He seriously questions whether any human has the power to decisively say. Nevertheless, he asserts that any one who looked at the cut-up remains of an aborted baby would have to recognize that this had been a human life. Although Augustine apparently had a firm belief that a developing fetus participates in human life, he argues equally strongly here that a conclusive proof is outside our human ability.

Augustine’s Skepticism

Such personal awareness of the limits of our knowledge—the effects of the fallibility and finitude of our understanding—permeates Augustine’s writings, including *The Enchiridion*. We need patience with our ignorance of our world and with the difficulties of discerning correct interpretations of Scripture, he suggests. We must admit that many issues are beyond our understanding, so that even additional study of Scripture might not resolve them. After all, ignorance is not an error in and of itself, but it is a serious mistake for a person to think “he knows what he does not know.” Thus, on many questions it is a valid

intellectual exercise to guess at answers, he says, so long as we do not presume “to know what we do not know.”

To sum up Augustine’s thinking here: It is crucial that we know God. We can actively nourish that vital knowledge through the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, because of the hopelessness of evil, the triumph of good, and the worthiness of almsgiving. Consequently, we should also know our duties. However, on many issues ignorance is perfectly acceptable. More positively, the personal awareness of our own ignorance helps us put our trust where it belongs—not in ourselves, but in God only.

In our own time we seem torn between pessimistic realism and naive positive thinking. In contrast, Augustine gives us an honest picture of the hopelessness of evil, while enlightening our real struggle with sin in terms of the triumph of good.

Also, we often seem driven to define faith in terms of doctrinal knowledge, even to the neglect of good works. In contrast, Augustine humbly points out the severe limits of our knowledge, and he thunderously proclaims the necessity of disseminating alms and forgiveness—both to others and to ourselves.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

Pope John Paul II on Augustine

In an official statement issued in 1986, on the 1,600th anniversary of Augustine's conversion to Christ, Pope John Paul II spoke about the influence of this 5th-century great, parts of whose legacy are still claimed today by millions of Catholics and Protestants alike.

Let us ask this extraordinary man what he has to say to the modern man. I believe he has much to say, both by his example and by his teaching.

He teaches the person who searches for truth not to despair of finding it. He teaches this by his example—he himself rediscovered it after many years of laborious seeking—and by means of his literary activity, the program of which he had fixed in the first letter after his conversion: "It seems to me that one must bring men back... to the hope of finding the truth." He teaches therefore that one must seek the truth "with piety, chastity and diligence" in order to overcome doubts about the possibility of returning into oneself, to the interior realm where truth dwells: and likewise to overcome the materialism which prevents the mind from grasping its indissoluble union with the realities that are understood by the intelligence, and the rationalism that refuses to collaborate with faith and prevents the mind from understanding the "mystery" of the human person.

Augustine's legacy to the theologians, whose meritorious task is to study more deeply the contents of the faith, is the immense patrimony of his thought, which is as a whole valid even now. Above all, his legacy is the theological methods to which he remained absolutely faithful. We know that this method implied full adherence to the authority of the faith which is one of its origin—the authority of Christ—and is revealed through Scripture, Tradition and the Church. His legacy includes the ardent desire to understand his own faith—"Be a great lover indeed of understanding" is his command to others, which he applies to himself also. Likewise the profound sense of the mystery "for it is better," he exclaims, "to have a faithful ignorance than a presumptuous knowledge." Likewise the sure conviction that the Christian doctrine came from God and thus has its own original source, which must not only be preserved in its integrity—this is the "virginity" of the faith of which he spoke—but must also serve as a measure to judge the philosophies that conform to it or diverge from it.

It is well known how much Augustine loved Sacred Scripture, proclaiming its divine origin, its inerrancy, its depth and inexhaustible riches; and it is well known how much he studied Scripture. But the aim of his own study, and of his promotion of study by others, is the entirety of Scripture—so that the true thought or, as he says, the "heart" of Scripture, may be indicated, harmonizing it where necessary with itself. He takes these two principles to be fundamental for the understanding of Scripture. For this reason he reads it in the Church, taking account of the Tradition, the nature and obligatory force of which he forcefully underlines. He made the celebrated statement "I should not believe the Gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church."

In the controversies that arose concerning the interpretation of Sacred Scripture, his recommendation was that one should discuss "with holy humility, with Catholic peace, with Christian charity," until the truth itself be grasped, which God "has set ... upon the throne of unity." One will then be able to see that the controversy had not broken out in vain, because it "was the occasion for learning" and progress has been made in the understanding of the faith.

Another contribution of Augustine's teaching to the men and women of today that we may briefly mention is his proposal of the twofold object of study that should occupy the human mind: God and man. "What do you wish to know?" he asks himself. And he replies: "God and the soul are what I wish

to know." Nothing more? Nothing at all. Confronted with the sad spectacle of evil, he reminds modern men and women that they must nevertheless have confidence in the final triumph of the good, that is, of the City "where the victory is the truth; where dignity is holiness; where peace is happiness; where life is eternity."

Further, he teaches scientists to recognize the signs of God in the things that have been created, and to discover the "seeds" that God has sown into the harmony of the universe. He recommends above all to those who have control over the destinies of the people that they love peace, and that they promote it, not through conflict, but with the methods of peace, because, as he wisely writes, "there is more glory in killing the wars themselves with a word than in killing men with the sword, and there is more glory in achieving or maintaining peace by means of peace than by means of war."

Finally, I should like to address the young people whom Augustine greatly loved as a professor before his conversion and as a pastor afterwards. He recalls three great things to them: truth, love and freedom—three supreme goods that stand together. He also invites them to love beauty, for he himself was a great lover of beauty.

I have... sketched briefly a panorama of the thought of an incomparable man whose children and disciples we all are in a certain fashion, both in the Church and in the Western world itself. I express once again my fervent desire that his teaching should be studied and widely known, and his pastoral zeal be imitated, so that the authoritative teaching of such a great doctor and pastor may flourish every more happily in the Church and in the world, for the progress of the faith and of culture.

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From the Archives: A Translation of Bishop Oldrad's Letter to Emperor Charlemagne

Where are Augustine's bones a-moldering? To some, that has been a very significant question. It seems that by Augustine's time, many portions of the church had begun to attach substantial religious significance to relics—ranging from supposed physical remains of the apostles and other well-known martyrs and leaders, to remains of objects associated with notable persons, such as fragments of Christ's cross. Thus it is not surprising that the remains of a renowned figure Augustine became precious. In the condensed letter below, which to our knowledge is translated here from Latin to English for the first time, one Peter Oldrad, archbishop of Milan, is writing to the emperor Charlemagne about the whereabouts of Augustine's remains and how they got there. Dated 796A.D., the Latin of this letter appears in the 1588 edition of Cesare Baronio, and has been reprinted in Vol. 40 of the Acta Sanctorum, pp. 366–368. The translation was done for Christian History magazine by Father Joseph Schnaubelt, O.S.A., director of the Augustinian History Institute of Villanova University.

Among other things, note the obsequious tone that Oldrad uses toward Charlemagne, the lengthy accounts of King Luitprand's generous gifts to the church (perhaps hints to Charlemagne?), the miraculous healings attributed to Augustine's remains, and the sleeping metaphors used to describe the actual body of the long-dead bishop.

The Translation

The Epistle of Peter Oldrad, Archbishop of Milan, To Charlemagne.

On the transfer of the body of St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, from Sardinia to Pavia.

For the Most Pious King of kings, Charles the Great, Peter Oldrad, unworthy archbishop of Milan, entreats an everlasting crown in Christ.

While your Majesty was sojourning in the city of Milan, you graciously entrusted me with the task of making an inquiry into the transfer of the body of the saintly bishop Augustine from Sardinia to Pavia and of writing a trustworthy account of it for you. This has been done, so far as human frailty has permitted. Now, with the help of God, I shall briefly relate what I found in the letters and books of the Lombard Kings, along with what I garnered from many by way of oral tradition.

Blessed Augustine, the Doctor of the Churches of Christ, rendered up his soul to God, after many splendid signs and miracles in this world and after much exhausting labor against the obstinacy of heretics and the deviousness of sinners. In the course of the year 430 since the Incarnation of Christ, he was buried with honor by the faithful in the Church of St. Stephen in the City of Hippo, his episcopal seat. Thus respectfully laid to rest at the hands of his disciples, he reposed there for almost 56 years.

Thereafter, his remains were transferred to Sardinia by the faithful Catholic bishops at the time the Vandals were laying waste to Africa by force of arms. On account of the faith of Christ, these bishops, and in particular Fulgentius, the bishop of Ruspe, together with a great multitude of the faithful, had been forced to move to that island by Trasamund, the iniquitous king of the Vandals. To forestall the

desecration of such a great jewel and treasure by perverse and contemptuous men, the exiles transported the relics with them, along with those of several other saints. There, in Sardinia, Augustine was renowned for many miracles for 223 years. In this we are manifestly given to understand that those whom God holds dear he distinguishes and marks with the power of miracles as a testimony to their sanctity.

Then came Luitprand, the son of Asprand, the king of the Lombards. Succeeding his father as overlord of the Lombards some 280 years after the death of Augustine, Luitprand persevered in the way of the true faith and distinguished himself as a staunch defender of the Churches of God. Certainly, his gifts of prudence, wisdom and counsel qualified Luitprand for his great principate more than any other man. He exhibited such remarkable justice and clemency, moreover, that one would be hard put to say which was his more outstanding trait. He was a most Christian man, who loved his religion so much that nowhere in his kingdom did he permit the erection of a church without his involvement. At Pavia, for example, he donated many castles and other possessions for the construction of many beautiful churches. His palace was especially notable for the oratory he built in honor of the Holy Savior. There he established benefices for priests and clerics to fulfill the divine offices by day and night. And his gifts were lavish, so that they would be able to serve God all the more virtuously and assiduously.... In honor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, moreover, he constructed a monastery adorned with artwork in the suburbs of Pavia, to which he gave the name of Sky of Gold.

Then an enormous horde of barbarians attacked Sardinia, which they subjugated and laid waste, desecrating even the holy places with their violence. Among these was the tomb of St. Augustine. King Luitprand, that pillar of justice and lover of religion, heard this sad news from Peter, the bishop of Pavia, whom the king greatly honored and revered for his holy life. Accordingly, the king sent his leading nobles to Sardinia as legates with a great weight of gold and silver, in order to ransom the body of so great a saint and transport it as soon as possible to the city of Pavia. Intent on satisfying the command and desire of the pious king, these men sailed to Sardinia, where they ransomed the holy remains from the barbarians and placed them on their ship. By the mercy of God, and to their great joy, they made the crossing with a following wind, through a tranquil sea, in the space of one day and night, to the landfall and port of Genoa. They immediately sent heralds to inform the king of what had taken place, so that he could proceed with honor to receive the relics of such a great saint.

Filled with immense joy at the news, the king gave profound thanks to God for having granted his desire. He immediately cancelled all other business, and summoning the bishops of all his cities and the entire clergy from as far as Tortona, he set out with great humility to accept so signal a gift from God. Accompanied by a great multitude of nobles and commoners of both sexes, he hastened to repose it in a fitting place, like David of old receiving the Ark of the Covenant.

However, when the king drew near the place where the holy body lay, he laid aside the insignia of his royal estate. And bare of head and foot, he proceeded with such humility and devotion that all present marveled and praised God at the great devotion of the pious king.

Moreover, the merciful Lord deigned to work a number of miracles to honor his Holy Confessor Augustine, for many invalids who were present recovered their health. Spontaneously raising their voices in the praise and glory of God, they happily returned home. From there, bearing the body of the Blessed Confessor with hymns and praise, the progress arrived, near the border of Tortona, at a manor called Savinaria. There King Luitprand and the entire cortege of bishops and nobles spent the night in the services due so great a father But at dawn the next day, when the crowd surged forward to complete the journey to the city of Ticino, they could in no wise move the holy body, even though many engaged the bier. The king therefore rent his garments, and with a sorrowful countenance did fling himself to the ground, so much did he burn with desire to convey the relics to Ticino, for he had lost all hope of moving the bier.

All the bishops and nobles were astonished at this miraculous phenomenon, and were wondering

inwardly what almighty God wanted to signify in regard to the relics of so glorious a Doctor. Present in the throng of bishops was Gratian, the ordinary of the Church of Novara, a man endowed with great learning and distinguished in all the disciplines, who was withal a true priest of God. He confidently approached King Luitprand to affirm that the mercy of God must be implored, not with forms and empty words, but rather with solemn promises and deeds. The king accepted this advice very willingly. And when he had made his vow, he asserted with a solemn oath and a royal decree that, if the Lord God almighty would permit him to convey the body of St. Augustine to Ticino, he would deed the aforementioned manor of Savinaria in perpetuity to God and to the Church of St. Peter, unto which he intended to bring the relics.

It ensued therefore, that having fulfilled his vow, the king approached the bier and attempted to raise the relics off the ground. He found that they were very light and that two porters could now handle the blessed body, which previously could not be budged by many. And so they completed the journey with great joy and exultation, praising the omnipotence of God...

Moreover, when the news spread of the king's arrival with the relics of the Blessed Confessor, those who had stayed home hurried out to meet the cortege and to welcome the saint. A joyous concourse of people singing hymns and canticles escorted the holy body to its reposition in the Church of St. Peter in the Sky of Gold, with all the honor due so great a Father. That church, moreover, was placed under the jurisdiction of the Prince of the Apostles, who has always striven on behalf of the faith against the snares of the devil and the duplicity of heresy. There St. Peter is still celebrated for many signs and miracles in tribute to his sanctity and for the edification of the faithful.

After the reposition of the relics at Pavia, it became apparent that the transfer had been pleasing to God and to the blessed Father Augustine, inasmuch as there were many noteworthy recoveries from various illnesses upon the application of the sacred tokens or even from contact with the ark.

Also the gifts, which the pious King Luitprand bestowed on the Church of St. Peter, consisting of property and possessions as well as vessels of gold and silver and liturgical vestments, exceeded expectations of pious men everywhere. For the king felt he could never do enough for the holy shrine. And he was so replete with joy over the recovery of the relics that day and night he participated in the liturgy with the clerics and priests, and exercised himself in psalmody like one of the ministers.

This transfer of the body of St. Augustine took place on Feb. 28, during the pontificate of Gregory II, of happy memory. May the King of kings Christ the Lord, by his almighty power deign to keep your excellent Majesty through the course of many years. Given in the city of Milan in the year ... 796.

The Relics Today

On Oct. 1, 1695, almost a thousand years after King Luitprand had the relics of St. Augustine concealed in Peter in the Sky of Gold, an ark supposedly containing them was discovered by workmen in the course of renovating the crypt. Behind some brickwork, the workmen found a marble ark some 3 ft., 3 in. long; 1 ft., 2 in. wide; and 1 ft. 4 in. high, reinforced at the corners with iron bands. On the cement that held it together appeared the name "Agostino" or "Augustino," written in black gothic letters. However, this writing was inadvertently destroyed by one of the workmen before he realized what he had found.

The workmen carefully removed the ark from its niche, but out of reverence did not open it. Nor was it immediately opened by the clergymen in charge. When the ark was opened, in early 1696, it was found to contain a silver capsule full of whole bones, pieces of bone, and 7 lbs., 3 oz. of bone dust—altogether commensurate, according to the examiners, with an average human skeleton. Nonetheless, said some skeptics, these were not the genuine remains of St. Augustine.

On Feb., 9. 1696, the remains were examined by anatomists. And on June 23 of that year, Lorenzo

Trotti, the bishop of Ticino, made an official visit to the shrine to review the whole matter. In 1698, during February and March, witnesses were called to testify a second time, and another of examination of the relics was conducted. On May 15 yet another examination and description of the relics was made. All the while, many thousands of words were written on both sides of the issue, and continued to be for the next 30 years.

Finally, on Jan. 23, 1728, Pope Benedict XIII sent a letter to Francesco Pertusati, the bishop of Ticino, directing him to put an end to the controversy by episcopal decision. On June 25 and 26, the bishop made a visit to the shrine to review the situation, then drew up a declaration that solemnly affirmed the authenticity of the relics, promulgating the declaration on July 19. On Sept. 22, some three months later, Pope Benedict issued a bull confirming this episcopal action.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 15: St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine: Recommended Resources

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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From the Archives: Excerpts from an Augustine Sermon

In view of the length of my previous sermon, I deferred a question of great importance, namely the correct meaning of what John ... says in his epistle: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). We see many heresies confessing that Christ came in the flesh, yet we cannot say they are all of God.

The Manichee, of course, denies that Christ came in the flesh. There is no need to linger over this and persuade you at length that such a fallacy is not from God. The Arian, however, professes that Christ came in the flesh, as does the Eunomian, the Sabellian and the Photinian. Why do we seek witnesses to prove them wrong? Who can count the number of these pestilences? For the moment, however, let us deal with the more notorious of these. There are many who do not know the heresies I have mentioned, and they are better off for their ignorance. As we well know, the Donatist says that Christ came in the flesh, and yet far be it that this fallacy is from God. To speak to the more recent heresies, the Pelagians profess that Christ came in the flesh; nevertheless, this fallacy is far removed from God.

Let us then, my beloved ones, reflect carefully. For since we all accept the truth of the words: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God," we therefore must refute those who do not profess that Christ came in the flesh. For if we were to allow this confession to stand, we should have to admit that those who profess it are of God. How am I to restrain or deter you from these errors, how am I to defend you against them with the shield of truth? May the Lord assist me—for your expectation is already a prayer for me—that those may be refuted who do not profess that Christ came in the flesh.

The Arian hears of and preaches the birth by the Virgin Mary. Does he therefore profess that Christ came in the flesh? Not at all! How am I to prove this? If God will spur on your minds, it will be very easy. What is the question I am posing? I am inquiring whether the Arian professes that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. How can one who denies Christ himself profess that He came in the flesh? Who is Christ, after all? Let us ask the blessed Peter.

When the Gospel was being read just now, you heard how Jesus Christ himself asked, "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). The disciples gave Him various answers: "Some say, John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets" (v.14). Those who were professing this word or would profess it now, know Jesus Christ as no more than a man. If, however, they know Jesus Christ as no more than a man, they do not know Him at all. If He is only a man and nothing more, then He is not Jesus Christ. But then He asked of the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (v. 15). Peter answered for all of them, for there was agreement among all of them. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

There you have a true confession and a full confession. You must now reconcile what Christ said of himself with what Peter said of Christ. And what did Christ say of himself? "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" And what did Peter say of Christ? "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Reconcile these two and you will have the Incarnation of Christ...

What then is the Son of God? Just as we were asking what Christ is and heard that He is the Son of God, let us now ask what the Son of God is. Behold, here is the Son of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1,2). "In the beginning," as Genesis 1:1 says, "God created the heavens and the

earth. You, however, maintain that "In the beginning God created the Word." You say the Word was created and you make the Word a part of Creation. But while you say, "In the beginning God created the Word," the Evangelist says, "In the beginning was the Word." Therefore, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," for He was the Word. "All things were made through Him" (John 1:3). You say the Word was created. If you say it was created, then you deny the Son.

We are seeking the Son according to His nature, not according to grace. We seek the only-begotten Son, not the adopted son. Such is the Son we seek, such is the true Son, "who was by nature God" (Philippians 2:6). I quote the words of the Apostle, lest those of you who are uninstructed think these are my words. We are seeking the Son, "who though he was by nature God," as the Apostle says, "did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to." It was not a thing to be clung to, because it was His nature. He obtained it by His nature, not by seizing it. "He did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to." He was thus by nature, not by acquisition. Thus He was from all eternity, thus He was co-eternal with the Creator, thus He was equal with the Father; thus He was.

"But he emptied himself." (v. 7). How did He do this? Was it by divesting himself of what He was or by clothing Himself in what He was not? Let us listen to what the Apostle says: "... He emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (V. 7). Thus did He empty himself: not by losing His nature as God, but by taking the nature of a slave. His nature as a slave was added to Him, and His nature as God did not depart from Him. This is what it means to profess that Christ came in the flesh. The Arian, however, who does not profess that He is equal with the Father, thus fails to profess Him as the Son. If he does not profess Him as the Son, then he does not profess Christ. How can he who does not profess Christ profess that Christ came in the flesh?

The Eunomian is the equal and the ally of the Arian, differing only in small matters. The Arians are said to have professed that Christ is at least similar to the Father. Although not equal, He is similar. For the Eunomian, however, He is not even similar. Thus he too denies Christ. For if the true Christ is equal with and similar to the Father, then he who denies that He is equal denies also that He is Christ. Thus whoever contends that He is neither equal nor similar denies that Christ came in the flesh. I ask him, "Did Christ come in the flesh?" "He came," he answers. We assume that this is his confession. Then I ask, "Who was this Christ who came in the flesh? Was He equal with the Father or was He unequal?" "Unequal," he answers. Thus you say that one unequal with the Father came in the flesh. In so doing, however, you deny that Christ came in the flesh, for Christ is equal with the Father.

Listen to what the Sabellian says. "He who is the Son is also the Father." This he says, and it is from this that he stings and injects his venom. He says that Christ is the Father. At one moment He is the Son; at the next moment He is the Father, This is not the true Christ. You are mistaken if you say that this is the Christ who came in the flesh. For since this is not Christ, you deny that Christ came in the flesh.

And what do you say, Photinus? He says that Christ is merely a man, that He is not God at all. You profess His nature as a slave and you deny His nature as God. In His nature as God He is equal with the Father; in His nature as a slave He shares in our human lot. Thus you deny that Christ came in the flesh.

And what of the Donatists? Many of the Donatists profess as we do, saying that the Son is equal with the Father and of the same substance. There are other Donatists, however, who, while professing that He is of the same substance as the Father, deny that He is equal with the Father. What need is there to argue with those who deny that He is equal with the Father? If they deny that He is equal, they deny Him also as the Son, and they deny Christ. If they deny Christ, how can they profess that Christ came in the flesh?