



AURELIAN AUGUSTIN

THEOLOGIAN OF THE WESTERN CHURCH

Christian Biographies
Richard D. Phillips
Second Presbyterian Church

AUGUSTINE'S MASSIVE INFLUENCE

Champion of Sovereign Grace

- At a time when the Roman Empire was falling and barbarians were swarming the walls, Augustine forcefully and beautifully articulated God's sovereign and gracious rule over history.
- Attracted to Christianity because of purity and truth, Augustine surrendered all to the cause of Christ and died valiantly, sacrificing his life for the care of his church

Compelling Defending of the Gospel

- Augustine "was known throughout the Christian world as a God-besotted, biblical, articulate, persuasive shepherd of his flock and a defender of the faith against the great doctrinal threats of his day, mainly Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.





AUGUSTINE'S EARLY LIFE

Born in 354 in Roman North Africa

His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian; his father was a secular middle-class farmer who converted on his death bed

His brilliance obvious from youth, Augustine was sent to schools of rhetoric

- His father “took no trouble at all to see how I was growing in your sign [O God] or whether I was chaste or not. He cared only that I should have a fertile tongue” (*Conf.* II.3).

At school in Carthage, Augustine fell into “a hissing cauldron of lust.”

- “It was my ambition to be a good speaker, for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity” (*Conf.* III, 3).

As a young adult, he took a concubine, with who he had one son.

Became a much-in-demand tutor in rhetoric



AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

From Hedonism to Manichaeism

- Feeling the emptiness of his hedonism, Augustine read Cicero's *Hortensius*, which exalted the quest for wisdom and truth above pleasure.
- Became devoted to philosophy, embracing the dualism of Manichaeism.

From Manichaeism to Neo-Platonism

- Arriving in Milan in 384, Augustine was exposed to the writings of Plotinus and embraced Neo-Platonism, with its emphasis on stoicism and ideal forms. This Platonism moved Augustine from self-deification to the transcendence of the one God.

From Neo-Platonism to Christianity

- Under the preaching of Ambrose of Milan, Augustine questioned his Platonism.
 - "I had my back to the light and my face was turned towards the things which it illumined, so that my eyes, . . . Were themselves in darkness."
 - In Milan I found your devoted servant the bishop Ambrose. . . . At that tie his gifted tongue never tired of dispensing the richness of your corn, the joy of your oil, and the sober intoxication of your wine" (*Conf.* V, 13).



AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

The Barrier of the Love of Sin

- “Lord, deliver my from my sin – but not yet!”

Believing but Not Surrendering

- “Your beauty drew me to you, but soon I was dragged away from you by my own weight and in dismay I plugged again into the things of this world” (*Conf VII*, 10).
- Piper: “The battle would be determined by the kind of pleasure that triumphed in his life.”
- Monica arrived to arrange a Christian marriage, causing Augustine’s concubine to be sent away. Augustine in emotional crisis.
- How shall I find strength to enjoy God more than [sex]. . . Until I embraced the mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ” (*Conf. VII*, 18).



AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

Garden Conversion

- Aware of his bondage to sin, while Christians he knew lived free from it, he entered a garden with his friend Alypius and a book of Paul's writings.
- Hearing children cry, "Take and read!" he opened the book to Romans 13:13-14 and surrendered.

"Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites."



MINISTRY IN NORTH AFRICA

Baptized on Easter, 387, Augustine soon returned to North Africa.

- Attracted to the monastic tradition, and embracing celibacy and poverty, he founded a monastic community

Against his desires, he was summoned to Hippo, first as priest and then as bishop.

Established his monastic order in Hippo, which became the important medieval order of the Augustinian monks (one of whom was Martin Luther).

AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

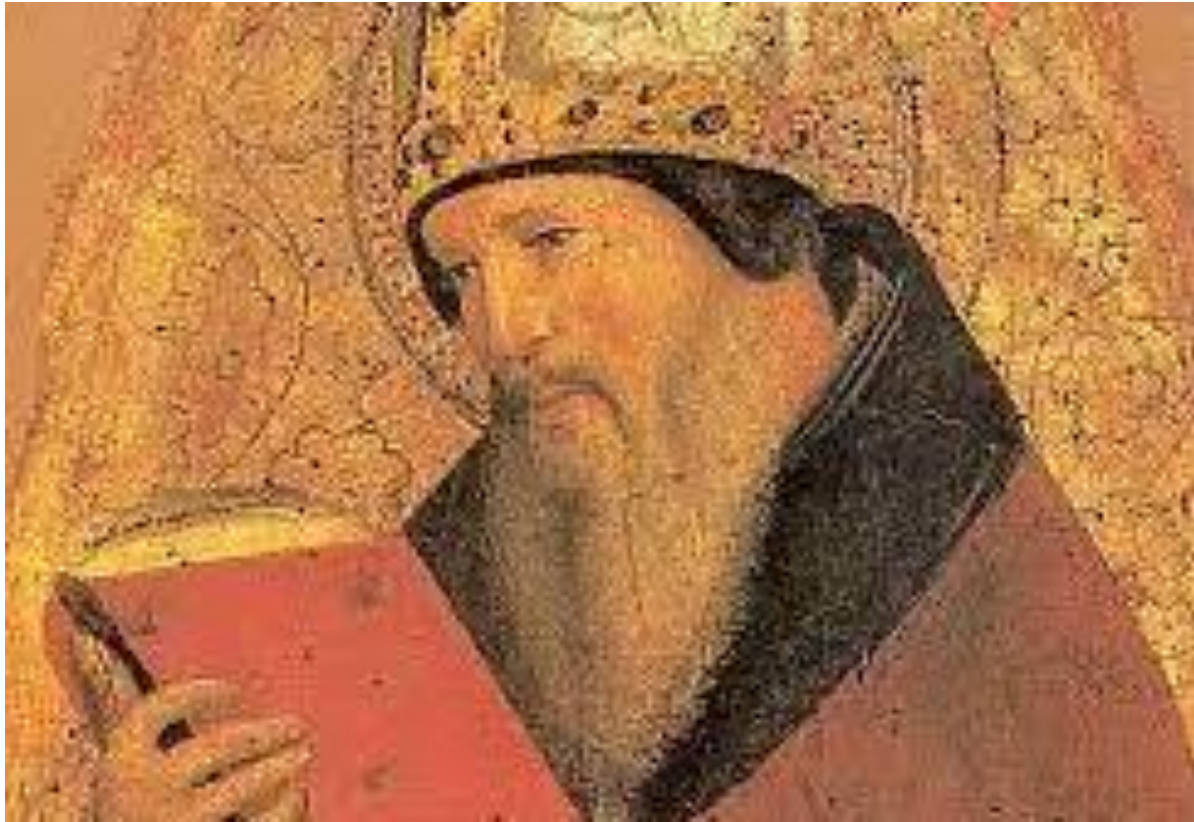
Written between 397 and 400, chronicles Augustine's spiritual journey from a hedonistic youth to his Christian conversion

The classic of spiritual autobiography, providing a first-person account of deliverance from the bondage to sin into the freedom of Christ.

"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee."

"Command, O Lord, what Thou wilt. But grant why Thou Command."





CONFLICT WITH PELAGIUS

Pelagius was a British monk who resented the influence of the *Confessions*.

- Taught that the fall did not take away the free will, and that salvation depends on a decision, with little or no influence of grace.
- “Though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end.”

Augustine replied with a salvo in defense of sovereign grace

- Piper “Grace is God’s giving us sovereign joy in God that triumphs over joy in sin.”

Insisted on Total Depravity

- “Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe?”

In His *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Augustine taught predestination, total depravity, and salvation by grace alone.

Based on Augustine, the Council of Ephesus condemned Pelagianism in 431.

THE CITY OF GOD

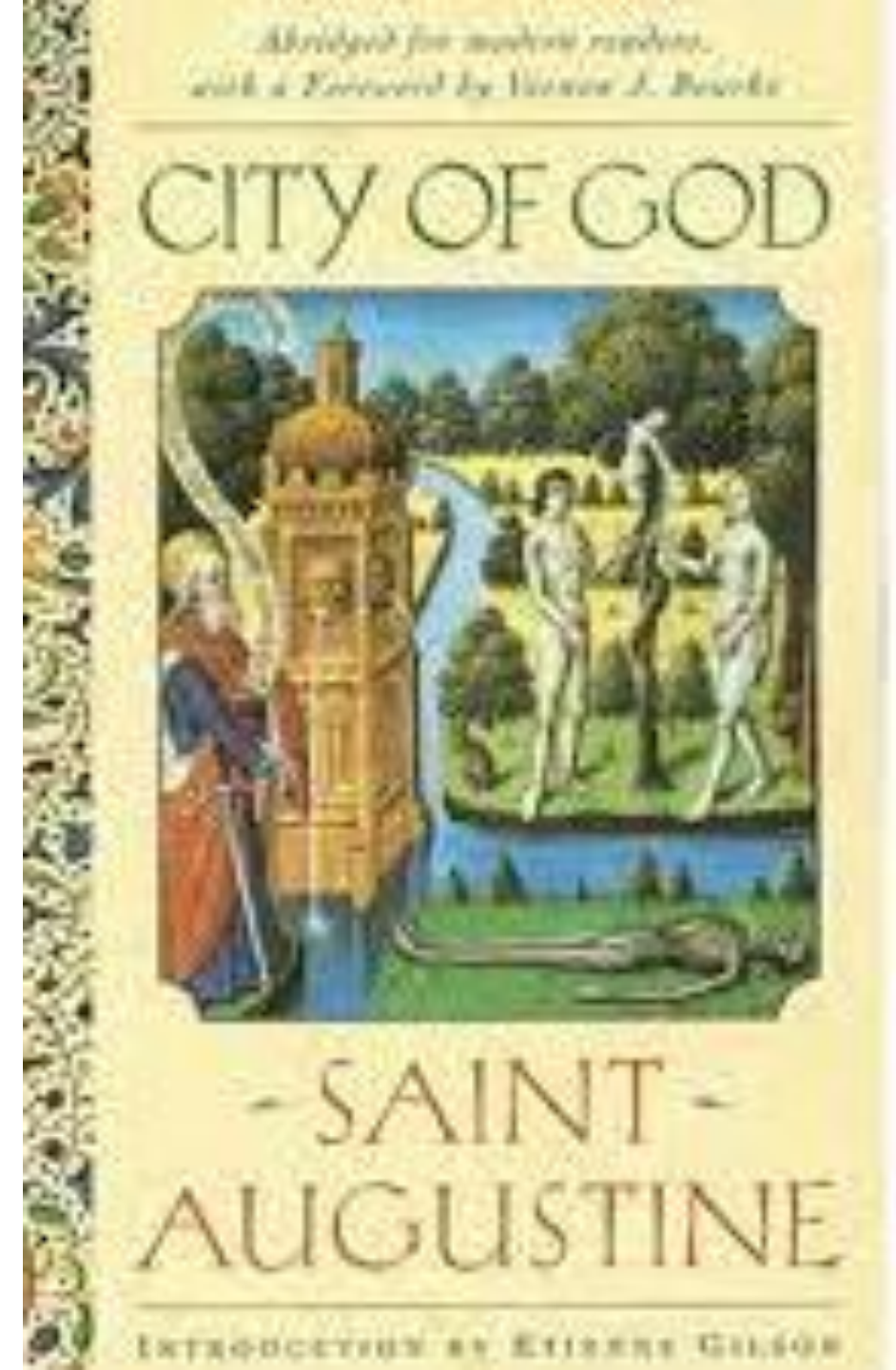
After the sacking of Rome in 410, many blamed Christianity for the disaster.

Augustine wrote to defend the gospel and provide a Christian account of the meaning of history.

Centered human history on the appearing and death of Jesus Christ, God's Son

Taught that history consists of a contest between two kingdoms – cities – with Christ's victory at the end.

- The City of Man is based on love of self with enmity to God; the City of God is based on the love of God with the sacrifice of self."





AUGUSTINE'S FURTHER LEGACY

Other aspects of Augustine's massive legacy:

Defended the Trinity in *On the Trinity*

Strongly opposed Donatism

Preached and published volumes of sermons

Had a direct and powerful influence on Reformers like Luther and Calvin

Set a trajectory of Christian piety and personal devotion

Death in 430 set an example of ministerial faithfulness

FOR FURTHER READING

