

Aurelius Augustine

- Was born in AD 354 in Thagaste in Northern Africa (Current Nigeria)
 - Might be compared to the “Bible Belt” of the US
- Lived between the times of Nicaea/Constantinople, and Ephesus 1/Chalcedon
- He grew up in a place with strong Christian influence
- His father was a Pagan Roman official (Patricius), his mother (Monica) was a devout Christian who constantly prayed for Augustine’s conversion.
 - Monica was one of the great mothers of the church – pursues, prayers for, guides him throughout his life.
- His parents noted they had a very gifted child, sought to give him the best education possible.
- Sent him to Matura until they ran low on funds, so he returned to Thagaste, lived a sinful life
- Story of stealing pears with friends from an orchard, not due to hunger but for fun.
- Was later sent to Carthage to continue studies (17 yrs. old) – political, cultural center of Latin speaking Africa.
- Took a concubine (something like a common law wife) and had a son with her – Adeodatus (given by God)
- Led a life of carnal pursuits
- Studied rhetoric, the most elevated subject of study in the ancient world
- Through reading Cicero (a philosopher), he became interested in the pursuit of truth

Augustine becomes involved with cult of Manichaeism:

- Light (spirit) and darkness (matter) mingled, our reality is the result. Synchronistic, dualistic religion of good vs. evil.
- Scripture was interpreted in a highly literal manner, which led to belief that the Bible was full of bad theology.
- Salvation is equated with the separation of the two, and returning to the light, into which the spirit is absorbed.
- Mingling of these two principles is evil, so humans should not procreate.
- Prophets in this tradition (according to founder) included Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and Mani
- This religion appealed to Augustine for its rationality
- Augustine considered the Bible to be a series of inelegant, Barbaric writings

- Struggled with the problem of evil – if God were good, evil could not be a creation of the divine. Mani claimed it was the creation of darkness, explained things for Augustine
- Augustine eventually moved away from this teaching and became an adherent of Neoplatonism, which sought to reach God through study, discipline, mystical contemplation.

Augustine moves to Rome

- Moved from Carthage to Rome in 375 – a larger City, opens a school of rhetoric
- Doesn't like it.
- Meets Symmachus, learns of an opportunity to teach Rhetoric in Milan, he becomes a professor in Milan of Rhetoric – a post of great political influence. He is 30 years old at this time.
- Augustine's mother persuaded him to listen to the teachings of Ambrose.
- Augustine respected Ambrose for his great rhetorical skills.
- Augustine experiences Ambrose as a friendly man, his love led Augustine to the gospel
- Through Ambrose' teaching, which included allegorical interpretation of the scripture. Augustine began to draw near to the Christian faith, but believed to adhere to it completely would have to give up all pleasures. Prayed: "give me chastity and continence, but not too soon".
- Experienced the anguish of somebody who grew up in a Christian environment, gave up that environment to live the life of a prodigal
- Experienced the anguish of somebody who knows what is right, but wants to keep sinning

Augustine's conversion

- It was during this spiritual struggle, when Augustine entered a garden.
- Famous conversion story in 386 at age of 31. He read in a garden about St. Anthony. Was very impressed, and considering his own inability to live a good life led him to anguish. He has reached the pinnacle of his career, but feels empty.
- While reading Athanasius' Life of Saint Anthony, Augustine heard the voice of a child playing, saying "Tolle lege, tolle lege" meaning "Take and read, take and read."
- Seeing a manuscript lying on the ground, Augustine read from the open page. The passage he read was Romans 13:13, and after reading Paul's admonishment to avoid immorality:

Romans 13: 13-14: Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. (ESV)

- How is it that this text on proper living results in the conversion of the Doctor of grace?
 - He was searching into the Christian faith of his mother, which was speaking to him
 - He was reading the life of St. Anthony
 - He had a Bible near at hand
- After this conviction, he was then baptized along with his son, and then headed back to Northern Africa in 388, intending to live in a monastic retreat.
- At this point his mother Monica became sick and died.
- He gave most of his belongings away, left his common law wife and intended to live a life of prayer and contemplation.

Augustine becomes a Bishop, makes great contributions to the church

- In 391, visited a friend in Hippo
- While there, he attended a church service. The Bishop Valerius requested the congregation to pray for somebody whom God had sent to be their minister.
- Augustine was ordained as Bishop, along with Valerius.
- During this time, he authored many, many works, and his writings made a profound impact upon the Western church.
- Among these works were attempts at refuting Manicheism. These works centered on the authority of scripture, free will and the origin of evil.
- In his *On the Freedom of the Will*, Augustine argued that humans must use their will for the glory of God, but this can only be achieved as the Holy Spirit bestows grace on the will and draws it to God.
- He addressed the problem of evil in relation to that of free will, which although created good, can choose evil, resulting in the evil in the world.
- Augustine put forth many a profound theological insight in his reflective work, *Confessions* (cover birth to age 35, 4 years after his conversion). He was 47 when he wrote this. Later, a friend (Possidius) wrote a biography of his later life. Result, we know a lot.
- Augustine outlines one of the great apologetic and pastoral truths of Christianity: “For You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in You.”

- Augustine wrestles with the nature of evil in man in the Confessions, evolving from a Platonist understanding of evil into a Biblical understanding of it.
- The Platonists viewed evil as a failure to love properly.
- As Augustine reflected on an incident in his childhood when he stole pears, he came to the conclusion that the issue was not his failure to love his neighbor but his love for wrongdoing.
- He observed this desire to do evil existed in children who were too young to articulate their desires, but were still evident from their behavior , gave the example of an envious baby who being still unable to speak, looked bitterly at its foster brother, and pointed out that this is evident to all.
- “The weakness of infant limbs, not its will is its innocence”
- He developed the theory of a just war in response the extreme and violent Donatists

Augustine’s Enduring Theological Formulations

- Turn the other cheek theory for private individuals – no private vindication, but self defense is permissible
 - Just war theory:
 - Not to satisfy territorial ambition, or a mere exercise of power
 - Must only be defensive
 - Must be waged by properly instituted authority (prevented personal vendettas)
 - Motive of love must be crucial
 - Christians may serve in the military
 - Church and sacraments
 - Donatist view: Church must be pure, sacraments void if priest sins
 - Augustine: church is mixture of sinners and saints, wheat and tares
 - All Pastors sin, sacraments are instituted by Jesus, their value is not dependent on sinful people.
 - Depend on the sanctity of the Lordship of Christ, who guarantees the effectiveness of this ministry
 - We can trust in the ministry of the church, and not purity of the minister
 - Christians and culture
 - Power is fleeting, hope is not in this world, but in the Kingdom of Christ
 - We are citizens of Heaven; the Kingdoms of this world cannot be a replacement for this
 - Christians exist in the scope of a larger story.

Augustine's developing doctrinal understandings

- As Augustine cultivated a Biblical understanding, he began to understand the problem of evil and the need for grace.
- As Augustine reflected on the burden of sin, the incapacity of mankind to remove this burden, and God's plan to rescue man from this predicament from before the foundation of the world, he recaptured an important element of salvation and he brought this doctrine of salvation to the forefront of the life of the church.
- These teachings spurred the question: how can we be saved? Augustine battled many different individuals and groups over this question.

Pelagius

- Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine (and a British monk), argued that God's grace was not necessary for salvation, and people could achieve salvation in and of themselves:
- There is no original sin, or sinful nature that causes us to sin. Children have no sin until they decide to sin.
 - Sin was described as "bad habits"
 - We have free will and the ability to do good and not evil
 - Salvation is entirely by works: God has given us the bar to jump over, and we need to jump over it. "Because perfection is possible, it is mandatory"
 - Salvation is achievable, and the duty of all Christians to live perfectly
 - Perfection is required for salvation.
 - People must have the ability to overcome their sin, otherwise the sin would be excusable.
 - No focus on the cross

Augustine's stance on sin, grace, free will

- Augustine noted that the will is sometimes powerless over sin, nor can it accomplish that which its fallen state cannot imagine.
- The power of sin takes hold of our will, and as long as we are under its sway, we cannot rid ourselves of it. The sinner can will nothing but sin.
- Prior to the fall, we had the will to do good or evil, but after the fall, we retain only the will to sin. In Adam we fall.
- We are "not able not to sin"
- In Heaven, we will have a free will, but only the will to not sin. Sin will be as unimaginable as not sinning is now.
- Sin = absence of good, rooted in pride
- Appetites have grown so large; we have an appetite/desire for everything

- How can conversion take place? How can we make the decision to accept grace?
- By divine initiative. God's initiative. God's grace is irresistible. God gives it to those whom he predestined to receive it.
- To sum up his teaching:
- Sin, grace, predestination
- Relationship of humanity, sin, predestination, atonement
- The will is broken, it chooses evil, not inclined to good
- Weight on a scale: scale is broken because of sin. When presented with two options, we choose bad because scale is weighted in that direction.
- We need something to come from the outside to repair this. God's free grace does this.
- The heart of stone is taken out, the heart of flesh is taken in.

Results of these debates

- Augustine decimated Pelagius' argument, affirming the gracious activity of God in salvation.
- Ultimately Pelagianism was rejected.
- The church immediately distanced itself from Pelagianism.
- Following Pelagius, the Semi-Pelagians arose, and they argued that grace comes first in salvation, but human beings must cooperate with this grace.
- Augustine again directed the movement toward the doctrine of salvation by grace alone as found in Scripture.
- Later, The Synod of Orange presided over these issues and decided in favor of Augustine in 529 with respect to the primacy of grace in salvation.
- Despite this, the Semi-Pelagians persisted in the church, influencing the Roman Catholic Church to this very day.

Augustine's theological masterpieces

- Augustine authored multiple very famous works including "Confessions" (a spiritual autobiography that details how God led him to faith; and a theology of history in his work, The City of God.
- This great work was written at the time of the fall of Rome, which impelled him to write it.
- Many during this time claimed that Rome fell because it ceased to worship the pagan gods and turned to Christianity.
- In this, Augustine looked at the whole of history and tried to see how God works in history.
- Ultimately, Augustine argued that history is all about the building of two cities: the city of God and the city of man.
- The city of God seeks to honor God. The city of man seeks to honor man.
- These two cities represent totally different understandings to the meaning of life and how to serve God.
- The city of Rome flourished until its purpose of spreading the gospel had been fulfilled. After this it was left to the destiny of all human cities, to be punished for its sins.
- Augustine argued that these two cities would eventually be separated in a final judgment. In the meantime, the two cities are mixed.
- Was aware that the world was changing, Rome was disappearing, and something else was coming
- With this statement, Augustine clearly advanced the notion that Christians should dominate society, and this view influenced the church over the next millennium as it frequently sought to take control of the state and to persecute unbelievers.

Augustine's Legacy

- Augustine was the last great imperial leader of the western church.
- When he died, the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo, besieging the city
- He was a last glimmer of a dying age, who became the greatest teacher in the age to come, as well as to the protestant reformers.
- He is regarded as the most influential theologian of the western church.
- Entirety of vocabulary of 16th century is inconceivable without Augustine

Preservation against external forces

- During the events discussed above, the Nicene church was threatened not only by the Roman Emperor and those clerics he supported, they were geographically surrounded by Arians



Northern Africa:

- Vandals crossed the straits of Gibraltar in 429, and conquered Northern Africa by 439.
- By 455, they sacked Rome, causing great devastation and persecution against the Nicene/Catholic church.
- After century of Vandal rule, the area was conquered by the eastern Roman Empire, who had orthodox doctrine, but different customs and practices.

Spain:

- The Visigoths also defeated Rome in AD 410, and also held power in Spain.
- Visigoth King Racared (586 – 601) converted to Nicene Christianity in 589 AD. This prompted a mass conversion of the Nobility.

- Arianism soon disappeared.
- Orthodox Christianity gained a strong foothold during this time, and was firmly established until the Muslim invasion of AD 710.

Gaul:

- Burgundian Arians and Frankish Pagans
- Burgundians did not persecute the Catholics
- In 516, King Sigismund was converted to orthodox trinitarian doctrine, and the rest of the kingdom followed him

Franks:

- King Clovis married a Christian princess, promised to convert if his wife's God gave him victory
- On Christmas day, 496 AD, he was baptized, his nobility and people followed him into the faith

Muslim invasion

- Muslims overran Spain, and advanced into Frankish Gaul
- Frankish leader Charles Martel ("The Hammer" led Frankish troops against the Muslims and defeated them at the battle of Tours in 732
- Martel's Son Pepin took the throne with the support of Pope Zacharias and anointed by Bishop Boniface
- Pepin's son Charlemagne was eventually crowned by the Pope

End Result

- Orthodox Christianity was threatened internally by heresies whose version of Christianity denied the key fundamental of the Christian faith – the deity of Christ
- These threats were overcome through the preservation of God for His people, whom he moved to provide greater clarity to key doctrines through creeds
- External threats diminished as Arian Kings adopted the orthodox faith of the peoples, they conquered
- Though the Islamic threat overran much of the territory of the ancient church, their forces were stopped, and they were eventually forced to give up much of their territory