Footprints into Africa

CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

GREAT PREACHERS

THE LIFE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

By: Bishop Warwick Cole-Edwardes

Footprints into Africa

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SAINT AUGUSTINE (354 – 430)

INTRODUCTION

Saint Augustine, formerly known in England as St. Austin, was a noted bishop, Doctor of the church, and the most eminent of the Latin Church Fathers. His spiritual journey from paganism to Christian baptism at the age of thirty-two and the extraordinary range of his activities and writings during the remaining forty-three years of his career have constituted an impressive apologetic theology, and indeed the course of Western culture, have been influenced and periodically revitalized by his insights. He has been hailed as Doctor of Grace and as the first "modern" man; as the formulator of a philosophy of history and as everyman's guide to the mystery of the human condition. His ideas appear in the teachings of John Calvin, Martin Luther, and other Protestant reformers. He influenced such philosophers as Immanuel Kant and Blaise Pascal

AUGUSTINE'S LIFE

Our knowledge of the first years of Augustine's life is mainly derived from his autobiographical 'Confessions'. He was born on 13 November 354 in Tagaste in Proconsular Numidia (now Souk-Ahras in Algeria), a little town about 150 miles south-west of Carthage. His parents were of Romanized Berber origins. They were Latin-speaking citizens of the Roman Empire in the last days of its greatness. His mother Saint Monica, was a devout Christian, whose life of patient virtue finally led her pagan husband to baptism just before his death in 370. His father, Patricius, was an unbeliever and only went to church on important occasions. Monica went to church frequently, and we assume that she took her children with her. She taught Augustine to pray and hold in reverence the sacred name of Christ, but it is doubtful if she did much more. So far as we can tell, Augustine's religious instruction as a child was of a superficial nature and had a permanent effect upon his attitude towards the Bible.

Augustine's parents were chiefly concerned for his worldly advancement. Recognizing him as the most gifted of their three children, they struggled to provide him with a liberal education as preparation for a career in teaching, law, or imperial administration.

The young Augustine disliked Greek and never achieved much proficiency in it, but he was enthralled by Latin literature and soon began to excel in rhetoric and public speaking. After elementary school at Tagaste, he was sent for his secondary education to Madaura, a nearby intellectual centre. Lack of money kept him at home during his sixteenth year. However, in the autumn of 370 he was able to go to Carthage for three years of study through the generosity of Romanianus, a family friend in Tagaste.

At Carthage, Augustine led his class in rhetoric while engaging in love affairs and student escapades. By the time he was eighteen he had acquired a mistress and had become the father of a boy, to whom he gave the pious name, Adeodatus. It should be noted, however, that concubinage was a socially acceptable relationship of the times and that Augustine was loyal to this unnamed woman for the next dozen years. His Carthage dissipations, which later he was to reprove so penetratingly in the light of Christian theology, were nothing unusual in the eyes of his contemporaries. For the young student this settling down to family life seems to have set the stage for the important new interest; the study of philosophy. A deep passion for wisdom was suddenly aroused when he happened to read, in his nineteenth year, Cicero's "Hortensius". This led him to attempt some reading of the Bible, since he remembered his mother's praise of this Book's wisdom and her veneration for Christ. But he found the Bible unintelligible and, to his classical taste, full of crudities. He next turned to Manichaeasm, a fashionable religion which purported to include the "purified" truths of all previous religions within a "rational" system. Meanwhile he began to teach rhetoric, first for a year at Tagaste and then back at Carthage.

In his "Confessions" Augustine dwells on the nine long years of his prodigal addiction to the "empty husks" of Manichaeism and points out how Manichaeism dualism attracted him by ascribing all evil as matter, a "dark" principle opposed to, and hampering, a spiritual principle of "light". Thus mans' material body, rather than his will, was held responsible for sins. This consoling theory eliminated the need for real repentance, though it encouraged honour for certain "elect" who undertook to practice asceticism to overcome the body's influence. Augustine records, also, his fascination with Manichaeism objections to the Old Testament, which furnished him superficial arguments with which to shine in debate against unskilled Christians. The Manichees claimed to rest their doctrines on scientific proof rather than on traditional authority. By his own wayside studies in science, however, Augustine finally began to realize how unscientific some of the claims of the Manichees were; and when their leader, Faustus, could not answer his questions, he lost faith in Manichaeism. This happened in 383, the year in which he also decided to seek a teaching post in Rome to escape the classroom rowdyism characteristic of Carthage pupils.

He stayed in Rome only a year, for he found that his pupils there, while more mannerly, were careless about paying their fees. He was glad to get an appointment as Municipal Professor of rhetoric in Milan. There, outside of class hours, he could make friends at the Emperor's court and hope, perhaps, for an administrative position. He was now exploring the skepticism of the New Academy (an Athenian school of philosophy) despairing of any final truth, since Manichaeism had failed him. But at this point, through reading some Latin translation of Plotinus by the Roman rhetorician, Victorinus, Augustine discovered Neoplatonism.

Here he found his first clear understanding of God as a non-material transcendent Being and an interpretation of evil as simply a deprivation of being. Moreover, Ambrose was Bishop (374 -397) in Milan; and when Augustine attended the Bishops sermons to study their rhetoric, his eyes were opened to the reasonableness of orthodox Christianity. Other

factors which contributed to his conversion were his mother's prayers (she had followed him from Carthage to Milan), his own reading in St. Paul's epistles (now surprisingly intelligible, in the light of Neoplatonism and of Ambrose's teaching), and a conversation with the Bishop's assistant, Simplicianus, from whom he hears the thrilling story of the conversion of Victorinus. Then one day a friend from the palace, Pontitianus, brought news of two young courtiers who had given up worldly advantage to become monks. Their heroic example greatly intensified for Augustine the struggle within his own will. Finally, the mystical hearing of a child's voice in a garden while Augustine was reading in Paul (Romans) brought an end to his hesitation.

He now resigned his professorship and retired for several months to Cassiciacum, at a villa provided by a friend. He was accompanied by Monnica, his son Adeodatus, his brother, two cousins, his friend Alypius, and two pupils. With them he engaged in a study of the Scripture and in philosophical discussions. Having accepted the authority of Christ, he was resolved, as he tells us in his 'Soliloquies' to "apprehend truth not only by believing it but by understanding it." From stenographic records of the group discussions he fashioned several dialogues, modeled on Cecero's 'Tasculan Disputations'. They show Augustine putting Platonism to work in the service of Christian wisdom. At Easter 387 he was baptized in Milan with Adeodatus, whose promising career was to be cut short by death within two years, and Alypius, who was to become bishop of Tagaste in 393.

These three and Monica started out for Africa, but on the way Monica died at Ostia. Her last conversation with her son, expressing a happiness beautifully recorded in the 'Confessions ', provides the serene note on which Augustine closes his autobiography Our knowledge of his later life depends on such facts as we can draw from his letters and treatises, together with a 'life' composed by Possidius to supplement the 'Confessions' Possidius was in close association with Augustine for almost forty years, first as a student in the monastery which Augustine established in 391 after his ordination at Hippo, and later as bishop of nearby Calma.

Possidius tells how Augustine on returning to Africa settled at Tagaste with a few friends in a monastic community and how three years later, during a visit to Hippo Regius, he was snatched up by the aged Bishop Valerius and forced into ordination by popular demand. Since Valerius was a Greek who had found preaching in Latin some what difficult, he was happy to assign his new assistant this task, even though it was not then customary in Africa for a mere presbyter to preach. In all but name Augustine was soon functioning as Bishop of Hippo, a seaport city of some half a dozen churches, and in prestige second to Carthage. By 395 Valerius had arranged for Augustine's consecration as bishop coadjutor and in 396 he died, leaving Augustine sole bishop. During the next thirty-five years Augustine's leadership reinvigorated the Christian community in North Africa, influenced the papacy to condemn Pelagianism, and won at last even the blessing of Jerome in Bethlehem, whose feelings had earlier been ruffled when Augustine dared to question a few of Jerome's scholarly views. Augustine's monastery at Hippo became virtually a theological seminary. Men trained there were called to minister in other African churches, ten of them as bishops. They in turn founded monastic schools

modeled on his. Convents also were founded modeled on the one headed at Hippo by Augustine's sister Perpetua. His pupils were quick to stir Church councils to action against Africa's dominant Donatist party and against the teaching of Pelaguis.

Augustine's own controversial efforts were directed first of all against the Manichees, partly in the hope of converting former friends. Between 389 and 405 he wrote thirteen anti-Manichaean tracts, besides telling his life story in the 'Confessions' published around 397. At Hippo, moreover, the townspeople were eager to hear Augustine debate and by 392 had maneuvered him into a face-to-face encounter with a Manichaean priest named Fortunatus. In a two day debate held at the Baths of Sozius, with the proceedings carefully recorded by a stenographer, Fortunatus found himself backed into questions he could not answer, and soon afterwards he fled. On another such occasion, in 404 Felix the Manichee broke down and confessed himself converted.

Augustine found the Donatists more difficult, since their method was to evade public debate while secretly slandering their adversaries and inciting mob violence, winking even at the so-called Circumcellions who supported them by brigandage. A gang of these ambushed Possidius in 403, though not fatally, and about the same time set for Augustine an ambush he narrowly avoided. The Donatists were schismatic North African Christians who had formed a communion of their own after the Diocletian persecution, alleging on unreliable evidence that certain Catholic clergy had handed over copies of Holy Scripture to Diocletian's officers and thus had betrayed the faith. Accordingly they refused to accept as valid any subsequent sacraments of ordination or of baptism except by their own priests. They were purists and rigorists, who advertised themselves as "the church of the martyrs" and found political support among African nationalists.

Augustine had made overtures to the Donatists for a conference to heal the schism, and he had written briefly against their theory and their slanders of himself. On learning of their injury to Possidius, he supported an appeal to the magistrate and resumed on a larger scale the literary debate. In 404 the Council of Carthage appealed to the Emperor Honorius for protection from violence, and the Emperor replied in 405 with laws against the schism itself. Though Augustine kept urging conciliation, he also justified this intervention by the state. Yet the outrages continued and even increased because law enforcement was lax. Finally, a second appeal from the Catholic bishops brought a tribune from Rome to hold a fact finding conference at Carthage in 411, and the formal hearing was held amid a great assemblage from both camps. It ended in a clear ruling against the Donatists, followed this time by a severe enforcement which completely shattered their party. The most telling speech at the conference was Augustine's documented history of the Donatist schism.

Augustine next turned his attention to a new danger, the seductive doctrine being spread by Pelagius and his disciples. He wrote against it during the years 412 – 421, and again in the closing years of his life. With painstaking arguments he attached the Pelagian attempt to minimize divine grace, exaggerate the liberty of the human will, and deny original sin. Augustine's great contribution was to make plain that without God's continual help the human will is weak and crippled. Grace is needed to regenerate the

will and empower it. On predestination, however, Augustine sometimes spoke incautiously of "predestination to damnation,"or of "irresistible" grace – phrases whose meaning is difficult to interpret and which later Catholic theologians have come to agree should be avoided. They have reaffirmed, instead, Augustine's declarations that God desires the salvation of all men, that His grace does not coerce the will, and that He does not foreordain the commission of sin even though He foreknows the sin.

Apart from controversy, books of other kinds flowed from Augustine's pen, and on Sundays and certain weekdays he preached sermons, which stenographers usually took down. He had to give them time, besides, to judging innumerable cases brought into his Episcopal court, to directing parish charities, and to answering appeal from the sick or the perplexed. The Bishop of Milevis hailed him as "God's own busy bee". When he died on August 28, 430, the Vandals were besieging Hippo, and when later they burned the city they spared only the cathedral and the Bishop's library.

AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

There was a small garden attached to the house where Augustine lodged. He was driven by his inner turmoil to take refuge in the garden, where no one could interrupt his thoughts while trying to deal with his inner turmoil.

It was here that he probed his innermost thoughts and feelings. He examined his heart closely and was reduced to tears. Augustine realized that he was enslaved by his sin. He cried out "How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow?' Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins this moment?"

Augustine was asking himself these questions and crying, when all at once he heard the sing-song of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl he could not say, but again and again it repeated the chorus, "Take it and read, take it and read."

Augustine stopped his flood of tears and stood up, telling himself that this could only be God's command to open His Book of scripture and read the first passage on which his eyes should fall …….

He hurried to the place where he had left his book containing Paul's letters. He seized it and opened it, and in silence he read the first passage on which his eyes fell:
"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Romans 13: 13-14)

He had no wish to read more and no need to do so, for in an instant, as he came to the end of the sentence, it was though the light of faith flooded into his heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled

AUGUSTINE'S WRITINGS

It was through his voluminous writings, by which Augustine's wider influence was exerted, that he entered both the Church and the world as a revolutionary force, and not merely created an epoch in the history of the Church, but has determined the course of history in the West up to the present day. He was already an author when he became a Christian, having published an aesthetical study (now lost), on "De pulchro et apro" in 380. But his amazing literary productivity began with his conversion. His first Christian writings were a series of religious-philosophical treatises, in which he sought to lay the foundation of a specifically Christian philosophy. These were followed by a great number of controversial works against the Manichaeans, Donetists, Pelagians, interspersed with Biblical expositions and dogmatic and ethical studies.

EARLIEST WORKS

Of the Cassiciacum dialogues, two may be quickly noted. "Against the Academics" is a refutation of skepticism. It argues, for example, that the skeptic's reliance simply on probability is impossible without some knowledge of actual truth, since to claim anything as probable is to assert for it a likeness to the truth. "On the Happy Life" goes on to declare that happiness consists not in the mere search for wisdom, but in its attainment. More remarkable than these is the 'Soliloquies' written shortly before Augustine's baptism, in the form of a dialogue between him and his reason. A lovely introductory prayer states his desire to know two things only, the soul and God. Since both are suprasensible, how can they be known? Augustine here resorts to analogy. In simple sense-perception, knowledge arises when the bodily eye of man's mind is directed to a visible object illuminated by corporeal light. Similarly, is not knowledge of God given when the eye of man's mind is directed toward intelligible truths as these are, illuminated by a spiritual light from God? Reason attains its goal in an act of vision in which the soul and God meet, with God providing the light of faith, hope, and love by which the mind can be healed to direct its gaze beyond temporal things. This theory of divine illumination, more fully developed elsewhere, becomes a basic Augustine doctrine.

ANTI-MANICHAEAN WRITINGS

Augustine's arguments against the Manichees can be illustrated from several of his works. "On True Religion" (390), dedicated to Romanianus, takes up the Manichaeism notion of two warring substances in man. Augustine answers with the Biblical doctrine that no life is evil as life, but only by a falling away from the one God who made it. Man thus suffers a loss of wholeness. He suffers the evil of a less ample existence as a penalty for his voluntary sin. "On Free Choice" (388 -395), a dialogue in three books, enlarges on the argument. The cause of evil lies not in anything outside the will but in a perversion of free will. Man has the power of free choice, if only he will do what he can

to seek God's help. Even man's being born in ignorance does not force him into evil, Augustine insists, for the soul is always free to confess its weakness and beg help of God, who will open to those who knock. But the soul that despises Him who can heal, by preferring some temporal good ahead of eternal good, acts against its own nature, corrupts itself and becomes unhappy. Its wretched existence, even then, is better than nonexistence, since good is not extinguished by vice, but simply diminished. "On the Profit of Believing" (391) meets the Manichees on another front, namely their demand that reason has priority over faith. Here Augustine is addressing a friend, Honoratus, whom he had misled into Manichaeism and whom he wishes now to convert to Catholicism. He explains to him why faith must come first, though reason is nobler and in God the ultimate. He cites examples from everyday experience. Is it blameworthy that a child believes his parents before he can prove they are his parents? Or will a teacher of Vergil study to illumine the obscure passages unless first he believes in Vergil's importance? A reader of Holy Scripture, similarly, must believe in their authority before he can make progress in understanding them. To accept faith as reason's guide is, itself, reasonable. Augustine's celebrated statement in "Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manicheus" (396) extends the argument: "I should not believe the Gospel unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved me to do so." That is, it becomes reasonable to accept the Scriptures because of the way the Church testifies to them. Augustine no doubt has Ambrose in mind, from whom he learned how to understand the Bible. Hence repeatedly, but not lengthily in his "Answer to Faustus" (c.400) in thirty three books, Augustine turns his argument in a third direction, the clarifying of troublesome Old Testament passages which the Manichees were blindly misreading.

ANTI-DONATIST WRITINGS

Augustine develops teachings on the sacraments, on the Church and on the role of the state during his controversy with the Donatists. "On Baptism" (c 400) and 'Answer to Patilian' (401-405) present the main points. To refute the Donatist practice of re-baptizing, he argues that baptism in the name of the Trinity, in whatever communion, requires no repetition. It confers grace as being Christ's ordinance and not man's. The Donatists had invoked the authority of St Cyprian of Carthage and of the Council of Carthage in 256, both of whom had declared in favour of re-baptizing heretics and schismatics. Much of Augustine's 'On Baptism', therefore is devoted to making the point that the question had not been worked out in Cyprian's day, but that since then a clearer view of the matter has been established, not only in church custom but by the authority of a general council, to which further support is given by a careful consideration of Scripture and weighing of arguments on both sides. "What truth has declared, that we follow." Moreover, the Catholic communion speaks, not for Africa alone as do not Donatists, but for the Church which is spread throughout the world; and "the whole is always, with good reason, looked upon as superior to the parts." The Donatists are urged to return to the Catholic communion, not to make their baptism valid, but to make it profitable to salvation. They stunt the fruitfulness of grace by their schism, which cuts them off from that unity of the fold through which charity is preserved. In "Answer to

Patilian" Augustine takes up the Donatist concern for a pure and "holy" church. He has no difficulty in showing that if the validity of baptism were to depend on the minister's being free from all stain of sin no recipient could be sure of his baptism. For God alone can judge the conscience of men, and God alone, at the Last Judgment, will separate the true Christian from the false. Meanwhile His church on earth includes bad fish as well as good ones in its dragnet, chaff along with wheat. In this world, moreover, kings have a service which they can render to the Lord. Though some are persecutors, as Petilian had pointed out, he has overlooked others who are friends and supporters of God's people. To these later, Catholics may appeal for help; and the Donatists, who had invoked aid from Julian the Apostate, are in no position to criticize.

ANTI-PELAGIAN WRITINGS

Of the fifteen primary treatises against Pelagius and his disciples, Celestius and Julian of Eclanum, a few may be singled out for mention. 'On the Merits and Forgiveness of sins', (412) is a defense of infant baptism and the doctrine of original sin, in answer to the Pelagian denial of an inherent propensity to sin in the human race. 'On the spirit and the Letter' (412) makes an important distinction between "exterior" grace, the letter of the law and "interior" grace, the spirit of the law. Further, it stresses a distinction between the exercise of the will and the exercise of power. "For as we sometimes will what we cannot do, so also we sometimes can do what we do not will." Freedom lies in the capacity to fulfill, not just in the capacity to choose. Grace is needed to repair nature. In 'On Nature and Grace' (415) this point is elaborated. "Our present inquiry is about the man whom 'the thieves' left half dead on the road, and who being disabled and pierced through with heavy wounds, is not so able to mount up to the heights of righteousness as he was able to descend there from." A sinful condition impedes the human will, whose cure must be begun by Christ, the Good Samaritan. 'On Rebuke and Grace' (426) explains why one man may rebuke another and try to lead him, even though the latter's salvation depends on God's work of grace in the heart. The rebuke is to be applied medicinally, as a penalty for sin, along with prayer that the neighbour may be healed. In this Treatise, Augustine introduces the celebrated distinction between ability to sin (non posses peccare) and ability not to sin (posse non peccare). The latter is what Adam originally had, when God gave him not only a good will but the power to continue to will the good. But Adam, of his own fault, failed to exercise this power. Had he done so, he would have been rewarded by the grace of perseverance. It is this final grace which ensures an inability to sin, and it is offered through Christ, the second Adam.

OTHER MAJOR WORKS

Augustine's most famous work is his "Confessions", an autobiography except, for the last four books, which probe the nature of memory and of time. The form of the whole is a long prayer to God, to whom Augustine is confessing his life's faults and God's graces, in order that he may testify to God's providence and benefit his fellow men. As an autobiography, it introduces a new literary form. Facts are selected, not for their external

descriptiveness, but as a having theological meaning for the pilgrimage of the human soul.

'On the Trinity' (399 – 419) is Augustine's chief contribution to dogmatic theology. Its fifteen books provide a systematic exposition of the doctrine which Augustine regarded as most basic to Christianity. He begins with exegesis, examining and reconciling the many passages in Scripture from which the Nicene formula is deduced. Then follows a defense of the Trinity on philosophical grounds, bringing in various analogies drawn from nature and in particular from the operation of the human mind. Trinality (the doctrine of the three persons in one God) is shown to be intrinsic to the Divine Essence, and necessary to God's self-contemplation and self-communion as a society of persons wholly independent of the universe. His essence is not prior to the persons, either in the order of nature or of truth, but is simultaneously and eternally in and with them. Miracles are discusses incidentally in Book III and the atonement in Book 1V and XIII.

'On the Literal Meaning of Genesis' (401 – 414) explores in its twelve books the deepest implications of the Creation story. Transcending its anti-Manichaean controversy, which had first drawn Augustine's interest to Genesis; it stands at an exegetical masterpiece in its own right. It sets forth, along with much else, Augustine's important concept of 'rationes feminales', by which he seems to anticipate modern notions of evolution but at a more profound level. For he understands the first verse of Genesis to mean that in the beginning God created "seed like principles" or "hidden causes", from which were later to be brought forth visible, at appropriate times, during the course of history, individuals of various species. He does not think that human beings, as we know them, have existed from the beginning of the world. Rather man was made in the beginning "potentially," in order to be given actual form and visible existence "in his time". The six days of Genesis are to be understood mystically.

THE CITY OF GOD

Alaric, leader of the West Goths, after two previous marches on Rome, captured and ransacked the city in 410. The event sent psychic shock waves throughout the empire. Eternal Rome had fallen! Since Christianity had been in ascendancy for less than a century, it was blamed for the fall. The Pagan gods were venting their wrath. In 412 Augustine began writing 'The City of God' (considered by many to be his greatest work) in order to show that destruction was the logical outcome of a civilization like that of Rome. The twenty-two books of this monumental opus were not finished until 426, just four years before the death of Augustine, in 430 when the Vandals were besieging Hippo.

Augustine, himself, explains the outline. The first five books refute the argument that the destruction of Rome resulted from the ban that Christianity placed on pagan cults. The next five books expose the worship of pagan deities as a poor investment for life after death. These ten books are highly polemical, journalistic in style, and primarily negative. The next twelve books, Augustine noted, are "devoted expressly to meeting the criticism that we have refuted other positions but have not declared our own." Books 11 – 14 trace

the rise of the divine and earthly cities; 15 – 18, their growth, and 19 – 22, their proper ends.

Augustine's analysis of the two cities is set against the backdrop of God's action in history. History has its beginning in the creation, its climax in the coming of Christ and its conclusion in the Day of Judgment. History has a beginning and an end; it is not an eternal repetition of cycles. The conflict between the city of God and the city of man provides the dramatic action. The real causes of worldly catastrophe stem from assertions of arrogant pride and self sufficiency, seen first in the revolt of the angels and then in the rebellion of man. God is the source of all good, but in the Fall, man willfully turned to himself to the world of creation. In this disorientation man can achieve only relative good – of which the city of man is one. But God grants His grace to a selected few who, in directing their love toward God, form the heavenly city. The two cities, co-existing in this world, vie with each other throughout the Old Testament and will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment, but in the church, the city of God has begun its fulfilment

The earthly city and the heavenly city, relatively identified in this world with the state and the church respectively, and formed by love (amor). The acquisitiveness of love motivated all of man's actions. Love directed toward the creature is 'cupiditas'; it can never result in complete happiness. Love directed toward the creator is 'caritas'; it alone holds the possibility of complete happiness. Love of self (the creature) to the exclusion of God creates the earthly city; love of God to the exclusion of self creates the heavenly city. The state is not completely bad and the church is not completely good. They are approximations of the two cities.

Profound pessimism pervades Augustine's conception of all earthly institutions. Man is sinful, rendering all his achievements less than good. This roots in the Fall of Adam and the subsequent contamination of the whole human race. But even before the fall, God predestined some to be saved by His irresistible grace; these constitute the true city of God. Through the grace of God they seek happiness, not in creaturely ends, but in God himself, who alone is the source of eternal happiness. All other – the great majority of men – seek happiness in inferior objects and continually meet with pathetic failure. Men are filled with self-centered drives for power, glory, wealth and pleasure. They lust, hate, connive, deceive, pretend and cheat. Each one is his own standard and anarchy would result except that men have enough enlightened self-interest to establish some order for the sake of self-preservation. Thus the state came into existence to keep people from exterminating themselves. God permitted – did not create – the earthly city or state. The state is man's utilitarian means of curbing greed. It guarantees relative peace and order and relatively secures men against extermination; its basis is self-seeking. It exists because of the immortality of people; it is a dyke against sin.

Men, in their self-centeredness, vie for advantages. The strong conquer; the weak submit to find some peace rather than annihilation. Kingdoms rise and fall; their foundations make it impossible for them to endure. In his providence, God allows some to last longer than others, depending on the extent to which they promote the relatively higher goods,

such as justice and liberty. A kingdom without justice is but piracy on a large scale. But in the end all kingdoms in this world are ephemeral.

Augustine conceives of God saving individuals, not political regimes, for the Christian's home is not in this world where coercive power prevails. Yet Christians are not to abandon worldly affairs; they are to submit to political authority; Christ himself, whose kingdom was not of this world, submitted to Pilate. They are to help mitigate violence, curb sin, check injustices, not for themselves – for Christians really need no government – but because God has commanded them to love him and their neighbours. Secular society ruled by good men is better than that ruled by bad men. The Christian should tolerate imperfect governments, co-operate, and obey, so long as they command nothing contrary to the word of God. Thereby God exercises the righteous. Christians are pilgrims in the world, living now by faith, using the state's peace, acknowledging the state's relative righteousness, but looking to the hereafter.

Over against culture Augustine places Christian eschatology. History moves by the providence of God toward the elimination of the state and the enthronement of the heavenly city as the one and only final society. Only in God can be found the happiness, peace, and order that all men seek. This is profoundly presented in Book 19. Augustine believed in resurrection. At death, the soul and the body separate; but on the final day of resurrection all decayed bodies will in an instant rejoin souls. Thus Augustine rejects a final dichotomizing of soul and body. The misery and eternal death of the damned will be their estrangement from the life of God. The happiness and eternal life of the saved will be just the opposite. .

The final and eternal union of soul and body as seen in the Enchiridion and the City of God indicated the extent to which Augustine basically rejected Manichaean and Neoplatonic thought. For Augustine the body is not extraneous to the real person, even though Augustine believed that in this world, because of sin, ascetic practices are necessary to reorganize man's priorities – the ultimate goal being God. He maintained a dualism of creator-creature, not soul-body. Instead of eternal emanation or eternal realms, Augustine depicts a personal God whose creative act brought the universe into being. God created matter, it is not evil. Members of the Trinity are not emanations of the One; they are non-substantial, equal. To speak of one is to speak of all, nevertheless, Augustine makes numerous allusions to the eulogizes Neoplatonism. This is especially strong from the time of Augustine's conversion to the writing of the 'Confessions', and then it fades, leaving behind a tint, if not a discoloration, on the doctrinal fabric woven by Augustine the theologian-churchman. Neoplatonism influenced Augustine to love God for the sake of self-fulfilment, whereas the New Testament emphasis self-giving as a consequence of what God has done for man.

DE CATECHIZANDIS RUDIBUS

The 'De Catechizandis Rudibus', written in 400, is addressed to Degratias, a deacon of Carthage. "On the Art of Catechising, for the use of those who are ignorant of Christian Doctrine". Is the sense of this title. Degratias had admitted to Augustine the

embarrassment and discouragement he had more than once experienced in his duties as catechist, and had asked him for his advice and a system. Augustine begins with kind consolation, showing him there is nothing exceptional in his case. That thought is always in advance of its expression was a fact well known to all who speak or write, and required to be somewhat simple to be disturbed over translating badly into speech what one felt strongly:

> *"I myself am almost always dissatisfied with what I have said. I would like to say something better; I play with this something in my mind before trying to express it in speech. And when I perceive the inferiority of this expression I suffer because my tongue renders so imperfectly the sentiments of my heart".*

The essential thing was to love what one was doing; and very usually the pleasure which one derived from the task of teacher passed on to the listeners and became the measure of the attention they would give. There was nothing that communicated itself so easily as tediousness if there be no alacrity proceeding from a cheerful teacher.

For the teaching of Holy Scripture, of the Old Testament especially, experience suggested certain principles with which it was good to inspire oneself. In the first place, not to put oneself to the pains of either relating or even summarizing all the facts included therein, but to choose a few of the most wonderful and most moving, and then extract all the juice, and be satisfied with brief illusions for the rest. To inculcate in their minds the essential idea that everything in Scripture, up to the coming of Christ, was a figure of what had been realized in Christ and his Church. Once this truth was grasped it mattered little if the details were omitted. Also, to make the catechumens understand that the Redemption was essentially a work of love, and that human love ought to respond to divine love by passionate obedience to the divine law. To question each one as to the personal motives which were urging him to the faith in order to make him feel God better in the changes through which his own experiences were passing. Lastly, not to be afraid of insisting on the promises of the Resurrection which were so much laughed at by pagans and skeptics, and upon the punishments beyond the grave, not forgetting to forewarn the simple of the scandal which the feebleness of some of those already in the Church might offer to them.

Such is the general system recommended by Augustine. But he takes pains, also, to foresee and study certain special cases.

First, the case of the merely educated man (liberalibus doctrinis excultus) who reaches Christianity. It was probable that a postulant of this quality had already occupied himself for some time with matters concerning the faith. There was no need therefore to weary him with making him go over the rudiments. But it would be a good thing to enquire what books he had read and how, and when, his aspiration towards the faith took shape. If by chance these have been heretical works, he should enlighten him upon them by basing himself on the authority of the universal church. Certain authors, Catholics who

were dead, favoured heresy, however, in some pages of their writing; he must equally know in what points their views were incompatible with true orthodoxy.
More delicate was the case of the catechumen who was an "intellectual", a former pupil of grammarians and rhetoricians, and already initiated into all the curiosities of the mind. The first step to attempt was to give him a taste of Christian humility, and to show him that it was a more serious thing to sin against good morals than against grammar. If he was successful in piercing the envelope containing his classical prejudices, in asking him to understand the seriousness of human life, and the greater importance of what one does than of the refinements of the intellect, a considerable step would have been made. As regards Holy Scripture, the taste for this could not be given to people of this kind except by representing it to them as a book of mystery, fruitful in deep meanings upon which the intellect must exercise itself in a broad manner. This is a significant passage which helps one to penetrate the state of mind of the lettered pagans, and explains the fondness of the Christian interpreters for allegorical exegesis.

> *"One must make them see how great is the profit from these matters which are hidden beneath a veil, and for that very reason are called mysteries, and how much these obscure riddles sharpen a love for truth and dissipate the weariness and distaste inspired by any notion too easy to discover."*

Lastly, Augustine enlarges upon the disposition of mind in which the catechist should endevour to place himself in order to react against moments of dryness and carelessness. He shows him how to arouse the attention of a class which has become a little sleepy and how to keep up their spirits. As a conclusion to the treaties, he gives a specimen "instruction" for the use of uneducated postulants, which is simple, direct, practical, and wonderfully adapted to the minds of common people.

DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA

We have already marked the importance of the 'De Doctrina Christiana' from the point of view of the destinies of the old learning during the preceding centuries of Christianity. There are certain notions developed in this work which are worth while drawing attention to again, all the more that Augustine, having completed his work three years before his death, must have given them in their final form.

Augustine's object was to provide a method of interpreting the Scriptures both for the understanding of the test itself and also for giving an account of the results attained (modus inveniendi quae intellegenda sunt et modus proferendi quae intellecta sunt).

Of the first three books, which are of an altogether technical character, only a few features need to be specified here. In chapter 10 of book 2, Augustine recommends the Christian exegetist to learn Greek and Hebrew for cases where the Latin translations appear obscure or doubtful. He was ignorant of Hebrew himself. We remember that he

had not supported St Jerome when the latter made his vigorous attempt at 'Hebraica veritas'. Some change had thus come over his sincere mind; he no longer limited the investigations of the exegetist to the Latin translations, nor even to the Septuagint – which, nevertheless, still remained, in his eyes, the privileged version.

In Chapter 15 of Book 2 we find the famous passage on the 'Itala', which has been the cause of much vexatious confusion. St Augustine mentions the multiplicity of Latin versions of the Bible, some very servile, others rather more free, which latter he prefers. There was one to which he assigns the palm, the 'Itala', in which clearness was united to a scrupulous fidelity; "Among the translations we must place the 'Itala' above all others for it comes closest to the words, and the idea stands out clear, in it. In "ipsis autem interpretationibus Itala ceteris praeferatur; nam est verborum tenacior cum perspicuitate sententiae."

What exactly was this Itala? Many different answers have been given. To Ronsch, the 'Itala' was …. The 'Afra', a version of African origin! Other modern critics, F.C. Burkitt, for instance (The old Latin and the Itala, in Texts and Studies), and more recently still, Dom de Bryne, have wished to identify the 'Itala' with St Jerome's version. In the 7th century this was already the interpretation of Isidore of Seville. This gives rise to such great difficulties that it must be rejected deliberately.

The 'Itala', as its name indicates, could be no other than a version accustomed to be used in the "diocese" of Italy, which at the time of Augustine included Verona, Aquileia, Brescia, Ravenna and Milan, From the moment that Augustine put it forward against the other translations which were current in large numbers ("Latinorum interpretum infinita varietas," he wrote in the De Doctrina Christiana, 2, 16), it is altogether unreasonable to attribute this name to the Latin translations anterior to St Jerome taken in bulk, and it is an erroneous assignment which must at last be given up.

In interpreting the scriptures, all the resources of profane knowledge, with the exception of those confined to superstition, would not be superfluous. Nevertheless, Augustine is careful to mark that the Bible, to a certain degree, surpassed all other books: "Nam quidquid homo extra didicerit, si noxium est, ibi damnatur; si utile est, ibi invenitur."

In Book 3 he indicates with much minuteness the different ways of solving the difficulties which result from the letter of the Scriptures, or from the apparent sense of certain passages which are disconcerting as regards morality. Allegorical exegesis should render good service in the last case.

No interpretation which set forth the 'caritas Dei et proximi', could be altogether erroneous. He counsels the use of the seven rules of Tyconius the Donatist which were excellent notwithstanding the partial heterodoxy of their author.

Book 4 is very important from the point of view of the literary ideas of St Augustine. He recommends the Christian professor to study rhetoric. When any technique of eloquent phraseology was encountered it should be assimilated, lest a bad service be done to these

interests of truth by excluding it with less skill than that shown in the passage it was intended to combat. To instruct, to please, to touch, were in the opinion of Augustine, as of Cicero, the ends of eloquence. But it was only in St Paul and the prophets that he sought his examples. According to him, Scripture offers specimens of every variety of style. It is lawful to follow the models presented in it, or those put forward by the best Christian writers, such as St Cyprian of St Ambrose. But the rule governing all presentation of the truths of faith was clearness; the susceptibilities of good language must not prevail against that fundamental law. If one spoke, it was in order to be understood.

AUGUSTINE'S LETTERS

Of the 276 letters of St Augustine, of which we posses 53, have reference to his correspondents. This series is spread over forty years (from 386-7 to 429): it therefore only reflects in a very incomplete manner Augustine's immense activity as a letter writer.

His letters do not possess the literary and brilliant turn of those of St Jerome. There are no animated scenes and no biting satires. He only very rarely betrays himself or becomes expansive. Sometimes we meet with a slight trace of malice, but he very soon recovers himself, being entirely taken up with his purpose and bent solely on the demonstration he wishes to give.

They are of varying length. Some are compressed into short notes. Others take the form of veritable treatises which can only be classed as letters from the fact of the names which appear at the beginning and end. For instance 'Ep, clxxxv' to Count Boniface, which St Augustine in his 'Retractions' himself entitles "Liber de correctione Donatistarum".

Letter 280 is still further removed; it is a stenographic report of a meeting held in the Church of Peace in Hippo on 26 September 426, at which Augustine obtained the assent of his flock to the priest Heraclius being his successor in the Episcopal chair of that city

From the point of view of the history of religion, and even that of civilization, this collection is of first importance. Year by year we feel the prestige of Augustine growing. He is the revered Pope to whom the Emperors, themselves, judged it indispensable to address a copy of the official letters which they sent to the Primate of Carthage. He was consulted on every side, and these enquiries, even on the most delicate and sometimes preposterous matters, brought forth replies full of forbearance. He gives comfort and advice with eagerness and inexhaustible kindness, and is as ready to provide a community of religious women with a detailed rule of life, as to treat of the great questions of grace, free will, or the lawfulness of a career as a soldier.

THE SERMONS OF AUGUSTINE

St Augustine was not accustomed to write out beforehand the sermons he was to deliver, except on rare occasions. He would not have had the time to do that. He contented himself with a preliminary meditation bearing principally on the texts from Scripture which he intended were to form their structure. If we are to believe his biographer, Possidius he sometimes even abruptly changed his subject under the pressure of some unexpected circumstance. Stenographers, sometimes the faithful themselves, took down his words. This is how a certain number of them have survived. Victor, of Vita, informs us that this ran away with much of his time. Among the sermons to which Possidius, Cassiodorus and others allude, there are some which do not figure in our very incomplete collection. To make up for this, many were fraudulently written under Augustine's name. This task of modern editors has been to separate the genuine from the false. Unfortunately the valuable revision represented by the 'Retractations' is wanting in his sermons and letters.

The interest offered by these sermons is very unequal. Many are made up merely of paraphrases of verses from the Bible over which the attention of the most zealous reader wavers a little. The interest revives upon seeing rebukes he delivers to them. The language in which he speaks is curiously composite. The methods of rhetoric betray themselves on more than one page; there are alliterations, metaphors, plays upon words, etc; but he approaches closely turns of phrase which are in distinctly popular language wherein we see certain marks similar to those in use in language of Latin origin. There should be much material in the sermons for reconstructing life in Africa at the beginning of the 5th century, the survivals of paganism, the relations between the pagans and Christians, as well as the frenzy for public shows and the sensual ardour of those races upon whom Augustine assayed unweariedly to impose the law of Christianity, with its refinements and austerities.

AUGUSTINE'S BELIEFS

His beliefs can be divided into three main groups:

i. God and the soul
ii. Sin and grace
iii. The church and the sacraments

GOD AND THE SOUL

Augustine's study of Neo-Platonism convinced him that God existed in the soul of every human being. He believed that people should direct their attention to God and not be distracted by the cares and pleasures of the world.

SIN AND GRACE

Augustine preached that people could not change their sinful ways unless helped by the grace of God. He believed that God chooses only certain individuals to receive His grace. This belief forms part of the doctrine called 'Predestination or election'

THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

Augustine believed that people could not receive God's grace unless they belonged to the church and received the sacraments. A group of clergymen in northern Africa said that grace could not be given unless the clergy itself was perfect. But Augustine declared that God could bypass human weaknesses through the sacraments. Augustine's longest book, 'City of God' presents the history of mankind as a struggle between those who depend on God and those who rely on themselves.

CONCLUSION

Augustine's greatness lies in the synthesis he achieved of Christianity and classical learning. He mastered, criticized, and readapted the liberal arts of his age, using them as handmaids to Christian theology. His theology was Biblical and reinforced by an astounding memory for hundreds of texts, from which he could draw at will to weave illuminating chains of apt quotations. Taking as his motto Isaiah 7: 9 in the Septuagint, "Unless you believe you shall not understand," he appealed to the authority of Scripture as his key for probing both the cultural issues of his time and the inner abyss of his own experience. From Scripture he took as his first principle, charity, invoking it to set in order the scale of human loves and to give final meaning to all vehicles of language and thought.

'Noverim me, noverim te' to know God, and to know the human soul formed the twofold object towards which the mind of Augustine was drawn with an ever fresh impetus. He was the most philosophic of the fathers of the Primitive Church. We will say more: among the Latin Fathers he is the only one who really possessed speculative genius and the gifts of a close thinker. He embodied some of the purest sources of the old philosophy, especially those of Platonism; but he searched into them with a gaze that was too 'clairvoyant' not to enrich with his own personal contribution their lofty lessons which he made his own.

Moreover, his philosophy did not pride itself on any independence. He made his submission resolutely to the faith and to the church. Augustine accepted whole-heartedly the authority of Catholicism, and all his dialectic efforts were used only to justify it in a rational manner, and to make it understood by those who had not yet felt its benefits. The Bible and the Church were for him the very foundations of truth, and every construction not based upon them seemed in his eyes destined to ruin. Notwithstanding, he

appreciated learning, and was less distrustful of it than a St Hilary or a St Ambrose; he would not subject his faith to it, but his mentality in deciphering its riddles, and his life.

Minds inclined to be critical find more satisfaction in the works of St Jerome than in his. His very humility sometimes rendered him credulous, and Manichaeism had made the minutiae of exegesis excessively distasteful to him. The vigorous mind of Jerome had more defensive power than Augustine's and greater resistance to what was unacceptable. But when detachment from self was in Augustine, what true modesty in face of the admiration which his contemporaries were not sparing in showing him, what passionate flights, what ardent meditations! He was all charity and all love.

In his letter to St Bernard, Peter the venerable calls him 'Maximus post apostolos ecclesia rum instructor.' Not that certain of his teachings did not provoke bitter opposition. But his thoughts have become as it were the substance of Christian literature; they have been present in the thick of all battles of the spirit during the centuries past.

G L O S S A R Y

ALAGRITY - Cheerful willingness

ALARIC - King of the Visigoths

ALLEGORY - A literary, dramatic, or pictorial representation, the apparent or superficial – sense of which both parallels and illustrates a deeper sense.

AMBROSE - Bishop of Milan. Author and composer of hymns.

ALLUSION - An indirect, but pointed or meaningful reference.

CARTHAGE - An ancient city and state on the northern coast of Africa, nine miles north east of Tunis.

CATECHIST - A person who catechizes, especially one who instructs catechumens in preparation for baptism

CATECHUMEN - One who is being taught the principles of Christianity

CECERO - Roman statesman and orator

CORPOREAL - Of a material nature

DICHOTOMIZING - To separate into two parts or classifications

DONATIST - A member of a schismatic Christian sect that arose in North Africa in the fourth century

EMINENT - Towering above others

ENCHIRIDION - A handbook; manual

EPHEMERAL - Lasting for a brief time

EPISCOPAL - Pertaining to a bishop or bishops

EPOCH - A particular period of history, especially one regarded as being in some way characteristic, remarkable, or memorable.

ESCHATOLOGY - A branch of theology that is concerned with the ultimate or last things, such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

EULOGIZE - To write or deliver a eulogy about or for; praise highly, extol.

EXEGESIS - Critical explanation or analysis, especially interpretation of the Scriptures

FAUSTUS - A magician and alchemist who sells his soul to the

		Devil in exchange for power and worldly experience.
GENRE	-	A distinctive class or category of literary composition
HERETIC	-	A person who holds controversial opinions in any area; especially, one who publicly dissents from the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.
INCULCATE	-	To teach or impress by forceful urging and frequent repetition.
INTERPOLATED	-	To insert (additional or false material) in a text.
MANICHEANISM	-	The syncretic dualistic religious philosophy taught by the Persian prophet Manes about the third century, combining elements of Zorcastrian, Christian and Gnostic thought.
NEO-PLATONISM	-	A philosophical and religious system developed at Alexandria in the third century, based on the doctrine of Plato and other Greek philosophers, combined the elements of original mysticism and some Judaic and Christian concepts.
PELAGIANISM	-	The theological doctrine propounded by Pelagius, a British or Irish monk, and condemned as heresy by the Roman Catholic Church in 416 Included in its tenents were denial of original sin And affirmation of man's ability to be righteous by the exercise of free will.
POSTULANT	-	To assume the truth or reality of, with no proof, especially as a basis of an argument.
RHETORIC	-	The study of elements used in literature and public speaking, such as content, structure, cadence, and style.
RHETORICIAN	-	An expert in, or teacher of rhetoric.
SCHISM	-	A separation or division into factions, especially a formal breach of union within a Christian church.
TREATISE	-	A formal account in writing treating systematically of some subject.

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