

Augustine - "Confessions" - Books 1-4

I Why start with "Confessions" (Testimony)?

- A. first "autobiography" but it is really not an autobiography is it?
- B. fits the nature of the group
- C. encourages our own "confession, testimony"
- D. shows theology as lived God-talk
- E. cannot understand Christianity in the West without understanding

Augustine and cannot understand Augustine without reading "Confessions"

"All theology is autobiography" – what do you think of this statement (made by a 20th century pastor)

What are your early impressions of this book? What makes it seem "ancient" and what makes it seem modern?

Have you ever started (or finished) something similar to "Confessions"?

II What makes "Confessions" so great?

- A. Historical
- B. Psychological
- C. Philosophical
- D. Theological
- E. Conversion Story
- F. Setting of the early church

This is why it is read in literature classes to this day; this is why one reads it to gain a picture of what it was like to be a Christian and to live in the ancient world. This "type" of story remains one of the most popular still Can you think of other examples of journeys like Augustine's?

III Augustine's process of writing

- A. process of writing was a group activity
- B. process of reading was also a group activity
- C. Augustine's Confessions (Garry Wills p.2-5)

D. Augustine's writing career (5,000,000 words)

"If anyone says that he has read everything Augustine has written, he is a liar". It seems that Augustine spent all his days (similar to Jerome) in a cave, writing, writing, writing.....do we know if this was so?

From what you have read (or as you continue to read) can you find instances when Augustine (as a young man or a middle aged man, or an aging man) was alone? Can you tell us some of the groups of people that he belonged to, or started, or ministered unto?

IV Background to Augustine's writing of "Confessions"

- A. Augustine is a bishop
- B. In Hippo, Africa (modern day Algeria, near the Sea) 30,000 people
- C. Living in the monastery that he founded
- D. In the "Bible Belt" of the later Roman Empire
- E. He is 43, 10 years after baptism, 6 years after ordination, 1 year after consecration as bishop of Hippo

There are some personal reasons Augustine writes his "Confessions" – do you know of any?

Can you see the way that Hebrew poetry has affected Augustine's writing?

V Augustine's Duties at the time of writing the "Confessions"

- A. Monastery of "clerics" (Augustine as Mentor, Edward Smither p.149)
- B. Augustine's Sermon # 340:1
- C. Preaching
- D. Overseeing with Authority the church
- E. Presiding over sacraments
- F. Serving as a judge
- G. Administering church property and gifts
- H. Participation in church councils

It is certainly a very busy life and yet Augustine ends up becoming the church's intelligent answer to the heresies of Manichaeism, Donatism, Pelagianism,

Arianism. He is a hinge that swings us away from Greek / Roman philosophy toward the “City of God” that would become central to the church’s faith and life. Thus, of all the church fathers – he casts the longest shadow – even profoundly affecting the Reformation over 1,000 years later (Luther was an Augustinian monk quite familiar with Augustine as was Calvin – ditto the Medieval Roman Church).

VI Confessions (the Testimony) the end shedding light on the beginning

A. How Augustine set up his book (1-9)

B. How Augustine set up his book (10-13)

C. Book 10:1-3,5,8

The importance of memory is stated, restated, meditated upon, exemplified, prayed about and then stated again. Memory is crucial to Augustine’s Confessions, for obvious reasons (35, 38)

D. Book 10:39-70 (I John 2:15,16)

How Augustine differs from other “fathers’ in his self-examination.

How he ends his self-examination (10:66-70)

E. Book 11-13 Set up to reflect the Book of Genesis and the Trinity

The whole purpose of his confession, stirring up his memory to think through his sins, journeys, God’s grace and judgments is so that he can be ready to enter the holy place of God’s word (11:1-4) and reach the Sabbath rest (13:50-53)

“Augustine thinks in questions”. (Karl Jaspers)

Have you ever “cleansed the temple” as Augustine does here? Is this some legalistic activity for super-strict Christians? Is it possible? Augustine’s letter to Proba (Letter 130) helps us see why he thought it so important to our prayer life to feel need, to confess who and what we are and where we are going.

VII Confessions – early chapters

A. famous opening

An opening that, similar to Hebrew poetry, is going to be seen from so many angles in the books to follow.

B. childhood (Book 1)

How would Augustine know some of these details about an infant? (1:8,11)
Do you find some of his “confessions” pathetic, or monkish, or melancholic?

C. language (1:19-23)

Interestingly, modern language experts agree with Augustine’s description of how language is learned. Why didn’t he learn Greek? Does this have any ramifications down the road? In what language are all his books, letters written?

D. “conforming to a deforming society” (1:25-31)

Sound familiar?

Let’s discuss Augustine’s family:

Monica: What do we know about her?

Did Augustine have siblings?

Did Augustine have children? Wife? Concubine?

Augustine’s “The Teacher” is an entertaining, witty dialogue (like Socrates, Plato) between Augustine and Adeodatus (Godsend) written after their baptism but before Augustine’s call as a priest (and then a bishop). Godsend was 16 years old and the whole thing was written down by stenographers. He would die about a year after and Augustine, in the last book he wrote Augustine quotes Cicero: ‘Surely what Cicero says comes straight from the heart of all fathers, when he wrote, *“You are the only man of all men whom I would wish to surpass me in all things”*’ (see book 9:14)

E. sin (book 2)

Is Augustine some kind of sex fiend? Why is he considered one? Have things changed? What part does Monica play in his concubine and plans for a wife? Augustine thinks God was not talking during this item (2:7,8) How was He talking?

F. the great sin (2:9-18)

Is it odd to you that “sex” is not the great sin? Is this Augustine in his “tear-jerking (phoniness”(Nietzsche)? What about the “pear tree” (singular) shows Augustine the true nature, danger and wickedness of sin?

Can you see the Genesis pattern here? How?

See 2:18 for how he weaves in the early statement (1:1) and the ending (13:50-53)

Have you noticed something similar (or dissimilar) about your sin that you would like to “confess”?

G. Manichaeism (book 3) first Cicero awakens him to seek wisdom (3:7-9)

Here is some information about this sect that Augustine belonged to for about 9 years: they were widespread, illegal, heretics, materialists, rationalists, dualists. The opposite of pagans – they knew the right names (Christ, God, Spirit) but not the reality. Augustine was perplexed by God as Spirit and by the question of evil. He thought the Manicheans had answers. Does this time in his life, and this heretical group, remind you of anything around us today?

H. Monica’s tears (one of the more famous passages of “Confessions” 3:21)

Freudian psychiatrists have analyzed “Confessions” and, not surprisingly, come up with an Oedipus Complex for Augustine (and some call him a Mama’s boy, tied to the apron strings of a domineering mother)

I. Friends (book 4) nothing was more important to Augustine than friendship. See his description of his friends death (4:7-12) Can you tell the story of what happened here? What was the end result to Augustine’s journey? In what state does he go back to Carthage? (4:12) Is there a “Genesis” story here?

What exactly does Augustine do with his friends? (4:20) What is Augustine doing during this time period? (4:23)

Can you list any of the friends of Augustine in “Confessions”?

Augustine is Adam, stealing the pears from “the tree” for no reason other than sin. Augustine is Cain, downcast at his friend’s conversion and death and fleeing to start anew where he can be comfortable. He is Jacob, on the run from God, already with a child, and a mother who desperately is praying for his conversion. He is seeking answers but full of pride. He is a master of rhetoric, a poet, a writer, a teacher, a young man who is so highly regarded that his father (and a rich patron from Tagaste) will invest in his

education. He is already seen as possessing a brilliant mind – with it, he is enmeshed in Manichaeism, and seeking light from “the Elect” teachers of Mani’s doctrine. And he is tortured (4:30)

HOMEWORK

- 1) Map his life – trace his geographic wanderings throughout “Confessions” How long was he in each place?
- 2) Monica – prove to us that Augustine was not a “Mama’s Boy” – using the text of “Confessions”
- 3) Write a short paper (one page) comparing the sexual mores of Augustine with our own 21st century American mores. Not just the concubine, but Monica’s view and plans for his marriage and views of singleness and how the church looked at all this
- 4) Look at chapter 12 carefully and list 5 principles of Bible study that Augustine is sharing in this chapter
- 5) Take a phrase (section) and write about it in the context of Augustine’s whole story, showing how it fits in and its importance. Why does it appeal to you?
- 6) Tell us about the conversion of Augustine; what does it remind you of? Can you list some other famous conversions?
- 7) Tell us about Alypius; who was he, where did he come from, what part does he play? Write a brief (1 page) biography of this man.