

Major Player: St. Augustine of Hippo

Intro: Augustine of Hippo is the most influential theologian in church history. Why is it not someone else (such as Luther, or Athanasius, or Aquinas)?

Who was Augustine?

Early Life

- His full Latin name is Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis
- He born in 354 in Tagaste, North Africa (part of the Roman Empire in what is today Algeria).
- His father, Patricius, was a Pagan, and his mother, Monica, was a devout Christian.



- He showed exceptional brilliance from a young age, so his parents sought out the best schooling they could afford. He went to study at Carthage at the age of 17. He eventually became a very talented rhetoric professor. In Carthage his students were too unruly; in Rome they didn't pay him on time; so, he eventually taught rhetoric in Milan.
- He lived a sexually licentious lifestyle. He slept around and even seduced women from churches. He had a live-in girlfriend with whom he had a child out of wedlock (Adeodatus, which means "Gift of God"). After he sent away this mistress he was set to marry a girl but he had to wait two years until she was old enough. His lust couldn't wait, so he took another mistress in the meantime.
- In addition to being a playboy, he joined a cult called Manichaeism. This cult was founded by a guy named Mani in the third century and is of Persian origin. It is a form of Gnosticism; it teaches that what is spiritual is good and what is physical is bad and so both good and evil are eternal forces in the world, and the goal is to get rid of the physical and be absorbed into the divine light.
- Augustine didn't like Christianity for two main reasons. First, he thought the stories and language in the bible were crude and unrefined. Second, he didn't understand how God could be good if there was evil in the world. Where did the evil come from if not from God?
- In Milan, he met two very important people. The first is named Simplicianus who introduced Augustine to Neoplatonism (the philosophy of Plotinus). Plotinus' philosophy answered the question of how there could be evil in the world. The second was a wise bishop named Ambrose of Milan who taught him to read the Old Testament allegorically (thus quelling his other objection to Christianity).



-But Augustine didn't want to convert because he knew he would have to give up certain physical pleasures.

“God, give me chastity and continence; but not too soon.” -Augustine

Conversion

One day Augustine was sitting in a garden overwhelmed by his sin. He heard some children singing a children's song and a line in the song was, “Tolle lege, Tolle lege” (“take up and read”). Augustine took this as a sign to read part of the Bible and he opened up to Romans and read...

Romans 13:13–14 - Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

At that point he was converted. He was baptized (by immersion) by Ambrose in 387, he sold his property and began a monastic life in North Africa. His mom and son died around the same time and he was overwhelmed with grief. His son was just a teenager.

Ministry

One day in 391, Augustine was visiting the town of Hippo (also in modern Algeria) and he attended a church service where a bishop named Valerius told the church that God always provides a shepherd for his sheep. Augustine's popularity had grown, so they forced Augustine to be ordained (against his will!). He eventually became bishop of Hippo in 396. He would remain the bishop there for the rest of his life.



What did Augustine contribute to Christianity?

1. He solved the problem evil.
2. He defended the idea that Christians can and should use any true philosophy because all truth is God's truth.
3. He wrote what is probably the first, extensive work of Christian psychology, *Confessions*.

“Though madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in thee.” -Augustine

4. He defended the unity of the church against Donatism.
5. He is the first one in church history to really clarify a full doctrine of grace. He was actually called “Dr. Grace” by some of his followers. Against Pelagius, he taught that mankind was born sinful and salvation could only be a free gift of God.

“What is grace? *That which is freely given.* What is ‘freely given?’ *Given, not paid.* If it was due, wages would be given, but grace would not be bestowed. But if it was really due, then you were good. But if, as is true, you were evil but believed *on him who justifies the ungodly*...consider what by right hung over you by the law and you have obtained by grace. But having obtained that grace by faith, you will be just by faith – ‘for the just lives by faith.’” -Augustine

“For you did not obtain favor by yourself, so that anything should be owed to you. Therefore, in giving the reward of immortality, *God crowns his own gifts, not your merits.*” –Augustine

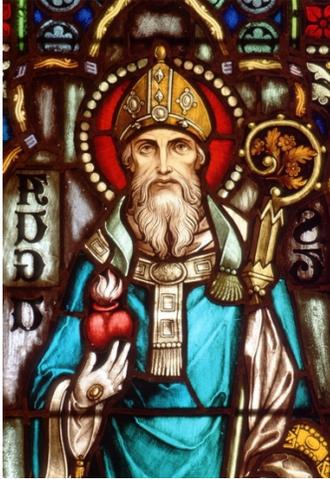
“For what good work can a lost person perform, except so far as he has been delivered from damnation? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will?...When man by his own free will sinned [i.e. Adam], then sin was victorious over him, and *the freedom of his will was lost.*” –Augustine

6. He discovered undeniable evidence for absolute truth 1,000 year before Descartes.
7. He developed an interesting method of interpreting scripture: Any interpretation that furthered your love of God or love of others could be a meaning of the text.
8. He developed one of the first theories of predestination.
9. He was the first major Christian to explicate Just War Theory.
10. He refuted the heresies of Manichaeism.
11. He focused a lot on the heart, the importance of love, and the conscience.

“Love God, and do what you want.” -Augustine

12. He wrote a lengthy work, *The City of God (“De Civitate Dei, Contra Paganos”)* in which he laid out his theory that world history is a clash between the City of God and the city of man. The reason Rome was collapsing was not because Christianity had abandoned pagan gods but because Rome was pagan - the City of God would triumph over the pride of man.

“Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, You are my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, I will love You, O Lord, my strength.” -Augustine, *City of God*.



The Legacy of Augustine

Augustine was a rhetoric professor in Milan before his conversion and had a broad education in the humanities. He combined neo-Platonism with the Bible and wrote over 5 million words (that's the length of about 90 doctoral dissertations). He wrote over 100 books, 500 sermons, and 200 letters. He solved the problem of evil, defended the doctrine of grace, proved the existence of absolute truth, and defended the Trinity. In fact, he studied the Trinity for more than 22 years before he finished writing *De Trinitate*.

He is, without a close second, the most influential theologian outside of the Bible.

There was a common slogan during the Reformation at the University of Wittenberg, "the Bible and St. Augustine." John Calvin famously said, "Augustine is wholly ours" when discussing Protestantism against Catholicism.

Some negative things we got from Augustine

1. A bad view of sex.

"But the action [of married intercourse] is not performed without evil." -Augustine

"Surely any friend of wisdom and holy joys . . . would prefer, if possible, to beget children without lust." -Augustine

2. A view that it is the act of baptism itself (and not the faith of the person being baptized) is what marks regeneration.

3. He helped develop the doctrine of purgatory.

4. He greatly bolstered the power of the Church of Rome.

5. He believed justification was by grace alone, but not necessarily faith alone.

6. He believed the church membership should, intentionally, be made up of believers and non-believers.