

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY – FALL 2023

“Western doctrine is a series of footnotes, commentaries, and questions to Augustine.” – Eugene Teselle

“The whole development of Western life, in all its phases, was powerfully affected by his teaching.” – B.B. Warfield

CONVERSION

- Born and raised in North Africa (the Bible Belt of the Roman Empire)
- Left Africa for Milan to pursue a career in rhetoric
- Spent years in loose living
- Heard the voice of a child - “take up and read”
- Randomly turned to this verse:
 - “13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” - Romans 13:13-14
- Augustine felt immediate conviction
- Started listening to the preaching of Ambrose
- Baptized by Ambrose in 386, at the age of 31
- Augustine later said his mother, Monica, prayed for his conversion for years

QUOTES

- “As a youth I prayed, ‘Give me chastity and continence, but not right now.’”
- “You made us for yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you.”
- “You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.”
- “The good man, though a slave, is free; the wicked, though he reigns, is a slave, and not the slave of a single man, but — what is worse — the slave of as many masters as he has vices.”
- “Love God, and then do whatever you want. Let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.”

THE MINISTRY OF AUGUSTINE

- Defeated Manichaeism (his former faith) – an Eastern religion designed to combine and rise above all other religions, depicting reality as a struggle between light and darkness.
- Defeated Donatism – the belief that clergy must be faultless for their ministry to be effective and for their prayers and sacraments to be valid.
- Developed the concept of the Visible and Invisible Church
- Developed Amillennialism, the official eschatology of the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and many Protestants
- Defeated Pelagianism – the belief that humans are born without sin and choose for themselves to obey or disobey God. Augustine defended the Bible’s view of original sin.
- Defended the mystery of God’s sovereignty and human free will (predestination)
- The first Christian theologian to write a theory of just war
- Wrote a theory of natural law - “An unjust law is no law at all.”
- Argued that slavery as an institution was developed in sin and convinced many of the clergy under his authority to free their slaves.
- Mike’s opinion – Augustine’s most important contribution was his doctrine of sin, informed by his own experience and his former religion. His writing formed the basis of the Reformed understanding of “total depravity”.

“I thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us. It flattered my pride to think that I incurred no guilt and, when I did wrong, not to confess it ... I preferred to excuse myself and blame this unknown thing which was in me but was not part of me. The truth, of course, was that it was all my own self, and my own impiety had divided me against myself. My sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner.” - Confessions, Book V, Section 10

“The will is truly free, when it is not the slave of vices and sins.” – City of God, Book XIV

“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place. O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, my Salvation.” – Confessions, Book IX, Section 1