

Heroes of the Church: Augustine (354-430 A.D.)

Confessions:

- A. Books 1-9 (autobiographical)
- B. Books 10-13 (memory, time and eternity, Platonic and Christian teachings on creation, Genesis 1)
- C. Theme: our need of grace

“You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable. Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being ‘bearing his mortality with him,’ carrying with him the witness of his sins and the witness that you ‘resist the proud.’ Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (*Conf.* 1, 1; Chadwick 3).

“My sin consisted of this, that I sought pleasure, beauty, and truth not in God but in his creatures, in myself, and other created beings. So it was that I plunged into miseries, confusions, and errors.” (*Conf.* 1, 20; Chadwick 22-23).

Family Life:

- A. Born into a modest Latinized family in Roman North Africa (modern day Algeria)
- B. Patricius (pagan; only converted shortly before his death in 372 A.D.)
- C. Monica (Christian from a Christian family)

Childhood/Early Education:

- A. The need to win

“I was overcome by a vain desire to win and was often guilty of cheating. Any breach of the rules I would not tolerate and, if I detected it, would fiercely denounce it, though it was exactly what I was doing to others Is that childish innocence?” (*Conf.* 1, 19; Chadwick 22).

- B. Classical education (the Trivium: grammar, logic, rhetoric; pagan classics: Cicero and Virgil)

Adolescence:

- A. The need to be loved

“The single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and to be loved. The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart so that I could not see the difference between love’s serenity and lust’s darkness.” (*Conf.* 2, 2; Chadwick 24).

- B. Socially ambitious parents

“The reason why my mother showed little concern for my virginity was that the hope that she had placed in my success would be impeded. Both of them [Monica and Patricius], as I realized were very anxious for my success: My father because he hardly gave a thought to you at all, and his ambitious for me were concerned with mere vanities; my mother because she thought it would do no harm. . . .The reigns were relaxed to allow me to amuse myself.” (*Conf.* 2, 3; Chadwick 28).

C. Youthful rebellion: “Pear” pressure (age 16)

“I stole something of which I had plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong The pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it.” (*Conf.* 2, 4; Chadwick 29). “The theft itself was a nothing, and for that reason I was the more miserable. Yet had I been alone I would not have done it My love in the act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it.” (*Conf.* 2, 8; Chadwick 33).

D. Summary

“As an adolescent I went astray from you, my God, far from your unmoved stability. I became to myself a region of destitution.” (*Conf.* 2, 10; Chadwick 34).

Carthage (age 17):

A. Carnality continues

“I came to Carthage [where Augustine went to school] and all around hissed a cauldron of illicit loves. As yet I had never been in love and longed to love; and from a subconscious poverty of mind I hated the thought of being less inwardly destitute. I sought and object for my love; I was in love with love, and I hated safety and a path free from snares. My hunger was internal, deprived of inward food, that is of you yourself, my God. But that was not the kind of hunger I felt. I was without any desire for incorruptible nourishment, not because I was replete with it, but the emptier I was, the more unappetizing such food became To love and have my love returned was my heart’s desire, and it would be all the sweeter if I could also enjoy the body of the one who loved me.” (*Conf.* 3, 1; Chadwick 35).

B. “My concubine” (never named); son Adeodatus born in 372 A.D.

Cicero (age 18):

A. Love of wisdom

“This book [the *Hortensius*] changed my feelings. It altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself. It gave me entirely different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me. . . . I began to rise up and return to you.” (*Conf.* 3, 4; Chadwick 39).

B. Intellectual pride

“[The scriptures] seemed unworthy to me in comparison with the dignity of Cicero. My inflated conceit shunned the Bible’s restraint, and my gaze never penetrated to its inwardness.” (*Conf.* 3, 5; Chadwick 40).

Professor of Rhetoric:

Thagaste → Carthage → Rome → Milan

Manichees (age 19-28):

A. Dualist religion (fused Persian and Indian religious ideas with Paul’s epistles; claimed to be Christians)

“Because I took [the Manichees] to be you, I ate—not indeed with much of an appetite, for the taste of my mouth was not that of yourself. You were not those empty fictions, and I derived no nourishment from them but was left all the more exhausted than before.” (*Conf.* 3, 6; Chadwick 41).

B. Monica horrified; won’t let Augustine into her house for a time

“It cannot be that the son of so many tears could be lost.” (*Conf.* 3, 12).

- C. Faustus – a disappointing discussion; prompts him to leave for Italy (384 A.D.)

Milan:

- A. Writes and delivers speeches in praise of the Roman Emperor (no teleprompters yet!)
- B. Monica joins him in Milan

“She found me in a dangerous state of depression. I had no confidence, and had lost hope that truth could be found.” (*Conf.* 6, 1; Chadwick 90).

- C. Bishop Ambrose of Milan (famous orator, theologian, and philosopher)

“And so I came to Milan to Ambrose the bishop, known throughout the world as among the best of men, devout in your worship. At that time his eloquence valiantly ministered to your people. I was led to him by you, unaware that through him, I might be led to you.” (*Conf.* 5, 13; Chadwick 87).

“I began to like him [Ambrose] at first not as a teacher of the truth...but as a human being who was kind to me.” (*Conf.* 5, 13; Chadwick 88).

- D. Neo-Platonism (denied the existence of evil; evil is really only the absence of good)

“That the word was made flesh I did not read [in the works of the Neo-Platonists].” (*Conf.* 7, 9). “Those pages do not contain the face of this devotion, tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humble spirit, the salvation of your people, the espoused city [of Jerusalem] (Rev. 21:5), the guarantee of your Holy Spirit, or the cup of our redemption.” (*Conf.* 7, 21; Chadwick 131).

- E. Engagement to underage, wealthy Catholic heiress; concubine dismissed (385 A.D.); takes a mistress

Conversion (age 32):

- A. Self-deception

“You set me before my face so that I should see how vile I was, how twisted and filthy And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself. If I tried to avert my gaze from myself, you once again placed me in front of myself; you thrust me before my own eyes so that I should discover my iniquity and hate it. I had known it, but deceived myself, refused to admit it, and pushed it out of my mind.” (*Conf.* 8, 7; Chadwick 145-6).

- B. “Pick up and read” (July 386 A.D.)

“Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticisms and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh and its lusts’ (Romans 13:13-14). I neither wished or needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.” (*Conf.* 8, 12; Chadwick 153).

- C. Evolution of the will: self to God

“You, O Lord, are gracious and compassionate. You were able to look deep within me and see that I was spiritually dead; you drained the deep well of corruption at the bottom of my heart. All I had to do was to reject what I wanted and accept what you wanted. Yet where was my free will during those long years? From what remote depths was it brought forth so that, all at once, I could bend my neck to your comfortable yoke and my shoulders to your light burden, Christ Jesus, my helper and redeemer? Suddenly I found it delightful to be without those frivolous pleasures that I had fear to lose and was now glad to reject. You threw them out of me, you who are the true and perfect pleasure, and replaced them with

yourself; sweeter than every desire My mind was at last free from the gnawing cares of ambition, of the hunger for gain; free to stop wallowing in self-indulgence and picking at the scab of lust. I was now freely talking to you, Lord God, my light, my wealth, and my salvation.” (*Conf.* 9, 1; trans. Caroline White).

D. Passion for God

“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things of the world kept me far from you You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put flight to 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.” (*Conf.* 10, 27; Chadwick 201).

D. Baptized Easter Sunday 387 A.D. along with his son Adeodatus

Tragedy/Return to North Africa:

A. Gives up his career in rhetoric

Laments that he has spent his life as a “salesman of words.” (*Conf.* 9, 5; Chadwick 163).

B. Monica dies; Adeodatus dies soon thereafter (age 17)

Witness to her family: She won her husband and mother-in-law to Christ through “her constant patience and gentleness.” (*Conf.* 9, 9; Chadwick 169).

“Servant of the servants of God”: Christians who knew her “held her in honor and loved her, for they felt [God’s] presence in her heart.” (*Conf.* 9, 9; Chadwick 170).

C. Returns to family estate in North Africa; plans to live a quiet life

The Bishop:

A. Ordained as a priest against his will in 391 A.D.; bishop of Hippo in 395 A.D.

B. Polemics against Manichean, Arian, Donatist, and Pelagian heresies; writes *Confessions* in 397 A.D.

C. Pelagius denied original sin; argued that humanity had merely picked up bad habits during the pagan era, and that humanity could recreate paradise on earth by perfect obedience to Christ.

The City of God (413-426 A.D.):

A. Roman emperor Valens killed by the Visigoths in battle in 378 A.D.; paganism outlawed by Roman Emperor Theodosius I in 390-91 A.D; Rome sacked by the Visigoths in 410 A.D.

B. Response to pagan accusations that Rome was sacked because paganism had been abandoned: > 1000 pages! Excoriates paganism as merely a *quid pro quo* (e.g., sacrifice to Neptune for a safe sea voyage).

“[In the new heavens and new earth] we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold that will be in the end without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?” (*The City of God* 22, 30).

Death (age 76):

Hippo besieged at the time of Augustine’s death in 430 A.D. by the Vandals