

Lecture 15-The Restless Heart: The Confessions of St. Augustine

We read of an intimacy on the part of S. Augustine and others with the Eternal Being in a measure and form which far, very far, exceeds [our] own experience...It will not do to say: 'To the height of a S. Augustine, I can never come!' No, just because you are no S. Augustine renders it impossible for you mechanically to do what he did. But you are called of God, and held responsible by Him to seek from yourself and for yourself that individual and only path, along which you, and no one else, can come to this hidden walk and persevere therein.

Abraham Kuyper, To Be Near Unto God, p. 548

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

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—chapter 24, pp. 207-212

Key Terms

Confessions, Manicheism

Objectives

- Report on the testimony of Augustine
- Identify the major events and people in Augustine's life which led him to Christ

Class Prayer

"O Lord, our Saviour, you have warned us that you will require much of those to whom much is given; grant that we whose lot is cast in so godly a heritage may strive together the more abundantly to extend to others what we so richly enjoy; and as we have entered into the labors of others, so to labor that others may enter into ours, to the fulfillment of your holy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."
Augustine

The Restless Heart: The Confessions of St. Augustine

I. The Confessions

A. Books 1-9 (autobiographical)

B. Books 10-13

1. 10—Memory
2. 11—Time and eternity
3. 12—Platonic and Christian ideas of creation
4. 13—Exposition of Genesis 1 (symbolic of the church and sacraments)

C. Thee: our need for God's grace

II. The Family

A. Augustine born into a Latinized family in North Africa (Algeria) in 354

B. Mother: Monica

1. Woman of prayer: the bishop to Monica—"It cannot be that the son of these tears should perish." (3, 12)
2. Witness to family by life and love: she won her husband and mother-in-law to Christ by "her constant patience and gentleness." (9, 9)
3. "Servant of the servants of God." Christians who knew her "held her in honor and

loved her; for they felt Your presence in her heart.” (9, 9)

III. The Sinner

- A. Childhood: “So tiny a child, so great a sinner.” (1, 12)
- B. Youth: “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.” (8, 7)

IV. The Search

- A. Philosophy (Cicero’s Hortensius)
- B. Manicheism
- C. Skepticism-
 - 1. “I had no confidence, and had lost hope that truth could be found.” (6, 1)
 - 2. “I had become to myself a place of unhappiness in which I could not bear to be.” (4, 7)
 - 3. “I could not even find myself, much less you [God].” (5, 2)
- D. Neo-Platonism - “that the Word was made flesh I did not read there [in the books of the Platonists].” (7, 9)

V. The Christian

- A. God’s providence
 - 1. Career in rhetoric - “vendor of words” (9, 5)
 - 2. Move to Rome and to Milan
- B. Ambrose’s life and preaching
- C. Testimony and example of others (Life of Antony)
- D. “Take and read” (Romans 13:13-14)—386 - “I have learned to love you late.” (10, 27)
- E. Retreat at Cassiciacum - “where we rested in you from the heat of the world.” (9, 3)
- F. Death of Monica

VI. The Bishop

- A. Ordained in 391; Bishop of Hippo in 395
- B. His ministry
 - 1. Preaching
 - 2. Counseling
 - 3. Governing
 - 4. Writing
 - a. Books
 - 1) Autobiographical: *Confessions and Revisions*
 - 2) Philosophical-theological: *City of God, The Trinity*
 - 3) Exegetical: Christian Instruction, writings on the Old and New Testaments
 - 4) Pastoral: writings on marriage and virginity and on morality and Christian asceticism
 - 5) Polemical: against the Arians, the Manicheans, the Donatists, and the Pelagians
 - b. Letters (excerpts below from Leinenweber’s edition)
 - 1) On humility: “I wouldn’t have you prepare for yourself any way of grasping and holding the truth other than the one prepared by him who, as God, saw how faltering were our steps. That way is, first, humility; second, humility; third, humility; and as often as you ask, I’ll tell you humility.” (100-101)
 - 2) To a proconsul: “Though I don’t want you ever to suffer in the future what you have borne in the past, still I would grieve more if you have suffered these things without any change in your life for the better.” (192-93)
 - 3) To a woman whose brother had recently died: “If the fact that I am now

wearing this garment which you wove for your brother, because he is unable to wear it, brings you some consolation, how much greater and more certain consolation should you experience because the one for whom you prepared it, who does not now need a perishable covering, is clothed in incorruption and immortality.” (159)

- 4) On charity: “This is not the time to do fewer works of mercy, but, rather, more... Think of people who see the walls of their home shaking and know that it is about to be destroyed—don’t they leave it and go as fast as they can to a more secure place? So should Christians, as their increasing afflictions reveal to them that the destruction of this world is coming closer, transfer unwearyingly and with all speed the goods they were intending to store up on earth to the treasure house of heaven.” (109-10)
- 5) On judging: “None of us is known to another person as we know ourselves; and yet neither do we know ourselves well enough to feel secure about our behavior, even the very next day... There is so much unknown and undependable about human hearts that the Apostle was surely right to counsel us not to judge anything prematurely, ‘before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intentions of the heart.’” (163)
- 6) On church practices: Some practices “vary in the different places and regions of the world. Some people fast on Saturdays, others do not; some receive communion in the Lord’s body and blood daily, others only on certain days... [In these things] there is no better discipline for a wise and serious Christian than to do as does the church where you happen to be.” (73)
- 7) On the Bible: “It seems to me disastrous to hold that the sacred books contain any falsehoods... Once you allow in the supreme authority an expedient falsehood, a reader who thinks something difficult to do or hard to believe can explain away any part of these books by this fatal precedent, saying that it comes from an author who said what was not true intentionally and from expediency.” (42)

VII. The End (430)

“...the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what 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

For Further Study

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo*. 1967.

Full and readable.

Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine*. 1986.

Brief and brilliant.

Chadwick, Henry, tr. *The Confessions*. 1992.

One of the most recent and best of many translations.

Leinenweber, John, ed. *The Letters of Saint Augustine*. 1992.

Another way to look into the heart and mind of this good and great man.

Marshall, Michael. *The Restless Heart: The Life and Influence of St. Augustine*. 1987

Short and illustrated (with occasional undue criticism of Puritans and fundamentalists).

Rotelle, John E., ed. *The Complete Works of Saint Augustine*.

A new series published by New City Press, in conjunction with the Augustinian Heritage Institute, the complete works of Augustine in English.
Read the brief excerpt from “A Sermon by Saint Augustine.”