St. Augustine's *Confessions*

Part I

Professor William R. Cook and
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William R. Cook, Ph.D.

Professor of History, State University of New York at Geneseo

William R. Cook was born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana, and attended public schools there. He is a 1966 graduate of Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana (*cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa). He received Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Lehman fellowships to study medieval history from Cornell University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1971. His dissertation was a study of a Hussite theologian and diplomat named Peter Payne.

In 1970, Dr. Cook was appointed Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo, the honors college of SUNY. He has taught there for 30 years and holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of History. At Geneseo, Dr. Cook has taught courses in medieval and ancient history, the Renaissance and Reformation periods, and the Bible and Christian thought. In 1992, he was named CASE Professor of the Year for New York State.

After publishing several articles on Hussite theology and monastic thought, Dr. Cook has, for more than 20 years, focused his research on St. Francis of Assisi. In 1989, he published a volume in a series, *The Way of the Christian Mystics*, entitled *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility*, with Michael Glazier (later published by the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN). For years, Dr. Cook sought to find and catalogue all the early paintings of St. Francis done in Italy. In the 1990s, he published a series of articles in Franciscan and Italian journals on specific images of the saint. In 1998, he published a study entitled *St. Francis in America* (Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL) of early Italian paintings of Francis that are currently in the United States and Canada. These years of research on the images of Francis were brought to a conclusion with the 1999 publication of a comprehensive catalogue: *Images of St. Francis of Assisi in Painting, Stone and Glass from the Earliest Images to ca.1320 in Italy: A Catalogue* (Leo S. Olschki, Florence) in the series *Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies*.

Dr. Cook has also contributed to the *Cambridge Companion to Giotto*; is currently editing (and contributing to) a collection of essays on early Franciscan art under contract with Brill publishers; is creating a CD-ROM containing early images of St. Francis of Assisi with New City Press; and has published two books of local history about his home area, Livingston County, New York.

Currently, Dr. Cook is writing articles based on research that was not used in his books, and he plans to bring two great loves—St. Francis and the city of Siena—together by doing research on the 15th-century Franciscan Bernardino of Siena.

Dr. Cook has taught about Francis at Siena College (Loudenville, New York) and has given lectures about Francis and Franciscan art throughout the United States and in Europe. With Dr. Herzman, he has taught about Francis to groups ranging from school children to students in religious education classes to Trappist monks.

Dr. Cook has directed 10 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities since 1983; six have had Francis as their subject and have been conducted in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2003, he directed an NEH seminar for college teachers in Italy entitled "St. Francis and the Thirteenth Century." Recently, Dr. Cook has been teaching a course about medieval Italian city-states every other year in Siena, Italy.

Ronald B. Herzman, Ph.D.

Distinguished Teaching Professor of English,
State University of New York at Geneseo

Ronald Herzman was born in Brooklyn, New York. He attended Brooklyn Prep and Manhattan College, graduating with honors in 1965 and receiving the Devlin Medal for excellence in French. He studied English literature at the University of Delaware as a DuPont Fellow and a New York State Regents Fellow. He received his M.A. in 1967 and his Ph.D. in 1969, writing his dissertation on Geoffrey Chaucer. Dr. Herzman has also studied at Princeton University (summer 1973) and as a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow-in-Residence at the University of Chicago during the 1978–1979 academic year. He received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1976 and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Manhattan College in 1991.

In 1969, Dr. Herzman was appointed Assistant Professor of English at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where he currently holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of English. He has also been an adjunct professor at Genesee Community College, teaching in the inmate education program at Attica Correctional Facility (together with Dr. Cook); he has been a professorial lecturer at Georgetown University; and he has served as a guest tutor at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. From 1982–1985, Dr. Herzman was on leave from SUNY to work at the National Endowment for the Humanities, where he was the founding Program Officer for the Summer Seminars for School Teachers and the Assistant Director of the Division of Fellowships and Seminars.

Dr. Herzman's teaching interests include Dante, Chaucer, Francis of Assisi, Shakespeare, the Bible, and Arthurian literature. With Dr. Cook, he has team-taught several courses at Geneseo, including "The Age of Dante" and "The Age of St. Francis of Assisi."

Dr. Herzman's books include *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, with Richard Emmerson) and *Four Romances of England* (Medieval Institute Publications, edited with Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury). He has written extensively on medieval literature, including 15 articles and book chapters on Dante, several articles on Francis of Assisi, and work on Chaucer, the *Romance of the Rose*, and the *Song of Roland* (with Dr. Cook). His current research interests include a book-length study of Dante's *Paradiso*.

Dr. Herzman has directed 12 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities, conducted at Geneseo; at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2004, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a foundational member of the Geneseo chapter.

Professors Cook and Herzman have been teaching and writing together for 30 years. They taught their first course, "The Age of Chaucer," in 1973 and took it "on the road" to England the following summer. While teaching together in Assisi in 1975, they decided to write an article together. In 1983, they published *The Medieval World View* with Oxford University Press. The second edition of *The Medieval World View* was published in 2004.

In addition to teaching generations of students at SUNY Geneseo, Professors Cook and Herzman twice taught a course on Dante to inmates at Attica Correctional Facility. They have lectured throughout the United States and have worked with high school teachers from Maine to California. They also enjoy giving talks in the schools and churches in and around their home in Geneseo, New York.

In 2003, Professors Cook and Herzman were presented with the first-ever award for excellence in the teaching of medieval studies by the Medieval Academy of America.

Table of Contents

St. Augustine's *Confessions*
Part I

St. Augustine's *Confessions*

Scope:

The 24 lectures of this course are devoted to an analysis of one of the world's greatest and most beloved books, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430). The first four lectures provide several types of useful background for an intelligent reading of the *Confessions*. We deal with everything from Roman history to Christian controversies at the time of Augustine to the corpus of the writings of Augustine. The 24th lecture looks forward from antiquity to the 21st century, pointing out authors who have been moved and influenced by Augustine from his time to ours. By bringing the story to the present, we mean to suggest the ongoing usefulness of the book and how it may serve as a guide to us, despite the obvious differences between Augustine's world and ours.

All the other lectures are a continuous exegesis of and meditation on the 13 books that make up the *Confessions*. The bulk of the course examines the first nine books, in which Augustine tells his life story from his birth to the time of his conversion at age 31. For many modern readers, these nine books *are* the *Confessions*, because many ignore the four non-narrative books that follow the story of Augustine's life. There is, indeed, almost nothing in the world's literature that is more powerful than some of the stories that Augustine tells—his stealing of some pears, his struggle to understand God's nature, the powerful moment of his conversion when he opens Paul's letter to the Romans and reads words that lead him to God, and the death of his beloved mother, Monica.

Yet we also devote four lectures to those books that tell no story. His reflection on memory in Book X explains how it is possible to write the story of his life. His meditation on time and eternity (Book XI) continues a theme incorporated into the narrative books. The last two books discuss approaches to Scripture and provide a powerful allegorical reading of the beginning of the Book of Genesis.

Our goal for the course is to bring all those who hear us to the text itself. We hope that when people finish the course, they will run to the bookstore or library to obtain the *Confessions*, then commit to spend a good long time marveling at its beauty and applying its insights to themselves.

Lecture One
Augustine and the *Confessions*

Scope: Lecture One introduces the overall plan of the course, which is to engage in a close reading of Augustine's *Confessions* in the context of his own time and in the context of ours. Thus, this lecture deals with the questions of why we are still reading the *Confessions* in the 21st century and how a first-time reader (or someone who has read the work only casually before) should go about reading the text in translation. We explain what translation we use and why we use it. As the most widely read work of the most important post-biblical Christian theologian in the West, the *Confessions* occupies a special place in the history of Christianity. Because a large portion of the *Confessions* is a personal account, a kind of autobiography different in many ways from anything that had been written before it in the Christian tradition, the work is also rightly seen as pivotal in Western intellectual history.

Given that the first nine books of the *Confessions* are set in a particular historical reality, it is vital that a good reader of the book is rooted in the cultural milieu of the late Roman Empire and of Christianity in the 4th century. Concerning the latter, we will look at the development of Christianity from its origins. Because Augustine relies so heavily on the writings of Paul, we will introduce this most important figure in the development of Christian thought. Then, we will briefly discuss the developing structure of Christian institutions, because Augustine was a bishop when he wrote *Confessions*. Finally, we will look at the relationship between Christian and pagan thought and the controversies that arose over the proper understanding of God and of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Outline

I. Augustine's *Confessions* is a book of timeless importance.
- **A.** Though written at the end of the 4th century C.E., the work speaks of the human condition, thus making it relevant far beyond its original context and audience.
- **B.** Reading the *Confessions* is far more than examining a monument of the past.

II. The *Confessions* was written in Latin.
- **A.** The great majority of readers of the work today read it in translation.
- **B.** Although there are numerous competent English translations of the *Confessions*, for this course, we have chosen to use the new translation by Maria Boulding, published by New City Press and available in hard cover and two different paperback editions.

III. The *Confessions*, although hardly an autobiography in our modern sense, is a new type of writing in the West.
- **A.** Reading the *Confessions* is of central importance for those who want to understand the Western intellectual tradition.
- **B.** Reading the *Confessions* is to engage the most important non-biblical Christian writer in his most intimate and most widely read work.

IV. The century into which Augustine was born, the 4th century C.E., is a pivotal period in the history of Christianity.
- **A.** At the beginning of the 4th century, Christianity was a persecuted religion of a small minority of the population of the Roman Empire.
- **B.** At the end of the 4th century, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- **C.** By 400, most of the residents of the empire were at least nominally Christian.
- **D.** Because of these changes, there were debates among Christians over the very nature of the church—should it be inclusive of all who are baptized or a community of saints?

V. Christ was crucified circa 30 C.E., and the earliest Christian writer was Paul.
- **A.** Paul's letters, especially the one to the Romans, are the most important historical and theological documents in the Christian tradition.

B. For Paul, salvation was God's work, not a human achievement.
   1. All humans were born in bondage to sin.
   2. Salvation is possible only through faith in Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection.

VI. In roughly the 100 years following Christ's crucifixion, the other books contained in Christian Scripture (New Testament) were written.

VII. The institutions of the church evolved in the first three centuries.

A. Although the apostles were the authority in the earliest period of Christian history (Acts 15), there was a great uncertainty after they died.

B. The office of bishop developed in the 1st and 2nd centuries.
   1. A bishop was the chief priest of a community located in a town or city.
   2. It came to be widely believed that bishops were successors of the apostles and had authority in their communities equal to the authority Christ gave to the apostles.
   3. Eventually, bishops claimed jurisdiction over a diocese, which contained a city and some surrounding countryside.
   4. This is important for Augustine because he was the bishop of Hippo (in modern Algeria) when he wrote the *Confessions*.

VIII. Christianity was in contact with pagan thought from its origins, given that Jesus lived in the Roman Empire and the entire New Testament was written in Greek.

A. There is evidence that New Testament writers knew and were influenced by classical authors; for example, Luke, by Thucydides and the anonymous author of the Letter to the Hebrews, by Plato.

B. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Christians held radically different opinions about the relationship between classical, primarily Greek, learning and Christian revelation.
   1. There were those who believed that such Greek authors as Plato also received revelation and were, thus, "Christians before Christ."
   2. Others saw all pagan learning as inferior to Scripture and useless to Christians.
   3. On this issue, as on so many others, Augustine is the most important Latin Christian writer to deal specifically with the value and the limitations of pagan learning.

Suggested Readings:

William Cook and Ronald Herzman, *The Medieval World View* (2nd ed.), chapters 1 and 3.

The Cambridge Companion to Augustine, chapter 1.

Sandra Dixon, *Augustine: The Scattered and Gathered Self*, chapter 1.

Questions to Consider:

1. Although today we refer to Augustine as coming from the early period of Christian history, why is it vital to understand that Christianity was several hundred years old by the time that Augustine lived and that it had a history and traditions?

2. What did being a bishop mean, and why is that an important question to consider when reading the *Confessions*?

3. What do we expect of an autobiography today, and how may we need to broaden our understanding of this form of writing to appreciate the *Confessions*?

Lecture Two
Augustine and the World of Classical Antiquity

Scope: Although Augustine addresses the Roman Empire more directly in *The City of God* than he does in *Confessions*, it is important to lay out the political, social, and cultural context of the late Roman Empire, especially as that reality existed in North Africa. Augustine takes for granted such basic knowledge on the part of his audience. In addition, we will explore the Donatist movement in North Africa, considered a heretical form of Christianity by Augustine, which came directly out of the Christian persecutions at the beginning of the 4th century. It is also important to understand that during the period of Augustine's life, the relationship of Christianity to the state and the Christian population of the empire was undergoing extraordinary changes. Although we will not recount the life of Augustine up to the time of his conversion, because that is the subject of the first nine books of the *Confessions*, we will provide useful context for those 31 years.

Outline

I. Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste, a Roman city in North Africa in what is now Algeria.
- **A.** It is important to remember that the Roman Empire was a Mediterranean-centered, not a European-centered, empire.
- **B.** Augustine lived closer to the heart of the Roman Empire than someone born in Paris or Trier or London, was thoroughly Roman in his culture, and spoke Latin as his native tongue.
- **C.** The name of Augustine's mother, Monica, is not Roman; she may have been of Berber origin.

II. During Augustine's lifetime, the Roman Empire was facing new challenges.
- **A.** Although the Christianization of the empire occurred rapidly in the 4th century, no one living at that time knew that Christianity would triumph and become the dominant religion wherever Rome ruled.
- **B.** The Roman Empire became administratively divided into western and eastern halves beginning in the late 3rd century. After 395, there were always two emperors, one based in Italy and one based in Constantinople.
- **C.** Germanic tribes attacked the empire in the 4th century, and some settled down to live in the empire.
  - **1.** In 378, an eastern emperor was defeated in battle and killed by the Goths.
  - **2.** In 410, the Goths briefly took over and sacked Rome itself.
  - **3.** The sack of Rome led Augustine to write the *City of God*.
  - **4.** As Augustine lay dying in Hippo in 430, a Germanic tribe, the Vandals, was besieging Hippo and captured it soon after Augustine's death.
- **D.** By the end of the 4th century, the western emperors usually lived in Milan rather than in Rome because of the former's greater proximity to the military front lines.

III. In the 4th century, there were several disputes among Christians.
- **A.** Although the first two ecumenical councils were held in the 4th century, the issues they dealt with were hardly settled.
  - **1.** The ideas of Arius were condemned at the first two ecumenical councils.
  - **2.** Several Germanic tribes, including the Vandals, came to be converted to Arian Christianity and retained their beliefs into the 6th century.
- **B.** There was an especially bitter division among Christians in North Africa in Augustine's time.
  - **1.** The group of Christians known as Donatists believed that only morally worthy priests and bishops could legitimately carry out their ministries.
  - **2.** Donatists had been condemned during the reign of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, but the movement remained strong.
  - **3.** Augustine wrote against the Donatists and worked hard to protect his flock from the heresy.
  - **4.** In Augustine's time, there were probably about equal numbers of Catholic and Donatist Christians in Latin-speaking North Africa.

IV. Before the 4th century, the institutions of the church and the Roman Empire had been separate and often in conflict.

A. The conversion of Constantine changed the relationship between "church and state."

1. Constantine favored Christianity in his legislation.

2. Constantine enriched the church and gave certain powers to church leaders.

B. In Augustine's lifetime, new relationships were being redefined from the level of the empire all the way down to local bishops and governors.

V. It is always important to remember that Augustine grew to adulthood and converted to Christianity in the most dynamic century of church history.

Suggested Readings:

Cook and Herzman, chapter 2.

Allan Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages*, entries for "Classical Authors," "Donatus, Donatism," "Pelagius, Pelagianism," "Arius, Arianism."

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways is Augustine a Roman, and why does that matter while reading an account as personal and theological as the *Confessions*?

2. Although the *Confessions* is hardly a polemical work, why should one consider theological and ecclesiological controversies in Augustine's time while reading the *Confessions*?

3. How does the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire give birth to what we today refer to as church/state controversies?

Lecture Three
The Corpus of Augustine's Writings

Scope: In modern times, *Confessions* is certainly the most read of Augustine's numerous books. However, if we are to place it in the context of Augustine's thought, we need to become acquainted with the corpus of his works. In addition to discussion of such major works as *On Christian Teaching* (*On Christine Doctrine*) and *The City of God*, we will survey the scope of the writings of Augustine. We will also explore some of the questions that concern Augustine, not just in books focused on particular topics (for example, he writes a book about free will) but as they appear, perhaps less directly, in the *Confessions*.

Outline

I. Augustine was a prolific writer who has left us multiple works in a variety of forms and genres.

- **A.** A current translation project of New City Press includes all of Augustine's surviving writings and will consist of 48 volumes.
- **B.** The divisions of the writings of St. Augustine in the new translation consist of the following:
  1. Autobiographical works (2 volumes). This category includes the *Confessions*.
  2. Philosophical and dogmatic works (6 volumes). The most famous works in this category include *The Trinity* and *The City of God*.
  3. Pastoral works (18 volumes). Among the most important works in this category is *Teaching Christianity*, sometimes known by the title *On Christian Doctrine* or *On Christian Teaching*.
  4. Letters (3 volumes).
  5. Homilies (19 volumes). This section includes Augustine's vitally important expositions on all 150 psalms in 5 volumes.

II. In addition to the *Confessions*, it is important for readers of any work of Augustine to know *The City of God* and *Teaching Christianity*.

- **A.** *The City of God* is about 1,000 pages in modern editions and covers an enormous range of topics in the framework of dealing with the true city (heaven) and earthly societies
  1. It was written as a response to those who attributed Rome's sack by the Goths in 410 to the abandonment of the Roman gods in favor of Christianity.
  2. Augustine argues that no worldly city or empire can be a person's final home because it is full of injustice and in constant flux.
  3. True citizenship is possible only in a just city that is not subject to change—the heavenly Jerusalem.
  4. Augustine argues that societies function in ways that are analogous to the parts of the individual, thus linking macrocosm to microcosm.
  5. *The City of God* argues that government is a result of sin and would not be needed if humans were not sinners.
  6. Augustine divides history into six eras, each initiated by an important biblical event.
     - **a.** The birth of Christ initiated the sixth age.
     - **b.** At the end of the present (sixth) era, Christ will come in glory and history will come to an end.
- **B.** *Teaching Christianity* is essential for those who wish to understand how Augustine approaches the Bible and the enterprise of reading it.
  1. Augustine elaborates a theory of symbolism that includes the key distinction between use and enjoyment: God sometimes makes passages of Scripture obscure to readers so that they must struggle to understand them.
  2. To understand Scripture in a spiritual manner, one must live a spiritual life.
  3. Augustine explains how the liberal arts are valuable for scriptural interpretation.
  4. Augustine defines a limited but open-ended way of interpreting scripture: Any interpretation consonant with the faith is a good one, even if it is far from authorial intent.

III. Augustine was involved in the controversies of his day and devoted much ink to countering pagan and Christian error.

- **A.** He wrote against the Manichees, the group to which he was attached before he became a Christian.
- **B.** He wrote against the Donatists, a heresy that originated in North Africa.
- **C.** He wrote against Pelagius and his followers, who downplayed the need for grace and the fallen condition of humanity.

Suggested Readings:

Cook and Herzman, chapter 4.

Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp. 13–15, 19–42.

Cambridge Companion, chapter 16.

www.newcity.press.com (Click on "Works of Saint Augustine").

Questions to Consider:

1. Where does the *Confessions* fit in the taxonomy of Augustine's writings, and how does a broad view of the corpus of his writings help us to understand the *Confessions* more fully?
2. What does it mean to be a citizen of Rome, and what does it mean to seek citizenship in the city of God? Can one be a citizen of both?
3. How does Augustine's approach to the Bible underpin the way he looks at his own intellectual and moral development? What are the implications for readers of the *Confessions* of Augustine's belief that living well is necessary to be a good scriptural interpreter?

Lecture Four
Form and Genre

Scope: This lecture serves as an introduction to the form of the *Confessions*. The *Confessions* is a rich narrative, but one that is not particularly easy to characterize. One unusual element of form in the *Confessions* is that the entire work is a prayer addressed to God. This means that the audience "overhears" the work, rather than listens to it directly. Second, Augustine wrote this work when he was a bishop, in charge of a Christian community in Hippo in North Africa. Thus, the events he describes in his earlier life are told from two points of view: where Augustine was at the time of his writing, as well as where he was when the events occurred. Third, the *Confessions* is more than its autobiographical elements: The first nine books are a narrative of Augustine's life, but the last four are not. Augustine selectively describes elements in his life from his birth to the time of his conversion and baptism in these first nine books, but in the last four books, he moves to other topics, including a sophisticated discussion of memory and time and methods of biblical interpretation.

One major question that has fascinated readers and students of the *Confessions* is: What is the relationship between the first two-thirds of the *Confessions* and the last third? This lecture takes these elements as the starting point to show that we are not dealing with an autobiography in the modern sense. One aid in discovering what kind of work we are reading is the title itself. What did Augustine mean by the word *confession*? What are the various levels of the word *confession* that help us understand the kind of work that we are reading?

Outline

I. The *Confessions* is written in the form of a prayer to God.
- **A.** For some modern readers, this puts a barrier between themselves and Augustine's ideas.
- **B.** Augustine writes the *Confessions* directly to God, but he allows his readers to eavesdrop.

II. Augustine writes the *Confessions* in 397, after he became bishop of Hippo in North Africa.
- **A.** He was a middle-aged man (43), looking back on the first 31 years of his life.
- **B.** Given that he had undergone a Christian conversion at age 31, the way in which Augustine discusses his pre-Christian life in the *Confessions* is radically different from the way in which he regarded those events as he lived them.
- **C.** Sometimes, readers have difficulty making the distinction between how Augustine responded to an event at the time it occurred and how he reflected on it years later.

III. The *Confessions* consists of 13 books (chapters).
- **A.** The first nine books outline a narrative of Augustine's life from his birth until just after his conversion to Christianity and baptism.
  - **1.** The first two books are about his youth and the failure of his schoolteachers and parents to turn him toward God.
  - **2.** Books III through VII explain Augustine's struggle to understand and to have faith.
  - **3.** Book VIII presents Augustine struggling to embrace what he knows to be the truth.
  - **4.** Book IX tells of Augustine's baptism and contains a moving description of his mother, Monica, and her death.
- **B.** The last four books are not narrative.
  - **1.** Book X deals with Augustine's present when he wrote the book and explores the nature of memory.
  - **2.** Book XI is a discussion of time and its relationship to eternity.
  - **3.** Book XII presents principles of biblical interpretation.
  - **4.** The last book, XIII, is a meditation on creation according to Genesis.

IV. Clearly, the *Confessions* is not merely an autobiography in the modern sense.
- **A.** Readers have struggled to understand the relationship of the last four books to the first nine.

B. Often, in modern times, especially in academic courses, people read only the first eight or nine books.

V. What are some of the signs even in the narrative books that the *Confessions* is not strictly an autobiography?

A. Augustine tells us almost nothing about his day-to-day life and often generalizes rather than narrates specific incidents.

B. Augustine leaves out key "facts" that a modern autobiography would include, for example, the name of the friend about whose death he writes in Book IV.

C. Augustine does not present readers with his résumé in narrative form.

D. Augustine does not defend his conduct.

VI. The meanings of the word *confession* are a clue to the nature of the work.

A. *Confession* can be used in the sense of confessing one's sins.

B. *Confession* can mean *profession* in the sense of professing one's faith.

C. One modern writer on Augustine has translated the title as *Testimony*.

Suggested Readings:

Introduction to translations of the *Confessions* by Maria Boulding and Henry Chadwick.

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 158–181.

Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine*, pp. 1–63.

———, *Saint Augustine's Childhood*, pp. 3–26.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can Augustine sustain for more than 300 pages the writing of a prayer to God?

2. What are the principal subdivisions of the *Confessions*, and how is this modern scheme both useful and limiting while reading the book?

3. What are some differences between autobiography as defense of a life and as a restating of one's achievements and the autobiographical form that Augustine invents in the writing of the *Confessions*?

Lecture Five
Book I—Sin and Confession

Scope: We will take some time to acclimate ourselves to the form and genre discussed in the previous lecture. The first book (we today would say *chapter*) of Augustine's *Confessions* begins with a general introduction, then turns to his infancy and childhood. From the first paragraph, we are able to see how Augustine will incorporate and "Christianize" elements of classical thought. He also describes the restlessness of the human spirit if it does not recognize and praise God. He ponders the stability of the moral order, given that customs and practices change while God's law does not.

Outline

I. The first paragraph needs careful analysis, because it introduces the reader to the entire book.
- **A.** In it, we find two paraphrases (almost quotations) from Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and two more from Christian Scripture (New Testament).
- **B.** In that same paragraph, there is also a rather clear allusion to the neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus.
- **C.** Hence, from the beginning, one aspect of the *Confessions* to look for is Augustine's weaving together of elements of the classical and Judaeo-Christian traditions.
- **D.** Augustine states that, by their nature, all creatures desire to praise their creator.
- **E.** From the previous statement, it follows that no one is at peace unless he or she praises God.
- **F.** This concept of the civil war in the soul of the unjust is a Platonic idea found in the *Republic* but Christianized here.

II. Augustine ponders the nature of God and is struck with certain paradoxes.
- **A.** God is immutable but changes everything.
- **B.** God is always active and always in repose.
- **C.** In the story that follows in the rest of the narrative portion of the *Confessions*, Augustine will learn how to deal with mystery and will conquer his desire to understand everything with the same assurance that he understands that $7 + 3 = 10$.

III. Augustine begins his narrative by considering what he was like as a baby, even a baby one day old.
- **A.** He explains that he speculates about his infancy based on watching infants later in life.
- **B.** He considers babies who are one day old to be sinners, because all babies show a radical selfishness, not regarding anything except their immediate desires, such as milk from their mothers' breasts.
- **C.** Augustine recognizes that such behavior as crying for food is discarded when children grow older.
- **D.** However, Augustine believes that the value of understanding a baby's selfishness is that he or she and not the specific manifested behavior must be corrected as soon as the child can learn from correction.
- **E.** He claims that it is a good thing that babies are so physically limited; otherwise, their selfishness could cause real damage.
- **F.** This recognition of the need for the reorientation of each person from being self-centered to being God-centered is the basis for Augustine's theory of education.
  1. *Education* is used in the Platonic sense of turning people toward the highest things.
  2. Augustine is, thus, introducing a Christianized version of Plato's understanding of education.
  3. Augustine will later clarify this by alluding to having been in the "cave" for quite a long time.

IV. Augustine looks back on his earliest schooling with loathing for its goals and for his behavior.
- **A.** He understands that his schoolmasters saw their job as teaching Augustine how to be successful—defined as achieving fame and fortune—in the world.
- **B.** He especially hated corporal punishment when he was lazy in his schoolwork.

C. His first thoughts about God were that God might keep the teacher from hitting him. This prayer to God to keep the teacher from beating him demonstrates his selfishness, because he is concerned with what God can do for him, not what he can do for God.

D. This prayer of Augustine also suggests that he believed that he could act badly, then be rescued at the last minute by pleading to God.

V. Augustine realizes that much of the correction he received from adults when he was a child was tainted.

A. Adults criticize children for doing exactly what they are doing on a different plane as adults.

B. Augustine says that many adults act on exactly the same selfish motives as children, but they criticize children for their selfish behaviors.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions, chapter 1.

Robert O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 2.

Stephen Cooper, *Augustine for Armchair Theologians*, chapter 1.

Dixon, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is the idea that our hearts are restless until they rest in God the culmination of the introductory paragraph of the *Confessions*?

2. How does the Platonic definition of education—the process of being turned toward highest things—serve as the underpinning for what Augustine has to say about his early schooling?

3. How does Augustine's behavior as a young boy, especially his first prayer, illustrate his need for a true education?

4. Can we make a distinction between *indoctrination* (learning what the rules of the game of life are so that we can win at it) and *education*?

Lecture Six
Book I—Augustine's Childhood

Scope: When he turns to infancy, Augustine is rather straightforward in his condemnation of himself as a sinner, even when he was one day old; however, he explains that there is no correction to be meted out because an infant is incapable of learning from what he has done. Augustine discusses both his life as a pupil in a "pagan" school and his home life. It is not a picture of a bright kid who did well in his studies—what we would probably emphasize about young Augustine—but rather, of one who was selfish and mis-educated. His teachers cared only about his academic success and did not bother with his moral development. We also get our first look at Augustine as a reader of books, especially Virgil's *Aeneid*. As Augustine makes clear, his misspent youth is not a matter of needing to outgrow some habits or the fact that "boys will be boys." The issue is his habituation to sin.

Outline

I. Augustine takes a good deal of time to discuss the good and bad elements of his formal schooling.

- **A.** He learned how to read, write, and speak well.
  - **1.** Reading later allowed him to explore all sorts of books, including the Bible.
  - **2.** Writing allowed him to express to others what he was thinking.
  - **3.** He will become a well-known teacher of rhetoric.
- **B.** He loved Latin literature (although not Greek literature), especially the *Aeneid* of Virgil.
  - **1.** He enjoyed the story of the wanderings of Aeneas.
  - **2.** He wept when he read of the death of Dido.
  - **3.** However, Augustine could not see his own wandering and his own dying.
  - **4.** He will have to become a much better reader and discover how and what to learn from books.
  - **5.** He will later image the voyage of Aeneas when he travels from Carthage to Rome (Book V).

II. Augustine looks back on his early education and is reminded about the power of words and how beautiful words can easily become guides to, and reasons for, bad behavior.

III. Augustine is shocked by the moral vacuity of his early education.

- **A.** If a student described his lusts in elegant Latin, he received the teacher's approval.
- **B.** If a student described good behavior in less than perfect Latin, he would be subject to embarrassment from the teacher.
- **C.** Augustine realized when he wrote the *Confessions* that he was learning to accept moral conventions, rather than to determine right and wrong.

IV. Augustine considers the concept of childhood innocence.

- **A.** There are those who take the "boys will be boys" attitude, implying that children grow out of the sorts of behavior Augustine exhibited as a child.
- **B.** The author of the *Confessions* disagrees with this idea.
- **C.** He used to lie to his parents and to steal from them so that he could participate in competitions with his "friends."
- **D.** Augustine would cheat in contests with his friends to win prizes from them, yet he resented it when other children cheated him.
- **E.** These attitudes suggest, once again, that Augustine was as selfish as the day he was born.
  - **1.** He was the center and focus of all things.
  - **2.** The purpose of everything and everyone was to make him happy.
- **F.** Unless Augustine changed, he would be exactly the same as an adult, except that he would exhibit his selfishness in matters of business and politics rather than in trivial children's games.

V. Augustine realized that what he called his *education* as a child was not, in fact, education in the Platonic sense at all.

VI. Having looked at his early schooling, Augustine is ready to turn to the question of whether his parents provided him with real education.

Suggested Readings:

See readings for Lecture Five.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why are such ideas as "boys will be boys" and "he'll outgrow it" insufficient for Augustine?

2. Why was the young Augustine so drawn to literature, especially Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the writer Augustine somewhat skeptical about the value of such literature?

3. How does the selfishness of Augustine, which was a part of him when he was one day old, manifest itself throughout his childhood?

Lecture Seven
Book II—Augustine Grows Up

Scope: If sin was a problem to the child Augustine, it was much more of a problem as he grew older and became more mature. In Book II, Augustine explains how his parents dealt with him growing into a man. Although he tells us that his mother cared more than his father about his moral and spiritual development, both were too anxious for him to advance to worldly honors and, thus, cared more about his success in school than his goodness. The failure of his family to guide him becomes clear, beginning with his father's discovery that his son had reached puberty. Combining the first part of Book II with what Augustine tells us about his schooling in Book I, we can conclude that the teenage Augustine has been born into sin, and his sinfulness has actually been furthered by both his teachers and his parents because they are so concerned about his goals of becoming rich and famous.

Outline

I. Augustine introduces Book II with his description of the desire of his adolescence–to love and be loved.

- **A.** Augustine does not distinguish, at this time in his life, between love and lust.
- **B.** Augustine describes how concupiscence dominates him and clouds the way he sees everything.

II. Augustine introduces his father to the reader of the *Confessions* by telling of how he was praised for using his money to obtain for Augustine an expensive education.

- **A.** Augustine provides an alternative interpretation of his father—that he was acting selfishly to benefit from a son who would become rich and famous.
- **B.** Therefore, Augustine's father was interested in Augustine's success in school, not in his moral and spiritual development. His mother, Monica, felt similarly.
- **C.** The most revealing story concerning Augustine's father came when the two were in a bathhouse together and the father saw the physical evidence that Augustine had entered puberty.
  - **1.** Augustine's father rejoices that it will not be long before he will become a grandfather.
  - **2.** The father probably celebrated this news by getting drunk.
  - **3.** At an age when Augustine needed moral guidance, his father was unable to provide it.
  - **4.** We realize that Augustine's father had not turned away from his selfishness toward higher things; hence, he is hardly in a position to guide Augustine.

III. Augustine introduces his mother, Monica, by explaining how she responded to his adolescence and his progress in school.

- **A.** Monica warned her son against adultery and preferred that he remain celibate.
- **B.** However, she also told him that if he had to have sex, not to get married because it would take him from his studies and damage his career.
- **C.** Monica believed that if Augustine received a good education, he would use it at some later time to discover and follow the Christian God.
- **D.** Augustine explains that although Monica is herself experiencing an ongoing conversion (she is already a baptized Christian), she still had a long way to go.
- **E.** However, Monica certainly was a better parent than her husband.

IV. Augustine makes numerous allusions to Athens (Plato) and Jerusalem in weighing the virtues of his education.

V. Having established his need for true education—a real turning toward the highest things—Augustine now tells the story of how he and some friends stole some pears one night. This story summarizes the narrative of Augustine's need for education and his failure to obtain it.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 3.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 4.

Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine's Sin*, pp. 3–28.

Cooper, chapter 2.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does becoming an adolescent make life more complicated for Augustine?
2. Is Augustine the writer too tough in his criticisms of his parents during his teen years?
3. Are there ways for children to get a real education in the Platonic sense if teachers and parents are unable to provide it because they themselves do not have it?

Lecture Eight
Book II—Stealing Pears: So What?

Scope: The longest narration of an event in Augustine's youth is of a minor incident that occurred when he was 16. He and a few friends stole some pears from a neighbor's tree. Augustine was never caught, and from one perspective, this appears to be a non-event in Augustine's life. However, as Augustine looks back, he sees that the stealing of the forbidden fruit shows him to be another Adam—unwilling to obey laws and trying to declare a kind of freedom from society and its conventions, as well as from God. Because Augustine did not steal the pears alone and is sure that he wouldn't have done it by himself, he also reflects on what he thought at the time was friendship. This is particularly important, because Augustine values friendship and will deal with two other important friendships in his life in the later books.

Outline

I. One of the most poignant and detailed stories in the *Confessions* is the story of Augustine and friends stealing pears from a neighbor's tree.

- **A.** This was a petty crime at most.
- **B.** Augustine was never caught and paid no consequences for his act.
- **C.** Augustine sees this story as emblematic of who he really was as a teenager.
  - **1.** No doubt, many regarded him as a bright young man with great promise, but this story shows that Augustine was as selfish as the day he was born.
  - **2.** Augustine can bring the energy of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to illuminate his taking of the "forbidden fruit" from his neighbor.

II. As Augustine looks back at this teen prank, he realizes that it was not at all about pears—he does not even remember if he ate any of them.

- **A.** The joy was not in the object of the theft—the pears—but simply in doing something forbidden.
- **B.** Had Augustine been allowed to pick those pears, he would not have been at all interested.

III. Augustine asks why there was so much apparent pleasure in doing what was forbidden. Paralleling Paul's thoughts about the way humans respond to law in Romans and Eve's desire to be like a god in Genesis 3, Augustine realizes that his rebellion against the law is still another manifestation of his selfishness.

IV. Augustine tells us that his friends convinced him late one evening to carry out this prank.

- **A.** He says that he would not have done this alone.
- **B.** This leads to a reflection on friendship.
  - **1.** He called these fellow thieves his friends, but in his telling of the story, he makes clear that he had no idea of true friendship when he was a boy.
  - **2.** This is the first of several considerations of friendship, which the adult Augustine took very seriously.
  - **3.** He knows that true friendship is a great good and that it is based on goodness and a movement toward unity—the opposites of the kind of friendship he experienced with his fellow thieves. This reflects his reading of still another classical writer, Cicero.

V. The young Augustine was also seeking a kind of autonomy.

- **A.** He believed that no one, not even God, could control him.
- **B.** When he broke the law and stole the pears, he would truly be free.
- **C.** Reflecting on this attitude he had as a youth, Augustine likens himself to a prisoner who acts up, believing that he is, at least for a moment, free.
- **D.** Like that prisoner, however, Augustine was deceiving himself in defining this sort of hooliganism as true freedom.

VI. Augustine enjoyed "getting away" with his theft, unaware that he cannot escape God.

- **A.** When Augustine heard adults talking about the theft, he felt a thrill.

B. He never considered whether the person from whom he stole would suffer from the theft.

C. The theft was not about the one stolen from or about the pears; like everything else, Augustine's act was all about himself.

VII. Having presented his readers with a story that demonstrates what he was like as a teenager, Augustine is ready to turn to events of his late teen years that, indeed, began his real education.

Suggested Readings:

See readings for Lecture Seven.

Brown, pp. 28–34.

Margaret Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's* Confessions, pp. 17–38.

Questions to Consider:

1. If we had only the pear tree story to tell us about the youthful Augustine, what would we be able to know by reading that story carefully?
2. When Augustine breaks the law and steals pears, how can we see that the freedom he feels is only an illusion?
3. Is the writer Augustine being too harsh in the way he looks back on his relationships with his friends with whom he stole the pears?

Lecture Nine
Book III—The Journey Begins

Scope: At the beginning of Book III, Augustine comes to Carthage "where the din of scandalous love-affairs raged cauldron-like around me." But balanced against the story of his own lustful impulses is the beginning of his search for truth. At the age of 18, the young and lust-filled Augustine reads a work of Cicero as part of his training in rhetoric. Cicero urged his readers to seek those things that last forever. Of course, Cicero was not talking about fame or fortune or sex. Augustine thus begins his education, the process of turning toward the highest things. Because his mother was a Christian, he first turned to the Bible but is disappointed by the quality of the language. Because he wants things that last forever and he wants them soon and effortlessly, he becomes associated with a religious-philosophical group called the Manichees, adherents of a basically dualist way of looking at reality.

Outline

I. Augustine moves to Carthage to continue his studies. Carthage is the most important city in Latin-speaking North Africa and one of the great cities of the Roman Empire.

II. In the course of his rhetorical studies, he read Cicero's *Hortensius*.

- **A.** Although Augustine read the book for its style (form), he was drawn to its content (substance).
  - **1.** The book, which is now lost, encouraged the reader to seek eternal wisdom.
  - **2.** Augustine was won over by Cicero's call to seek wisdom.
  - **3.** Because of his mother's Christianity, he first sought that wisdom in the Bible.
- **B.** He was disappointed in his reading, because he found the writing itself to be inferior to the prose of Cicero and did not pursue it.

III. Augustine begins to consider "big questions" that he will struggle with for many years.

- **A.** What is the nature of evil? Augustine wonders where evil originates.
- **B.** What is the nature of God? In his initial questioning, Augustine wonders whether God has a body, although he will refine this question over the next decade.
- **C.** How can people of the past be considered moral if they did things that today are condemned as evil?
  - **1.** Augustine gives examples of Old Testament figures who offered animal sacrifices and practiced polygamy.
  - **2.** Augustine ponders the act of God commanding people to do unprecedented things.

IV. Young Augustine, seeking eternal wisdom, wants it rather quickly.

- **A.** He turns to a group called the Manichees for answers. The Manichees were a quasi-religious, quasi-philosophical movement named for the 3rd-century thinker Mani.
- **B.** The Manichees took basically a dualist stance—everything material is evil and everything that is spirit is good.
- **C.** Among other things, this dualism led the Manichees to take rather peculiar positions on Christian teachings.
  - **1.** The God who, in Hebrew Scripture, created the material world and declared it to be good is not a good God.
  - **2.** Jesus was not flesh and blood, because all matter is evil.
  - **3.** The Crucifixion was not what it appeared, because nails can hardly harm pure spirit.

V. Augustine became associated with the Manichees for almost a decade.

- **A.** The Manichees, despite a complicated mythology, offered a rather simple answer to complex questions: All could be explained as the struggle between matter (evil) and spirit (good).
- **B.** Augustine, in his Manichean period, learned about the teachings of Christianity through the prism of Manichean thought and found it to be intellectually indefensible.

VI. At the end of Book III, Augustine is asking good questions and beginning to get serious about life.

A. He is ready to learn.

B. He is impatient and does not yet understand the struggle that he must go through to find eternal wisdom.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 3.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 5.

———, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's* Confessions, chapter 1.

Cooper, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you think of any experience you have had of reading a book that has radically altered your way of thinking and priorities similar to the way Augustine responded to reading Cicero?

2. In what way might the cliché "a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing" apply to Augustine after he has read Cicero's *Hortensius*?

3. How important is figuring out what questions to ask to anyone's education?

4. How do we gear ourselves up for a long struggle once we embark on a quest for genuine wisdom?

Lecture Ten
Book IV—The Problem of Friendship

Scope: While Augustine is engaged in studies and a rather carefree life, a dear friend dies. Augustine was puzzled and even put off by the friend's baptism just before he died. Most of all, Augustine became severely depressed and morose, avoiding places where he used to meet his friend. At the time, Augustine thought that he was mourning for his friend, but by the time he writes the *Confessions*, he realizes the selfishness of his grief. He was mourning, not his friend's fate, but his own loss; this is another manifestation of the selfishness he was born with, a selfishness nurtured by teachers and parents. Augustine realizes both the goodness of friendship and how it can become another manifestation of concern for self rather than a genuine union of two souls. Toward the end of Book IV, Augustine describes his encounter with the writings of Aristotle and reports that this experience failed to move him forward in his journey toward God.

Outline

I. Augustine reminds readers of how his career and personal life are developing as he undertakes a quest for wisdom.

- **A.** He has become a professional teacher of rhetoric. As he looks back at his early adulthood, he sees himself as a seller of eloquence and argumentation.
- **B.** Augustine took a mistress.
  - **1.** He makes clear that he was faithful to her.
  - **2.** He considers what a great difference there is between the relationship one has with a mistress and with a wife.

II. Augustine even briefly is interested in astrology. In seeking immediate "solutions" to the complex questions he is now asking, he dabbles in astrology because it certainly offers simple answers to complex questions, such as why people do bad things—because it is in the stars.

III. Augustine developed a strong friendship with an unnamed young man.

- **A.** This relationship was much closer to a true friendship than his teen friends with whom he stole pears.
- **B.** Augustine looks back on this friendship and realizes that it was not of the highest type because it was not rooted in a common quest for God.
- **C.** Augustine also remembers that it was a warm and sweet relationship, based on the common interests of the two men.

IV. Augustine's friend became ill and died.

- **A.** While the friend was ill, he was baptized without his consent.
- **B.** Later, when his friend recovered somewhat, Augustine teased him about his baptism.
- **C.** Surprisingly, his friend responded to Augustine with a new confidence and forbade him to talk disrespectfully about his Christian initiation.
- **D.** At the time, Augustine had no understanding of why his friend responded as he did.
- **E.** Not long afterward, Augustine's friend died.

V. Augustine responded to the death of his friend with great anguish and suffering.

- **A.** He could hardly stand to be in places that he had visited with his friend.
- **B.** Augustine did not consider that his friend came into the presence of God upon death.
- **C.** He simply wept and could not be consoled.

VI. Reflecting on the death of his friend from a distance of about 20 years, Augustine realized that his response was inappropriate and ultimately selfish.

- **A.** He felt more attachment to his response to his friend's death than to the friend himself.

B. He had developed this relationship as if it were an immortal one, thus mistaking a temporal relationship for an eternal one.
   1. He loved his friend without regard to his human condition.
   2. His sweet friendship with this young man had been seriously flawed.

C. In the final analysis, Augustine was mourning for himself, not for his friend.

D. Even as Augustine is seeking eternal wisdom, his life is still dragged down by the condition and habit of selfishness that had been with him since the first day of his life.

VII. Augustine ends this episode by reflecting on the nature of friendship.

VIII. Augustine reports that in his quest for eternal wisdom, he turned to a book of Aristotle, *Ten Categories*.

A. He tells us that the book clarified his understanding of substances.

B. However, Aristotle did little to help Augustine find eternal wisdom.

C. Augustine's judgment on Aristotle would be the position of most theologians in the West until the 12th and 13th centuries.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 4.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 6.

Cooper, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can we see the disconnect between Augustine's pursuit of wisdom and the way he is living his life?

2. What was the meaning of the response of Augustine's friend when Augustine kidded him about his baptism?

3. How do Augustine's interests in astrology and the writings of Aristotle demonstrate that education is not easy and that there is no straight movement toward wisdom?

Lecture Eleven
Book V—From Carthage to Rome

Scope: In this section of the *Confessions*, Augustine moves from North Africa to Italy, first Rome, then Milan. Two powerful encounters define this part of Augustine's journey. For quite some time, he has been told by his Manichean colleagues that any questions they could not answer could be addressed to Faustus when he came to visit them. Although Augustine found Faustus personable and articulate, this Manichee "bishop" really had no substantive answers to the questions he asked. Hence, Augustine reflects on the relationship of form to substance, the way something is said and the truth it may contain. After Faustus's visit, Augustine begins to despair that humans are unable to grasp what he has been searching for—those things that last forever. For professional reasons, Augustine departs for Italy. When he arrives in Milan, he goes to hear Bishop Ambrose speak, because the bishop has a reputation for his rhetorical skills. Despite his lack of interest in the substance of Ambrose's sermons, Augustine finds himself drawn in. In particular, Ambrose interprets certain biblical passages allegorically. On hearing what Ambrose has to say, Augustine begins to realize that Christians are not so primitive and literal as he had imagined. This discovery would soon lead Augustine to return to Scripture and to give Christianity another look.

Outline

I. In this book, Augustine moves from North Africa (Carthage) to Italy (Rome, then Milan).
- **A.** In this journey, he is following the path of Aeneas after his affair with Queen Dido of Carthage.
- **B.** This move indicates the success Augustine is having in his career as a teacher of rhetoric.
- **C.** In fact, Milan, not Rome, was the seat of the Roman Empire at this time.
- **D.** Thus, Augustine is practicing his craft at the center of power.

II. During Augustine's time with the Manichees, he had formulated some questions that the local Manichees could not answer.
- **A.** Augustine always got the same answer: "Wait for Faustus," a Manichean leader.
- **B.** Finally, Faustus arrived, and Augustine wasted no time questioning him.

III. Faustus did not have answers that satisfied Augustine.
- **A.** Augustine found Faustus to be pleasant and to have a certain eloquence.
- **B.** However, the eloquence could not, for Augustine, conceal the fact that Faustus had little of substance to say.
- **C.** By this time, Augustine is beginning to perceive the differences between eloquence and truth.
  1. This distinction between surface and substance is an essential advance in Augustine's search for truth.
  2. He tells the reader that an eloquent statement is not necessarily true, nor is one stated inelegantly consequently false.

IV. After Faustus's failure to address Augustine's concerns, Augustine begins a period in which he wonders if humans are at all able to comprehend eternal wisdom. Augustine had no thought at this time to reexamine Christianity, because he still accepted a Manichean interpretation of the Bible.

V. Augustine moves to Rome, where he believes that he will find better students. Because his mother, Monica, did not want to bid farewell to her son, Augustine snuck away after lying to her.

VI. Augustine discovers that students in Rome find ways to cheat teachers out of payment and decides to move to Milan.

VII. In Milan, Augustine meets Bishop Ambrose.
- **A.** Because Ambrose had a reputation for being an excellent rhetorician, Augustine went to listen to him for the purposes of what we would call today 'professional development.'
- **B.** Augustine explicitly sought to divorce form from content and pay attention only to the manner in which Ambrose spoke.

C. Ambrose was such a good rhetorician that Augustine could not divorce form from content and began to listen to the message that Ambrose was preaching.
   1. That message was, specifically, that some biblical stories, especially ones in Hebrew Scripture, were not meant to be understood primarily at a literal level but had deeper meanings.
   2. Ambrose's figural interpretations of certain biblical stories opened Augustine to the possibility that Christians were not materialists and literalists, as the Manichees had taught him to believe.
   3. The encounter with Ambrose presented Augustine with the possibility that he should rethink his understanding of Christianity and, perhaps, once again look at the Bible.

VIII. The lessons that Augustine learned from Faustus and Ambrose are essential to moving toward a glimpse of eternal truth.

A. The encounter with Faustus clarified for Augustine that truth does not necessarily abide in the most beautiful packages.

B. The experience listening to Ambrose reinforced for Augustine the idea that he must look beyond the surface to the substance of things.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 5.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 7.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the significance of Augustine's move from Carthage to Italy, both literally and metaphorically?

2. How does Augustine's disappointment with Faustus's response to his questions further his quest for wisdom?

3. How good a speaker is Ambrose, and what does Augustine learn about rhetoric from listening to Ambrose's sermons?

Lecture Twelve
Book VI—A New Look at Christianity

Scope: As Augustine continues to bemoan people's inability to find those things that last forever, he also takes a fresh look at the Bible and Christianity. While doing this, he considers the idea of faith, something he had previously regarded as an insufficient basis for accepting anything. He wanted the certitude he found in mathematics as the basis for anything he would commit himself to. However, he realized that everyone has faith in something because no one has sufficient knowledge. It is not a question of "Do you have faith?" but of "What do you put your faith in?" As he is moving toward Christianity, Augustine "interrupts" the narrative to tell the readers about a new friend, Alypius, and how he had gone astray with a love of gladiatorial violence while in Rome. This seeming digression is vitally important, because Alypius will convert to Christianity just minutes after Augustine, and they will be baptized together. Again, Augustine asks readers to consider the nature and value of friendship.

Outline

I. Augustine's movement toward Christianity in Book VI is intertwined with three important people in his life: Monica, his mother; Ambrose, bishop of Milan; and a friend named Alypius.

II. In this book, Augustine takes a fresh look at Christianity by reading the Bible in a new way and by examining carefully, for the first time, the rationality of believing on faith.

III. At the beginning of the book, Monica is more confident about the conversion of Augustine than Augustine himself is.

- **A.** Augustine is, thus, able to narrate his own doubts, yet give readers clues to the ultimate outcome of the story he is telling.
- **B.** He also tells us some interesting details of his mother's life, preparing us for the longer account that he will give us in Book IX.

IV. Augustine gives a memorable account of Ambrose's life in this book.

- **A.** He talks about the burdens of the public life of a busy administrator.
  - **1.** He stresses the limited and, hence, precious time that Ambrose has for contemplation and study.
  - **2.** He is undoubtedly reflecting on his own life as a busy bishop, his situation when he was writing the *Confessions*.
- **B.** He describes Ambrose's habit of silent reading.
  - **1.** Clearly, what we take for granted is presented as something new and almost shocking in Augustine's time.
  - **2.** He suggests some practical reasons why Ambrose adopted this habit.
- **C.** Augustine describes what he learns from listening to Ambrose preach.
  - **1.** He discovers that his own ideas about Christianity were crude and inaccurate.
  - **2.** In particular, he discovers that Catholic belief about the meaning of the biblical phrase concerning humans, "being made in the image and likeness of God" from the Book of Genesis, is much more sophisticated and less literal than he previously believed.

V. Augustine tells the memorable story of his friend Alypius's addiction to gladiatorial games.

- **A.** This seeming digression is important, because Alypius will convert to Christianity just minutes after Augustine.
- **B.** In one of the most striking sections of the *Confessions*, Augustine presents the paradox of a mild and gentle friend becoming a "violence junkie" when he is taken to an arena.
- **C.** This section is also worthwhile for what it tells us about what was valued in the way of entertainment in the waning days of the Roman Empire.
- **D.** Once again, Augustine asks his readers to consider the nature and value of friendship.
- **E.** Augustine makes the case that the idea of self-sufficiency is incompatible with the idea of conversion.

F. Augustine wants us to see a parallel between Alypius and himself.

VI. Augustine presents an important reflection on the nature of faith in this book.

A. He comes to the conclusion that the rational certainty that we get with such subjects as mathematics is simply not appropriate to many kinds of knowledge.

B. He reflects on the fact that many who have promised certainty have been unable to deliver and that the Catholic Church has been much more moderate in its claims than others.

C. He talks about the many things that must be believed on the testimony of others.

D. He reflects on the kind of testimony that Christian Scripture is able to provide.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 6.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 8.

Cooper, chapter 6.

Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, pp. 53–64.

Questions to Consider:

1. How are the relationships Augustine has with Ambrose, Monica, and Alypius complementary?

2. What does Augustine discover about human limitations and the consequent need to trust?

3. Why does Augustine "interrupt" his narrative to tell us about how Alypius became addicted to the violence of the gladiatorial contests?

Timeline

c. 65	Death of St. Paul.
269	The conversion of St. Antony of the Desert.
337	Death of Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor.
354	Augustine is born in Thagaste (modern Algeria).
366	At age 12, Augustine is sent to study rhetoric in Madaura, about 20 miles south of Thagaste.
370	Augustine returns to Thagaste while his father saves money to send him for further education.
371	Augustine leaves Thagaste for study in Carthage (modern Tunisia), one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire. While there, he begins a long relationship with a woman.
372	Augustine's mistress gives birth to a son, Adeodatus. Augustine begins his association with the Manichees.
373	Augustine has a life-changing experience when he reads Cicero's *Hortensius*.
374	Augustine returns to Thagaste to teach.
376	Augustine experiences the death of a friend in Thagaste and, soon after, returns to Carthage, where he was to teach rhetoric for almost eight years.
383	Augustine leaves Africa and teaches rhetoric in Rome.
384	Augustine receives an important appointment as a "professor" of rhetoric in Milan, where he comes in contact with the city's bishop, Ambrose. Augustine enters the Christian catechumenate in Milan.
385	Augustine's mother, Monica, arrives in Milan. Augustine dismisses his mistress and the mother of Adeodatus but takes another mistress while plans are made for him to marry.
386	Augustine experiences a conversion to Christianity in a garden outside Milan. He; his son, Adeodatus; and his friend Alypius are baptized shortly afterward by Bishop Ambrose.
387	While in Ostia (the port of Rome), waiting to return to Africa, Augustine's mother, Monica, dies.
388	Augustine returns to Thagaste and begins to live a contemplative life.
c. 389	Augustine's son, Adeodatus, dies.
391	While in Hippo (modern Algeria) to consider establishing a monastery there, Augustine is ordained a priest.
391	Emperor Theodosius outlaws pagan sacrifices, essentially declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.
395	Augustine is ordained as an assistant bishop in Hippo.
396	Augustine becomes bishop of Hippo, a position he holds until his death.
397	Augustine begins to write the *Confessions*; death of St. Ambrose.
410	The Goths sack the city of Rome, an event that shakes the Roman Empire and eventually leads Augustine to write *The City of God*.

413 ..... Augustine begins to write *The City of God*.

430 ..... Augustine dies in Hippo on August 28.

7th century ..... With the Muslim conquest of North Africa, Augustine's body was moved, first, to Sardinia and, later, to Pavia in northern Italy. He is buried in the church of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in a tomb made in the 14th century.

1298 ..... Pope Boniface VIII establishes the feast of the four Latin Doctors of the Church—Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory.

Glossary

Arianism: Theological position that asserts that the Father and the Son are of different natures and, hence, that Christ is not truly divine. Condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325), Arianism nevertheless had a great impact on the history of early medieval Europe, because many of the Germanic tribes that took control of the Roman Empire were Arian Christians.

Carthage: A city in North Africa (present-day Tunisia), Carthage was one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire, and the capital of the province of Africa Proconsularis. Augustine comes to Carthage at the beginning of Book III of the *Confessions* to continue his studies and to find love. Carthage is also the home of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Augustine's coming to Carthage, "in love with loving," suggests a parallel with the ill-fated love affair between Aeneas and Dido. Augustine lives with his unnamed mistress in Carthage.

Cassiciacum*:* Country estate outside of Milan where Augustine, together with his mother, Monica, and a group of friends, moved after his conversion. He lived there between the time of his conversion and his baptism (386–387) and produced some of his earliest extant writings there.

City of God: Augustine's longest and most comprehensive work, written between 413 and 427. It can be seen as both a critique of pagan thought and the foundational work on the relationship between Christianity and the temporal order. For the Middle Ages, this was the most influential book of political theory and the theory of history.

Constantinople: The old city of Byzantium, located on a strait connecting the Mediterranean with the Black Seas, became Constantinople when the emperor Constantine moved the administrative and political center of the Roman Empire there. (It was dedicated in 330.) It continued as the capital of the empire (sometimes called the Byzantine Empire) until it was captured by the Turks in 1453.

Donatism*:* Theological position that denied priestly office to those who had previously abandoned their faith. At the heart of the Donatist controversy were competing ideas about the nature of the church. The Donatists saw the church as a community of saints, while the orthodox position was that the church was a mixed body of saints and sinners. The heart of the Donatist controversy was in North Africa, and Augustine wrote widely against the Donatist position.

Goths*:* Germanic tribe. Their looting of Rome in 410 provided the impetus for anti-Christian polemic. Augustine's *City of God* was written, in part, as an answer to this polemic.

Manichees*:* Sect that emphasized a radical dualism, in which two co-eternal principles, a principle of good and a principle of evil, exist completely separated from each other. Good is associated with spirit, and evil with matter, and each individual presents a microcosm of the struggle between these two. Manichee practices promised liberation from the flesh, the world of matter. Augustine was a Manichee for approximately 10 years, between the ages of 19 and 28.

Milan: Roman city that had become the capital of the Roman Empire in the west by the time of Augustine, because it was closer than Rome to the military front lines. It was in Milan that Augustine met Ambrose, and it was in Milan that Augustine was converted and baptized.

***Teaching Christianity* (*On Christian Doctrine*)**: Work of Augustine's that presents his theory of biblical interpretation. Although the date of composition of this work presents a problem—because it seems to have been written at various points in Augustine's career—it has been argued that there is a close tie with the *Confessions* in that this work provides a theory of interpretation that is carried out in practice in the *Confessions*.

Thagaste*:* Roman city in North Africa (in present-day Algeria) in which Augustine was born in 354.

Vandals: Germanic tribe that was besieging the city of Hippo at the time of Augustine's death in 430. They captured the city soon after Augustine's death.

Biographical Notes

Adeodatus: Augustine's son (372–c. 389), by his unnamed mistress at Carthage. He is baptized at the same time as Augustine, and Augustine talks about his importance in a dialogue that he wrote that is usually identified as *Concerning the Teacher.*

Alypius: Friend of Augustine (d. after 428) whose addiction to gladiatorial contests is described in Book VI of the *Confessions*. Alypius's conversion takes place at the same time as Augustine's own.

Ambrose: Bishop of Milan (c. 340–397) who was influential in the conversion of Augustine. Augustine learned from Ambrose his theory of biblical interpretation. He is considered to be one of the four Latin Doctors of the Church.

Antony*:* The "founder" of Christian monasticism (c. 251–356) whose story of conversion is told twice in Book VIII of the *Confessions* as a model and parallel with Augustine's own conversion. As the story is told in the *Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius, Antony hears the gospel passage about selling one's goods and giving to the poor and does just that, going to the Egyptian desert to live a life a prayer and asceticism for 87 years.

Aristotle: Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.E.) whose work on all aspects of philosophy and science was an important part of classical thought as it was inherited by pagan, Jewish, and Christian thinkers in the late empire. Augustine talks about the influence of Aristotle's *Categories* on his own education.

Cicero: Roman statesman and writer (106–43 B.C.E.) whose work *Hortensius* (a work that has not survived) sets Augustine on his search for wisdom, as related in Book III of the *Confessions*. Cicero was a great orator, whose speeches were a model for learning Latin rhetoric.

Dante: Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) is the author of *The Divine Comedy*, a poem that recounts the journey of Dante the pilgrim to the three parts of the Christian afterlife: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* depends heavily on Augustine's account of conversion in Book VIII of the *Confessions*.

Dido: In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido is the queen of Carthage whose tragic love affair with Aeneas is depicted in Book IV. Augustine recounts his childhood experience of weeping over the fate of Dido in Book I of the *Confessions.*

Faustus: Manichee "bishop" (late 4th c.) whose arrival is eagerly anticipated by Augustine in Book V of the *Confessions*. Instead of assuaging Augustine's intellectual doubts about Manicheeism, he increases them because his pleasant and agreeable style is not matched by serious intellectual content.

Martin Luther: The church reformer (1483–1546) whose break with Rome inaugurated the Protestant Reformation. Luther was an Augustinian friar teaching at the University of Wittenberg when he made his break with Rome. After Luther, both Protestants and Catholics looked to Augustine to support their theological positions.

Thomas Merton: American contemplative and writer (1914–1968) whose autobiographical conversion account, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has been described as a modern day *Confessions*.

Monica: Mother of Augustine (331-387). The name *Monica* is not Roman, and some have used that as evidence that she is of Berber origin. A devout Christian whose concern for her son forms an important part of Augustine's conversion narrative, her own life is narrated in some detail in Book IX of the *Confessions*.

Patricius: Augustine's father (d.c.370). A pagan who converts to Christianity toward the end of his life, Patricius remains a relatively sketchy figure in the *Confessions*. What we find out about him comes from Augustine's account of his adolescence in Book II and the extended account of his mother in Book IX.

Paul: Biblical figure and author (d.c.65) whose conversion is narrated in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Paul's letters (Epistles) are the most important theological accounts in the New Testament. Augustine's own conversion takes place during his reading of a section from Paul's Letter to the Romans (ch. 13).

Petrarch: Italian humanist (1304–1374) whose story of his ascent of Mount Ventoux includes an account of his reflections on Augustine's *Confessions*.

Plato: Greek philosopher (c. 427–347 B.C.E.) whose thinking has become a model for all those who find the true life of a human to be an upward striving toward the divine. The Platonist philosophers who provide the intellectual

foundation for Augustine's conversion in Book VII of the *Confessions* represent a later development of Plato's philosophy.

Possidius: Contemporary and friend of Augustine (c.370-c.440), he wrote the only life of Augustine that has come down to us from Augustine's own time.

Victorinus: Fourth-century philosopher/rhetorician (b.c.290) whose translations of neo-Platonist texts may have been read by Augustine. His conversion to Christianity, described in Book VIII of the *Confessions*, is one of several contemporary accounts of conversion that clearly influenced Augustine's. Victorinus gives up the practice of rhetoric after his conversion, as does Augustine.

Virgil: Latin poet (70–19 B.C.E.) whose epic poem *The Aeneid* describes the journey of its hero, Aeneas, from the ruins of Troy to the shores of Italy, where he begins the foundations of Rome. The *Aeneid* was a foundational text in the Roman educational system, and Augustine consciously models the structure of the *Confessions* on the *Aeneid*.

Bibliography

I. General References

Fitzgerald, Allan, ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). This 900-page volume has articles on all essential topics associated with the life and works of St. Augustine. Each entry has a bibliography.

The *Revue des études Augustiniennes* publishes a bibliography of works concerning St. Augustine about every 18 months, containing works in all major languages.

II. Works of St. Augustine

New City Press (www.newcitypress.com) is currently in the process of publishing new English translations of all the works of St. Augustine. Although it will be several years before the project is completed, many are already available. They are of very high quality from a scholarly perspective and are good, readable translations. However, many fine translations of the most important works of Augustine are available in other editions. Some modern volumes contain all or parts of several works arranged by theme. One example is *Augustine: Political Writings*, edited by E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

III. Translations of *Confessions*

For this course, we have used the translation by Maria Boulding published in three formats (hardcover, study, and pocket) by New City Press. Many other useful translations are available, including:

Chadwick, Henry. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Pine-Coffin, R. S. (New York: Penguin, 1961).

Sheed, F. J. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

Warner, Rex (New York: New American Library, 1963).

Garry Wills has translated three books of *Confessions* in separate volumes. Book I is published as *Saint Augustine's Childhood* (New York: Viking, 2001). Book II is published as *Saint Augustine's Sin* (New York: Viking, 2003). Book X is published as *Saint Augustine's Memory* (New York: Viking, 2002).

The most extensive commentary on the text is contained in the Latin edition edited by James J. O'Donnell: *Confessions*, 3 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The first volume of this monumental work contains the Latin text of the *Confessions*. The second and third volumes are a systematic, line-by-line commentary, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the *Confessions* and the other works of Augustine. As such, this is an extremely valuable resource, but the reader should be warned that O'Donnell makes little concession to those who do not read Latin (or Greek, German, Italian, and French), quoting freely from these languages without translation in his commentary. For scholars, it is an indispensable source. For the more general reader, it is still a work that can be used with profit and should be consulted.

IV. Biographies of Augustine

In addition to the partially autobiographical *Confessions*, a hagiographical life of Augustine written by someone who knew him is available in translation: Possidius, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, ed. John Rotelle (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1988).

Among the numerous modern biographies are the following:

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California, rev. ed., 2000). This work is generally regarded as the standard biography in English.

Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Price, Richard. *Augustine* (Ligouri, MO: Triumph, 1996).

Van der Meer, Frederick. *Augustine the Bishop* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

Wills, Garry. *Saint Augustine* (New York: Viking, 1999). This short, readable introduction provides both a biographical and a thematic account of Augustine's major concerns. This book also contains interesting interpretations of several sections of the *Confessions*.

The most important visual presentation of the life of St. Augustine is a fresco cycle in the church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (Tuscany), the work of the 15th-century Florentine artist Benozzo Gozzoli. Access to all the scenes can found on the website www.gallery.euroweb.hu/html/g/gozzoli/4gimigna/2.

V. Important Studies of Augustine and His Works

A. General Studies on the Thought of Augustine

Chapter 4 of William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2004), is devoted almost entirely to an overview of the thought of Augustine. The earlier chapters of this book—on the Bible, the Classical Heritage, and Early Christianity—are meant to introduce students and the general reader to the Middle Ages but would also be useful to the reader coming to Augustine without an awareness of his cultural heritage.

Another good place to start is the collection of essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven and London, 2003), is an important account of early thinkers in the church, including Augustine, and how they combined experience and learning in clarifying Christian belief. This book is accessible to a general reader and does not presume much prior knowledge of the period. Also interesting is Wilken's earlier work, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984, rpt. 2003).

More specialized studies include the following:

Arendt, Hannah. *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, new ed., 1996).

Bright, Pamela, ed. *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

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Cooper, Stephen. *Augustine for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

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Power, Kim. *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

Rist, John. *Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Scott, Kermit. *Augustine: His Thought in Context* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

TeSelle, Eugene. *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

B. Studies of the *Confessions*

Dixon, Sandra. *Augustine: The Scattered and Gathered Self* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

Herzman, Ronald. "*Confessions* 7.9: What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?" *Journal of Education* 179 (1997): 49–60.

Miles, Margaret. *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's* Confessions (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

O'Connell, Robert. *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's* Confessions (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996).

———. *St. Augustine's* Confessions: *The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

Paffenroth, Kim, and Robert Kennedy, eds. *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's* Confessions (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

Stock, Brian. *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

St. Augustine's *Confessions*

Part II

Professor William R. Cook and
Professor Ronald B. Herzman

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William R. Cook, Ph.D.

Professor of History, State University of New York at Geneseo

William R. Cook was born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana, and attended public schools there. He is a 1966 graduate of Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana (*cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa). He received Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Lehman fellowships to study medieval history from Cornell University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1971. His dissertation was a study of a Hussite theologian and diplomat named Peter Payne.

In 1970, Dr. Cook was appointed Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo, the honors college of SUNY. He has taught there for 30 years and holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of History. At Geneseo, Dr. Cook has taught courses in medieval and ancient history, the Renaissance and Reformation periods, and the Bible and Christian thought. In 1992, he was named CASE Professor of the Year for New York State.

After publishing several articles on Hussite theology and monastic thought, Dr. Cook has, for more than 20 years, focused his research on St. Francis of Assisi. In 1989, he published a volume in a series, *The Way of the Christian Mystics*, entitled *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility*, with Michael Glazier (later published by the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN). For years, Dr. Cook sought to find and catalogue all the early paintings of St. Francis done in Italy. In the 1990s, he published a series of articles in Franciscan and Italian journals on specific images of the saint. In 1998, he published a study entitled *St. Francis in America* (Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL) of early Italian paintings of Francis that are currently in the United States and Canada. These years of research on the images of Francis were brought to a conclusion with the 1999 publication of a comprehensive catalogue: *Images of St. Francis of Assisi in Painting, Stone and Glass from the Earliest Images to ca.1320 in Italy: A Catalogue* (Leo S. Olschki, Florence) in the series *Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies*.

Dr. Cook has also contributed to the *Cambridge Companion to Giotto*; is currently editing (and contributing to) a collection of essays on early Franciscan art under contract with Brill publishers; is creating a CD-ROM containing early images of St. Francis of Assisi with New City Press; and has published two books of local history about his home area, Livingston County, New York.

Currently, Dr. Cook is writing articles based on research that was not used in his books, and he plans to bring two great loves—St. Francis and the city of Siena—together by doing research on the 15th-century Franciscan Bernardino of Siena.

Dr. Cook has taught about Francis at Siena College (Loudenville, New York) and has given lectures about Francis and Franciscan art throughout the United States and in Europe. With Dr. Herzman, he has taught about Francis to groups ranging from school children to students in religious education classes to Trappist monks.

Dr. Cook has directed 10 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities since 1983; six have had Francis as their subject and have been conducted in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2003, he directed an NEH seminar for college teachers in Italy entitled "St. Francis and the Thirteenth Century." Recently, Dr. Cook has been teaching a course about medieval Italian city-states every other year in Siena, Italy.

Ronald B. Herzman, Ph.D.

Distinguished Teaching Professor of English,
State University of New York at Geneseo

Ronald Herzman was born in Brooklyn, New York. He attended Brooklyn Prep and Manhattan College, graduating with honors in 1965 and receiving the Devlin Medal for excellence in French. He studied English literature at the University of Delaware as a DuPont Fellow and a New York State Regents Fellow. He received his M.A. in 1967 and his Ph.D. in 1969, writing his dissertation on Geoffrey Chaucer. Dr. Herzman has also studied at Princeton University (summer 1973) and as a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow-in-Residence at the University of Chicago during the 1978–1979 academic year. He received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1976 and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Manhattan College in 1991.

In 1969, Dr. Herzman was appointed Assistant Professor of English at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where he currently holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of English. He has also been an adjunct professor at Genesee Community College, teaching in the inmate education program at Attica Correctional Facility (together with Dr. Cook); he has been a professorial lecturer at Georgetown University; and he has served as a guest tutor at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. From 1982–1985, Dr. Herzman was on leave from SUNY to work at the National Endowment for the Humanities, where he was the founding Program Officer for the Summer Seminars for School Teachers and the Assistant Director of the Division of Fellowships and Seminars.

Dr. Herzman's teaching interests include Dante, Chaucer, Francis of Assisi, Shakespeare, the Bible, and Arthurian literature. With Dr. Cook, he has team-taught several courses at Geneseo, including "The Age of Dante" and "The Age of St. Francis of Assisi."

Dr. Herzman's books include *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, with Richard Emmerson) and *Four Romances of England* (Medieval Institute Publications, edited with Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury). He has written extensively on medieval literature, including 15 articles and book chapters on Dante, several articles on Francis of Assisi, and work on Chaucer, the *Romance of the Rose*, and the *Song of Roland* (with Dr. Cook). His current research interests include a book-length study of Dante's *Paradiso*.

Dr. Herzman has directed 12 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities, conducted at Geneseo; at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2004, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a foundational member of the Geneseo chapter.

Professors Cook and Herzman have been teaching and writing together for 30 years. They taught their first course, "The Age of Chaucer," in 1973 and took it "on the road" to England the following summer. While teaching together in Assisi in 1975, they decided to write an article together. In 1983, they published *The Medieval World View* with Oxford University Press. The second edition of *The Medieval World View* was published in 2004.

In addition to teaching generations of students at SUNY Geneseo, Professors Cook and Herzman twice taught a course on Dante to inmates at Attica Correctional Facility. They have lectured throughout the United States and have worked with high school teachers from Maine to California. They also enjoy giving talks in the schools and churches in and around their home in Geneseo, New York.

In 2003, Professors Cook and Herzman were presented with the first-ever award for excellence in the teaching of medieval studies by the Medieval Academy of America.

Table of Contents

St. Augustine's *Confessions*
Part II

St. Augustine's *Confessions*

Scope:

The 24 lectures of this course are devoted to an analysis of one of the world's greatest and most beloved books, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430). The first four lectures provide several types of useful background for an intelligent reading of the *Confessions*. We deal with everything from Roman history to Christian controversies at the time of Augustine to the corpus of the writings of Augustine. The 24th lecture looks forward from antiquity to the 21st century, pointing out authors who have been moved and influenced by Augustine from his time to ours. By bringing the story to the present, we mean to suggest the ongoing usefulness of the book and how it may serve as a guide to us, despite the obvious differences between Augustine's world and ours.

All the other lectures are a continuous exegesis of and meditation on the 13 books that make up the *Confessions*. The bulk of the course examines the first nine books, in which Augustine tells his life story from his birth to the time of his conversion at age 31. For many modern readers, these nine books *are* the *Confessions*, because many ignore the four non-narrative books that follow the story of Augustine's life. There is, indeed, almost nothing in the world's literature that is more powerful than some of the stories that Augustine tells—his stealing of some pears, his struggle to understand God's nature, the powerful moment of his conversion when he opens Paul's letter to the Romans and reads words that lead him to God, and the death of his beloved mother, Monica.

Yet we also devote four lectures to those books that tell no story. His reflection on memory in Book X explains how it is possible to write the story of his life. His meditation on time and eternity (Book XI) continues a theme incorporated into the narrative books. The last two books discuss approaches to Scripture and provide a powerful allegorical reading of the beginning of the Book of Genesis.

Our goal for the course is to bring all those who hear us to the text itself. We hope that when people finish the course, they will run to the bookstore or library to obtain the *Confessions*, then commit to spend a good long time marveling at its beauty and applying its insights to themselves.

Lecture Thirteen
Book VII—Neo-Platonism and Truth

Scope: Within the 13-book structure of the *Confessions*, Book VII is the exact center. In some ways, this makes sense. If we look at the *Confessions* in terms of Augustine's search for truth, this book marks the time when he becomes convinced of the intellectual superiority of Christianity. In this lecture, we will discuss how Augustine becomes convinced that Christianity is true. He presents the climax of his search in terms of an amazing paradox: He learns of the truth of Christianity by reading pagan philosophers. Because he makes the case for the importance, indeed, the necessity, of pagan learning in his search for truth, this book is an important chapter in the history of Christianity and in the intellectual history of the West. Augustine offers a valuable contribution to the question: "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" This lecture deals with what Augustine is and is not saying about the relationship between Christian revelation and classical learning and what the long-term implications of his position have been for subsequent history.

Outline

I. Book VII is the center of the *Confessions.*
- **A.** By the end of the book, he is convinced of the intellectual superiority of Christianity.
- **B.** Paradoxically, he comes to this understanding by reading philosophy written by pagans, more specifically, by Platonist philosophers.
- **C.** Book VII, thus, makes an important contribution to the question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" That is, in what way can Christians make use of classical learning or, indeed, any non-Christian learning?
  - **1.** Previously, as in his reading of the story of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid* in Book I, Augustine seems to be skeptical about the value of classical learning.
  - **2.** Now, he makes it clear that he could not have come to an understanding of the intellectual truth of Christianity without these texts.

II. At the beginning of the book, Augustine is still wrestling with the problem of evil.
- **A.** The Manichees had a consistent answer for this problem, because they believed that there was an ultimate principle of good and an ultimate principle of evil.
- **B.** Now that he has become disillusioned with the Manichees, Augustine can no longer accept that answer.

III. At this time, Augustine also sees the intellectual contradiction of predictive astrology.
- **A.** He had already become suspicious of it.
- **B.** He receives help from a man who tells him that the idea is bogus.
- **C.** He uses the example of twins to put the final nail in the coffin, using in particular, the biblical examples of Jacob and Esau.
- **D.** The implication here seems to be that astrology was important for Manichaean beliefs and practices.

IV. Augustine tells us that he read books "written by the Platonists" and translated from Greek into Latin.
- **A.** He is not specific about the exact texts that he has read.
- **B.** He paraphrases these books, rather than quoting them directly.
- **C.** His paraphrase is also a paraphrase of one of the most important texts of Christian Scripture, the beginning of the gospel according to John
- **D.** The surprising and, to some extent, shocking claim that he makes is that these Platonists teach the same thing as the Gospel of John.
- **E.** Augustine's claim is that even though these words may not have been exactly what was said in the text of these philosophers, they accurately represent the substance of what he saw in them.
- **F.** Thus, in these pagan philosophical texts, he finds a way of articulating Christian beliefs.

V. Augustine realizes that this is a conclusion with extraordinary consequences.

A. To fully explain its significance, he goes to another key biblical text, the story of Jacob and Esau from Genesis 27.

B. In that story, the younger son, Jacob, steals the inheritance from his older (twin) brother, Esau.

1. This is the same story that Augustine used to discredit astrology, as we saw above.

2. But here, he uses the account to tell his own story.

C. Augustine sees himself as Jacob, the younger son, and sees himself as a representative of those who come to Christianity through pagan philosophy, rather than through the Jewish inheritance.

D. The elder son, Esau, represents those who come to Christianity through Judaism.

E. In this analysis, Augustine is updating and adding to what St. Paul said in the Epistle to the Romans.

VI. He also uses another key scriptural idea to explain his intellectual conversion: the idea of Egyptian gold.

A. When the Hebrews left Egypt during the Exodus, they left many things behind, but they took gold with them.

B. Augustine uses this fact, by analogy, to talk about the value of pagan culture: It is the Egyptian gold that he brings with him on his own personal exodus.

C. Augustine implies that the Christian community is made richer by the Egyptian gold that people like himself bring with them when they convert.

D. This is a key moment, therefore, in the self-understanding of Christianity.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 7.

O'Connell*, St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 9.

Dixon, chapter 6.

Cooper, chapter 7.

Brown, pp. 88–100.

Stock, pp. 65–74.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why has it taken Augustine so long to make significant progress in finding answers to the problem of God and the problem of evil?

2. Why does Augustine explain what he learned from the Platonists by paraphrasing Scripture, and why does he have a "but" at the end of each one of those quotations?

3. How does Augustine imagine himself as the biblical Jacob?

Lecture Fourteen
Book VII—Faith and Reason

Scope: Augustine's reading of the Platonist philosophers enables him to come to some conclusions about intellectual problems that he has been wrestling with for years. In this lecture, we will discuss what Augustine has learned about the nature of evil and about the goodness of creation. At the end of this book, Augustine knows that Christianity is true, but he still does not make the decision to be baptized. The end of the book is a powerful meditation on the limits of reason, on the necessity for faith, and on the relationship between faith and reason. In this lecture, we will discuss what Augustine has to say about these issues.

Outline

I. With the new insights that Augustine has gained from his reading of the Platonists, he is ready to seek new approaches to two questions that he had been wrestling with since he was 18.
- **A.** What is the nature of God?
- **B.** What is the nature of evil?

II. With a faith that is based on the fact that the Platonists gave reasons for things that the Bible simply states to be true, Augustine turns to Scripture.
- **A.** He considers Exodus 3:14: "I am who am."
- **B.** Augustine has been trying to figure out what sort of a being God is, but he has been asking the wrong question.
- **C.** God is not *a* being but, rather, being itself; God simply *is*.
- **D.** Augustine tells the readers that all doubt vanished from him when he recognized that God is being itself.

III. Augustine describes his understanding of a neo-Platonic view of the universe.
- **A.** It is a hierarchy of being with God at the top and inanimate objects at the bottom.
- **B.** Humans are somewhere in the middle of this hierarchy.

IV. Using this neo-Platonic model, Augustine turns to the question of the nature of evil.
- **A.** Again, Augustine had been asking the wrong question: What sort of thing is evil?
- **B.** Evil is not a substance; if it were, it would be good, because God would have created it.
- **C.** Evil is, instead, the perversion of the will, the choosing of lower rather than higher things.
  - **1.** If a person chooses gold over God, it is not that the gold is evil; rather, the act of turning away from something higher and toward something lower is evil.
  - **2.** It is the choosing, not what is chosen, that constitutes evil.

V. In an important passage, Augustine declares that he knows enough to choose God.
- **A.** He uses the cave image from Plato's *Republic* to proclaim that he is, indeed, out of the cave.
- **B.** He uses a passage in Paul's Letter to the Romans to show how he has glimpsed God's invisible nature, starting with an examination of the things that God has made.

VI. The understanding that Augustine has gained is not enough.
- **A.** The knowledge that he has may be enough to allow him to perceive God, but it is not sufficient for him to enjoy God.
- **B.** As he explained earlier in Book VII, when he told readers what he learned from reading Platonists, they cannot explain mysteries of incarnation and atonement.
- **C.** Christ is not *a* way but, rather, *the* way.
- **D.** Only through Christ does one encounter *caritas*, love.

VII. Augustine reflects on the value and limitations of pagan writings.
- **A.** Great philosophers can tell people where they want to go.

B. Great philosophers, however, cannot tell people how to get there.

C. The only *way* or road to God is Christ.

VIII. These insights allow readers to go back to the beginning of the true education of Augustine with his reading of Cicero in Book III.

A. Augustine wrote there that reading Cicero turned him toward God.

B. Historically, that makes no sense, because Cicero knew nothing of God.

C. What we now can see is that Cicero turned Augustine toward eternal truth, which ultimately is God for the Christian Augustine.

Suggested Readings:

See readings for Lecture Thirteen.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 10.

———, *Images of Conversion*, pp. 174–203.

Cambridge Companion, chapters 3 and 6.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is Augustine's "verdict" about the importance and limitation of classical wisdom for the Christian?

2. How does a new way of reading of Scripture (Ambrose's influence) and a new confidence in Scripture (aided by his reading of the Platonists) lead Augustine to find some answers to questions about the nature of God and evil? Does this mark the end of the need to ask these questions?

3. For Augustine at this time in his journey, what is the importance of Christ?

Lecture Fifteen
Book VIII—Converging Conversions

Scope: Book VIII presents the actual moment of Augustine's conversion and, therefore, one of the most important moments in the *Confessions*. He presents this conversion both as the climax of an intense personal struggle and as part of a pattern of interlocking conversions that he has either read about or heard about that, in effect, trace a history of Christianity from Paul to Augustine. By focusing on the conversion stories that Augustine recounts in this book, from Paul to Antony of the Desert to Victorinus, this lecture shows how Augustine prepares the reader to understand the meaning of his own conversion and to understand how the *Confessions* is about an important cultural moment, in which the Roman Empire is, to a great extent, Christianized.

Outline

I. Book VIII presents the actual moment of Augustine's conversion and, therefore, is one of the central moments of the *Confessions*.

II. Augustine presents this story as the climax of an intense personal struggle that has been going on at least since his early adolescence.

III. He also presents it as part of a pattern of interlocking conversions that provides not only the context for his own conversion but also a kind of mini-history of Christianity from Paul, the most famous convert, up to the time of Augustine himself.

- **A.** Some of these conversion stories are taken from the experience of Augustine's own circle of friends and acquaintances.
- **B.** It is clear, for example, that many of the friends who visit Augustine during this time immediately before his conversion have become Christian.
  - **1.** Their conversions continue the theme of friendship that is central to the concerns of the *Confessions.*
  - **2.** When Augustine is converted, his friend and student Alypius is, too.

IV. Although he does not describe it in detail, it is clear that the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus is the most important example for Augustine.

- **A.** During the time immediately before Augustine's conversion, Paul's letters are his constant companion.
- **B.** Friends who visit Augustine during this time notice the works of Paul lying around, and this spurs them to tell him other stories of Christian conversion.

V. Augustine is told the story of St. Antony of the Desert by his friend Ponticianus.

- **A.** Although it was already a famous story by this time, Augustine did not seem to know about it.
- **B.** The story is the foundational story of Christian monasticism.
- **C.** The story resonates with Augustine's own conversion, because Antony is converted by hearing a text from Scripture, just as Augustine is converted by reading a text from Scripture.
- **D.** The story is also important, because after his own conversion, Augustine will live in a monastic-type community.

VI. Another friend tells Augustine the story of the conversion of Victorinus.

- **A.** This story, too, has many parallels to that of Augustine: Victorinus, like Augustine, is a teacher of rhetoric and an important interpreter of Platonist philosophy.
- **B.** After he becomes convinced of the truths of Christianity, Victorinus believes himself to be Christian, even though he is not willing to profess his beliefs publicly.
- **C.** This story also makes the important cultural point that even though Christianity was both legal and even favored in the empire, it is still suspect in intellectual circles.
  - **1.** Augustine himself, especially during his Manichee years, felt this strongly.
  - **2.** The fact that Christianity was for everybody made it suspect.

D. Is it possible to be a private Christian? This is one of the larger questions that this particular conversion story asks.

VII. All of these interlocking stories of conversion prepare the way for Augustine's conversion, even as they shed light on that conversion.

A. They help us to see that his struggle is both individual and communal.

B. They help us to see some of the cultural ramifications of that conversion.

C. After his conversion, Victorinus is, in fact, baptized publicly and gives up his position as a teacher of rhetoric, because he believes it is not compatible with being a Christian.

D. After his conversion, Augustine, too, must learn to profess his faith publicly.

1. As we will see in Book IX, Augustine, like Victorinus, also gives up his "trade" as a teacher of rhetoric.

2. It is also important to look at the text of the *Confessions* itself as a public display of Augustine's beliefs.

Suggested Readings:

A Reader's Companion, chapter 8.

Cook and Herzman, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the most interesting conversion stories that Augustine learns about in this book as a lead-in to his own conversion?

2. How is the conversion of Victorinus, told in this book, a model for Augustine's own conversion?

3. How do Augustine's friends help in his conversion?

Lecture Sixteen

Book VIII—"Pick It Up and Read"

Scope: This lecture begins by taking a close look at Augustine's description of his imprisonment to sex, the obstacle that is preventing him from turning his will toward God. In a passage that sounds amazingly contemporary, Augustine talks about the chains of lust as an addiction that binds his will. After examining this passage as a kind of summary of a long struggle that began for Augustine in adolescence, we will be prepared to examine the actual moment of conversion. Augustine's description of his conversion is rightly famous for its dramatic intensity. A close examination of the process shows us that Augustine uses this scene to bring together many of the major themes of the *Confessions* as a whole. We will also discuss how this scene has an important post-Augustinian afterlife, serving as a model for conversion for subsequent Christian history and as an important "scene" for such writers as Dante, writing centuries after the *Confessions.*

Outline

I. Augustine prepares us for his conversion by describing the great obstacle to his conversion: his imprisonment to sex.

- **A.** He tells us that it was difficult to face the truth that it was this habit that kept him from turning toward God.
- **B.** He tells us that he could no longer use the excuse of intellectual uncertainty.

II. His description of what it is like to be bound in the chains of lust is both moving and insightful.

- **A.** He describes how will becomes habit and habit becomes a compulsion.
- **B.** In this description, he sounds amazingly contemporary, as if he were using the contemporary language of "addiction."

III. Augustine also tells us about how this habit has been with him since adolescence.

- **A.** He deals with the paradoxical nature of this habit: He wanted to be rid of it, but he was also totally attached to it.
- **B.** This paradox is stated in what is perhaps the most famous line in the *Confessions*: When he was a youth, Augustine used to pray, "Grant me chastity and self-control, but please, not yet."

IV. Augustine's conversion comes when he reads a book.

- **A.** The book is Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
- **B.** The passage in Romans speaks directly to the great obstacle to his conversion, sex.
- **C.** The passage is the famous command against "debauchery and lewedness" from Romans 13.

V. The passage is rightly famous for its dramatic intensity.

- **A.** Augustine hears a voice saying, "pick it up and read, pick it up and read."
- **B.** The voice is mysterious, the voice of a child, but Augustine cannot remember any children's games that have that tag line.
- **C.** Augustine takes the voice as being addressed to himself.

VI. Augustine the author has clearly set this scene up so that it makes its point with the greatest effect.

- **A.** He is interested in showing that his search for God and God's search for him have come together at this point.
- **B.** Did it happen exactly as Augustine said it did?
  - **1.** We can never know for sure.
  - **2.** But clearly, that is not the major point for Augustine the author to make at this moment.
  - **3.** He is more interested in presenting the meaning of his conversion as memorably and convincingly as he can.

VII. The story of Augustine's conversion takes its place among the great conversion stories of Christianity, another book added to the stories of Paul and Antony of the Desert.

A. Antony, as the first monk, is a model: first, for being converted by Scripture and, second, because he anticipates Augustine's own monastic period.

B. As for Paul, Augustine reads his text from Romans, and at that moment, his will is turned to God. As he famously puts it, "I had no wish to read further, nor was there need."

C. Since Alypius converts in Augustine's footsteps, this becomes the account of a dual conversion.

Suggested Readings:

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto V.

Cook and Herzman, chapter 4.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapters 11 and 12.

Miles, chapter 2.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Augustine dramatize the moment of his conversion? How important is it that events happened exactly the way that he said they did?

2. Why is it important that Augustine's friend Alypius is converted at the same time that Augustine is?

Lecture Seventeen
Book IX—The New Man

Scope: One center of this book is Augustine's baptism, which marks the end of the process of his conversion and, thus, the end of the biographical part of the *Confessions.* But Augustine also has to deal with the very real question of what to do with his life now that he has formally become a Christian. This book deals with his decision to abandon his life as a teacher of rhetoric in favor of a life of leisure and contemplation. In this lecture, we will deal with his new "career choice," seen both in itself and in terms of his later life as a Christian bishop. We will also follow Augustine as he recounts the deaths of several friends who have become close to him, as well as the death of his son. Given that the pattern of Christian baptism, as a rite of initiation, is seen by Augustine as a pattern of death and rebirth, it seems clear that Augustine wants us to view these deaths, as well as the climactic death of his mother, which also takes place in this book, in terms of the Christian doctrine of resurrection. We will discuss what Augustine says about his son, in what amounts to a kind of eulogy for him, and explore some of the questions that are left unanswered in Augustine's discussion of his son.

Outline

I. Augustine's conversion leads toward his baptism. His official reception into the Christian community through this rite of Christian initiation is, in a real sense, the goal of his lengthy journey, which ends in his turning toward God.

- **A.** Baptism as a rite of the Christian Church is extremely rich in significance and symbolism.
- **B.** St. Paul, for example, talks about baptism in terms of a pattern of death and resurrection.
  - **1.** Christ's death and resurrection, according to Paul, is that pattern that all Christians must follow.
  - **2.** Our immersion in the waters of baptism recreates precisely that pattern.

II. In Book IX of the *Confessions*, Augustine relates the death of several people of great importance in his life.

- **A.** In this book, for example, he recounts the death of his son.
- **B.** He also relates the death of his friends Nebridius and Verecundus.
- **C.** Finally, he recounts—at considerable length—the death of his mother, Monica.

III. It seems clear that he wants us to understand these deaths and his reaction to them in terms of the Christian doctrine of resurrection.

IV. In this book, we are given more details about Augustine's son.

- **A.** He talks about his son's baptism.
- **B.** He talks about a book they wrote together, as a dialogue, even though his son was only 16 years old at the time.
- **C.** He asserts that he has no anxiety for his son because of the kind of life he led.

V. Now that Augustine is a baptized Christian, he must deal with the very real question of what to do with his life.

- **A.** He is concerned that he live a life that is appropriate to a Christian.
- **B.** He understands that there may be some problems in leading the life of a teacher of rhetoric.
- **C.** Like Victorinus in Book VIII, Augustine gives up the teaching of rhetoric as inappropriate to his new life.
  - **1.** Augustine uses a lung problem as his opportunity to "retire" from the teaching of rhetoric.
  - **2.** He takes advantage of the generosity of his friend Verecundus, who makes his country estate at Cassiciacum available to Augustine.

VI. The period of contemplation and leisure that Augustine and his friends enjoy at Cassiciacum must surely be contrasted with his later busy life as a bishop.

- **A.** He enters a quasi-monastic atmosphere that reflects earlier periods of his life.
- **B.** The decision to put marriage aside probably derived from a desire to dedicate himself to other aspects of life.

C. He is, in a sense, "wasting time with God" during this contemplative period, developing ideas he will later write about at length.

Suggested Readings:

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 13.

Stock, chapter 3.

Cooper, chapter 9.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Augustine's account of the death of his son, Adeodatus, in Book IX differ from his account of the death of his unnamed friend in Book IV?
2. What can we infer about Augustine as a father from what he tells us about his son in this book?

Lecture Eighteen
Book IX—The Death of Monica

Scope: This lecture focuses on one of the most famous sections in the *Confessions*, a section that is also full of surprises. To set the scene of his mother's death, Augustine tells the story of her life. Because attitudes toward women have changed a great deal since the time of Augustine, his description of her life opens up a window on the world of late antiquity, especially in terms of domestic life. We learn something of the relations between men and women during this time, as well as some of the circumstances that were unique to Monica, including the fact that she was "addicted" to wine in her youth. But Augustine carefully crafts this narrative to prepare the reader for the scenes surrounding her death. Of particular importance is the meditation that Augustine and his mother share immediately before her death on the joys of heaven. This passage is often seen as one of the key texts in the history of Christian mysticism in the West and is, therefore, worth a close look. Augustine's reaction to his mother's death is also important: Because it takes place after his conversion and baptism, it provides an interesting and important contrast with the death of his friend that we discussed in Book IV and shows how Augustine has carefully shaped the narrative so that events play off each other.

Outline

I. The death of Augustine's mother, Monica, is one of the most famous sections of the *Confessions*, but it is also a section that is full of surprises.

II. To prepare us for her death, Augustine fills in some of the details of her life, details that were not given to us earlier in the narrative.

- **A.** We learn the rather surprising story of her "fondness" for wine in her youth.
  - **1.** This becomes yet another way for Augustine to talk about addiction to a vice.
  - **2.** Monica fell into this vice despite the strong warning of one of her servants.
  - **3.** What starts as a seemingly innocent pastime becomes something serious: "she had fallen at length into the habit of avidly quaffing near-goblets full of wine."
  - **4.** She is cured of the habit when another servant calls her a "wine-swiller."
  - **5.** Augustine makes the point that this servant was trying to insult her, not cure her, but the effect was a cure.
- **B.** We learn about her relations with her husband, Patricius, Augustine's father.
  - **1.** Patricius is not as important to the entire narrative as Monica is, but the information is valuable to fill in some background about Augustine's father.
  - **2.** We are told that Monica put up with his "marital infidelities."
  - **3.** Her reasons for doing so are interesting: It is clear that women had little power legally in such situations, and she believes that fidelity will come only when he accepts Christianity.
  - **4.** We are told that he had quite a temper, but that Monica's strategies kept her from ever being beaten.
  - **5.** We are told that she gave advice to some of her friends to avoid the same fate.
- **C.** We are told of her relationship to her mother-in-law and how Monica won her over.
- **D.** In all these stories, we see the huge gap that separates domestic life in Augustine's time from our own, in particular, the gap in the position of women.
  - **1.** It seems that women had no power at all.
  - **2.** Yet, at the same time, they had considerable authority in the domestic sphere.
  - **3.** It seems clear, for example, that Monica's mother-in-law had a good deal of de facto power, even as Monica herself has.
- **E.** Augustine seems to be using this material to make theological points rather than sociological ones.

III. At the port of Ostia, while waiting to go back to Africa, Augustine and his mother share a beautiful meditation on the joys of heaven immediately before her death.

- **A.** Because it is an attempt to describe the infinite, it is a particularly important document in the history of the Christian mystical tradition.

B. It is one of the most beautiful passages in the *Confessions*.
  1. The entire description consists of one long sentence.
  2. In the attempt to go beyond language, the images are, paradoxically, physical ones.
  3. The passage describes the process of going beyond itself by not thinking of itself.
  4. It is an important discussion of the nature of time and timelessness and, therefore, prepares us for the more extended discussion of memory and time in Books X and XI.

IV. After this meditation, Monica tells her son that she is ready for death.
  A. She had previously wanted to be buried alongside her husband.
  B. Now she realizes that this is unimportant.

V. Augustine describes his reaction to her death.
  A. He doesn't cry, but he describes his own pain at her death by explaining how close he has become to her.
  B. Augustine wishes us to compare his response to her death to his response to the death of his friend, earlier in the *Confessions*.

Suggested Readings:

TeSelle, pp. 59–89.

Cooper, chapter 9.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the most surprising aspects of the life of Augustine's mother, as described in Book IX?

2. How do the stories of Augustine's father and mother remind us of the gap between domestic life in Augustine's time and in our own?

3. How does Augustine use the death of his mother to illustrate his own spiritual life at this point in his life?

Lecture Nineteen
Book X—Augustine the Bishop

Scope: Unlike the previous nine books, Book X of the *Confessions* is written in the present. Augustine is no longer reflecting on his life up to the time of his conversion; rather, he is reflecting on the present, on his life as a bishop. In the course of this reflection, he tells us that his flock ought to know who their bishop is. This means that part of what he is doing in the *Confessions* is setting the record straight. Augustine is no spin doctor. He is not trying to present a sanitized account of his life, either in the past or in the present. Rather, he knows that people have heard stories about him. (He was already a famous writer by this time and one who had something of a "past.") He presents himself in Book X as one who is still seeking and struggling, who is still subject to temptations, especially sexual temptations (which he describes movingly), and therefore, as one whose struggle can serve as a model for the brothers and sisters who are part of his flock. Thus, Book X offers a powerful interpretation of the idea of conversion, not as something over and done with, but as a continual struggle in the present. Book X of the *Confessions* provides a unique account of some of the reasons why Augustine undertook the writing of this book.

Outline

I. Unlike the previous nine books, Book X of the *Confessions* is written in the present.
- **A.** Most modern readers tend to think of the strictly biographical part of the work contained in Books I through IX as what is most interesting and most important.
- **B.** Indeed, many ignore the last four books in the reading and evaluation of the work.
- **C.** We need to ask both what the purpose of the last four books is and how they are related to what has come before.
- **D.** The form of the *Confessions* remains the same: The last books are, like the first, a prayer addressed to God.

II. If the most important meaning of "confession" is "praise," then we can look at the last four books as also providing praise, although in a different way.
- **A.** The first nine books are only one way of "praising."
- **B.** The last four books also offer praise but in different ways.
- **C.** These books contain more overtly philosophical and theological material.
- **D.** But it is also important to point out that the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the first nine books are often not given sufficient attention.

III. In Book X, Augustine is still reflecting on his life, but now, he is reflecting on his life in the present, as a bishop with all the responsibilities that office entails, rather than as a series of events leading up to his conversion.
- **A.** Because he is a bishop addressing his flock directly, he is concerned with misinterpretations that they might have had.
  1. In the course of his reflections, he affirms that his flock ought to know who their bishop is.
  2. This means, for Augustine, that he needs to tell the truth. He is not interested in being a spin doctor.
  3. He realizes that he is someone with a past and that people may have heard stories about him.
  4. He is also a famous writer by this time and must deal with the implications of that.
  5. Thus, he is addressing those who "know me but who do not really know me."
- **B.** Augustine believes that his confessions can make his readers his brothers and sisters, a model for those who are in his flock.
- **C.** He now understands more fully the power of storytelling, whether in the Bible or in the works of pagan writers.
- **D.** He considers himself part of a brotherhood with those, like Paul or Antony, who have taken a similar spiritual journey.

IV. Augustine talks movingly about temptations in the present.

- **A.** He talks about the presence of temptation, especially sexual temptation.
- **B.** But he does not know "which temptations I may have the strength to resist and to which ones I shall succumb."
- **C.** Sexual images have been imprinted on his mind because of his previous life.
- **D.** They act on him in the present, especially when he is asleep.

V. This book provides a powerful support for the idea that conversion is not something that is over and done with but is, rather, a continuous activity. We might easily overlook this idea if we paid attention only to the first nine books of the *Confessions*.

Suggested Readings:

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 14.

Wills, *St. Augustine's Memory*, pp. 3–36.

Cambridge Companion, chapter 11.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the reasons that Augustine tells his readers about his current temptations in Book X, even though he is now not only converted but also the bishop of the city of Hippo?
2. What does Augustine tell us in Book X that helps us understand the structure of the *Confessions* as a whole, including the non-narrative books?

Lecture Twenty
Book X—Augustine on Memory

Scope: We will deal with some of the more fascinating aspects of memory as Augustine meditates on it in Book X. Given that he has just finished an account of his past in the first nine books, his discussion of memory is a logical next step; to some extent, the validity of his account depends on the validity of memory. Augustine sees memory as a mystery and wants us to see it in the same way. He also sees memory as a more encompassing notion than we generally do and presents some telling examples of the ways in which so much of what we know depends on this faculty. For example, any time that we learn about things that are not immediately present to the senses, we are dependent on memory. Augustine also explores some of the interesting paradoxes connected with memory, namely, that we are, in some ways, able to remember forgetfulness. He uses this discussion of memory as part of a larger quest for God.

Outline

I. In Book X of the *Confessions*, Augustine provides a fascinating account of memory.
- **A.** Given that he has just finished an account of his life up until the present in the previous nine books, a discussion of memory is logical and appropriate at this point.
- **B.** The validity of the previous account depends, to a great extent, on the accuracy of his memory.
- **C.** Although he speaks eloquently about the nature of memory in this book, it ultimately remains a mystery to Augustine. And *mystery* is an extremely important subject in this meditation.

II. Augustine meditates on the difference between things as we experience them and things as they are called up by memory.
- **A.** Memory can distinguish things that are not actually being experienced.
  - **1.** "I can distinguish between honey and grape juice ... without tasting or feeling anything."
  - **2.** "[S]ky and the earth and sea are readily available to me."
- **B.** Whatever else we might want to say about memory, we need to see it as a great treasure house.

III. Augustine discusses certain paradoxes of memory to explore differences between mind and body.
- **A.** We can remember pain without feeling the pain.
- **B.** We can remember things we have forgotten; that is, we can remember forgetfulness.
- **C.** What does it mean to remember the concept "forgetfulness"?
- **D.** He talks about what happens when we find something that we have lost.
  - **1.** When we find such an object, memory tells us that we have found what we were looking for.
  - **2.** We haven't found the lost object unless we are able to recognize it.

IV. Our memory also has the astonishing capacity to call up things that are not images, for example, things that we have learned through what Augustine calls "a liberal education."
- **A.** He means, for example, what he has learned about rhetoric or philosophy.
- **B.** In this case, what the mind, through its faculty of memory, is calling up is not an image of something but the thing itself.
- **C.** The memory is able to store countless truths and laws of mathematics.
- **D.** We may learn of these truths when they are sounded out to us through language, but the sound is not the same as the truth the sounds convey.

V. Augustine uses some of the paradoxes of memory as a kind of help in describing the search for God.
- **A.** We could not search for happiness unless, to some extent, we know what it is.
- **B.** Happiness must, to some degree, be a function of memory.
- **C.** He poses the question: Does the life of happiness exist, therefore, in memory?
  - **1.** This kind of memory is not the same as remembering the city of Carthage after we have seen it.

2. This kind of memory is not memory of a corporeal object.

VI. Augustine reflects on the passions and memory.

A. He considers the fact that he can write about remembered emotions, such as sadness and fear, without reliving the pain of the time in which they occurred.

B. With the faculty of memory, events can mean more to us later then they did at the outset.

C. At a different level, every event before Augustine's conversion exists in a new light after he becomes a Christian.

VII. In his discussion of memory, Augustine gives a catalogue of sense impressions.

A. He warns of unrestrained curiosity as a characteristic that may lead one astray.

B. He struggles, for example, over the question of whether music is a distraction.

VIII. Memory, intellect, and will are key elements in the Augustinian world.

A. These three qualities neatly reflect the religious symbol of the Trinity.

B. Augustine compares memory to God the Father; intellect, to God the Son; and will, to the Holy Spirit.

IX. Memory is part of mind.

A. The mind is unable to totally grasp itself.

B. How can we use the mind to find out about the mind?

C. We will never be able to fully plumb the depths of the mind.

Suggested Readings:

See readings for Lecture Nineteen.

Dixon, chapter 8.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is a discussion of memory appropriate in Book X of the *Confessions*?

2. Why is memory ultimately not something that can ever fully be explained, according to Augustine?

3. According to Augustine, what makes memory such a fascinating subject?

4. What are some of the major paradoxes that Augustine associates with memory?

Lecture Twenty-One
Book XI—Augustine on Time

Scope: Augustine's fascinating exploration of the nature of time in Book XI is the subject of this lecture. Augustine points to the difficulty of this exploration in one of the famous lines of the *Confessions*: "What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone, I do not know." For Augustine, his reflection on the difficulties of talking about time are balanced by the necessity of doing so: He sees, for example, the paradox of talking about time while remaining in time, a paradox similar to using the mind to talk about the mind, one of the problems he explored in the previous book. Nonetheless, he needs to talk about time both to justify the time-bound nature of his own autobiographical account—what kind of existence does this account of his past have?—and because his discussion of time leads him to a discussion of the nature of eternity and God. In this book, Augustine shows that we are usually not very precise when we use words connected with time. But when Augustine himself becomes precise, some of the most important insights of the entire *Confessions* emerge, a series of insights and paradoxes that are vital parts of Augustine's explorations. Time for Augustine is not self-existent but depends on a Christian doctrine of creation. His exploration of this idea leads naturally to his discussion of creation in the final two books of the *Confessions.*

Outline

I. The subject of this lecture is Augustine's fascinating exploration of the nature of time.

II. Clearly, this represents one of the most important philosophical explorations in the entire *Confessions*.

- **A.** Augustine himself realizes the difficulty of this exploration.
- **B.** One of the most famous passages in this book is: "What is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone, I do not know."
- **C.** But he also realizes that the difficulty of talking about time intelligently doesn't negate the necessity of doing so.
- **D.** This book is a meditation on time, then, not an answer to the question: "What is time?"
  1. Augustine asks and answers an old joke about time.
  2. Question: What was God doing before he made heaven and earth? Answer: He was getting hell ready for people who inquisitively peer into deep matters.
  3. Augustine says that he would rather have answered: "What I do not know, I do not know."
  4. For Augustine, this joke evades the force and importance of the question.
  5. He says it is important not to expose the serious questioner to ridicule.

III. As before, Augustine links Athens to Jerusalem.

- **A.** For Augustine, one way of seeing Scripture, especially Genesis, is as a kind of autobiography of God.
- **B.** Much of Augustine's thinking is influenced by his reading of the Platonists. In fact, Plato's *Timaeus* makes for an interesting parallel with Genesis in its account of a creation that exists in the mind of God.
- **C.** In the *Timaeus*, Plato defines time as the moving image of eternity.

IV. Augustine sees that the mysteries of time are connected with the mysteries of creation.

- **A.** If God creates through his word, reasons Augustine, then creation must have taken place in time, because syllables are heard but then fade away.
- **B.** He asks, "What word did you speak to bring into being that material object from which those other words were to proceed?"
- **C.** He makes a distinction between the eternal word and the word that exists in time.

V. By meditating on the process of time ("whatever is past has been pushed out of the way by what was future, and all future follows on the heels of the past"), we can glimpse the nature of timelessness.

- **A.** By meditating correctly on the passage of time, we can see that in eternity, nothing passes.

B. In eternity, the whole is present.

VI. Augustine discusses the mystery of the "present."

A. The present can only be a moment in time that cannot be further divided, but even this moment passes by.

B. Even the present is reduced to a vanishing point.

C. But we've hardly reached a dead end; Augustine considers this as an opening from which to explore the difference between time and eternity.

D. Eternity is the eternal present, not "was" or "will be."

E. By parallel, Dante writes in the *Inferno* that sufferers there cannot live in the present, only in the past and future.

VII. For Augustine, time is part of creation; that is, time is made by God, along with creation. He says that measureless ages could not have passed before creation because God is the creator of the ages themselves.

VIII. Augustine makes some important distinctions that are crucial to his discussion.

A. God's will is not a created thing; it exists prior to creation, because nothing would be created unless the creator first willed it.

B. If God's will is eternal, then it makes sense to see creation itself as eternal.

Suggested Readings:

Cambridge Companion, chapter 8.

Stock, chapter 8.

Questions to Consider:

1. According to Augustine in Book XI, what makes a discussion of time so difficult?

2. How does Augustine's meditation on time lead him to a meditation on the nature of God?

Lecture Twenty-Two
Book XII—Augustine on Biblical Interpretation

Scope: At first, this book might seem out of place in the *Confessions*. However, given that Augustine's conversion depends so greatly on learning how to read texts correctly, especially the text of the Bible, it stands to reason that the *Confessions* ends with a demonstration of the fruits of that conversion. Here, Augustine begins an explication of the Book of Genesis, a subject that he comes back to in other important writings. This is a key text for Augustine, not simply because it is the beginning of the Bible. For Augustine, this is a particularly difficult text because we are forced to talk about creation even though we are a part of that creation (as he states in Book I), and it is a key text because it deals with the nature of time, the nature of God, and many other significant topics. This book also shows us Augustine's approach to scriptural interpretation. Two aspects of his approach stand out: First, Augustine does not read the text in a narrow way but sees that it is open to what we would now call symbolic interpretations. Second, Augustine believes that there is no one correct interpretation of Scripture. He argues for the importance of multiple interpretations at the end of the book.

Outline

I. In this lecture, we will look at Augustine's interpretation of the first chapters of the biblical Book of Genesis.
- **A.** His interpretation amounts to a scriptural refutation of the Manichees.
- **B.** The modern reader of Augustine may find it difficult to understand why he moves to biblical exegesis or why we should be as interested in this book as in the others.
  - **1.** Part of the answer comes from the previous book: For Augustine, talking about time leads inevitably to talking about the doctrine of creation, for which the key text is the beginning of Genesis.
  - **2.** Part of the answer comes from an understanding of the entire movement of the *Confessions*.
    - **a.** Augustine's own conversion depends on his learning of how to read books correctly.
    - **b.** After many starts and stops and changes of direction, he learns that the most important book for him to read is the Bible.
    - **c.** This book of *Confessions* can be seen as "proof" that Augustine has learned how to read the Bible: He shows us the fruits of his conversion.

II. In other works, Augustine writes at great length about the beginning of the Book of Genesis.
- **A.** It is a key text for Augustine for many reasons.
- **B.** It deals with the nature of time and the nature of God, essential topics for Augustine throughout the *Confessions.*

III. Augustine sees the difficulty of writing about creation.
- **A.** We can think about time only from within time and about the mind only by using our minds.
- **B.** Similarly, we can think about the nature of creation only from within creation.
- **C.** Augustine tells us at the beginning of the book that "penury of human understanding is apt to lead to excessive wordiness."

IV. Augustine is clearly interested in a broad, rather than a narrow, interpretation of the creation story.
- **A.** He is interested in the deeper meaning, rather than in looking at the text as though it were a temporal blueprint.
- **B.** He is interested in talking about the difference between the creator and what is created, seeing that as one of the key issues in the Genesis creation account.
- **C.** He believes that there was a spiritual creation before there was a physical one, as he tells us in his explication of the opening lines of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- **D.** Augustine would seem to have little sympathy with those who take the creation account as a "clinical" description of what happened.

V. Augustine realizes that many, even in the Christian community, might disagree with his interpretation.

A. He believes that his interpretation should be argued on its own merits.

B. He believes that other interpretations should also be argued on their own merits.

VI. Augustine states that more than one interpretation might be valid.

A. "I am convinced," says Augustine, "that when [God] wrote these words what he meant and what he thought are all the meanings we have been able to discover there."

B. He says that other interpreters must be careful of arguing a case simply because it is their case.

VII. And Augustine is convinced that there is also truth that we have not yet been able to discover.

A. He thinks that it would be silly to assert that Moses (thought to be the author of the first five books of the Pentateuch in Augustine's time) had one meaning and one meaning only in mind.

B. Because truth belongs to God, truth will prove to be richer than any one interpretation of the truth.

Suggested Readings:

Cambridge Companion, chapter 5.

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 16.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does Augustine have to say about the interpretation of the first passages of Genesis that would be of particular interest to contemporary readers?

2. What does Augustine have to say about those who disagree with his interpretations of the Bible?

Lecture Twenty-Three
Book XIII—Augustine on Creation

Scope: In this concluding book, Augustine continues his interpretation of the opening passages of Genesis. He calls on God to help him in the opening passage in a way that is deliberately reminiscent of the opening of Book I, but with a difference: In the beginning, he asks how he can call upon God without knowing God. In Book XIII, there is a much clearer sense of the God that he is calling on. Once again, Augustine argues for a sophisticated understanding of the meaning of creation. Once again, we see that the primary meaning of the story of creation is not "physical." Augustine gives an important explication of the command to "increase and multiply." His understanding of this and other aspects of creation are particularly important in the development of Christian theology. We end the lecture by exploring ways in which the text continues to engage us in the 21st century. Augustine's synthesis of Greek and Roman thought with Christianity in the *Confessions* is not only historically important, but it models important ways in which inter-religious dialogue can take place in the present and future. Augustine's search for truth has much to say to a culture that sometimes seems to be satisfied with easy answers. Augustine also shows himself to be a writer who is both open to surprises and still capable of providing surprises for his readers.

Outline

I. Augustine begins the final book of the *Confessions* with an invocation to God.
- **A.** This invocation is deliberately reminiscent of the opening of Book I.
- **B.** Augustine wants to show something of the circular nature of his search, starting with God and ending with God, as well.
- **C.** But clearly, he also wants us to see differences.
  - **1.** In Book I, he asks if it is possible to call on God without knowing God.
  - **2.** In Book XIII, we get a sense that Augustine is calling on a God about whom he has learned something in his explorations.
- **D.** Yet Augustine also makes the point in this book that God's utter transcendence means that what we can say about God is in no way able to capture God. Augustine has become comfortable with mystery, an echo of his early years as a skeptic.

II. In continuing the discussion of the opening passages of the Bible, the creation story, Augustine argues for a sophisticated understanding of the meaning of creation, what he sees in one light as an allegory of the church.
- **A.** In particular, it is important that we understand that God's command to "increase and multiply" must be understood in both spiritual and literal ways.
  - **1.** This is an especially important concept for the development of Christian spirituality for subsequent centuries.
  - **2.** It helps us understand monastic spirituality, because those who live a life of vowed celibacy do not increase and multiply in any literal sense.
- **B.** In reading the part of Genesis that describes the days of creation, Augustine argues for acts of Christian charity, as well as acts of faith.

III. Augustine wants us to understand that the meaning of the creation story that is given to us through our senses is God's way of dealing with our ignorance.
- **A.** Thus, the "sensible" meaning of the creation story should be only a starting point.
- **B.** The meaning of creation stories is not primarily to be found in their purely physical meaning.

IV. A passage in Book XIII provides us with a convenient entry into the question, "What does Augustine have to say to us in the 21st century?"
- **A.** In talking about the relationship between the sexes in this book, Augustine notes that women are equal to men "in their rational mind and intelligence" (XIII, 47).
- **B.** This is not the Augustine who is frequently cited as a fountainhead of Christian misogyny.

C. One conclusion to be drawn from this passage is that issues are often more complex than we have been led to believe.

D. We also discover that it is important to learn about the past by going to primary sources, rather than to summaries written by others.

E. In the first seven books, no one more than Monica more fully embodies the interaction between time and eternity, another valuable lesson for the ages.

V. There are many other reasons why the *Confessions* remains a key text, one well worth exploring in depth today.

A. Augustine's synthesis of Greek and Roman thought with Christianity in Book VII and throughout the *Confessions* is crucial to the subsequent history of the West.

B. He describes at length the relationship between intellect and will. Like Plato, he regards their connection as both intimate and important.

C. Augustine's search for truth has much to tell a society that is sometimes satisfied with easy answers.

Suggested Readings:

O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul*, chapter 17.

Cook and Herzman, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does the opening of the Book of Genesis make a deliberate appeal to our senses, according to Augustine in Book XIII?

2. In this, the last book of the *Confessions*, how does Augustine lead his readers back to the very beginning of the work, especially to the first paragraphs of Book I?

Lecture Twenty-Four
The *Confessions* Through the Ages

Scope: Having now discussed the *Confessions,* it is worthwhile to look at how great thinkers in ages very different from Augustine's have understood and made use of Augustine's reflection on his life. Although there have been formal imitations of the *Confessions*, including those by the Benedictine monk Guibert de Nogent, written circa 1115, and Thomas Merton (d. 1968), in the 20th century, we focus on two of the most important readers and interpreters of Augustine, Dante (d. 1321) and Martin Luther (d. 1546). Not only does Dante use narrative details from the *Confessions* in his telling of the punishment of the sin of lust in the *Inferno*, but the entire pattern of the *Confessions* is "updated" in the *Commedia* to 14th-century Italy. Martin Luther, an Augustinian friar, was deeply dependent on Augustine for his ideas about biblical interpretation and the nature of the church, as well as a basic anthropology that develops from Augustine's reading of Paul. In the 21st century, people are searching for ways to reflect about themselves and to discern patterns of meaning that are often hidden in masses of detail; for these important intellectual activities, there is no better guide than the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

Outline

I. The *Confessions* was read and imitated throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

- **A.** Augustine was a famous author while he was alive, and his reputation grew in subsequent centuries.
- **B.** One example of a rather literal imitation is the "confessions" written circa 1115 by the French Benedictine monk Guibert de Nogent.
- **C.** In the 14th century, the great humanist Petrarch carried a copy of the *Confessions* with him when he made his famous climb of Mont Ventoux.
  - **1.** When he got to the top, he opened his copy to a passage from Book X.
  - **2.** The passage, which said that people consider views from mountains more than their own souls, led to a kind of conversion for Petrarch, for that day he read no further.
- **D.** In 1298, Augustine was officially designated as one of the four Latin Doctors of the Church; one of the others was Ambrose, who baptized Augustine in Milan.
- **E.** Numerous works of art narrated the life of St. Augustine, although they had Possidius's *Life of Augustine*, as well as *Confessions*, as their source.
  - **1.** One famous example is the 14th-century tomb of Augustine in Pavia, carved with scenes from the saint's life.
  - **2.** The most famous is the narrative cycle of frescoes painted circa 1450 in the Church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (between Florence and Siena) by the great Florentine artist Benozzo Gozzoli.

II. We want to focus on the use that Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) made of Augustine's *Confessions*.

- **A.** The *Divine Comedy* is the story of the pilgrim Dante's trip to the Christian afterlife.
- **B.** It is presented as a journey of the pilgrim Dante toward spiritual enlightenment.
- **C.** It is safe to say that without the *Confessions*, there would be no *Divine Comedy*.
  - **1.** Dante learns from Augustine the retrospective structure of his poem.
  - **2.** He writes the poem after he has "completed" the journey.
  - **3.** He writes about an earlier time from a later perspective.
  - **4.** Unlike other heroes in the epic tradition, Dante's hero in the *Commedia* is himself.
- **D.** Although Augustine's influence can be seen throughout the *Commedia*, it is easiest to see in Dante's treatment of the sin of lust.
  - **1.** Dante superimposes the story of Augustine's conversion on the story of his sinners' lustful fall.
  - **2.** Dante incorporates the very language of Augustine's conversion in his depiction of this scene.
  - **3.** Dante assumes that sophisticated readers of his poem already know the *Confessions*.

III. Two different religious orders named for St. Augustine developed in the Middle Ages.

- **A.** One was a group of canons, a quasi-monastic order of priests who ministered to the laity.

B. The other began as a group of hermits but developed into an urban preaching order of friars in the 13th century.

IV. The most famous Augustinian friar was Martin Luther (1483–1546).

A. Luther became an Augustinian friar in Erfurt, Germany, and made his only trip to Rome in conjunction with business of his order.

B. Luther was deeply influenced by the thought of Augustine.

1. In Augustine, he found what he considered "correctives" to the corruption and wrong-headedness of the church in his day.

2. Augustine had made clear in many of his writings, including *Confessions*, that salvation could not be earned but was a matter of God's choice.

3. Luther agreed with the Pauline/Augustinian idea of humans enslaved to sin, such as we saw at the beginning of Augustine's narrative of his life and throughout the *Confessions*, with its imagery of Augustine in bondage.

C. Because Luther and other Reformation thinkers were so openly reliant on Augustine, some Catholic apologists began to lean more heavily on Thomas Aquinas because of his doctrinal clarity.

D. Augustine never ceased to be a venerated saint and a carefully read author.

V. Similar to the *Confessions* itself, this course has come full circle.

A. We began Lecture One with the assertion that Augustine's *Confessions* is a book for the 21st century.

1. People in modern times are still thinking of their lives in light of the pattern that Augustine articulated in the 4th century.

2. Thomas Merton's (d. 1968) *The Seven Storey Mountain* is, for many readers, a modern analogue to Augustine's *Confessions*, and many others can be found.

B. This intellectual exploration is not an activity only for published writers.

1. Most people today have a great deal more information about their earlier lives than Augustine would have had.

2. Often, such a mass of information makes it difficult for people to focus on what matters in the shaping of their lives.

3. In the *Confessions*, Augustine understands biblical prophecy as examining past and present and seeing what matters for the future.

4. Augustine gives us a moving and personal example of that process by allowing us to examine his reflections on his life.

5. We all can benefit from following and applying his model to ourselves.

Suggested Readings:

Cook and Herzman, chapter 11.

Cambridge Companion, chapters 17 and 18.

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto V.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the most important ways in which the *Confessions* can provide a model and guidance for the present?

2. What can we learn about Augustine from the way in which he was "imitated" by other writers, such as Dante?

Timeline

c. 65	Death of St. Paul.
269	The conversion of St. Antony of the Desert.
337	Death of Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor.
354	Augustine is born in Thagaste (modern Algeria).
366	At age 12, Augustine is sent to study rhetoric in Madaura, about 20 miles south of Thagaste.
370	Augustine returns to Thagaste while his father saves money to send him for further education.
371	Augustine leaves Thagaste for study in Carthage (modern Tunisia), one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire. While there, he begins a long relationship with a woman.
372	Augustine's mistress gives birth to a son, Adeodatus. Augustine begins his association with the Manichees.
373	Augustine has a life-changing experience when he reads Cicero's *Hortensius*.
374	Augustine returns to Thagaste to teach.
376	Augustine experiences the death of a friend in Thagaste and, soon after, returns to Carthage, where he was to teach rhetoric for almost eight years.
383	Augustine leaves Africa and teaches rhetoric in Rome.
384	Augustine receives an important appointment as a "professor" of rhetoric in Milan, where he comes in contact with the city's bishop, Ambrose. Augustine enters the Christian catechumenate in Milan.
385	Augustine's mother, Monica, arrives in Milan. Augustine dismisses his mistress and the mother of Adeodatus but takes another mistress while plans are made for him to marry.
386	Augustine experiences a conversion to Christianity in a garden outside Milan. He; his son, Adeodatus; and his friend Alypius are baptized shortly afterward by Bishop Ambrose.
387	While in Ostia (the port of Rome), waiting to return to Africa, Augustine's mother, Monica, dies.
388	Augustine returns to Thagaste and begins to live a contemplative life.
c. 389	Augustine's son, Adeodatus, dies.
391	While in Hippo (modern Algeria) to consider establishing a monastery there, Augustine is ordained a priest.
391	Emperor Theodosius outlaws pagan sacrifices, essentially declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.
395	Augustine is ordained as an assistant bishop in Hippo.
396	Augustine becomes bishop of Hippo, a position he holds until his death.
397	Augustine begins to write the *Confessions*; death of St. Ambrose.
410	The Goths sack the city of Rome, an event that shakes the Roman Empire and eventually leads Augustine to write *The City of God*.

413 ..... Augustine begins to write *The City of God*.

430 ..... Augustine dies in Hippo on August 28.

7th century ..... With the Muslim conquest of North Africa, Augustine's body was moved, first, to Sardinia and, later, to Pavia in northern Italy. He is buried in the church of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in a tomb made in the 14th century.

1298 ..... Pope Boniface VIII establishes the feast of the four Latin Doctors of the Church—Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory.

Glossary

Arianism: Theological position that asserts that the Father and the Son are of different natures and, hence, that Christ is not truly divine. Condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325), Arianism nevertheless had a great impact on the history of early medieval Europe, because many of the Germanic tribes that took control of the Roman Empire were Arian Christians.

Carthage: A city in North Africa (present-day Tunisia), Carthage was one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire, and the capital of the province of Africa Proconsularis. Augustine comes to Carthage at the beginning of Book III of the *Confessions* to continue his studies and to find love. Carthage is also the home of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Augustine's coming to Carthage, "in love with loving," suggests a parallel with the ill-fated love affair between Aeneas and Dido. Augustine lives with his unnamed mistress in Carthage.

Cassiciacum*:* Country estate outside of Milan where Augustine, together with his mother, Monica, and a group of friends, moved after his conversion. He lived there between the time of his conversion and his baptism (386–387) and produced some of his earliest extant writings there.

City of God: Augustine's longest and most comprehensive work, written between 413 and 427. It can be seen as both a critique of pagan thought and the foundational work on the relationship between Christianity and the temporal order. For the Middle Ages, this was the most influential book of political theory and the theory of history.

Constantinople: The old city of Byzantium, located on a strait connecting the Mediterranean with the Black Seas, became Constantinople when the emperor Constantine moved the administrative and political center of the Roman Empire there. (It was dedicated in 330.) It continued as the capital of the empire (sometimes called the Byzantine Empire) until it was captured by the Turks in 1453.

Donatism*:* Theological position that denied priestly office to those who had previously abandoned their faith. At the heart of the Donatist controversy were competing ideas about the nature of the church. The Donatists saw the church as a community of saints, while the orthodox position was that the church was a mixed body of saints and sinners. The heart of the Donatist controversy was in North Africa, and Augustine wrote widely against the Donatist position.

Goths*:* Germanic tribe. Their looting of Rome in 410 provided the impetus for anti-Christian polemic. Augustine's *City of God* was written, in part, as an answer to this polemic.

Manichees*:* Sect that emphasized a radical dualism, in which two co-eternal principles, a principle of good and a principle of evil, exist completely separated from each other. Good is associated with spirit, and evil with matter, and each individual presents a microcosm of the struggle between these two. Manichee practices promised liberation from the flesh, the world of matter. Augustine was a Manichee for approximately 10 years, between the ages of 19 and 28.

Milan: Roman city that had become the capital of the Roman Empire in the west by the time of Augustine, because it was closer than Rome to the military front lines. It was in Milan that Augustine met Ambrose, and it was in Milan that Augustine was converted and baptized.

***Teaching Christianity* (*On Christian Doctrine*)**: Work of Augustine's that presents his theory of biblical interpretation. Although the date of composition of this work presents a problem—because it seems to have been written at various points in Augustine's career—it has been argued that there is a close tie with the *Confessions* in that this work provides a theory of interpretation that is carried out in practice in the *Confessions*.

Thagaste*:* Roman city in North Africa (in present-day Algeria) in which Augustine was born in 354.

Vandals: Germanic tribe that was besieging the city of Hippo at the time of Augustine's death in 430. They captured the city soon after Augustine's death.

Biographical Notes

Adeodatus: Augustine's son (372–c. 389), by his unnamed mistress at Carthage. He is baptized at the same time as Augustine, and Augustine talks about his importance in a dialogue that he wrote that is usually identified as *Concerning the Teacher.*

Alypius: Friend of Augustine (d. after 428) whose addiction to gladiatorial contests is described in Book VI of the *Confessions*. Alypius's conversion takes place at the same time as Augustine's own.

Ambrose: Bishop of Milan (c. 340–397) who was influential in the conversion of Augustine. Augustine learned from Ambrose his theory of biblical interpretation. He is considered to be one of the four Latin Doctors of the Church.

Antony*:* The "founder" of Christian monasticism (c. 251–356) whose story of conversion is told twice in Book VIII of the *Confessions* as a model and parallel with Augustine's own conversion. As the story is told in the *Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius, Antony hears the gospel passage about selling one's goods and giving to the poor and does just that, going to the Egyptian desert to live a life a prayer and asceticism for 87 years.

Aristotle: Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.E.) whose work on all aspects of philosophy and science was an important part of classical thought as it was inherited by pagan, Jewish, and Christian thinkers in the late empire. Augustine talks about the influence of Aristotle's *Categories* on his own education.

Cicero: Roman statesman and writer (106–43 B.C.E.) whose work *Hortensius* (a work that has not survived) sets Augustine on his search for wisdom, as related in Book III of the *Confessions*. Cicero was a great orator, whose speeches were a model for learning Latin rhetoric.

Dante: Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) is the author of *The Divine Comedy*, a poem that recounts the journey of Dante the pilgrim to the three parts of the Christian afterlife: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* depends heavily on Augustine's account of conversion in Book VIII of the *Confessions*.

Dido: In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido is the queen of Carthage whose tragic love affair with Aeneas is depicted in Book IV. Augustine recounts his childhood experience of weeping over the fate of Dido in Book I of the *Confessions.*

Faustus: Manichee "bishop" (late 4th c.) whose arrival is eagerly anticipated by Augustine in Book V of the *Confessions*. Instead of assuaging Augustine's intellectual doubts about Manicheeism, he increases them because his pleasant and agreeable style is not matched by serious intellectual content.

Martin Luther: The church reformer (1483–1546) whose break with Rome inaugurated the Protestant Reformation. Luther was an Augustinian friar teaching at the University of Wittenberg when he made his break with Rome. After Luther, both Protestants and Catholics looked to Augustine to support their theological positions.

Thomas Merton: American contemplative and writer (1914–1968) whose autobiographical conversion account, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has been described as a modern day *Confessions*.

Monica: Mother of Augustine (331-387). The name *Monica* is not Roman, and some have used that as evidence that she is of Berber origin. A devout Christian whose concern for her son forms an important part of Augustine's conversion narrative, her own life is narrated in some detail in Book IX of the *Confessions*.

Patricius: Augustine's father (d.c.370). A pagan who converts to Christianity toward the end of his life, Patricius remains a relatively sketchy figure in the *Confessions*. What we find out about him comes from Augustine's account of his adolescence in Book II and the extended account of his mother in Book IX.

Paul: Biblical figure and author (d.c.65) whose conversion is narrated in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Paul's letters (Epistles) are the most important theological accounts in the New Testament. Augustine's own conversion takes place during his reading of a section from Paul's Letter to the Romans (ch. 13).

Petrarch: Italian humanist (1304–1374) whose story of his ascent of Mount Ventoux includes an account of his reflections on Augustine's *Confessions*.

Plato: Greek philosopher (c. 427–347 B.C.E.) whose thinking has become a model for all those who find the true life of a human to be an upward striving toward the divine. The Platonist philosophers who provide the intellectual

foundation for Augustine's conversion in Book VII of the *Confessions* represent a later development of Plato's philosophy.

Possidius: Contemporary and friend of Augustine (c.370-c.440), he wrote the only life of Augustine that has come down to us from Augustine's own time.

Victorinus: Fourth-century philosopher/rhetorician (b.c.290) whose translations of neo-Platonist texts may have been read by Augustine. His conversion to Christianity, described in Book VIII of the *Confessions*, is one of several contemporary accounts of conversion that clearly influenced Augustine's. Victorinus gives up the practice of rhetoric after his conversion, as does Augustine.

Virgil: Latin poet (70–19 B.C.E.) whose epic poem *The Aeneid* describes the journey of its hero, Aeneas, from the ruins of Troy to the shores of Italy, where he begins the foundations of Rome. The *Aeneid* was a foundational text in the Roman educational system, and Augustine consciously models the structure of the *Confessions* on the *Aeneid*.

Bibliography

I. General References

Fitzgerald, Allan, ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). This 900-page volume has articles on all essential topics associated with the life and works of St. Augustine. Each entry has a bibliography.

The *Revue des études Augustiniennes* publishes a bibliography of works concerning St. Augustine about every 18 months, containing works in all major languages.

II. Works of St. Augustine

New City Press (www.newcitypress.com) is currently in the process of publishing new English translations of all the works of St. Augustine. Although it will be several years before the project is completed, many are already available. They are of very high quality from a scholarly perspective and are good, readable translations. However, many fine translations of the most important works of Augustine are available in other editions. Some modern volumes contain all or parts of several works arranged by theme. One example is *Augustine: Political Writings*, edited by E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

III. Translations of *Confessions*

For this course, we have used the translation by Maria Boulding published in three formats (hardcover, study, and pocket) by New City Press. Many other useful translations are available, including:

Chadwick, Henry. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Pine-Coffin, R. S. (New York: Penguin, 1961).

Sheed, F. J. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

Warner, Rex (New York: New American Library, 1963).

Garry Wills has translated three books of *Confessions* in separate volumes. Book I is published as *Saint Augustine's Childhood* (New York: Viking, 2001). Book II is published as *Saint Augustine's Sin* (New York: Viking, 2003). Book X is published as *Saint Augustine's Memory* (New York: Viking, 2002).

The most extensive commentary on the text is contained in the Latin edition edited by James J. O'Donnell: *Confessions*, 3 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The first volume of this monumental work contains the Latin text of the *Confessions*. The second and third volumes are a systematic, line-by-line commentary, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the *Confessions* and the other works of Augustine. As such, this is an extremely valuable resource, but the reader should be warned that O'Donnell makes little concession to those who do not read Latin (or Greek, German, Italian, and French), quoting freely from these languages without translation in his commentary. For scholars, it is an indispensable source. For the more general reader, it is still a work that can be used with profit and should be consulted.

IV. Biographies of Augustine

In addition to the partially autobiographical *Confessions*, a hagiographical life of Augustine written by someone who knew him is available in translation: Possidius, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, ed. John Rotelle (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1988).

Among the numerous modern biographies are the following:

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California, rev. ed., 2000). This work is generally regarded as the standard biography in English.

Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Price, Richard. *Augustine* (Ligouri, MO: Triumph, 1996).

Van der Meer, Frederick. *Augustine the Bishop* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

Wills, Garry. *Saint Augustine* (New York: Viking, 1999). This short, readable introduction provides both a biographical and a thematic account of Augustine's major concerns. This book also contains interesting interpretations of several sections of the *Confessions*.

The most important visual presentation of the life of St. Augustine is a fresco cycle in the church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (Tuscany), the work of the 15th-century Florentine artist Benozzo Gozzoli. Access to all the scenes can found on the website www.gallery.euroweb.hu/html/g/gozzoli/4gimigna/2.

V. Important Studies of Augustine and His Works

A. General Studies on the Thought of Augustine

Chapter 4 of William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2004), is devoted almost entirely to an overview of the thought of Augustine. The earlier chapters of this book—on the Bible, the Classical Heritage, and Early Christianity—are meant to introduce students and the general reader to the Middle Ages but would also be useful to the reader coming to Augustine without an awareness of his cultural heritage.

Another good place to start is the collection of essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven and London, 2003), is an important account of early thinkers in the church, including Augustine, and how they combined experience and learning in clarifying Christian belief. This book is accessible to a general reader and does not presume much prior knowledge of the period. Also interesting is Wilken's earlier work, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984, rpt. 2003).

More specialized studies include the following:

Arendt, Hannah. *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, new ed., 1996).

Bright, Pamela, ed. *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

Brown, Peter. *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber, 1971).

Burt, Donald. *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

Cooper, Stephen. *Augustine for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

Gilson, Etienne. *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York: Knopf, 1960).

Harrison, Carol. *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Meagher, Robert. *Augustine: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1978).

Power, Kim. *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

Rist, John. *Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Scott, Kermit. *Augustine: His Thought in Context* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

TeSelle, Eugene. *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

B. Studies of the *Confessions*

Dixon, Sandra. *Augustine: The Scattered and Gathered Self* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

Herzman, Ronald. "*Confessions* 7.9: What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?" *Journal of Education* 179 (1997): 49–60.

Miles, Margaret. *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's* Confessions (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

O'Connell, Robert. *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's* Confessions (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996).

———. *St. Augustine's* Confessions: *The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

Paffenroth, Kim, and Robert Kennedy, eds. *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's* Confessions (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

Stock, Brian. *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

