

Westminster Book of the Month – August 2023
***Confessions*, by Augustine of Hippo**
Sept 6, 2023

*“You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself,
and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” – Augustine of Hippo*

I. Introduction

A. The Plan

1. Who was Augustine?
2. The *Confessions*: What is it?
3. Key events of Augustine’s life in *Confessions* (Books 1–6)

II. WHO Was Augustine?

A. Early Life

1. Born in Thagaste (“Roman North Africa,” modern day Algeria) in 354 AD
2. Parents: Patricius or Patrick (pagan); Monica (Christian)
3. Born into a “success driven” world and struggled with sexual temptation
 - a) *“If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder ... But I in my misery seethed and followed the driving force of my impulses, abandoning you. I exceeded all the bounds set by your law, and did not escape your chastisement—indeed no mortal can do so. For you were always with me, mercifully punishing me, touching with a bitter taste all my illicit pleasures.”* (Bk II/2, 25)

B. Young Adulthood

1. 371 AD – Studies rhetoric in Carthage
 - a) *“I came to Carthage and all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves. As yet I had never been in love and loved to love ... I sought an object for my love; I was in love with love, and I hated safety and a path free of snares.”* (Bk III/1, 35)
2. 372–386 AD – 13-year relationship with common-law wife, son Adeodatus (“gift from God”) born in 373 AD.
3. 375–76 AD – Returns to Thagaste to teach rhetoric, then in Carthage
4. 376 AD – “Unnamed friend” who was baptized dies
5. 383 AD – Sails to Rome with concubine and son
6. 384 AD – Becomes professor of rhetoric in Milan

C. Christian Believer

1. 386 AD – Augustine is finally converted (along with Adeodatus)
2. 391 AD – Is ordained priest at Hippo (becomes bishop of Hippo in 396 AD)
3. c. 400 AD – Writes his *Confessions* (~age 46)
4. 413–426 AD – Writes *The City of God*, *On the Trinity*, *The Enchiridion* (“Handbook”) *on Faith, Hope, and Love; On Christian Doctrine*
5. 429 AD – The Vandals invade North Africa
6. 430 AD – Augustine dies at Hippo, August 28

III. *The Confessions*: What is it?

- A. “[T]he story of a soul wandering away from God and then in torment and tears finding its way home through conversion ...” – Henry Chadwick
- B. *Confessions* “is a book about why what should have happened took so long to happen.” – Peter Brown
 - 1. From the Latin *confiteri* = (1) as a confession of sin (*confesio peccati*); (2) a confession of praise (*confessio laudis*); (3) a confession of faith (*confessio fidei*).
- C. Augustine on *Confessions*
 - 1. “The thirteen books of my *Confessions*, whether they refer to my evil or good, praise the just and good God, and stimulate the heart and mind of man to approach unto Him. And, as far as pertaineth unto me, they wrought this in me when they were written, and this they work when they are read.” (Augustine, *Retractions*, 2.6.1)

IV. Key Passages in *Confessions* (Books 1–6)

A. Early Childhood

- 1. “My sin consisted in this, that I sought pleasure, sublimity, and truth not in God but in his creatures, in myself and other created beings. So it was that I plunged into miseries, confusions, and errors.” (Bk. I/20, 22–23)

B. Adolescence: The Pear Tree Incident

- 1. “There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs.” (Bk. II.3, 29)

C. Worldview Struggles

- 1. Manichaeism = Founded by a Parthian “prophet” (an empire of ancient Iran) Manes (aka, Mani) in 240 AD, as a combination of Eastern religions, Christianity, and astrology.
- 2. Neoplatonism = A modification of Plato in which levels of being emanate from an ultimate rational principle (“the One”), which beckons rational creatures to ascend through purifying levels of rational reflection unto union with the One through an ecstatic mystical experience.

D. Augustine on Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- 1. “Let these transient things be the ground on which my soul praises you (Ps 145:2), ‘God creator of all.’ But let it not become stuck in them and glued to them with love through the physical senses.” (Bk. IV.10, 62)

V. Conclusion