



Confessions (Bks. 1–6) by Augustine of Hippo

BOOK OF THE MONTH – SEPT 6, 2023
WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
R. CARLTON WYNNE

THE PLAN

- ▶ I. WHO was Augustine?
- ▶ II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?
- ▶ III. WHAT DOES AUGUSTINE SAY in *Confessions*?

I. WHO WAS Augustine?



- ▶ Born in Thagaste (modern Algeria) in 354 AD
- ▶ Parents: Patrick (pagan) & Monica (Christian)
- ▶ Born into a “success driven” culture
- ▶ 370–384 AD – Common-law relationship with unnamed woman (son, Adeodatus – “Gift from God”—dies in 390 AD at age 17)
- ▶ 376 AD – Teaches rhetoric in Carthage; Augustine’s unnamed friend dies
- ▶ 386 AD – Augustine is converted to Christ
- ▶ 391 AD – Ordained as bishop of Hippo
- ▶ Writes *Confessions*, *City of God*, *On Christian Doctrine*, *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, etc.



II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?



II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?



II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ...



*“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.” (Bk. I.1, 3)*

II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ...



*“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.” (Bk. I.1, 3)*

*“[T]he story of a soul wandering away from God and then
in torment and tears finding its way home through
conversion ...” – Henry Chadwick*

II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ... RECOUNTED AS A PRAYER TO GOD!



II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ... RECOUNTED AS A PRAYER TO GOD!



“Augustine’s back is turned to us throughout the Confessions. His attention is elsewhere. He is speaking with his God.”

– Peter Brown

II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ... RECOUNTED AS A PRAYER TO GOD!



“Augustine’s back is turned to us throughout the Confessions. His attention is elsewhere. He is speaking with his God.”

– Peter Brown

“Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee! For behold Thou wert within me, and I outside . . . Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee. . . Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.” (Bk. X.27.38)

II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ... RECOUNTED AS A PRAYER TO GOD!



“Confessions” – From Latin *confiteri*

- (1) a confession of SIN (*confesio peccati*);
- (2) a confession of PRAISE (*confessio laudis*);
- (3) a confession of FAITH (*confessio fidei*).

II. WHAT KIND OF BOOK is Augustine's *Confessions*?

- ▶ A “psychological biography”? A “theological autobiography”? An “extended prayer”? A “theological treatise”?
- ▶ BEST: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY ... RECOUNTED AS A PRAYER TO GOD!



*“To whom do I tell these things? Not to you, my God ... [But] **that I and any of my readers may reflect on the great depth from which we have to cry to you.** Nothing is nearer to your ears than a confessing heart and a life grounded in faith.”*

(Bk. II.3)

III. KEY PASSAGES: Early Childhood



III. KEY PASSAGES: Early Childhood

- ▶ *“How shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord? ... Where may he come to me? Lord my God, is there any room in me which can contain you?” (Bk. I.2, 3)*
- ▶ *“What has anyone achieved in words when he speaks about you?” (Bk. I.4, 5)*
- ▶ *“Who will enable me to find rest in you?” (Bk. I.5, 5)*
- ▶ *“The house of my soul is too small for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: restore it. In your eyes it has offensive features. I admit it, I know it; but who will clean it up? Or to whom shall I cry other than you?” (Bk. I.6, 6)*

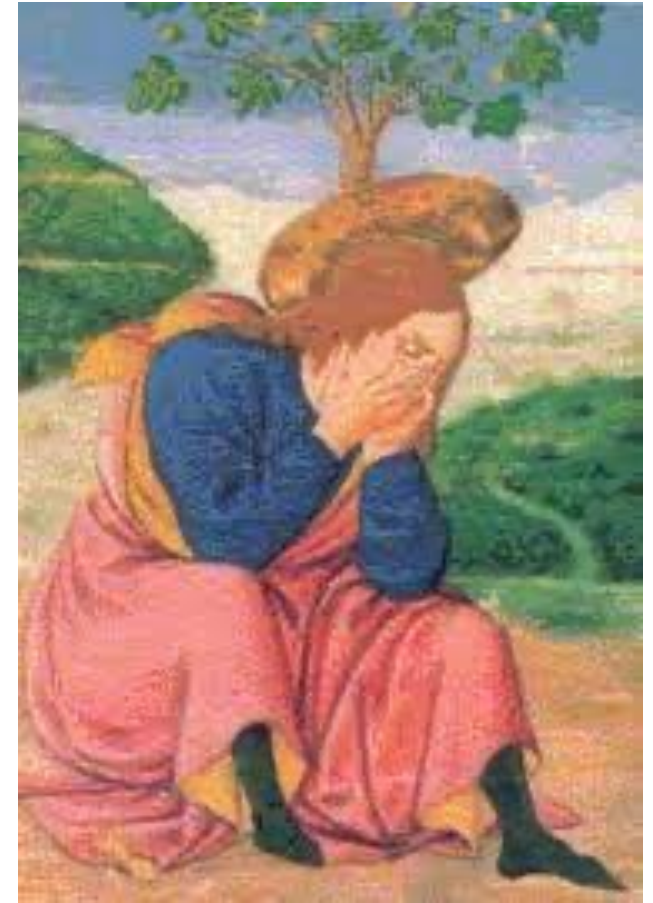


III. KEY PASSAGES: Early Childhood

- ▶ *“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)



III. KEY PASSAGES: The Pear Tree Incident



III. KEY PASSAGES: The Pear Tree Incident

- *“There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither color 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)*



III. KEY PASSAGES: The Pear Tree Incident

- ▶ *“There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither color 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)*



The ORDINARINESS of Sin

III. KEY PASSAGES: The Pear Tree Incident

- ▶ *“Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed ... I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself .. I had a quantity of better pears. But those I picked solely with the motive of stealing. I threw away what I had picked. My feasting was only on the wickedness which I took pleasure in enjoying.” (Bk. II.3, II.6, 31)*



The ORDINARINESS of Sin
The **ABSURDITY** of Sin

III. KEY PASSAGES: The Pear Tree Incident

- ▶ *“Now—as I think back on the state of my mind then—I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone. Perhaps then what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it.”* (Bk. II.8.16, 33)



The ORDINARINESS of Sin
The ABSURDITY of Sin
The DECEIT of Sin

III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles



III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles

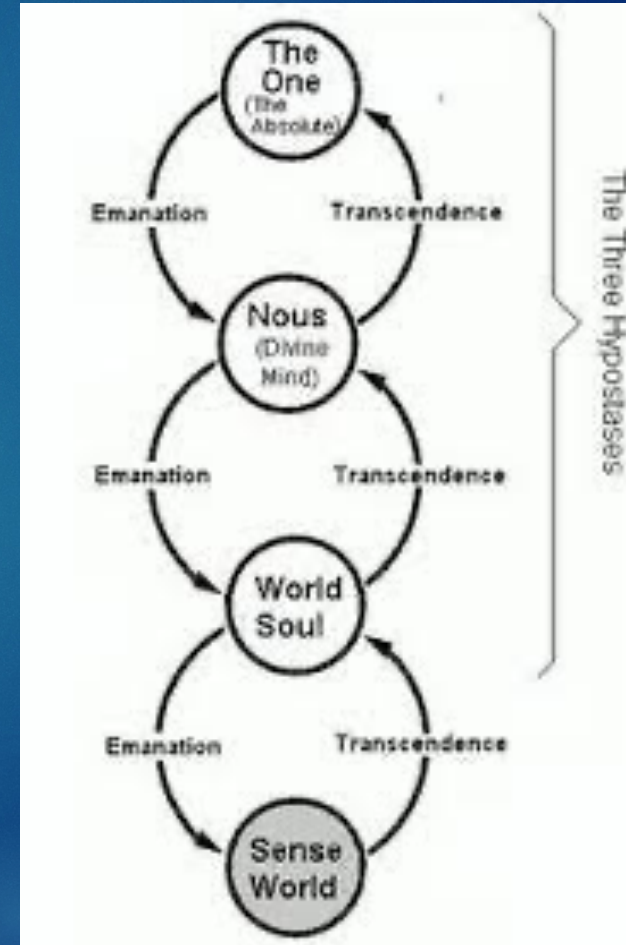
MANICHAEANISM – An Iranian-based religion founded by Parthian prophet, Manes (aka, “Mani”), combining Eastern religions, Christianity, and astrology. Big on DUALISM!



Good, **Spiritual** World of Light
VS. Evil, **Material** World of Evil

III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles

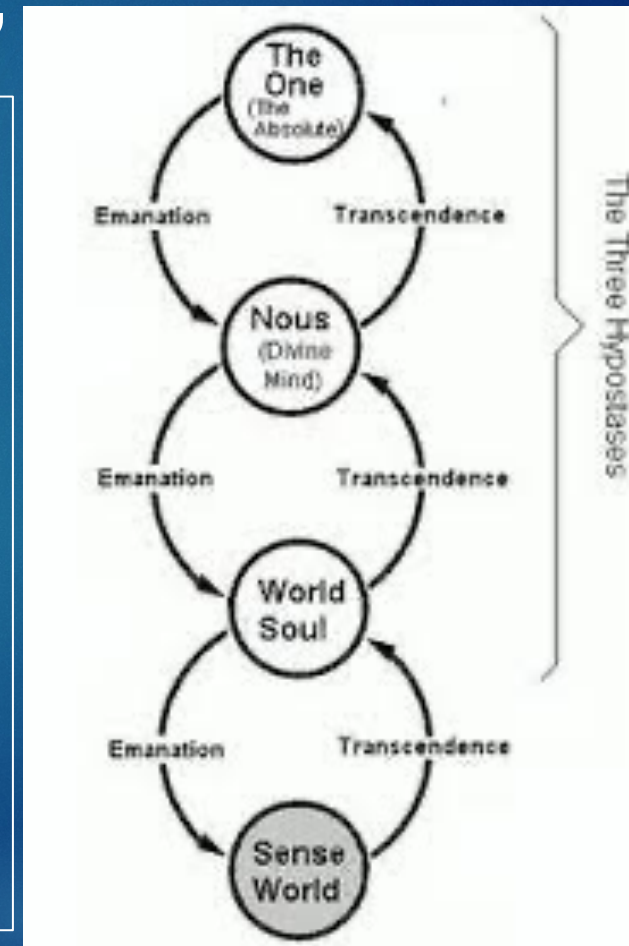
NEOPLATONISM – A 3rd Century religious and philosophical system holding that all existing things emanated from, and yearn to return to, the transcendent “One.”



III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles

NEOPLATONISM – A 3rd Century religious and philosophical system holding that all existing things emanated from, and yearn to return to, the transcendent “One.”

“I believe that you wanted me to encounter them before I came to study your scriptures. Your intention was that the manner in which I was affected by them should be imprinted in my memory, so that when later I had been made docile by your books and my wounds were healed by your gentle fingers, I would learn to discern and distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but not how to get there and those who see the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in.”
(Bk. VII.20, 130)



MANICHAEANISM – Two equally opposing forces, a GOOD invisible realm vs. an EVIL material realm, fight.

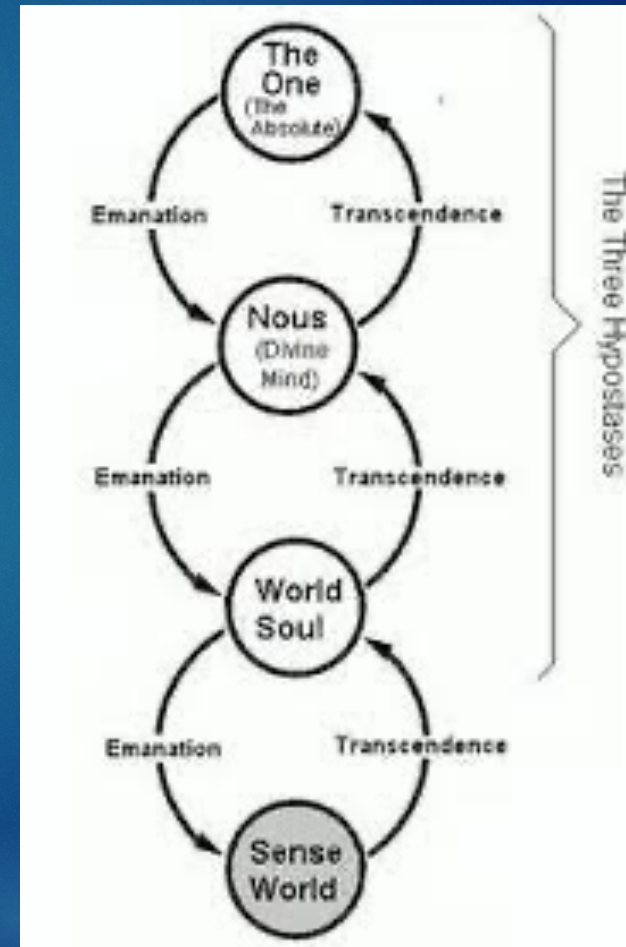
NEOPLATONISM – All existing things emanate from, and yearn to return to, the transcendent “One.”

CHRISTIANITY – God the Trinity freely and sovereignly creates non-divine creatures for covenant fellowship!



III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles

NEOPLATONISM – A 3rd Century religious and philosophical system holding that all existing things emanated from, and yearn to return to, the transcendent “One.”

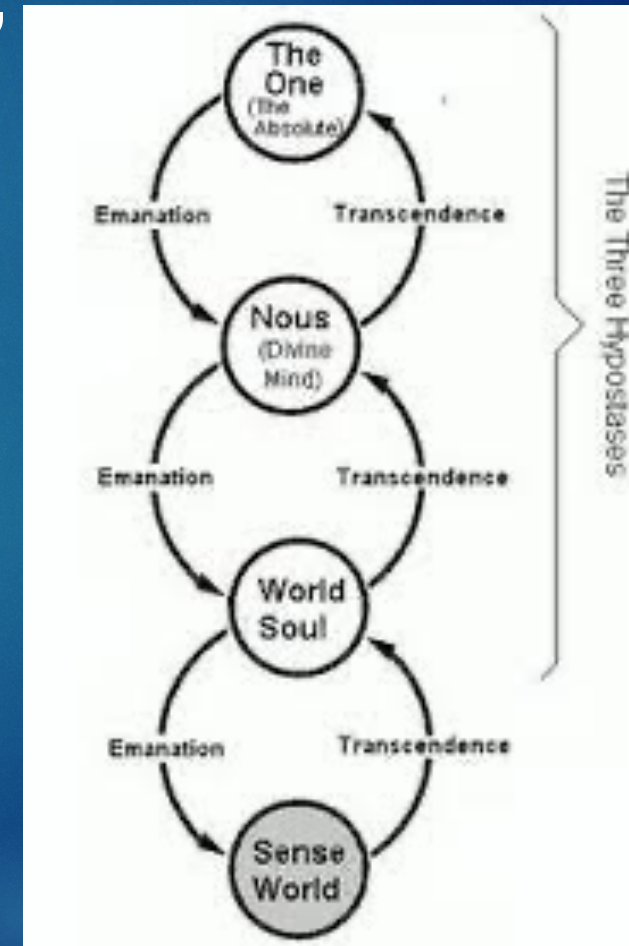


III. KEY PASSAGES: Worldview Struggles

NEOPLATONISM – A 3rd Century religious and philosophical system holding that all existing things emanated from, and yearn to return to, the transcendent “One.”

“From the Gentiles indeed I had come to you; and I fixed my mind upon the gold which You willed that Your people should bring with them from Egypt: for it was Yours, wherever it was.”

(Bk. VII. 9)



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- ▶ ON THE DEATH OF ALYPIUS:
- ▶ *“My hometown became a torture to me; my father’s house a strange world of unhappiness; all that I had shared with him was without him transformed into a cruel torment ... I had become to myself a vast problem, and I questioned my soul, ‘Why are you sad, and why are you very distressed?’” (Bk. IV.4, 57–58) (ref. to Ps 42:5)*



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- ▶ AUGUSTINE ON LOVE:
 - ▶ To “USE” a thing = Love it for sake of another end
 - ▶ To “ENJOY” a thing = Love it as an end in itself!



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- ▶ “Happy is the person who loves you, and his friend in you, and his enemy because of you. Though left alone, he loses none dear to him; for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost ... **For wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you, it is fixed in sorrows,** even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you.” (Bk. IV.9–10, 61)



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- ▶ “Happy is the person who loves you, and his friend in you, and his enemy because of you. Though left alone, he loses none dear to him; for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost ... **For wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you, it is fixed in sorrows,** even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you.” (Bk. IV.9–10, 61)
- ▶ “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)



III. KEY PASSAGES: On Love, Sexuality, and Sin

- ▶ “I do not say that children, coming from an evil action, are evil, since I do not say that the activity in which married persons engage for the purpose of begetting children is evil. As a matter of fact, I assert that it is good, because it makes good use of the evil of lust, and through this good use, human beings, a good work of God, are generated. But the action is not performed without evil ...”
(Against Julian, Bk. III.7)



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)

- ▶ (1) Augustine (354–430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was and is one of the most influential theologians in Christian history.



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)

- ▶ (1) Augustine (354–430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was and is one of the most influential theologians in Christian history.
- ▶ (2) Augustine was educated in a success-driven culture, but was consumed by an insatiable thirst for wisdom/Truth.



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)

- ▶ (1) Augustine (354–430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was and is one of the most influential theologians in Christian history.
- ▶ (2) Augustine was educated in a success-driven culture, but was consumed by an insatiable thirst for wisdom/Truth.
- ▶ (3) Augustine fell into a series of false philosophies (Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism), though the latter aided him in his conversion to Christianity in 386 AD.



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)

- ▶ (1) Augustine (354–430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was and is one of the most influential theologians in Christian history.
- ▶ (2) Augustine was educated in a success-driven culture, but was consumed by an insatiable thirst for wisdom/Truth.
- ▶ (3) Augustine fell into a series of false philosophies (Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism), though the latter aided him in his conversion to Christianity in 386 AD.
- ▶ (4) Augustine understood his pre-Christian life as a series of misdirected “loves,” pride fueled sins, and a fixation on what is finite rather than the infinite God in whom to rest.



III. CONCLUSION: Five Take-Aways (Bks 1–6)

- ▶ (1) Augustine (354–430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was and is one of the most influential theologians in Christian history.
- ▶ (2) Augustine was educated in a success-driven culture, but was consumed by an insatiable thirst for wisdom/Truth.
- ▶ (3) Augustine fell into a series of false philosophies (Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism), though the latter aided him in his conversion to Christianity in 386 AD.
- ▶ (4) Augustine understood his pre-Christian life as a series of misdirected “loves,” pride fueled sins, and a fixation on what is finite rather than the infinite God in whom to rest.
- ▶ (5) Augustine’s Neo-Platonism informed his faulty view that selfish/sinful passion is intrinsic to the sexual union in marriage, though he believed marriage was created by God for our good.

