



St. Augustine
Pastor, Theologian, Mystic

The Confessions of ST. AUGUSTINE

REVISION OF THE TRANSLATION OF
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CATHOLIC BOOK PUBLISHING CORP.
NEW JERSEY

PREFACE

AMONG all the spiritual, philosophical and theological works of the Fathers of the Church, none has been more universally esteemed in all ages or read with greater profit than *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*.

The word *confession* in the Old Testament has two meanings: to *confess* our *sins* and to *praise* God. Accordingly, the recurrent theme of this great work is that of penance and praise—a humble confession of Saint Augustine's sins and the glorification of God's mercy. Although popularly classed as an autobiography, it is only accidentally so in the true sense of the word. The many and sometimes intimate events of his life are narrated parenthetically and are subordinated to his main purpose of encouraging penance and praise for God.

The *Confessions* cannot be considered as a book that narrates, but as one that edifies; the story not of a life, but of a soul; not a work of art, but a cry of repentance and love. Thus, the *Confessions* can be called a magnificent soliloquy before the Divine Presence, or rather, as one writer classifies it, "an Epistle to God."

The temperament of the Saint was ardent, affectionate and excitable. In his early youth, driven by the desire for his companions' praise, he stole some fruit from a neighbor's orchard, and he later records the desolation of soul caused by the death of a friend. Whether he dwells on the characters of Alipius and Nebridius or that of Adeodatus, the son of his sin, or whether it is his conversations with Monica, his mother, and her loving and tender care

of him, or his sorrow at her death, St. Augustine reveals himself as a compassionate man to whom friendship and fellowship were absolutely essential, and one in whom there was not the slightest trace of desire for personal aggrandizement.

The style of the *Confessions* bears many traces of Augustine's training in rhetoric. It is often epigrammatic, and in a stately and untranslatable way he plays on the sounds of words and balances them with extraordinary care. His familiarity with, and common use of, Scripture is remarkable. His mind was thoroughly steeped in the Bible, and its phrases had become so much a part of his vocabulary that they recur constantly in his writings.

The long struggle between Augustine's higher spiritual impulses and his lower carnal habits, the way in which his moral character and conduct act and react upon his mental clearness of vision, and his state of religious doubt—these facts are set forth in a manner that cannot fail to awaken deep interest and to manifest the intimate connection between moral conduct and ardent faith.

To the agnostic of the twentieth century *The Confessions of St. Augustine* provides a warning. His cultured intellect had sought, at the prompting of his lower nature, complete satisfaction and rest in many deviations from a Faith that demanded a purer life than he was prepared to live. Yet, the fact that he finally embraced the Creed of the Catholic Church may suffice to convince unbelievers that the religion of Christ can afford to the most logical and scientific mind a peace that elsewhere will be sought in vain.

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Book 1—Early Years

After invoking and praising God, Augustine relates the beginning of his life, from his birth to his fifteenth year. He acknowledges his sins of youthful misconduct, idleness, and abuse of his studies. Finally, he gives Thanks to God for gifts bestowed upon him.

CHAPTER I—Made for God Himself

Y*OU are great, O Lord, and highly to be praised (Ps 145:3), You are mighty in power, and there is no limit to Your wisdom (Ps 147:5). Yet man, who is only an infinitesimal part of Your creation, desires to praise You. He fully realizes his mortality, bears witness to his sinful nature, and is aware that You, O God, resist the proud (1 Pt 5:5).*

You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. Grant, O Lord, that I may know and understand which is my first obligation—to call upon You or to praise You, and whether first I must know You or call upon You.

If someone does not know You, he might call upon something else instead of You. *How are they to call upon Him in Whom they have not believed? How are they to believe Him Whom they have not heard?* (Rom 10:14).

Certainly *they who seek the Lord shall praise Him (Ps 22:27)*. They who seek shall find Him (see Mt 7:7), and they who find Him shall praise Him.

Let me seek You, O Lord, calling upon You; and let me call upon You, believing in You, for You have been preached to us. My faith calls upon You—a faith that You have given me and that You have breathed into me by the Incarnation of Your Son, by the ministry of Your preacher.

sinful because they offend neither You, our Lord God, nor human society—such as when things are procured suitable for one's need in life according to the exigencies of the time and others are uncertain whether they may have been obtained out of a sense of greed, or when persons are punished by a lawful authority with the purpose of charitable correction, but to others it is uncertain whether such chastisement may have been administered out of malice.

Hence, many actions that to men might have appeared blameable have been approved by Your testimony, and many that have been praised by men are condemned in Your eyes, there being often a great difference between the outward appearance of a deed and the intention of the doer. Also one may not be certain whether or not there was a particular urgency for the deed at the time it was done.

When, therefore, You suddenly command some unusual and unexpected thing—although it be what You have previously prohibited, and although You conceal for the present the reason for Your command, and though it may be against the law of some human society—there is no doubt that what You command ought to be obeyed, since no human society is truly just unless it serves You.

But happy are they who know these Your commands. For all the extraordinary things that have been done by those who served You were either to exhibit something needful for the present or to foretell something to come.

CHAPTER 10 — Foolish Beliefs

NOT knowing these things, I regarded Your holy servants and Prophets with scorn. And in de-

CHAPTER 4 — Suspended in Doubt

WHEN, therefore, I was unable to see how this Your image could subsist, I should have knocked and inquired in what manner this was to be believed, instead of insultingly opposing it, as if it were believed in the way I imagined. Hence, the doubt as to what I should now hold for certain gnawed the more sharply at my heart in proportion to my greater shame for having been so long deluded and deceived with the promise of certitude, and for having all the while with childish error and heat babbled endlessly about so many uncertainties, as if they had been things most certain.

That they were absolutely false, I did not fully know till afterward, but I was now sure that they were uncertain, and that I had formerly taken them for certain, when with blind contentions I accused Your Catholic Church. Though I had not yet fully discovered that she taught the truth, neither had I found that she taught the things with which I so vehemently had charged her.

Therefore, I was in the process of being confounded and converted. I rejoiced, O my God, that Your only Church, the body of Your only Son, in which when a child I had received the name of Christ, held no such childish fopperies, and that her sound doctrine did not shut You up, the Creator of all things, within a space, however high and large, yet terminated on every side by the figure of a human body.

I rejoiced also that those ancient writings of the Law and the Prophets were not now offered to me to be read with that eye to which they formerly seemed absurd, when I charged Your saints with

What then shall I do, O You Who are my true life, my God? I will pass even beyond this power of mine, which is called the memory; I will pass beyond that so that I may come to You, the sweet light. What do you say to me? Behold, I am ascending by my mind to You, Who remain above me. I deserve only to reach You where You may be reached, and to cling to you there where You may be clung to.

Even the beasts and birds have memory, otherwise they could not return to their dens or nests, nor to many other things that they are accustomed to. And they could not be accustomed to anything except through the memory. Therefore, I will pass beyond the memory, that so I may arrive at Him Who has separated me from the four-footed beasts and made me wiser than the fowls of the air. I will pass beyond the memory.

But where then shall I find You, O true Good and secure Sweetness? Where then shall I find You? If I find You without my memory, then I have no remembrance of You. And how shall I find You if I have no remembrance of You?

CHAPTER 18 — Reminiscence

WHEN the woman had lost her drachma and sought it with a lamp (cf. Lk 15:8), how could she have found it if she had not remembered it? And when she had found it, how could she know that it was the same if she had no remembrance of it? I remember that I have sought and found many things that I have lost. How do I know this? Because when I was seeking any of them, if anyone should have said to me, "Is it not this or that?" I should have answered, "No," until that was brought forth