Life with Augustine

...a course in his spirit and guidance for daily living

By

Edmond A. Maher
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Dear Participant

Saint Augustine of Hippo is a figure in our history who has appealed to the curiosity and imagination of many generations. He is well known for being both sinner and saint, for being a bishop yet also a fellow pilgrim on the journey to God. One of the most popular and attractive persons across many centuries, his influence on the church has continued to our current day. He is also renowned for his influence in philosophy and psychology and even (in an indirect way) art, music and architecture.

Much of what we know about Augustine is contained in his written works that all have access to. In his best known book *The Confessions*, he recalls some of the most intimate and important experiences of his life including of childhood, schooling, further education, his relationships and above all his sincere search for truth. He wrote *The Confessions* so that whoever read them would come to know better their own life experience and their journey to God.

The unacquainted might wonder at the title of the book. Is the famous book of Augustine’s only about sin? In reality it is a positive work, a long prayer of praise for all the good in Augustine’s life. Confession in the book aims at praising the goodness and mercy of God.

As we study and reflect on Augustine’s life in this course we join with him, his family, his friends and those who have read his writings in the past. All of these become our fellow pilgrims and in many ways we are like them. In coming to understand their experience of life and of God we come to better know our own.

This second edition is a significant improvement on the first. I mention with gratitude those persons who studied the first edition and offered advice and Mike Morohan osa for his work in formatting the book.

I hope you will enjoy this journey with your fellow pilgrim, Augustine.

Sincerely

Edmond A. Maher
“I do not wish that someone accepts all my opinions in such a way that he or she follows me blindly, except in those points where the reader has come to the conviction that I was not mistaken. Not even I myself have followed myself on all points. I have written books constantly making progress. But I did not start off in perfection, and to claim that I now, in my old age, write perfectly and without error would be rather a sign of conceit than of veracity.”

(Augustine; De dono perseverantia 21.55)
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PROGRAM
INTRODUCTION
Program Introduction

Who is the program designed for?

The program is designed for adults who wish to know more about the life of Augustine and the work of God in their own life. No prior theological training is necessary nor are participants required to be of any particular religious affiliation, although some knowledge of the Christian tradition will be helpful (the glossary of terms will be of use for all participants).

Style of Learning

This is a self learning program. The readings provide a basis for individual reflection and group discussion.

What to expect from the course

At the end of the course participants should have

- learned more about the story of Augustine’s life and his experience of God in the context of the time in which he lived
- learned more about their own life and experience of God
- discussed their learning and reflections with other participants

Course Structure

Each of the nine chapters in the course follow a similar seven step format:

1. Introduction
2. Reading from scripture
3. Article(s) about Augustine
4. Augustine’s Confessions
5. Personal reflection
6. Prayer with Augustine
7. Group discussion

Necessary Materials

- This booklet
- The Confessions

**HOW TO PROCEED**

1. The first step for each chapter is to undertake the reading, reflection and prayer at home. This will normally take two hours. For convenience the chapters are divided into a number of smaller tasks, meaning you do not have to do the whole chapter at once.

   Keeping a journal will be of great help to your study. You can use it to keep notes and also respond to the reflection questions. In some areas a ‘Life with Augustine course journal’ will be available.

2. For each chapter there is a group gathering to discuss the readings and reflections. Sharing your thoughts and hearing other’s provides an opportunity to broaden your experience. Your discussions could be based on the questions provided in each chapter, or members of the group may volunteer to facilitate discussion of particular sections. Meetings that start and finish on time are appreciated, and it is recommended that discussions last no longer than one hour.

3. A learning coordinator is available to guide those doing the course and will help with difficulties you may encounter. You are advised to contact the learning coordinator once during the first two chapters and then as required throughout the remainder of the course.

4. Local groups will determine how often they gather but meetings at least monthly will help continuity and momentum.

There is no formal assessment in the course and no possibility of failing! You may wish to prepare and present some reflections from time to time. Please adjust all methods proposed in this booklet to suit your own needs and your groups needs. Remember, it’s your learning!
Hints for Doing a Chapter

The structure of the course is geared toward making study on your own as simple as possible.

Scripture

Each chapter of the course opens with a reading from Scripture. This is in keeping with the practice of Augustine whose writings are imbued with the written Word of God. The Scripture passages that open each chapter are ones that Augustine himself used in *The Confessions* and relate directly to the subject matter.

The recommended practice for reading the Scripture is:
- pause in silence
- read the passage slowly
- sit quietly with it for a short while
- take time to consider how God speaks to you in the passage

Writings about Augustine

To give you a context for each reading from *The Confessions* and to help the passage come to life for you, one or two extracts by other authors is provided with each chapter of the course. These extracts are followed by study or reflection questions. Recording your reactions and further questions in a journal will prove of benefit to you.

Augustine’s Confessions

Excerpts from *The Confessions* follow. Again it can be helpful to mark words and phrases that are important to you and to record questions and personal reactions you may have. It is not necessary to understand or remember all details in the reading, the ideas that “leap out to you from the page” are the important ones. Reflection questions follow each of the readings from *The Confessions*.

Prayer

A prayer of Augustine’s taken from *The Confessions* concludes the personal study of each chapter. You are invited to use Augustine’s words as your own prayer.
GROUP GATHERING
Program Introduction

The normal way to undertake each chapter is to discuss the material of each chapter with a group. This will enable you to receive the material at greater depth. The set questions which appear on a page like this can support you in this sharing although participants may prepare particular sections.

At the bottom of each of these pages are found “Group Discussion Guidelines” which will facilitate fruitful group work.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of Life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
Presentation to a Group

To conclude the course participants are encouraged to present a prepared reflection to the group. This is an opportunity for the group to develop in awareness of the grace that works in the lives of all. Presentations are not meant to be scholarly, their focus could be:

“what experience of Augustine’s speaks about the work of God in your own life and in the world around you?”

There are a variety of ways in which prepared reflections could be done. Below are a few suggestions, you may think of other ideas!

Choose three favourite quotes from *The Confessions* and use them as a basis for presentation

or

Create an art work such as a painting, sculpture or mosaic

or

Write and present a talk

or

Write and present a poem or song

or

Create a collage of quotes from *The Confessions* and present them to the group
REFERENCES TO THE CONFESSIONS AND OTHER WORKS

THE CONFESSIONS

There are numerous ways which are used to cite The Confessions. Maria Boulding’s translation of The Confessions (the recommended text for this program) presents references in the following manner

Confessions II, 4 (9)

indicates

The Confessions Book 2, Chapter 4 (other translations), Chapter 9 (Boulding’s translation)

The two most important numbers for our purposes are the first (book reference) and the last (Boulding’s chapter divisions)

NOW YOU TRY...

Just to check you understand the reference see if you can find Confessions II, 4 (9).

Hint!

(If you are having trouble go to page 30 in the recommended edition, the text begins “Beyond, question, theft is punished by your law, O Lord, and by the law written in human hearts...”)

If you have been unable to acquire the Boulding translation just ensure that you take notice of the first 2 numbers of the reference (i.e Confessions II, 4). In most instances this will get you if not to the right place at least very close (it probably wouldn’t hurt to read an extra couple of paragraphs anyway).
REFERENCES TO OTHER SET READINGS (ALL ARE CONTAINED IN THIS BOOKLET)

Other reading references will be given by name of Author, book title, publisher, place of publication, year of publication and page numbers to be read.


Is a book
- by Pellegrino, M.C.
- titled Give What You Command.
- published by the Catholic Publishing Co.
- of New York
- in 1970
- with pages 35 to 46 to be read
SEEKING GOD WITH AUGUSTINE
**Chapter 1: Seeking God with Augustine**

“*I confess not only before you in secret exultation tinged with fear and secret sorrow infused with hope, but also in the ears of believing men and women, the companions of my journey and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me, those who have gone before and those who will follow, and all who bear me company in my life. They are your servants and my brethren*.“ Confessions X, 4 (6).

**Introduction:**

Why study Augustine’s life? As mentioned in the introduction there are many reasons for doing so but none so important as those given us by Augustine himself, in sum, to know more of our own experience of God and to “know and praise our good and just God and...the depths from which we must cry to Him”. Confessions II, 3 (5).

Augustine’s life long journey is remarkable, from its high points to its depths of suffering we can see evidence of God’s gratuitous love. Fortunately Augustine was generous in speaking of his own life experience in *The Confessions*. Sixteen centuries later we still have copies of his famous work and through it he comes alive to us as our fellow pilgrim on life’s journey to God.

But just what were his reasons for writing *The Confessions*? This first chapter will examine Augustine’s motivations for undertaking this magnificent and famous book.
Scripture

The recommended practice for reading the Scripture is:
- pause in silence
- read the passage slowly
- sit quietly with it for a short while
- take time to consider how God speaks to you in this passage

Eph 3:14-21

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name. In the abundance of his glory may he, through his Spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, with all God’s holy people you will have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.
Article 1: The Confessions, translation and notes by Boulding, M. 
Introduction pp9-12

The introduction written by Maria Boulding in her other translation of The Confessions provides a good starting point not only for Augustine’s book but also for this course. It is recommended that you read at least the first 4 pages of the introduction (pages 9-12). They are printed below.

As you read it may prove beneficial to highlight things of interest and those sections about which you have questions. Also the GLOSSARY OF TERMS at the back of this program will help you greatly.

If the Bishop of Hippo looked out of his window as he picked up his pen, he saw a brilliant, colorful world, its hot details vivid in the fierce African sun. Augustine loved light, “the queen of colors” (X, 34, 51). He looked out at a prosperous Mediterranean country, at well-maintained roads gleaming white in the sun, at olive groves, orchards and vineyards, at municipal buildings and public baths. And everywhere was the stamp of Rome.

Augustine’s “Africa” was wholly different from the vast and varied continent suggested by that name today. To the south, beyond the Aures Mountains, it was cut off from the rest of the continent by the impassable Sahara. It was equally different from any North African country of medieval or modern times. The birth of Islam was more than two hundred years in the future, and the spread of Arab culture and language nearly three centuries away. Augustine’s Africa (the eastern part of Algeria and Tunisia today) was ancient Carthaginian country. Legend dated the foundation of Carthage to the ninth century B.C., and in succeeding centuries Phoenician sea-power and commerce had established trading ports along the Mediterranean coast. The Berber peasant farmers of the hinterland and the fishermen in the ports still spoke Punic, a Semitic tongue, in Augustine’s day. But after a disastrous series of clashes with Rome, Carthage had been subjugated in the second century B.C., and upon the ethnic substrate Rome had imposed the rule of law, Latin culture, and the amenities of civilized life. Augustine’s Africa faced north, across the tideless sea toward Italy.

Augustine picked up his pen, prayed to his God to enable him to say what he had to say, and began.

The Confessions are one long prayer, a poetic, passionate, intimate prayer. It is paradoxical, but exact, to say that he prayed for the grace to pray: “Allow me to speak in your merciful presence” (I, 6, 7); “Let me not weary as I confess to you those acts of mercy by which you plucked me from all my evil ways” (I, 15, 24); “Let me love you, Lord, and give thanks to you and confess to your name” (II, 7, 15); “Let me confess my disgraceful deeds to you, and in confessing praise you. Allow me this, I beg you” (IV, 1, 1); “Accept the sacrifice of my confessions, offered to you by the power of this tongue of mine which you have fashioned and aroused to confess to your name” (V, 1, 1).

He undertook this, his greatest piece of writing, in the conviction that God wanted him to make this confession: “You first willed that I should confess to you, my Lord and my God” (XI, 1, 1). In his heart, in his “inner ear,” he heard God asking it of him; but there were practical and human promptings as well. In A.D. 397, the most probable date for The Confessions, or at least for his beginning to write them, Augustine was forty-three. He had been a baptized Catholic for ten years, a priest for six, and a bishop for only about two. There were probably many in the church at Hippo, and more widely in the church throughout Numidia, who were less than convinced of their good fortune in acquiring so brilliant and distinguished a man for their bishop. Cleverness was, perhaps, not highly prized. His pre-baptismal life raised questions, especially his nine years’ adherence to the Manichean sect, and his polemical attitude toward the Catholic Church in earlier days. Was his conversion genuine? Finally, his elevation to the episcopate had itself been controversial, since the aged Bishop of Hippo, Valerius, had been in a hurry to snap Augustine up before any other church staked a claim, and had persuaded the Primate of Numidia to consecrate him coadjutor bishop with right of succession in canonically dubious fashion. Some kind of apologia pro vita sua from Augustine’s pen was therefore timely, and might disarm his critics. Insofar as The Confessions are polemical
at all (which is not very far), the Manichees are in Augustine’s sights.

Beyond the critics was a wider circle of potential readers who would listen far more sympathetically. Augustine was not the only cultured and intelligent man to embrace Christianity at a mature age, after a long intellectual search. Paulinus of Nola was a kindred spirit; he and many others would be very interested in anything Augustine might have to say about his understanding of his faith and its relation to philosophy and the humanities. Many another had perhaps found in Neo-Platonism the highest and most spiritual achievement of the human mind in search of union with God, yet turned away disappointed, as Augustine had, because something was missing.

Finally there was the great company of Augustine’s fellow Christians who were neither critics nor philosophers, those who would overhear his confessions and judge in charity, whose charity would itself be the medium for understanding whatever he had to say: “All whose ears are open to me by love will believe me” (X, 3, 3); “The charity that makes them good assures them that I am not lying” (X, 3, 4). These would be encouraged and praise God, for “it is cheering to good people to hear about the past evil deeds of those who are now freed from them” (ibid.).

For all these he wrote his “confessions in thirteen books” (Revisions II, 6, 1). There was no printing, no mass-production, only laborious writing and copying by hand. It is likely that the first “readers” were groups of interested persons who gathered for reading sessions. Each of the thirteen books is an episode in the story, although the length varies.

Augustine had, therefore, both private and public inducement. He had also superb fluency and an addiction to talking about himself. Yet these facts should not blind us to what it must have cost him. It is something remarkable, even daring, for a man to write a book addressed to God which is principally about himself. For all his magnificent egoism and genius for communication, he was a highly sensitive man, and afraid of mockery. As an orator he had been professionally attuned to his audience’s reaction; as a bishop he had not become indifferent to it. His desire for praise, his need to please people, were not just the weaknesses of a young man, now left behind; even as a bishop he needed to watch his motives, as he admits (X, 36, 59).

Clearly the first hearers were captivated, as many thousands have been over the following sixteen centuries. His own way to God had been the way of deep and searing self-knowledge, yet his confession of it could speak to others: the prefix con- already implies communication. Through the particular and personal experiences of his own life, time, place, and culture, Augustine searches the human heart and exposes the predicament of weak, sinful, sensual, vacillating, hopeful, graced human beings, evoking their valiant and passionate search for truth, their fascination with beauty, their disintegration when they yield to temptation and sink back to their native darkness, their longing for a happiness that will be found only in the satisfaction of the questioning mind and restless heart in God, and their unquenchable thirst for that peace and rest which may be found partially and temporarily in this life (as Augustine himself had found them for a time at Thagaste after returning from Italy to Africa as a Christian), but are finally attainable only in the vision of God, in the enjoyment of God, in the Sabbath of eternal life.

He spoke with an honesty to which every man and every woman could instinctively respond, and in powerful language. The Latin classics had been ruthlessly dinned into him in boyhood, and the phrases of Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, and Terence came readily. The verbal abilities of a promising boy had been honed and refined in the hard school of rhetoric until Augustine, always fascinated by words, was a master of vivid late Latin, with an ear for its music and a delight in its puns and paradoxes. But then had come his immersion in the scriptures, known to him in the Old Latin version which preceded the Vulgate; and by the time he came to write The Confessions scriptural thought and language were so thoroughly his own that nearly every page contains echoes and allusions. So much for the setting. Now to the story Augustine had to tell.
QUESTION FOR CONSIDERATION

Has the previous reading challenged your current knowledge of Augustine?

Are there aspects of the previous reading you would care to highlight for further investigate as you continue through the program?

RECOMMENDED EXTRA READING

Augustine’s writings:

In the following sections of *The Confessions* Augustine tells us of his reasons for writing this mighty work. While reading these sections listed below it may be useful to keep track of what he says are his motivations for writing the book. For your help I have given page numbers for the recommended Boulding translation.

**Confessions I, 1-6 (1-7) (pages 3-6)**
**Confessions II, 3 (5) (begins page 27)**
**Confessions II, 7 (15) (begins page 34)**
**Confessions X 1-4 (1-6) (begins page 197, ends 201)**

Journal Time

You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading *The Confessions* in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Questions for consideration

Are there any of Augustine’s reasons for writing *The Confessions* that you find admirable? If so what are they?

You might wish to write about something in these last readings that really ‘leapt out at you’ from the page?
Prayer

The following prayer of Augustine may assist you in your own prayer at the end of this first chapter.

Confessions I, 1(1)

1, 1. Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise;’ your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning! And so we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you—we who carry our mortality about with us,’ carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud! Yet these humans, due part of your creation as they are, still do long to praise you. You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.
GROUP GATHERING
Seeking God with Augustine

INTRODUCTIONS (10 MINS)

As this is your first time together take a couple of minutes to introduce yourselves to one another and share your reasons for undertaking the course. Also what was it like working through chapter one, did you encounter any difficulties?

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

You may wish to use the reflection questions from the previous chapter as a basis for discussion.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT MEETING

Someone in the group might volunteer to prepare a presentation/reflection on a section of chapter 2.

Group Discussion Guidelines

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
2

THE WORLD OF AUGUSTINE
Chapter 2: The World of Augustine

Introduction

In order to understand Augustine it is important to know something of the world from which he came. The prevailing culture, politics, geography, education, social patterns and, of course, church situation made up Augustine’s world view and coloured his outlook. So we take this look back into the social fabric of Augustine’s Roman world to understand him a little better. You might be surprised at some of the similarities to our own world.

This chapter has a different format than others in that there is no Scripture or prayer included, just two articles about the world of Augustine. A map has been provided on the following page should you wish to keep track of the places where some of the major events of his life occurred.

Articles by Augustine scholars

The two articles following are concerned with the world that Augustine was a part of. As you progress through them underline what you think are important points, insights and challenges. The questions for consideration that will be presented at the end of this chapter are listed below.

- What insights about Augustine have you gained from this reading?
- Do you see any similarities between Augustine’s world and our present world?
Article 2

Burt, Donald. 
Augustine’s World, An Introduction to His Speculative Philosophy. 
*University Press of America, Inc. 1996 xv- xix*

Introduction

The Environment

The Place

Augustine was born in the town of Thagaste in the Roman province of Numidia on North Africa in the year 354. At that time Rome’s influence stretched along the coastline of present day Algeria and Tunisia, extending inland with diminishing power to the borders of the Sahara desert. These coastal regions were a fertile land, producing great crops of grain and vegetables in the river valleys and huge forests or olive trees on the hillsides and arid high plains.

The town of Thagaste (the present Souk-Ahras in Algeria) was situated in the northeast highlands of Numidia, some sixty miles from Hippo Regius (the present Annaba [Bone]), the seaside city where Augustine was to spend the last forty years of his life. It was about fifteen miles from Madaura (the present M’Daourouch, Algeria) where he went to “prep” school and about one hundred and fifty miles from Carthage on the coast of present day Tunisia, where he was to go for higher education and where he was to spend the early years of his teaching career. Carthage was the grand metropolis of the land. Founded by the Phoenicians nine centuries before the coming of Christ, destroyed by Rome in 146 BC, reestablished by the Emperor Augustus in 29 BC, it had become in Augustine’s day the second largest city in the Western Empire. Only Rome itself was larger.

Thagaste had no such pretensions to grandeur. Though it had already existed for three hundred years before Augustine was born (and was to last even till today), it was nothing more than a somewhat pleasant county-seat for farms and great estates. It is likely that its population was never more than a few thousand people, if that. It was situated in the river valley of the Medjerda, a fertile land filled with corn and pastures and gardens. The hills (where they were not cultivated with olive trees) were heavily forested with oak and pine and in these natural habitats lived lions and bears and panthers, animals frequently captured to be sold for the Roman amphitheater games. Wild flowers were sprinkled through the open ground and flocks of various birds coursed through the clear skies. It was a land of four seasons with a climate not unlike that of southern Spain. The winters were short, of course, but snow was not unknown. The summers were long and very hot. In sum it was a land full of life, pungent smells, and violent colors. It is no wonder that Augustine’s writings are filled with analogies from the land and that he so often speaks about the beauty of this world. He grew up and lived most of his life in a beautiful land.

The People

This vitality was reflected in the people of the land. The native North Africans were Berbers, and these were still the dominant population in the rural areas (for example, Thagaste) in the fourth century. Added to these roots was that of the Phoenicians who had founded Carthage nine centuries before the coming of Christ. There was also some Roman blood intermixed, coming from the army veterans who had been given land as a reward for their services some two hundred years before. Roman settlement had ceased when Augustine was born, though many of the great estates were owned by absentee Roman landlords. The flow of immigrants would increase later on as the barbarians swept down on Rome in the early fifth century.

The people had a taste for wine, women, and song. They were sociable and gregarious but given to violent anger when they felt abused. Augustine in 420 gave the following sympathetic description of the typical North African Christian who was serious about salvation. He was like a husband who did good works from time to time, who was faithful to his wife and enjoyed having sex with her, who was very serious about his honor and who thought seriously about taking revenge on anyone who sullied that honor. He valued his property without being especially greedy or grasping. He would give some of his goods to those
in need but would fight vigorously anyone who dared to steal from him. He did not pretend to be a saint nor did he think he was God. He was ready to admit his failings and in all humility recognized that without the grace of God they were likely to occur again.

The society was characterized by defined social strata. At the very top were the landowners, high government officials, and rich expatriates from Italy. The landowners lived like feudal kings supported by the annual fees paid by tenant farmers for the use of the land. Many of them were absentee landlords, taking little interest in the products or the people that provided their income. At the second level were minor bureaucrats, merchants, lawyers, and teachers. If the great estate owners were the noble rich, these were the noble poor. They were noble in that they lived by their wits more than by their sweat, but they were poor because any extra funds from gainful employment were quickly absorbed by high taxes. The problems that this middle class had in “making ends meet” is exemplified in the difficulty Patricius had in keeping his son in school much beyond the elementary level. It was only through the kindness of the wealthy Romanianus that Augustine was able to continue his education and career in Carthage.

At the third level in society were the peasants, poor fishermen, and day-laborers of the city. These lived a hard life, glad on any given day to find a warm bed and adequate food. Their only equity was their physical strength and when this ran out they faced disaster. It was not unknown for them to sell their children into slavery so that both they and the children could get enough to live. Sometimes they turned to crime, attacking any person foolish enough to travel far from the towns without military escort. People of the land, they had a healthy suspicion of any alien people or alien ideas that threatened their historic culture. The peasants owned little but themselves. The very lowest class in society, the slaves, owned not even that. Still, from a material point of view their lot was sometimes better than that of the poor freeman. If their master was kind, they could at least be sure of daily meals and evening shelter. In truth they were not free, but at least their owner was a human being who could just possibly take pity on them. The peasant was chained by a harsher master . . . an economic condition which could not feel pity or any other emotion and which destroyed the very possibility of a truly human, secure, comfortable existence.

The Political Environment

When Augustine was born in the middle of the fourth century, the western Roman Empire was still a force to be reckoned with. Though rebellions of border tribes in Northern Europe were a continuing aggravation, Rome could still claim control over most of the civilized world in Europe and North Africa. When Augustine died seventy-six years later, all this had changed. The western Empire was under siege from the barbarians from the north. They had invaded France and Spain. In 410 they captured the city of Rome itself. They moved on into North Africa and by 430 were laying siege to Hippo where Augustine lay dying. They were to rule in North Africa for a hundred years thereafter.

During most of Augustine’s life, Rome held uneasy control of its North African provinces. Its influence was quite strong in the cities and larger towns, but lost its vigor the further one moved out into the country. There the native North African people held sway, suspicious of any foreign challenge to their historic practices and filled with hatred for the “aliens” from across the sea who took their crops and imposed impossible levies on their possessions. Symptomatic of the power of this native spirit was the success of Donatism, a vigorous faction within North African Christianity. Part of its strength, it would seem, came from its identification as a “North African” thing . . . an ultra-conservative interpretation of salvation doctrine that struck a resonant chord in the rigid native mind.

The Religious Environment

The North African people were greatly attracted by mystery. The world of the unseen was just as real to them as the world of the seen. Few if any had a problem with whether God (or gods) existed. The only
question was what the divine was like. Daily life was a continuing ritual aimed at placating and worshiping innumerable unseen spirits. Magic to control the present and astrology to learn the future were accepted tools for protecting one’s existence. It is no great wonder that mystery cults such as Manichaeism found a fertile field among the North Africans. There was special veneration of the dead, a veneration which in Christian times was converted to a deep reverence for those who had died for the faith. The border between the living and the dead was very thin and in the perilous times of the fourth and fifth century it was a line that was easily crossed.

At the same time there was a pessimism about what one could do to make life better. Fate and chance ultimately ruled one’s life.

When Augustine was born Christianity was a major force in the Roman provinces of North Africa. Yet there still remained a healthy residue of the native mystery cults as well as the pagan rites imported with Rome. Christianity had appeared in North Africa by the second century. It had survived the persecutions of the third century and had produced such giants as Tertullian and Cyprian. By the time of Augustine Christianity was the approved religion of the Empire, but in North Africa it was split into two factions: the Roman Catholic and the Donatist. The Donatist faction represented a conservative, rigorist element in Christianity. They claimed to be the only “pure” Christianity since none of their group came from the despised “Traitors” (Traditores) who had denied their faith in the midst of the persecutions. They followed the Cyprian principle that there can be no salvation outside the Church and the Church was for those who remained faithful after baptism. Augustine, who was of the liberal faction, was to spend much of his early years as a bishop in battle with the Donatists, ultimately winning the day by getting their position rejected by the Pope and proscribed by the Emperor.

In dealing with his own congregation over forty years Augustine had to take into account their passion for the mysterious and their tendency toward fatalism. He spoke frequently against such practices as astrology and magic. He preached Divine Providence, rather than fate and chance, as the ruling force in life. He complained about their superstitious worship of the martyrs and their tendency to use the feast days as an excuse for debauchery. He attempted to center their enthusiasm on Christ and to channel their passionate nature into a warm and enduring love for God and all humans, even enemies. In this he was not completely successful, on one occasion having to remonstrate with them for participating in the lynching of an unpopular public official. He could not change the hard conditions of their life nor their passionate nature nor their exuberant taste for life. But he did have some success in calling on their generosity to help the poor, in substituting hope in providence for fear of fate, and in encouraging them not to stop loving but only to love in some sort of orderly fashion.

Question for consideration

Note down some of the interesting aspects of the world Augustine grew up in.
Article 3


Roman in Culture and Language

Although Augustine was born in Africa and, according to all indications, was an African by descent, he was a Roman in culture and language. Tagaste, his birthplace, was one of the many towns which the Romans had scattered around North Africa. As everyone knows, after conquering Carthage the Romans undertook a monumental transformation of these vast regions by laying down an extensive network of roads, building cities, erecting country houses, encouraging agriculture, and bringing culture, trade and prosperity to every corner of the land.

Tagaste

Tagaste was not a large city; it is called civitas parva, “a small town,” by the anonymous author of the Latin version of the Life of St. Melania the younger. In fact it offered only the first stage of public education, the schools taught by the primus magister (“instructor in the rudiments”) or, in modern parlance, elementary schools. The town had no special importance except that it was a place where many of the roads of the Mediterranean hinterland met: one of the three roads from Hippo to Carthage passed through it, as did the road from Carthage to Cirta, Sitifis, and distant Caesarea in Mauritania, and the road from Hippo southward to Theveste (Tebessa). The mansion or inn of Tagaste was therefore a well-known one and allowed the citizens of this little town to come in contact with the commercial and cultural doings of a large area of Roman Africa.

The town was situated in a pleasant location on the broad and fertile ‘altiplano’ of Numidia, 2,200 feet above sea level. It was surrounded by fragrant woods in which Augustine went on long excursions hunting birds and by vines and olive groves; it was rich in grains, fruits, and pasture.

To the east stretched the broad valley of the Medjerda river which descended a distance of 155 miles to Carthage. To the south the vast altiplano ran to the Aures Mountains, beyond which, almost on the verge of the Sahara, a chain of fortresses protected—not always effectively—the frontiers and territory of the pax romana. To the west the altiplano of Cirta (the modern Constantine) stretched as far as the two Mauretanians. To the north, beyond the hills, lay the valley of the Seybouse (the Ubus of the Romans), which emptied into the sea near Hippo Regius, about 60 miles away.

Roman Tagaste lies buried under the white houses of the modern Souk-Ahras (Algeria) or under the green of the olive groves on some of the nearby hills. But the excavations which have brought to light the splendid ruins of other cities of ancient Numidia allow us to form an idea of its life, its houses and its public places (forum, baths, theater, circus) and also enable us to understand and partially to excuse the pompous title of “Most Illustrious” with which the municipal council adorned it.

When Augustine was born there on November 13, 354 Tagaste had already been in existence for 300 years, and the splendor of its historic places, even if not utterly gone, was certainly in decline. On the other hand, its true history, which is completely bound up with that of Augustine and his mother Monica, was only beginning.

At Tagaste, as in the other cities of Roman Africa for that matter, people of the most varied social condition met and often came in conflict: immigrants and natives, bosses and servants, those who enjoyed unbridled luxury and those who lived in squalid wretchedness. Luxury prevailed in the cities, wretchedness in the rural areas where the sumptuous country houses of the great landowners were the focal point for a swarm of tenant-farmers who worked the soil with difficulty while envying the bosses. The language and culture were Latin, but many people in the rural areas and the hills spoke and understood only Punic.

Family

Between these opposed extremes a middle class had formed which was for the most part African in origin but Roman by education and mentality and which by now was fully absorbed into the organization
of the empire. This was the class of the small landowners who took part in the running of civic affairs and wanted their sons to pass through all the levels of instruction in order that they might become magistrates, rhetoricians, or lawyers. It was to this class that Augustine’s family belonged.

By comparison with other families of Tagaste, that of Alypius, for example, which was one of the leading families of the town or that of Romanianus which was very wealthy, Augustine’s could be called poor. That is in fact how Augustine himself thought of it. He says that his father was “a poor freedman from Tagaste,” and speaks of himself as having been “born of poor parents.”

The reader should not take these words to mean what they would mean nowadays. “Poverty” at that time did not exclude a certain degree of comfort. As a matter of fact, Augustine’s parents had domestic servants and owned some land; they could afford to send their son to school at Madauros, 20 miles away, and conceive the ambitious plan of sending him to Carthage to complete his studies.

But comfort did not mean wealth. The ambitious plan would probably have never been carried out, despite the sacrifices made by the family, unless a fellow citizen, Romanianus, a relative of Alypius and one of those who were and were called rich, had come to Augustine’s aid.

Augustine was to recall with admiration both the generosity of this patron and the determination and sacrifices of the father who spent on his son more than he could really afford. “Who did not then highly commend my father for laying out in my behalf, even beyond the strength of his means, what was necessary for carrying on my studies at that great distance from home! Many citizens, far wealthier than he, did no such thing for their children.”

Augustine’s patrimony did not amount to more than one twentieth of the property of the Church of Hippo, and Hippo was not a wealthy Church. His patrimony was therefore a quite modest one, although once he became bishop he helped his relatives, as he helped the other poor, that “they might not suffer want or at least suffer less from it.”

It does not appear that Augustine’s brother Navigius and his sister, whose name we do not know, had the good fortune of attending the classes of the “master of grammar” at Madauros. Certainly his cousins Lastidianus and Rusticus did not have it.

Augustine’s family, then, was not wealthy, but it was certainly distinguished and respected. His father, Patricius, was a member of the municipal council; his mother, the devout Monica, won admiration for her noble character and outstanding virtues.

Language

The family was probably of African origin but had become Romanised. In Patricius’ house all, including the servants, spoke Latin and only Latin. This should not surprise us. We know that not everyone in Hippo knew Punic and that even among the clergy few were able to make use of it. In any case, before learning Latin in school Augustine had already learned it at home, “by observing others, without being frightened into it or forced by the rod, amid the flatterings of my nurses, and the jests of such as smiled upon me, and the mirth of those who played with me.” He learned it because he felt a desire and need to express his own thoughts.

As a matter of fact, Latin was the first language in which Augustine expressed himself and the only one that he mastered fully.

As for Punic, a term which I use here in the (to us) rather vague sense in which Augustine used it, he would later on as bishop cite a few proverbs from that language and indicate the Punic words corresponding to a few Latin terms, but when he had to make himself understood by the peasants of his diocese he used an interpreter, as did the Donatist bishop Macrobius.

In like manner, when Augustine refers to Punic literature in which “many wise things have been handed down,” he draws not on personal experience but on the authority of the more learned: “as is attested by very learned men.” We must conclude, therefore, that he had but a limited and general knowledge of it that did not allow him to make use of it.

His knowledge of Greek was another matter again. He learned it in school at Madauros, but learned it unwillingly, either because his own natural inclination was more to poetry than to drier studies that elicited no feelings in him (and the study of a dictionary was one of these), or because the current methods of
instruction were based on “painful forms of punishment.” He never became really at home with Greek. It was not that he did not know it, for he did know enough of it to serve various purposes. He could consult the Greek text of the Bible and use it, if need be, to correct the Latin version (as he habitually did). He could judge the accuracy of a translation, even one of Jerome’s. He could himself make an accurate translation of a passage from the Fathers or Plotinus. He could go directly to the original Greek of a work. But he did not know it well enough to be able to read the works of the Fathers with the fluency that he would have liked to possess and that he would have needed if he were to make good use of the few “drops” of time available to him.

His culture, then, unlike that of many of his contemporaries (Jerome, for example, or Ambrose), was essentially Latin or, more accurately, was obtained through the medium of Latin.

Rhetoric

When it came to Latin, however, Augustine was master of all its riches of content and form, all its secrets, all its resources. He spoke it indeed with a typically African accent that caused the Italians to make fun of him, and he displayed stylistic peculiarities proper to a writer of the late imperial age who was both an African and a pastor of souls. But he was also a consummate artist in language, with the ability to make it express every nuance of thought and every variety of style. To realize this, the reader need only compare the Confessions with the City of God or the Letters or the Sermons.

He studied the rudiments of Latin in Tagaste, grammar in Madauros, and rhetoric in Carthage. When he had completed his studies, he opened a grammar school in Tagaste, and then, after a year or two, a school of rhetoric first in Carthage, then in Rome. Finally, he taught rhetoric at the imperial court in Milan.

In Carthage he entered a poetry competition and was crowned poet by Vindicianus the proconsul. At Rome Symmachus the prefect tested his abilities as a speaker and sent him to Milan as professor of elocution; this first success would lead to even greater successes. In his capacity as professor at Milan he delivered the panegyric for the consulate of Bauto and, a few months later, the official encomium on the emperor, who was at that time, as we know, the fourteen-year-old Valentinian II. Twelve years of teaching and intense study, added to the years already spent in school, gave him the opportunity to gain a deeper knowledge of the liberal arts and to fulfill the great ambition of many in that age by becoming a “most learned and eloquent” man.

The vast learning he had acquired made it possible for him, even as a new convert, to conceive the grandiose scheme of writing a series on the Disciplines, a kind of encyclopedia on the liberal arts. In it he would show how to pass, as by a series of sure steps, from corporeal things to spiritual, and from these in turn to God. He did write a volume on grammar, now lost, and began the treatise on music; this he finished in Africa, having written six books on the element of rhythm in music. For the other five liberal arts—dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic and philosophy—he made only sketches, but even these have been lost.

Even as a bishop, Augustine always retained a deep sense of admiration, gratitude, and even, we may say, affection for the authors from whom he had gained his own literary formation. He felt this way especially toward Virgil, over whose pages he had shed so many tears; toward Cicero, who had awakened him from a deadly slumber and given him a love of wisdom; and toward Varro, the most erudite of the Romans, whose works were of great use to him in writing the City of God.

These sentiments manifest themselves in, for example, the following letter, which dates from 415 when Augustine had already entered his sixties and been bishop for about twenty years. Evodius, a friend and fellow townsman, has asked him the meaning of St. Peter’s words about the descent of Christ into hell and the liberation of those confined there (1 Pet 3:18; Acts 2:24). Augustine answers:

If we say that on that occasion all who were there were set free without distinction, who could fail to be pleased (if we could prove it); especially in regard to those whose writings have made them familiar to us and whose genius we admire? I am not referring only to the poets and other orators who have heaped scorn and ridicule on their own false pagan gods and at times have even acknowledged the only true God, while admittedly sharing with all their contemporaries in a superstitious form of worship. I am also referring to those who asserted the same truths not in poems or discourses but in works of philosophy. I am speaking even of the many learned persons whose works have not reached us but whose praiseworthy lives (praiseworthy at least from one point of view) are known to us from the writings of others.

All these individuals did not worship God but erred by adoring false gods as ordered by the laws of the
state and by serving creatures rather than the Creator. But in the rest of the conduct of their lives they are rightly proposed as models for imitation by reason of their frugality, continence, chastity, sobriety, scorn of the death they faced in order to save their country, fidelity to the word they had given not only to compatriots but even to enemies .... Because of our natural inclination we would be greatly pleased if persons so endowed with virtues were, singly and together with everyone: else, freed from the torments of hell.

This passage, with its contrast between natural inclination and the teaching of the Christian faith, shows better than any other the profound humanity of Augustine and the extent to which he belonged to the Greco-Roman world. He was a Roman not only in language and culture, but also in feelings and heart.

**Questions for Consideration**

What insights about Augustine have you gained from this reading?

Do you see any similarities between Augustine’s world and our present world?

What talents/skills will Augustine bring from his early life into his ministry as Christian and bishop?
GROUP GATHERING
THE WORLD OF AUGUSTINE

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

It might be useful to use the questions from the previous chapter for discussion. A general discussion on interesting points from the readings will be valuable.

Can the group begin to ‘paint a picture’ of what Augustine would have been like?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

EXPECT TO ENJOY SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LIFE WITH AUGUSTINE
INCLUDE A FORM OF PRAYER IN THE GATHERING
VALUE THE RESPONSES TO THE COURSE THAT EACH ONE OFFERS
NO ONE HAS ALL THE WISDOM BUT MANY PIECES TOGETHER FORM A LARGER PICTURE
DISCUSSIONS KEPT ON TRACK ARE MORE SATISFYING (USING THE QUESTIONS FROM THE CHAPTER WILL HELP)
MEETINGS THAT START AND FINISH ON TIME ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED
OCCASIONALLY COMBINING THE GROUP GATHERING WITH SNACKS/REFRESHMENTS OR A MEAL COULD ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE
AUGUSTINE’S
EARLY LIFE
CHAPTER 3: EARLY LIFE

“From you derives all manner of being, O God most beautiful, who endow all things with their beautiful form and by your governance direct them in their due order.” Confessions I, 7 (12)

INTRODUCTION

Augustine, in telling of his childhood and adolescence, is very honest about his positive experiences and his ‘less than ideal’ ones. He tells of significant people in his life such as his parents, friends and teachers, who were not perfect, yet Augustine also praises them for their good.

Despite the limitations of those around him, and indeed his own limitations, Augustine looked back and recognised God’s providence working during this time of his life, even through other people’s folly’s.

The following readings will give insight into some of those key events, Augustine’s early ideas of God and his attempts at prayer.
Scripture

The recommended practice for reading the Scripture is:
- pause in silence
- read the passage slowly
- sit quietly with it for a short while
- take time to consider how God speaks to you in this passage

Psalm 70 (69)

Be pleased, God, to rescue me,
Yahweh, come quickly and help me!
Shame and dismay to those
who seek my life!
Back with them! Let them be humiliated
who delight in my misfortunes.
Let them shrink away covered with shame,
those who say to me, “Aha, aha!”

But joy and happiness in you
to all who seek you.
Let them ceaselessly cry, “God is great”,
who love your saving power.

Poor and needy as I am,
God, come quickly to me!
Yahweh, my helper, my Saviour,
do not delay!
Article 4

notes from Van Bavel, Tarcisius osa

Who Was Augustine?

AUGUSTINE’S CHARACTER

Intellect and heart

The young Augustine describes himself in the following way: “I lived and thought and took care of my self-preservation. An inward instinct told me to take care of the integrity of my senses, and even in my little thoughts about little matters I took delight in the truth. I hated to be deceived, I developed a good memory, I acquired the armory of being skilled with words, friendship softened me, I avoided pain, despondency, ignorance. But every one of these qualities is a gift of my God; I did not give them to myself. They are good qualities, and their totality is my self.” The same qualities are evident throughout his life.

He was very sensitive, emotional, and passionate. Although he was an intellectual, one does not find in him a dry, cerebral attitude. Although he liked self-control, there is no trace of inhuman rigidity. Although he always emphasized the relativity of created things, he would never deny the richness of life or the splendor of the world. Intellect and heart always go together. Consequently, love, common life and friendship are the heart of his life and thought. A superficial reading of his Confessions can give the impression that Augustine was an introvert, constantly busy with self analysis. The reality was very different. One is surprised to learn that this man was scarcely ever alone. He himself admitted that he could not possibly be happy without friends. A friendship might cost him half his soul, but it was through friendship that his wounds could be healed. This is probably due to the congenital feeling for solidarity of the Africans.

Passion for truth

“Only the truth gains the victory, but the victory of truth is love” (Sermon 385,1).

It is true that his passion for the truth made him a tenacious debater; when he got his teeth into a subject, he had difficulty in giving it up. Outside of debates, he showed a great sense of modesty. As an old man he revised his books, and declared: “I do not wish that someone accepts all my opinions, in such a way that he or she follows me blindly, except in those points where the reader has come to the conviction that I was not mistaken. Not even I myself have followed myself in all points. I have written books constantly making progress. But I did not start of in perfection, and to claim that I now, in my old age, write perfectly and without any error would be rather a sign of conceit than of veracity.” In a letter to a girl named Florentina, he wrote: “You should not think that you will find in me an answer to all your questions and to everything you want to know. For I did not present myself as a perfect teacher who knows everything, but as a man in search of light, together with those for whom he has been called in order to enlighten them. Please, realize the danger we are in, we of whom it is expected that we be not only teachers, but even teachers of divine realities, although we are just simple human beings.”
Child of Great Expectations

It is natural that we should want to know everything about great men and women, even their external appearance. Unfortunately, we do not know what Augustine looked like, but we do know quite a bit about his bodily constitution, which was sound but delicate and subject to frequent illnesses.

As a boy he suddenly fell into a fever one day due to a stomach disorder and almost died. At the age of 29 he was struck down in Rome by an unspecified but serious illness that carried him to the threshold of the grave. At the age of 33, while in Milan, he developed a weakness of the lungs that caused him a good deal of chest pain, made breathing difficult, and prevented him from speaking clearly and at length. Not long afterward, at Cassiciacum, he suffered an agonizing toothache that kept him from speaking at all. When he was about 56 living in Hippo, an illness forced him into a period of convalescence outside the town, during which he had a relapse and new attacks of fever. When he was about 73, Count Boniface came to visit him at Hippo and found him so weak that he could hardly speak.

In addition to these instances of severe illness, such as often attack even the most robust, Augustine was rather sickly. Recently returned from Italy, he wrote to his friend Nebridius that bodily weakness was keeping him from doing what he had planned, unless, he says jokingly, “I stop wishing to do what I cannot.” Many years later, almost at the end of his life, he would tell the people that while he was now old in years, he had already been old for a long time because of bodily illness: per infirmitatem corporis alim sum senex.

And in fact it was not “any indisposition of mind” but “weak health” that kept him from the journeys on and across the sea which his brother bishops undertook for the sake of their ministry. He could not stand the cold; he was tortured by “the pain and swelling of hemorrhoids” that often kept him in bed; his voice was so weak that he could not be heard unless there was complete silence; more than once while speaking he confessed to weakness and a failing voice.

Despite all this, it must be said that Augustine had a great deal of physical stamina. Otherwise there is no explaining the prodigious amount of work he did, the many long and uncomfortable journeys he undertook on land, and the longevity that brought him to “a good old age.” His extraordinary strength of mind and soul explains a good deal, but not everything.

Temperament

Nature gave Augustine a delicate physique and a vivacious spirit; it gave him as well a mind that was kind, affectionate, and refined, but also strong and decisive. There was something of his mother about him. He loved order, quiet, and friendship; above all he loved truth. He was easily touched, but evil evoked his indignation and, when the occasion required, he could not be moved from his purposes.

In the Confessions he writes of himself as a child:

For even then I was, I lived, I felt. I had a care for the maintenance of this my being, an imprint of that mysterious Unity from which I derived my origin. I watched over the integrity of my senses with an interior sense. Even in little things, and in the thoughts about the little things, I was delighted with truth. I was unwilling to be deceived; I had a powerful memory, facility of speech, found charm in friendship. I fled from pain, meanness, and ignorance. What was there in such a living being that was not wonderful and praiseworthy? But all these things are the gifts of my God. It was not I who gave them to myself; and they are good, and they are myself.

All of Augustine is here in germ: the Augustine that the years would reveal and that others
would esteem. From his very first contacts with literature he showed his gifts as poet and speaker; at the age of nineteen he revealed himself to be a philosopher as well. The unhappy fate of Dido moved him to tears, and when he had to repeat in prose what Virgil has said in verse (one of the most important exercises in the teaching methods of his day), he put so much ardor and warmth into it that he won the applause of his fellow students.

At Carthage he was “a leader in the school of rhetoric.” At about the age of twenty he read and understood without help a work of Aristotle, the Categories, which was regarded as so difficult that “my teacher at Carthage and others who were regarded as learned spoke of it with cheeks almost bursting with pride.” He also read and understood on his own all the treatises in the “liberal arts” that he could put his hands on. “Whatever was taught concerning the art of speaking and of reasoning, concerning the dimensions of figures, and of music, and of numbers, I understood with no great difficulty, without any teacher. You know it, O Lord my God; for both quickness of apprehension and sharpness of wit for learning are your gifts.”

Expansive mind and rich imagination

In addition, Augustine had an expansive mind and rich imagination. It did not bother him that he had to study under the threat of the teacher’s cane. He liked to play games, make a lot of noise in public places, attend the shows and imitate the actors, and go bird-hunting in the woods. Yet toward his own family he was very respectful. When dying, his mother would be unable to recall ever hearing a harsh or abusive word from his mouth, and would tell him for his consolation that he had been a good son to her. Never a harsh word to his mother! Not even, therefore, when, proudly and disdainfully, she refused to allow him into the house because he had become a Manichean. Not even when in Carthage she insisted “with all her strength” that he not go to Rome.

As we know, on this last occasion Augustine resorted to a trick that allowed him to do as he wished without having to use strong words or act uncivilly toward his mother. Nonetheless, he had bitter memories of this incident for the rest of his life. “I told a lie to my mother—and to such a mother!”

Another element in Augustine’s naturally good disposition was his deep aversion to the uproar caused by the eversores (“Subverters”). This was a band of restless mischief-makers among the students. They pestered the more naive among their fellows with insolent words, “annoying them and making sport of them without cause, only to gratify their own malicious mirth.” Boldly entering classrooms “with an attitude approaching madness,” they disturbed good order. “They commit many outrages with strange blindness that would be punishable by law.”

In Carthage Augustine found himself among these fellows. He even enjoyed their company at times, but he always felt abhorrence at their doings and never took part in them. A fellow student from that time, a man who had subsequently become the Donatist bishop of Cartenna (in Mauritania Caesariensis), wrote to Augustine: “I’ve known you well ever since the days when you were far from the Christian faith and devoting yourself to literary studies. You were a lover of peace and decency.”

What he neither did nor approved as a student, he also refused to allow as a professor. The “most important reason, and almost the only one,” why he left Carthage for Rome was the assurance that over there “the behavior of young students was quieter. Discipline was stricter.” A decree of Emperors Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian in 370 had prescribed stern measures for dealing with the students of Rome and it had had positive results. In Carthage, on the other hand, the students enjoyed “a shameful and intolerable liberty.”

Cult of friendship

When he himself was among them as a fellow student, he wanted to give everyone the impression that he was a man of the world. The young man not only desired but in fact did cut a fine figure. Yet there is another side of him that must be emphasized if we are not to have an inadequate idea of his personality: I am referring to his feeling for friendship, and even, I might say, his cult of friendship. He experienced friendship in all its forms: the “unfriendly” friendship that leads to evildoing; the purely human friendship that despair when faced with the scandal of death; the Christian friendship that is deeper and more serene and lasts, in hope, into eternity.

At every moment he felt within himself the truth of the words he wrote one day to a devout Roman
matron: “Nothing human is attractive to the person who has no friend.”

He experienced “unfriendly” friendship at the age of sixteen when he found himself among companions who were ashamed of not being shameless. It was this friendship that persuaded him to commit the theft of the pears, for on his own he would never have done it. “O fiendish friendship! O seduction of the mind . . . O desire for another’s loss without any gain to myself or passion for revenge! Someone cries, “Let’s go, let’s do it,” and we are ashamed of not being shameless.”

He experienced purely human friendship when he was twenty-one and living at Tagaste during his first stint as a teacher. There he found a contemporary who had been his schoolmate and playmate, and he bound himself to this man with tender affection. “There was sweetness in our friendship, mellowed by the eager pursuit of similar studies . . . A friendship that was sweeter to me beyond all the sweetness of that life of mine.”

Suddenly, however, the friend died, and his death caused Augustine to despair:

Great was the grief with which my heart was darkened, and whatever I looked upon was death to me. My own country became a torture to me, and my father’s house a strange unhappiness; and whatever I had shared with him was turned into a frightful torment to me, now that I was without him. My eyes longed for him everywhere, but nowhere was he given to me; and I hated all things, because they had him not, nor could they now tell me, “Behold, he will come,” as before in his lifetime when he was absent. And I became a great riddle to myself . . . .

I wondered that the rest of mortals could live, because he was dead whom I had loved, as if he were never to die. I wondered still more that I myself, who was a second self to him, could live when he was gone. Well did one say of his friend that he was one half of his soul in two bodies: and hence, I loathed life, unwilling to live by halves; and, therefore, perhaps I was afraid to die, lest he whom I had loved so much should die completely . . . .

I carried about with me a soul all wounded and bleeding, impatient to be any longer borne by me, and where to lay it down to rest I did not find. It could take no delight in pleasant groves, not in plays and music, nor in fragrant odors nor in elegant banquets, nor in the pleasures of the chamber and the bed, nor in fine books and poems. All things looked ghastly, even the very light, and whatever was not he, was loathsome and hateful to me, except sighs and tears, for in these alone I found a little rest.”

This astonishing passage from the Confessions lays bare the inmost recesses of Augustine’s soul and shows us his rich humanity, his capacity for affection, his nobility. And yet in his own eyes that friendship had not been a true friendship. “That friendship only is true, by which such as adhere to you are fastened together by you, by Charity which is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

This Christian friendship does not exclude but rather supposes and renders perfect that other, human friendship. When Augustine had been converted he experienced the attraction, saw the ideal, and interpreted the requirements of this higher friendship. He saw it as characterized by a love unto tenderness, a trust that is not disturbed by the friend’s possible infidelity, a communion marked by generous giving and joyous receiving, and a disinterestedness that requires of the friend only that he or she advance in wisdom, union with God, and love of Christ.

Above all, he experienced and emphasized the consolation friendship brings. “Where can we find consolation in this human tangle of error and toil except in the fidelity and mutual affection of true and virtuous friends?” We think immediately of Alypius, “the brother of my heart,” of Nebridius, “my very dear friend,” of Severus, “my dear fellow townsman,” of Profuturus, “my other self,” and of so many others to whom he gave much and from whom he received much.

In addition to his capacity for friendship, there is another essential aspect of Augustine’s personality that must be emphasized: his love of wisdom. Of that I shall speak later on. For the moment we must pause a little and consider his sad experience of sin as a young man.
Questions for Consideration (Articles 4 & 5):

What sort of a child and young adult do you think Augustine was?

What impression did you have of Augustine’s early life prior to doing the readings for this chapter?

Do you find any similarities between Augustine’s childhood and your own?
AUGUSTINE’S WRITINGS

Now we start into Augustine’s writings about himself, the background reading should have given you enough to understand what life situations he is referring to in the following sections.

CONFessions I, 6-12 (7-19)
(HINT: PAGES 6 - 16)

CONFessions II, 1-4, 10 (1-9, 18)
(HINT: PAGES 25-31 AND PAGE 36)

Journal Time
You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading The Confessions in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.
Questions for consideration

What was Augustine’s experience of life as a school student?

In what ways does Augustine see God at work in the early years of his life, his schooling and adolescence?

Has there been an experience through which you have experienced God’s providence? (During the group meeting you may wish to narrate something of this episode)

Are you uncomfortable with anything that Augustine said in this chapter’s readings?
PRAYER

Confessions I, 20 (31).

In a living creature such as this
everything is wonderful and worthy of praise,
but all these things are gifts from my God.
I did not endow myself with them,
but they are good, and together they make me what I am.
He who made me is good, and he is my good too;
rejoicing, I thank him for all those good gifts
which made me what I was, even as a boy.
In this lay my sin, that not in him was
I seeking pleasures, distinctions and truth,
but in myself and the rest of his creatures,
and so I fell headlong into pains, confusions and errors.
But I give thanks to you, my sweetness, my honor, my
confidence; to you, my God, I give thanks for your gifts.
Do you preserve them for me.
So will you preserve me too,
and what you have given me will grow and reach perfection,
and I will be with you;
because this too is your gift to me - that I exist.
GROUP GATHERING
Early Life

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

What sort of a child and young adult do you think Augustine was?

In what ways does Augustine see God at work in his early years of his life, his schooling and adolescence?

Has there been an experience through which you have appreciated God’s providence? (During the group meeting you may wish to narrate something of this episode)

Are you uncomfortable with anything that Augustine said in this chapter’s readings?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning.

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
A SINCERE SEARCH FOR TRUTH
Chapter 4: A Sincere Search for Truth

"O Truth, Truth, how the deepest and innermost marrow of my mind ached for you."  

Introduction

Possibly the best known part of Augustine’s life is his young adulthood. As Augustine himself admits it was a time of sinful excess, coloured by pride. Yet we must not be too quick to judge Augustine as many exaggerations about his young adult years exist. During this time of his life he did believe in God and, in a rudimentary way, Jesus. This time of searching through numerous avenues, while seeming to lead him far away, was in fact already part of his movement towards conversion. Augustine was sincerely searching for truth.

In these turbulent stages of his life he studied rhetoric in Carthage, became a member of the Manichee sect (see glossary of terms for further information), began the fourteen year relationship with his de-facto partner, had a son (Adeodatus) and undertook a rather unenjoyable teaching career. Toward the end of his young adulthood he gradually became disillusioned with the Manichee sect, particularly their ability to answer complicated questions. Assured by his fellow Manichees that the ‘learned’ great prophet Faustus would be able to answer his question Augustine found the content of his responses disappointing. From this point he wanted to move out of the Manichees.

By the end of Augustine’s young adulthood the seeds of conversion to Christ had already sprouted.
**Scripture**

The recommended practice for reading the Scripture is:

- pause in silence
- read the passage slowly
- sit quietly with it for a short while
- take time to consider how God speaks to you in this passage

**Ps 69 (68) 1-5**

Save me, God, for the waters
have closed in on my very being.

I am sinking in the deepest swamp
and there is no firm ground.
I have stepped into deep water
and the waves are washing over me.

I am exhausted with calling out, my throat is hoarse,
my eyes are worn out with searching for my God.

More numerous than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without reason.
Those who seek to get rid of me are powerful,
my treacherous enemies.
(Must I give back what I have never stolen?)

God, you know how foolish I am,
my offences are not hidden from you.
Article 6

Sinner


Sinner

A great deal has been written on this subject, but it is not always to the point. Some writers exaggerate, others play down.

The various appraisals offered take their cue from the tone of Augustine's story, which is filled with intense sorrow, repentance, bitter regret at sins committed, and ardent gratitude to God for the liberation he had granted Augustine.

Some have interpreted these accents as a sign that Augustine's sins were objectively serious. Others see them as distorting the facts. The latter emphasize the apologetic purpose of the Confessions and claim that because of it Augustine unwittingly falsified the facts in order to exalt the grace of God. Augustine was not really the sinner he would have us believe.

The controversy, which is part of a broader dispute over the historical reliability of the Confessions generally and the relation of the Confessions to the Dialogues of Cassiciacum, has had a long history. A great deal of study has been devoted to these problems but the results achieved have not been very great. The controversy may now be said to have ended. On the point that interests us here scholars have opted for a good sense solution based on a distinction between the facts narrated and the judgment passed on them by the narrator. The facts are located in the past, and Augustine sets them down quite simply, adding nothing and suppressing nothing. The judgment passed on the facts is, however, a judgment made in the present, that is, at the moment when the writer sees the past through new eyes: the eyes of an ascetic and a bishop to whom even a "little fault" is a "bitter morsel" to swallow.

Childhood

With this obvious distinction in mind, here are the facts. Augustine's sins as a child were negligence in study, little acts of cheating in play, little thefts from the domestic pantry, quarrels with playmates, and lies. He liked to win at games and could not stand being cheated. When he found that he had been cheated he became a bitter critic, as stern in blaming the subterfuges of others as he was unyielding, when discovered, in denying his own. He could not always find boys willing to play with him. Then he bought their cooperation with little gifts that he had gotten by small thefts.

Such were the facts. Nothing unexpected, evidently, in any lively and outgoing child. We must not let ourselves be fooled by the famous exclamation: tantillus puer et tantus peccator ("a great sinner for so small a boy"). These words represent the later judgment of the writer, who does not mean that when he was a child he considered himself a great sinner. Augustine is emphasizing not the seriousness of the sins but the seriousness of evil inclinations that if not corrected in time, would lead to sins of quite different kind from those of the child who stole nuts and was overly absorbed by games.

After describing his childish actions, Augustine asks: "Is that the innocence of childhood?" And he answers: "It is not, O Lord. For these same things are but transferred from our first subjection to pedagogues and teachers; and our playing with nuts and balls and sparrows, to our subjection afterward to magistrates and prefects, and gaining gold and manors and slaves."5

Adolescence

When Augustine entered his adolescence his sins became more serious. The main ones were these: the theft of pears from a neighbor's orchard, sins against chastity, a passionate liking for shows, and a quasi-connubial union with a young woman of Carthage.

The least serious was the theft of pears, even though the author of the Confessions reflects long and
bitterly on it. His reflections nonetheless do not change the real character of the incident described. The action was indeed far from admirable, but at bottom it was no more than a boyish prank, though a prank which was motivated by the wicked desire to do something forbidden and dangerous.

Augustine’s reflections focus not on the action itself but on the motive for it. Without a motive even Catiline would not have committed his crimes. What then was Augustine’s motive in doing what he did? Not gluttony, because he did not eat the pears; not need, because he had better ones at home. Perhaps his companions? It is a fact that outside of the bad company he would not have done what he did. But can the example and urging of others lead someone to commit a motiveless act? What, then, was Augustine seeking? What was it that he loved about this theft?

Augustine concludes to a gratuitum facinus (a crime committed for its own sake). It is this conclusion that causes his profound grief and leads him to write unforgettable pages on the “psychology” of vice and on the divine mercy that forgives even the sins we have not committed, inasmuch as prevenient grace keeps us from committing them?

Augustine’s sins against chastity were of quite a different order than the theft of the pears. “When, at sixteen years of age, I began to live idly at home with my parents while domestic necessities caused a vacation from school, the briars of lust grew over my head, and there was no hand to root them out.”

In fact, his mother was there. True enough, lest her son’s studies be jeopardized, she did not go so far as to advise marriage. On the other hand, she constantly exhorted him to avoid fornication and, above all, adultery. But the boy was now sixteen and thought himself emancipated; he therefore scorned her admonitions and thought himself obliged to avoid putting them into practice. “I remember how she secretly admonished me with great solicitude, to keep myself pure from women, and above all to never defile anyone’s wife. This seemed to me to be but the admonition of a woman, which I should be ashamed to obey”

While engulfed in this turmoil of his senses, Augustine, now seventeen, went the next year to Carthage in order to continue his studies. Here the inexperienced and presumptuous young man from the provinces was sucked down into the whirlpool of the great city whose voluptuous ways had won it the name of Carthago Veneris (Venus’ Carthage). “I came to Carthage, and there a cauldron of vicious loves was roaring on every side of me.”

“I was much carried away with the stage plays, which were full of representations of my miseries and furnished fuel for my fire.”

In the beginning he joined the Catholic community and attended its liturgies. But even within the walls of the church he “dared to give way to concupiscence and to drive on the trade of procuring the fruits of death.”

Augustine the bishop does not hesitate to reveal to everyone these hidden and shameful sins. He does so with great humility and for the instruction of others. He does it in a precise manner and with an undeniable sense of modesty. He gives us no basis for letting our imaginations stray and attributing to him sins he did not commit or at least does not confess.

**The mother of Adeodatus**

A year after his arrival in Carthage Augustine began to live with a woman by whom he had a son in the following year. The son was named Adeodatus; the woman is left nameless.

The judgment often passed on this episode was incorrect and has today been revised. It was not the act of a dissolute man, but on the contrary a bulwark against dissoluteness. The dissolute were rather those-and they were many-who gave themselves to vagabond vice and boasted of it. Carthage was well known for it. The stimulus to this kind of life came from the theaters and the celebrations in honor of the goddess Caelestis. Augustine gradually became aware of the whirlpool in which he was being sucked down and he wanted to escape from it and regain the freedom of an honorable life. He therefore committed himself to a stable union which, though not yet a true marriage, was at least an approximation to it, a kind of “second degree marriage.”

The union was not sanctioned by Christian law and therefore Augustine deplored it. It did, however, meet with the approval of good people of the time, who regarded it as licit and honorable. Augustine in fact looked to it for cum bona fama voluptatem, a sexual satisfaction accompanied by a good name. His action therefore represented not a sinking into the abyss of vice but, in this case, an emergence from it.
It was an act of responsibility and a compromise born of the tug of passion and a moral sense of honor.

This sense of honor, which was something Augustine felt deeply, caused him to remain faithful to the woman for fourteen years, even though she was not his wife. “In those years I lived with one, not joined to me by lawful marriage, but chosen by the wandering heat of imprudent passion. Yet I had but one, and I was faithful to her”. “I was faithful to her”! A rare example of honorable behavior in his day-and not only in his day alone. Salvian tells us that such fidelity was almost unknown among the married fold of Africa,” and Augustine’s sermons seem to confirm this judgment.” As for conjugal infidelity, Augustine had an example of that within his own family.

This example of fidelity becomes even more astonishing when we reflect that Augustine was not yet baptized. The presence of the woman and his son Adeodatus created no trivial problems for Augustine, who was not rich and as a teacher had to move from city to city. He managed, however, with financial help from Romanianus; he kept the woman with him, loved her, was faithful to her, and suffered greatly when forced to separate from her. All this signals a nobility of spirit, but also a very normal sexual construction.

I consider it worth calling the reader’s attention to this last point. The lengthy controversy that Bishop Augustine would later engage in with the Pelagians regarding disordered sexual passion was philosophical and theological in character and, contrary to what is frequently asserted, not implicitly autobiographical. The most serious sins of the young Augustine were not sins of sensuality but, as we shall see shortly, sins of pride.

Questions for Consideration

By the standards of our society today do you think Augustine would be considered a serious sinner?

Could Augustine be over-exaggerating the gravity of his sin? If so why might he have done this? (The author makes some excellent clarifications in the above article)

Article 7: 
from Corcoran, Gervase. Augustine Singer of new songs. 

Delight in the Truth

O Truth, Truth, how inwardly did the very marrow of my soul pant for you. 
(Confessions III, 6, 10)

“I had delight in the truth,” wrote Augustine, and this is a very telling expression. It re-emerges as a kind of refrain all through his writings. In his treatise on the Trinity for example, he wrote of being “carried along by a love of investigating the truth” (The Trinity I, 5, 8). For him, however, the truth always had an intimate relationship with life, with the solution of the mystery of one’s own existence. He never pursued knowledge
for its own sake; his mind was practical rather than speculative. Therefore, for him the basic human task was not the discovery of truth but the enjoyment of happiness. As he declared in the Confessions: “Now joy in the truth is happiness” (X, 23, 33), and as God is the Truth who gives true happiness, Augustine could address him as: “Eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity! You are my God, I sigh to you by day and by night” (Confessions VII, 10, 16). And this outpouring of his heart is echoed by the sympathetic pagan philosopher, Longinianus, who declared that he had never met or heard of a man so dedicated to the search for God as Augustine (Letter 234, 1). The intellectual enterprise, then, always has a practical aim: solving the problem of one’s destiny. Precisely because of this, he attended to the future rather than to the past or even the present - which is merely the point at which the future begins to be past (Confessions XI, 15, 20). For him, knowledge of the past or even of the present was quite useless if it could not contribute in some way to our ultimate happiness which is still future. In the middle ages Saint Thomas Aquinas appreciated fully this aspect of Augustine’s outlook. As he put it: “Augustine speaks about angelic and human natures not by considering them according to their natural way of being but as they are orientated toward beatitude”. (Qq. disp., De spir. treat., art 8 ad 1).

Indeed, Augustine pointed out that it made no difference whether a person on a voyage to Rome forgot the port of embarkation - what was crucial was accurate knowledge about the port of arrival (Free Will III, 21, 61). As he wrote: “So too it would be no hindrance to my soul if it forgets what it may have endured in the past, provided it keeps carefully in mind all for which it is urged to prepare in the future” (III, 21, 61). This attitude remained a constant in Augustine’s thinking as can be seen from his very frequent citation of that text from Paul: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead (Phil 3:13). It is not surprising, then, that he had this advice for his congregation: “By looking back Lot’s wife remained motionless. Therefore, fear to look back from whatever point you have reached; walk in the way, follow Christ” (Sermon 96, 8).

This determined orientation toward the future corresponded to Augustine’s idea of human life as a journey toward a heavenly homeland. In this world we are strangers, travelers far from home. Therefore, Augustine insisted, we must regard this world as an inn and not home. As he told his congregation: “But these things (that is, material goods) are for necessity’s use, not for love’s affection; let there be as the traveler’s inn, not the possessor’s estate. Refresh yourself and pass on” (Sermon 177, 2). In the City of God he was even more emphatic: “When man lives on a human basis and not on a divine basis, he resembles the devil” (The City of God XIV, 4). This radical other-worldly view of human life and values has shocked some but has won the applause of others. However, it should be stressed that this emphasis on a future home never led Augustine to underestimate the influence of the past in human life and experience. Profound psychologist that he was, he realized that the history of each individual exerts a very profound effect on his or her present life, responses, hopes, and fears. Indeed, his very frequent quotation of Paul on forgetting the past, which we have noted already, reveals the difficulty he experienced in trying to come to terms with his own history. And to come to terms with his own history is precisely what he sought to do in his Confessions. Looking back from the vantage point of faith, the bishop in his early forties could glimpse a single theme which united and made sense of the various experiences and commitments he had lived through from his childhood. His past, he discovered, was the story of God’s unceasing search for the stray, the story of Augustine’s absence from God’s presence: “For behold you were within me, and I outside” (Confessions X, 27, 38). And yet, his past was not completely exorcised by the writing of the Confessions but continued to hold him captive to some extent all his life.

**Question for consideration**

In what ways do you think Augustine’s search for truth has relevance for people of today?
Augustine's Writings

Some of the sections of the following extracts from *The Confessions* may seem a little confusing. It may be helpful to focus on what Augustine was experiencing as he experimented with different philosophies and religious groups.

If you wish to know more about the groups he was involved with see the glossary of terms at the back of this course book.

**Confessions III**  
**Confessions IV 1-9 (1-14)**  
**Confessions V 3, 6-13 (3, 10-23)**

Journal Time  You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading *The Confessions* in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Questions for Consideration

Reading Cicero’s Hortensius changed Augustine dramatically [see Confessions III, 4 (7)]. The character of his prayer changed and his secular ambitions fell away. His heart now burned with desire for wisdom given by the Spirit. Is there an experience in your life which led to significant change?

In the readings from Confessions we see Augustine getting caught up in a variety of ‘spiritualities’. Did any of them seem familiar to the variety of spiritualities of today?
O Lord our God,
grant us to trust in your overshadowing wings:
protect us beneath them and bear us up.
You will carry us as little children,
and even to our grey-headed age
you will carry us still.

When you are our strong security, that is strength indeed,
but when our security is in ourselves, that is but weakness.

Our good abides ever in your keeping,
but in diverting our steps from you
we have grown perverse.

Let us turn back to you at last, Lord,
that we be not overturned.

Unspoilt, our good abides with you, for
you are yourself our good.

We need not fear to find no home again
because we have fallen away from it;
while we are absent our home falls not to ruins,
for our home is your eternity.
GROUP GATHERING
Search for Truth

As a group create a collage or list of some of the key events of Augustine’s life as presented thus far.

Can the group identify insights gained from reading about Augustine’s early life and his search for truth?

Do you have any questions (or difficulties) which you would like to put to the group and/or Learning Coordinator?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of Life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
THE STORY OF HIS CONVERSION
CHAPTER 5: THE STORY OF HIS CONVERSION

“So I came to Milan and to Ambrose”

INTRODUCTION

Augustine, secretly wishing to leave the Manichee sect, accepted a government position in Milan and departed Rome. It was in Milan that he encountered the great preacher and bishop Ambrose. At first intending to listen to Ambrose because of his public speaking technique he, almost without knowing it, was drawn in by the content of his speeches. Ambrose had a particular talent of drawing out the Scriptures and relating them to the modern day. He also had the talent of explaining Christianity in relation to Greek philosophy, in particular Platonism. Augustine was impressed with Ambrose ability to interpret the Old Testament spiritually rather than literally and hence he began to see the truth in Scripture as far deeper and nuanced than he had earlier imagined. Christianity was starting to seem like a better idea to Augustine and the gaps in Manichaeism were becoming more obvious to him.

Not long after Augustine entered Milan his mother Monica arrived. Events unfolded in such a manner that Monica arranged a legal marriage for him and his de-facto partner of fourteen years was sent away. Augustine took a turn for the worse, torn with grief, he took up with another woman for a brief period, for all the wrong reasons.

The combination of his personal grieving, his growing disillusionment with secular ambition and finally his disappointment in the Manichees, drove Augustine to his lowest ebb. He said to the Lord “you set me down before my face,... I saw and shuddered”. Yet Gods healing power was greater than Augustine’s infirmities.

All along he believed in God and, in a way, Jesus. After getting close to his lowest point he was now able to accept that Christianity was the right idea for him. Yet he needed the conversion of his heart to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. In August of 386, in a state of extreme anxiety Augustine, in the garden with his friend Alypius, heard a child’s voice saying “Pick it up and read, pick it up and read”. Augustine took up the bible and read the following verse

“Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires.”

He had no wish to read further, the light of certainty had flooded his heart and all the dark shades of doubt fled away. Christ was now The Way for Augustine. He was baptised in the Cathedral of Milan, by Ambrose, on the 24th of April, 387 (Easter Saturday)
**Scripture**

**Ps 103 (102) 1-14**

*Bless Yahweh, my soul,*  
*from the depths of my being, his holy name;*  
*bless Yahweh, my soul,*  
*never forget all his acts of kindness.*

*He forgives all your offences,*  
*cures all your diseases,*  
*he redeems your life from the abyss,*  
*crowns you with faithful love and tenderness;*  
*he contents you with good things all your life,*  
*renews your youth like an eagle’s.*

*Yahweh acts with uprightness,*  
*with justice to all who are oppressed;*  
*he revealed to Moses his ways,*  
*his great deeds to the children of Israel.*

*Yahweh is tenderness and pity,*  
*slow to anger and rich in faithful love;*  
*his indignation does not last for ever,*  
*nor his resentment remain for all time;*  
*he does not treat us as our sins deserve,*  
*nor repay us as befits our offences.*

*As the height of heaven above earth,*  
*so strong is his faithful love for those who fear him.*  
*As the distance of east from west,*  
*so far from us does he put our faults.*

*As tenderly as a father treats his children,*  
*so Yahweh treats those who fear him;*  
*he knows of what we are made,*  
*he remembers that we are dust.*
Augustine on the Return Journey

But there I was, going mad on the way to sanity.’

When Augustine arrived at Milan he paid a courtesy call on the bishop, Ambrose and was pleasantly surprised to receive such a friendly welcome. He had received the post through the influence of those who were opposed to the Christians, and Ambrose very likely knew that. However, he let none of this appear in the warm welcome he accorded the new teacher of rhetoric. Augustine we may suppose, had had little to do with Catholic bishops hitherto. True, his mother had tried to persuade a bishop to convince him of his errors, but the bishop had declined. However, after that first meeting with Ambrose, Augustine came to like him very much on account of the graciousness he had shown him. Of course, as yet he had no interest in the bishop’s beliefs, but was eager to hear him speak and see whether his performance matched his reputation. Augustine soon found out that Ambrose’s great reputation was indeed merited, and yet he did not find him as pleasing as the Manichee, Faustus. However, the more he listened and without his noticing it, the content of the bishop’s sermons was beginning to affect him, disillusioned Manichee as he was. In the long run, they were to make a decisive contribution to his conversion.

Others besides Ambrose were to play a part in this drama too, notably Simplicianus a priest of Milan who had received the bishop himself into the Church and was destined to succeed him as bishop of Milan in 397. Closer to Augustine was Alypius, a fellow townsman whom he had taught both in Thagaste and Carthage. Later, he had gone to Rome to study law and had secured a post as Assessor to the Chancellor of the Italian Treasury where he showed himself to be a man of great honesty, integrity and courage. The other friend who shared most of Augustine’s inner drama was Nebridius who came from near the city of Carthage and had left his rich parents for no other reason than to be with his friend in Milan. He was the most intelligent and independent of Augustine’s circle and had pointed out the folly of astrology as a means of knowing the future and the insufficiency of the Manichees’ idea of the two Kingdoms long before Augustine himself came around to this view. Unfortunately, he died young shortly after his return to Africa.

However, the Augustine who was greeted so kindly by Ambrose on his arrival in Milan was in reality a very disillusioned man. Ever since he had met the famous Faustus he had given up all hope of making progress in the Manichee sect. Perhaps some reports of gross immorality among the members, and even among the Elect, had served to disenchant him further. This is barely mentioned in the Confessions, but is highlighted in another work he wrote explicitly against the Manichees. In this mood and accompanied by Alypius and Nebridius, he decided to halt all search for the truth in the vague hope that something more salubrious than Manichaeism would appear. He had grown slack and careless about the learning of the sect, and when he first listened to the sermons of Ambrose, he was at least half-heartedly looking for something to take its place. In his disappointment, as we have seen he had already begun to think that the Academic philosophers were wiser than the others in treating everyone as a matter of doubt and claiming that no truth could be understood by men. Already while in Rome he had argued against the dogmatic certainty of his Manichee host in that city. Having been so disappointed with Faustus, he was impatient with men who spouted certainties. However, his disillusionment with the teaching of the Manichees did not extend to their criticisms of the Catholic Church. One of these criticisms which must have influenced him very much, since he mentions it a number of times, was their claim that the Catholics worshipped a God who was limited by a bodily form and had hair and nails like any man. This claim they based on Genesis 1:26: ‘Let us make man to our own image and likeness.’ According to the Manichees this reduces God to the level of man. However, while they accused the Christians of a grossly materialistic idea of God, their own system was truly materialistic, though as Professor O’Meara puts it, the spiritual substance of the Kingdom of Light was material without appearing to be material’. It was made of subtle matter completely different from
the crass matter of the Kingdom of Satan, but material nonetheless. At any rate, when Augustine arrived in Milan, he still accepted the Manichees’ evaluation of Christianity. His belief in the Manichee idea of god which passed for spiritual but was really material, had received a jolt from the argument of Nebridius, but he had not yet seriously questioned it. The section of their teaching which led to his disillusionment was centred around their explanation of natural phenomena, the movements of the heavenly bodies. These, in fact, were the topics he had discussed with Faustus. However, even before his arrival in Milan his doubt had already begun to extend to the Manichees’ criticism of the Scriptures. He remembered the very able defence of Helfidius and while in Rome he had desired to meet someone learned in the Scriptures. He had now met that man in the person of Ambrose.

While the rhetorical technique of Bishop Ambrose was drawing honest admiration from Augustine, the content of his discourses was also beginning to have its effect. Despite his recent admiration of the academic philosophers and his doubts about certainty, he had remained quite certain that the Manichees’ presentation of the Catholic religion was accurate. Now, under the influence of Ambrose he began to see that the faith of the Catholics could be held on reasonable grounds and that the objections he had heard so many times against it were not as strong as he had been led to believe. The more Ambrose explained the Old Testament in figurative terms, the more uncertain he became of the detailed Manichee criticism of it. However, this did not impel him to a sudden conversion. He had merely reached the conclusion that Catholicism could be reasonably maintained. Having been so disappointed by the Manichees and their sophistication, he was now painfully aware that one learned man does not make a certainty.

However, he did begin to move further away from the Manichees and began to look around for arguments which would show decisively that they were wrong. The area of their teaching which he selected for examination was natural science, and after serious consideration decided that the views of so many of the philosophers were more likely to be true than what the Manichees taught on the subject. On the basis of this he decided to leave the sect altogether. However, he also had reservations about the philosophers and tells us that he absolutely refused- omnino recensebam- to trust them completely because like Cicero, they were silent about Christ. In this state of uncertainty, he decided to continue as a catechumen in the Catholic Church. Soon after this his mother from whom he had stolen away two years before, having promised her that he was only seeing off a friend at the port, arrived in Milan. If there were any recriminations when they met, they were soon forgotten when Monica heard her son was no longer a Manichee, though not yet a baptised Christian. Woman of faith and prayer that she was, she showed no great surprise of the news: it was something she expected. Before long, she too, was a devout admirer of Ambrose.

Meanwhile, Augustine was beginning to enquire more about the Christian religion: `my mind was intent upon inquiry and unquiet for argumentation. He became especially interested in Ambrose and would liked to have known `what hope he bore within him,’ what struggles and temptations he had to endure, and what was his consolation in adversity. However, Ambrose was such a busy man that he never got the opportunity of having a long interview with him; he only got to know him through his sermons which he attended regularly every Sunday. He regarded Ambrose as a lucky man. He enjoyed such esteem among so many important people, though his celibacy seemed a heavy burden. By any standards the career of the bishop had been an exciting one. He was a member of a noble family and had once been the Governor of Liguria and Aemilia with his official residence in Milan. At the time the city was the scene of great rivalry between the Catholics and the Arian heretics, and this turned into bitter feuds when the bishop died. In fact, the disputes over the election of a successor became so serious that Ambrose the Governor had to intervene to restore the peace, and to his great surprise he found himself elected bishop even though he was only a catechumen at the time. He accepted and was consecrated bishop eight days after his baptism in December 374. After his consecration he studied theology and became a famous theologian and preacher.

It was in the course of listening to the bishop’s sermons that Augustine came to hear the Catholic interpretation of Genesis 1:26, and found that it bore no resemblance whatever to the crude interpretation attributed to them by the Manichees. As a result, he felt ashamed at having misjudged the Catholic idea of God for so long, though he did not accept it immediately as true. He was still very cautious about accepting anything as true, but he did see clearly that the Church did not teach some of the doctrines attributed to it by the Manichees. As time went on he found that the Catholic interpretation of the Old Testament in general was different from what he had been led to believe. Thus gradually his confidence in that part of the Manichee system which had first attracted him - their rationalistic criticism of the Scriptures, was eroded.
Yet this of itself did not bring any commitment to Christianity. Since he still tended towards scepticism, his criteria of what constituted certainty were excessively strict. In fact, in spiritual matters he sought the very same certainty with which he knew that seven and three make ten.

Gradually however, he began to see that belief can be a reasonable form of knowledge. He discovered that a great part of his knowledge was based solely on the evidence of others, and that there were some things, the identity of his parents for example, which he was utterly convinced of though he knew them only through belief. His reflection on belief led him to contrast the honesty of the Catholics who openly demanded belief in doctrines which could not be proved with the deception of the Manichees in this matter. Manes and his followers scoffed at belief and regarded it as superstition and claimed instead to give certain knowledge. In practice, as Augustine had already found out, they demanded belief in ‘every kind of nonsense’ which, naturally, they could not prove. From this new insight into the value of knowledge acquired through belief, he began to see that it was perfectly reasonable to believe the Scriptures. He already believed both that God exists and that he takes care of creation, and from that he argued that since Scripture enjoys such authority all over the world, it must have the authority of God behind it. If God really cared for the world, he would hardly allow a spurious book to gain such authority over so great a part of it. This line of reasoning, Augustine tells us, appealed to him with greater and lesser intensity at different times. Yet he still hesitated, the pains of the past mingled with the ambitions of the present to produce in him an unwillingness to press forward in his evaluation of the Christian claims. At this period he spent his mornings teaching and his afternoons preparing his lectures and cultivating rich friends who would be useful in helping him up the social ladder. If he made a good impression on enough influential people, he might, get a wife with money and even become governor like the bishop he admired so much. Yet, despite the fact that he ‘was all hot for honours, money, marriage,’ his efforts at social climbing were becoming increasingly distasteful to himself. As he prepared an oration in praise of the Emperor he felt so ashamed of the lies and the flattery needed that he became very depressed. In this state, as he walked along a street in Milan one day he saw a beggar who had obviously taken a few drinks and was in a merry mood, and he realised how unhappy he himself really was. It seems also that around this time a great opportunity of furthering his ambition came his way, but he was so depressed and hesitant that he let it pass.

He was now coming up to his thirtieth birthday and the authority of Scripture was gradually gaining ground in his mind as the scepticism of the Academics slowly disappeared. He was a catechumen but he still hesitated to take any concrete step towards baptism.” One of his reasons for this was his fear that he would find life miserable without a woman, and curiously enough, he never thought seriously of being a married Catholic.’ If he were to be a Catholic, he meant to be a celibate one like Ambrose. Perhaps his point was that if he became a Christian he would live a community life with his friends, and together they could investigate the profundity of the Scriptures. Already, some of his circle in Milan had planned a philosophical community, but many of them were married and the wives posed a problem and no more was heard of the scheme. At an earlier date Augustine wanted to marry, but had been persuaded from doing so by Alypius who pointed out that marriage would put an end to their community life. Monica however, had other plans, she wanted her son respectably married before he came to the baptismal font, and she found a bride for him. To make way for the wedding, his mistress with whom he had lived the best part of fifteen years, was sent back to Africa, while their son, Adeodatus remained with his father. However, the promised bride was still two years under age, and with his mistress back in Africa, Augustine found another. For once, Monica’s plans went very wrong. Despite this however, the process of her son’s conversion was steadily advancing.

At last Augustine came to see the force of the argument which Nebridius had long ago brought against the Manichæes’ idea of the two Kingdoms of Light and Darkness. If God could be attacked, then he was vulnerable and corruptible. But it is clearly impossible that God should be corruptible, therefore, the conclusion to be drawn was that there was no Kingdom of Darkness standing against God in rival independence. God is incorruptible and without rivals and supreme over everything. However, once Augustine denied the existence of the Kingdom of Darkness he was under pressure to explain the fact of evil in the world. God is all-good and all-powerful and so nothing exists except by his will. It would be unthinkable that God caused evil, but where then did it come from? For the moment Augustine could only give a tentative answer -having rejected the Manichee doctrine of two wills in man, he began to think that perhaps the exercise of free-will was the cause of evil. At this time he also considered the possibility of evil matter which had somehow escaped the creative hand of God, but rejected it. Then he turned to the account of the origin of evil given in the Christian tradition, but for the moment, found no clear solution
there either because it puzzled him why an angel created by the allgood God could turn his will to perversity and become a devil.

However, while his mind wrestled with the problem of evil he came to elaborate a new idea of God. Now he imagined God to be immeasurable, without limits of any kind, containing and penetrating all creation, but still corporeal, i.e. extended through infinite space.

In describing his progress towards baptism at this point, he writes: ‘But at least the faith of your Christ, our Lord and Saviour, taught by the Catholic Church, stood firm in my heart, though on many points I was still uncertain and swerving from the norm of doctrine. In other words, he was no longer in conscious disagreement with the Church; he believed in the existence, incorruptibility, providence and final judgement of God, he believed in Christ and the Scriptures and any deviation from the teaching of the Church was due solely to ignorance. Indeed, his thinking did fall short of the norm of doctrine on one very important point - the nature of Christ. He thought of Christ as a mere man, but a man of marvellous wisdom whom no other could possibly equal and whose divine mandate was indicated by his birth from a virgin. However, he did not realise at this time that Christ is the Word of God made flesh. In short, he believed in the authority of Christ and his Church, but did not yet understand his status.

The next step in his interior journey was his reading some books of the Neo-Platonists which had been translated into Latin. In God’s plan which uses good and evil men to accomplish his just decrees, Augustine got these books from a person he describes as ‘an incredibly conceited man.’ These books had a decisive influence on his thinking in that they afforded him a completely new idea of God. Prior to reading the Neo-Platonists he had always assumed that whatever exists, even God, must he extended in space, must be a body in some sense. From these books he discovered that not all beings are extended in space and that God is not present in space in such a way that one part of him is in one place and another part in another. God is equally and totally present everywhere. With this new insight into the nature of God’s being, he can address him thus: ‘O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity.’ The Neo-Platonic philosophers also told him much about the Word of God who exists from eternity, but they were completely silent about the Incarnation. However, despite his excitement at such new insights, he was disappointed to find that even these philosophers were dragged into idolatry despite their sublime idea of God. Augustine himself was by now sufficiently convinced of the Catholic faith to avoid agreeing with them on this.

Once Augustine had acquired this new insight into the nature of God, he found he could also re-adjust his thinking on the relationship between Creator and creature. Only God supremely is because only he exists unchangeably. Creatures on the other hand, have being and perfection in so far as they are from God and like him. In other words, the more a creature approaches God in likeness, the greater is its permanence and perfection, and this was the insight that was eventually to blossom into his theory of man. Here too he found the key to solving the problem of the origin and nature of evil. If all things exist only in so far as they are somehow like God, then it follows that they exist only in so far as they are good. Evil therefore, cannot have a real existence, because if it had, it would be good and not evil. So his conclusion is that evil is not a being, a substance, but a lack of being. It is not a being independent of God, neither is it a creature of God since he made all things good. From this he went on to consider the nature of sin and reached the conclusion that neither is it a substance, ‘but a swerving of the will which is turned towards lower things and away from you, O God, who are the supreme substance.

As a result of his reflection on what he had read in the Neo-Platonic books, he tells us that he was able to love God now and not the corporeal phantom which he had hitherto considered to be God. However, he found that he could not stably enjoy God because he found the attractions of the visible world too great. In other words, he discovered that his love tended to steer him away from God and toward the enjoyment of creatures. Perhaps it came as a shock to him to find that he was so weak when it came to the ascent to God about which the Neo Platonist philosophers spoke. At any rate, the problem of his own weakness began to engage his attention and impelled him to return to the Scriptures once more and especially to St Paul. Most likely he had studied the Letters of St Paul as a Manichee, but now with his new insights into the spiritual nature of God, he sees that Paul agrees with the Neo-Platonists about God and his Word. He also finds that the Apostle dealt with the very problem which was presently tormenting him - weakness and temptation. From his reading of Paul he comes to realise that Jesus Christ is more than a man, that he is the Word of God who ‘emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man’ (Phil. 2:78). As he recalls his reading of Paul, he thinks that it was part of God’s plan that he should have read the philosophers before coming to the Scriptures so that he would have experience of
his own weakness and need for help in his ascent to God. As he puts it: ‘(that) I might be able to discern the
difference that there is between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but
do not see the way, and (those who see) the Way which leads to the country of blessedness, which we are
meant not only to know but to dwell in.  Augustine had now come to realise his need of the help of Jesus
Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and with this realisation his intellectual conversion to Christianity was
complete. However, he finds that he has not the moral strength to live up to the demands of Christianity,
and this brings its own waves of misery.

According to himself, the difficulty which loomed large in his thoughts was his attachment to women. He
realised full well that he could live the Christian life as a married man as his mother wanted, but this did not
appeal to him; he wanted to be a celibate Christian, and yet found celibacy impossible. In his distress he
wanted to consult some minister of the Church, and since Ambrose was always too busy, he approached
the priest Simplicianus, a man of great learning and pastoral experience. Simplicianus realised fairly quickly
that what Augustine needed at this point was not information but encouragement and he proceeded to tell
the story of the conversion of Marius Victorinus, the man who had translated into Latin those Neo-Platonist
books which he had already read. Simplicianus did not fail to dramatise the account and as a result
Augustine was on fire to imitate him. In the next few weeks he learned more accounts of conversion from a
fellow countryman of his, Ponticianus, who told him the story of the famous Anthony who was converted to
the eremitical life by hearing a Scripture text read in church. Recently, so the story of Ponticianus went, this
story of Anthony had inspired two companions of his in the imperial service to abandon their careers and
their girl friends and become monks. This heightened the tension in Augustine’s life, as he says himself: ‘But
you, Lord, while he was speaking, turned me back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back
where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And you set me there before my own
face that I might see how vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous. I saw myself and
was horrified.’

In the Confessions Augustine describes most dramatically the torment of mind he endured at this time,
yet the end was near though he did not realise it. Shortly after the visit of Ponticianus he was in the garden
of his lodging with his friend Alypius, and feeling so desperate and depressed that he knew he was about
to burst into tears. To avoid embarrassment, he left Alypius and flung himself down under the shade of a fig
tree and began to cry at his miserable state. Then all of a sudden he heard a child in some nearby house
chant Take and read, take and read. The chant engaged his attention and he wondered whether it was
connected with some game. Then, though he could not be sure why the child was chanting that refrain, he
suddenly took it as a divine command to open the book of St Paul lying there on a bench and read the first
passage on which his eye should fall. He did so, doubtless remembering the story of Anthony, and read:
‘Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye
on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences (Rom. 13:13f). At that
very moment, all that was in him preventing his becoming a Catholic seemed to melt away.

the end the decision had been sudden, but it was being prepared for over a long period - Augustine
himself would say ever since he read the Hortensius in his nineteenth year.87 There were only about three
weeks left in the school term, and just as well, because his interest in teaching rhetoric had vanished and he
retired from his post when the term ended and went to relax in the country villa of a friend. On the following
Easter Vigil, 24 April 387, he was baptised along with his son and his friend, Alypius. As was fitting, the
sacrament was administered by Ambrose. After so much wandering and heartbreak his wandering had
eventually become a pilgrimage. As he finishes his Confessions he is still on the way, still fascinated and
puzzled by the mystery of God and human life, and yet confident of some day knowing all things because
God is his Teacher. So he concludes: ‘What man will give another man understanding of this, or what
angel will give another angel, or what angel will give a man? Of you we must ask, in you we must seek, at
you we must knock. Thus only shall we receive, thus shall we find, thus will it be opened to us.
Questions for consideration

What were some of the key experiences in the final stages of Augustine's conversion?

Was there anything in this last reading you found difficult?

How are we challenged by Augustine's story of conversion?

Are there issues associated with Augustine's family life that you might care to explore or discuss further?
**Augustine’s writings**

Because the following readings from Augustine are fairly extensive they are broken up into three sections. This gives you an opportunity to do them section by section.

You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading *The Confessions* in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

**Confessions V 13 (23-25)**

*Journal Time* You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading *The Confessions* in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

**Question for consideration**

What qualities in Ambrose make a strong impression on Augustine?
His Conversion

Confessions VI, 1-6 (1-10)
Confessions VI, 13-16 (23-26)

Journal Time You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading The Confessions in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Questions for consideration

What were some quotes from the above sections which you found moving?

After reading these two sections of The Confessions do you have any questions about this period of Augustine’s life?

Confessions VII, 18-21 (24-27)
Confessions VIII, 1 (1-2)
Confessions VIII, 8-12 (19-30)

Journal Time You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading The Confessions in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Question for consideration

As a person seeking God each of us has at least gradual experiences of conversion. Do you recognise in your journey experiences similar to those of Augustine?
Prayer

Confessions X 27 (38)

Late have I loved you,
Beauty so ancient and so new,
late have I loved you!

Lo, you were within,
but I outside, seeking there for you,
and upon the shapely things you have made
I rushed headlong,
I, misshapen.

You were with me, but I was not with you.

They held me back far from you,
those things which would have no being
were they not in you.

You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
you lavished your fragrance, I
gasped, and now I pant for you;

I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;
you touched me, and I burned for your peace. (82)
GROUP GATHERING
His Conversion

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

How are we challenged by Augustine’s story of conversion?

Are there issues associated with Augustine’s family life that you might care to explore or discuss further?

What were some quotes from the above sections which you found moving?

As a person seeking God each of us has at least gradual experiences of conversion. Do you recognise in your journey experiences similar to those of Augustine?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

EXPECT TO ENJOY SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LIFE WITH AUGUSTINE

INCLUDE A FORM OF PRAYER IN THE GATHERING

VALUE THE RESPONSES TO THE COURSE THAT EACH ONE OFFERS

NO ONE HAS ALL THE WISDOM BUT MANY PIECES TOGETHER FORM A LARGER PICTURE

DISCUSSIONS KEPT ON TRACK ARE MORE SATISFYING (USING THE QUESTIONS FROM THE CHAPTER WILL HELP)

MEETINGS THAT START AND FINISH ON TIME ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED

OCCASIONALLY COMBINING THE GROUP GATHERING WITH SNACKS/REFRESHMENTS OR A MEAL COULD ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE
MONICA
Chapter 6: Monica

“You stretched out your hand from on high and pulled my soul out of those murky depths because my mother, who was faithful to you, was weeping for me more bitterly than ever mothers wept for the bodily death of their children... O Lord you heard her.”

Introduction

Saint Monica, Augustine’s mother, was a remarkable woman who played a very important part in his life and conversion.

She was a committed Christian woman of great personal strength and resource, firm in her convictions, dignified and determined in her responses. She knew the joys of family life but also the challenges, particularly in regard to her marriage with a less than ideal husband and her occasionally wayward son.

Monica desired that her children would come to know Christ, as Augustine says he drunk in the name of Christ with his mother’s milk. What a shock she must have experienced when seeing how far her son drifted away.

As a saint of the church Monica is a great exemplar for parents and for spouses. Yet, like all of us, she was not perfect and in the context of the 20th Century some of her responses may seem unusual. Even in the readings of the last chapter we might wonder at her motivations for organising the marriage for Augustine.

The following chapter will give a brief outline of her life experiences, struggle as a wife and mother and her final joy in her son’s conversion, soon after which she became ill and died.
Scripture

Psalm 69

I am worn out from calling for help, and my throat is aching. I have strained my eyes, looking for help...

I will pray to you Lord; answer me, God, at a time you choose. Answer me because of your great love, because you keep your promise to save.
THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF AUGUSTINE

...Monica, played a very important role in the life and works of Augustine. She had been brought up in a Christian family, and was a women of deep inner resources: patient, determined, dignified, above gossip, a firm peacemaker among her acquaintances. The relationship with her husband was anything but slavish. She could wait, without saying a word to provoke him, until his anger abated. Then she would explain how she had been right. Augustine tells us that “she loved to have her son with her, as it is the way with mothers, but far more than most mothers.” Still a boy, Augustine heard from her about eternal life promised to us by Jesus Christ. As he later states, his infant heart had piously drunk in the name of Christ with his mother’s milk, and retained at a deep level the memory thereof. She also showed her determination when she banned her son from her house after he had become a Manichean heretic. The most important thing she aimed at in her life was the conversion of her son: “My mother, your faithful servant, wept for me before you more than mothers weep when lamenting their dead children.” For this reason she visited a bishop and pressed him to see her son and debate with him. Irritated, the bishop answered: ‘Go away from me; it cannot be that the son of such tears should perish.” When Augustine at the age of twenty-eight slipped off at night, to sail away from Africa to Rome, he states in The Confessions: “I have no words to express the love she had for me, and with how much more anguish she was now suffering the pangs of childbirth for my spiritual health than when she had given birth to me physically. I just cannot see how she could have been healed if my death in sin had come to pierce the entrails of her love.”

We don’t know much about the other members of Augustine’s family. We know only that he had at least one brother, Navigius, and a sister whose name is unknown, and who later, as a widow, became the superior of a religious community.
Augustine’s Writing’s

Confessions III, 11-12 (19-21)
Confessions V 9 (16)
Confessions VI 1-2 (1-2)
Confessions IX 8 -13 (17-37)

Journal Time
You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading The Confessions in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Questions for consideration

What is your impression of Monica?

How do her anxieties, disappointments, hopes and joys relate to us today?

Were there sections of the above readings which you had difficulty with?
PRAYER

O Lord, I am your servant, I am your servant and your handmaid’s son.

You burst my bonds asunder, and to you will I offer a sacrifice of praise.

May my heart and tongue give praise to you, and all my bones cry out

“Who is like the Lord?” Yes, let them ask, and then do you respond and say to my soul, “I am your salvation”.
GROUP GATHERING

Monica

What is your impression of Monica?

How do her anxieties, disappointments, hopes and joys relate to us today?

Were there aspects of the above readings which you had difficulty with?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of Life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
Life with others
Chapter 7: Life with Others

“I cast myself without reservation on the love of those who are especially close to me, particularly when worn out by the upsets of the world. In their love I rest without the slightest worry because I perceive that God is present there... For when I see that a person is aflame with Christian love and has therefore become a faithful friend to me, I know that whatever thoughts I entrust to him, I entrust not to another human being, but to God in whom that person dwells, and by whom he is who he is” (Letter 73: 3).

Introduction

Among many Augustine is most famous for his colourful youth, yet one of his strongest traits was his desire and ability for genuine friendship. Friends were with Augustine in all of the critical moments of his life including his struggles, his conversion and his deepest prayer experiences. He displays a great capacity for friendship at a variety of levels.

Once converted Augustine, inspired by the Acts of the Apostles, transformed his desire and capacity for just friendship into desire for friendship founded on the love of God. He imagines the ideal church as true community, based on genuine love, wherein a variety of talents and gifts combine to form the Body of Christ. The small Christian monastery style communities the he went on to form were intended to be a microcosm of the Universal Church.

This chapter will trace some of Augustine’s key experiences of friendship and community as presented in The Confessions.
As they prayed, the house where they were assembled rocked. From this time they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly.

The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common.

The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and they were all accorded great respect.

Not one of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any who might be in need.
Article 10

Van Bavel Tarcisius. Who was Augustine?
English edition, translation by John Rotelle osa.

Mutual love

Augustine was very social-minded and friendly. He never wanted to be alone, and he hardly ever spent a moment of his life without friends, or blood-relatives, close by him. No thinker in the early Church was so preoccupied with the nature of human relationships. Even in his youth, he formed a core of abiding friendships. He describes them in a beautiful passage of his Confessions: “All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company: to talk and laugh, and to do each other kindnesses; to read pleasant books together; to pass from lightest jesting to talk of the deepest things; to disagree without rancor, as one might disagree with oneself, and then to season through this very rare dissension our normal agreement; to teach each other and to learn from each other; to be impatient for the return of the absent, and to welcome them with joy on their homecoming. These, and such-like things, proceeding from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, and shown by face, by voice, by the eyes, and by a thousand other pleasing gestures, kindled a flame which fused our souls together, and, of many, made us one.” This is what he loved in his friends. He felt guilty if he did not love the person who loved him and if that love was not returned. To give love and to receive love, in short, mutual love, this is Augustine’s definition of friendship. The measure of true friendship is not temporal advantage, but unselfish love, based on a similarity of character, ideas, interest, and commitment.

Limitations of human friendship

Human nature possesses two great natural goods: marriage and friendship. In another text Augustine declares that two things are essential for the human being, namely life and friendship, and both are nature’s gifts. God created the human being that he or she might exist and live. But if a human person is not to remain solitary, there must be friendship. He who tries to forbid all friendly conversation must be aware that he breaks the ties of all human relationships. Faithfulness, trust, veracity, and stability are the most significant qualities of friendship. Augustine considered, however, all human things perishable, a realization that came upon him most powerfully when one of his young friends died. The experience of the loss of this friend did not drive him into a denial of friendship, but showed him that friendship has to be based on love of God, for “he alone does not lose a beloved one, for all are beloved in God, who is not lost.” But not only death can snatch a friend from our midst; human weakness and instability can also cause friendship to change into treachery, baseness, and even hatred. Therefore, Augustine seeks the basis of faithfulness and stability among friends in God and in Christ. He had become aware of the fact that Cicero’s definition of friendship, “Friendship is an agreement on all human and divine things, with benevolence and love,” also encompassed the domain of the divine.

Friendship in religious life

In contrast to many founders of religious communities, Augustine gave friendship an important place
in the common life of the religious. He taught his young monks that they were not obliged to accept immediately everyone in friendship, but that it should be their wish to accept everyone as a friend. Their attitude toward others should be such that the possibility of taking them into their friendship remains open. Although we never will succeed in penetrating fully another’s innermost self, he called our attention to the fact that “Nobody can truly be known, except through friendship.” And when his monks asked him when they could call another a friend, he answered: “We can consider another person as a friend, if we dare to entrust to him or her all our innermost thoughts.” He also saw friendship as a help and consolation for himself, describing his monastic experience as follows: “I admit that I readily throw myself entirely on the love of my most intimate friends, especially when I am wearied with the world’s scandals, and I find rest in that love, free of anxiety. This is because I feel that God, upon whom I cast myself without fear, and in whom I find secure rest, is present there. In this security of mine, I do not fear the uncertainty of tomorrow and of human weakness. What ideas and thoughts I entrust to a human being who is full of Christian charity, and has become for me a faithful friend, I do not entrust to a human being, but to God, in whom this person abides, and who made him or her a faithful friend.”

**Influence**

In Western Europe, particularly in England and Northern France, Augustine’s ideas on friendship had a strong influence on medieval Cluniac-Cistercian religious life, especially on Peter the Venerable, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Peter of Celle. It was only during the fifteenth century, apparently, that there came a flight from friendship because of the conviction that friendship among religious would undermine the integrity of life in religious community.

**Questions for consideration**

The last reading gives a picture of Augustine’s ideal of Christian common life. What are some ways in which that ideal challenges us?
Augustine's writings:

Confessions IV 4-8 (7-13)
Confessions IX 1-4 (1-8)

Journal Time You may wish to write your comments and reflections while reading The Confessions in a journal. It may also be helpful to record references and/or quotes that had an impact on you.

Questions for consideration

What seems to be Augustine's attitude to friendship?

Can you identify both helpful and difficult experiences of friendship?
Prayer

Let us rejoice and give thanks.

Not only are we become Christians, but we are become Christ.

My Brothers and Sisters, do you understand the grace of God that is given us?

Wonder, rejoice, for we are made Christ! If he is the head, and we are the members,

then together He and we are the Whole Christ.

(Tract. Jn.21)
GROUP GATHERING
Life with Others

What seems to be Augustine’s attitude to friendship?

Can you identify both helpful and difficult experiences of friendship?

What are some ways in which Augustine's ideal of friendship challenges us?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning.

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of Life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
A LEADER IN THE CHURCH
Chapter 8: A Leader in the Church

“I am fearful at what I am for you, but I draw strength from what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former designates an office received, the latter the foundation of salvation.” (Sermon 340)

Introduction

Augustine was never hoping to be a leader in the Church, quite the opposite. In his first few years as a Christian he is openly critical of clericalism in the Church and aware of the dangers of pride and avarice working their way into the life of church leaders. By the 380’s Augustine was aware that the community had their eye on him to become a priest. He tried to avoid it, yet the community won out. They dragged him to the alter and before he knew it he was ordained. He soon readily accepted the role of priest because he felt that God’s desire for Augustine was being expressed through the desire of the people. From there he went on to become bishop, again accepting the desire of the people as an expression of the desire of God.

Augustine remained aware of the great dangers of leadership yet undertook his duties as a service to the people. For Augustine to be an effective Christian leader was to be of use to those whom you serve, and one in need of compassion.

His leadership also involved responding to difficult heresies (via writing, participation in Councils and preaching), leading his local church, providing advice to other bishops and civil responsibilities.

To this day he is regarded as the exemplar of bishops, intelligent, brave and compassionate in a time of great struggle for the church and world.
Scripture

Find a place and make some time where you can be still. When you feel ready read the following piece of Scripture slowly and sit silently with it.

1 Cor 12: 12-27

For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts - all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body - so it is with Christ. We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit. Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free men, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink.

And indeed the body consists not of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, ‘I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body,’ it does not belong any less to the body. Or if the ear were to say, ‘I am not an eye, and so I do not belong to the body,’ that would not stop its belonging to the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how would there be any hearing? If the whole body were hearing, how would there be any smelling?

As it is, God has put all the separate parts into the body as he chose. If they were all the same part, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ and nor can the head say to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’

What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones. It is the parts of the body which we consider least dignified that we surround with the greatest dignity; and our less presentable parts are given greater presentability which our presentable parts do not need. God has composed the body so that greater dignity is given to the parts which were without it, and so that there may not be disagreements inside the body but each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all the parts share its pain. And if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy.

Now Christ’s body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole.
Article 11
Van Bavel, Tarcisius. Who Was Augustine?

Return to Africa: Monk - Priest - Bishop
Servant of God: monk

Soon after his baptism Augustine decided to return to Africa, a decision which bears witness to a renunciation of his worldly career. At Ostia, the port of Rome, on their homeward journey, Monica became sick and died. Her death meant a year’s delay in their return to Africa. In 388, however, Augustine arrived at Thagaste, together with his son and a little group of his most intimate friends. As servants of God they settled on Augustine’s portion of the family estates at Thagaste. Augustine sold some of his property, and organized a kind of monastic community. The group of like-minded enthusiasts that had gathered around him put into practice the lifestyle of a monastery, with Augustine as the spiritual father of the community. Augustine intended to live a life of retirement, study, contemplation, meditation, and prayer for the rest of his days. However, this happy period of rest was not to last longer than some three years. Since ancient monasticism essentially was a lay movement, a monk shunned the honour and task of priesthood. Thus when Augustine went to Hippo in order to gain a new candidate for his monastery, he was on his guard not to visit a town where the episcopal see was vacant. Nevertheless his journey to Hippo turned out differently from what he had hoped.

Priest, bishop, and monk

The bishop of Hippo, Valerius, was an elderly Greek, who spoke Latin with difficulty. He needed a priest to assist him, and who could later on become his successor. The bishop of Hippo had informed the faithful of his wishes. With persistent shouting the people required Augustine to be their priest. They seized him against his will and presented him to Valerius for ordination. Such ordinations were not uncommon in the later Roman Empire. The vocation to an ecclesiastical ministry was not considered a question of the personal will of the subject; it became this in later centuries, but in former days it was the will of the community. On the other hand, Valerius welcomed Augustine’s proposal to set up a monastery like the one at Thagaste, and put the garden-enclosure of the church at his disposal. In 395 Valerius wrote secret letters to the primate of Carthage to have Augustine consecrated as his co-adjutor. A year later Valerius died, and Augustine became bishop of the seaport town, Hippo Regius.

All these events required serious changes in Augustine’s life. Although he had to renounce many of his dreams, he accepted his new task in a resolute way, being well awake of his responsibility and the burden on his shoulders. But also as a bishop he wanted to live in a monastic community He moved from the lay monastery into the bishop’s house, establishing there a monastery of clerics. He lived the full common life of his brothers as much as was possible for a bishop. This monastery became very famous for it was a nursery of learned and capable bishops for the whole North African Church. For nearly forty years Augustine was the real driving force of that Church.

The Duties of a Bishop

Primacy of the Bible

Bishop Augustine led a very busy life, his entire time being taken up with preaching, teaching, catechetical instruction, synods, public debates, and journeying all over North Africa. The emperor Constantine had also put the office of local judge under the care of the bishops. Every morning he had to listen to lawsuits: questions of inheritance, of guardianship, of ownership, of demarcation, and so on, a burden that he did not like at all. Moreover, as a man of study and contemplation, he was a very productive writer. His works cover some 12,000 pages in modern printing: 113 books, 247 letters, and more than 500 sermons have been preserved. How could he manage so many distinct activities? He himself more or less gives the answer when he declares that his writing was mostly done at night. Then he dictated his writings to shorthand writers.

Possidius, his friend and biographer, tells us that, after he had disposed of the care of temporal and irksome affairs, he turned his mind to meditation on the divine scriptures. The significance of the Bible in
Augustine’s work cannot be stressed often enough. He knew the Bible by heart; it was for him the height of all truth, the source of all teaching, and the center of all cultural and spiritual life. His theology is in the full sense of the word a biblical one. His desire was that through his voice the word of God should be heard. Another characteristic of his works is that most of what he wrote was at the request of others; only a very few books were not provoked by external circumstances. We will present here only a rough classification of his writings.

**Anti-Manichean writings**

Augustine saw it as his first duty to devote himself to the conversion of his former friends, the Manichees. What he had previously thought to be the truth, he now saw as an error. He had been responsible for the adherence to the Manichean religion of the group around him; now he tried to win back as many as possible for Christianity. Therefore, his first books aimed at refuting the Manichean doctrine.

**Anti-Donatist works**

In the following period of his life he was forced to concern himself with a very sad situation, that of a separation within the North African Church. As soon as he was ordained a priest, he had to face the disunity among Christians, caused by the schism of Donatism. Every town had a Donatist and a Catholic church, every diocese a Donatist and a Catholic bishop, all in all over three hundred bishops on each side. The assertion that all should be one in Christ was fictitious. The Donatists pretended to be the only pure Church; they considered the Catholics as betrayers of the purity of Christian law. To understand how painful this split was, it must be remembered that the Donatists used the same holy scriptures, professed the same faith, possessed the same sacraments, and celebrated the same liturgy as did the Catholics. Hatred alone divided the Christians of Africa, and the conflict sometimes deteriorated into a civil war. With immense energy Augustine dedicated himself to restoring peace and unity, but he never completely succeeded in bringing an end to the Donatist schism - this in spite of the fact that the Conference at Carthage in 411, under the chairmanship of the very conscientious imperial delegate, Marcellinus, had decided against the Donatists. Two years later, Marcellinus himself was executed at Carthage. This murder was a heavy blow for Augustine, and it was one of the reasons why he lost his enthusiasm for the alliance between the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church.

**Anti-Pelagian writings**

In 411, after the condemnation of Donatism, Augustine must have hoped for some peace, but instead he became involved in another controversy, this time with Pelagianism. Pelagius was a servant of God, the inspirer of a more radical and ascetical Christian life, and held in high esteem by the Roman aristocrats. He insisted strongly on free will and on the efforts human beings had to make in order to reach perfection. Since perfection lies in the power of the human person, it is, according to him, something obligatory. No wonder that he was scandalized by a sentence in Augustine’s Confessions, namely: “Command what you will; give what you command.” For him this was cowardice and laxity. Pelagius’ concept of Christian perfection contrasted to a certain degree with Augustine’s theology and experience as a convert. Pelagius did not deny the role of God’s grace, but saw it rather as a divine help coming from outside. On the other hand, like Paul, Augustine was convinced that the human will had to be strengthened from within by God’s grace: all the good things we do are gifts of divine grace. It seemed to him that the Pelagian claim to be able to achieve a Church without spot or blemish continued the Donatist presumption of a pure Church. In Augustine’s eyes, the human situation is much more complex. Human freedom is not a static quality. Our freedom is always in a state of becoming: human freedom is by nature a limited freedom which has to become more and more free. Augustine also believed in the doctrine of original sin, including the existence of a collective guilt, with humankind as a whole responsible for the evil in the world. Certainly one need not agree with Augustine in every detail of his view on original sin (as, for example, his conviction that unbaptized infants will be excluded from the highest form of eternal bliss). His last work, left unfinished at his death, was against the Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum, the son of an Italian bishop friend. Julian was the most able adversary Augustine ever met. Augustine’s controversy with the much younger Julian was the most dramatic of his life, in which positions on both sides became more and more inflexible.

“TOO LATE HAVE I LOVED YOU, BEAUTY SO OLD AND SO NEW; TOO LATE HAVE I LOVED YOU. AND SEE, YOU WERE WITHIN, AND I WAS OUTSIDE, AND SOUGHT YOU THERE. AND IN MY UNLOVELY STATE I PLUNGED INTO THOSE LOVELY CREATED THINGS WHICH YOU MADE. YOU WERE
WITH ME, BUT I WAS NOT WITH YOU. THE LOVELY THINGS KEPT ME FAR FROM YOU, THOUGH IF THEY DID NOT HAVE THEIR EXISTENCE IN YOU, THEY HAD NO EXISTENCE AT ALL. YOU CALLED AND CRIED OUT LOUD AND SHATTERED MY DEAFNESS. YOU WERE RADIANT AND RESPLENDENT, AND YOU PUT TO FLIGHT MY BLINDNESS. YOU WERE FRAGRANT, AND I DREW IN MY BREATH AND NOW PANT AFTER YOU. I TASTED YOU, AND I FEEL BUT HUNGER AND THIRST FOR YOU. YOU TOUCHED ME, AND I AM SET ON FIRE TO ATTAIN THE PEACE WHICH IS YOURS.” Confessions X, 27, 38

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

What have you learned about Augustine’s leadership from this past reading?
In what ways are we challenged by his leadership?

Article 12
Possidius, Bishop of Calama. The Life of Saint Augustine.


From CHAPTER 4
Compelled to Become a Priest

1 The bishop of the Catholic Church of Hippo at this time was the saintly Valerius. The needs of the Church required him one day to speak urgently to the people about providing and ordaining a priest for the city. The Catholics already knew of Augustine’s way of life and teaching and they seized upon him as he stood peacefully in the congregation, unaware of what was to happen (for, as he used to tell us,’ when he was a layman he avoided only those churches that needed a bishop).

They therefore laid hold of him and, as is customary in these situations,’ brought him to the bishop to be ordained. With complete unanimity they asked that this be done, and demanded it with fervent cries. Meanwhile Augustine wept copiously; there were some, he himself told us, who attributed these tears to pride and tried to console him by telling him that though he was worthy of better things, priesthood was at least a step toward a bishopric. In fact, however, the man of God, as he told us, was applying a higher standard and was grieving at the many great dangers which the government and administration of the Church would bring upon him; that was the reason for his tears.’ In the end, however, they had what they wanted.

from CHAPTER 7
He Aids the Church by His Speaking and Writing

In private and in public, at home and in the church Augustine was preaching and teaching the word of salvation (Acts 13:26) with complete freedom (Acts 4:29) against all the African heretics, especially the Donatists, the Manicheans, and the pagans. He did so in carefully wrought books and in extemporaneous addresses and to the utter admiration and praise of Christians, who did not remain silent about all this but noised it abroad wherever they could.

The result was that by the grace of God the Catholic Church of Africa began to lift its head after having long been prostrated, led astray, weighed down and oppressed, while the heretics were growing stronger, especially the Donatists who were re-baptizing the majority of Africans.

These books and sermons, which flowed from the marvelous grace of God who inspired him, were filled
with abundant arguments and based on the authority of the sacred scriptures. Even the heretics joined the Catholics in listening to him with great enthusiasm, and anyone who wished and had the means could have his words taken down by stenographers.

From Hippo this outstanding doctrine and the sweet fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15; Ephesians 5:2) were diffused and made known throughout Africa, and the Church overseas rejoiced when it heard of this. For just as all the members suffer when one of them is hurt, so all the members rejoice when one of them is honoured (1 Corinthians 12:26).

from CHAPTER 8
He Is Unwillingly Ordained Coadjutor Bishop of Hippo

The blessed old man Valerius rejoiced more than anyone at all this and thanked God for the special blessing that had been bestowed on him. Being only human, however, he began to fear that Augustine might be sought out and taken from him to be bishop in another Church that had lost its own. That indeed is precisely what would have happened if Valerius, on discovering such a plan, had not seen to it that Augustine withdrew to a secret location and thus prevented his being found by those who were looking for him.

This incident increased the venerable old man’s fears. Realizing, moreover, that he himself had been greatly weakened by bad health and age, he secretly wrote to the bishop of Carthage, primate of all Africa, and, alleging his bodily weakness and the burdens of age, asked him that Augustine might be ordained a bishop for the Church of Hippo. What he wanted however was not so much a successor as a fellow bishop here and now. His wish and insistent request elicited a favourable answer.

He now asked Megalius, Bishop of Calamaz and at that time Primate of Numidia, to pay a visit to the Church of Hippo. Bishop Valerius now revealed his unexpected plan to the other bishops who happened to be present, and to all the clergy and people of Hippo. All who heard him expressed their joy and shouted enthusiastically that it should be done, but our priest refused to go against the practice of the Church and accept the episcopate while his own bishop was still living. Appealing to instances in Churches abroad and in Africa, they tried to convince him that this was in fact common practice. He finally yielded to pressure and accepted ordination to the higher rank.

Later on, however, Augustine said both orally and in writing that they should not have ordained him a bishop in the lifetime of his own bishop, because it had been forbidden by a General Council, although he himself became aware of this only after his ordination. Nor did he want to see done to others what he regretted had been done to him. He therefore worked to have episcopal councils’ decree that ordaining bishops must make known to priests, whether ordained or to be ordained, all episcopal statutes concerning them.

from CHAPTER 9
Work for the Conversion of the Donatists

As a bishop Augustine preached the word of eternal salvation (Acts 13:26) even more diligently and fervently and with even greater authority than before. And he did so, not in one area only but eagerly and fervently wherever he was asked to go, and the Lord’s Church grew and prospered. He was always ready to give seekers an account of his faith and hope in God (see 1 Peter 3:15). The Donatists especially, whether they lived in Hippo or a neighbouring town, used to bring his sermons and notes taken at them to their bishops.

On hearing of what he had said, these bishops would sometimes issue replies. These, however, were either rejected by their own followers or were reported to the holy Augustine. After studying their answers, he would patiently and gently and, as it is written, with fear and trembling, work for the salvation of all (see Philippians 2:12) by showing that those bishops were not willing or able to refute him and how true and evident on the contrary are the things which the faith of God’s Church holds and teaches. All this he did perseveringly day and night.

He also wrote letters to eminent bishops of the sect and to lay persons as well, giving his reasons for admonishing and exhorting them either to correct their error or at least to come and debate with him. But these men were not confident of their own cause and were never willing even to answer him; instead they vented their anger and loudly claimed in private and in public that he was a seducer and deceiver of souls.
They would say and preach that in defense of the flock he must be killed; having no fear of God or shame before their fellow mortals they even said that God would undoubtedly forgive all the sins of any who could succeed in doing so. Augustine worked to make everyone aware of their distrust in their own cause, and when they met on public occasions they did not dare to come to grips with him.

from CHAPTER 10
Victories and Persecutions

In almost all of the Donatist churches there was a novel class of perverse and violent men who professed continence and were known as Circumcellions. There were large throngs of them scattered throughout almost all the districts of Africa. Evil teachers taught them an arrogant boldness and a reckless disregard for law; they spared neither their co-religionists nor outsiders. Against all law and right they interfered in the operation of justice; those who disobeyed them suffered serious losses and injuries, for these men, armed with weapons of all kinds, raged through fields and estates and were not afraid even of shedding blood. Moreover they made war without cause on those who zealously proclaimed the word of God and tried to make peace with these haters of peace (see Psalm 120:7).

As truth made headway against their teachings, those who were willing and able broke away from the sect openly or secretly, and gave their allegiance to the peace and unity of the Church, along with any they could bring with them. Seeing their heretical congregations decreasing in numbers, and envious of the growth of the Church, the Circumcellions were inflamed to utter fury and began an intolerable persecution of those loyal to the unity of the Church; by day and night they attacked even the Catholic bishops and ministers and robbed them of all their goods. They beat and crippled many of God’s servants; they threw lime mixed with vinegar in the eyes of some and killed others. As a result, these Donatist re-baptizers came to be hated even by their fellows.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

What do you find impressive about Augustine’s attitude to leadership?

In your opinion does his practice of leadership have something to teach our church today?

Did you note the disunity caused by the various groups such as the Donatists (re-baptizers)? Does this also relate to our various situations of this day?
Augustine’s Writings

Augustine’s Confessions were written only a short period (a year or two) after he became a bishop, so they do not deal with Augustine’s leadership in the Church. For this reason we will have to find out about his leadership from his sermons, in which he makes references to the responsibility and burden of leadership in the church. The following pages have been put together by the author and present some of the facets of his leadership, supported by a collation of quotes from his sermons and other writings.

What Augustine has to say about his leadership experiences

1. Augustine saw his leadership as a burden and a duty to the people of the Church, certainly not as an honour.

In Sermon 340 he says that

“1. From the moment this burden, about which such a difficult account has to be rendered, was placed on my shoulders, anxiety about the honour shown me (leadership- brackets mine) has always indeed been haunting me. But this sort of consideration troubles me much more when the anniversary brings back afresh the old memory of that day, and sets it before my very eyes in such a way, that I feel as though I were coming up today to receive what I have already received all that time ago. What, though, is to be dreaded in this office, if not that I may take more pleasure, which is so dangerous, in the honour shown me, than in what bears fruit in your salvation? Let me therefore have the assistance of your prayers, that the one who did not disdain to bear with me may also deign to bear my burden with me. When you pray like that, you are also praying for yourselves. This burden of mine, you see, about which I am now speaking, what else is it, after all, but you? Pray for strength for me, just as I pray that you may not be too heavy.

I mean, the Lord Jesus wouldn’t have called his burden light, if he wasn’t going to carry it together with its porter. But you too must all support me, so that according to the apostle’s instructions we may carry one another’s burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). If he doesn’t carry it with us, we collapse; if he doesn’t carry us, we keel over and die. Where I’m terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation. Finally, as if in the open sea, I am being tossed about by the stormy activity involved in that one; but as I recall by whose blood I have been redeemed, I enter a safe harbour in the tranquil recollection of this one; and thus while toiling away at my own proper office, I take my rest in the marvellous benefit conferred on all of us in common.

So I hope the fact that I have been brought together with you gives me more pleasure than my having been placed at your head; then as the Lord has commanded, I will be more effectively your servant, and be preserved from ingratitude for the price by which I was bought to be, not too unworthily, your fellow servant.”

In this passage we see that Augustine is fearful of the responsibilities he has for the community. As their shepherd he hopes not to lead the flock astray. Yet at the same time he is a follower of Christ with the people and that is his salvation (grace from
God) and honour. So when he feels overcome by the great burden of leadership he can still find rest in the harbour of tranquillity given by the faith community. After all it is for them that he is a leader.

2. **Monastic life was Augustine’s great joy and support, even though most of his time was taken up with his duties as a bishop.**

In letter 73: 3, 10 He writes

“I admit that I readily throw myself entirely on the love of my most intimate friends, especially when I am wearied with the world’s scandals, and I find rest in that love, free of anxiety. This is because I feel that God, upon whom I find secure rest, is present there. In this security of mine, I do not fear the uncertainty of tomorrow and of human weakness. What ideas and thoughts I entrust to a human being who is full of Christian charity, and has become for me a faithful friend, I do not entrust to a human being, but to God, in whom the person abides, and who made him or her a faithful friend.”

3. **He was faced with a very difficult pastoral situation.**

In Hippo, his diocese, Catholics were barely tolerated, as we have seen in the previous readings. The majority of the Church had earlier split away from the mainstream church and were from then on called Donatists. The Donatists saw themselves as the pure Church of God, more faithfully following the law than those ‘sinful’ Catholics. So aggressive were the Donatists that a Catholic priest could find few places to reside with safety. Augustine himself was denounced by the Donatists as

“A seducer and destroyer of souls; and wolf that could be lawfully slain in defence of the flock, with the certainty of obtaining a complete remission of one’s sins by so laudable and act” (Possidius)

Augustine also faced other conflicts (heresies) which threatened the unity of the church and (at times) the safety of its members, these included;

- **Manichaeism** (believing that creation is fundamentally bad and that reason is the way to salvation), see glossary of terms

- **Pelagianism** (an arrogant naturalism denying the necessity of grace and asserting human sinlessness and autonomy before God) see glossary of terms

It is interesting to note that Augustine was not a person who enjoyed conflict, or indeed went looking for it, but the situations of conflict all around him were such that he had to respond. He was forced to negotiate, debate, challenge and at times condemn. At times it may have been that his old skills of oratory (winning a debate at all costs) came in handy, but also were the source of occasional exaggerations and sarcasm.

The pastoral situation also led him to write many books, over 100 of which have endured to this day.

4. **Being a bishop involved a great variety of duties.**

These included care for the poor, preaching, teaching, administration of the sacraments, stewardship of the Church’s goods, defending the faith and acting as a judge in matters of civil justice.\(^{14}\)
5. Augustine's first concern was the church (of Hippo) entrusted to him.

He says “I serve its interests and desire less to rule it than to be useful to it” (Ep 134,1). He also calls himself “a servant of Christ, and, in his name, a servant of his servants” (Ep 217).

Along these lines Augustine’s sermon 47, delivered in 414 AD, also deals with the idea of concern for the faithful of the church, it reads;

“1. The words we have sung contain our acknowledgment that we are God’s sheep. Nor are we being importunate when we demand with tears the mercy of him whose sheep we are. What we said was, Let us weep before the Lord who made us, for he is the Lord our God (Ps 95:6-7). In case anyone weeping should despair of being listened to, God is reminded of a reason why in a sense he has got to listen to us: for he is the Lord our God, who made us. He is our God; we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hands (Ps 95:7). Men who are shepherds, or even landowners who own the flocks and herds, haven’t made the sheep they own, haven’t themselves created the sheep they feed. But our Lord God, because he is God and creator, made himself sheep to own and sheep to feed. It wasn’t someone else who brought the sheep he feeds into being, nor is it someone else who feeds the sheep he brought into being. So let us weep before him.

And you know, we are not in a good way while we are in this world. When we please the Lord in the region of the living, that is when our tears shall be wiped away, and we shall sing the praises of him who has delivered us from the bonds of death, our feet from slipping, our eyes from tears, that we may please the Lord in the region of the living, because it is difficult to please him in the region of the dead. Even here, though, there are ways of pleasing him, by begging him to have mercy on us, by abstaining as far as we can from sins, and in so far as we can’t, by confessing and lamenting them. In this way we go through this life hoping for that other life, weeping in hope - or rather weeping now as we try to cope, rejoicing as we look forward in hope.

2. So after acknowledging in this song that we are his sheep, the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hands, let us hear what he has to say to us, as to his sheep. Some time ago he was speaking to the shepherds in the reading before this one. But in this reading today he is speaking to the sheep. So to those words of his that time we bishops were listening with fear and trembling, while you people had nothing to worry about in what you heard. So what about these words today? Do we change places, we with nothing to worry about, you fearing and trembling? Not at all. First, because even if we are shepherds, the shepherd doesn’t only tremble at hearing what is said to him, but also at what is said to the sheep. If he is carefree about what he hears said to the sheep, it means he doesn’t care about the sheep.

Secondly, as we already remarked to your graces on that occasion, two things have to be taken into account about us bishops: one that we are Christians, the other that we have been put in charge. So it’s because we have been put in charge that we are counted among the shepherds, if we are good. But because we are Christians, we too are sheep along with you. So whether the Lord is speaking to the shepherds or the sheep, we have to listen to all of it with fear and trembling, nor should we put anxious care out of our minds, but rather weep before the Lord who made us.”
6. All along the foundation of Augustine’s ministry is love.

Augustine says “Brothers and sisters, I can never speak enough of love” (In ep. John. Tr. 9, 11). Love comes from God and is God. We have seen in previous chapters and in readings of The Confessions that Augustine is fascinated with love, it is his joy and calls him to the burden of leadership.

7. Augustine always recognises that the true teacher is Christ and in so doing is able to achieve an occasional sense of detachment from his work.

“Go back, therefore, to the heart (Is 46:8), and if you are believers, you will find Christ there; he himself is speaking to you there. Yes, here am I, shouting my head off; but he, in silence, is doing more teaching. I am speaking by the sound of these words; he is speaking inwardly by the dread of your thoughts. So may he infiltrate my words into your minds; because I had the nerve to say, “Live good lives, in order not to die a bad death.” So there you see, because there is faith in your hearts, and Christ is there, he too has the task of teaching you what I am eager to trumpet out loud.”
Prayer

Confessions XII 15 (21)

O lightsome house, so fair of form,
I have fallen in love with your beauty,
loved you as the place where dwells
the glory of my Lord,
who fashioned you and
claims you as his own.

My pilgrim-soul sighs for you,
and I pray him. who made you
to claim me also as his own within you,
for he made me too.

Like a lost sheep I have gone astray,
but on the shoulders of my shepherd,
your builder,
I hope to be carried back to you.
GROUP GATHERING
Leader in the Church

Questions for Consideration:
What do you find impressive about Augustine’s attitude to leadership?
In your opinion does his practice of leadership have something to teach our church today?
Did you note the disunity caused by the various groups such as the Donatists (re-baptizers)? Does this also relate to our various situations of this day?

Reminder
Next meeting provides the opportunity for some members to present a prepared reflection. For further information see the guidelines in the introduction of this program or read the notes for the group gathering at the end of the next chapter. You may wish to organise a Mass and/or meal together to celebrate your last meeting.

Group Discussion Guidelines
The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

Expect to enjoy sharing experiences of life with Augustine
Include a form of prayer in the gathering
Value the responses to the course that each one offers
No one has all the wisdom but many pieces together form a larger picture
Discussions kept on track are more satisfying (using the questions from the chapter will help)
Meetings that start and finish on time are always appreciated
Occasionally combining the group gathering with snacks/refreshments or a meal could enhance the experience
DECLINING YEARS
Chapter 9: Declining Years

“In this present life all of us will die, but the last day of life is always uncertain for the individual. Nevertheless in childhood we hope to reach adolescence, and then in succession young manhood, adulthood, maturity and finally old age. We are not sure we will reach these successive stages but we hope we will. In old age, however, there is no further period of life to hope for; even the duration of old age is uncertain. The only thing certain is that there will be no further period of life. By God’s will I came into this city as a vigorous grown man, but now I am old” (Commentary on Ps 132, 6)

Introduction

Augustine’s decline in health in his older years occurred during the time of the rapid decline in the Roman Empire. Many simply could not imagine the world in any other way than as under the stabilising influence of Rome, which had not fallen for a thousand years. How could it be that the Empire, a bastion of culture and economic stability, was under threat from vandals?

By the late 420’s the vandals from Spain were approaching along the coast of Mauritania. Many were seeking counsel from Augustine, including his fellow bishops. He was able to provide some help but his health declined further. In 430, at age 76, he was bed ridden and too weak to receive visitors. His close friends hung the psalms on the walls of his room so that he could pray constantly. As the vandals approached the walls of Hippo Augustine died.

Fortunately his followers had the good sense to preserve his writings so that today we can still come to know our brother Augustine. Many other classic works were destroyed by the vandals and subsequent wars, and have been lost forever. To this day Christianity as an organised religion, is still almost non-existent in North Africa.
Whoever trusts in Yahweh is like Mount Zion: unshakeable, it stands for ever.

Jerusalem! The mountains encircle her: so Yahweh encircles his people, henceforth and for ever.

The sceptre of the wicked will not come to rest over the heritage of the upright; or the upright might set their own hands to evil.

Do good, Yahweh, to those who are good, to the sincere at heart.
CHAPTER 28: Revision of His Works

Vandal Invasion and Siege of Hippo

Not long before his death he reviewed the books he had dictated and published, whether in the early days of his conversion when he was still a layman or in his years as priest and then bishop. He revised and corrected anything he found to be at odds with the Church’s rule (things he had dictated or written at a time when he had less knowledge and understanding of ecclesial tradition). The result was two further volumes entitled A Revision of My Books.

He complained, however, that some of the brethren had taken some of his books before he could carefully correct them, although he did correct them later on. Some of his books he left incomplete because death prevented him from finishing them.

In order to help all, whether or not they were capable of reading many books, he extracted the divine precepts and prohibitions from the two inspired Testaments, the Old and the New. He wrote a preface for the collection and made it into a single book, so that those who wished might read it and see to what extent they were obedient or disobedient to God. This work he wished to be known as the Mirror.

Not long after, by permission of almighty God, a vast army, equipped with varied weapons and experienced in war, came by ship from Spain across the sea and poured into Africa. It was made up of savage hordes of Vandals and Alans, intermingled with Goths and men of various other nations. These overran the Mauretanias and reached our own provinces and districts. In their rage they displayed an utterly atrocious cruelty and laid waste to everything with looting, slaughter, and all kinds of tortures, fire, and countless other unspeakable enormities. They had no pity on either sex or age, or even on the priests and ministers of God, or on the ornaments or furnishings or buildings of the Churches.

The man of God did not think and judge as others did of this savage aggression and devastation that had been and was still being inflicted by the enemy. He looked to the deeper meaning of events and foresaw chiefly the dangers and even death they brought to souls. And because, as scripture says, he who increases knowledge increases sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:18) and an understanding heart is a worm in the bones (Proverbs 14:30; 25:20) tears were more than ever his food by day and by night (Psalm 42:4). The part of his life that he endured almost at the very end was thus the bitterest and saddest of his old age. For the man of God saw cities destroyed, farm buildings razed and their inhabitants either slaughtered by the enemy or put to flight and scattered, churches stripped of their priests and ministers, consecrated virgins and men vowed to continence scattered in all directions. Of the latter, some died of their tortures, others were killed with the sword, and still others fell into captivity, where they lost innocence of soul and body and even their faith in a baneful and harsh slavery to the enemy. Hymns and praises of God had disappeared from the churches; in most places church buildings were put to the torch; the solemn sacrifices owed to God were no longer offered in the proper places; the divine sacraments were no longer requested or, if they were requested, no one was readily found to administer them.

Some people fled to the wooded hills, rocky caverns and caves, or any fortified place; others were overpowered and taken prisoner; still others, being robbed and deprived of the necessities of life, wasted away of hunger. The heads of churches and other clerics who by God’s favour did not encounter the enemy or, if they did, escaped were despoiled of absolutely everything and forced in their utter need to beg, nor was it possible to supply all of them with what they needed. Of the countless Churches barely three survived - those of Carthage, Hippo, and Cirta, which by God’s favour were not destroyed. These cities too have survived, having found divine and human aid (although after Augustine’s death the city of Hippo was abandoned by its inhabitants and burned by the enemy).

11 Amid all this devastation Augustine found strength in the saying of a wise man: “No one is great who is amazed that wood and stone collapse and mortals die. In his own great wisdom he shed copious
tears every day at these calamities. A new and intense grief was added when the same enemy came and besieged Hippo Regius, which until then had been left untouched because Boniface, then Count, and an army of Gothic allies had been defending it. The enemy enclosed and besieged it for almost fourteen months, having blockaded even the seacoast.

I myself, along with fellow bishops from the neighbouring districts, had taken refuge in the city and remained there throughout the siege. Therefore we talked together very frequently and would say, as we reflected on the fearful judgments of God that were displayed before our eyes: You are just, O Lord, and your judgment is equitable (Psalm 118:137). In our common sorrow we groaned and wept as we prayed to the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation (2 Corinthians 1:3) that he would deign to assist us in our trials.

CHAPTER 29
Final Illness and Last Good Works

On one occasion he said, as we sat with him at table and were discussing these matters: “You know that during our present disaster I pray God to deliver this city from the enemies that surround it or, if he decide differently, to make his servants strong in accepting his will or at least to take me from the present world to himself.”

He said this in part for our instruction; from that point on, therefore, we joined him in offering the same prayer for ourselves and all our fellow Christians and all who were in the city.

In the third month of the siege he took to his bed with a fever; it was his final illness. Nor did the Lord deprive his servant of the fruits of his prayer; for in due time he obtained what he had asked both for himself and for the city with tearful prayers. I know, moreover, that when as priest and as bishop he was asked to intercede for those afflicted by evil spirits he beseeched God with tears, and the demons departed from these persons.

Again when he lay sick in bed someone came with a sick relative and asked him to lay hands on the man in order that he might be cured. Augustine answered that if he had any power in these matters he would have used it for himself first of all. The visitor replied that he had had a vision and had been told in a dream: “Go to Bishop Augustine and have him impose hands on the man, and the man will be made healthy.” On hearing this, Augustine did not delay to do as he was asked, and the Lord immediately caused the sick man to leave Augustine’s presence in good health.

CHAPTER 31
Last Days and Death: A Legacy of Holy Deeds and Example

Conclusion

God granted this holy man a long life for the benefit and prosperity of his holy Church (he lived seventy-six years, almost forty of them as a cleric and bishop). In intimate conversations with us he used to say that after receiving baptism even exemplary Christians and bishops should not depart from this life without having repented worthily and adequately. That is precisely what he himself did in his final illness; he had the very few Davidic psalms on repentance written out and the sheets attached to the wall opposite his bed; then, while he lay ill, he looked at them, read them, and wept continually and copiously.

In order that his recollection might not be broken, about ten days before departing from the body he asked us who were present not to let anyone in to see him except when the doctors came to examine him or his meals were brought to him. His wish was carefully respected, and he spent the entire time in prayer.

Right down to his final illness he preached the word of God in the church uninterruptedly, zealously, and courageously, and with soundness of mind and judgment. Then, with all his bodily members still intact and with sight and hearing undiminished, as we stood by watching and praying, he fell asleep with his fathers (as scripture says) in a good old age. A sacrifice was offered to God in our presence to commend his bodily death, and then he was buried.

He did not make a will because as a poor man of God he had nothing to leave. He always intended
that the library of the church and all the books in it should be carefully preserved for posterity. Any money or ornaments the church might have were entrusted to the care of the priest who was in charge of the church house while he himself was superior.

Neither in life nor in death did he treat his relatives, whether in monastic life or outside it, as others usually treat theirs. While he was still alive, he gave to them, if need be, as he did to others, not to make them rich but to keep them from want or at least to make them less needy.

His legacy to the Church was a very numerous clergy and monasteries filled with men and women vowed to continence under the guidance of their superiors, as well as libraries containing his own books and discourses and those of other holy men. From these, God be thanked, we can know his quality and importance as a churchman; in them he will always be alive for the faithful. So too, one of the secular poets dictated the following epitaph for the tomb which he ordered built for himself by a public road: “Traveller, would you know how a poet, dead, lives on? When you read, I speak, and your voice is mine.”

From the writings of this priest, so pleasing and dear to God, it is clear; as far as the light of truth allows humans to see, that he led a life of uprightness and integrity in the faith, hope, and love of the Catholic Church. This is certainly acknowledged by those who read his writings on the things of God. I believe, however, that they profited even more who were able to hear him speaking in church and see him there present, especially if they were familiar with his manner of life among his fellow human beings.

Not only was he a teacher learned in the kingdom of heaven, who brings forth things new and old from his storeroom (Matthew 13:52), and one of those merchants who on finding a precious pearl sells what he has and buys it (Matthew 13:45-46). He was also one of those regarding whom it was written: So speak and so act (James 2:12), and of whom the Saviour says: He who does these things and teaches them to others will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

I earnestly beseech you, my readers, that in your charity you would join me in thanking almighty God and blessing the Lord who has given me understanding (Psalm 16:7) and made me willing and able to bring these matters to the knowledge of all both here and elsewhere, both now and in the future. I ask you also to pray for me that after having by God’s gift lived with this man for almost forty years, without bitterness or dissension and in sweet familiarity, I may emulate and imitate him in the present world and enjoy the promises of almighty God with him in the world to come.

CLOSING QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Take this opportunity to note down some of the statements about Augustine in this last reading that made an impression on you.

What aspects of Augustine’s life are impressive?

What have you learned about the presence of God in your life through undertaking this program?

What questions has your reading of Augustine led you to?
PRAYER

Confessions X 40 (65)

O Truth, is there any road where you have not walked with me, teaching me what to avoid and what to aim at, whenever I referred to you the paltry insights I had managed to attain; and sought your guidance? I surveyed the external world as best I could with the aid of my senses, and studied the life my body derives from my spirit, and my senses themselves.

Then I moved inward to the storehouse of my memory, to those vast, complex places amazingly filled with riches beyond counting; I contemplated them and was adread. No single one of them could I have perceived without you, but I found that no single one of them was you. But what of myself, the discoverer, I who scanned them all and tried to distinguish them and evaluate each in accordance with its proper dignity? Some things I questioned as my senses reported them, others I felt to be inextricably part of myself; I classified and counted the very messengers, and in the ample stores of memory I scrutinized some items, pushed some into the background and dragged others into the light: what, then of me? No, I was not you, either, not even I as I did all this: the faculty, that is, by which I achieved it, not even that faculty in me was you; for you are that abiding Light whom I consulted throughout my search. I questioned you about each thing, asking whether it existed, what it was, how highly it should be regarded; and all the while I listened to you teaching me and laying your commands upon me.

It is still my constant delight to reflect like this; in such meditation I take refuge from the demands of necessary business, insofar as I can free myself. Nowhere amid all these things which I survey under your guidance do I find a safe haven for my soul except in you; only there are the scattered elements of my being collected, so that no part of me may escape from you.
GROUP GATHERING
Declining Years

In this final group gathering each participant is given the opportunity to present a prepared reflection on a topic related to the course, should they wish to do so.

The time should be divided as appropriate given the number of participants. In any case no more than 10 minutes per reflection including time for questions and discussion. Many groups have a meal together or Mass for this final meeting.

The focus of a presentation could be:

“what experience of Augustine’s speaks about the work of God in your own life and in the world around you?”

There are a variety of ways in which prepared reflections could be done. Below are a few suggestions, you may think of other ideas!

Choose three favourite quotes from The Confessions and use them as a basis for presentation
or
Base your presentation on an art work such as a painting
or
Write and present a talk
or
Write and present a poem or song
or
Create a collage of quotes from The Confessions and present them to the group

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The group gathering provides an opportunity for you and other participants to receive the material at greater personal depth and to broaden the course experience. The questions from the chapter may provide a basis for discussion. Adjust the group gathering as suits your groups needs. It’s your learning

EXPECT TO ENJOY SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LIFE WITH AUGUSTINE
INCLUDE A FORM OF PRAYER IN THE GATHERING
VALUE THE RESPONSES TO THE COURSE THAT EACH ONE OFFERS
NO ONE HAS ALL THE WISDOM BUT MANY PIECES TOGETHER FORM A LARGER PICTURE
DISCUSSIONS KEPT ON TRACK ARE MORE SATISFYING (USING THE QUESTIONS FROM THE CHAPTER WILL HELP)
MEETINGS THAT START AND FINISH ON TIME ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED
OCASSIONALLY COMBING THE GROUP GATHERING WITH SNACKS/REFRESHMENTS OR A MEAL COULD ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE
Timeline of Main Events of His Lifetime
## Appendix A: Main Events of Augustine’s Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>World Events</th>
<th>Augustine’s Life</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 Nov. Born in Thagaste in Numidia Proconsularis, to Patricius and Monica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>Julian Emperor</td>
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<td>365-369</td>
<td></td>
<td>Schooling at Madaura</td>
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<tr>
<td>369-370</td>
<td></td>
<td>A year of idleness at home while Patricius saves up to enable him to continue studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>370</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conversion of Patricius</td>
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<tr>
<td>371</td>
<td></td>
<td>Goes to Carthage as a student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>373</td>
<td>Consecration of Ambrose</td>
<td>Reading of Hortensius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>375</td>
<td></td>
<td>Returns from Carthage to Thagaste to teach rhetoric. Death of a friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>376</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaches at Carthage</td>
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<td>380</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writes De Pulchro et Apto (The beautiful and the harmonious)</td>
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<tr>
<td>383</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sails for Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>World Events</td>
<td>Augustine’s Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>384</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appointed Professor of Rhetoric in Milan (autumn).</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meets Ambrose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>385</td>
<td>Monica arrives in Milan (late spring).</td>
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<tr>
<td>386</td>
<td>February, persecution by Justina.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June, finding of bodies of Saints Gervasius and Protasius.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reads Plato</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visited by Ponticianus, talks with simplicianus.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conversion in the Garden (end of August).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goes to Cassiciacum (September)</td>
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<tr>
<td>387</td>
<td>Maximus invades Italy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Returns to Milan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Baptised, on Easter night, 24 April with Alypius and Adeodatus.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vision at Ostia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Death of Monica</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>388</td>
<td>Goes to Rome from Ostia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stays in Rome till latter part of the year</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Returns to Carthage then Thagaste</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>390</td>
<td>Death of Adeodatus and Nebridius</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>General edict against paganism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrives in Hippo to found monastery</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ordained a priest (somewhat unwillingly!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>392</td>
<td>Death of Valentinian</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Debate at Hippo with Fortunatus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writes to Jerome asking for Latin translation of Greek commentaries of the bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>World Events</td>
<td>Augustine’s Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>393</td>
<td>Donatist council at Cebarsussa</td>
<td>Council of Hippo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consecrated as successor to Bishop Valerius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 397  | Death of Ambrose | Debates with Donatist Bishop Fortunius  
<p>| | | Writes The Confessions |
| 399  | Pagan shrines in Africa closed |  |
| 401  | Election of Pope Innocent I |  |
| 402  | Defeat of Goths in Italy |  |
| 403  | Bishop of Bagai set upon by Donatists and badly wounded. |  |
| 404  | Bishop of Bagai goes to Ravenna asking for stern measures against the Donatists. |  |
| 405  | ‘Edict of unity’ against the Donatists |  |
| 406  | Vandal invasion of Gaul |  |
| 407  | Usurpation of Constantine III. |  |
| 408  | Theodosius II becomes Emperor in the East. |  |
| 409  | Donatists enjoy toleration |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>World Events</th>
<th>Augustine’s Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 410  | Alaric enters Rome.  
      | Roman refugees to Africa.  
      | Pelagius passes through Hippo  
      | Withdrawal of toleration for Donatists | Poor health, spends winter outside Hippo to recover. |
| 411  | Donatists come to Carthage.  
      | Judgement given against Donatists by Marcellinus |  |
| 412  | Edict against Donatists | Preaches at Carthage (against Donatists) |
| 416  |  | Council at Milevis (condemns Pelagius and Caelestius) |
| 417  | Innocent condemns Pelagius |  |
| 429  | Vandals from Spain approaching along the Coast of Mauretania |  |
| 430  | Ravaging of Numidia by Vandals | Death and burial of Augustine |

**REFERENCES:**


*(In instances where the dates put forward by Boulding and Brown conflicted Boulding’s prevail. Some dates are no more than the best possible assertion given the data available).*
**APPENDIX B:**

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Adeodatus**
Augustine’s son, born to him and his de-facto in approximately 373.

**Alypius**
Augustine’s close and trusted friend who shared Augustine’s conversion and baptism. He later also became a bishop.

**Ambrose of Milan**
339-397 Bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church. A key figure in Augustine’s conversion. He had an outstanding ability to channel Greek Philosophy, in particular Neo-Platonism, into the Christian tradition. He explained the Old Testament allegorically leading Augustine to believe that the Old Testament was far more sophisticated than he had earlier thought. Ambrose was elected as bishop of Milan before he was baptised.

**Arianism**
A 4th Century heresy of the Church denying the true divinity of Christ. According to Arius (founder of the movement) Christ must have been begotten by God and therefore is not equal to God. Christ is still above humanity but is only a saviour by example, not by who he is.

**Augustine**
354 - 430; Bishop of Hippo in North Africa; predominant influence on the whole theology of the church until the rise of scholasticism in the 13th Century, still a major influence to this day. Author of *The Confessions* and subject of this program. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council only the Scriptures are quoted more often than Augustine.

**Bishop**
A priest who enjoys the fullness of the sacrament of orders (Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office, n.15) and usually the pastoral leader of a diocese. The three primary functions of a bishop are teaching, leading and sanctifying.

**Christ**
Equivalent of the Hebrew term Messiah meaning ‘the anointed one’. The Jesus of history, early in the ancient church’s development, was soon properly called Christ, The Christ or Jesus Christ (Gal 1:6, Rom 5:6, Mark 1:1). Christ therefore is proclaimed as one and the same as Jesus of history, the anointed one of God sent to save us.

Church  The people belonging to the Lord, also known as the Christian Church, the People of God and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The Church has but one single intention, that the reign of God may come to pass (a reign of peace, justice, holiness and eternity). The Church herself has undergone tremendous development and at times struggle since its starting point as an evangelising group after Pentecost.

Church Councils  Official gatherings of church leaders to make decisions concerning the church. Augustine himself was involved in many Church Councils because of the tremendous struggles/heresies of his time.

City of God  One of Augustine’s great works, proposing that human existence, as we know it, lives in preparation for and anticipation of the heavenly eternal city at the end time. The end time is God’s full revelation to us which is already present, in part, in the present.

Communion, Church as  The church is a community seeking oneness with each other, the broader human community and God. The Church is described as ‘universal’ in that it aims for the unity not just of its own members but the whole of humanity.

Communion, the sacrament of  The reception of the body and blood of the Lord under the forms of bread and wine as the culmination of the Eucharistic liturgy. The liturgy, in a variety of forms, can be traced all the way back to the NT and embodies the very life of the church herself. For the Catholic Church it is the source and summit of church life.

Community  A body of persons with a desire for one-ness of purpose. Also a group of people with a common organisation or interests, living under the same law.

Community, Christian  A body of persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and working toward the reign of God.

Confessions (the)  Augustine’s most famous work in which he confesses first praise of God, faith in God and his own sin.

Diocese  A Catholic community usually defined territorially, established by the authority of the church and headed...
Donatism

A North African schismatic sect, tending towards rigorism, which wracked Christianity in North Africa during Augustine’s time. The schism arose because Caecilian was elected bishop of Carthage. Caecilian was ‘one who handed over the Scriptures’ during the Diocletian persecution. The Donatists held that one who had previously been a traitor could not be elected a bishop. The sect insisted that the Church hold a rigid standard of holiness and that sacraments performed by traitors (such as Caecilian) were invalid.

Faustus

Esteemed in Manichaen circles as a learned and great prophet. Augustine, on meeting Faustus in Rome, was less than impressed with him, particularly his lack of understanding of Greek philosophy.

Gnosticism

From Gnosis; a Greek term meaning true knowledge. In the true sense of the word Gnosis is wisdom granted human beings by the Holy Spirit. However a group called the Gnostics hijacked the term and proposed that a God, of a higher level than that presented in the Scriptures, had given them knowledge over and above the Scriptures. Condemned in the 3rd and 4th Century Gnosticism is currently undergoing a revival in western society, illustrated in many modern ‘spiritualities’ and in publications such as “The Celestine Prophecy”.

Gospel


Gracce

God’s free and forgiving self-communication. Grace is unmerited, given freely by God and cannot be earned by works of the Law. In Hebrew Scriptures the Grace of God is strongly evidenced in the exodus event. In the New Testament God’s Grace is seen to be given in its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ. Augustine’s view of Grace was inherently sacramental (that is that God is present to us through things that are other than God) and also presented Grace as necessary to heal and liberate the person from the bondage of sin.

Gratuitous love of God

See Grace

Heresy

Serious deviation from official church dogma. Usu-
ally identified because it is the cause of division in
the church and the world rather than unity. And
because it brings harm to people.

Heretics
Persons who are deemed to promote religious opin-
ions which cause serious division and are at odds
with official Church Dogma.

Hippo
(Present day Bone/Annaba) The town and diocese of
the North African region of Numidia, within which
Augustine formed a monastery style community and
presided as bishop.

Incarnation
The event of the Word of God becoming human and a
human being the Word of God. The result being the
unification of the divine nature (the Word) and human
nature in Jesus Christ, fully, inseparably and eternally.

Jesus of Nazareth
The person of history, born of the virgin Mary and
proclaimed as the incarnation of the Word of God and
Christ of faith. See incarnation. Usually referred to
as Jesus Christ, some use the word Christ almost as
his surname, however the intention of the early
Christian communities was different. Christ was
given as a title, so ‘Jesus the Christ’ may be a more
accurate reflection of what they intended, meaning
the Jesus of history was the anointed one of God, the
Christ, the Messiah.

Manichaeism
A heresy named after Manes (216-276). Dualistic,
emphasising the conflict between light and darkness,
good and evil. Manichees had the basic view that
light particles (good) were entrapped in matter (dark-
ness and evil). Therefore the purpose of religion was
to liberate the light from the darkness. The principal
means of doing this was by strict asceticism. August-
tine himself was a Manichee, although a hearer
(lesser level) not a member of the elect. After con-
version to Christianity Augustine became an oppo-
nent of this religion. Some people remained suspi-
cious of him even though he had left the sect.

Milan
City of North Italy, in Augustine’s time arguably the
main centre of administration for the Roman Empire.
Also the place at which Augustine encountered the
famous bishop Ambrose.

Monica
Best known as the long suffering mother of the
wayward young Augustine. Her devout prayer,
persistence and keen mind helped the conversion of
her son to Christianity. Without doubt Monica was a
Life with Augustine

most intelligent woman, participating as an equal in philosophical and theological discussions with the most learned of people, an unusual occurrence in that era.

Monophysitism

A heresy which proposes that there is only one nature in Christ, that being divine. Therefore, according to this, Jesus was not really human, did not really undergo temptation or suffer on the cross. When taken to its extreme it presents the incarnation as a sham, and leads us to see God as something totally other than humanity. The incarnation and Jesus’ death on the cross, lose their power to communicate God’s great solidarity with humanity.

Numidia

(Present day Algeria and Tunisia) The region of North Africa in which Hippo was located. It was predominately an agricultural and trading region which also highly valued education.

Ostia

The sea port of the city of Rome at which Monica and Augustine had the shared vision.

Paschal Mystery

The Easter mystery of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ

Patricius

The father of Augustine. A man of average means yet enjoying a degree of civil responsibility and power. Not much is said about Patricius in The Confessions except that he was not the model husband or father, yet seems to have had a great commitment to his son’s future.

Pelagius

A spiritual director in Rome at the beginning of the fifth century, Pelagius argued that God has given human beings the ability to choose between good and evil and therefore no special help from God is required to live a life free from sin. He became an opponent to Augustine because Augustine argued that Grace is needed to free one from the bondage of sin and that even the desire to do so is the direct result of the inspiration of God’s Grace.

Pentecost

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles 50 days after Easter (Acts 2:1 - 41). Also refers to the feast day of the Church. This event was the birthplace of the Church as an evangelising community because it is from this point of transformation that the apostles went out to the world to proclaim the Good News about Jesus Christ.
Pilgrim A person on a journey to a destination. In the religious sense it can be taken to mean all persons on the journey to God, or in another sense the participants of a pilgrimage to places of religious significance (e.g. the annual pilgrimage to Mecca).

Revelation God’s free and loving self-communication to the world which can potentially occur in an infinite variety of ways, although so far in our history most fully in the person of Jesus Christ and continued through the Church tradition and the Scriptures (which arose from within the tradition).

Rome Previous capitol of the Roman Empire and current capital of Italy.

Sin A general term which covers a variety of realities including a deliberate violation of God’s law, a fall away from God, the pre-disposition to participating in evil or the state one falls into from participating in habitual sin. Sin moves us towards the disintegration of unity with God, oneself and those around us. However the term should not be trivialised and used only as a reference to occasional minor transgressions which are not really a threat to unity of relationship with God, self and others.

Thagaste (Present day Souk Ahras), located in the region of Numidia, the town in which Augustine was born.

Trinity The central mystery and dogma of the church. God exists in three persons but is of one substance.

Universal Church The body of people living in anticipation of the end time when the reign of God will be absolute. The Catholic Church is described as the Universal Church because her hope is that the salvation of the whole world may come to pass.

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Most definitions were checked against and draw upon the following references.


Footnotes

1 There are some slight variations depending upon the subject matter, for example in the second chapter, The World of Augustine, the Scripture and prayer sections have been omitted.

2 Confessions X 4 (6)

3 Confessions II, 3 (5)

4 The word ‘Coloured’ is intended in a positive sense i.e. Augustine’s experience of God cannot be divided from his experience of life, it is in the midst of the very fabric of his life that God spoke to Augustine. Likewise God to speaks to us in our situation.

5 Confessions I, 7 (12). A quo est omnis modus, formissime, qui formas et lege tua ordanis omnia, according to Boulding an invocation of the Trinity. Modus suggests initial creation of as yet unformed matter; forma the principle of differentiation which gives each thing its distinctive identity; ordo the animating, dynamic force of interrelatedness and love.

6 Confessions III, 5 (9)

7 Confessions VII, 7 (11)

8 Roman Law may have prevented Augustine marrying his de-facto as she was from a lower social class. Yet there is another possible explanation. Augustine was to marry a girl of high social standing (and wealth) therefore his de-facto may have been sent away to allow Augustine to marry a girl whose family would have solved his financial concerns.

9 Confessions VIII, 7 (16)

10 Confessions X 43 (69)

11 Confessions VIII 12 (29)

12 Rom 13:13-14

13 Confessions III 11 (19)

14 Taken from a talk by the Most Rev. D. L. Walker, Bishop of the diocese of Broken Bay. Delivered on May 16, 1999 at St Kieran’s Parish, Manly Vale, NSW, Australia.

15 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in then Modern World n.45

16 Attridge, Harold W. Encyclopedia of Catholicism. See bibliography below