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## St. Augustine of Hippo

### Life

#### Early childhood



Earliest portrait of Augustine, from the 6th century

Augustine was born in 354 to a pagan father named Patricius and a Christian mother named [Monica](#) in the [municipium](#) of Thagaste (now [Souk Ahras, Algeria](#)) in [Roman Africa](#). Regarding his ethnic origins, there is a consensus among scholars that his origins represented an intermingling of the main North African peoples, that is Berbers, Latins and Phoenicians. Augustine's family name, Aurelius, suggests that his father's ancestors were [freedmen](#) of the [gens Aurelia](#) given full Roman citizenship by the [Edict of Caracalla](#) in [212](#). Augustine's family had been Roman, from a legal standpoint, for at least a century when he was born. It is assumed that his mother, Monica, was of [Berber](#) origin, on the basis of her name, but as his family were *honestiores*, Augustine's first language is likely to have been Latin. At the age of 11, Augustine was sent to school at Madaurus (now [M'Daourouch](#)), a small [Numidian](#) city about 19 miles south of Thagaste. There he became familiar with [Latin literature](#), as well as pagan beliefs and practices. While at home in 369 and 370, he read [Cicero's dialogue Hortensius](#) (now lost), which he described as leaving a lasting impression on him and sparking his interest in philosophy.

#### Studying at Carthage

At age 17, through the generosity of fellow citizen Romanianus, Augustine went to [Carthage](#) to continue his education in [rhetoric](#). Although raised as a Christian, Augustine left the church to follow the [Manichaean religion](#), much to the despair of his mother. As a youth Augustine lived a [hedonistic](#) lifestyle for a time, associating with young men who boasted of their experience with the opposite sex and urged the inexperienced boys, like Augustine, to seek out experiences with women or to make up stories about experiences in order to gain acceptance and avoid ridicule. At a young age, he began an affair with a young woman in Carthage. She was his lover for over thirteen years and gave birth to his son Adeodatus.

## Teaching rhetoric

During the years 373 and 374, Augustine taught grammar at Thagaste. The following year he moved to Carthage to conduct a school of rhetoric, and would remain there for the next nine years. Disturbed by the unruly behavior of the students in Carthage, in 383 he moved to establish a school in Rome, where he believed the best and brightest rhetoricians practiced. However, Augustine was disappointed with the Roman schools, where he was met with apathy. Once the time came for his students to pay their fees they simply fled. Manichaean friends introduced him to the prefect of the City of Rome, [Symmachus](#), who had been asked to provide a professor of rhetoric for the imperial court at [Milan](#).



"St Augustine and [Monica](#)" (1846), by [Ary Scheffer](#).

Augustine won the job and headed north to take up his position in late 384. At the age of thirty, he had won the most visible academic position in the Latin world – at a time when such posts gave ready access to political careers. During this period, although Augustine showed some fervor for Manichaeism, he was never an initiate or "elect" but remained an "auditor", the lowest level in the sect's hierarchy.

While he was in Milan, Augustine's life changed. While still at Carthage, he had begun to move away from Manichaeism, in part because of a disappointing meeting with the Manichean Bishop, Faustus of Mileve, a key exponent of Manichaean theology. In Rome, he is reported to have completely turned away from Manichaeism, and instead embraced the [skepticism](#) of the New Academy movement. At Milan, his mother pressured him to become a Christian. Augustine's own studies in [Neoplatonism](#) were also leading him in this direction, and his friend Simplicianus urged him that way as well. But it was the bishop of Milan, [Ambrose](#), who had most influence over Augustine. Ambrose was a master of rhetoric like Augustine himself, but older and more experienced.

Augustine's mother had followed him to Milan and he allowed her to arrange a society marriage, for which he abandoned his concubine. It is believed that Augustine truly loved the woman he had lived with for so long. In his "Confessions," he expressed how deeply he was hurt by ending this relationship, and also admitted that the experience eventually produced a

decreased sensitivity to pain over time. However, he had to wait two years until his fiancée came of age, so despite the grief he felt over leaving "The One", as he called her, he soon took another concubine. Augustine eventually broke off his engagement to his eleven-year-old fiancée, but never renewed his relationship with "The One" and soon left his second concubine. It was during this period that he uttered his famous prayer, "Grant me [chastity](#) and continence, but not yet" (*da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo*).

## Christian conversion

In the summer of 386, after having read an account of the life of [Saint Anthony of the Desert](#), which greatly inspired him, Augustine underwent a profound personal crisis, leading him to convert to Christianity, abandon his career in rhetoric, quit his teaching position in Milan, give up any ideas of marriage, and devote himself entirely to serving [God](#) and to the practices of [priesthood](#), which included [celibacy](#). According to Augustine his conversion was prompted by a childlike voice he heard telling him in a sing-song voice, "*tolle, lege*" ("take up and read"):

I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long? how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long, "to-morrow, and tomorrow?" Why not now? why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness? So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read. " Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me: and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

– *The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Book VIII, Paragraphs 28 and 29.*

The volume Augustine read was Paul's [Epistle to the Romans](#) (Romans 13: 13-14). He wrote an account of his conversion in his [Confessions](#), which became a classic of Christian theology. Ambrose baptized Augustine, along with his son, Adeodatus, on [Easter Vigil](#) in 387 in Milan, and a year later they returned to Africa. Also in 388 he completed his [apology](#) *On the Holiness of the Catholic Church*. On the way back to Africa Augustine's mother died, and Adeodatus soon after.

## Priesthood

Upon his return to north Africa Augustine sold his patrimony and gave the money to the poor. The only thing he kept was the family house, which he converted into a [monastic](#) foundation for himself and a group of friends. In 391 he was [ordained](#) a [priest](#) in [Hippo Regius](#) (now [Annaba](#), in [Algeria](#)). He became a famous [preacher](#) (more than 350 preserved sermons are believed to be authentic), and was noted for combating the Manichaean religion, to which he had formerly adhered.

In 395 he was made [coadjutor Bishop](#) of Hippo, and became full Bishop shortly thereafter. He remained in this position until his death in 430. Augustine worked tirelessly in trying to convince the people of Hippo to convert to Christianity. He left his monastery, but continued to lead a monastic life in the episcopal residence. He left a [regula](#) his monastery that has led him to be designated the "[patron saint](#) of [regular clergy](#)"

Much of Augustine's later life was recorded by his friend [Possidius](#), bishop of [Calama](#) (present-day [Guelma](#), Algeria), in his *Sancti Augustini Vita*. Possidius admired Augustine as a man of powerful intellect and a stirring orator who took every opportunity to defend Christianity against its detractors. Possidius also described Augustine's personal traits in detail, drawing a portrait of a man who ate sparingly, worked tirelessly, despised gossip, shunned the temptations of the flesh, and exercised prudence in the financial stewardship of his see.

## Death



Tomb in [San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro](#) Basilica, Pavia.

Shortly before Augustine's death, Roman Africa was invaded by the [Vandals](#), a [Germanic](#) tribe that had converted to [Arianism](#). The Vandals besieged Hippo in the spring of 430, when Augustine entered his final illness. According to Possidius one of the few miracles attributed to Augustine took place during the siege. While Augustine was confined to his sick bed, a man petitioned him that he might lay his hands upon a relative who was ill. Augustine replied that if he had any power to cure the sick, he would surely have applied it on himself first. The visitor declared that he was told in a dream to go to Augustine so that his relative

would be made whole. When Augustine heard this, he no longer hesitated, but laid his hands upon the sick man, who departed from Augustine's presence healed.

Possidius also gives a first-hand account of Augustine's death, which occurred on August 28, 430, while Hippo was still besieged. Augustine spent his final days in prayer and repentance, requesting that the penitential [Psalms of David](#) be hung on his walls so that he could read them. He directed that the library of the church in Hippo and all the books therein should be carefully preserved. Shortly after his death the Vandals lifted the siege of Hippo, but they returned not long thereafter and burned the city. They destroyed all of it but Augustine's cathedral and library, which they left untouched.

According to [Bede's True Martyrology](#), Augustine's body was later removed to [Cagliari, Sardinia](#) by the Catholic bishops expelled from North Africa by [Huneric](#). Around 720 his remains were moved again by Peter, bishop of [Pavia](#) and uncle of the Lombard king [Liutprand](#), to the church of [San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro](#), in order to save them from frequent coastal raids by [Moors](#) and [Berbers](#). In January 1327 Pope John XXII issued the papal bull *Veneranda Sanctorum Patrum*, in which he appointed the [Augustinians](#) guardians of the tomb of Augustine, which was remade in 1362 and elaborately carved with bas-reliefs of scenes from Augustine's life. By that time, however, the actual remains of Augustine could not be authenticated. Stonemasons working in the crypt altar removed paving blocks and discovered a marble box. Within it were other boxes; in the third box were fragments of wood, numerous bones and bone fragments, and glass vials. Some of the workers later claimed to have seen the name "Augustine" written in charcoal on the top of the box. A factor complicating the authentication of the remains was that San Pietro was shared by two Augustinian religious orders in bitter rivalry. The Augustinians were expelled from Pavia in 1700, taking refuge in [Milan](#) with the relics of Augustine, and the disassembled Arca, which were removed to the cathedral there. San Pietro fell into disrepair and was a military magazine during the [Napoleonic](#) occupation of the city. It was finally rebuilt in the 1870s, under the urging of [Agostino Gaetano Riboldi](#), and reconsecrated in 1896 when the relics of Augustine and the shrine were once again reinstalled.

## Works

**Augustine of Hippo**



Augustine as depicted by [Sandro Botticelli](#) (c. 1480)

Augustine was one of the most prolific Latin authors in terms of surviving works, and the list of his works consists of more than a hundred separate titles. Please see a near-exhaustive list [below](#). They include [apologetic](#) works against the heresies of the [Arians](#), [Donatists](#), [Manichaeans](#) and [Pelagians](#), texts on Christian [doctrine](#), notably [De Doctrina Christiana](#) (*On Christian Doctrine*), [exegetical](#) works such as commentaries on [Book of Genesis](#), the [Psalms](#) and [Paul's Letter to the Romans](#), many [sermons](#) and [letters](#), and the *Retractationes* (*Retractions*), a review of his earlier works which he wrote near the end of his life. Apart from those, Augustine is probably best known for his [Confessiones](#) (*Confessions*), which is a personal account of his earlier life, and for *De civitate dei* (*Of the City of God*, consisting of 22 books), which he wrote to restore the confidence of his fellow Christians, which was badly shaken by the sack of [Rome](#) by the [Visigoths](#) in 410. His [De trinitate](#) (*On the Trinity*), in which he developed what has become known as the 'psychological analogy' of the [Trinity](#), is also among his masterpieces, and arguably one of the greatest theological works of all time. He also wrote *On Free Choice Of The Will* ([De libero arbitrio](#)), addressing why God gives humans free will that can be used for evil.

## Influence as a theologian and thinker

Augustine was a bishop, priest, and father who remains a central figure, both within Christianity and in the history of Western thought, and is considered by modern historian [Thomas Cahill](#) to be the first medieval man and the last classical man. In both his philosophical and theological reasoning, he was greatly influenced by [Stoicism](#), [Platonism](#) and [Neo-platonism](#), particularly by the work of [Plotinus](#), author of the [Enneads](#), probably through the mediation of [Porphyry](#) and [Victorinus](#) (as [Pierre Hadot](#) has argued). Although he later abandoned Neoplatonism some ideas are still visible in his early writings. His generally favourable view of Neoplatonic thought contributed to the "baptism" of Greek thought and its entrance into the Christian and subsequently the [European](#) intellectual tradition. His early and

influential writing on the [human will](#), a central topic in [ethics](#), would become a focus for later philosophers such as [Schopenhauer](#) and [Nietzsche](#). In addition, Augustine was influenced by the works of [Virgil](#) (known for his teaching on language), [Cicero](#) (known for his teaching on argument), and [Aristotle](#) (particularly his [Rhetoric](#) and [Poetics](#)).

Augustine's concept of original sin was expounded in his works against the [Pelagians](#). However, St. [Thomas Aquinas](#) took much of Augustine's theology while creating his own unique synthesis of Greek and Christian thought after the widespread rediscovery of the work of Aristotle. Augustine's doctrine of [efficacious grace](#) found eloquent expression in the works of [Bernard of Clairvaux](#); also [Reformation](#) theologians such as [Martin Luther](#) and [John Calvin](#) would look back to him as their inspiration.

Augustine was [canonized](#) by popular acclaim, and later recognized as a Doctor of the Church in 1298 by [Pope Boniface VIII](#). His [feast day](#) is August 28, the day on which he died. He is considered the patron saint of brewers, printers, theologians, sore eyes, and a number of cities and dioceses.

The latter part of Augustine's *Confessions* consists of an extended meditation on the nature of time. Even the [agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell](#) was impressed by this. He wrote, "a very admirable relativistic theory of time. ... It contains a better and clearer statement than [Kant](#)'s of the subjective theory of time - a theory which, since Kant, has been widely accepted among philosophers." Catholic theologians generally subscribe to Augustine's belief that God exists [outside of time](#) in the "eternal present"; that time only exists within the created universe because only in space is time discernible through motion and change. His meditations on the nature of time are closely linked to his consideration of the human ability of [memory](#). [Frances Yates](#) in her 1966 study *The Art of Memory* argues that a brief passage of the *Confessions*, 10.8.12, in which Augustine writes of walking up a flight of stairs and entering the vast fields of memory<sup>[37]</sup> clearly indicates that the ancient Romans were aware of how to use explicit spatial and architectural metaphors as a [mnemonic](#) technique for organizing large amounts of information.

Augustine's philosophical method, especially demonstrated in his *Confessions*, has had continuing influence on Continental philosophy throughout the 20th century. His descriptive approach to intentionality, memory, and language as these phenomena are experienced within consciousness and time anticipated and inspired the insights of modern [phenomenology](#) and [hermeneutics](#). [Edmund Husserl](#) writes: "The analysis of time-consciousness is an age-old crux of descriptive psychology and theory of knowledge. The first thinker to be deeply sensitive to the immense difficulties to be found here was Augustine, who laboured almost to despair over this problem."<sup>[38]</sup> [Martin Heidegger](#) refers to Augustine's descriptive philosophy at several junctures in his influential work, *Being and Time*.<sup>[39]</sup> [Hannah Arendt](#) began her philosophical writing with a dissertation on Augustine's concept of love, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* (1929): "The young Arendt attempted to show that the philosophical basis for *vita socialis* in Augustine can be understood as residing in neighbourly love, grounded in his understanding of the common origin of humanity." Jean Bethke Elshtain in *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* finds likeness between Augustine and Arendt in their concepts of evil: "Augustine did not see evil as glamorously demonic but rather as absence of good, something which paradoxically is really nothing. Arendt ... envisioned even the extreme evil which produced the Holocaust as merely banal [in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*]." Augustine's philosophical legacy continues to influence contemporary critical theory through the contributions and inheritors of these 20th century figures.

According to [Leo Ruickbie](#), Augustine's arguments against [magic](#), differentiating it from miracle, were crucial in the early Church's fight against paganism and became a central thesis in the later denunciation of witches and witchcraft. According to Professor Deepak Lal, Augustine's vision of the heavenly city has influenced the secular projects and traditions of the [Enlightenment](#), Marxism, Freudianism and Eco-fundamentalism.

## **Influence on St. Thomas Aquinas**

For quotations of St. Augustine by St. [Thomas Aquinas](#) see [Aquinas and the Sacraments](#) and [Thought of Thomas Aquinas](#).

On the topic of original sin, Aquinas proposed a more optimistic view of man than that of Augustine in that his conception leaves to the reason, will, and passions of fallen man their natural powers even after the Fall.

## **Influence on Protestant reformers**

While in his pre-Pelagian writings Augustine taught that Adam's guilt as transmitted to his descendants much enfeebles, though does not destroy, the freedom of their will, Protestant reformers Martin Luther and [John Calvin](#) affirmed that Original Sin completely destroyed liberty (see [total depravity](#)).

# **Theology**

## **Abortion and ensoulment**

Like other Church Fathers, St Augustine "vigorously condemned the practice of induced abortion" as a crime, in any stage of pregnancy. In his works, Augustine did consider that the gravity of participation in an abortion depended on whether the fetus had yet received a soul. According to his beliefs, this occurred at 40 days for males, and 90 for females.

## **Anthropology**

Augustine was one of the first Christian [ancient Latin](#) authors with very clear [anthropological](#) vision. He saw the human being as a perfect unity of two substances: soul and body. In his late treatise [On Care to Be Had for the Dead, section 5](#) (420 AD) he exhorted to respect the body on the grounds that it belonged to the very nature of the human [person](#):

In no wise are the bodies themselves to be spurned. (...) For these pertain not to ornament or aid which is applied from without, but to the very nature of man.

Augustine's favourite figure to describe *body-soul* unity is [marriage](#): *caro tua, coniunx tua - your body is your wife*. Initially, the two elements were in perfect harmony. After the [fall of humanity](#) they are now experiencing dramatic combat between one another.

They are two categorically different things. The body is a three-dimensional object composed of the four elements, whereas the soul has no spatial dimensions. Soul is a kind of substance, participating in reason, fit for ruling the body. Augustine was not preoccupied, as [Plato](#) and [Descartes](#) were, with going too much into details in efforts to explain the [metaphysics](#) of the

soul-body union. It suffices for him to admit that they are metaphysically distinct; to be a human is to be a composite of soul and body, and that the soul is superior to the body. The latter statement is grounded in his hierarchical classification of things into those that merely exist, those that exist and live, and those that exist, live, and have intelligence or reason.

## **Astrology**

Augustine's contemporaries often believed astrology to be an exact and genuine science. Its practitioners were regarded as true men of learning and called *mathemathici*. Astrology played a prominent part in Manichean doctrine, and Augustine himself was attracted by their books in his youth, being particularly fascinated by those who claimed to foretell the future. Later as a bishop he used to warn that one should avoid 'mathematicians' who combine science and horoscopes. According to Augustine, they were not genuine students of [Hipparchus](#) or [Eratosthenes](#) but "common swindlers":

Hence, a devout Christian must avoid astrologers and all impious soothsayers, especially when they tell you the truth, for fear of leading his soul into error by consorting with demons and entangling himself with the bonds of such association.

– *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*<sup>[55]</sup>

## **Baptism**

Against the [Pelagians](#) Augustine strongly stressed the importance of [infant baptism](#). About the question if baptism is an absolute necessity for salvation however, Augustine appears to have refined his beliefs during his lifetime, causing some confusion among later theologians about his position. He said in one of his sermons:

"God does not remit sins but to the baptized".

– *A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed, Paragraph 16*

This belief was shared by many early Christians.

However, a passage from his *City of God*, concerning the Apocalypse, may indicate that Augustine did believe in an exception for children born to Christian parents:

"But what shall become of the little ones? For it is beyond all belief that in these days [the Apocalypse] there shall not be found some Christian children born, but not yet baptized, and that there shall not also be some born during that very period; and if there be such, we cannot believe that their parents shall not find some way of bringing them to the laver of regeneration."

– *City of God, Book 20, Chapter 8*

## **Creation**

See also: [Allegorical interpretations of Genesis](#)

In "*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*" Augustine took the view that everything in the universe was created simultaneously by God, and not in seven calendar days like a plain account of Genesis would require. He argued that the six-day structure of creation presented in the book of Genesis represents a [logical framework](#), rather than the passage of time in a physical way - it would bear a spiritual, rather than physical, meaning, which is no less literal. One reason for this interpretation is the passage in [Sirach 18:1](#), *creavit omni simul* ("he created all things at once"), which Augustine took as proof that the days of Genesis 1 had to be taken non-literally. At the same time, however, Augustine did not hold to an age of the earth of millions or more years, as the quotation below from *The City of God* indicates. Augustine also does not envision original sin as originating structural changes in the universe, and even suggests that the bodies of Adam and Eve were already created mortal before the Fall. Apart from his specific views, Augustine recognizes that the interpretation of the creation story is difficult, and remarks that we should be willing to change our mind about it as new information comes up.

In "*City of God*", Augustine rejected both the immortality of the human race proposed by pagans, and contemporary ideas of ages (such as those of certain Greeks and Egyptians) that differed from the Church's sacred writings:

Let us, then, omit the conjectures of men who know not what they say, when they speak of the nature and origin of the human race. For some hold the same opinion regarding men that they hold regarding the world itself, that they have always been... They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though, reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6000 years have yet passed.

– Augustine, [Of the Falseness of the History Which Allots Many Thousand Years to the World's Past](#), *The City of God*, Book 12: Chapt. 10 [419].

## **Ecclesiology**

See also: [Ecclesiology](#)

Augustine developed his doctrine of The Church principally in reaction to the [Donatist](#) sect. He taught a distinction between the "church visible" and "[church invisible](#)". The former is the institutional body on earth which proclaims salvation and administers the [sacraments](#) while the latter is the invisible body of the elect, made up of genuine believers from all ages, and who are known only to God. The visible church will be made up of "wheat" and "tares", that is, good and wicked people (as per Mat. 13:30), until the end of time. This concept countered the Donatist claim that they were the only "true" or "pure" church on earth.

Augustine's ecclesiology was more fully developed in *City of God*. There he conceives of the church as a heavenly city or kingdom, ruled by love, which will ultimately triumph over all earthly empires which are self-indulgent and ruled by pride. Augustine followed [Cyprian](#) in teaching that the bishops of the church are the [successors of the apostles](#).

## **Eschatology**

Augustine originally believed that Christ would establish a literal 1,000-year kingdom prior to the general [resurrection](#) ([premillennialism](#) or chiliasm) but rejected the system as carnal. He was the first theologian to systematically expound a doctrine of [amillennialism](#), although

some theologians and Christian historians believe his position was closer to that of modern [postmillennialists](#). The mediaeval Catholic church built its system of eschatology on Augustinian amillennialism, where the Christ rules the earth spiritually through his triumphant church. At the Reformation, theologians such as [John Calvin](#) accepted amillennialism while rejecting aspects of mediaeval ecclesiology which had been built on Augustine's teaching.

Augustine taught that the eternal fate of the soul is determined at death, and that [purgatorial](#) fires of the [intermediate state](#) purify only those that died in communion with the Church. His teaching provided fuel for later theology.

## **Epistemological views**

Augustine's intellectual development was shaped by epistemological concerns. His early dialogues ([Contra academicos](#) (386) and [De Magistro](#) (389)), both written shortly after his conversion to Christianity, reflect his engagement with skeptical arguments and show the development of his doctrine of [inner illumination](#). Augustine also posed the [problem of other minds](#) throughout different works, most famously perhaps in [On the Trinity](#) (VIII.6.9), and develops what has come to be a standard solution: the argument from analogy to other minds. In contrast to Plato and other earlier philosophers, Augustine recognizes the centrality of [testimony](#) to human knowledge and argues that what others tell us can provide knowledge even if we don't have independent reasons to believe their testimonial reports.

## **Intercession of the Saints**

In his book *Confessions*, Augustine wrote of a peculiar practice of his Christian mother, Monica, in which she "brought to certain oratories, erected in the memory of the saints, offerings of porridge, bread, and wine." When she moved to Milan, the bishop Ambrose forbade her to use the offering of wine, since "it might be an occasion of gluttony for those who were already given to drink". So, Augustine wrote of her:

In place of a basket filled with fruits of the earth, she had learned to bring to the oratories of the martyrs a heart full of purer petitions, and to give all that she could to the poor - so that the communion of the Lord's body might be rightly celebrated in those places where, after the example of his passion, the martyrs had been sacrificed and crowned.

– *Confessions* 6.2.2

## **Just war**

*See also:* [Just War](#)

Augustine agreed strongly with the conventional wisdom of the time, that Christians should be pacifists in their personal lives. But he routinely argued that this did not apply to the defense of innocents. In essence, the pursuit of peace must include the option of fighting to preserve it in the long-term. Such a war could not be preemptive, but defensive, to restore peace.

Thomas Aquinas, centuries later, used the authority of Augustine's arguments in an attempt to define the conditions under which a war could be just: First, war must occur for a good and just purpose rather than for self-gain or as an exercise of power.

- Second, just war must be waged by a properly instituted authority such as the state.
- Third, peace must be a central motive even in the midst of violence.

## **Mariology**

Although Augustine did not develop an independent Mariology, his statements on Mary surpass in number and depth those of other early writers. Even before the [Council of Ephesus](#), he defended the ever Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, who, because of her virginity, is full of grace. Likewise, he affirmed that the Virgin Mary “*conceived as virgin, gave birth as virgin and stayed virgin forever*”.

## **Natural knowledge and biblical interpretation**

Augustine took the view that the Biblical text should not be interpreted as properly literal, but rather as metaphorical, if it contradicts what we know from science and our God-given reason. While each passage of Scripture has a literal sense, this "literal sense" does not always mean that the Scriptures are mere history; at times they are rather an extended metaphor. In *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, St. Augustine wrote:

It not infrequently happens that something about the earth, about the sky, about other elements of this world, about the motion and rotation or even the magnitude and distances of the stars, about definite eclipses of the sun and moon, about the passage of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, of fruits, of stones, and of other such things, may be known with the greatest certainty by reasoning or by experience, even by one who is not a Christian. It is too disgraceful and ruinous, though, and greatly to be avoided, that he [the non-Christian] should hear a Christian speaking so idiotically on these matters, and as if in accord with Christian writings, that he might say that he could scarcely keep from laughing when he saw how totally in error they are. In view of this and in keeping it in mind constantly while dealing with the book of Genesis, I have, insofar as I was able, explained in detail and set forth for consideration the meanings of obscure passages, taking care not to affirm rashly some one meaning to the prejudice of another and perhaps better explanation.

– *De Genesi ad litteram 1:19–20, Chapt. 19 [408]*

With the scriptures it is a matter of treating about the faith. For that reason, as I have noted repeatedly, if anyone, not understanding the mode of divine eloquence, should find something about these matters [about the physical universe] in our books, or hear of the same from those books, of such a kind that it seems to be at variance with the perceptions of his own rational faculties, let him believe that these other things are in no way necessary to the admonitions or accounts or predictions of the scriptures. In short, it must be said that our authors knew the truth about the nature of the skies, but it was not the intention of the Spirit of God, who spoke through them, to teach men anything that would not be of use to them for their salvation.

– *De Genesi ad litteram, 2:9*

A more clear distinction between "metaphorical" and "literal" in literary texts arose with the rise of the [Scientific Revolution](#), although its source could be found in earlier writings, such as those of [Herodotus](#) (5th century BC). It was even considered heretical to interpret the Bible literally at times.<sup>[72][clarification needed]</sup>

## Original sin

Main article: [Original sin](#)

Augustine taught that Original sin of Adam and Eve was either an act of *foolishness* (*insipientia*) followed by *pride* and *disobedience* to God or the opposite: pride came first.<sup>[73]</sup> The first couple disobeyed God, who had told them not to eat of the [Tree of the knowledge of good and evil](#) (Gen 2:17). The tree was a symbol of the order of creation. Self-centeredness made Adam and Eve eat of it, thus failing to acknowledge and respect the world as it was created by God, with its hierarchy of beings and values. They would not have fallen into pride and lack of wisdom, if Satan hadn't sown into their senses "*the root of evil*" (*radix Mali*). Their nature was wounded by *concupiscence* or *libido*, which affected human intelligence and will, as well as affections and desires, including sexual desire. In terms of [Metaphysics](#), *concupiscence* is not a being but bad quality, the privation of good or a wound.

Augustine's understanding of the consequences of the original sin and of necessity of the redeeming grace was developed in the struggle against [Pelagius](#) and his [pelagian](#) disciples, [Caelestius](#) and [Julian of Eclanum](#), who had been inspired by Rufinus of Syria, a disciple of [Theodore of Mopsuestia](#). They refused to agree that *libido* wounded human will and mind, insisting that the human nature was given the power to act, to speak, and to think when God created it. Human nature cannot lose its moral capacity for doing good, but a person is free to act or not to act in a righteous way. Pelagius gave an example of eyes: they have capacity for seeing, but a person can make either good or bad use of it. Like [Jovinian](#), pelagians insisted that human affections and desires were not touched by the fall either. Immorality, e.g. fornication, is exclusively a matter of will, i.e. a person does not use natural desires in a proper way. In opposition to that, Augustine pointed out to the apparent disobedience of the flesh to the spirit, and explained it as one of the results of original sin, punishment of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God:

For it was not fit that His creature should blush at the work of his Creator; but by a just punishment the disobedience of the members was the retribution to the disobedience of the first man, for which disobedience they blushed when they covered with fig-leaves those shameful parts which previously were not shameful.  
(...) As, therefore, they were so suddenly ashamed of their nakedness, which they were daily in the habit of looking upon and were not confused, that they could now no longer bear those members naked, but immediately took care to cover them; did not they—he in the open, she in the hidden impulse—perceive those members to be disobedient to the choice of their will, which certainly they ought to have ruled like the rest by their voluntary command? And this they deservedly suffered, because they themselves also were not obedient to their Lord. Therefore they blushed that they in such wise had not manifested service to their Creator, that they should deserve to lose dominion over those members by which children were to be procreated.

– *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.31-32

Augustine had served as a "Hearer" for the Manicheans for about nine years, who taught that the original sin was carnal knowledge. This allowed Augustine, after his conversion, to find narrow path between the Manichean and Pelagian positions.

The view that not only human [soul](#) but also senses were influenced by the fall of Adam and Eve was prevalent in Augustine's time among the [Fathers of the Church](#). It is clear that the reason of Augustine's distance towards the affairs of the flesh was different than that of [Plotinus](#), a neo-Platonist who taught that only through disdain for fleshly desire could one reach the ultimate state of mankind. Augustine taught the redemption, i.e. transformation and purification, of the body in the resurrection. Some authors perceive Augustine's doctrine as directed against human [sexuality](#) and attribute his insistence on continence and devotion to God as coming from Augustine's need to reject his own highly sensual nature as described in the Confessions. But in view of his writings it is apparently a misunderstanding. Augustine teaches that human sexuality has been wounded, together with the whole of human nature, and requires [redemption](#) of Christ. That healing is a process realised in conjugal acts. The virtue of continence is achieved thanks to the grace of the sacrament of Christian marriage, which becomes therefore a *remedium concupiscentiae* - remedy of concupiscence. The redemption of human sexuality will be, however, fully accomplished only in the resurrection of the body.

The sin of Adam is inherited by all human beings. Already in his pre-Pelagian writings, Augustine taught that Original Sin was transmitted by [concupiscence](#) which he regarded as the passion of both, soul and body, making humanity a *massa damnata* (mass of perdition, condemned crowd) and much enfeebling, though not destroying, the freedom of the will.

Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of original sin was confirmed at numerous councils, i.e. [Carthage \(418\)](#), [Ephesus \(431\)](#), [Orange \(529\)](#), [Trent \(1546\)](#) and by popes, i.e. [Pope Innocent I \(401-417\)](#) and [Pope Zosimus \(417-418\)](#). [Anselm of Canterbury](#) established in his *Cur Deus Homo* the definition that was followed by the great Schoolmen, namely that Original Sin is the "privation of the righteousness which every man ought to possess", thus interpreting *concupiscence* as something more than mere sexual lust, with which some Augustine's disciples had defined it as later did Luther and Calvin, a doctrine condemned in 1567 by [Pope Pius V](#).

[Lutherans](#) and [Calvinists](#) disaccordingly claim that, according to Augustine, human beings are utterly depraved in nature. According to them, humans are spoiled by the original sin to the extent that the very presence of concupiscence, *fomes peccati* (*incendiary of sin*), is already a personal sin. Augustine's doctrine about the *liberum arbitrium* or free will and its inability to respond to the will of God without divine grace is interpreted (mistakenly according to Roman Catholics) in terms of [Predestination](#): grace is [irresistible](#), results in conversion, and leads to [perseverance](#). The [Calvinist](#) view of Augustine's teachings rests on the assertion that God has foreordained, from eternity, those who will be saved. The number of the elect is fixed.<sup>[58]</sup> God has chosen the elect certainly and gratuitously, without any previous merit (*ante merita*) on their part.

The [Catholic Church](#) considers Augustine's teaching to be consistent with free will. He often said that any can be saved if they wish. While God knows who will be saved and who will not, with no possibility that one destined to be lost will be saved, this knowledge represents God's perfect knowledge of how humans will freely choose their destinies.

## Sacramental theology

Also in reaction against the Donatists, Augustine developed a distinction between the "regularity" and "validity" of the [sacraments](#). Regular sacraments are performed by clergy of the Catholic Church while sacraments performed by schismatics are considered irregular. Nevertheless, the validity of the sacraments do not depend upon the holiness of the priests who perform them (*ex opere operato*); therefore, irregular sacraments are still accepted as valid provided they are done in the name of Christ and in the manner prescribed by the Church. On this point Augustine departs from the earlier teaching of Cyprian, who taught that converts from schismatic movements must be re-baptised.

## Eucharist

Convinced of the [Real presence](#) of Christ in the Eucharist, Augustine made the following logical observation regarding this sacrament: "Christ was carried in his own hands when, referring to his own body, he said, 'This is my body' [Matt. 26:26]. For he carried that body in his hands." In a sermon addressed to new Christians, Augustine explicitly described the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ.

I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord's Table. . . . That bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ.

What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; yet faith does not desire instruction".

## Soteriology

Augustine made several statements concerning his views on the limitations of the atonement, such as:

The garden of the Lord's brothers and sisters, includes, yes it includes, it certainly includes not only the roses of martyrs but also the lilies of virgins, and the ivy of married people and the violets of widows. There is absolutely no kind of human beings, dearly beloved, who need to despair of their vocation; **Christ suffered for all**. It was truly written, it is he "who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the acknowledgment of the truth."

– *Sermon 304.2*

## Statements on Jews

Against certain Christian movements, some of which rejected the use of Hebrew Scripture, Augustine countered that God had chosen the Jews as a special people, and he considered the scattering of Jews by the Roman Empire to be a fulfillment of prophecy.

Augustine also quotes part of the same prophecy that says "Slay them not, lest they should at last forget Thy law" (Psalm 59:11). Augustine argued that God had allowed the Jews to

survive this dispersion as a warning to Christians, thus they were to be permitted to dwell in Christian lands. Augustine further argued that the Jews would be converted at the end of time.

## Views on lust

Augustine struggled with lust throughout his life. He had a mistress before he converted, but once he became a Christian, he condemned all forms of extra-marital sex (including his previous relationship with his mistress), considering them unlawful and unbiblical. In the *Confessions*, Augustine describes his personal struggle in vivid terms: "But I, wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, 'Grant me chastity and continence, only not yet.'"<sup>[101]</sup> At sixteen Augustine moved to Carthage where again he was plagued by this "wretched sin":

There seethed all around me a cauldron of lawless loves. I loved not yet, yet I loved to love, and out of a deep-seated want, I hated myself for wanting not. I sought what I might love, in love with loving, and I hated safety... To love then, and to be beloved, was sweet to me; but more, when I obtained to enjoy the person I loved. I defiled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I beclouded its brightness with the hell of lustfulness.

– *Confessions 3.1.1*

For Augustine, the evil was not in the sexual act itself, but rather in the emotions that typically accompany it. In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine contrasts love and lust:

By love I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy God on his own account and to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour on account of God, and by lust I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour and any corporeal thing not on account of God.

– 3.37

Here we can see the theoretical resolution of the struggle documented in *Confessions*: that proper love exercises a denial of selfish pleasure and the subjugation of corporeal desire to God.

To the pious virgins raped during the sack of Rome, he writes, "Truth, another's lust cannot pollute thee." Chastity is "a virtue of the mind, and is not lost by rape, but is lost by the intention of sin, even if unperformed."<sup>[94]</sup>

Augustine viewed [erections](#) themselves as involuntary: *at times, without intention, the body stirs on its own, insistent; at other times, it leaves a straining lover in the lurch.*<sup>[102]</sup>

In short, Augustine's life experience led him to consider lust to be one of the most grievous sins, and a serious obstacle to the virtuous life.

## List of Works (books, letters and sermons)

- [On Christian Doctrine](#) ([Latin](#): *De doctrina Christiana*, 397-426)
- [Confessions](#) (*Confessiones*, 397-398)
- [City of God](#) (*De civitate Dei*, begun ca. 413, finished 426)
- [On the Trinity](#) (*De trinitate*, 400-416)
- [Enchiridion](#) (*Enchiridion ad Laurentium, seu de fide, spe et caritate*)
- [Retractions](#) (*Retractationes*): At the end of his life (ca. 426-428) Augustine revisited his previous works in chronological order. The English translation of the title has led some to assume that at the end of his career, Augustine retreated from his earlier theological positions. In fact, the Latin title literally means "re-treatments" (not "Retractions") and though in this work Augustine suggested what he would have said differently, it provides little in the way of actual "retraction." It does, however, give the reader a rare picture of the development of a writer and his final thoughts.
- [The Literal Meaning of Genesis](#) (*De Genesi ad litteram*)
- [On Free Choice of the Will](#) ([De libero arbitrio](#))
- [On the Catechising of the Uninstructed](#) (*De catechizandis rudibus*)
- [On Faith and the Creed](#) (*De fide et symbolo*)
- [Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen](#) (*De fide rerum invisibilium*)
- [On the Profit of Believing](#) (*De utilitate credendi*)
- [On the Creed: A Sermon to Catechumens](#) (*De symbolo ad catechumenos*)
- [On Continence](#) (*De continentia*)
- [On the teacher](#) (*De magistro*)
- [On the Good of Marriage](#) (*De bono coniugali*)
- [On Holy Virginit](#) (*De sancta virginitate*)
- [On the Good of Widowhood](#) (*De bono viduitatis*)
- [On Lying](#) (*De mendacio*)
- [To Consentius: Against Lying](#) (*Contra mendacium [ad Consentium]*)
- [To Quodvultdeus, On Heresies](#) (*De haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum*)
- [On the Work of Monks](#) (*De opere monachorum*)
- [On Patience](#) (*De patientia*)
- [On Care to be Had For the Dead](#) (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*)
- [On the Morals of the Catholic Church and on the Morals of the Manichaeans](#) (*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*)
- [On Two Souls, Against the Manichaeans](#) (*De duabus animabus [contra Manichaeos]*)
- [Acts or Disputation Against Fortunatus the Manichaeon](#) (*[Acta] contra Fortunatum [Manichaeum]*)
- [Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental](#) (*Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*)
- [Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon](#) (*Contra Faustum [Manichaeum]*)
- [Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans](#) (*De natura boni contra Manichaeos*)
- [On Baptism, Against the Donatists](#) (*De baptismo [contra Donatistas]*)
- [The Correction of the Donatists](#) (*De correctione Donatistarum*)
- [On Merits and Remission of Sin, and Infant Baptism](#) (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*)
- [On the Spirit and the Letter](#) (*De spiritu et littera*)
- [On Nature and Grace](#) (*De natura et gratia*)
- [On Man's Perfection in Righteousness](#) (*De perfectione iustitiae hominis*)
- [On the Proceedings of Pelagius](#) (*De gestis Pelagii*)
- [On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin](#) (*De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*)

- *On Marriage and Concupiscence (De nuptiis et concupiscentia)*
- *On the Nature of the Soul and its Origin (De natura et origine animae)*
- *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians (Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum)*
- *On Grace and Free Will (De gratia et libero arbitrio)*
- *On Rebuke and Grace (De correptione et gratia)*
- *On the Predestination of the Saints (De praedestinatione sanctorum)*
- *On the Gift of Perseverance (De dono perseverantiae)*
- *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (De sermone Domini in monte)*
- *On the Harmony of the Evangelists (De consensu evangelistarum)*
- *Treatises on the Gospel of John (In Iohannis evangelium tractatus)*
- *Soliloquies (Soliloquiorum libri duo)*
- *Enarrations, or Expositions, on the Psalms (Enarrationes in Psalmos)*
- *On the Immortality of the Soul (De immortalitate animae)*
- *Answer to the Letters of Petilian, Bishop of Cirta (Contra litteras Petiliani)*
- *Against the Academics (Contra Academicos)*
- Sermons, among which a series on selected lessons of the New Testament
- Homilies, among which a series on the First Epistle of John

## Translations

English translations of Augustine's work abound. One of the best translations of Augustine into English currently available is the one offered by [New City Press](#) in the series *The Works of St. Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century*. To date, this is also the most complete translation of Augustine's works in English. The second most complete translation of Augustine's works in English is by the [Catholic University of America Press](#). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy offers a [list of selected translations](#), which however does not claim to be exhaustive.