

## 12 POINTS OF LIGHT

### POINT 3: AUGUSTINE - FOUNDATIONS OF THEOLOGY

#### INTRODUCTION

##### A. Importance

1. *Christian History, After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity...he is one of the central pillars on which our entire Western civilization is built.*
2. Augustine in each of the 16 centuries since his conversion, has been *a major intellectual, spiritual and cultural force, Time* (Sept. 29, 1986).
3. *The greatest Christian since New Testament times* (as one patristic scholar has called him).

##### B. Background

1. Born in North Africa, 354
2. Patricius, his father, worshiped pagan gods.
3. Monica, his mother, was a devout Christian who prayed constantly for his salvation.
4. His early education was interrupted due to lack of funds when he was 16
5. He later went to school in worldly Carthage
6. He took a concubine who bore him a son, Adeodatus (a gift from God)

##### C. Personal Information

1. Speech writer for the Roman emperor.
2. Supported by a pagan benefactor who hoped Augustine would lead Rome back to paganism.
3. One of his duties as Bishop of Hippo was to arbitrate lawsuits.
4. Wrote more than 1,000 works including 242 books.
5. Composed a song, "An ABC against the Donatists" which was sung in churches and became very popular.
6. Some wanted to canonize his writings.
7. Never met with females (including his sister) without someone else present
8. When the great European universities were formed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, their curriculum was essentially the same as what Augustine had outlined eight centuries earlier in *On Christian Doctrine*.

#### THE LIFE OF AUGUSTINE

##### A. Influences

1. Manichaeism
  - a. Based on teachings of a Persian man named Mani
  - b. Dualistic system (2 worlds constantly at war with each other)
    - 1) World of light - represented by Christ
    - 2) World of darkness - represented by Satan
  - c. Augustine thought it made better sense of the world than his mother's Christianity.
  - d. His mother threw him out of her house for promoting heresy.
2. Disappointment with Manichaeism
  - a. Confronted by death of a childhood friend
    - 1) They both disdained Christianity
    - 2) A priest baptized the young man on his deathbed and he miraculously recovered
    - 3) Augustine thought the baptism was a joke but not his friend
    - 4) Augustine was shaken by his friend's change of attitude.
    - 5) His friend died suddenly two weeks later.
    - 6) He reappraised Christianity in his heart and mind because he was dumb in the face of death.
  - b. Failure of leading Manichaean teachers to answer his questions.

### 3. Bishop Ambrose of Milan

- a. Led fight against Roman paganism
  - 1) Had statue of goddess Victoria removed from Senate
  - 2) Symmachus, leader of the pagan party, fought for the statue's return
  - 3) Symmachus chose Augustine as Professor of Rhetoric in Milan
- b. Impressed Augustine
  - 1) Intellect and ability to answer questions from the Bible
  - 2) Devotion to sermon preparation
  - 3) Musical abilities
    - a) Conservative churchmen criticized Ambrose for starting a craze for hymns.
    - b) He was the founder of Latin hymnody and rhyming stanzas for congregational singing.
  - 4) Firm resolve
    - a) Justina, mother of emperor, Valentinian, ordered Ambrose to surrender his church to Arians.
    - b) Ambrose refused and led congregation in psalm-singing while imperial troops surrounded church
    - c) Troops surprisingly withdrew
    - d) Greatly impacted Augustine as seen in his *The City of God*.

### B. Conversion

1. In the summer of A.D. 386, 32-year-old Augustine sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alypius in Milan, conscious of a deep inner dissatisfaction.
2. As he sat, he heard a child singing in a neighboring house, *Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!* ("Take up and read! Take up and read!"). He took up the scroll by his side and opened to Romans 13:13-14, *Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*
3. *No further would I read, he says, nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.*

### C. Ministry as Bishop of Hippo

1. Fighting heresies
  - a. Donatism
    - 1) Withdrew from the Church for political and doctrinal reasons.
    - 2) Believed that Catholic leaders had betrayed the church during persecution by Emperor Diocletian.
    - 3) Donatists held that they alone were the true church and insisted on church discipline and excommunication for all members they deemed unworthy.
    - 4) Issue was separation as Augustine wrote, "The clouds roll with thunder, that the house of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth; and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak, 'We are the only Christians!'"
    - 5) The controversy was settled in favor of the Catholics in 411 with a formalization of Augustine' doctrine of the church, "that the essence of the church is the union of the whole church with Christ, not in the personal character of certain select Christians."
  - b. Pelagianism
    - 1) Pelagius was a 4<sup>th</sup> century British monk who rejected the idea of original sin.
    - 2) The tendency to sin is man's own free choice and not inherited from Adam.
    - 3) There is no need for divine grace since man can make up his own mind to do the will of God.
    - 4) Augustine refuted Pelagianism in *Against Julian*.
2. His Writings
  - a. *Confessions*
    - 1) Written between 397 and 401 and was probably a consecration of himself for his ministry as bishop
    - 2) One of the most widely read religious works in the Western world.

- 3) Takes the form of a prayer of contrition with 3 major sections
    - a) The restless heart
      - 1} Most famous quotation, *And man wants to praise you, man who is only a small portion of what you have created and who goes about carrying with him his own mortality, the evidence of his own sin and evidence that you resist the proud...Yet still man, this small portion of creation, wants to praise you. You stimulate him to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*
      - 2} The Pear Tree
        - a} At the age of 16, Augustine stole pears from a neighbor's tree.
        - b} Augustine concluded later that his *theft was a perverse imitation of God.*
        - c} He wanted to be in control not under God's control.
    - b) The mystery of God - He is described in paradox (mystery)
      - 1} God's being is in Himself; man's being is in God. Foolishly, man tries to be like God and find rest in himself.
      - 2} God is *the controller and creator of all things in nature, though of sin only the controller.*
      - 3} God is able to use our own sinful ways to draw us to Himself.
    - c) Human affection
      - 1} Augustine relates that his restlessness resumed after conversion because salvation needs grounding in God - one's affections must be centered in God.
      - 2} Pursue it through trust in God and humility
  - 4) Jacobsen, *Augustine has discovered the majesty and mystery of God as the condition for interpreting human restlessness. We will either use the restlessness to love God or to avoid God by vainly worshiping and serving something else.*
- b. *The City of God*
- 1) Introduction
    - a) Written in response to the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410.
    - b) Many blamed the fall of Rome on its promotion of Christianity which enraged the pagan gods - Augustine's response was *The City of God.*
    - c) Topics include creation, time, the origin of evil, human freedom, divine knowledge of the future, the resurrection of the body, final judgment, happiness, the Incarnation, sin, grace and forgiveness.
  - 2) Selected topics
    - a) The world - it contrasts the City of God (inhabited by God's people) with the city of men (sinners who reject God). Augustine said, *These two cities were made by two loves: the earthy city by the love of self unto the contempt of God, and the heavenly city by the love of God unto the contempt of self.*
    - b) Basic truth - *God's Son, assuming humanity without destroying His divinity, established and founded this faith, that there might be a way for man to man's God through God's Man.*
    - c) Future things - Augustine was an amillennialist. He saw the millennial kingdom spiritually as the reign of Christ in the hearts of the faithful.
    - d) Human suffering - *...when He exposes us to adversities, it is either to prove our perfections or correct our imperfections; and in return for our patient endurance of the sufferings of time, He reserves for us an everlasting reward.*
    - e) Loss of possessions - Augustine taught that the real tragedy is not in losing physical possessions but in loving them in the first place.
    - f) Death - *They, then, who are destined to die, need not inquire about what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them.*
  - 3) Keith Yandell, *What he said then is relevant now. It is, frankly, far better reading than the books of many contemporary theologians and philosophers. Similar to the eternal City of God, it has stood when more superficial entities have fallen.*

c. On Christian Doctrine

1) Introduction

- a) Written over a period of 30 years.
- b) Designed to equip teachers to understand and communicate Christianity, *the kind of man he ought to be who seeks to labor in sound doctrine, which is Christian doctrine, not only for himself, but also for others.*
- c) 4 books with 2 main divisions
  - 1} First 3 books deal with interpretation of Scriptures.
  - 2} 4<sup>th</sup> book deals with methodology of teaching (pedagogy)

2) Selected topics

- a) Truth - students of Scripture must have knowledge of natural world, of mathematics, and of music.
- b) Attitude - the key to understanding Scripture is humility before the Word of God.
- c) Scriptures - inspired and totally reliable.
- d) Faith - *You are not required to understand in order to believe, but to believe in order to understand.*
- e) Instruction - one must be concerned primarily not with eloquence of teaching but clarity.
- f) Example - the life of the speaker carries greater weight than his eloquence in determining whether or not he will be heard.

3) *The Enchiridion*

- a) A handbook on Christian living designed to be carried by believers.
- b) Themes:
  - 1} Hopelessness of evil
  - 2} Triumph of good
  - 3} Value of good works
  - 4} Ongoing struggles of the Christian life
  - 5} Human limitations of understanding

<b><i>SUMMARY</i></b>
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- A. A man of great intellect and devotion.
- B. Studied broadly and deeply.
- C. A man for his time who addressed issues in the church and society.
- D. A man for our times.

The Life of Augustine		
Year	His Life	Contemporary Events
354	Born at Thagaste, North Africa, November 13	
357		Athanasius writes the <i>Life of St. Anthony</i>
361-363		Constantine's nephew, Julian the Apostate, is emperor
365	Attends school in Madaura	
371	Studies rhetoric in Carthage	
ca. 372	His father dies and Adeodatus, his son is born	
373		Athanasius dies. Ambrose becomes bishop of Milan
375	Returns to Thagaste to teach rhetoric	
375		Valentinian I, last great emperor in the West, dies
376	Begins teaching rhetoric in Carthage Death of friend who was baptized	
378		Eastern emperor Valens defeated by the Goths
380		Theodosius I makes Christianity the state religion
381		The Council of Constantinople is convened
383	Sails to Rome with concubine and son	
384	Becomes professor of rhetoric in Milan	Symmachus appeals for the re-recognition of paganism
386	Is converted and moves to Cassiciacum	Purge of the Manichees at Carthage
387	Returns to Milan and baptized by Ambrose. He and Monica have a vision. Monica dies.	
388	Goes to Rome	
390	Returns to Carthage and then Thagaste; his son dies.	
391	Ordained priest at Hippo	Theodosius orders all pagan temples closed.
392	Debates in Hippo with Fortunatus the Manichee	
395		Theodosius dies; Empire redivided; Huns invade East
396	Becomes bishop of Hippo	
397		Ambrose dies
400	Writes <i>Confessions</i>	Jerome translates the Bible into the Latin Vulgate
402		Goths defeated in Italy
403-412	Donatist controversy	
411		The Council of Carthage mends the Donatist schism
412-421	Pelagian controversy	
413-426	Writes <i>The City of God</i> and <i>The Enchiridion</i>	
417		Pope Innocent I condemns Pelagianism
418		First schism between Rome and Constantinople
419		Jerome dies
429		Vandals invade North Africa
430	Dies at Hippo, August 28	Vandals besiege Hippo

Adapted from "The Christian History Timeline," *Christian History* (15:1997)

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