

THE
CONFESSIONS
OF
ST. AUGUSTINE



BOOKS I–IX (SELECTIONS)

With Introduction, Notes, and Vocabulary by

JAMES MARSHALL CAMPBELL
and
MARTIN R. P. MCGUIRE

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RAYMOND V. SCHODER, S. J.

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James Marshall Campbell and Martin R. P. McGuire

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FOREWORD

I am glad to see back in print this excellent edition of Latin selections from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, with its helpful introduction, notes, and vocabulary. This is another good service by this publisher to the cause of Classical and Christian education, by way of making available again textbooks for the study of our great cultural tradition.

The *Confessions* rightfully rank among the most splendid and influential works of Western Man. Here is one of the most illuminating and moving autobiographies, a profound treatise on the way of God with men, a pioneer essay in psychological analysis of human motives and ideals, and a noble example of the grandeur, power, and rhetorical beauty of the Latin language. To read Augustine in his own words is to come to know a magnificent human being, a brilliant master of literary style, and the rich mellowness and sublimity of mind and spirit which results from giving divine grace its full scope in its potential impact on human life. Anyone who knows enough Latin to read this timeless masterpiece will be inspired and humanized by the experience. Making that experience possible is a contribution to civilization. The world today has much to learn from Augustine's story, his humility, his spiritual perspective and insights, and his authentic love. His is a voice and a message little heard in our time — and therefore all the more imperative to hear.

Reasons for enthusiasm for Augustine the man and his thought are many. Reading his own meditations in the selections here provided will justify my claims. I am happy also to have been able to provide illustrations of places connected with Augustine's life, and the delightful portrait of him wrapped in thought that deserves to be better known.



Hippo Regius. Punic tombstones.

PREFACE

THE beginnings of this edition of the *Confessions* reach back to the year 1924, when Sister M. Constance Mooney, M.A., of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur of Fort Worth, presented to Professor Deferrari's Latin Seminar a paper entitled "A Suggested College Course in St. Augustine's Confessions." In the summer of that year Sister Inviolata Barry, Ph.D., Professor of Latin in Our Lady of the Lake College, San Antonio, and the editor whose name appears first upon the title-page began gathering materials for an edition of the *Confessions* suitable for the college and the preparatory seminary. Sister Inviolata had scarcely determined upon the selections to be used, however, when her promotion to a strenuous deanship compelled her to abandon the enterprise. The work was begun anew by the present editors in 1926.

The only other annotated edition of the *Confessions* in whole or in part readily available in English differs apparently in purpose and certainly in execution from the present work. Whatever class of readers Gibb and Montgomery had primarily in mind, their commentary emphasizes the literary, philosophical, and historical interests of the *Confessions* rather than the syntactical and linguistic. For college students, if for no others, adequate notes upon the latter are as indispensable as adequate notes upon the former, and it is for college students that the present edition is intended, although advanced high-school students can use the text without difficulty. The selections, therefore, constitute the equivalent of a normal semester's reading in college Latin, and aim to include the most interesting passages of the narrative portions of the *Confessions*. Besides the usual notes upon historical, religious, philosophical, and Biblical matters, every syntactical difficulty is considered, classical and non-classical, and a

baldly literal translation is ventured wherever interpretation seems to demand it. Frequent reference is made to stylistic devices of St. Augustine, and definitions of such devices are given. An especially prepared vocabulary is appended. We have failed of our resolution to write no "learned" notes in the single instance of the question of St. Augustine's knowledge of Greek, because of a wide misconception upon the subject prevalent among the educated. The "Selected Bibliography" may be of use to novices in Augustinian studies, while its remarks may suggest how largely pioneer even a school edition of the *Confessions* may be, despite all the Augustinian labors of recent years.

De Labriolle's text is used throughout. His paragraph divisions, we believe, will facilitate immensely the understanding of the text. We have taken the liberty of interspersing the text with headings designed to recall the student always to the prayerful character of the *Confessions*.

We are indebted to the following editors and translators of the *Confessions* and in the order given: Professor De Labriolle, of the Sorbonne; the late Graf von Hertling; Drs. Wolf-schläger and Koch, of Münster in Westphalia and of Dortmund respectively; the Rev. John Gibb and the Rev. William Montgomery, the Cambridge editors of the *Confessions*. Materials furnished by the foregoing entered into the composition of about a score of our notes. Acknowledgment is made by appropriate symbol in each case.

We must finally thank Professor Deferrari for suggesting the enterprise, for constant encouragement and advice during its execution, and for the wealth of materials put at our disposal by his Seminar in Patristic Latin; our colleague, Brother Giles, C.F.X., Ph.D.; the Rev. Felix M. Kirsch, O.M.Cap., Ph.D., of the Capuchin College, The Catholic University of America, who read the work in manuscript; and Mrs. Florence B. McGuire, M.A., for assistance in preparation of the Vocabulary.

JAMES MARSHALL CAMPBELL
MARTIN R. P. MCGUIRE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

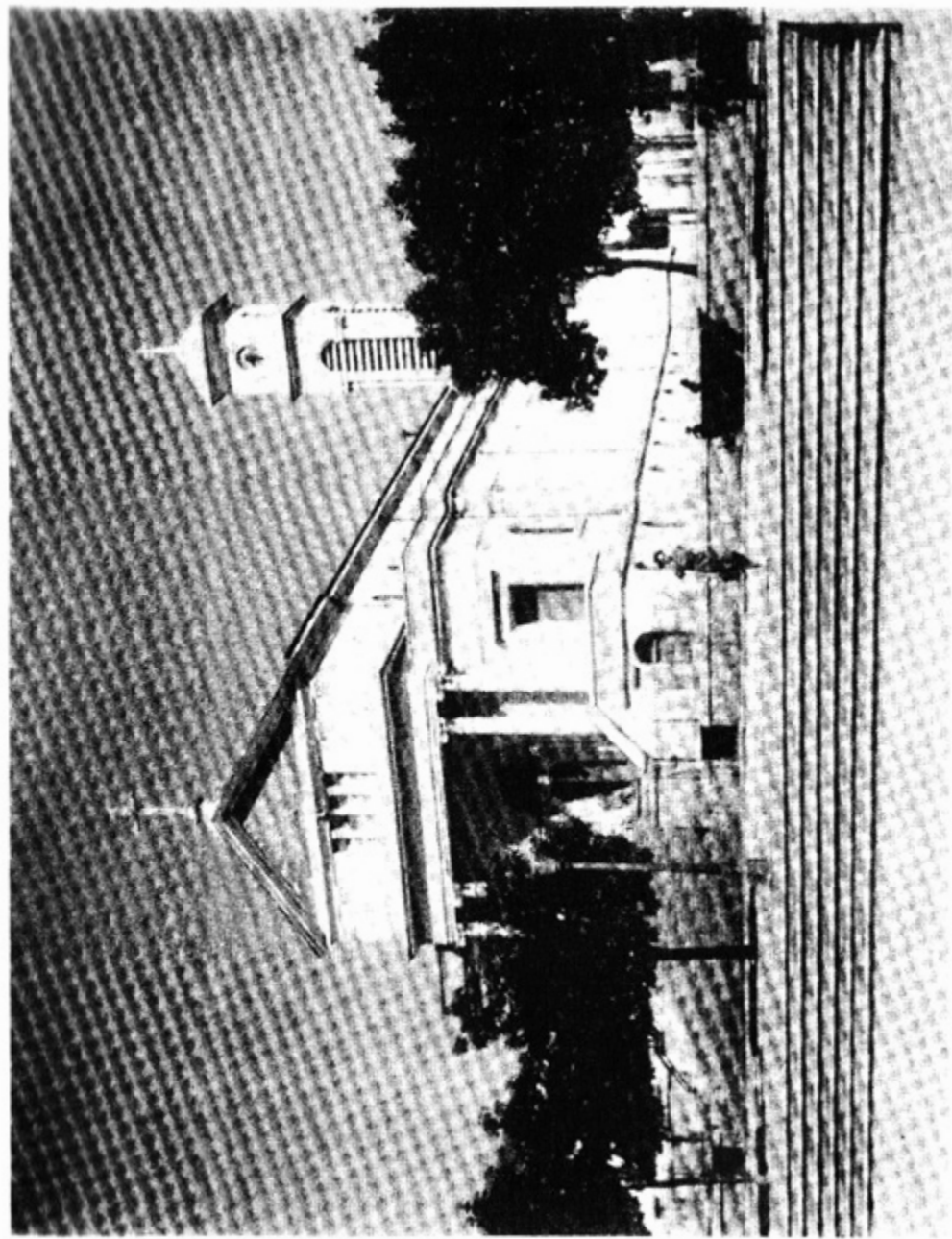
	PAGE
PREFACE.....	vii-viii
INTRODUCTION.....	3
I. St. Augustine's Life in Outline before his Con- version.....	3
II. St. Augustine in the World of Thought.....	9
III. The <i>Confessions</i>	13
IV. The Style of St. Augustine.....	14
V. Some Stylistic Devices in the <i>Confessions</i>	17
VI. Notes on the Vocabulary of the <i>Confessions</i> ...	19
VII. Syntactical Summary.....	23
VIII. Biblical Citations.....	51
IX. The Problem of St. Augustine's Conversion...	53
X. A Selected Bibliography.....	55
TEXT AND NOTES.....	65
I. Preliminary Prayer.....	65
II. Infancy.....	69
III. Boyhood Influences.....	73
IV. Adolescence.....	92
V. To Carthage.....	100
VI. The <i>Hortensius</i> of Cicero.....	104
VII. The Manichee.....	109
VIII. Death of a Friend.....	117
IX. Carthage Once More.....	122
X. Faustus.....	126
XI. To Rome.....	133
XII. To Milan and St. Ambrose.....	140

XIII. Hesitations	142
XIV. <i>The Life of St. Anthony</i>	153
XV. In the Garden	161
XVI. The Voice in the Garden	166
XVII. Cassiacum	169
XVIII. Baptism	174
XIX. The Death of St. Monnica	178
XX. Prayer for St. Monnica	190
VOCABULARY	197
INDEX	261

ILLUSTRATIONS

St. Augustine	II
Hippo Regius: Punic Tombstone	VI
Church of St. Augustine, Thagaste (Souk Ahras)	2
Theater Facade: Christian Oratory at side, Ostia	64
Tomb of St. Augustine, Pavia	260
Modern Carthage	268

INTRODUCTION



Church of St. Augustine, Thagaste (Souk Ahras), where Augustine was born.

INTRODUCTION

I. AUGUSTINE'S LIFE IN OUTLINE BEFORE HIS CONVERSION

1. Aurelius Augustinus was born on November 13, 354, at Thagaste, in the province of Numidia, in North Africa. His father, Patricius, a magistrate of the town, was still a pagan at the time of Augustine's birth; his mother, Monica, or more correctly Monnica (after the manner of the Inscriptions), was a Christian. Though he was thus exposed from his earliest years to contrary religious impressions, he was completely subject to his mother in formal spiritual training, becoming while still quite young a catechumen in the local church. He was not baptized, however, until near his thirty-third year, after he had lived that part of his life which forms the narrative portion of his *Confessions*.

2. The talents of the son aroused the hopes of the father, and after the usual primary instruction, taken at Thagaste, Augustine was sent to the larger city of Madaura, some twenty miles away and locally eminent in commerce and in the arts and sciences. After a period of study there of unknown duration, he returned to Thagaste for a year's sojourn while Patricius raised money for his further schooling. Augustine was between fifteen and sixteen at the time, and in the enforced idleness of this interval at home evil habits grew up, which were finally renounced only at his conversion seventeen years later. With the aid of a rich fellow townsman, Romanianus, Patricius at the end of this year had funds sufficient for his purpose and Augustine went to Carthage, the greatest town in all North Africa and one of the glories of the fourth-century Empire in luxury and learning. Augustine embraced both, if we may take his own story literally. To his after-self these years at Carthage were a time of depravity never sufficiently bewailed. To at least one contemporary, however, he ap-

peared modest and studious at the time.¹ It is only the degree of his waywardness, however, that can well be called into doubt. Patricius meanwhile died, a Christian on his deathbed, and Augustine continued at Carthage, supported by Monnica and Romanianus.

3. In his nineteenth year Augustine was recalled for a time from his dissolute beginnings by a perusal of a lost dialogue of Cicero's, called the *Hortensius*, a work intended by its author as an exhortation to the pleasures of philosophy, though studied at Carthage chiefly as a model of style. So far did the youthful Augustine seize its deeper import that it produced a revolution in his thinking. From now on he was ceaselessly in quest, amid philosophical and moral aberrations, of that higher, enduring happiness which, in his ignorance of self, he thought could be found in the possession of knowledge alone. The influence of his mother's earliest instructions was indelible in him, however blurred over by recent indulgences, and, upon reading the *Hortensius*, he resorted to the Scriptures as a possible source of the wisdom and contentment which he was seeking. But their bald, unadorned style seemed so inferior to the cadences of Cicero that the pupil of the rhetorical art turned elsewhere. That love of the Sacred Scriptures, so abundantly evident in the *Confessions*, was to awaken only in Milan during the last stages of his spiritual wanderings.

4. His search for intellectual peace now led him, as it was leading so many of his contemporaries, into the strange syncretism of the Manichees.² The accommodative theology of Manichaeism was calculated to have some appeal for everyone. The sect made a great point of scientific independence, among other things, and singled out the Old Testament for deprecia-

¹ The schismatic bishop, Vincentius, writing thirty years afterwards, thus recalls him. Cf. Augustine, *Epistola* XCIII, 51, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* XXXIV, Pars II, 494-495.

² For a detailed description of Manichaeism cf. F. C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees*, Cambridge, 1925; Gibb and Montgomery, *The Confessions of Augustine*, Cambridge, 1927, XXI-XXXIII. The following references in the present work may also prove useful, p. 109, note 1; p. 115, note 97; p. 125, note 40.

tive criticism. On both scores Augustine was attracted. And the fact that Our Saviour was numbered among its prophets appealed to one of the latent affections of his childhood. For nine years he was a Manichaean disciple.

5. Soon after joining the sect he returned to his native Thagaste as a teacher of rhetoric. After a short period there he was back in Carthage again, with opportunities more suited to his gifts. He quickly made a name for himself in this larger field and sustained this name by his studies in the tireless quest of wisdom. Gradually he began to doubt the sufficiency of the Manichaean system, particularly when he compared its cosmology with the results of Greek astronomical science. His associates strove to allay his growing misgivings by the prospects of a visit from Faustus, a man famed among them for resourcefulness in defending the Manichaean faith. Finally Faustus came and shattered completely, by his superficial answers to Augustine's questions, all his hopes of finding peace among the Manichees. He remained in outward communion with them, however, while in search of a better system.

6. Augustine was now approaching his thirtieth year in great spiritual unrest. At the same time the unruly conduct permitted Carthaginian students was becoming too much for him. Attracted by the reports of a more rigorous discipline in the traditional capital of the Empire, he sailed away in the night, without the knowledge of his mother. His sojourn at Rome was not a pleasant one. His African reputation was of no avail against the fame of teachers already in residence; he suffered a severe illness; he was living with Manichees, in whose religion he no longer believed. Tossed to and fro intellectually, despising the Catholic Church and the doctrine of the Incarnation especially, tortured by the problem of evil and by man's responsibility thereto, Augustine began to speculate in earnest on the possibility of certain knowledge and to veer towards the New Academy,³ which taught that truth was unattainable for man.

³ For a sketch of the New Academy, cf. Windelband, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, English translation by H. E. Cushman, 2nd ed., New York, 1901, 332-349.

7. In this state he eagerly and successfully tried for a professorship of rhetoric vacant at Milan in 384. Soon after his arrival there he fell under the spell of Milan's great and eloquent Bishop Ambrose, easily the first man in the city where the imperial authority was centered. The magnetism of Ambrose, and not his doctrine, at first attracted Augustine, but after a time the doctrine too began to break in upon his soul, as he returned again and again to Ambrose's sermons. He came to perceive that the Catholic doctrine could be defended credibly. Finally he saw that it could be true. But was it true? That was the question. In his doubts he made some decisions. He broke off his remaining connections with the Manichees. He found the skeptical philosophers of the Academy unsatisfactory because, as he said, "the wholesome name of Christ was lacking to them." He resolved, therefore, to return to the catechumenate of his childhood, there to await clearer guidance.

8. About this time Monnica came to Milan, to add her fervent prayers in the city's churches to the action of grace within her son. Meanwhile he was studying ardently Neoplatonic works.⁴ Through these he slowly arose above his materialistic conception of God. He began to perceive that there is a spiritual method of knowledge, distinct from and superior to the senses. He was led on by degrees from the perceptible to the imperceptible world. He finally came to the idea of the creator, single, spaceless, unchangeable. The problem of evil vanished for him under this concept, and the idea of an authority, to be accepted for its own sake, began to grow in his soul. He saw the possibility of contentment without completeness of knowledge. In fact the higher his ideal of knowledge became, the more insufficient appeared to him the indulgence of earthly passion—and in this he was unconsciously approaching the deepest root of his troubles.

⁴ On Neoplatonism, cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, X, 742-745, s. v. *Neoplatonism*; Windelband, op. cit., 365-383; and Gibb and Montgomery, XXXIX-XLIX.

9. Unconscious it remained to him for a long time, however. Meanwhile he entertained the idea of marriage as a remedy for his soul, encouraged to it by Monnica, who saw in it a possible step towards his conversion. A young lady was chosen; the marriage was scheduled to take place two years thereafter, when she would be of age; Augustine, in anticipation of the event, gave up living with a woman who had been his companion from early years at Carthage, and who was the mother of his son, Adeodatus. This renouncement proved too much for him, however, and he was soon living with another woman outside the bonds of wedlock.

10. Augustine had a genius for friendship, and there gathered around him at Milan a group, partly from his native Africa, all bent like himself upon the earnest seeking for truth. There were many discussions in this circle and several hesitations in the tendency of Augustine's thinking, but his Neoplatonic readings served always to recall him to lofty planes of thought. He had developed a liking for the language of the Scriptures after Ambrose had given him respect for their doctrines. Now he discovered many agreements between the Scriptures and the Neoplatonists. Presently he found in them what the Neoplatonists could not give, a motive for his will in grace and redemption and the following after Christ. It was no longer a question of the truth of Christian doctrine nor of the consolations it certainly held in store. It was now a question of accepting the moral restrictions which Christianity imposed. Augustine therefore hesitated.

11. At length from out the Egyptian East and in a most roundabout manner came the impulse for a crisis. Ponticianus, an officer from Africa in attendance at court and a pious, sincere Christian, was visiting Augustine's circle one day, when he fell to speaking of St. Anthony, the famous Egyptian hermit, who had died about thirty years before and whose fame was already spreading through the West. He related how one day, while at Trèves, he was strolling with three companions outside the city and how two of them, taking a route by themselves, came by chance upon the hut

of a hermit, where they found a little book which told the story of St. Anthony. This was probably St. Athanasius' life of the hermit, which had been recently translated into Latin. One of the two fell to reading it and both were so gripped by the narrative that they renounced their imperial offices and devoted themselves to God. This story, as told by Ponticianus, was decisive for Augustine. When the narrator had departed, he rushed out into the garden, followed only by his friend, Alypius. He sat down and pondered over the futilities of his past life. The final scene is one of the classics of literature—how he moved by himself to a fig tree, threw himself under it, burst into a flood of tears, heard the voice of a child near by cry, "Take and read, take and read"; how he returned to Alypius, seized a copy of the Epistles of St. Paul, unrolled it and began to read what first his eyes lit upon, "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 with its concupiscences." With these words he ceased. His decision was made. He resigned his professorship, he retired with his mother, his son, and some other members of his circle to the villa of Cassiciacum in the hills near Milan, which his friend Verecundus owned, and there passed the winter of 386-387 in prayer, study, and writing. In Easter week of 387, in the thirty-third year of his age, he was baptized by Ambrose at Milan, and the long catechumenate of Augustine was over.

12. St. Monnica died in the same year at Ostia on their way home to Africa. Augustine returned to Rome. He was ordained a priest in 391 and became bishop of the African see of Hippo about 396. Sometime thereafter,⁵ but not later than the turn of the century, he wrote his *Confessions*, the best known of his works today, but only one of a vast output of sovereign importance for his own time and still a masterly, though hidden, influence, after the march of fifteen centuries.

⁵ On the date of the *Confessions*, cf. De Labriolle, P., *Saint Augustin Confessions*, vol. I, Paris, 1925, pp. v-vi.

II. ST. AUGUSTINE IN THE WORLD OF THOUGHT

13. The latter half of the fourth century and the first decades of the fifth combine to form one of those times of transition so frequent in the history of the West. Within this three-quarter century the Latin half of the world empire plunges formally to predestined ruin, and the uncertain beginnings of the Middle Ages commence to emerge from the chaos. The civilization of many centuries, long suffering a slow decay, is precipitated towards far-flung destruction by devastating barbarian invasions. The ancient pagan religion, disprivileged now but still powerful, makes its last great stand against the Church, and the Church, at grips with the deadliest heresies, defines doctrine vital to her mission. Italy, Gaul, Spain, Rome, all fall before the hordes from the North, and finally even Augustine's own Africa, as Augustine is breathing his last. In abiding significance for the after-world this period is scarce second to any, and that the years of Augustine (354-430) spanned its limits is one of its major claims on the future.

14. The importance of Augustine to the story of civilization is not to be easily exaggerated. His name is the last in point of time of the great names of antiquity; in influence on the thought of after-ages his name is one of the first. He was not the most learned of the Latin Fathers; St. Jerome was in this his superior. In the subtle play of dialectical argument Tertullian was at least his equal. There are several Latin Fathers whom as a stylist he does not surpass, and yet Augustine in sheer greatness of stature towers above them all, and not only above them, but above all the Fathers of the Church Universal. Until his time the Greek domination of the intellectual West was a fact not seriously challenged, a tradition already ancient before Christianity came. The first three centuries of the Church had but added to the Greek hegemony. It was as accepted a feature of the standing order as the political solidarity of the Empire. No Latin Father, no Latin writer, had arisen to whom the Greeks were not sovereign in thought. Not even the protesting Tertullian had avoided his tribute of

homage. And then Augustine came and the Greek Fathers lost forever their primacy in Western theology. This achievement is as startling in retrospect as the fall of the West which it survived. But it is not the full measure of Augustine in the history of ideas.

15. To assess the parts of Greece and Rome in the formation of our present-day culture is a fruitful preoccupation of contemporary classical scholarship. While the originality of Rome in certain respects emerges in correction of venerable errors, the originality and predominance of Greece in most things of the spirit is stated with always clearer precision. In almost every department, the leading, the creative names are Greek. But it is the unique fact that in that department in which Greece most obviously outreached Rome—the field of speculative philosophy—the name of one Latin is coupled with the greatest of the Greeks in any survey of Graeco-Roman civilization. Some critics, according to their prejudice, will call the greatest Greek thinker Plato, others will call him Aristotle. In either case his Latin companion is always St. Augustine. Cicero and Vergil among the Latins can rival, and in our day surpass, him in after-world popularity; but not even Cicero and Vergil attain to his influence in the world of thought.

16. Long before the birth of Christ an intellectual decline had come over the ancient world, and the ancient mind tended to move in heavy dependence on the past. Into this relatively inferior intellectual life came that new principle of living which is Christianity. And some philosophers were converted to Christianity and applied the method of philosophy to the new message and thus became numbered among the Fathers of the Church. In varying degree these Fathers, from the second century on, were masters of the older heritage and in varying degrees they were masters of the new. But the greatest of them were typical of the intellectual traditionalism that was a mark of later antiquity. And then Augustine came and the ancient mind found in him once more an Athenian elasticity and freedom, and it seized at the same time the

meaning of Christianity with an insight which has never been surpassed. This is the unique distinction of Augustine as a thinker. He had not the pioneering, creative originality of Plato nor the systematizing power of Aristotle, but he was creative and he was systematic as was no one of their ancient successors, and he came in time to possess what their unaided reason had never achieved—the supernatural message of Christianity. Because he surpassed all ancient thinkers, save Plato and Aristotle, in philosophic power, he surpassed all other Fathers in philosophic appreciation of Christianity; because his talents were enriched by this appreciation, by this philosophic experience unknown to Plato and Aristotle, he came to have a place by their side as a determining force in thought. His superlative gifts, forever focussed upon God as the center of the universe, constitute the peculiar mark of Augustine's originality. Because of it he was able to discuss God, God's relation to the world, the Trinity, Providence, Freedom, Grace, with a mastery unapproached hitherto and surpassed in part only when St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century brought Aristotle to the service of the Gospel. And because St. Thomas' task was chiefly a harmonization of Platonic-Augustinian theology with contemporary Aristotelian science, St. Augustine's thought lives in that Thomistic philosophy in which the Roman Catholic Church still sees her intellectual self. And because Protestantism developed from the medieval tradition dominant in its formative years, traditional Protestantism has borne at least traces of Augustine from Luther's day to our own. Outside formally religious circles Augustine is the hope of many present-day philosophers who can find neither in St. Thomas nor in Kant a basis for the natural knowledge of God. And into the realm of psychology the originality of Augustine ventured. That tireless theocentric impulse which led him to trace out man's relations to God drove him inevitably to the depths of man's heart and made of him the first great writer in the field of descriptive psychology—the most “modern,” perhaps, of his many claims to a place beside Plato and Aristotle.

17. Of all the Fathers of the Western Church, Augustine was the most voluminous. Three years before his death in 430 he wrote his *Retractions*, a work that aimed to give an account in chronological order of all his writings and to correct, especially in questions of dogma, such errors as he believed them to contain. Ninety-three works were thus reviewed and they did not include his large output of sermons and letters nor about ten other works, written after the completion of his *Retractions*. Impressive as this total is, it cannot suggest the huge dimensions of some of the writings it embraces. There is scarcely a branch of theology which has not received at least some enrichment from his works and, though few of them are read today, even by specialists, their content has become a part of the living traditions of the West. Among them the *De Trinitate* is one of the most ambitious and influential, being the authoritative prelude to all that the Middle Ages did in exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. The *De Doctrina Christiana*, explaining the method proper for an effective exposition of the Bible, was the model for Christian hermeneutics during all the Middle Ages. The *De Civitate Dei*, unfolding on a colossal scale his concept of Christianity in the environment of the world, is a philosophy of history, remarkable for its profundity of thought and for the synthetic power it reveals and, again, a dominant book in the Medieval period, particularly on questions of the relation between church and state; a book that is read and admired for its own sake today.

18. Augustine is, therefore, our contemporary, as he has been of every age since his own. In some of his works he seems the contemporary of his own age scarcely at all. And of no work of his is this more true than of his *Confessions*, a work whose title would promise us much on the context of his times and whose development ignores, wherever possible, the world through which he moved. In this, however, is another token of the creative originality of St. Augustine, and out of it came a type of literature unknown to the world before.

III. THE CONFESSIONS

19. Towards the end of 397 or the beginning of 398, when St. Augustine was about eleven years in the Faith, he wrote a work treating, for the most part, the story of his progress thereto⁶ and called his book *Confessions*. Much has since been made of the lapse of time and of the change of viewpoint which an eleven-year interval could produce in the mid-life of a strenuously busy man, and it is admitted generally that St. Augustine was at least severe in this picture of his earlier self. In any case he wrote a book unique among the achievements of antiquity.

20. If Augustine had intended mere autobiography, models were at hand for the taking. Xenophon, Caesar, and Marcus Aurelius among the pagans; Aquilius Severus, Ephraem the Syrian, St. Gregory of Nazianzus among the Christians, had all recorded epochs and phases of their lives. How many of these writings Augustine knew is a highly dubious matter. What seems certain is that he did not use them, nor, in fact, any autobiography, as a model. Christian Greek and Latin literature borrowed mostly from its pagan counterpart the other literary forms which it used as vehicles for its thought, and Christian Latin was immediately dependent in many instances upon Christian Greek. But with the *Confessions* there came a type which in its purpose, its outline, its content, its general manner of exposition was something new—a prayer in the form of a spiritual autobiography, a work written primarily to God, to praise Him, to thank Him, and to petition Him in memory of that event for which Augustine was before all else grateful, his conversion. It traces his spiritual experiences from his birth in 354 to his baptism and the death of St. Monnica in 387.⁷ It is the grateful record of the action

⁶ Books I-X treat of himself (*de me scripti sunt*) according to his *Retractions*, II, 6; Books XI-XIII are a treatise on the History of Creation. Books I-IX treat of his spiritual wanderings; Book X, of his state of soul at the time he wrote the *Confessions*; Books XI-XIII, while not autobiographical, are pertinent to the subject of his conversion as a scientific proof of the knowledge of God that had come to him.

⁷ Cf. note 6 above.

of Grace in him during these years and it is so exclusively this that the stirring environment in which Grace unfolded is ignored, beyond the irreducible minimum necessary for a proper account of the author's spiritual Aeneid.

21. The *Confessions* are the most widely read of his works. The timelessness and universality of their appeal lies in their power to paint the moods of the soul with such penetration and accuracy, with such freedom from the prepossessions peculiar to a given age that in them every age can see its most secret self depicted. And all is told with such profundity and truth of feeling that St. Augustine has been one of the most widely read authors of Latin antiquity. And of all the vast deposit of Patristic writings, in whatever tongue composed, only the *City of God* of the same Augustine has a place alongside the *Confessions* in the literature which all the civilized world appropriates as its own.

IV. THE STYLE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

22. It seems almost trite to insist that Augustine in style, as in all things else, was conditioned by the age in which he lived. How he could have dominated his own time if his style had been strange to his contemporaries passes the limits of the imagination. This point is usually made, however, in discussion of Augustine's style, and sometimes in his defense—as if to differ from the "Golden" Latin of some four hundred years before was necessarily to be decadent, as if there were an absolute norm evaluating style for all time. It is a fact that Augustine is markedly different from the classic prose of Cicero; that he indulges devices which Cicero would not have tolerated and which we do not allow. But his own age did allow them—demanded them, in fact—and every age accepts his *Confessions*, regardless of what "decadence" it perceives, and even holds up certain chapters as examples of surpassing beauty. Are we to assume, as is sometimes done,⁸ that the *Confessions* enjoy their world position unsupported in any

⁸ Cf. A. Gudeman, *Geschichte der altchristlichen lateinischen Literatur vom 2.-6. Jahrhundert*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1925, 84-85.

respect by the allurements of what we call style? This is not the place to attempt to answer so mighty a question. It involves the central problem of just what style is. It suggests that much loose thinking enters into evaluations of style, that an unconsciously subjective element is a factor in our conclusions, that there is something confusing and unsatisfactory in trying to be absolute about it. It is sufficient to remark here that the expressed canons of taste change, but that the appeal of the *Confessions* endures amid all the changes and that if style has nothing to do with the universal prestige of the *Confessions*, they are the only work, besides the Bible, of which such a statement can be made.

23. Regardless of what is to be thought of them, certain features of Augustine's style are determined, of course, by his times and by the circumstances of his life. Born an African and educated thoroughly in the rhetorical manner of his day and place, eventually becoming a teacher of rhetoric himself, he exhibits even in his matured prose traits that impress us as bombastic and puerile; a love of metaphor that seems to us unmeasured, a fondness for word-play that is soon wearisome to us and that at times is downright repulsive; deliberate repetitions of single words and phrases that sometimes are not musical to us. The educated world of his day and of the three centuries preceding had retained a love of the older rhetoric, though the occasions that had made that rhetoric serious and dignified had faded with the rise of Roman absolutism. Form had been exalted, therefore, to make up for poverty of content, and Augustine was the heir of a long tradition of rhetorical frivolity, when he entered the rhetorical schools. Later in life he tried to shake off some of these mannerisms on the grounds that they were devices of display and concessions to pride. They persisted with him, however, to the end.

24. But the mighty subjects which engaged the maturity of Augustine assured form a secondary place in his stylistic economy. While we of today, with our different tastes, are offended by some of the devices he employs, we must admit

them subordinate to the march of his thought, even when they pall upon us most, and frequently they present that thought in a texture which strikes us as hauntingly beautiful. The language of the Latin Bible, particularly of the Latin Psalter, enters here—that acquisition of Augustine so tardy in his intellectual development, yet so powerful an instrument in his delicate hands for profound emotional suggestion.

25. The most striking fact about the style of Augustine is the richness of viewpoint it reflects. Even in its most emotional flights a passion for truth controls it, a philosophical anxiety to express every element in its proper relation to the universal; an everlasting effort to phrase all things in their exact place in God's scheme. Augustine would have been far more attractive to us, had he not been so careful; if the subjective had only found occasional play amid his universal caution. But this theocentric consciousness conditions his style throughout, and gives even his *Confessions*, despite all their passion, an impersonal, objective tone. It is also the secret, however, of the exalted heights which he reaches, the source of some of the sublimest passages resident in the traditions of the West.

26. A final feature of Augustine's style, which no summary of it can ignore, is its adaptability to the person or persons whom he addresses. His *Sermons*, though extemporized, never lose sight of the lay audience for which they are chiefly intended and of the love of flowery devices so strong in uncultured minds. His *Letters* too are remarkable for their consistent effort to reach the cultural level of the recipient. The *City of God* is cast in a brilliance of form calculated to appeal to those best capable of grasping its profound argument.

27. The appropriateness of the style of the *Confessions* is not obvious at first glance; there is so much in them reflecting the rhetoric of the schools and so much that clearly ignores that rhetoric. Parallelisms abound and more than abound, at least to our standards of taste. Word-play and repetition are everywhere. Other devices of sound are frequent throughout. But the sentence structure and the word order, as a

whole, exhibit an informality, an arbitrariness almost, which is strange to the practices of rhetoric in his day, while the constant infiltration of Biblical quotations is an added violation of unity of style as the rhetors conceived it. But the *Confessions* are first and foremost a prayer. God is the auditor whom Augustine has first and chiefly in mind, and, after God, only those friends of his who could follow the informalities of his prayer. The features of the contemporary culture abound in his work, therefore, but the freedom of prayer is its outstanding and appropriate characteristic.

V. SOME STYLISTIC DEVICES IN THE CONFESSIONS

28. The following is a list of some of the favorite devices used by Augustine in the *Confessions*. It does not pretend to be exhaustive,⁹ but the definitions¹⁰ and illustrations it includes, together with references made to this list in the notes, may serve to give some accurate impressions of the style of the *Confessions*.

29. **Adjective substantive abstract.** An idea properly adjectival is raised to substantive rank as an abstract noun. *Conf.* III, 4, 7, *immortalitatem sapientiae*.

30. **Alliteration.** The recurrence of the same initial letter or letters in succeeding words. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, *Reddis debita nulli debens, donas debita nihil perdens*.

31. **Anadiplosis.** Cf. *Geminatio* below.

32. **Antimetathesis.** The repetition of the same word in a sentence with a change of meaning. *Conf.* I, 13, 20, *tenere cogebar Aeneae nescio cuius errores* (travels), *oblitus errorum* (religious aberrations) *meorum*.

⁹ A definitive treatment of the style of the *Confessions* is scheduled to be published in *The Catholic University of America Patristic Studies*, in June of 1931, by the Rev. Clement L. Hrdlicka, O.S.B., of St. Procopius College, Lisle, Illinois.

¹⁰ The definitions are based upon J. M. Campbell's *The Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Style of the Sermons of St. Basil the Great*, Washington, 1922, and upon Sister M. Inviolata Barry's *St. Augustine the Orator*, Washington, 1924. For the theory of style in Late Latin, cf. Norden, *Die Antike Kunstprosa*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1922, 573-624.

33. **Antonomasia.** The designation of a person by one of his qualities or accomplishments. *Conf.* IV, 2, 2, **diligentibus vanitatem et quaerentibus mendacium.**

34. **Asyndeton.** The ellipsis of grammatical connectives to obtain energy of style and staccato emphasis. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, **Summe, optime, potentissime, omnipotentissime, misericordissime, etc.**

35. **Chiasmus.** Two or more successive clauses wherein the succession of words in the first clause is reversed in the second and the succession of words in the second is reversed in the third, etc. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, (with repetitive paronomasia) **opera mutas nec mutas consilium.**

36. **Epanaphora.** The repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of two or more successive clauses. *Conf.* I, 1, 1, **Magnus es, domine, . . . magna virtus tua . . .**

37. **Geminatio.** The repetition, either immediately or after an interval, of the same word or phrase. *Conf.* I, 1, 1, **Et laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae . . . Et tamen laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae.**

38. **Hendiadys.** The placing on an equal grammatical plane of two expressions, one of which is logically subordinate to the other. *Conf.* III, 11, 19, **ex fide et spiritu = ex spiritu fidei.**

39. **Hyperbaton.** A transposition of a word (or words) from its natural position either for emphasis or for elegant affectation. *Conf.* II, 2, 4, **cum accepit in me sceptrum et totas manus ei dedi vesania libidinis.**

40. **Oxymoron (paradox).** An expression self-contradictory when separated from its context. *Conf.* II, 2, 2, **superba deiectione et inquieta lassitudine.**

41. **Parison.** Successive clauses having the same general structure. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, (with epanaphora and paradox) **numquam novus, numquam vetus.**

42. **Parechesis.** A similarity in the sound of words of different roots plus a dissimilarity of sense. *Conf.* III, 1, 1, **Veni Carthaginem, et circumstrepebat me undique sartago flagitiosorum amorum.**

43. **Paronomasia.** A similarity in the sound of words of the same root, plus a dissimilarity of sense. *Conf.* II, 3, 7, *Quid dignum est vituperatione nisi vitium? Ego ne vituperarer, vitiosior fiebam.*

44. **Pleonasm.** The joining of several words or phrases which have about the same meaning. *Conf.* III, 4, 8, *ut diligerem et quaererem et adsequerem et tenerem atque amplexarer.*

45. **Polyptoton.** A repetition of the same word in different cases, either directly or after an interval. *Conf.* IX, 11, 28, (with paronomasia) *ut coniuncta terra amborum coniugum terra tegetur.*

46. **Polysyndeton.** The artistic multiplication of connectives. *Conf.* VIII, 6, 15, *Quam legere coepit unus eorum et mirari et accendi et inter legendum meditari.*

47. **Repetitive paronomasia.** The rhetorical repetition of the same word in the same sense. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, *aut quid dicit aliquis, cum de te dicit?*

48. **Rhetorical question.** A question asked for effect rather than information. *Conf.* I, 4, 4, *et quis habet quicquam non tuum?*

49. **Zeugma.** An adjective made to modify, or a verb to govern or be governed by, two nouns with one of which it is logically connected and with the other of which it is connected only by an extension of meaning. *Conf.* I, 6, 8, *Itaque iactabam et membra et voces.*

VI. NOTES ON THE VOCABULARY OF THE CONFESSIONS

50. In the period of four hundred and fifty years that separates the *Confessions* from the masterpieces of Cicero, Latin, like any living tongue, experienced an evolution in its vocabulary. This evolution is particularly marked in the Christian writers, whose language is permeated with words introduced into or developed within Latin itself to give adequate expression to the doctrines and ideas of Christianity. If we except this special Christian vocabulary, however, it is

really surprising how relatively few striking innovations in vocabulary are to be found in the carefully written works of highly cultured Christian authors of the Late Empire like St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. These men in their language and style reflect very clearly the Ciceronian tradition of their age.

51. All words occurring in the present Selections are listed and defined in the Vocabulary at the end of the book. An indication here, however, of the more important elements that have entered directly or indirectly into the composition of St. Augustine's vocabulary may serve to give the student a more concrete and discerning appreciation of the divergences of the word-content in the *Confessions* and in other Christian Classics from the norms of Ciceronian and Caesarian prose. The elements mentioned may be grouped conveniently under two heads: general innovations in the Latin vocabulary, and special innovations introduced by or under the influence of Christianity.

General Innovations

52. **The employment in prose of poetical words and phrases.** This practice, already initiated by Livy, who borrowed from Vergil, was continued without restraint by subsequent prose writers of Silver and Late Latin. Horace and Vergil were the schoolbooks of succeeding generations and left an indelible stamp on Silver and Late Latin prose and verse. This merging of the vocabulary of prose and poetry was promoted actively also by the stylistic tendencies dominant in the schools of rhetoric under the Empire.

53. **The employment of archaic words.** Sallust and Varro already reveal a marked fondness for archaic words and expressions, and we meet this again in Tacitus, an imitator of Sallust, but especially in Fronto, Gellius, and Apuleius, who were avowed archaists. Even in Augustine's own age, we find men like Symmachus drawing materials from the old comic poets and Sallust. Through the efforts of the archaists a number of old words were put back into circulation.

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