

Chapter 8

Augustine

St. Augustine (354-430) was a Doctor of the Church and bishop of Hippo (North Africa). Perhaps more than any other theologian, with the possible exception of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), he profoundly shaped the form of theology in both Catholicism and Protestantism. Augustine's theology, like his life, has upsides and downsides. A complete discussion of his life and theology could occupy a lifetime. What we can have here is the briefest of outlines.

Early Life - We know a great deal about Augustine's early life from his own writings - *The Confessions, Retractions and Letters*. He was born November 13, 354 in the small town of Thagaste in North Africa (Algeria). His mother Monica was a devout Christian and his father Patricius was a pagan until just before his death. He had a brother and at least one sister. Monica was a Christian, but Augustine was not baptized until age 33.

With great difficulty his parents scraped together enough money for a good education - first in Thagaste, then Madaura and finally Carthage. This education focused on the Latin classics - Virgil, Cicero, etc., but did not include philosophy or science. At the age of eighteen, while a student in Carthage, he took a concubine with whom he lived for fifteen years. In 373, she bore him a son, Adeodatus.

A Moment of Conversion - In Carthage, at the age of nineteen, while reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, he felt a strong desire for wisdom. In this search, he first turned to Scripture but found it unscholarly and he felt that the OT portrayed a God of wrath unlike the God of Jesus. Next he turned to the Manichees, who claimed to be Christians, but also rejected the OT. Following their founder Mani, they took a Gnostic view of the world in which the power of Good was in constant conflict with the power of Evil. Thus, for Augustine, their explanation of evil within this dualistic philosophy "solved" the problem of evil better than trying to explain how a gracious God could allow evil.

Early Teaching Career - After his formal education Augustine became a professor of rhetoric, first in Thagaste (375), then Carthage (376) and in 383 to Rome. There through influential Manichean friends, he was appointed professor of rhetoric in Milan, the seat of the Western imperial court.

It was in Milan that Augustine became disenchanted with Manichaeism and came under the influence of St. Ambrose, that same bishop of Milan, (we can recall from Chapter 6), who had also influenced Theodosius I, the emperor who made Christianity the religion of the Empire.

Neoplatonism - Ambrose, as noted in Chapter 7, had a great influence on Augustine. Ambrose had been elected by the people of Milan while he was an un-baptized, government official. Ambrose was a classically educated aristocrat. Philosophically, he was within a school of Christian Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism reflected the thought of

Plotinus (205-70) who in his interpretation of Plato spoke of three substances: 1) the “One” - the source of all being- , 2) the “Mind” emanating from and an image of the “One” and containing the eternal “ideas” on which the world was modeled and 3) the “World-Soul” which enlivens the world through rational principles which it receives through its generation from the “Mind”. Neoplatonism did not teach that the world was evil as did the Gnostics. Rather than evil being an eternal opposing spiritual force, for Plotinus evil was equivalent to “nonbeing” - a privation of good, rather than some thing.

For Plotinus all things sprung from the “One” and thus were linked together in a hierarchy of interconnected being. Given this unity of all being, through a study of nature, a person can come to the contemplation of “The Mind” and eventually “The One”. Even in this outline form, it is possible to see how this philosophical system could be integrated with such Christian beliefs as the Trinity and Christian practices like meditation and natural theology.

These philosophical notions strongly influenced the intellectual Ambrose and he used them in his battle against the Arians and the Manichees. Through Ambrose, Neoplatonism would also become an intellectual factor within the later theology of Augustine. In addition, Ambrose’s command of rhetoric and the use of allegorical readings of Scripture (a la Origen) made him a powerful and popular preacher. The sermons of Ambrose were a significant factor in Augustine’s eventual decision to accept baptism.

The Beginnings of a New Life - In 384, Augustine’s mother, Monica, came to Milan. Interested in preparing her son for a successful career, she insisted that Augustine’s concubine of fifteen years be dismissed and planned a socially advantageous marriage for her son. However, in the two years before the marriage, Augustine took up with another woman.

As time went on, the progressive influence of Ambrose, Neoplatonism, a new knowledge of monasticism through reading Athanasius’s *Life of Anthony* and the moral exhortations of St. Paul, especially in Romans 13:13-14, convinced Augustine to take on a new life. In 386, he retired from teaching, broke off his marriage plans and retired with his mother, son, brother and some friends to a villa near Lake Como to prepare himself for baptism through a simple life of prayer and contemplation.

On Holy Saturday night, in 387, he was baptized by Ambrose. His plans to return to his home town to take up a monastic-like life of prayer and philosophical study were temporarily interrupted by the death of his mother and his son in 388. Later, he did set up his “monastery” with a community of educated men in Thagaste.

Augustine Becomes Bishop of Hippo - In one of those odd historical moments, in 391 Augustine took a trip to the seaport city of Hippo to recruit a new member for his monastery. While attending church at the cathedral, he was acclaimed by the congregation, forcibly taken before bishop Valerius and ordained a priest on the spot.

Thus recruited, Augustine moved his monastic community to Hippo and began the life of a cleric, preaching and teaching. In 393 he was called on to address a council of African bishops. As his fame spread, in 395 the bishop of Hippo, Valerius, chose him as his co-adjutor. Three years later, Augustine succeeded him as Bishop of Hippo. He would remain there until his death in 430.

Unlike his fellow African bishops, who were married and often lead lives of ostensible luxury, Augustine ran his residence as a monastery and required his priests to dedicate themselves to a life of poverty, celibacy and obedience to a strict rule of religious life.

Three Great Controversies - Augustine was involved in a great many controversies, but three stand out - his battles against the Manichees, the Donatists, and the Pelagians. We shall consider them in turn.

Manichaeism - After his disillusionment with Manichaeism, in 388 and 389 (prior to his ordination) he wrote two treatises - *On Genesis Against the Manichees* and *On the Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life*. His references to the Manichees continued throughout his lifetime in various works and speeches.

As we noted above, the Manichees had a dualistic view of the world and taught that the world was created by the powers of evil. Augustine held for a good Creator who creates a good world. While Augustine considered virginity a higher calling, marriage itself was considered good in contrast to the Manichaean elect who abstained from many material (evil) things including sexual contact. Procreation was to involve one in creating evil.

For Augustine, evil was not the result of creation, but came from the perverse will of mankind in turning from the will of God. Many commentators, however, have seen remnants of Manichean thought from Augustine's early life, especially in the area of sexuality and his theory of the transmission of original sin through sexual intercourse.

Donatism - As seen in early chapters, the Donatist Schism has plagued the Church since the time of Constantine in the early fourth century and would linger on into the seventh century. Donatism had arisen in a rigorist Christian sect in North Africa which claimed to be a Church of the elect, pure and free from sin. They reacted to apostates or "traitors", especially those who had handed over the Scriptures to Roman officials during the persecution of Diocletian in 303.

The controversy came to a head over the consecration of Caecilian as of Carthage in 312 by one Felix who was accused of being a traitor. In the theology of the Donatists no sinful clergy could validly administer the sacraments, especially Baptism and Ordination. They reacted by consecrating a man named Majorinus as a rival bishop of Carthage and Majorinus was succeeded by Donatus who became the leader of the sect.

An appeal to Rome in 313 was decided against the Donatists as were appeals to the

Council of Arles in 314 and to Emperor Constantine in 316. Nevertheless the Donatists prospered and in Augustine's time were a rival majority with churches in most cities.

Against the Donatists, Augustine argued that the sacraments belong to Christ and the Church and are not dependent for their validity on the holiness of the ministers. Furthermore, no rebaptism was possible and thus could not be required of repentant apostates as the Donatists claimed. Augustine also argued that the Church is a community of saints and sinners, not a small group of "sinless" elect.

Augustine's views gained the support of the Emperor Honorius who in 405 issued the *Edict of Unity* which ordered the dissolution of the Donatist Church. A persecution ensued, supported by Augustine. Augustine argued in favor of state coercion in this matter from several points of view. These included his view of God in the OT chastising his people to bring them back to him and his estimation of the low moral status of most people so that only fear could motivate them to return to the true Church. This unfortunate "reasoning" of Augustine would later be used to legitimate the use of force against heretics, especially in the Inquisition and The Crusades. This was one of the major "downsides" of Augustine's thought.

Pelagianism - Pelagius (350-425) taught in Rome until 409 when he came to Carthage. As we noted in Chapter 7, Jerome and Augustine joined forces in opposing the views of Pelagius. Pelagius was reacting to Manichaeism, a Gnostic theology that taught that matter was evil and humans were formed by "rulers of Darkness" and thus procreation is of demonic origin.

Pelagius stressed the goodness of mankind and his freedom and ability to do good and avoid evil. This God-given freedom is actually a "grace" and therefore no special supernatural grace is needed for humans to do good. He seemed to assert that humans had the power to save themselves by good works without any supernatural help. Later disciples like Celestius, would be condemned for teaching that infants were sinless prior to baptism. This was in direct contradiction to Augustine's opinion that all humans are born in original sin and that unbaptized babies who died went to Hell. In 413 Jerome attacked Pelagius and, in 415, Augustine attacked these ideas in his treatise *On Nature and Grace*.

Augustine had also reacted negatively to Manicheism, but admitted the fallen state of mankind and the need of God's grace for humans to choose the good. For Augustine, human nature was not evil in itself, but is deeply flawed by original sin.

Pelagius moved to the Holy Land, where he got a friendlier reception - two synods declared him orthodox. Augustine, however, kept on the attack. In 415 he wrote an anti-Pelagian work entitled *On Nature and Grace*. Augustine also helped organize a synod of North African bishops in 416 which condemned Pelagius and requested a judgment from Pope Innocent. Innocent excommunicated Pelagius and Celestius in 417 and this excommunication was upheld later by Pope Zosimus.

Predestination - For Augustine, human nature is so radically disordered by sin that only God's grace can empower our freedom to respond to God. Mankind is free to sin, but only God's grace can empower them to choose the good. However, this saving grace of God is seen as irresistible and thus it is difficult to see how human beings are truly free in their response to God. The elect are predestined from all eternity to receive saving grace. Why do some receive this irresistible gift? For Augustine, that is the mystery of predestination. Catholic theology, to this day, has never solved this problem.

As we noted Augustine is not only influential in Catholic theology, but in Protestant as well. Luther was an Augustinian monk and he shared Augustine's view that human nature is deeply flawed by sin. Not quite a Manichean, but certainly not a Pelagian, Luther taught that only God's grace can save us and good works in themselves go for nothing. Mankind is not the new creation of St. Paul, but a saved sinner. Calvin also took up the notion of predestination and perhaps carried Augustine's thought to its logical extension.

Original Sin - For better or for worse, Augustine coined the term "original sin". Pelagius had denied that infants could be guilty of any sin and so the baptism of infants was unnecessary. In part to defend infant baptism, Augustine held that the guilt of Adam's sin was passed on to all his descendants through the *libido* (Lat. "lust") involved in the sexual act of procreation.

Because of the sin of Adam the entire human race is a *massa damnata* (Lat. "condemned mass) whom God in His justice could have rightly damned for all eternity. However, through Christ some receive the grace of salvation through faith and in baptism. In this view, all un-baptized persons, including infants, are damned to eternal punishment.

Seven hundred years later, St. Anselm would consider this treatment of un-baptized children too harsh for a loving God and thus he proposed the notion of Limbo - not heaven, but a place of happiness. The new Catechism of the Catholic Church makes no mention of Limbo. We have decided to leave the issue and the children in the good "hands" of God.

Great Literary Achievements - Augustine wrote hundreds of important books, treatises and pamphlets, not to mention his famous sermons. However, two of his works stand out - *The City of God* and his *Confessions*.

In *The City of God*, Augustine contrasts the City of Man whose inhabitants live under the power of sin and only pursue earthly goods and pleasures to the City of God which encompasses those elect who place their hope in the things of God, rather than the things of man. These two cities, however, coexist and are not discernable in ordinary life. They are not two opposing entities, but two opposing attitudes or relationships of humans to God. The Church on earth is one of saints and sinners and thus not to be identified with the City of God.

This great work consists of twenty-two books and took thirteen years to write. Throughout Western history it has served as a reminder that all human history is a preparation for and anticipation of God's revelation in Jesus.

Confessions - It has been hailed as one of the great works of Western culture. It is an autobiography that searches the depths of human subjectivity - emotions, sin, sexuality, temptations, religious experience, etc. The first nine chapters examine his life up to the time of his conversion. The tenth covers his life up to the time of writing the Confessions (397-400).

Legacy - Like any great person, Augustine's legacy is mixed. His great theological struggles against the Manichees, Donatists and Pelagians point the way for Christian theology for centuries to come and his views are still with us today.

While rejecting the dualism of Gnosticism and Manicheanism with their dualistic view of creation - matter evil, spirit good - Augustine's reaction to Pelagius gave Christian theology a negative view of human nature and human sexuality in particular. His notion of original sin had to be modified in later theology to enhance the theological view of human existence and human freedom.

Chapter 9

Pope Leo I

With this chapter, our historical inquiry begins to consider the evolution of the position and power of the papacy. Sociologists and historians will see this as a "natural" evolution in structure for an organization that was becoming large and geographically wide-spread and thus needed a center or principle of internal unity. History had shown that Councils often could not definitively settle theological disputes (Arianism) and that at times of crisis a single voice of authority in matters of faith would be necessary.

Before Leo I - As we shall see, the reign of Pope Leo (440-61) was certainly pivotal in the history of the papacy. Leo has been called "The Great" because of his personality, education and achievements. Before Leo there is certainly no unanimity on the issue of the bishop of Rome as having supreme power - either teaching or jurisdictional - over the entire Church. The real power in the first three centuries was held by the bishops of the East centered in the ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Furthermore, Constantine, not Sylvester I, called the first ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 to which Sylvester was not even invited and the vast majority of the bishops at the Council were Eastern. The same conditions held for the Council of Constantinople in 381.

There were, however, early signs of a trend toward the establishment of Rome as the primary See in Christendom. In 185 Irenaeus had written (*Against Heresies*) that all doctrine came from the apostles and that the bishops of Rome are in direct succession

from the apostles Peter and Paul. Victor I (189-198) had enforced the Roman date for the celebration of Easter using the threat of excommunication for non-compliance. And before the reign of Leo, Roman bishops like Damasus (366-84), Siricius (384-99) and Innocent I (401-17) had attempted to give the bishop of Rome a high profile.

Damasus claimed primacy for Rome based on the Lord's promise to Peter in the Gospel of Matthew. He seems to be the first to refer to Rome as the "Apostolic See". At synod in Rome in 382 he secured a pronouncement that Rome was superior in primacy to Constantinople.

Siricius had taken up the habit of issuing "decretals" in the manner of imperial edicts. Decretals were responses to various questions about law or theology. Siricius made claim for the primacy of the Bishop of Rome with certain demands directed toward the whole Church, e.g. he demanded that no bishop be consecrated without the permission of Rome.

Innocent I claimed supreme authority for the "Apostolic See". He demanded that all disputes in the Church be settled by him. In 404 he restored John Chrysostom as patriarch of Constantinople, in 417 he excommunicated Pelagius and cooperating with the emperor he issued decrees against the Donatists.

Leo and Papal Power - Beginning with his consecration in 440, Leo set out on a policy of making Rome the center of Christendom and establishing the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. For Leo, Peter was "the Rock" on which the Church was built and the popes were personifications of Peter. In this role, the popes were to be seen as having universal power over the Church as supreme rulers, teachers and judges.

To achieve his goals, Leo used not only his interpretation of the role of Peter in the Gospels, but he also used commanding personality and every secular means at his disposal to establish the power of the Roman See over the rest of Church. He first worked to establish his authority with the dioceses around him and then began to exercise his authority in various disputes in the dioceses of Spain and North Africa and with the aid of the Western Emperor, Valentinian III, he secured his authority in Gaul (France) and finally the emperor granted him full jurisdiction over the Western Church.

In the political vacuum caused by the crumbling of the Western Roman Empire, Leo became a real political power in Rome. In 452 he saved Rome by dissuading Attila the Hun from sacking Rome. Later in 455, he confronted the Vandals and at least averted a severe sack of the city of Rome.

Leo I and the Council of Chalcedon (451) - Leo's goals were cemented and his fame established with his role in the Council of Chalcedon. This Council has been recognized as the most important of the first four ecumenical councils. It settled a number of difficult Christological issues by declaring that in Jesus there is one divine person and two natures, human and divine, in hypostatic union.

This formulation avoided the idea of two persons in Christ (Adoptionism and Nestorianism) or that the human nature was subsumed into the divine nature (Monophysitism, Apollinarianism, Eutychianism). The theory of the hypostatic union was developed by Cyril of Alexandria and finally accepted by the Council of Chalcedon.

Chalcedon cannot be understood fully without a complete review of the theological discussions in the century preceding it and a review of the Council of Ephesus (431). Here we can only give a brief outline of the nature of the theological crisis involved.

The central question was one of Christology. How are the humanity and divinity of Jesus related? As various opposing answers were being proposed in the great schools of Alexandria and Antioch (see above), a monk of Constantinople, Eutyches was called on the carpet for his views. At a synod he was found in error by the patriarch Flavian. The matter did not end there.

Eutyches' major supporter, Dioscoros, the patriarch of Alexandria was determined to embarrass Flavian. He persuaded the Emperor to call a council to settle the dispute. In 431 a Council was held at Ephesus. At this Council the theology of the Alexandrian school won out over that of Antioch. Eutyches and Dioscoros were defeated. Nestorius, who supported the Antiochean theology and would not accept the Alexandrian formulation of Mary as "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*), and thus accept the divine nature, was condemned as a heretic and exiled to Egypt.

The theological disagreement did not end with Ephesus. Another council was called in 449, again at Ephesus. At this council it was Dioscoros who presided, by appointment of the Emperor. Dioscoros attacked Flavian and deposed him, while he persuaded the bishops to accept Eutyches' formulation of the relationship of the two natures of Christ: "Two natures before the union, after the union, one nature". In this formulation the human nature of Jesus was completely absorbed by the divine.

Meanwhile, Leo had studied the matter and had sided with Flavian. He wrote his famous *Tome* (*Epistola Dogmatica*) which supported Flavian and taught that in Jesus there was indeed one person and two natures. Dioscoros refused to let the *Tome* be read at the Council. Leo condemned the Council and history has dubbed it the "Robber Council". Its findings, however, were upheld by the emperor Theodosius II. When the emperor died in 450 and new Council was called - it opened on October 8, 451 at Chalcedon. Of the some 600 bishops in attendance, all were from the East, but two and two Roman papal legates.

Leo's *Tome* was read which condemned Eutyches and affirmed the hypostatic union. The decrees of the "Robber Council" were annulled, Eutyches was again condemned and Dioscoros deposed. The council fathers then made this famous statement about Leo's *Tome*: "This is the faith of the Fathers and of the Apostles. This we all believe. Peter has spoken through Leo...anathema to him who teaches otherwise...". This was a grand

step in the promotion of papal supremacy.

Appendix

Turning Points in the Spread of Christianity

1. 40's on -- Acceptance of the Gentiles without demanding they become Jews first.
2. 40's and 50's - The work of Paul, a Diaspora Jew
3. 100-200 - The development of Church authority structure
4. 70 --Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the end of Christianity as a Jewish sect
5. 312 - The Edict of Milan - the toleration and promotion of Christianity by Constantine
6. 325 - The Council of Nicea - the Hellenization of Christian thought and the beginnings of a Christian creed. The divinity of Jesus defined.
7. 350 - 450 - The beginnings of monasticism
8. 380 - Christianity officially adopted as the religion of the empire - Theodosius I
9. 451 - The Council of Chalcedon - Jesus defined as one divine person with two natures (divine and human).
10. 440-461 - reign of Pope Leo I. The beginning of the modern papacy.