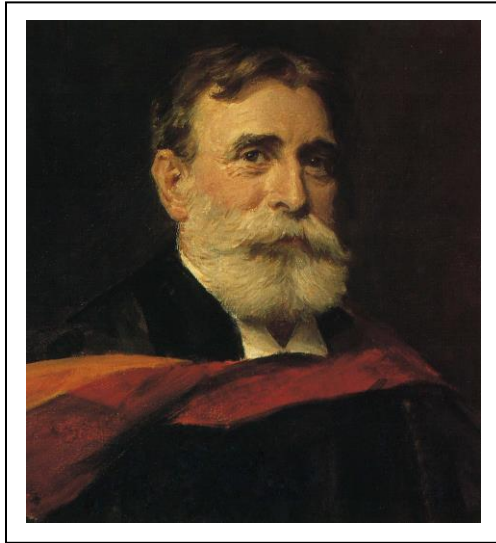


# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Augustine and His "Confessions"

BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD



THERE is probably no man of the ancient world, of whose outward and inward life alike we possess such full and instructive knowledge as of Augustine's. His extraordinarily voluminous literary product teems with information about himself: and the writings of his contemporaries and successors provide at least the usual quota of allusions. But in his case these are supplemented by two remarkable books. For the whole earlier portion of his experiences, up to and including the great crisis of his conversion, we have from his own hand a work of unique self-revelation, in which he becomes something more than his own Boswell.

And for the rest of his career, comprising the entire period of his activity as a leader in the Church, we have an exceptionally sober and trustworthy narrative from the hand of a pupil and friend who enjoyed a close intimacy with him for an unbroken stretch of nearly forty years. He is accordingly the first of the Christian fathers, the dates of whose birth and death we can exactly determine, and whose entire development we can follow from—as we say—the cradle to the grave.

The simple facts of his uneventful external life are soon told. He was born of mixed heathen and Christian parentage, in the small African municipality of Thagaste, on the thirteenth of November, 354. Receiving a good education, he was trained to the profession of rhetorician and practiced that profession successively at Thagaste, Carthage, Rome and Milan, until his conversion, which took place at the last-named city in the late summer of 386. Baptized at Easter, 387, he returned to Africa in the autumn of 388, and established at his native town a sort of religio-philosophical retreat for himself and his friends. Here he lived in learned retirement until early in 391, when he was ordained a presbyter at Hippo—the sacred office being thrust upon him against his will, as it was later upon his followers, John Calvin and John Knox. Five years later (shortly before Christmas, 395), he was made coadjutor-bishop of Hippo, and from the first sustained practically the entire burden of its administration. He continued bishop of that second-rate sea-side town, until his death on the 28th of August, 430, meanwhile having

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revolutionized the Church of Africa by his ceaseless labors and illuminated the world by his abundant writings. In this humble framework was lived a life the immediate products of which seemed washed out at once by the flood of disasters which instantly overwhelmed the African provinces, and with them the African Church which it had regenerated; but the influence of which is, nevertheless, not yet exhausted after a millennium and a half of years.

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## I.—POSSIDIUS' PORTRAIT OF AUGUSTINE

The *Life* by Possidius is much briefer than we could have wished, but it presents a clear outline of Augustine's life drawn by the hand of one who worked in the full consciousness that he was handing down to posterity the record of a career which was of the first importance to the world. Augustine's literary activity by means of which he freed the Church from her enemies and built her up in the knowledge and service of God; Augustine's labors for the Church's peace by means of which he healed the schisms that divided the African community; Augustine's regeneration of the clergy of Africa through his monastic training-school: these are the points on which Possidius lays the greatest stress. In the meanwhile, however, he does much more than sum up for us what Augustine was doing for the Church and the world; though in doing this, he was speaking with a wisdom beyond his own knowledge, inasmuch as in a broader field than Africa Augustine has been a determining factor in precisely the matters here emphasized. He also paints for us a touchingly sincere portrait of the personality of his beloved master and enables us to see him at his daily work, submerged under superabundant labors, but always able to lift his heart to God, and already enjoying his rest with Him even in the midst of the clangor of the warfare he was ever waging for His Church and His truth.

Even as a presbyter, we read, he began to reap the fruit of his labors:

"Alike at home and in the Church, he gave himself unstintedly to teaching and preaching the word of salvation with all confidence, in opposition to the heresies prevalent in Africa, especially to the Donatists, Manicheans and Pagans,—now in elaborated books, and again in unstudied sermons,—to the unspeakable admiration and delight of the Christians who as far as in them lay spread abroad his words. And thus, by God's help, the Catholic Church began to lift up its head in Africa, where it had long lain oppressed under luxuriating heresies, and especially under the Donatists, who had rebaptized the greater part of the people. And these books and tractates of his, flowing forth by the wonderful grace of God in the greatest profusion, instinct with sweet reasonableness and the authority of Holy Scripture, the heretics themselves, with the greatest ardor, vied with the Catholics in hearkening to, and moreover every one who wished and could do so

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brought stenographers and took notes even of what was spoken. Thus the precious doctrine and sweet odor of Christ was diffused throughout all Africa, and even the Church across the sea rejoiced when she heard it,—for, even as when one member suffers all the members suffer with it, so when one member is exalted all the members rejoice with it.”\*

The labors he thus began as a presbyter, we are told, he but completed as bishop, the Lord crowning his work for the peace of the Church with the most astonishing success:

“And more and more, by the help of Christ, was increased and multiplied the unity of peace and the fraternity of the Church of God.... And all this good, as I have said, was both begun and brought to a completion by this holy man, with the aid of our bishops.”†

But alas! while man may propose it is God that disposes. Scarcely had this hard-won *pax ecclesiae* been attained, when the Vandal invasion came and with it the ruin of the land. As the fabric he had built up fell about him, the great builder passes away also, and Possidius draws for us the picture of his last days with a tenderness of touch which only a true friend could show:‡

“We talked together very frequently and discussed the tremendous judgment of God enacted under our eyes, saying, ‘Just art Thou, O God, and Thy judgment is righteous.’ Mingling our grief and groans and tears we prayed the Father of mercies and God of all consolation to vouchsafe to help us in our trouble. And it chanced on a day as we sat at the table with him and conversed, that he said, ‘Bear in mind that I am asking God in this our hour of tribulation, either to deign to deliver this town from the enemy that is investing it, or, if that seems not good to Him, to strengthen His servants to submit themselves to His will, and in any event to take me away from this world to Himself.’ Under his instruction it became therefore our custom thereafter, and that of all connected with us, and of those who were in the town, to join with him in such a prayer to God Almighty. And behold, in the third month of the siege, he took to his bed, afflicted with a fever; and thus fell into his last illness. Nor did the Lord disappoint His servant of the fruit of his prayer.... Thus did this holy man, his path prolonged by the Divine bounty for the advantage and happiness of the Church, live seventy and six years, almost forty of which were spent in the priesthood and bishopric. He had been accustomed to say to us in familiar conversation, that no baptized person, even

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\* *Vita*, etc., ch. vii.

† Ch. xiii.

‡ Chs. xxviii, xxix, xxxi.

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though he were a notable Christian and a priest, should depart from the body without fitting and sufficient penitence. So he looked to this in his last sickness, of which he died. For he ordered that those few Psalms of David called Penitential should be written out, and the sheets containing them hung upon the wall where he could see them as he lay in bed, in his weakness; and as he read them he wept constantly and abundantly. And that he might not be disturbed, he asked of us who were present, some ten days before he departed from the body, that no one should come in except at those hours when the physicians visited him or when food was brought him. This wish was, of course, observed, and he thus had all his time free for prayer. Unintermittently, up to the outbreak of this last illness, he had zealously and energetically preached in the church the Word of God, with sanity of mind and soundness of judgment. And now, preserved to a good old age, sound in all the members of his body, and with unimpaired sight and hearing, and with us, as it is written, standing by and looking on and uniting with him in prayer, he fell asleep with his fathers: and we offered a sacrifice to God for the due disposition of his body and buried him."

His library, the biography proceeds, he left to the Church; and his own books, who that reads them can fail to read in them the manner of man he was? "But I think," he adds,—

"But I think that those could profit more from him who could hear and see him speaking as he stood in the church, especially if they were not ignorant of his walk among men. For he was not merely a learned scribe in the kingdom of heaven, bringing out from his treasury things new and old, and one of those merchantmen who, having found a pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it; but he was also of those to whom it is written, 'So speak and so do,' and of whom the Saviour says, 'Whosoever shall do and teach men thus, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'"

What a testimony is this to Augustine's daily life before his companions! And how pathetic is this companion's parting request of his readers,—

"Pray with me and for me, that I may both in this world become the emulator and imitator of this man with whom for almost forty years, by God's grace, I lived in intimacy and happiness, without any unpleasant disagreement, and in the future may enjoy with him the promises of God Almighty."

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\* Ch. xxxi.

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## II.—THE “CONFESSIONS” OF AUGUSTINE

It is, however, to his own *Confessions*, of course, that we will turn if we would know Augustine through and through. This unique book was written about 397–400, say about a dozen years after Augustine’s conversion and shortly after his ordination as bishop of Hippo,—at a time when he was already thoroughly formed in both life and thought. There is laid bare to us in it a human heart with a completeness of self-revelation probably unparalleled in literature.

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Jean Jacques Rousseau, to be sure, claims this distinction for his own *Confessions*. “I have entered on a performance,” says he, “which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.” Rousseau has at least the merit of perceiving what many have not recognized, that his book cannot be considered to belong to the same class of literature with Augustine’s. But what we wish now to emphasize is that even as an unveiling of the soul of a man, which it makes its sole object, Rousseau’s performance falls far behind Augustine’s searching pages, although, as we shall see, self-revelation was in these merely an incidental effect. The truth is, Rousseau did not see deeply enough and could not command a prospect sufficiently wide to paint all that is in man, even all that is in such a man as he essayed to portray. Quite apart from the interval that separates the two souls depicted, Rousseau’s conception of self-revelation rose little above exhibiting himself with his clothes off. To his prurient imagination nakedness, certainly unadorned and all the better if it were unadorning, appeared the most poignant possible revelation of humanity. It seemed to him, essential scandal-monger that he was, that he needed but to publish on the housetop all his “adventures” to enable the whole world to say of him in the Roman proverb, *Ego te intus et in cute novi*; and he was only too pleased to believe that the world, on so seeing his inward disposition at least if not his outward life, would be convinced that it agreed well with “loose Natta’s.”\* He could feel no sympathy with Augustine’s cry, “I became a mighty puzzle to myself.”† The shallow self he knew only too well absorbed his entire attention and his one engagement was in presenting this self to the gaze of the public. What lay beneath the surface he passed by with the unconsciousness of an essentially frivolous nature.‡ No wonder that an air of insincerity hangs over the picture he has drawn. There will be few readers who will easily persuade themselves that what they read all happened, or happened as it is set down; they will rather be continually haunted with the suspicion that they are perusing not a veracious autobiography but a piccaroon novel. The interval that divides the *Confessions*

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\* PERSIUS, *Satt.*, III, 30.

† *Conf.*, IV, 4, 9: *factus eram ipse mihi magna quæstio*.

‡ JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, *Prose Works*, II, 261: “Rousseau cries, ‘I will bare my heart to you,’ and throwing open his waistcoat, makes us confidants of his dirty linen.”

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of Rousseau from the *Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane* is, in any case, narrower than that which separates it from the *Confessions* of Augustine.

It must be confessed, it is true, that, if not the sincerity, at least the trustworthiness of the portrait Augustine draws of himself also has not passed wholly unquestioned. It has of late become quite the mode, indeed, to remind us that the *Confessions* were written a dozen years after the conversion up to which their narrative leads; and that in the meanwhile the preceding period of darkness had grown over-black in Augustine's eyes, and as he looked back upon it through the intervening years he saw it in distorted form and exaggerated colors\* His is accordingly represented as "a prominent example of a tendency frequently found in religionists of an effusive type, to exaggerate their infirmities in order to enhance their merits in having escaped them, or by way of contrasting present attainment with former unworthiness, just as a successful merchant sometimes boasts that he began his career with only sixpence in his pocket."† We are warned, therefore, not to take his descriptions of his youthful errors and of his fruitless wanderings in search of truth at the foot of the letter. A recent writer, for example, condemns all current biographies of Augustine because, as he says, they "all are constructed on the perverse type which is followed by Augustine himself in his seductive *Confessions*," in which he "is sternly bent on magnifying his misdeeds." Blinded by "the glare of his new ideal," as leading ecclesiastic and theologian of the West, "his psychic perspective was foreshortened" and he hopelessly misrepresented his unregenerate youth. "The truth seems to be," we are told, "that the book is a kind of theological treatise and work of edification. The Bishop of Hippo takes the rhetorician as an 'awful example' of nature without God. To point his dogmatic antithesis of nature and grace, philosophy and Christianity, nothing could be more forceful than his own career painted as darkly

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\* See e.g., BOISSIER, *La Fin du Paganisme*, I, 293; HARNACK, *Monasticism and the Conf. of Augustine*, 132, 141; REUTER, *Augustinische Studien*, p. 4; LOOFS, *Herzog*<sup>3</sup>, 11, 260–261, and especially 266–267. Cf. also GOURDON, *Essai sur la Conversion de Saint Augustine*, Paris, 1900. R. SCHMID in an article entitled "Zur Bekehrungsgeschichte Augustins" in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1897, VII, pp. 80–96, has made the fact and extent of failure of the *Confessions* in trustworthiness the subject of a special study. No one doubts, he remarks, the subjective sincerity of the *Confessions*; and its objective trustworthiness can come into question only in minutiae. The conclusion at which he arrives is that only in two points are the *Confessions* open to correction in their representation. Augustine was not led to give up his professorship by his conversion, but these two things fell together only by accident; and he still wished after conversion for a comfortable life, an *otium cum dignitate*, and loved to teach. "Thus in reality there remains, so far as the *Confessions* do not correct themselves—that is, permit the history to be seen through the veil of later reflections thrown over it—very little over. But even a little is, here, much.... In the main matter, however, the *Confessions* remain in the right,—that it was a revolutionary inward experience, which brought him completely into the road on which he sought and found God and himself" (p. 96).

† See JOHN OWEN, *Evenings with the Sceptics*, II, 139.

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as conscience would permit.... But the fallacy of it all for us, reducing its value as a human document, is that Augustine examines his earlier life from a false point of view.”\*

Despite the modicum of truth resident in the recognition by the writer last quoted that the book is not formally an autobiography, but, as he terms it, “a kind of theological treatise and work of edification,” this whole representation is fundamentally wrong. The judgment that Augustine passed on the misdeeds not merely, but the whole course, of his youth was naturally essentially different at the time when he wrote his *Confessions* from what it had been during the life which is passed in review in them. He does not leave us to infer this—he openly declares it; or rather it is precisely this change of judgment which it is one of the chief purposes of the *Confessions* to signalize. We could hardly ask a man after he has escaped from what he has come to look upon as the sty to write of his mode of life in it from the point of view of one who loves to wallow in the mire. It is, however, something very like this that is suggested by our critics as the ideal of autobiographical narration. At least we read: “About the year 400, when the *Confessions* were written, Augustine had arrived at a most lofty conception of duty and life; he commits the usual and inevitable fallacy of taking this later standard back to illumine the ground of his early career. In the glare of his new ideal, actions which probably implied no moral resistance at the time they were performed, cast an appalling shadow.”† And again: “There is no trace in the *Confessions* that his conscience had anything to say at the time.”‡

Surely there is laid here a most unreasonable requirement upon the historian. We may or may not accord with the judgment that Augustine passes upon his early life. We may or may not consider that he who takes his knowledge of Augustine’s youth from the *Confessions* must guard himself from accepting from it also the judgment they pass on the course of that youth as well as on the separate events that entered into it. For example, we may or may not believe that Augustine, was right in attributing the passions of anger and jealousy manifesting themselves in infancy to the movements of inherent corruption derived from our first parents, or in representing the childish escapade of robbing a pear-tree as an exhibition of a pure love of evil, native in men as men. But any such differences of moral standpoint of which we may be conscious, between ourselves and the Augustine who wrote the *Confessions*, are one thing; and the trustworthiness of the record he has given us, whether of the external occurrences of his youth or of the inner movements of his soul during that period of restless search, which knew no rest because it had not yet found rest in God, is quite another thing. It is not merely the transparent sincerity of the *Confessions* which impresses every reader; it is the close and keen observation, the sound

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\* JOSEPH MCCABE, *St. Augustine and His Age*, pp. i, 24, 39, 41, 54, 69, 70, 195–198.

† MCCABE, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

‡ *Ibid.*, 41.

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and tenacious memory, the sane and searching analysis that equally characterize them. "Observation, indeed," says Harnack, with eminent justice, "is the strong point of Augustine.... What is characteristic never escapes him" — and that is especially true of the secret movements of the heart.\* The reader feels himself in the hands of a narrator not only whose will but whose capacity as well both to see and to tell the truth he cannot doubt. There is spread over the whole the evidence no more of the most absolute good faith than of the utmost care to distinguish between fact and opinion—between what really was and what the writer could wish had been. You may think "there is a morbid strain in the book"; you may accuse its author of "making a stage-play of his bleeding heart"; you may judge him "in many places overstrained, unhealthy, or even false."† All this will depend on the degree in which you feel yourself in sympathy with his standpoint. But "there is a look of intense reality on every page," as a careful student has put it;‡ and as you read you cannot doubt that here is not merely a sincere but a true record of the experiences of a soul, which you may—nay, must—trust as such without reserve.

It is important, however, in order that we may appraise the book properly, to apprehend somewhat more exactly than perhaps is common precisely what Augustine proposed to himself in it. It is inadequate to speak of it simply either broadly as an autobiography, or more precisely as a *vie intime*. Not to emphasize just here the decisive consideration that only nine of its thirteen books have any biographical content, it lies quite on the face of the narrative that even the biographical material provided in these nine books is not given with a purely biographical intent. Augustine is not the proper subject either of the work as a whole, or even of those portions of it in which his life-history is depicted. What he tells us about himself, full and rich and searching as it is, nevertheless is incidental to another end than self-portraiture, and is determined both in its selection and in its mode of treatment by this end. In sending a copy of the book, almost a generation later, to a distinguished and admiring friend who had asked him for it, he does indeed speak of it frankly as a mirror in which he himself could be seen; and, be it duly noted, he affirms that he is to be seen in this mirror truly, just as he was. "Accept," he writes to his correspondent\* — "accept the books of my Confessions which you have asked for. Behold me therein, that you may not praise me above what I am. Believe there not others about me, but me myself, and see by means of myself what I was in myself; and if there is anything in me that pleases you, praise with me there Him whom I wish to be praised for me,—for that One is not myself. Because it is He that made us and not we ourselves; nay,

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\* *Op. cit.*, pp. 128–131. Cf. also T. R. GLOVER, *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century*, p. 195.

† HARNACK, as cited, p. 132.

‡ A. F. WEST, *Roman Autobiography, Particularly Augustine's Confessions*, in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 46, p. 183 (April, 1901).

\* Letter 231 (§ 6), to Count Darius.



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we have destroyed ourselves, but He that made us has remade us. And when you find me there, pray for me that I be not defective but perfected.” Similarly in his *Retractations*,† he says simply that the first ten books were “written about himself”; but he does not fail to declare also of the whole thirteen that “they praise the just and good God with respect both of his evil and his good and excite the human intellect and affection toward Him.” This, he says, was their effect on himself as he wrote them, and this has been their effect on those that have read them.

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From such passages as these we perceive how Augustine uniformly thought of his *Confessions*—not as a biography of himself, but, as we have commended a rather blind commentator for seeing, rather as a book of edification, or, if you will, a theological treatise. His actual subject is not himself, but the goodness of God; and he introduces his own experiences only as the most lively of illustrations of the dealings of God with the human soul as He makes it restless until it finds its rest in Him. Such being the case the congeners of the book are not to be found in simple autobiographies even of the most introspective variety. The *Confessions* of Rousseau, of Hamann, of Alfred de Musset—such books have so little in common with it that they do not belong even in the same literary class with it. Even the similarity of their titles to its is an accident. For Augustine does not use the term *Confessions* here in the debased sense in which these writers use it; the sense of unveiling, uncovering to the sight of the world what were better perhaps hidden from all eyes but God’s which see all things; but in that higher double sense in which we may speak of confessing the grace of God and our humble dependence on Him, a sense compounded of mingled humility and praise.

The real analogues of Augustine’s *Confessions* are to be found not then in introspective biographies whose sole purpose is to depict a human soul, but in such accounts of spiritual experiences as are given us in books like John Newton’s *Authentic Narrative*, although the scope of this particular narrative is too narrow to furnish a perfect analogy. At the head of his narrative Newton has written this text: “Thou shalt remember all the way, by which the Lord thy God led thee through this wilderness”; and the same text might equally well be written at the head of Augustine’s *Confessions*. We might almost fancy we hear Augustine explaining his own purpose when we hear Newton declaring that with him it was a question “only concerning the patience and long-suffering of God, the wonderful interposition of His providence in favor of an unworthy sinner, the power of His grace in softening the hardest heart, and the riches of His mercy in pardoning the most enormous and aggravated transgressions.” Perhaps, however, the closest analogy to Augustine’s *Confessions*, among books, at least, which have attained anything like the same popular influence, is furnished by John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of*

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† II, 6: *a primo usque ad decimum de me scripti sunt.*

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*Sinners*. Bunyan's purpose is precisely the same as Augustine's—to glorify the grace of God. He employs also the same means of securing this end—an autobiographical account of the dealings of God with his soul. "In this relation of the merciful working of God upon my soul," says Bunyan, "it will not be amiss if, in the first place, I do, in a few words, give you a hint of my pedigree and manner of bringing up; that thereby the goodness and bounty of God toward me may be the more advanced and magnified before the sons of men." Just so Augustine, also, gave what he gave of "his pedigree and manner of bringing up"; and what he gave of his youthful wanderings in error and in sin; and what he gave of his struggles to find and grasp, to grasp and cling to what of good he saw and loved: only that "the goodness and bounty of God toward him might be the more advanced and magnified before the sons of men." We have said that the interval that divides Rousseau's *Confessions* from the *Adventures of Gil Bias* is less than that which separates them from Augustine's. We may now say that the interval that divides Augustine's *Confessions* from the *Pilgrim's Progress* is less than that which separates them from any simple autobiography—veracious and searching autobiography though a great portion of it is. For the whole concernment of the book is with the grace of God to a lost sinner. It is this, and not himself, that is its theme.

This fundamental fact is, of course, written large over the whole work, and comes not rarely to explicit assertion. "I wish to record my past foulnesses and the carnal corruptions of my soul," says Augustine, "not because I love them, but in order that I may love Thee, O my God. For love of Thy love do I do this thing,—recollecting my most vicious ways in the bitterness of my remembrance, that Thou mayest become my Joy, Thou never-failing Joy, Thou blessed and sacred Joy; and collecting myself from the dissipation in which I was torn to pieces, when turned from Thee, the One, I was lost among the many."\* "To whom do I relate this?.... And why? Just that I and whosoever may read this may consider out of what depths we are to cry unto Thee. And what is nearer to Thy ears than a confessing heart and a life of faith?"† "Accept the sacrifice of my confessions from the hand of my tongue which Thou didst form and hast prompted that it may confess to Thy name. Heal all my bones and let them say, Lord, who is like unto Thee?.... Let my soul praise Thee that it may love Thee, and let it confess to Thee Thy mercies that it may praise Thee."‡ "Why, then, do I array before Thee the narrations of so many things?.... That I may excite my affection toward Thee, and that of those who read these things, so that we all may say, 'Great is the Lord and highly to be praised.'"§ In these last words we observe that as he approaches the end of the book, he is still

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\* II, i, 1.

† II, iii, 5.

‡ V, i, 1.

§ XI, i, 1.

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bearing in mind the words which he set at its beginning;|| and by thus reverting to the beginning, he binds the whole together as one great volume of praise to the Lord for His goodness to him in leading him to His salvation. Accordingly he adds at once: "Therefore, we are manifesting our affection to Thee, in confessing to Thee our miseries and Thy mercies toward us, in order that Thou mayest deliver us altogether since Thou hast made a beginning, and we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and become blessed in Thee, since Thou hast called us to be poor in spirit, and meek and mourners, and hungerers, and thirsters after righteousness, and merciful and pure in heart and peace-makers."¶ Here the theme of the *Confessions* is clearly set before us. It is the ineffable goodness of God, which is illustrated by what He has done for Augustine's miserable soul, in delivering it from its sins and distresses and bringing it out into the largeness of the Divine life and knowledge.

It is, obviously, only from this point of view that the unity of the book becomes apparent. For we must not fancy that when Augustine has brought to a completion the narrative of the wonderful dealings of God with him, by which he was led to repentance, he has ended his "confessions"; to which he attaches the last four books therefore purely mechanically, without any rational bond of connection with their predecessors. To his consciousness, throughout the whole extent of these books, he continues to sound the voice of his confessions: and if we search in them for it we shall find the same note ringing in them as in the others. "Behold," he cries,\* "Thy voice is my joy: Thy voice surpasses the abundance of pleasures.... Let me confess unto Thee whatsoever I have found in Thy books, and let me hear the voice of praise, and drink Thee in and consider the wonderful things of Thy law, even from the beginning, in the which Thou didst make the heaven and the earth, down to the everlasting kingdom of Thy Holy City, that is with Thee." Not the least of the mercies that Augustine wished to confess to God that he had received from His hand was the emancipation of His intellect, and the freeing of his mind from the crudities with which it had been stuffed; and it is this confession that he makes, with praises on his lips, in these concluding books. The construction of the work, then, is something like the following: first Augustine recounts how God has dealt with him in bringing him to salvation (books i–ix); then what he has under the divine grace become, as a saved child of God (book x); and finally what reaches of sound and satisfying knowledge have been granted to him in the Divine revelation (books xi–xiii): and all to the praise of the glory of His grace. Body, heart, mind, all were made for God: all were incited to seek Him and to praise Him: and all were restless, therefore, until at last they found their rest in Him. Elsewhere than in Him had happiness, peace, knowledge been

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|| I, i, 1.

¶ *Ibid.*

\* XI, ii, 3 *ad finem.*

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sought, but nowhere else had they been found. The proud was cast down: and he that exalted himself inevitably fell. But they whose exaltation God becomes—they fall not any more forever. This is the concluding word of the *Confessions*.

Only in proportion as this, the true character of the book, is apprehended, moreover, does its true originality become evident. Even were it possible to think of it merely as an introspective autobiography, it would no doubt be epoch-making in the history of literary form. In an interesting paper on *Roman Autobiography*,\* Prof. A. F. West points out that this species of composition was especially Roman. "Autobiography, as well as satire," he remarks, "should be credited to the Romans as their own independent invention." "The appearance of Augustine's *Confessions*, in 399 or 400," he continues, "dates the entrance of a new kind of autobiography into Latin literature,—the autobiography of introspection, the self-registered record of the development of a human soul." It was characteristic of Augustine's genius that, in a purely incidental use of it, he invented an entirely new literary form and carried it at a stroke to its highest development. No wonder that Harnack falls into something like enthusiasm over this accomplishment.

"The significance of the '*Confessions*,' " says he, "is as great on the side of form as on that of contents. Before all, they were a literary *achievement*. No poet, no philosopher before Augustine had undertaken what he here performed; and I may add that almost a thousand years had to pass before a similar thing was done. It was the poets of the Renaissance, who formed themselves on Augustine, who first gained from his example the daring to depict themselves and to present their personality to the world. For what do the *Confessions* of Augustine contain? The portrait of a soul—not psychological disquisitions on the Understanding, the Will and the Emotions in Man, not abstract investigations into the nature of the soul, not superficial reasonings and moralizing introspections like the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, but the most exact portraiture of a distinct human personality, in his development from childhood to full age, with all his propensities, feelings, aims, mistakes; a portrait of a soul, in fact, drawn with a perfection of observation that leaves on one side the mechanical devices of psychology, and pursues the methods of the physician and the physiologist."†

Obviously Harnack is thinking of the first nine books only. Otherwise he could scarcely speak so absolutely of the absence from the *Confessions* of "psychological disquisitions." For what is the great discourse on "Memory," embodied in the tenth book, but a psychological disquisition of the most penetrating kind, to say nothing now of the analysis of the idea of "Time," broached in the eleventh book? The achievement which

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\* *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, April, 1901, p. 183.

† *Op. cit.*, pp. 127–128.

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he signalizes is, therefore, only part of the achievement of the book, and if Augustine in it has incidentally become the father of all those who have sought to paint the portrait of a human soul, what must be said of the originality of his performance when understood in its real peculiarity—as the dramatic portraiture of the dealing of Divine Grace with a sinful soul in leading it through all its devious wanderings into the harbor of salvation? Not in the poets of the Renaissance—not even in Goethe's *Faust* in which Harnack strangely seeks the nearest literary parallel to the *Confessions*—can it now find its tardy successors. We must come down to the Reformation—perhaps to the “second Reformation” as the men of the seventeenth century loved to call their own times, and after that to that almost third Reformation which was wrought by the “Evangelical Revival” or “Great Awakening”—before we discover its real successors: and we must look through all the years, perhaps in vain, to find any successor worthy to be placed on a level with it.

We must avoid exaggeration, however, even with respect to the novelty of the book. Perhaps if we eliminate the question of value and think merely of the literary species which it so uniquely represents, it can scarcely be said that Augustine's performance was absolutely without forerunners, or remained absolutely without successors “for a thousand years.” The greatness of its shining may blind our eyes unduly to lesser points of light, which, except for the glare of its brilliancy, might be seen to stud the heavens about it. A recent writer, for example, claims for a tractate of Cyprian's—the treatise or letter “To Donatus”—the honor of having pointed out the way in which Augustine afterward walked.

“Finally,” says he,\* “a great novelty appears in this little book. The pages on the conversion of Cyprian, which mark almost the advent of a new species of literature, directly herald the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. For a long time, a very profane manner of life, a passionate taste for pleasure, along with a sort of instinctive defiance of Christianity; subsequently, up to the very eve of the decisive event, incapacity to believe in the renewal promised in baptism, a very clear perception of the obstacles which a life so worldly opposed to so sudden a revolution; then, after many hesitations, grace, as startling as a clap of thunder, revolutionizing the whole being in its profoundest depths, to turn it toward a new destiny; and in the recollection left by this miraculous transformation, a fixed determination to refer all to God, to turn confession into acts of thankfulness: such are in Cyprian the essential traits that mark the steps of conversion. And these are precisely the ideas that dominate the *Confessions* of Augustine.”

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\* MONCEAUX, *Hist. Lit. de l'Afrique Chrét.*, II, S. Cyprian et son temps, p. 266.

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In effect, we have in this affected, mincing tract of Cyprian's, hidden as its lessons well-nigh are under the shadow of its rhetorical virtuosity, what may be called the beginnings of the Autobiography of Conversion—unless we prefer to penetrate yet a hundred years further back and see its beginnings in the beautiful description with which Justin Martyr opens his *Dialogue with Trypho* of how he found his way through philosophy to Christ. Both narratives have much in their substance that is fitted to remind of Augustine's. But both are too brief; the one is too objective and the other too affected; neither is sufficiently introspective or sufficiently searching to justify their inclusion in the same class with their great successor. A better claim, many will think, might be put in for the spiritual history which Hilary of Poitiers gives of his own former life in the splendid Latin of the first fifteen sections of his treatise *On the Faith* or, as it is commonly called, *On the Trinity*. It is the story of a naturally noble soul, seeking and gradually finding more and more perfectly the proper aim of life as it rises to the knowledge first of the God of philosophy and then of the God of revelation, and ultimately attains assured faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Did it not move so exclusively on the intellectualistic plane, without depth of experimental coloring, its dignity of language and high eloquence might, despite its brevity, justify us in esteeming it no unworthy forerunner of the *Confessions*.

Such predecessors, interesting as they are and valuable as marking the channels in which the new Christian literature naturally flowed, can hardly be thought of as having opened the way for Augustine—partly because their motive is too primarily autobiographical. Similarly he had few immediate successors who can be said to follow closely in his steps. Perhaps the *Eucharisticos Deo* of Paulinus of Pella—in which he essays to praise God for His preservation of him and for His numerous kindnesses through a long and eventful life—may not unfairly be considered a typical instance of such spiritual autobiographies as the next age produced. This poem is assuredly not uninteresting, and to the student of manners it has its own importance; but as a history of a soul it lacks nearly everything that gives to the *Confessions* their charm. That some resemblance should be discernible between the picture Augustine draws of his life and that which such writers draw of their own was unavoidable, since he and they were alike men and Christians and were prepared to thank God for making them both. But the resemblance ends very much at that point. The sublime depths and heights of Augustine and all that has made him the teacher of the world in this his most individual book is wanting, as well in his successors as in his predecessors. He had to wait for Bunyan before there was written another such spiritual “autobiography,” or to be more precise, another such history of God's dealings with a soul: and even the *Grace Abounding* stands beside the *Confessions* only *longe intervallo*.

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The attractiveness of the *Confessions* obviously lurks, not in its style, but in its matter,— or rather in the personality that lies behind both style and matter and gives unity, freshness, depth, brilliancy to both matter and style. Harnack is quite right when he remarks that the key to the enduring influence of the book is found in the fact that we meet a person in it,— a person “everywhere richer than his expression”:\* that we feel a heart beating behind its words and perceive that this is a great heart, to whose beating we cannot but attend. Nevertheless the form of the *Confessions* is itself not without its fascination, and its very style has also its allurements. His rhetorical training had entered, to be sure, into Augustine’s very substance and the false taste with which he had been imbued had become a second nature with him. Even in such heart-throes as express themselves in this book, he could not away with the frivolous word-plays, affected assonances, elaborate balancing of clauses and the like that form the hall-mark of the sophistic rhetoric of the times. It has been remarked that “rhetorician as Augustine was, and master of several styles, he had a curious power of dropping his rhetoric when he undertook in homilies and commentaries to interpret Scripture.”† Unfortunately, he also had a curious facility of dropping into offensive rhetorical tricks in the midst of the most serious discussions, or the most moving revelations of feeling. Apart from these occasional lapses—if lapses so frequent can be called occasional—the very form given this book as a sustained address to God is wearisome to many. M. Boissier‡ remarks that the transports and effusions with which Augustine addresses himself to God “end by seeming to us monotonous.” Harnack thinks the book too long and too alien to modern thought ever to enter into really literary use in its entirety: and therefore welcomes the preparation of abridgments of it.§ Prof. West|| finds in it “ineptitudes and infelicities” which can be expected to shrink and permit “the central power” of the book to appear only for him who reads it in its original Latin. The merely English reader, he remarks, can scarcely hope to find it very interesting. “The unchecked rhetoric, the reiterated calls on God, varied and wearisome, the shrewd curiosity in hunting down subtleties to their last hiding-places, the streaks of inane allegorizing,¶ and sometimes the violent bursts of feeling,— these are the things that frighten away readers and prevent them from reaching the real delights of the book.”

It is difficult to draw up a catalogue of such defects without exaggeration: and in the present case an exaggerated impression, both with respect to quantity and quality, is almost certain to be conveyed. After all said, the *Confessions* are an eminently well and

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\* *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

† E. W. WATSON, *Classical Review*, February, 1901, p. 65, quoted in GLOVER, *op. cit.*, p. 195, note.

‡ *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

§ *Theolog. Literaturzeitung*, 1903, I, 12.

|| As cited, pp. 184–185.

¶ Are these found to any appreciable extent outside the Thirteenth Book?

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winningly written book. There is even in the mere style a certain poetic quality that gives it not merely character but beauty. Harnack justly speaks of “the lyricism of the style.” There is certainly present in it, as Dr. Bigg points out,\* something of “the same musical flow, the same spiritual refinement and distinction” that characterizes the *Imitation of Christ*. It is not, indeed, as Dr. Bigg justly adds, either “so compact or so highly polished” as the *Imitation of Christ*: “St. Augustine cannot give the time to cut each word as if it were an individual diamond, as à Kempis did.” But Augustine more than compensates for this deficiency in preciousity by his greater richness, depth, and variety. There is nothing effeminate in Augustine’s style, nothing over-filed, nothing cloying or wearisome. Here, too, indeed, it is true, as it generally is, that the style is the man. And Augustine is never an uninteresting person to meet, even through the medium of the written, or even of the translated, page. No more individual writer ever lived: and the individuality which was his was not only powerful and impressive, but to an almost unexampled degree profound, rich, and attractive. Harnack is right: the charm of the *Confessions* is that they are Augustine’s and that he draws his readers into his life by them. Here are reflected, as in a mirror, the depth and tenderness of his ardent nature, the quickness and mobility of his emotions and yet, underlying all, his sublime repose. He who reads shares the conflicts and the turmoils depicted: but he enters also into the rest the writer has found with God.

It is in this fact that the unique attractiveness of the book as a “work of edification” resides—an attractiveness which has made it through a millennium and a half the most widely read of all books written in Latin, with the possible exception of the *Æneid* of Virgil.† He who reads these pages enters as in none other into the struggles of a great soul as it fights its way to God, shares with it all its conflict, and participates at last with it in the immensity of its repose. As he reads, that great sentence that sounds the keynote of the book and echoes through all its pages, echoes also in his soul: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in Thee.” The agonizing cry becomes his also, “O by Thy loving-kindness, tell me, O Lord my God, what Thou art to me: say unto my soul, *I am thy Salvation.*” And there likewise becomes his the childlike prattle of the same soul, stilled in praise now that it has found God its salvation, as it names over to itself as its dearest possession the sweet names by which its God has become precious to it, “O Lord, my God, my Light, my Wealth, my Salvation!” What is apt to escape us who have, after so many years, entered into the heritage which Augustine has won for us is that it really he who won it for us,—that in these groans and tears into which we so readily enter with him as we read, and in this hard-earned rest in God into

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\* Introduction to his version, published in Methuen’s series, called the “*Library of Devotion*,” 2d ed., 1900, p. 5.

† T. R. GLOVER, *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century*, p. 195.



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which we so easily follow him, he was breaking out a pathway not only for his own but for our feet. For here is the astonishing fact that gives its supreme significance to this book: it is the earliest adequate expression of that type of religion which has since attached to itself the name of "evangelical"; and, though the earliest, it is one of the fullest, richest and most perfect expressions of this type of religion which has ever been written. Adolf Harnack, realizing the immense significance of the appearance in Augustine of this new type of religion, consecrates a whole chapter in his *History of Dogma* to the "World-Historical Position of Augustine as Reformer of Christian Piety," as a preparation for the due exposition of his doctrinal teaching. In this chapter he makes many true and striking remarks; but he hardly exhibits a just appreciation of the intimate relation which subsists between Augustine's peculiar type of piety and his peculiar type of doctrine. Harnack, in fact, speaks almost as if it were conceivable that one of these could have come into existence apart from the other. The truth is, of course, that they are but the joint products in the two spheres of life and thought of the same body of conceptions, and neither could possibly have arisen without the other. If before Augustine alternating hope and fear were the characteristic sentiments of Christians and the psychological form of their piety was therefore unrest, while in Augustine the place of hope and fear is taken by trust and love, and unrest gives way to profound rest in God, this was because pre-Augustinian Christianity was prevailingly legalistic, and there entered into it a greater or less infusion of the evil leaven of self-salvation, while Augustine, with his doctrine of grace, cast himself wholly on the mercy of God, and so, as the poet expresses it,

"Turned fear and hope to love of God  
Who loveth us."

The fact of the matter is that pre-Augustinian Christian thinking was largely engrossed with Theological and Christological problems and with Augustine first did Christian Soteriology begin to come to its rights. It was not he first, of course, who discovered that man is a sinner and therefore depends for his salvation on the grace of God; but in him first did these fundamental Christian truths find a soil in which they could come to their richest fruitage in heart and life, in thought and teaching. And here lies the secret of his profound realization (on which Harnack lays so much stress) that Christian happiness consists in "comforted remorse" (getrösteter Sündenschmerz).<sup>\*</sup> Before him men were prone to conceive themselves essentially God's creatures, whose business it was to commend themselves to their Maker: no doubt they recognized that they had sinned, and that provision had been made to relieve them of the penalty of their sins; but they built their real hope of acceptance in God's sight more or less upon their own conduct. Augustine realized to the bottom of his soul that he was a sinner and what it is to be a

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<sup>\*</sup> O. c., III, p. 59 (E. T., V, p. 66).

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sinner, and therefore sought at God's hands not acceptance but salvation. And this is the reason why he never thought of God without thinking of sin and never thought of sin without thinking of Christ. Because he took his sin seriously, his thought and feeling alike traveled continually in this circle, and could not but travel in this circle. He thus was constantly verifying afresh the truth of the Saviour's declaration that he to whom little is forgiven loves little, while he loves much who is conscious of having received much forgiveness: and as his trust increased and his love grew ever greater he realized better and better also that other saying that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents more than over ninety and nine righteous persons which need no repentance. So he came to understand that the heights of joy are scaled only by him who has first been miserable, and that the highest happiness belongs only to him who has been the object of salvation. Self-despair, humble trust, grateful love, fullness of joy — these are the steps on which his own soul climbed upward: and these steps gave their whole color and form both to his piety and to his teaching. In his doctrine we see his experience of God's seeking and saving love toward a lost sinner expressing itself in propositional form; in his piety we see his conviction that the sole hope of the sinner lies in the free grace of a loving God expressing itself in the forms of feeling. In doctrine and life alike he sets before us in that effective way which belongs to the discoverer, the religion of faith as over against the religion of works — the religion which despairing of self casts all its hope on God as over against the religion that to a greater or less degree trusts in itself: in a word, since religion in its very nature is dependence on God, religion in the purity of its conception as over against a quasi-religious moralism. It is to the fact that in this book we are admitted into the very life of Augustine and are permitted to see his great heart cleansing itself of all trust in himself and laying hold with the grasp first of despair, then of discerning trust and then of grateful love upon the God who was his salvation, that the *Confessions* owe their perennial attractiveness and their supreme position among books of edification. In them Augustine uncovers his heart and lets us see what religion is in its essence as it works in the soul of one who has, as few have, experienced its power. He has set himself determinedly in this book to exhibit the grace of God in action. Elsewhere he has expounded it in theory, defended it against its assailants, enforced it with logical argument and moving exhortation. Here he shows it at work, and at work in his own soul.

It was only in his effort to show us the grace of God as it worked upon his own soul, that Augustine was led to set before us his life-history through all the formative years of his career, — until, after long wandering, he at last had found his rest in God. This is the meaning and this is the extent of the autobiographical element in the *Confessions*. Nine of the thirteen books are devoted to this religious analysis of his life-history; and although, of course, the matter admitted and its treatment alike are determined by the end in view, yet Augustine's analysis is very searching and the end in view involves a very complete

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survey of all that was especially determining in his life-development. In these pages we can see, therefore, just what Augustine was, and just how he became what he became. And the picture, almost extreme in its individuality as it is, is nevertheless as typical as it is individual. It is typical of the life of the ancient world at its best: for in his comprehensive nature Augustine had gathered up into himself and given full play to all that was good in the culture of the ancient world. And it is typical of what Christian experience is at its best: for in Augustine there met in unusual fullness and fought themselves out to a finish all the fundamental currents of thought and feeling that strive together in the human heart when it is invaded by Divine grace, and is slowly but surely conquered by it to good and to God. It may repay us to run over the salient elements in this life-history as here depicted for us.

## III.—THE AUGUSTINE OF THE “CONFESSIONS.”

Augustine came into being at the “turn of the ages,” just as the old world was dying, and the new was being born. He was the offspring of a mixed marriage, itself typical of the mixed state of the society of the times. His father, a citizen of importance but of straitened means, in a small African town, remained a heathen until his gifted son had attained his middle youth:\* he appears to have been a man of generally jovial disposition, liable to fits of violent temper, possessing neither intellectual endowments nor moral attainments to distinguish him from the mass of his contemporaries: but he appreciated the promise of his son, and was prepared to make sacrifices that opportunity might be given for his development. His mother, on the other hand, was one of nature’s noblewomen, whose naturally fine disposition had been further beautified by grace. Bred a Christian from her infancy, her native sensibility had been heightened by a warm piety: and her clear and quick intellect had been illuminated by an equally firm and direct conscience. Under her teaching her son was imbued from his infancy with a sense of divine things which never permitted him to forget that there is a God who governs all things and who is unchangeably good, or to find satisfaction in any teaching in which the name of Jesus Christ was not honored. He thus grew up in the nurture of the Lord,† but with the divided mind which almost inevitably results from the divided counsels of a mixed parentage.

As his gifts more and more exhibited themselves worldly ambition took the helm and every nerve was strained to advance him in his preparation for a great career. His early

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\* He became a catechumen shortly before Augustine’s sixteenth year (*Confess.*, ii, 3, 6. Cf. ix, 9, 22). He died soon afterward.

† Cf. *De duabus anim.*, I, 1: “The seeds of the true religion wholesomely implanted in me from boyhood.”

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piety, which had been exhibited in frequent prayer as a school-boy‡ and in an ardent desire for baptism during an attack of dangerous illness,§ more and more fell away from him, and left him, with his passionate temperament inherited from his father, a prey to youthful vices. An interval of idleness at home, in his sixteenth year (A.D. 370), brought him his great temptation, and he fell into evil ways; and these were naturally continued when, to complete his education, he went next year up to Carthage, that great and wicked city. But this period of unclean life was happily of short duration, lasting at the most only a couple of years. By the time Augustine had reached his seventeenth birthday (autumn of 371) we find him already attached to her who was to be the companion of his life for the next fourteen years, in a union which, though not marriage in the highest sense, differed from technical marriage rather in a legal than in a moral point of view. Though he himself, later at least, did not look upon such a union as true marriage,\* it was esteemed its equivalent not only in the best heathen society of the time, but even in certain portions of the Church, perhaps up to his own day by the entire Church;† and it served to screen him from the multitudinous temptations to vice that otherwise would have beset him. "I was faithful to her," he says.‡

It was an overmastering and lofty ambition, not fleshly lust, that constituted the real power in his life, and these years of preparation at Carthage were years of strenuous labor, during which Augustine was ever growing toward his higher ideals. Already in his nineteenth year (373) he was incited to lay aside his lower ambitions by the reading of a book of Cicero's, since lost,§ which had been designed to inflame the heart of the reader with a love of philosophy and which wrought so powerfully on Augustine that he resolved at once to make pure truth thenceforward the sole object of his pursuit.¶ During this whole period he must be believed to have remained nominally Christian; and perhaps we may suppose him to have continued in the formal position of a catechumen.¶¶

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‡ *Conf.*, I, 14, 2: "For even as a boy I began to pray to Thee, my Help and my Refuge; to call upon Thee I burst the bonds of my tongue and prayed to Thee—child as I was, how passionately!—that I might not be flogged at school."

§ *Conf.*, I, xi.

\* *Conf.*, IV, ii, 2: "One not joined to me in lawful wedlock"; X, xxx, 41: "Thou hast commanded me to abstain from concubinage." Cf. *Apost. Constt.*, viii, 32: "A believer who has a concubine,—if she be a slave, let him cease, and take a wife legitimately: if she be free, let him take her as his legitimate wife; and if he does not, let him be rejected."

† Cf. the canons of the Council of Toledo of 400, can. 17: "Only let him be content with one woman, whether wife or concubine." Cf. *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, X, 746, and *THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW*, April, 1903, pp. 309–10.

‡ *Conf.*, IV, ii, 2.

§ His *Hortensius*.

¶ Cf. esp. *Solil.*, I, 10, 17.

¶¶ *De util. cred.*, 1, 2: "sed de me quid dicam, qui iam catholicus christianus eram?"

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He seems to have been a frequenter of the Church services,\*\* and he speaks of himself as having been during this time under the dominance of “a certain puerile superstition” which held him back from the pursuit of truth.†† Accordingly, when the *Hortensius* stirred his heart to seek wisdom and yet left him unsatisfied, because the name of Jesus which, as he says, he had “sucked in with his mother’s milk,” was not mentioned in it, he turned to the Scriptures in apparently the first earnest effort to seek their guidance he had made since his earliest youth. But the lowly Scriptures—especially as read in the rough Old Latin Version—had nothing to offer to the finical rhetorician, and his eyes were holden that he could not penetrate their meaning: he was offended by their servant-form and—seeking wisdom, not salvation—turned from them in disgust. He had reached a crisis in his life, and the result was that he formally broke with Christianity.

It was eminently characteristic of Augustine both that throughout his years of indulgence and indifference he had maintained his connection with the Church, and that he broke with it when, having sloughed off his grosser inclinations, he turned to it in vain for the satisfaction of his higher aspirations. Essential idealist that he was, throughout the years in which he was entangled in lower aims the Church had stood for him as a promise of better things: now he felt that his spirit soared above all it had to offer him. But in breaking with the Church, he could not break with his conception of God as the good Governor of the world, nor with his devotion to the name of Jesus Christ. So he threw himself into the arms of the Manicheans. The Manicheans were the rationalists of the day. Professing the highest reverence for Christ and continually bearing His name on their lips, they yet set forth, under this cloak, a purely naturalistic system. The negative side of their teaching included a most drastic criticism of the Christian Scriptures; while on the positive side they built up a doctrine of God which seemed to separate Him effectually from all complicity with evil, and a doctrine of man which relieved the conscience of all sense of unworthiness and responsibility for sin, while yet proposing a stringent ascetic ideal. In all these aspects its teaching was attractive to the young Augustine, who, on fire with a zeal for wisdom, despised all authority, and, conscious of moral weaknesses, wished to believe neither God nor himself answerable for them. He not only, therefore, heartily adopted the Manichean system, but entered apparently with enthusiasm into its propagation.

The change nearly cost him the chief saving external influence of his life—intercourse with his godly mother. Terrified by his open repudiation of Christianity and his ardent identification of himself with one of its most dangerous rivals for the popular favor, she forbade him her house, and was only induced to receive him back into the family circle

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\*\* *Conf.*, III, iii, 5. According to *Contra epist. Manich. fund.*, VIII, 9, *ad fin.*, he had been accustomed to enjoy the Easter festival and missed it sadly when he became a Manichean.

†† *De beata vita*, 4.

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when she became convinced that his defection was not hopeless. Monnica has been made the object of much severe and, as it seems to us, scarcely intelligent criticism for her action on this occasion. It has been sneeringly remarked, for example, that she did not object very much to Augustine's cherishing a concubine, but did object violently to his cherishing a heresy. "She seems to have accepted his companion without a murmur," says a recent writer,\* "but the descent into heresy was an unpardonable depth." We shall raise no question here of the validity of Bacon's dictum, that "it is certain that heresies and schisms are of all others the greatest scandals; yea, more than corruption of manners." In any event the antithesis is unwisely chosen. We have seen that no great moral obliquity attached to such concubinage as Augustine's, which was, in fact, only an inferior variety of marriage: and though, no doubt, this entanglement was deeply regretted by Monnica, whose ambition for her son had earlier forbidden her providing him with a wife, yet it is quite likely that she saw no reason seriously to reprobate a relation which not only the law of the State, but probably that of the Church, too, acknowledged as legitimate. On the other hand, it is unfair not to recognize the immense change which Augustine's step wrought in his attitude to the religion which was his mother's very life. He may have been up to this moment both indifferent and even of evil life. But he had remained at least formally a Christian; he was still a catechumen; and there was ever hope of repentance. Now he had formally apostatized. He had not only definitively turned his back on Christianity, but was actively assailing it with scorn and ridicule, and that with such success that he was drawing his circle of friends away with him.† It was, says Augustine,‡ "because she hated and detested the blasphemies of his error" that she had broken off fellowship with him. Surely his mother's horror is not inexplicable; and it is to be remembered that her attitude of renunciation of intercourse was at once reversed on the reintroduction of hope for her son into her heart. Nor did she ever cease to pursue him with her tears and her prayers.§

Despite the eagerness with which he cast himself into the arms of the Manicheans and the zeal with which he became their advocate, Augustine had had very little grounding in the debatable questions that lay at the base of the system. His studies in literature and

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\* MCCABE, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

† In the *De duabus anim.*, ch. ix, Augustine tells of the effect his easy victory over the ignorant Catholics had in hardening him in his error.

‡ *Conf.*, II, xi, 19.

§ It is probably not necessary to revert here to the fact that Manicheism was not merely under the ban of the Church, but also under that of the State—that it was crime as well as heresy. The "severe and bloody laws enacted against them by Valentinian, A.D. 372, Theodosius, A.D. 381," repeating, possibly, the earlier proscription of Diocletian, A.D. 287 (see STOKES, *Smith & Wace*, III, 799), do not seem to have been executed with sufficient vigor in Africa to have made the profession of the heresy very dangerous (cf. STOKES as above: and LOOFS, *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, II, 262, 37, etc.).

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the rhetorical art had been formal rather than philosophical. His sudden discovery in the teachings of the Manicheans of the “wisdom” he had been inflamed to seek, was therefore liable to a rude shock of awaking when his studies in the liberal sciences, on which he now zealously entered, should begin to bear fruit. It was not, in effect, long before the sagacity of the good bishop’s advice to Monnica, that he should not be plied with argument but left to the gradual effects of his own reading and meditation to open his eyes, began to manifest itself. He remained nine years—from the end of his nineteenth to the beginning of his twenty-ninth year (373–383)—in the toils of the Manichean illusion, exercising in the interval his function of teacher, first at Thagaste and then at Carthage. But by the end of this period the doubts which had early in it began to insinuate themselves, first as to the mythological elements, and then as to the whole structure of the system, had fulfilled themselves. He seems to have been no longer inwardly a Manichean when he went to Rome in the spring of 383, though throughout his one year’s stay at that city he remained in outer connection with the sect. When he left Rome for Milan in the late spring of 384, as his thirtieth year was running its course, he left his Manicheism definitively behind him. Nothing had come, however, to take its place. His own experiences combined with his philosophical reading to cast his mind into a complete state of uncertainty, not to say of developed skepticism. He was half inclined to end the suspense by adopting out of hand the opinions of “those philosophers who are called Academics, because they taught we must doubt everything, and held that man lacks the power of comprehending any truth.”\* But he revolted from committing the sickness of his soul to them, “because they were without the saving name of Christ.”† And so, no longer a Manichean and yet not a Catholic, he hung in the balance, and “determined therefore to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, commended to him by his parents, until something assured should come to light, by which to steer his way.”\* Thus he reverted to the condition of his youth, but in a state of mind unspeakably different.

So far as his outward fortunes were concerned Augustine was now at last in a fair way to realize the ambitions which had been the determining force in his life.† Driven from Thagaste by a burning heart, racked with grief for a lost friend; and then successively from Carthage and Rome by chagrin over the misbehavior of his pupils; he cannot be said hitherto to have attained a position of solid consequence. Whatever reputation he may have acquired as a teacher, whatever applause he may have gained in the practice of his art, whatever triumphs he may have secured in public contests,‡ were all by the way, and

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\* *Confess.*, V, x, 19.

† *Confess.*, V, xiv, 25.

\* *Conf.*, V, xiv, 25.

† Cf. *LOOFS*, as cited, p. 265 *et seq.*

‡ Cf. *Conf.*, 4. 2, 3; 4. 3, 5.

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left him still a “viator” rather than a “consummator.” At Milan, however, as Government Professor of Rhetoric, he had at last secured a post which gave him assured social standing and influence, and in the fulfillment of the official duties of which he was brought into pleasant contact with the highest civic circles and even with the court itself. Now for the first time all that he had hoped and striven for seemed within his reach. His mother and brother came to him out of Africa; the circle of his old intimates gathered around him; new friends of wealth and influence attached themselves to him. It appeared no difficult matter to obtain some permanent preferment—through his host of influential friends a governorship might easily be had; and then a wife with a little money to help toward expenses could be taken; and the height of his desire would be reached. § Things were set in train to consummate this plan; a suitable maiden was sought and found and the betrothment concluded; || and everything was apparently progressing to his taste.

But, as so often happens, as the attainment of what had been so long and eagerly sought drew nigh, it was found not to possess the power to satisfy which had been attributed to it. ¶ At no period of his life, in fact, was Augustine so far removed from complacency with himself and his situation, inward and outward, as at this moment. His whole mental life had been thrown into confusion by the growth of his skeptical temper, and he had been compelled to see himself deprived of all rational basis for his intellectual pride. And now the very measures taken to carry his ambitious schemes to their fruition reacted to rob him of whatever remnants of moral self-respect may have remained to him. The presence in his household of his concubine was an impediment to the marriage he was planning; and accordingly she was, as he expresses it,\* torn from his side, leaving a sore and wounded place in his heart where it had adhered to hers. This was bad enough: but worse was to follow. Finding the two years that were to intervene before his marriage irksome, he took another concubine to fill up the interval. He could conceal from himself no longer his abject slavery to lust. And he was more deeply shamed still by the contrast into which his degrading conduct brought him with others whom he had been accustomed to consider his inferiors. His discarded concubine to whom his heart still clung set him a better example; but, as he says, he could not imitate even a woman. The iron entered his soul; and his pride, intellectual and moral, was preparing for itself a most salutary fall. No doubt the precarious state of his health at this moment added something to increase his dejection. Possibly on account of the harshness of the northern climate of Milan, he had been seized with a serious affection of the chest, which required rest at least from his labors, and possibly threatened permanently his usefulness as a rhetorician. It tended at

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§ VI, xi, 19, *ad fin.*: “amicorum maiorum copia”; “præsidatus”; “cum aliqua pecunia.”

|| VI, xiii, 23.

¶ Cf. LOOFS, *op. cit.*, p. 265; and BRET, *La Conversion de St. Aug.*, pp. 68–9.

\* VI, xv, 25.



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all events to cause deep searchings of heart in which he was revealed to himself in all his weakness.

Simultaneously with the growth of his better knowledge of himself, there was opening up to him also a better knowledge of Christianity. Received with distinguished kindness by Ambrose on coming to Milan and drawn by the fame of his oratory, he was accustomed to frequent the preaching services, with a view to estimating Ambrose's rhetorical ability. But as he listened, the matter of the discourses began also to reach his conscience, and he gradually learned not only that the absurdities of belief—such as, for example, that God had a physical form like a man's—which the Manicheans had charged upon the Catholics, but that the whole scheme of the baneful Biblical criticism he had learned from them lacked foundation. His prejudices having thus been removed he soon came to perceive that the Catholics had something to say for themselves worth listening to, and that there was an obvious place for authority in religion. By this discovery his mind was made accessible to the evidences of the divine authority of the Christian Scriptures, and he turned with new zest to them for instruction. Another discovery in his thirty-first year contributed powerfully to open his mind to their meaning. This was nothing less than the discovery of metaphysics. Up to this time Augustine's learning had been largely empirical and his thought was confined to crassly materialistic forms. Now the writings of the Neoplatonists came into his hands and revealed to him an entirely new world—the world of spirit. Under these new influences his whole mental life was revolutionized: he passed from his divided mind with a bound, and embraced with all the warmth of his ardent nature the new realities assured to him at once by the authority of Scripture and the authentication of reason. To all intents and purposes he was already on the intellectual side a Christian, and needed but some determining influence to secure the decisive action of his will, for his whole life to recrystallize around this new centre.

This determining influence was brought him apparently by means of a series of personal examples. These were given especial power over him by the self-contempt into which he had fallen through his discovery of his moral weakness. There was first the example of the rhetorician Victorinus, the story of whose conversion was related to him by Simplicianus, whom Augustine had consulted for direction in his spiritual distress. By this narrative Augustine was inflamed with an immense emulation to imitate his distinguished colleague, but found himself unable to break decisively with his worldly life. Then came the example of Anthony and the Egyptian monks, related to him by a fellow-countryman, Pontianus, on a chance visit; and with this the example also of their imitators in the West. This brought on the crisis. "A horrible shame," he tells us, "gnawed and confounded his soul" while Pontianus was speaking. "What is the matter with us?" he cried to Alypius. "What is it you hear? The unlearned rise and take heaven by storm, and we with all our learning, see how we are wallowing in flesh and blood! Are we

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ashamed to follow where they lead the way? Ought we not rather to be ashamed not to follow at once?" We all know the story of the agony of remorse that seized him and how release came at length through a child's voice, by which he was led at last to take up the book that lay on the table and read; reading, he found strength to make the great decision that changed his whole life. It is a story which must not be told, however, except in Augustine's own moving words.

"There was a little garden to our lodging of which we had the use.... Thither the tumult of my heart drove me, where no one could interrupt the fierce quarrel which I was waging with myself, until it should reach the issue known to Thee but not to me.... Thus was I sick and tormented, reproaching myself more bitterly than ever, twisting and writhing in my chain, until it should be entirely broken, since now it held me but slightly—though it held me yet.... And I kept saying in my heart, 'O let it be now! let it be now!' and as I spoke I almost resolved—I almost did it, but I did it not.... So when searching reflection had drawn out from the hidden depths all my misery and piled it up in the sight of my heart, a great tempest broke over me, bearing with it a great flood of tears.... And I went further off ... and flung myself at random under a fig tree there and gave free vent to tears; and the flood of my eyes broke forth, an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And not indeed in these words, but to this purport, I cried to Thee incessantly, 'But Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? O remember not against us our iniquities of old!' I felt myself held by them: I raised sorrowful cries: 'How long, How long? Tomorrow, and to-morrow? Why not now, why not this instant, end my wickedness?'

"I was speaking thus and weeping in the bitterest contrition of heart, when lo, I heard a voice, I know not whether of boy or girl, saying in a chant and repeating over and over: Take and read, Take and read. At once with changed countenance I began most intently to think whether there was any kind of game in which children chanted such a thing, but I could not recall ever hearing it. I choked back the rush of tears and rose, interpreting it no otherwise than as a divine command to me to open the book and read whatever passage I first lighted upon. For I had heard of Anthony, that he had received the admonition from the Gospel lesson which he chanced to come in upon, as if what was read was spoken to himself: 'Go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me'; and was at once converted by this oracle to Thee. So I returned quickly to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had laid down the volume of the apostle there when I left him. I seized it, opened it, and read in silence the passage 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

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Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' No further did I wish to read: nor was there need. Instantly, as I reached the end of this sentence, it was as if the light of peace was poured into my heart and all the shades of doubt faded away.... For Thou didst convert me to Thyself in such a manner that I sought neither a wife nor any hope of this world—taking my stand on that Rule of Faith on which Thou didst reveal me to my mother so many years before."

Thus there was given to the Church, as Harnack says,\* incomparably the greatest man whom "between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer the Christian Church has possessed"; and the thankful Church has accordingly made a festival of the day on which the great event occurred—according this honor of an annual commemoration of their conversions only to Paul and Augustine among all her saints, "thus seeming to say," as Boissier remarks,† "that she owes almost an equal debt of gratitude to each." But it would be more in accordance with Augustine's own heart to say, Thus a soul was brought to its God, and made so firmly His that throughout a long life of service to Him it never knew the slightest wavering of its allegiance. It is easy to make merry over the impure elements that entered into the process of his conversion. It is easy to point scornfully to the superstition which made out of the voice of a child at play a message from heaven; and which resorted to the sacred volume as to a kind of book of divination. It is easy to exclaim that after all Augustine's "conversion" was not to Christianity but to Monachism\*—with its entire ascetic ideal, including its depreciation of woman and its perversion of the whole sexual relation. It is easy to raise doubts whether the conversion was as sudden or as complete as Augustine represents it: to trace out the steps that led up to it with curious care and to lay stress on every hint of incompleteness of Christian knowledge or sentiment which may plausibly be brought forward from his writings of the immediately succeeding months.† But surely all this is to confuse the kernel with the husk. Of course, the conversion was led up to by a gradual approach, and Augustine himself analyzes for us with incomparable skill the progress of this preparation through all the preceding years. And, equally of course, there was left a great deal for him to learn after the crisis was past: and he does not conceal from us how much of a babe in Christ he was and felt himself to be as he emerged new-born from the stress of the conflict. And of course, in the preparation for it and in the gradual realization of its effects in his thought and life alike, and even in the very act itself by which he gave himself to God, there were mingled

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\* *Monasticism and the Conf. of Augustine* (E. T.), p. 123.

† *La Fin du Paganisme*, I, 291.

\* LOOFS says Augustine "was converted, because he permitted himself to be shamed—by Monachism" (*op. cit.*, p. 267, 31).

† So especially HARNACK and BOISSIER: they are sufficiently though briefly answered by WÖRTER, pp. 63 sq.

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elements derived from his stage of Christian knowledge and feeling, from the common sentiments of the time, which powerfully affected him, and from his own personality and ingrained tendencies. But these things, which could not by any possibility have been absent, not only do not in any respect derogate from the reality or the profundity of the revolution then accomplished—the reality and profundity of which are attested by his whole subsequent life‡—but do not even detract from the humanity or attractiveness of the narrative or of the personality presented to us in it. He must be sadly lacking not only in dramatic imagination, but in human sympathy as well, who can find it strange that in the stress of his great crisis, when his sensibilities were strained to the breaking point, Augustine could see the voice of heaven in the vagrant voice of a child; or should have followed out the hint thus received into his heated imagination and committed his life, as it were, to the throw of a die. Surely this is as psychologically true to life as it is touching to the sensibilities: and in no way, in the circumstances, can it be thought derogatory to either the seriousness of his mind or the greatness of his character. And how could he, in the revulsion from what he felt his special sin, fail to be carried in the swing of the pendulum far beyond the point of rest, in his estimate of the relation that could safely obtain between the sexes? The appearance of such touches of human weakness in the story contributes not only to the narrative the transparent traits of absolute truth and to the scene depicted a reality which deeply affects the heart of the reader, but to the man himself just that touch of nature which “makes the whole world kin.” In such traits as these we perceive indeed one of the chief elements of the charm of the *Confessions*. The person we meet in them is a person, we perceive, who towers in greatness of mind and heart, in the loftiness of his thought and in his soaring aspirations, far above ordinary mortals: and yet he is felt to be compacted of the same clay from which we have ourselves been moulded. If it were not so obviously merely the art of artless truth, we should say that herein lies, more than in anything else, the art of the *Confessions*. For it is the very purpose of this book to give the impression that Augustine himself was a weak and erring sinner, and that all of good that came into his life was of God.

It is especially important for us precisely at this point to recall our minds to the fact that to give such an impression is the supreme purpose of the *Confessions*. This whole account of his life-history which we have tried to follow up to its crisis in his conversion is written,

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‡ Even LOOFS, who is quite ready to correct the *Confessions* by what he deems the testimony of the treatises emanating from the period just after the conversion, is free to admit that a revolutionary crisis did take place in Augustine’s life at this time, and that, therefore, the *Confessions*, in describing such a crisis, give us a necessary complement to what we could derive from these treatises. He says (*Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, II, 267) that there must have happened *something* between Augustine’s adoption of Neoplatonism at a time when he still lived in concubinage and his decisive revulsion from all sexual life, witnessed in the *Soliloquies* (1. 10, 17), which will account for the great change: and this *something* the *Confessions* alone give us. This is a testimony to the historicity of the *Confessions* of the first value.

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let us remind ourselves, not that we may know Augustine, but that we may know God: and it shows us Augustine only that we may see God. The seeking and saving grace of God is the fundamental theme throughout. The events of Augustine's life are not, then, set forth in it *simpliciter*. Only such events of his life are set down as manifest how much he needed the salvation of God and how God gradually brought him to that salvation: and they are so set down and so dealt with as to make them take their places, rightly marshaled, in this great argument. This is the account to give of that coloring of self-accusation that is thrown over the narrative which is so offensive to some of its readers; as if Augustine were set upon painting his life in the blackest tints imaginable, and wished us to believe that his "quiet and honest youth" and strenuous and laborious manhood, marked as they really were by noble aspiration and adequate performance, were rather "all sin": nay, that the half-instinctive acts of his infancy itself and the very vitality of his boyish spirits were but the vents which a peculiarly sinful nature formed for itself. In these traits of the narrative, however, Augustine is not passing judgment on himself alone, but in himself on humanity at large in its state of sin and misery. By an analysis of his own life-history he realizes for himself, and wishes to make us realize with him, what man is in his sinful development on the earth, that our eyes may be raised from man to see what God is in His loving dealing with the children of men. We err, if from the strong, dark lines in which he paints his picture we should infer that he would have us believe that in his infancy, youth or manhood he was a sinner far beyond the sinfulness of other men. Rather would he say to us in his Saviour's words: "Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." But we should err still more deeply, should we fancy that he meant us to suppose that it was due to any superiority to other men on his part that God had sought him out and granted to him His saving grace. He knew his own sinfulness as he knew the sinfulness of no other man, and it was his one burning desire that he should in his recovery to God recognize and celebrate the ineffableness of the grace of God. The pure grace of God is thus his theme throughout, and nowhere is it more completely so than in this culminating scene of his conversion. The human elements that enter into the process, or even into the act itself by which he came to God, only heightened the clearness of his own perception that it was to the grace of God alone that he owed his recovery, and he would have them similarly heighten the clearness with which his readers perceive it with him.\*

With his conversion, therefore, the narrative of the *Confessions* culminates and practically ends. There follows, indeed, another book of narration in which he tells us briefly of his preparation for baptism and of the baptism itself and its meaning to him; but chiefly of

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\* Augustine's testimony that it was to the grace of God that he owed his conversion is drawn out at some length by T. BRET, *La Conv. d. St. Aug.*, pp. 60–66. See also WÖRTER, *Die Geistesentwicklung d. St. Aug. bis zu seiner Taufe* (Paderborn, 1892), especially the summary, pp. 62 sq.

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his mother and of that remarkable conversation he held with her at Ostia in which they fairly scaled heaven together in their ardent aspirations; and then of how he laid her away with a heart full of appreciation of her goodness and of his loss. And then, in yet another book, he undertakes to tell us not what he was, but what he had become, but quickly passes into such searching psychological and ethical analyses that the note of autobiography is lost. Not in this book, then, is the revelation of what Augustine had become to be found; it is rather given us by means of the narrative which fills the first nine books, in the judgment he passes there on his former self and in the cries of gratitude he raises there to God for the great deliverance he had wrought in his soul. We see without difficulty that this new Augustine who is writing is a different Augustine from him whom he depicts in the narrative: we see that it is even a different Augustine from him whom he leaves with us at the end of the narrative—after his conversion, and his emergence from his country retreat for baptism, and his return to his native Africa. And yet we see also that the making of this new Augustine was in essence completed at the point where the narrative leaves him. Whatever development came after this came in the processes of natural growth, and argues no essential change.

## IV.—THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUGUSTINE

It is convenient to draw a distinction between what we may call, by a somewhat artificial application of the terms, the making and the development of Augustine. Under the former term we may sum up the factors that coöperated to make the man who emerged from the crisis of his conversion just the man he was; and by the latter we may designate the gradual ripening of his thought and life after he had become a Christian to their final completeness. The factors that enter into his “making,” in this sense, are exhibited to us in his own marvelous analysis in the vital narrative of the *Confessions*. It is in the mirror of the works which he composed through the course of his busy life that we must seek the manner of man he was when he entered upon his Christian race and the man he became as he pressed forward steadily to his goal. Soundly converted though he was, it was yet the man who had been formed by the influences which had worked upon him through those thirty eager years who was converted: and his Christianity took form and color from the elements he brought with him to it.

An interesting indication of the continued significance to him of those old phases of his experience is discoverable in his setting about, at once upon his conversion, to refute precisely those systems of error in the toils of which he had himself been holden, and that in the reverse order in which he had passed through them. And that is as much as to say that he attacked them in the order in which they may be supposed to have been still living memories to him. It was during the very first months after his conversion, and even before his baptism, that his treatise *Against the Academics* was written. And before the year

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was out his first work against the Manicheans was published, inaugurating a controversy which was to engage much of his time and powers for the next ten years.\* This very polemic reveals the completeness with which he had outgrown these phases of belief, or rather of unbelief: there is no trace in it of remaining sympathy with them, and his entanglement in them is obviously purely a matter of memory.

He entered at this time into no such refutation of Neoplatonism: this was reserved for the teeming pages of the *City of God*. Rather it was as a Neoplatonic thinker that Augustine became a Christian; and he carried his Neoplatonic conceptions over into Christianity with him. This is not to say, however, as has been said, that his thinking “was still essentially Neoplatonic,” and “his Christianity during this period was merely Neoplatonism with a Christian stain and a Christian veneering.”† Much less is it to say, as also has been said, that what we call his “conversion” was a conversion not to Christianity but merely to Neoplatonic spiritualism, while actual Christianity was embraced by him only some years later on‡—if indeed it was ever fully assimilated, for still others insist that his thinking remained “essentially Neoplatonic” throughout his life, or at least a complete Neoplatonic system lay always in his mind alongside his superinduced Christianity, unassimilated and unassimilable by it.§ All this is the gravest kind of exaggeration. An analysis of Augustine’s writings composed during his retreat at Cassiciacum while he was awaiting baptism, presents to our observation already a deeply devout and truly Christian thinker, although it reveals the persistence in his thought and in his modes of expression alike, of conceptions and terms derived from his engrossment with Neoplatonic forms of thought and speech, which in his later writings no longer appear.\*

The reality of a gradual development of Augustine’s thought is already indicated by this circumstance, and it remains only to fix its course with such precision as may be attainable and to determine its stages and its rate of progress. It has become quite common to mark off in it quite a series of definite changes. Thus we read† that it was only “on his entrance upon a clerical career,” that is, only on his ordination as presbyter in 391, that Augustine entered upon a new phase of thought, marked by increasing knowledge of the Scriptures and deepening Church feeling; and only on his consecration as bishop,

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\* On the place in his works of a polemic against Polytheism—which would be going back to the very beginning—see NAVILLE, *St. Augustine, etc.*, pp. 170–171, note.

† LOOFS, *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, 270, 31.

‡ L. GOURDON, *Essai sur la Conversion de St. Augustin* (Paris, 1900), pp. 45–50, 83.

§ HARNACK, *Hist. of Dogma* (E. T.), V, ch. iv.

\* Such an analysis, brief but admirably done (except that justice is not done to the *Christianity* of this period of Augustine’s life), may be found in LOOFS’ article in *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, pp. 270, 11–274, 8. See also WÖRTER, *Geistesentwicklung der St. Aug.*

† LOOFS, *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, *loc. cit.*, pp. 270 and 279.

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late in 395, that he at length attained in principle that complete system of thought which we know as "Augustinianism." Even greater detail is sometimes attempted with respect to the development of the preëpiscopal period. The presbyterial period (391–395) is appropriately called "the last section of his apprenticeship," and the preceding four or five years are subdivided into the period between conversion and baptism in which the first place is given to reason and the effort is to conciliate religion with philosophy; and the period from baptism to ordination in which the first place is given to Scripture and the effort has come to be to conciliate philosophy with religion.‡ Four successive epochs in Augustine's thought are thus distinguished, marked by the progressive retirement of philosophy—Neoplatonism in this case—and the progressive advancement of Scripture to its rightful place as primary source of divine knowledge: and these four epochs are sharply divided from one another by external occurrences in Augustine's life,—his baptism, ordination as presbyter, and consecration as bishop.

It is scarcely possible to avoid the impression that the scheme of development thus outlined suffers from over-precision and undue elaboration. We are struck at once by the rapidity of the movement which is supposed to have taken place. Augustine's conversion occurred in the late summer of 386: the treatise *On Divers Questions to Simplicianus*, in which it is allowed on all hands that "Augustinianism" appears, in principle, in its completeness, was written before the end of 396. Only ten years are available, then, for a development which is supposed to run through four well-marked stages. The exact synchronism of the periods of development with changes of importance in the external conditions of Augustine's life raises further suspicion: there seems to be nothing either in the external changes fitted to produce the internal ones, or in the internal changes to produce the external ones. We begin to wonder whether the assumed internal "development" may not be largely an illusion produced merely by the gradual shifting of interest, accompanied by the natural adjustments of emphasis, which was inevitable in the passage of a layman to official positions in the Church of increasing responsibility. Color is given to this suggestion by the actual series of treatises proceeding from each of these periods of Augustine's life. When Augustine connected himself with the Church in 386, and entered the arena of discussion, he entered it not as an accredited teacher clothed with ecclesiastical authority, but in the rôle of Christian philosopher. His earliest writings bear entirely this character; and it does not appear that writings on the same themes and with the same end in view, if proceeding from him later in life, would not have assimilated themselves closely to these in tone and character. The shifting of the emphasis to more positive Christian elements in the later treatises belonging to his lay period, follows closely the change in the subjects which he treated. His polemic against the Manicheans, already begun in Rome, continued during his residence in Thagaste to

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‡ NOURISSON, *La philos. de St. Aug.*, I, 33–34.



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absorb his attention. This controversy still largely occupied him through his presbyterial period: but already not only was the Donatist conflict commenced, but his positive expositions of Scripture began to take a large place in his literary product. Speaking now from the point of view of an official teacher of the Church, it is not strange that a stronger infusion of positive elements found their way into his works. In his episcopal period purely thetical treatises enter into the product in important proportions, and the anti-Manichean polemic gave way first to the anti-Donatist, and after 412 to the anti-Pelagian, both of which were favorable to the fuller expression of the positive elements of his Christian doctrine—the one in its ecclesiastical and the other in its individualistic aspects. On a survey of the succession of treatises we acquire a conviction that such a series of treatises could not fail to give the impression of a developing doctrinal position such as is outlined by the expositors, whether such a development was actual or not. In other words, the doctrinal development of Augustine as drawn out by the expositors may very well be and probably is largely illusory. Its main elements may be fully accounted for by the different occasions and differing purposes on and for which the successive treatises were written.

We must, then, look deeper than this gradual change from treatises of thoroughly philosophical tenor to treatises of thoroughly Christian contents before we can venture to affirm a marked doctrinal growth in Augustine from 386 to 396 and beyond. On seeking to take this deeper view we are at once struck by two things. The first of these is that the essence of “Augustinianism” as expounded in the treatises of the episcopal period is already present in principle in the earliest of Augustine’s writings and, indeed, from the first constitutes the heart of his teaching. The second is that the working of this “Augustinianism” outwards, so as to bring all the details of teaching into harmony with itself, was, nevertheless, a matter of growth—and a growth, we may add, which had not reached absolute completeness, we do not say merely, until Augustine had obtained his episcopacy in 396, but when he laid down his pen and died in 430. Augustine’s great idea was the guiding star of his life from the very beginning of his Christian career. It more and more took hold of his being and extruded more and more perfectly the remainders of inconsistent thinking. But up to the end it had not, with absolute completeness, adjusted to itself his whole circle of ideas. An attempt must now be made at least to illustrate this suggestion.

What is the essence of “Augustinianism”? Is it not that sense of absolute dependence on God which, conditioning all the life and echoing through all the thought, produces the type of religion we call “evangelical” and the type of theology we call “Augustinian”? This is the keynote of the *Confessions*, and gives it at once its evangelical character and its appeal to the heart of the sinner. It is summed up in the famous prayer: “Command what Thou wilt, and give what Thou commandest” —hearing which, Pelagius, representative

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of anti-Augustinianism at its height, recognized in it the very heart, of Augustinianism and was so incensed as to come nearly to blows with him who had rashly repeated it to him. Now it is notable that this note is already struck in the earliest class of Augustine's writings. "Command, I beg," he prays in the *Soliloquies* (I, 1, 5)—"Command and ordain, I beg, whatsoever Thou wilt; but heal and open my ears.... If it is by faith that those who take refuge in Thee find Thee, give faith." When exhorted to believe—if, indeed, that is in our power—his pious response is: "Our power He Himself is." These great words, "*Dafidem,*" "*Potestas nostra Ipse est,*" sum up in themselves implicitly the whole of "Augustinianism"; and they need only consistent explication and conscious exposition so as to cover the entirety of life and thought to give us all that "Augustinianism"; ever gave us.

It may still, indeed, be asked whether the note they strike is the fundamental note of these earlier writings and whether such expressions constitute as large an element in them as might be expected from Augustine. On the whole, we think, both questions must be answered in the affirmative. But this answer must be returned with some discrimination. It is not meant, of course, that the substance of these books is made up of such sentences, even in the sense in which this is true, say, of the *Confessions*. What is meant is that these books, being of an entirely different character from, say, the *Confessions*, and written to subserve an entirely different purpose, yet betray this fundamental note throbbing behind the even flow of their own proper discourse, and thus manifest themselves as the product of a soul which was resting wholly upon its God. We must profess our inability fully to understand the standpoint of those who read these earliest books as the lucubrations of a Neoplatonic philosopher throwing over the mere expression of his thoughts a thin veil of Christian forms. Plainly it is not the philosopher, only slightly touched by Christianity, that is speaking in them, but the Christian theologian, who finds all his joy in the treasures he has discovered in his newly gained faith. Through the Socratic severity of their philosophical discourse—which is, after all, but the stillness after the storm—there continually breaks the undercurrent of suppressed emotion. The man who is writing has obviously passed through severe conflicts and has only with difficulty attained his present peace. He has escaped from the bonds of superfluous desires, and the burden of dead cares being laid aside, now breathes again, has recovered his senses, returned to himself.\* There is no direct reference made to the conversion that had so lately transformed him into a new man, but the consciousness of it lies ever in the background and it is out of its attainment that he now speaks.†

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\* *C. Acad*, II, ii, 4, *ad. init.*

† *Cf. Cont. Acad.*, II, ii, 5.

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We may be sure that when this man gives himself up after passing through such a crisis to philosophical discourses, it is not because there lies nothing more than these abstract reasonings deep in his heart, but because he has a conscious end of importance to serve by them. The end he has set before him in them certainly is not, as Harnack supposes, merely to “find himself” after the turmoil of the revolution he has experienced, to clarify to his own thinking his new religio-philosophical position. There is indication enough that he does not speak his whole heart out. He is rather seeking, as Boissier hints, to serve the religion to which he has at last yielded his heart and his life. In breaking with the world had he taken an irrational step? Had he sacrificed his intellect in bowing to authority? No, he would have all men know he is rather just entering now upon the riches of his inheritance—in which, moreover, all that he has really gained from the best thought of the world has its proper place and its highest part to play. He is, in a word, not expounding here the Neoplatonic philosophy in Christian terms: he is developing the philosophy of Christianity in terms of the best philosophic thought of the day—serving himself as a Christian heir to the heritage of the ages. The task he had set himself\* was to construct a Christian philosophy out of Platonic materials. Nor will the notion that he was at the outset so keen an advocate of the hegemony of reason that he was unprepared to submit his thought to the authority of Christ and of the Scriptures which He has given us, bear investigation: it shatters itself not only against the whole tone of the discussion, but also against repeated express declarations. In the very earliest of his books he tells us, for example, that to him the authority of Him who says “Seek and ye shall find” is greater than that of all philosophy;† and he sets the authority of Christ over against that of reason with the declaration that it is certain that he shall never fall away from it, because he cannot find a stronger.‡

Although, however, he had thus firmly from the beginning laid hold of what we may call both the formal and the material principles of his theology—the authority of the divine revelation in and through Christ, embodied in the Scriptures, and the utter dependence of man on God for all good; it does not in the least follow that he had already drawn out from Scripture all that was to be believed on its authority or worked out all the implications of his profound sense of absolute dependence on God. The explication of the teaching of Scripture and the realization of the implications of his fundamental principle of dependence on God constituted, on the contrary, precisely his life-work, on which he was just entering. As we read on from book to book we do not fail to feel, even within the limits of his lay life, a gradual deepening and widening of his knowledge of Scripture,

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\* Cf. NAVILLE, *Sant Aug.*, p. 69.

† *Cont. Acad.*, II, iii, 9.

‡ *Ibid.*, III, xx, 43. For this point of view see especially R. SCHMID'S paper in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1897, VII, 94.

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and under the influence of this growing knowledge, a gradual modification of his opinions philosophical and theological alike, and even a gradual change in his very style.\* His earliest writings certainly contain indications enough of crudities of thought which were subsequently transcended. We do not need to advert here to such peripheral matters as his confession that he cannot understand why infants are baptized.† Despite the passion of his dependence on God and the vigor of his reference to God alone of all that is good, he had not throughout this whole period learned to exclude the human initiative from the process of salvation itself. “God does not have mercy,” he says,‡ “unless the will has preceded.” “It belongs to us to believe and to will, but to Him to give to those that believe and will the power to do well, through the Holy Spirit, through whom love is shed abroad in our hearts.”§ “God has not predestinated any one except whom He foreknew would believe and answer His call.”|| Thus his zeal for free will which burned warmly throughout this whole period of his life, did not expend itself merely in its strong assertion over against the notion of involuntary sin,¶ but was carried over also into the matter of salvation. No doubt this zeal was in large measure due to the stress of his conflict with Manicheism, which colored the thought of the whole period: but what it concerns us here to note especially is that it was possible for him to hold and proclaim these views of human initiative in salvation although the centre of his thought and feeling alike lay in the great confession: “Our power He Himself is.” It is quite clear that throughout this period his most central ideas had not yet succeeded in coming fully to their rights. He had not yet attained to a thorough understanding of himself as a Christian teacher.

It is well to focus our attention on the particular instance of as yet unformed views which we have adduced. For it happens that with reference to it we have the means of tracing the whole process of his change of view; and it is most instructive. It was indeed just at the opening of his episcopal period that the change took place; but it stood in no direct connection with this alteration in his external status. Nor was it the result of any controversial sharpening of his sight: it is characteristic of Augustine’s life that his views

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\* Cf. NAVILLE, *op. cit.*, p. 70: “Beyond doubt, when we study in their chronological succession the works of these five years, we perceive the *rôle* of Scripture gradually to increase. The author, we feel, has immersed himself in the study of Scripture. He has acquired a knowledge of it, of ever-increasing depth. His very style becomes modified under its influence. No doubt, also, the idea of the Church is more and more emphasized up to the book on the True Religion, in which Augustine expressly undertakes to expound the faith of the Catholic Church. Finally the philosophical thought itself undergoes on some points alterations, which we shall point out.” This is all very justly said.

† *De quant. anim.*, 38, 80.

‡ *Quæst.* 83, 68, 5.

§ *Expos.*, 61.

|| *Expos.*, 55.

¶ *E.g., de vera relig.*, xiv, 27.

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were not formed through or even in controversy, but were ready always to be utilized in controversies which arose after their complete formation. It was the result purely and simply of deeper and more vital study of Scripture.

The corrected views find their first expression in the first book of the work *On Divers Questions to Simplicianus*, which was written in 396, the same year in which he was made bishop. The “questions” discussed in this book were Rom. 7:7–25 and Rom. 9:10–29. In the *Retractations*\* he says relatively to the latter “question”: “Later in this book the question is taken from that passage where it says, ‘But not only so, but Rebecca also having conceived of one, even our father Isaac’—down to where it says, ‘Except the God of Sabaoth had left us a seed we had been made as Sodom and had been like unto Gomorrah.’ In the solution of this question, we struggled indeed for the free choice of the human will;† but the grace of God conquered: otherwise the apostle could not have been understood to speak with obvious truth when he says, ‘For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? But if thou didst receive it why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?’ It was because he wished to make this clear that the martyr Cyprian set forth the whole meaning of this passage by saying: ‘We are to glory in nothing because nothing is ours’ (*Cypr.*, lib. 3, testim. 4).” Driven thus by purely exegetical considerations—working, no doubt, on a heart profoundly sensible of its utter dependence on God—Augustine was led somewhat against his will to recognize that the “will to believe” is itself from God. Accordingly, in this “question” he teaches at length that whether man despises or does not despise the call does not lie in his own power.\* For, he reasons, “if it lies in the power of him that is called not to obey, it is possible to say, ‘Therefore it is not of God that showeth mercy, but of man that willeth and runneth,’ because the mercy of him that calls is in that case not enough unless it is followed by the obedience of him that is called.”† No, he argues, “God has mercy on no one in vain: but so calls him on whom He has mercy—after a fashion He knows will be congruous to him—that he does not repulse Him that calls.”‡

At a much later time, Augustine details to us the entire history of this change of view.§ The whole passage is well worth reading, but we can adduce only the salient points here. His earlier view he speaks of as merely an unformed view. He “had not yet very carefully inquired into or sought out the nature of the election of grace of which the apostle speaks” in Rom. 10:1–5. He had not yet thought of inquiring whether faith itself is not God’s gift.

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\* II, 1, 1.

† *Laboratum est pro libero arbitrio voluntatis humanæ.*

\* *Op. cit.*, I, 2, 11.

† I, 2, 13.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *De prædest. sanct.*, 3, 7.

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He did not sufficiently carefully search into the meaning of the calling that is according to God's purpose. It was chiefly 1 Cor. 4:7 that opened his eyes. But here we will listen to his own words: "It was especially by this passage that I myself also was convinced, when I erred in a similar manner" — with the Semi-Pelagians, that is — "thinking that the faith by which we believe in God is not the gift of God, but that it is us of ourselves, and that by it we obtain the gifts of God whereby we may live temperately and righteously and piously in this world. For I did not think that faith was preceded by God's grace — so that by its means might be given us what we might profitably ask — except in the sense that we could not believe unless the proclamation of the truth preceded; but to consent after the Gospel had been preached to us, I thought belonged to ourselves, and came to us from ourselves."

That it was precisely at the beginning of his episcopate that he attained to his better and more consistent doctrine on this cardinal point, thus giving its completed validity for the first time to his fundamental principle of utter dependence on God, was obviously a pure accident. And there is a single clause in the expression he gives to his new doctrine on this the first occasion of its enunciation which exhibits to us that even yet he had not worked it out in its completeness. "But him on whom He has mercy," we read, "He calls, *in the manner that He knows will be congruous to him*, so that he will not repulse the Caller."\* About this clause there was much disputation a thousand years later between the Jansenists and the Congruists. As it stands in the text it is only a chance clause, in no way expressive of Augustine's developed thought, in which undoubtedly the grace of God is conceived as creative. Indeed, immediately before it occurs the declaration that "the effect of the Divine mercy can by no means be abandoned to the powers of man, as if, unless man willed it, God would vainly have exercised His mercy," the doctrine suggested by which is scarcely wholly congruous with the notion of "congruous grace." What the clause indicates to us is not, therefore, a determinate teaching of Augustine's, but rather the fact that he had not even yet very carefully inquired into the nature of the operation of God which he called grace, and was liable to suggest inconsistent views of its mode of operation in immediately contiguous sentences. Was it the *quâ* or merely a *sine quâ non* of salvation? To this question his fundamental principle of absolute dependence on God, that God alone is "our power," had a very decisive reply to give: and he was destined to find that reply and to announce it with great decision. But as yet he had not been led to think it out with precision. In important respects his view remained still unformed.

This instance of the gradual elaboration even of Augustine's most fundamental conceptions is only one of many that could be adduced. Another striking illustration is offered by the slow clarification of his doctrine of predestination, — purely again under

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\* *Quæst. ad Simplic.*, I, 2, 13.

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the influence of deeper study of Scripture.† The totality of Augustine’s development consists, in a word, of ever fuller and clearer evolution of the contents of his primary principle of complete dependence on God, in the light of ever richer and more profound study of Scripture: and we can follow out this development quite independently of external influences, which in his case never conditioned his thought, but only gave occasion to its fuller expression. It might fairly be said that his entire growth is simply a logical development of his fundamental material principle of dependence on God under the guidance of his formal principle of the authority of Scripture. One of the most striking results of this was that he learned little or nothing of primary moment from the controversies in which he was constantly engaged: but rather met them with already formed convictions. No doubt his conceptions were brought out in more varied and even in part clearer and stronger expression during the course of these controversies: but in point of mere fact they were in each case already formed and had been formally announced before the controversies arose. If Loofs says of Athanasius, for example, that he did not make the Nicænum, but the Nicænum made him; he is compelled to say, on the contrary, of Augustine, that he was not formed in the Pelagian controversy, but his preformation was the occasion of it. “Pelagianism,” he remarks,\* perhaps with some slight exaggeration, “was first of all nothing but a reaction of the old moralistic rationalism against the monergism of grace that was exalted by Augustine’s type of piety.” Of course, we are not to imagine that on this showing Augustine had from the first nothing to learn: or even that he ultimately worked out his fundamental principle perfectly into all the details of his teaching. We have already intimated that a process of growth is traceable in him and that the process of his growth to a perfect elaboration of his principle was never completed. Had it been, Harnack could not say of him that he bequeathed to posterity only “problems.”

In very fact, there remained to the end, as the same writer puts it, “two Augustines,” which is as much as to say, that he embraced in his public teaching inconsistent elements of doctrine.† It is indeed quite possible by attending alternately to one element of his teaching alone to draw out from his writings two contradictory systems: and this is just what has been done in the vital processes of historical development. To him as to their founder both Romanist and Protestant make their appeal.‡ The specific estimate which the Catholic places on the *unitas ecclesiæ* goes back to him, who it was that gave that compactness and far-reaching elaboration to the doctrine of the Church and its

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† *Expos.*, 60. The matter is sufficiently expounded by LOOFS, *Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, 276, 21.

\* *Leitfaden, d. Dogmengeschichte*, § 32, ed. 2, p. 210.

† HARNACK, *Dogmengeschichte*, III, 90 (E. T., V, 101); cf. SCHAFF, *Saint Augustine*, 102.

‡ And not Romanist and Protestant alone: in a finely conceived passage LOOFS (*Herzog*.<sup>3</sup>, II, 277) outlines Augustine’s position as the spring out of which many different waters flow. Cf. also his *Leitfaden*, § 46 (p. 176).

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Sacraments which rendered the immense structure of Catholicism possible. It was equally he who by his doctrine of grace contributed the factor of positive doctrine by which the Reformation was rendered possible; for the Reformation on its theological and religious side was just an Augustinian revival. Two children were thus struggling in the womb of his mind. There can be no doubt which was the child of his heart. His doctrine of the Church he had received whole from his predecessors and himself gave it only the sharpness and depth which insured its vitality. His doctrine of grace was all his own, his greatest contribution to Christian thought. He was pleased to point out how this element of it and that had found broken expression in the pages of his great predecessors. He was successful in showing that all the true religious life of the Church from the beginning had flowed in the channels determined by it. But after all it was his, or rather it was he himself translated into forms of doctrine. It represented the very core of his Christian being: by it he lived; and his whole progress in Christian thinking is only the increasing perfection with which its fundamental principle applied itself in his mind to every department of Christian thought and life. Everything else gave way gradually before it, and it was thus that his thought advanced steadily toward a more and more consistent system.

But his doctrine of the Church and Sacraments had not yet given way before his doctrine of grace when he was called away from this world of partial attainment to the realms of perfect thought and life above. It still maintained a place by its side, fundamentally inconsistent with it, limited, modified by it, but retaining its own inner integrity. It is the spectacle of collectivism and individualism striving to create a *modus vivendi*; of dependence on God alone, and the intermediation of a human institution endeavoring to come to good understanding. It was not and is not possible for them to do so. Augustine had glimpses of the distinction between the invisible and the visible Church afterward elaborated by his spiritual children: he touched on the problem raised by the notions of baptismal regeneration and the necessity of the intermediation of the Church for salvation in the face of his passionately held doctrine of the free grace of God, and worked out a sort of compromise between them. In one way or another he found a measure of contentment for his double mind. But this could not last. We may say with decision that it was due only to the shortness of human life; to the distraction of his mind with multifarious cares; to the slowness of his solid advance in doctrinal development—that the two elements of his thought did not come to their fatal conflict before his death. Had they done so, there can be no question what the issue would have been. The real Augustine was the Augustine of the doctrine of grace.\* The whole history of his inner life

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\* Cf. REUTER, *August. Studien*, Studies First and Second; e.g., p. 102: "It was not the idea of the Church as the institute of grace that was dominant in his later years, but that of predestinating grace"; "the doctrine of predestinating grace was the fundamental principle of his religious consciousness *It must be unconditionally maintained, while all else must give way to it.*"



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is a history of the progressive extension of the sway of this doctrine into all the chambers of his thought; of the gradual subjection to it of every element of his inherited teaching. In the course of time—had time been allowed—it was inevitable that his inherited doctrine of the Church also would have gone down before it, and he would have bequeathed to the Church not “problems” but a thoroughly worked-out system of purely evangelical religion.

No doubt it was the weakness of Augustine that this was not accomplished during the span of his six and seventy years. But it was a weakness in which there abode an element of strength. No facile theorizer he. Only as the clearly ascertained teaching of the Word slowly and painfully acquired moved him, did he move at all. Steadily and surely his thought worked its way through the problems presented to it; solidly but slowly. He left behind him, therefore, a structure which was not complete: but what he built he built to last. Had he been granted, perhaps, ten years longer of vigorous life, he might have thought his way through this problem also. He bequeathed it to the Church for solution, and the Church required a thousand years for the task. But even so, it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation. For what was the Reformation, inwardly considered, but the triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the Church?

*Princeton.*

Benjamin B. Warfield.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warfield, B. B. (1905). “Augustine and His ‘Confessions.’ ” *The Princeton Theological Review*, III(1–4), 81–126.