

Confessions Study Guide

Confessions by Augustine of Hippo

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Contents

Confessions Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Book I.....	5
Book II.....	7
Book III.....	9
Book IV.....	11
Book V.....	13
Book VI.....	15
Book VII.....	17
Book VIII.....	19
Book IX.....	21
Book X.....	23
Book XI.....	25
Book XII.....	27
Book XIII.....	29
Characters.....	31
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	36
Style.....	38
Quotes.....	41
Topics for Discussion.....	44



Plot Summary

The Confessions of St. Augustine is the story of Augustine's transformation from a young man driven by ambition and lust to the famous Christian monk, leader, and philosopher. Augustine comes from a humble background. Through his intellectual gifts, he becomes a leading teacher of rhetoric. As he becomes more learned, he wonders how one knows what the truth about God and the world is. In the beginning of Augustine's story, despite the influence of his Christian mother Monica, he is driven more and more into sin. After Augustine faces his shortcomings, he eventually is transformed through his study of philosophy and faith. When Augustine goes to Rome, he is more controlled in his bodily lust, but is even more consumed with a desire for worldly success as a teacher of Rhetoric to rich young men and as a rhetorician. At a certain point, through Augustine's study of secular philosophy, he desires to learn truth and develops a love of truth and philosophy. This begins to make him unhappy with his life and gives him a desire to change it. After learning about the example of the translator of platonic philosophy, Victorinus, and his public conversion to Christianity, Augustine begins to desire to change himself too. Augustine so desires to seek and promote the truth that he is not satisfied with merely being baptized a Christian, but decides to devote his whole life to the church. At first he thinks that this is impossible, but after he hears of the monk Antony, Augustine realizes that he can adopt this way of life as well. Augustine feels that he can best serve the church as a public advocate and teacher, and does not choose to go off into the wilderness to worship God. He and his companions decide to go back to Africa, and on the way his faithful mother passes away.

Even Augustine's struggle to deal with his environment as a baby symbolizes his future struggles in adult life, and the difficulty to know God. As a baby he does not know how to speak, and later he cannot know the will of God. Augustine remembers his difficulty to know truth and to know God, and the many errors he fell into. He contemplates the difficulties of adults to comprehend the Christian Scriptures and the wisdom and power of God, like babies learning to talk. When one learns scholastic or other knowledge, one does not know what its use will be later in life. Augustine had to learn many things to become a great debater and theologian. He spends many hours studying the books and theories of the Manichean sect, but later uses this knowledge to argue against that sect and its heretical beliefs. Augustine studies many of the great philosophers of the Greek and Roman world, including Cicero, Plato and the Platonists, and Aristotle. While he finds Aristotle distasteful and a hindrance to his attempts to know God, the Platonists actually help lead Augustine to God.

After Augustine converts to Catholic Christianity, he describes his theology of God as a commentary on the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Scriptures. The Confessions is a theological work in two senses. It first of all lays out Augustine's struggles to know God, and then goes through a general theology of the existence of God and an individual's responsibility to him. In Augustine's boyhood struggles to learn how to be a man and his errors that he later views as sinful, many issues are foreshadowed that he faces in adult life. He sees people help him by accident and

Augustine wishes to wed deed to intention. In that sense, the Confessions is also a search by Augustine for his own identity as a self-conscious man of God.



Book I

Book I Summary and Analysis

The Confessions of St. Augustine is the story of Augustine's transformation from a young man driven by ambition and lust to the famous Christian monk, leader, and philosopher. Augustine comes from a humble background, and through his intellectual gifts, becomes a leading teacher of rhetoric. As he becomes more learned, he wonders how one knows what the truth about God and the world is. Augustine asks questions such as, "whether I had any knowledge of myself when I was in the womb?" and, "where did I come from?" Augustine asks all these questions, but they do not shake his faith as they would modern skeptics, but rather strengthen his feeling about the mystery and all-knowingness of God. They let him explore his long journey from being a sinful youth to becoming a great investigator of the truth and of the nature of God.

Augustine talks about the primacy of sin, and that human beings sin even when they are infants. This foreshadows his later belief that evil is an independent force, but he overcomes this idea as well. As a school boy, he is told that he sinned, and is beaten for playing ball when he should be working at his studies. Adults tell him he must not be lazy, he must work hard at his studies. And yet, he reflects in the passage, is it justified to be beaten for this? It is not that he was against punishing youth to keep them on the right path, but these beatings were only to please his teachers. They in turn wanted to discipline their students so the students could eventually, as adults, play at various games of business and rhetoric. In this, Augustine foreshadows his future struggles in life to have the spirit of truth and faith to inform his and others' good deeds. Augustine sees that too many of his elders had him do the right thing, by accident, when they did so. Later, Augustine would imitate them, doing what he liked, and blaming his shortcomings on evil spirits.

Augustine reflects more on his school boy struggles to learn Latin grammar and works by Virgil, such as the Aeneid. He had to learn the works of Homer, which he did not like, in order to learn Greek. Augustine has much difficulty in learning the Greek language, whereas he had much less trouble with his native language Latin. Likewise, Augustine enjoyed studying Latin stories much more than the Greek. In this, he foreshadows his long studies of different religions, and how they were not useful to him in themselves, but helped him to deal with theological debates. Augustine fears that the pagan myths that he learned studying literature led to his personal corruption. Later, Augustine prefers the Manichean sect, not because it taught the truth, but because it fit in better with his lifestyle at that time.

Though Augustine admits that he benefited from his studies of Latin and Greek literature, he resents how he was led astray morally by some of the stories. When he read of Zeus engaging in fornication and being powerful, it also made him want to do these deeds. So, already in boyhood, Augustine sees the struggle to form his moral judgment and not be led astray by popular stories or opinion.



Augustine attacks the notion that there is the "innocence of boyhood", since he committed many of the same sins, in terms of inclination, that he later commits, on a greater scale, as an adult. He cheats on games, and had pride in wanting to be victorious. Even then he was showing skill in scholastic rhetoric and full of pride due to his successes. Likewise, Augustine sees the immorality of the bureaucratic thinking of his time. There was more shame in mispronouncing the word "human" than in hating or even killing another human being.

Augustine writes these Confessions to find out the sources of his errors earlier in life and also to encourage the faithful in seeking truth and knowledge of God. Augustine realizes that, although his secular education was adequate in many respects, his spiritual education was lacking. Instead of learning stories of the Christian Scriptures, he learned and admired the Gods in pagan myths. These later instilled him with pride in lust and other sins.

Augustine looks at even trifling incidents in his boyhood and young manhood and how he was led astray. Augustine is particularly interested in the importance of a person's intentions. His elders criticized him, but even righteous people like his mother Monica did not always have the best of intentions. This foreshadows his theological discussion on the need for a person's faith and works to go together. So a person may have properly disciplined Augustine when he was a boy, but since the person's intention and faith were misplaced, the benefit was not much.



Book II

Book II Summary and Analysis

Augustine's struggles for self-development intensify as he reaches young manhood. He is sunk into sin and lustful behavior. This is the turning point in Augustine's narrative, since it sets up the conflict that will follow and must be resolved by him. Augustine goes from the mild sins of his boyhood to the sins of young manhood, of which the most prominent is lust. Augustine is in love with being in love, and at that point in his life, that means sexual love. He has no comprehension of the love of God or love of anything or anyone for disinterested reasons. Looking back, Augustine wishes that someone in his family would have arranged for him to be married so at least his lusts could have been limited to raising a family. Augustine's father and mother have ambitions for him to get an education, so they did not want him to get married yet. Augustine's father wants his son to study, and is willing to shoulder large financial burdens to help him to succeed. Augustine's father has pride in looking at his son at the baths and seeing that he has arrived at a healthy young manhood. Both of Augustine's parents are proud of his intellectual promise. His father spends large amounts of money to send Augustine to Carthage to study.

When Augustine is sixteen years old, he has a period of time off from his studies. Augustine's mother Monica is fearful of him committing sexual sins, especially adultery with another man's wife. However, she also wants him to study and make a career for himself, which influences her to not interfere with Augustine. Later, Augustine's mother Monica shows her saintly qualities, but at this time she is more interested in furthering his ambition and her pride in his achievements. She is willing to let Augustine wait until he is older before getting married. Augustine recalls that he was under a lot of peer pressure to seek sexual pleasure and to applaud those who seek it from his peers that he knew from his town and from school. Augustine remembers even inventing sexual exploits to tell his peers, just to impress them. Likewise, Augustine recalls when he and some of his friends steal fruit from a pear tree. They do this not because they needed the fruit, but for the pure pleasure of thievery. Augustine and his friends, by stealing, get a chance to show how arrogant and brave they are to themselves and their comrades. There is always a rational for sin, Augustine reflects. Men are full of pride; therefore, they turn away from God, thinks Augustine, in his search for the reasons for his former behavior. It is better to seek the joys of life with God. In these passages, Augustine foreshadows his future philosophical struggles and how he would blame the evil he did on an evil force.

Like many young people with a lack of discipline, Augustine starts to get into trouble. He is more interested in love and friendship than any higher goals or values. He begins to have sexual adventures, which drive him further away from all thoughts about God or the church. Likewise, he wants to go along with the crowd, with his friends, and starts being involved in pranks and thievery. He does these acts, like stealing from the pear tree, to show that he is part of the crowd. Although Augustine is not the leader in this



gang which steals from the tree, he willingly takes part. This symbolizes those who grab the fruits of goodness without having the spirit of righteousness. This indeed is a theme of Augustine's long discussion later in this work. It foreshadows his discussion that gifts of worldly works without faith in God are not complete.



Book III

Book III Summary and Analysis

Augustine arrives in Carthage and is carried away with thoughts of love. He even mixes up friendship and physical lust, with a vague but possible mention of a homosexual incident. Augustine is also involved in other passions and emotions. He would go to see plays and feel sad for those who suffer in the play. He wonders why he gets so much pleasure out of seeing someone else suffer on stage. This type of preoccupation with drama, both on stage and in real life, further engage Augustine into a sinful life.

At the same time, Augustine is a senior student in the School of Rhetoric in Carthage and later a teacher. He reads the books of rhetoric, hoping to make a name for himself. By reading the philosopher Cicero's book, called Hortensius, Augustine first finds in himself the love for truth, or from the Greek derivation, philosophy. He finds it odd that Cicero's book does not promote any religion or sect, but rather the general goal of seeking the truth, and is impressed by this. Augustine decides then, at the age of nineteen, that he wants to be a philosopher more than anything else in life, and learn about truth. He only complains that this was not because of his love of God at that time, but his pride at being smarter than many other of his peers.

Thus, Augustine foreshadows his long struggle with philosophy and the actual purpose of philosophy. He also notes that he comes into contact with the Holy Scriptures and Christianity, but it is only worship of Christ in name only, not the real thing. This Christianity is deficient, in that it fails to impress Augustine with its superior viewpoint to the many other religions and sects available. In fact, Augustine wonders on the lack of even the basic morality of observance of the Ten Commandments in his vicinity. When men act wickedly, they do damage to their own soul. Augustine is unable or unwilling to understand spiritual notions and has difficulties with many heresies. These heresies use parts of the Christian story but then pervert it into something else.

Despite reading the Christian Scriptures, Augustine falls victim to religions that worship physical objects, such as the sun and the moon. Augustine talks about the "subverters", who try to mock and disgrace ordinary moral people. They get pleasure out of harassing people for not being devilish like they are. Augustine himself never sinks to this low level, but is content to hang around with men who are like that. Augustine agrees to the argument that the holy men in the Bible were not good or not consistent in obeying the will of God; therefore, no one is totally righteous. This softens him up for the arguments of the Manichean sect, that every man has a soul of light, good, and a soul of darkness, evil, and somehow has to reconcile the two halves of his personality and soul. Augustine agrees to the argument, that he later sees as false and deceptive, that God has some type of a body, and that God's body had to be in a specific location, no matter how far it was or how huge, or that his body could be divided up.



Augustine talks of the victims of sins of the lust of power, and the lust of feeling, such as the pleasure in watching the Gladiators fight in the arena. He talks about the practices of the Manichean sect, which he joins. The Manicheans believe that when a fig is picked off a fig tree, it cries tears. They give it to their "Elect" people, who by eating it, the Manicheans believe, release angels from the fig. At the time, Augustine finds these myths pleasant and believable, though later he sees them as ridiculous.

Monica, Augustine's mother, tries to get him to stop his wrong religious beliefs and life, but can't get him to change. Monica weeps a lot and prays to God. She then has a dream that symbolizes to her that Augustine will eventually come around to Monica's belief in God and Christianity. Monica is by then already a widow, since her husband, Augustine's father Patricius, died a couple of years ago. A Christian priest that Monica consults also assures Monica that Augustine will improve, and this foreshadows Augustine's conversion nine years later.

When Augustine first comes to Carthage, he is out of control with lust and passions. After being there a while, he becomes more focused on his studies of rhetoric. While doing this, after reading Cicero, he has the desire—not to join this or that religious sect—but to seek after truth. Augustine is an outstanding student and teacher and he wants to be the one to know the truths of the universe. This makes him open to a superior religion and philosophy, if he can be convinced to change. Augustine tries to read the Christian Scriptures, but at that point he is unable to understand them or be uplifted by them. He is fixated on physical objects and he has little ability to understand anything spiritual. His mother follows Augustine to Carthage, in Northern Africa, and is very disturbed by his lifestyle. She is assured by a dream and later by a priest that Augustine will have a great change for the better in terms of his soul. This foreshadows Augustine's conversion to Christianity. Already, through his readings of philosophy, Augustine is gradually becoming a more serious young man though, in a sense, his sins are greater. He is getting many people, even those who are Christians, to join the Manichean sect, by using his powers of rhetoric. Augustine is also enjoying the riches and friendship of other successful people.



Book IV

Book IV Summary and Analysis

Augustine is a member of the Manichean sect, while being a teacher of liberal arts and rhetoric. Augustine gets money from his students and teaches them rhetoric. Nevertheless, he tries to be honest in the various competitions that he is involved in. Augustine refuses to have a magician sacrifice animals for him in order to win a rhetoric contest. That would be to sacrifice animals to devils, and in any case, Augustine is suspicious of such superstitions. By now, Augustine has tamed his sexual impulses to the point that he lives with only one woman, who he is not married to, but is faithful to. Augustine is clear that this was not a marriage; this was an arrangement of convenience based on lust. Augustine has a son named Adeodatus with this woman.

Augustine becomes a promoter of the Manichean religion. The Manicheans believe that when one their "Elect" digest food gifts, angels or spirits are released to the Manichean's benefit. Augustine also teaches rhetoric, while enjoying various games and foolish pursuits with the Manicheans, and recruits people to the absurd beliefs of the Manichean sect. Yet, Augustine also learns some limits to superstition. He is instructed by the Governor of the Province on the falseness of astrology. This man had put the crown on Augustine when he won a prize for rhetoric. Yet, he told Augustine how he had quit learning about astrology, since he was an honest man, and instead studied medicine. Augustine's friend Nebridius also laughed at predicting the future through stargazing.

Augustine digresses to a point a couple of years prior, when he began teaching rhetoric in his hometown of Tagaste. Augustine had persuaded his friend to abandon Christianity, but later when the friend is unconscious after being sick, he is baptized a Christian. When the friend recovers, he takes the baptism seriously, and refuses to laugh at it as Augustine urges him to. Shortly after, the friend has a relapse and dies. Augustine is overwhelmed by the power of sin and death, but later sees this as foreshadowing his knowledge of the power of God. One of the reasons Augustine goes to Carthage is not only to have better opportunities to study and teach rhetoric, but also to escape his hometown to avoid seeing the places where he saw and enjoyed being with his dear friend. This is shown by his comment that by God letting his friend die, the corrupt Augustine did not have a chance to corrupt his friend again after the friend is baptized. This symbolizes the power of sin and death, as opposed to the power of the connection to God, to the divine. Augustine feels overwhelmed by the power of sin and death, but later sees the power of God being displayed strongly in the incident of the death of his friend.

Augustine reflects on the fact that time passes, and people die, and that is the nature of things. New people come into the world. It is necessary to follow the word of God, and not even be tied down to one's own flesh, let alone the flesh and existence of other human beings, including one's friends and family. This is something that Augustine finds



very difficult to follow in real life. The incident of the friend's death also symbolizes the fleetingness of human friendship, as opposed to God, who is eternal.

At one point, Augustine wrote a book, which he later lost, called "The Beautiful and the Fitting". The book was dedicated to Hiereus, who he describes as a great orator. Augustine thinks how he erred by idolizing such orators, who were persuasive, but actually didn't care if they told the truth or not. Augustine was primarily concerned with what was beautiful in itself, and not in its relationship to God; he had a materialistic philosophy.

Augustine recounts how he easily understood philosophy, including Aristotle's book "The Ten Categories", which is hard to understand for many people. He feels that this book is harmful to his development and ignores the existence of God. He tried to categorize God in one of Aristotle's categories, as if God and his qualities were a substance. This leads Augustine into a wrong belief, similar to the Manichean sect. Indeed, Augustine is proficient in learning the sciences and philosophy of his time; he just is unable to have any moral system on how to use this knowledge.

Augustine becomes more mature. He has controlled his sexual impulses, although his relationship to his woman is not a marriage. He has worldly ambitions to become a successful Rhetorician and write philosophical works. He is inspired by some works, particularly those of Cicero, which make him want to learn more about the truths of the world, or learn philosophy. Another work that is very influential in his time is by Aristotle, but he finds this work distasteful, and later cites it as having a negative influence in his search for God. This is a different reaction than Augustine's later reaction to the books of the Platonists, which he finds complementary to Christian theology, and helpful in his study of philosophical method and the natural sciences.

Book V

Book V Summary and Analysis

Augustine meets Faustus, the Bishop of the Manicheans, who visits Carthage. At this time, Augustine is twenty-nine years old, and has been a member of the Manichean sect for nine years. Augustine compares the notions he has learned from secular philosophy and science, such as the knowledge of eclipses, with the Fables of Manes, a book of the Manicheans. Manes writes about subjects in the book that he knows nothing about. Augustine is not satisfied with the explanations of Manichean doctrine that Faustus gives him. At the time, Augustine is a professor of literature in Carthage.

Augustine wants to move to Rome, in Italy. He hears that the students are much more disciplined there. In Carthage, students would walk in and out of class during a lecture and certain students would be very disruptive. Augustine hears that this type of behavior is not tolerated at schools in Rome. When he moves to Rome, Augustine has an increased interest in Catholic Christianity. He is unable to believe in Christ, since he thinks Christ would be defiled by being born of the Virgin Mary. Augustine still generally believes that God cannot have created evil; therefore, evil to him is an independent force. This issue is a stumbling block for Augustine, until he sees that evil is caused by corruption and lack of good.

One obstacle Augustine has is that his mother Monica does not want him to leave Carthage and Africa. Augustine pretends that he is going to a port in order to see off a friend going on a journey, but then goes on a ship to Rome. His mother Monica stays at an inn, and in the morning tries frantically to find Augustine, but his ship had already left. Monica doesn't realize that by Augustine going to Rome, he will have a chance to learn more about Christianity and be converted, her one great desire. Even a great soul like Monica is attached to people in the flesh, and does not want Augustine to go. This foreshadows Augustine's intense struggle to abandon his fleshy pleasure attachment to women and become a monk. Shortly after, in Rome, Augustine becomes deathly ill, but still does not seek to be baptized. One reason for this is that Augustine is still living with Manicheans.

Augustine recovers his physical health, but his spiritual health does not yet improve. He lives in Rome at a house of a Manichean, and still follows their doctrine of a soul of darkness and a soul of light in each body. This suits Augustine, because it gives him an excuse to follow his sexual and other desires and then blame his shortcomings on his dark side. Augustine does not defend and promote the faith of the Manicheans at this time, but is friendly with these people and likes to be around their community. Their doctrine causes him to turn against Christianity, because he thinks that the Christians believe in God being confined in a human body, as in when Jesus walked the earth. Augustine, in turn, believes that God and the Devil have real physical substance. He believes that God is infinite, but not in control of evil. The Manicheans believe that



human existence itself was defiled by evil, so that God could not come down to earth in the form of Christ.

Augustine is nervous and ill at ease about teaching in Rome, since he hears that often students contract with a professor and then leave him before paying the fees. He receives an offer to go to Milan, in Northern Italy, with his trip paid by public funds, and he accepts. In Milan, Augustine meets Bishop Ambrose, who is a devout leader of the Christian church there. Augustine becomes friendly with Ambrose, though is not immediately a religious follower of his. At first he finds Ambrose to be a pleasant man, a leader of the community and someone who is a good speaker. Augustine studies the Christian Scriptures and listens to Ambrose giving sermons, and he begins to understand that many passages in the Old Testament can be explained figuratively. On this basis, Augustine leaves the Manichean and becomes a catechumen, an initiate, in the Catholic Church.

A literal interpretation of the Christian Scriptures destroyed Augustine's belief in them, but now he adopts an interpretation of the spirit of the Scriptures. The Manicheans for a long time convince him that Christianity involves a belief that would defile God through contact with human flesh through the birth of Jesus. Now Augustine begins to reexamine this belief.

Augustine, looking back, sees how his belief in the Manichean sect and its separation of good and evil has given him the excuse to avoid truth and philosophy, and continue in his old habits. Yet, even a believer as devout as his mother Monica has an irrational urge to keep Augustine with her and not let him go to Rome. This incident symbolizes the struggle that all human beings have to control their fleshly desires in favor of their love of God. Augustine is led to first Rome and then Milan because of his desires for success and esteem as a professor of literature, but these desires actually lead him to become a Christian. Augustine returns to the theme that the ways of God are mysterious in changing man and giving him new opportunities. Also, Ambrose is a powerfully positive influence on Augustine, first by his professional and friendly manner, and then by his persuasive arguments and scholarship.



Book VI

Book VI Summary and Analysis

Augustine's mother, Monica, joins him in Milan. She becomes one of the faithful at Bishop Ambrose's church. Augustine is uplifted by her love of God and her admiration for Ambrose. Monica has a custom of bringing wine and other gifts to the tombs of Christian saints, but she immediately stops the practice when Ambrose tells the faithful to bring only prayers to these tombs. Ambrose is concerned that bringing wine to these tombs and drinking a blessing to the dead saints would actually encourage drunkenness. Monica understands that Ambrose's intent is to promote restraint and moral behavior.

Augustine also admires Ambrose and listens to his sermons. He would like to ask Ambrose questions, but Ambrose is so busy with his various duties and studying that it is impossible to do so. Augustine begins to understand that when the Scriptures say that God made man in his own image, this does not mean that God has a body. It is a metaphor referring to the Godlike attributes of man being also a creative and reasoning creature. This is an example of why it is so important to study the spirit and intent of the Scriptures, not the literal meaning of a phrase. This foreshadows Augustine's theological theory that the prophet Moses wrote the Scriptures so that the simple-minded could have something to believe in, but the more intellectual would be able to seek a deeper meaning in the word of God. It also foreshadows the positive influence of the spiritual and metaphorical works of the Platonists on Augustine.

Augustine continues to be a professor of literature and rhetoric. He is thinking of getting married, and doesn't understand how Ambrose, an active, vital man, can be totally celibate. Augustine is still caught up in the chase for worldly success and is still not able to make a commitment to Christianity. His friends Alypius and Nebridius are in a similar situation.

Alypius comes from Augustine's hometown and actually was a pupil of his. Augustine remembers using sarcasm and insults in talking of the circus games, and succeeding in pulling Alypius out of this mad recreation and getting him to become a student of his. Alypius had gone to Rome to study law, but there, because of bad friends, had gotten involved again watching the violent gladiator games and other circus entertainment. Later, he gives these recreations up. This is along the theme that God works in mysterious ways, to give us a chance to become spiritual men. Our critics and enemies, by telling us what we really look like and insulting us, can be a better help toward moral behavior than our friends who flatter us. Augustine also tells the story how Alypius was seized as a thief and almost punished, until evidence shows that someone else committed the crime.

Alypius again joins Augustine in Rome, and together they go to Milan. There Augustine continues to teach, and Alypius practices law. Alypius is an honorable fellow who avoids



accepting bribes, even though that would be the easy thing to do. He, Augustine, and Nebridius, another one of their countrymen from near Carthage, are together deliberating what sort of life to lead. Augustine is still seeking worldly achievements. He arranges to marry a girl who is underage, so he has to wait two years to marry her. Augustine is also hesitant to marry her immediately, since he enjoys spending lots of time with his friends Alypius and Nebridius, discussing theology and philosophy. His woman over many years leaves him and goes back to Africa to clear the way for Augustine's marriage. Augustine can't stand being without a woman, so he gets a new mistress. In the meantime, Augustine and his friends continue to discuss the nature of good and evil.

Augustine is going through rapid changes in the period since he arrives in Milan. While in Rome, he kept with the Manicheans, but in Milan, Augustine makes a total break with the Manichean sect. He learns that he was wrong to attack the Catholic religion on the grounds that they said that God had a body. He meets Ambrose, and between Ambrose and his mother Monica, Augustine is brought much closer to the Christian religion, though not yet a full member of it. Since Augustine sees Ambrose in action, he respects him and wants to learn further what this man is about, and learn his Christian beliefs as well. Augustine wants to have knowledge, truth, and philosophy while at the same time enjoying the good life of worldly success and marriage. He is divided, in that Augustine and his friends want to devote their lives totally to seeking truth but can't quite make themselves do it. The main thing keeping Augustine from doing this is his devotion to women. The concentration on this obstacle foreshadows his breakthrough in the next section, where Augustine learns of the monks and the life in monasteries.



Book VII

Book VII Summary and Analysis

Augustine does not think of God as having a body, but still sees him as having some sort of material substance. Nevertheless, Augustine knows that the Manichean doctrine is absurd. If there was really a kingdom of light versus a kingdom of darkness, and God was invincible, why couldn't God destroy the kingdom of darkness? In this Manichean doctrine, light represents the good, and darkness represents evil. If the darkness could harm God, he wouldn't be the Almighty God. This is an argument that Augustine learns from his friend Nebridius. This discussion still leaves Augustine questioning what is the source of evil.

Augustine rejects astrology after speaking to an old man Vindicianus, and also due to the arguments of his friend Nebridius. They both say that the predictions of astrologists are purely a matter of chance, plus taking into account a person's condition, wealth, and circumstances. Augustine learns of a story from a man named Firminus about how the son of a rich man and the son of a slave are born at almost the exact same time, and under the same stars. Of course, the rich son was destined to be rich and the poor one to be a slave. This shows that predictions of a person's life by studying the stars are ridiculous. Other examples of similar cases are discussed by Augustine, such as the biblical story of the twins Esau and Jacob.

Thoughts on the will of man and his destiny run through Augustine's mind. With difficulty, Augustine continues to learn Christian doctrine. A change in Augustine's philosophy is brought about by his study of the books of the Platonists. They had been translated into Latin from the original Greek. Augustine begins to understand, through this study, that evil is a result of ignorance and corruption of the good. Evil is not an independent force. He finds that the books of the Platonists are similar to the Scriptures, but without Christ in them. The books help Augustine understand that the presence of God is a spiritual reality, not a material one.

Evil is the lack of good, but why is evil not a real existent? What is evil? In one sense, it is a perversity of the will and a turning against God. Augustine has a vision of the heavens and the earth, of young men and women, and also old people. He begins to see how they all play their part in God's universe. Augustine sees that he didn't understand the nature of evil before, because his mind was too sick to let go of its own evil. Now, Augustine has this vision of God's universe, and keeps it in his memory. He is still too tied to worldly success and pleasure to give them up, but now Augustine thinks about how he can give up everything for the truth.

Augustine's next trouble is to embrace and understand Christ as God, brought down to the humility of living on earth and dying on the cross. He struggles long to find out what the Scriptures mean by "the Word become flesh". Augustine and his friend Alypius struggle long within themselves and argue with heretics in understanding these things.



Alypius believes at this time that God is in the flesh in Christ, but that Christ did not have a human soul, while Augustine believes that Christ has a human soul that is united with God's word, but has difficulty in comprehending Christ as God. Augustine again mentions the works of the Platonists as helping him to think of spiritual things, independent of bodies. From this platonic basis, Augustine studies the Christian scriptures. Augustine praises God now that he begins to learn the Scriptures, which have everything that is in the Platonic books, according to Augustine, and also more. They have the glory of God and the grace of Jesus Christ, which Augustine praises.

The development of Augustine's mind is continuing. He escapes the Manicheans and sees their doctrines as actually a justification for their own evil. This gives Augustine a chance to begin to see that he can change his old habits. This foreshadows his conversion to not only becoming a Christian, but to the great thinker and monk that he becomes. Augustine breaks with other pagan beliefs, such as the belief in astrology. Augustine uses his theoretical studies and logic to prove that it is impossible for astrology to be a true study. His study of the source of evil leads him to see the role of human will in determining a person's action. Augustine is no longer content to be a victim of desires that he feels he has no control over. Augustine and Alypius's religious and doctrinal debate continues, but it is done in a friendly fashion, seeking the truth.



Book VIII

Book VIII Summary and Analysis

Augustine has a long discussion with an old man and teacher of Ambrose, Simplicianus, who helps to develop Augustine's growing understanding of Christ. Augustine already has done much study of the Platonists and their natural philosophy. He finds this study complements his study of the Christian Scriptures. Augustine also admires the translations into Latin of these Platonic works, done by a man called Victorinus. Simplicianus tells Augustine that he knew Victorinus, before his recent passing, and that Victorinus converted to Christianity.

For many years, Victorinus had been a champion of the Roman Gods. He took part in the ceremonies for the God, Osiris, and other Gods that Rome had gathered from areas of the world that were conquered by the Roman Empire. Gods include "the dog Anubis and that monstrous brood; of deity that once took arms and fought; in arms against Minerva, Neptune, Venus". One day, Victorinus privately tells Simplicianus that he has become a Christian by studying the Christian Scriptures. Simplicianus then answers that Victorinus has to go to the Church and convert publicly to Christianity. Simplicianus answers that being inside "walls" doesn't make a Christian, but he was really afraid to go against the pagan establishment in Milan and convert to Christianity. However, finally he does convert publicly, and there is much joy among the Christians that Simplicianus publicly joined them. When the Roman Emperor Julian forbids Christians to teach rhetoric, Victorinus has to obey this law and stop teaching.

Augustine learns about the story of the conversion of Victorinus, which is a turning point in the story of his Confessions. It symbolizes the deep compatibility between Platonic philosophy and Catholic Christianity. The story also assures Augustine that he does not have to give up his philosophical and scientific inquiries and, in fact, they will be deepened by becoming a Christian.

At this point, Augustine no longer doubts his belief in God, and he is beginning to understand the nature of God. He thinks of this nature as "an incorruptible substance" which is the source of all other life and created beings and objects. He is still, in a way, a simple believer in God. He still has a woman and he is not yet ready to become celibate and a priest, and a leader of the Christian church. Therefore, his faith in the Scriptures is not the end of Augustine's inner struggle, but the beginning of a more intense struggle. As Augustine says, "The more pain and sorrow before" the rebirth of his soul, the more happiness and joy later.

Augustine feels a sort of schizophrenia with his sensual desires still at odds with his intellectual commitment to devote himself fully to the Christian Church. He is planning to marry in two years to a girl who is now underage. At the same time, in order to clear the way for this, his long-time woman leaves him and goes back to Africa. Not able to give up sex yet, Augustine finds a new woman to live with. His soul feels that to learn the



truth about God and the universe, he needs to give up women, but his body will not allow him. From the age of nineteen, when Augustine read a book Hortensius, by Cicero, he has wanted to be a successful philosopher, and now he is almost at the point where he can reach this goal.

Augustine and his friend Alypius meet a man named Ponticianus. He tells them the story of the Egyptian monk, Antony, and the recruitment of monks to monasteries. This puts Augustine into a total crisis, in that he sees he could live without sensual pleasure. He can't get this story out of his mind, and Augustine goes into the garden. There he meditates and contorts his limbs into different positions. He wonders why he has the will to contort his limbs but not change his life. Augustine wants to have control of his will; he is tired of being under the Manichean notion of an independent evil power. Augustine again attacks the notions of the Manicheans, that man has a good soul and a bad soul. The Manicheans don't want to admit, that in choosing what to do, whether it is good or it is evil, man has only one soul. That soul can be torn apart by many wills, but a person has to decide to control his will. Augustine has a vision of a female figure, representing Contenance. She urges him to dedicate himself to Jesus Christ. He is told by children's voices to "Take it and read", and then reads a biblical passage urging continence. Augustine decides to accept a priestly mission and be a monk, and tells Alypius and his mother Monica, both of whom are full of joy. Monica's vision of years ago has become true. Augustine will not only convert to Christianity, but will become a monk and dedicate his life to the church.

This book is the one with the key turning of Augustine to God, and his decision to become a monk. Augustine has already become disgusted with the Manicheans, his former sect, but he is not content with knowing intellectually that they are wrong. He wants to will himself to work totally for the good of God. Augustine wants to embrace Christianity, but has problems abandoning his worldly lifestyle and ambitions. He is a successful teacher of rhetoric, using a method that he realizes more and more is false. Yet, Augustine has trouble breaking with his worldly habits, especially women. He still has philosophical issues that prevent him from understanding Christianity in a manner that he is satisfied with. Finally, Augustine realizes that he can devote his life to truth as he had first desired nine years ago, after reading a book by the philosopher Cicero.



Book IX

Book IX Summary and Analysis

Augustine decides to quietly withdraw from his teaching position. He finishes the last three weeks of the term to avoid major scandal and disruption of the students' lives. He gets ready to enjoy his new life as a monk of the church as soon as the Vintage Vacation arrives. Already Augustine has been suffering from overwork, so he had an easy excuse to quit his job at the end of the semester.

Augustine goes to a country retreat estate in Cassiciacum that is provided to him by Verecundus for the Vintage Holiday, with his friend Alypius and his mother Monica. He is invited to the house by Verecundus, who, because of his ties to his wife, cannot enjoy this retreat or even become a full Christian. However, Verecundus is baptized a Christian before his death.

Augustine continues to read, write, and study. His attacks continue against the Manicheans, but Augustine also feels pity for them. Augustine is still angry with the Manicheans, because for so long he used their excuse of a man's soul being divided between a soul of darkness and a soul of light. Now, Augustine sees that all of his actions are his soul's responsibility. He is angry with himself to have been unable to control his own will for so long. Now he is contemplating the eternal peace of God.

Augustine returns to Milan, with his friend Alypius, and his son Adeodatus, age fifteen, and he prepares to be baptized. He has given notice of quitting his job teaching, and Augustine and his companions are baptized in the church of Milan. Just last year, the church in Milan had been threatened with being closed by the Roman empress Justina, who favored the Arian heresy over Christianity. During this time, the faithful, led by Ambrose, had stayed watching the church, and began the practice of singing hymns in order to maintain their strength while protecting the church. After the finding of the bones of some saints, which were holy relics, and prayers, the church was maintained. This starts the practice of regular singing of hymns in the church. Augustine's thoughts are confirmed that the pleasures of singing are good since they give the faithful strength to endure persecution.

Augustine, his companion Alypius, his son, and his mother meet with a fellow countryman, Euodius, and together decide that they would best serve the church by returning to Africa. On the way, Monica, Augustine's mother, becomes sick and dies. They bury her there, near the Tiber River. Monica had been no longer concerned about being buried with her husband Patricius, in Africa, and was content with the realization that her burial would be near the Tiber River.

Augustine discusses the upbringing of his mother Monica. She was taken care of by an old woman servant, who brought her up carefully. Monica was not allowed to drink water between meals, in fear that later she would drink too much wine. Monica later gets this



problem of drinking wine while drawing it for her household. She only stops when she is verbally attacked by a different resentful maid. Augustine uses this as another example of how our enemies, not our friends, often are the prod to make us give up evil habits. This shows how the rebuke to us comes from God, not from this maid, who just was expressing her resentfulness and mocking Monica. When Monica married, she was careful to only approach her husband, Patricius, about his shortcomings when he was calm, not when he was hot-tempered. In this way, she helped him to better himself, and avoided the beatings that many of her female friends receive from their husbands. Augustine's mother had always been a peacemaker between those having arguments.

Then that day, near the Tiber River, on the way back to Africa, Monica knows that the end of her life is near. Augustine and Monica discuss the joys of knowing God and contemplating eternal life. When she finally dies after being ill for nine days, Augustine mourns for her very much, along with his son Adeodatus. Euodius begins to sing and say psalms and Augustine and his son join in. All Monica wanted was to be remembered in the prayers of Augustine and the other faithful. She has lived a life that, despite some desires for success, especially for her son Augustine, was transformed into a life dedicated to God. Augustine tries hard to control his grief after the death of his mother. He is somewhat surprised by the long extant and depth of his mourning for Monica. Augustine blames himself for having a too strong affection for earthly things.

Augustine's long journey of study and conflict has finally arrived to the promised land of faith. Of course, he must keep strong, because he is only beginning his long journey as a Christian monk and religious leader. He acknowledges his error in being attracted to the Manichean sect, since it gave him easy excuses to continue his evil ways. Now Augustine is so dedicated to seeking God and the truth, he finally is ready to give up earthly ambition both in his work and in terms of marriage. He has dedicated himself to a monastic life and returns to Africa in order to best serve God and the church. Augustine's mother's joy is so great in seeing her son's dedication to the church that she wonders why she is still alive. Her greatest desire, the conversion of Augustine, has occurred. Shortly thereafter, she becomes sick and dies. In a sense, just as Augustine has reached the goal of his philosophical journey, Monica has reached the end of her life's journey and goals. To show she has given up all earthly attachments, she no longer wants to be buried with her husband, not because she resents him, but because her only concern is God. It is enough to Monica that she always be in Augustine's and his companions' prayers.



Book X

Book X Summary and Analysis

Augustine asks himself why he makes and publishes his confession. It is important to Augustine for the public to know what he once was and what he is now after his Christian conversion. Augustine makes this confession so he can share his thoughts, especially now that he is converted, with his brother and sisters in faith, in his time and all times after. Augustine asks, what does it mean to love God? He wonders if it is the connection of the inner light of one's soul to God, the maker of everything.

Augustine then looks at the power of memory. He can remember his life and thoughts, his actions, and his attitude about his life. Augustine remembers all the sciences, grammar, and rhetoric that he learned. Memory is beyond mere memory of sensory impressions and bodily touch; it is also remembering what a person's attitude was at a certain time. In this way, the mind retains not just an image of an object, but all qualities of an object, the thing itself. The memory organizes things that are in the mind in a disorganized way. Things can be deeply hidden in the memory, and then they can be dragged out when having a conversation with somebody. This gathering up of thoughts can be due to outside stimulus or an inner dialogue that one has with oneself. This is what it means when one "collects one's thoughts".

The same memory contains the feelings of the mind at that past time, such as fear, desire, joy, and sorrow. Finally, how does the mind reach beyond memory, to God, of whom it actually has no memory? We remember happiness when we are sad. We see others that are happy and want to be like them. All men want to be happy. But what about when we remember things that are low and disgusting that made us happy once, and now we remember them with disgust? So the happy life differs for each individual and even at different periods of a person's life.

Why do people hate the truth? They don't like to be shown that they were wrong. Only by admitting he was wrong does Augustine stop sinning. Sins are in three categories—sins of lust, pride and curiosity—and they can be difficult to escape. Long after Augustine abandons his mistress and decides never to marry, he still has sexual dreams. He feels guilty about enjoying sex even in a dream. Likewise, Augustine fears that he will enjoy food and drink too much, though to eat and drink is necessary for life. Overeating can be a sin and be detrimental to one's health. A human being, no matter how saintly, never fully is freed from temptation, since such temptations are always in our thoughts. This is a theme from the beginning of the Confessions, on how even little babies sin, and sin is part of what it is to be a human being.

Augustine is also tempted by hearing music. He admits that he enjoys religious hymns to God and that they can have a useful purpose. Augustine sees that with such pleasures it is wrong to be too strict in avoiding or reducing them. There can be good and useful pleasures, though there is always the danger of going too far with them.



Seeking pleasure can be the cause of sin, but not always the only cause. Scientific curiosity itself can be a danger, leading people into sin. People want to observe horrible events, hear gossip, and stop to see dead bodies or crime scenes out of curiosity. Another sin that is difficult to control is pride. If one lives a godly life, he can become full of pride merely because his achievements of goodness.

Other wrong and superstitious beliefs affect people who seek angels and magicians as mediators between them and God, and thus become ensnared in the clutches of the Devil. The devil himself can make himself into an angel of light (Lucifer) who is evil. Instead, Augustine chooses as his mediator, Jesus Christ, son of God. Augustine says that Jesus has suffered death on the cross, though he was resurrected. He was born in the flesh, but is the co-equal of God. Ultimately, Jesus is Augustine's refuge against sin, as a mediator who lived in the flesh as a human being.

The argument of Augustine is that it is wrong to make judgments on the basis of mere information of the senses. The mind develops concepts and full ideas that it attaches to what is, in the beginning, only memories of events and perceptions. Likewise, forgetfulness can be caused by subconsciously choosing not to remember. When we forget things, we often have to concentrate until we can recall them to our consciousness. Or if it is utterly forgotten, we cannot even remember that it is lost.

Augustine thinks about sin, and feels overwhelmed with the task of avoiding sin. Babies and the saintly are affected or tempted by sin. Augustine sees that one has to be consciously on guard against the many types of sin. Even necessary pleasures like eating and drinking can be done to excess. Sex is necessary to continue the species, but is one of the most dangerous ways people are led astray. Augustine hopes his faith in God, mediated through Jesus, will save him from sin.



Book XI

Book XI Summary and Analysis

Augustine makes a long philosophical commentary on the beginning of the Scriptures, the Old Testament book of Genesis. It is the story of the creation of the world. In the beginning, God created the word. But did he exist doing nothing? Why did he suddenly decide to create the Heavens and the Earth? Augustine then argues against this idea. Before the Heavens and the Earth existed, there were no cycles of the sun, the moon, or the planets. There was really no measurement of the ages of time at all. So no one knows if any time had passed, and anyway, no one besides God existed. So there was no time that existed for nothing to be done.

As far as time exists, it passes from the past into the future. The present only exists by going into non-existence. It passes, then it is not the present, it is the past. The past is a memory, and the future a hope, and both are non-existents except when they are the present. The mind can remember the past, though it does not exist anymore, and can forecast the future, though it doesn't exist yet. Augustine asks if time is measured by the day, which is the length of time for the revolving of the Earth, or likewise the movement of the Earth around the Sun, which is a year, and so on. A day is seen by man as the movement of the sun from east to west, but what if the sun traveled twice as fast? Would a day then be half the length of a normal day? Therefore, it is not the motion of the heavenly bodies that determines time.

Augustine then asks, how do we measure time? How do we measure a length? Time and a length are kinds of an extension. Augustine is measuring time passing the point that is the present. We also measure time and space between a beginning and an end. As time goes on, the future passes the point of the present, and is consumed, becoming the past. Augustine compares the recitation of a psalm to the passing of the time of a man's life, or the passing of the whole history of humanity. He then returns to the idea of the existence of God in time, and that it is wrong to say that time could have existed before God's creation of the heaven and the earth.

Augustine deals the passage from beginning of the Scriptures about when matter was formless. As it says in the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and darkness was upon the deep. . ." Augustine ponders what this can possibly mean. Augustine defines formlessness as close to nothing, but capable of receiving form, which it shortly does, in the Scriptures. And from the formless matter, God then forms the sky and the water and the earth. Augustine warns that if we move away from God's responsibility for the creation, we are moving away from reality, since God is the creator of all things.

The point is that the use of the senses, in the present, is what is used to determine the past and the future as well. The present is measured as it is passing. Augustine then goes over what is the nature of time. It is a joy to watch Augustine go from theological



considerations and commentary on the Book of Genesis, to thoughts about the movement of the Solar System. Time can be measured by the movement of the solar system, but God is beyond this measurement of time. It is shown that Augustine is still interested in natural science, and in fact there is no division for him between thinking about the nature of God (Theology) and thinking about the nature of the Universe (Science).

Book XII

Book XII Summary and Analysis

Augustine begins to study what God means by "the Heavens and the Earth". In a psalm, the psalmist refers to the heaven of heavens. The heaven of heavens is a place where God has his house and the angels and other beings are. Then, in the Book of Genesis, the skies would be considered part of the earth, below the "Heaven of Heavens".

Augustine discusses this heavenly house of God, where the angels live in chaste love. Just as Augustine characterizes two types of heaven, one being the skies above us and the other being the heaven of the angels, he also describes two types of wisdom. The first is the wisdom of God, which is co-equal of God. This is the same thing as the Holy Spirit, or the Word. The other type of wisdom is reflected wisdom on men who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Augustine is not concerned if people do not believe in a Heaven of Heavens, since he has decided to create it in his own heart and mind. He sees in his own mind the intellectual and spiritual creatures clinging to God.

Likewise, Augustine considers what the Book of Genesis means by referring to matter that is formless. Augustine decides that something formless is not some hideous ooze, but formless and invisible, actually, almost nothing. Augustine has a fascination with the expression "formlessness" in the Scriptures. This is, nonetheless, according to Augustine, not the same as nothingness, and this was then changed into the Earth and sky by God, as well as the Heavens of Heaven, the home of the angels.

There is no harm in having different interpretations of the Scriptures, at least as long as various heresies are avoided, according to Augustine. If two people both believe in the word of God, it can even be fruitful to have a debate about different interpretations of the Scriptures. For example, one interpretation says that "in the beginning" in the Scriptures refers to the Heaven of Heavens, which is an intellectual heaven, a vision of a house close to God, and also full of knowledge. Another person can say that "in the beginning" means wisdom.

Augustine takes up the question that the Scriptures don't mention the creation of formless matter, the creation of the angels, and other things. How do we solve this problem? There are the questions such as, if the waters were formless, how could they be beautiful? When Moses wrote down the Holy Scriptures, he had to make them understandable, says Augustine. Moses also needed them to convey a deeper meaning to scholars and truth-seekers. The simple people think of the story of creation in a simple way, which is literal and materialistic. This can start people on the road to God, which they will walk, hopefully, until they can fly with wisdom. Different meanings can be given to phrases. For example, Augustine says, another interpretation of the phrase "in the beginning" is that it means wisdom, since wisdom is the beginning of all things. Another says "in the beginning" means the first. The community of believers should realize that different interpretations are possible that can be all well-meaning in intent.



The discussion of Augustine is very philosophical, and in a way it is a playful discussion. As Augustine states earlier in the Confessions, the letter of the law kills, but the spirit of the law is what gives life. Augustine looks at the passage in the Scriptures "in the beginning" and finds many interpretations. Some of his questions are amusing, such as asking what the formless matter during creation looked like. Augustine looks for a scientific insight into the nature of the creation, at least in a hypothetical sense. God is the source of the creation and all wisdom, so it makes sense for Augustine to compare Scripture to Platonic studies and the scientific knowledge of his era.



Book XIII

Book XIII Summary and Analysis

Augustine looks at the words "heaven and earth" in the Scriptures as referring to the spiritual, versus the material world. With the creation of the universe, matter was given light and made to exist. Likewise, light means the spiritual, which lights up material bodies and also human beings.

Augustine has a vision of the Holy Trinity, the father, son, and the Holy Ghost. God is the father, or the creator, the Son is wisdom, and the Holy Spirit is what lights up the creation, and that which "shone upon the waters". Augustine asks, why is the Holy Spirit only mentioned after the heaven and the earth? Why does Moses, the author of the Holy Scriptures, use the phrase "borne above the waters" to refer to the Holy Spirit? What Augustine is sure of is that without the Holy Spirit, the light of God, even the angels fall.

Augustine then looks more deeply at the Holy Spirit. He compares the Trinity to these three things- existence, knowledge, and will. Augustine does this because he is a being that exists, and that both knows and wills. The difference in this matter between men and God is that men do not have an unchangeable will. This is another way to look at the mystery of the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Trinity is the three faces of the one God, but the Trinity also shows us three distinct entities. We learn about God through the Holy Scriptures, which covers man's spiritual needs. Augustine recalls how God clothed Adam and Eve, after their sin and fall from the Garden of Eden, described in the Scriptures. As God clothed Adam and Eve, the Scriptures stretch over man like a covering. The power of the dead servants of God continues to strengthen the Scriptures, and in this manner lives on after them. The Scriptures give us the power to break our pride and submit to God.

So Augustine plans to continue to thirst after God, and not "gather the bitterness of men", but instead to be like the beautiful waters of righteousness. To show their goodness, and what they learn from the Scriptures, men need to help their neighbor, not just in small matters. In this way, men bear gifts as also fruit for the goodness of God. Augustine calls on men to help their neighbors, clothe the naked, and in that way strengthen their ability to know and contemplate God. After much thought and study, man can have knowledge of God and see his light like the sun in the daytime. The righteous have to show their light of God, and not hide it. The righteous have to help others, not just the community of the faithful, but also those who are still caught in the darkness of obsession with sensuality. Until man reaches that point, he must be content to receive God's light like that of the stars and the moon at night.

The lower orders of human consciousness are also compared to the sea. They are also compared to herds of cattle. The dry land is used to represent the higher order of human consciousness, in that the awakened living soul is taken out of the bitter waters



of ignorance. The faithful ministers work on earth to bring the ignorant out of darkness. They get people to avoid pride, obsession with pleasure, lust, and curiosity. Man has to learn to be in God's image; that is, to be in the imitation of Christ.

It is not man's duty to judge other men unnecessarily. Augustine says that the secrets in a man's heart are only known to God. Even among evildoers, only God knows which ones will later convert to goodness. So the faithful have to spread righteousness and let it "increase and multiply and subdue the earth", as it says in the Scriptures. They need to think not only of helping other people, but in what spirit they do it. When the faithful go to good works, then that is a reason for joy. They not only give gifts to their fellowmen, but also deliver spiritual fruit to the glory of God.

The "fruits" of the faithful are very good because they bring together physical necessity with the right spirit about them as well. Of course, only God can know for sure if the spirit of the giver is right, or if spiritual needs are met, since they are things that are unseen. Augustine says we should try to know that we are doing right, since the image and likeness of God means men having reason and understanding. The spiritual form and material are given simultaneously by God, as we love God and his works praise him. So Augustine states that the God uplifts Man from ignorance, like the spirits rising from the waters to dry land. Augustine ends his Confessions with a prayer for peace and eternal life for the faithful and those who seek God.

Augustine studies the opening of the Book of Genesis to show deep insights on the nature of God. Augustine is a deep believer in the Holy Trinity and applies it even to the Old Testament, before Christ. He then forms other trinities to show the usefulness of thinking of three ideas that are so linked that they are really one. One of these groups of three is existence, knowledge, and will. Others are implied like that of righteousness, gifts, and spiritual fruits. The interesting thing is that Augustine may use categories, but he can playfully alter them or transmit them to other subjects. In the Confessions, the last book is the fulfillment of Augustine's youthful desire to devote his life to truth and philosophy. He not only describes his love of philosophy, but he develops a philosophy of theology in this last book. Augustine urges the church faithful to be righteous and to do good deeds, but not as a substitute for their faith. Their faith must be shown by their good deeds, and at the same time these good deeds must reflect their faith. In the same way, though Augustine attacks idle curiosity, his real curiosity in the nature of the Universe comes out even in his religious arguments. His arguments about the creation also display an interest in how such physical processes such as creation were carried out, as far as man can tell.



Characters

Augustine (of Hippo), St. Augustine

Augustine is the writer of the autobiographical confessions. He is born in the town of Tagaste, in North Africa. His mother's name is Monica, and his father is Patricius. Augustine is a good student in his youth, and because of his intellectual promise, he is sent to school in literature and rhetoric. He begins to teach in Carthage after his schooling is completed. Augustine looks back at the sins of his youth. He is involved with his first sexual conquests at the age of sixteen, and loving and being in love takes up much of his time. Likewise, he is involved in stealing for pleasure and other youthful pranks.

As Augustine matures, he has only one woman. He wants to become a philosopher, a seeker of truth, after reading a work of Cicero. For a long time he is a member of the Manicheans, a sect that believes that evil has an independent existence from God. After Augustine moves to Milan, he comes into contact with Ambrose and other Christian leaders. He converts to Christianity at the age of thirty-three, renounces his plans to marry and worldly ambitions, and becomes a monk. Augustine's long commentary on the Book of Genesis gives the reader a notion of Augustine's integration of religious belief and the study of natural science and philosophy.

God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit

God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are the objects of Augustine's devotion. God speaks to Augustine indirectly, through the words that Augustine quotes in the Christian Scriptures, and Augustine speaks directly to God, addressing him as "you". Augustine laments that it took him so long to understand God and the Christian Trinity. The Trinity is the three faces of the one God, which are: God the father, Jesus Christ, his son, who was born on earth, and the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son. There are many doctrines about the nature of God. According to Augustine, the Manicheans believe that there exists evil independent of God, since nothing about God can be evil. The Christian belief in God is that God is immutable and omnipotent and omniscient. Evil is not independent of God, it is only a corruption from the work of God or an absence of the good. God is the creator of the universe and everything in it. Christ is begotten of God the Father and is born in the flesh, to live among men, to die on the cross and to be resurrected. The Christian notion of God is a being that knows all of man's thoughts and actions.

Monica

Monica is Augustine's mother. At first, she is more interested in Augustine fulfilling his promise as an intellectual and teacher. She is always concerned that Augustine be a moral man and not sin. Later, she is determined that he convert to Christianity and give



up his lustful and sinful ways. Monica follows Augustine to Rome and Milan and lives to see him convert to Christianity. Her close association with Bishop Ambrose helps to inspire Augustine, and to get Augustine to study the sermons of Ambrose as well. At first, she assists in arranging a marriage proposal for Augustine, but she is overjoyed that Augustine decides to become a monk. When Monica sees that Augustine succeeds in not only converting, but devoting his life to the church, she feels her mission has been accomplished. Monica dies shortly after, in Italy, and is not able to return to Africa with Augustine. Augustine gives a detailed description of Monica's life and virtue, upon her death.

Patricius

Patricius is Augustine's father. He is not a Christian, only a catechumen in the church. He is baptized shortly before his death, before Augustine reaches the age of nineteen. He has strong ambitions for his son's worldly success.

Faustus, Bishop Faustus

Faustus is a leader of the Manichean sect. After long anticipation, Augustine meets Faustus in Carthage and has long discussions with him. Augustine says that his knowledge of natural science and philosophy are not strong, and his defense of the Manichean beliefs are weak.

Alypius

Alypius is Augustine's pupil in Carthage, and later becomes Augustine's close companion. He too converts to Christianity and becomes a monk with Augustine.

Adeodatus

Adeodatus is Augustine's son, born from Augustine's long-time woman. He converts with Augustine to Christianity.

Victorinus

Victorinus is the translator of Platonic works from Greek to Latin. The reader hears about him from Simplicianus. Later in his life, he converts to Christianity, after being inspired by the Platonic works and the Christian Scriptures.



Nebridius

Nebridius is a friend of Augustine, also from Africa. He converts to Christianity at the same time as Augustine.

Ambrose, Bishop Ambrose

Bishop Ambrose is the leader of the Christian Church in Milan. He is close to Augustine's mother Monica, and his sermons also inspire Augustine.

Simplicianus

Simplicianus is an older churchman who earlier had taught Ambrose. He has long discussions with Augustine that help lead to Augustine's conversion.

Augustine's long-time woman (unnamed)

Augustine's long-time woman is the mother of Augustine's son, Adeodatus. She leaves him to allow him to prepare his intended marriage, and returns to Africa.

Euodius

Euodius is a fellow African that joins Augustine in his trip back to Africa after Augustine's conversion.

Verecundus

Verecundus is a rich married man from Milan. He is not able to join Augustine in immediate conversion, but allows Augustine and his friends the use of his country estate in Cassiciacum.

Antony

Antony is an Egyptian monk whose story inspires Augustine to emulate him and become a monk.

Ponticianus

Ponticianus is a man from Africa who tells the story of the monk Antony to Augustine.



Objects/Places

Tagaste, North Africa

Tagaste is the place of Augustine's birth and growing up.

Madaura, North Africa

Madaura is a nearby town where Augustine went to school.

Carthage, North Africa

Carthage is a large city where Augustine teaches literature and rhetoric.

Rome, Italy

Rome is the capital of the decaying Roman Empire. Augustine goes here to teach and has difficulty with students.

Milan, Italy

Milan is a northern Italian city where Augustine goes to get a better teaching position. There he converts to Christianity.

Cassiciacum

This is the location of the estate of Verecundus, outside Milan, where Augustine and his companions spend their time after their decision to devote their lives to God. They go there at the beginning of the Vintage Holiday.

Vintage Holiday

This is the summer holiday at school. Augustine uses this break to end his teaching career.

Church in Milan

The church is the one in which Bishop Ambrose is the minister.



Books of Manes

The books of Manes are Manichean texts that Augustine studies and finds many things in them that do not make sense to him.

Pear Tree in Tagaste

The pear tree in Tagaste is on one of Augustine's neighbor's property. Augustine and his friends steal pears from it.

Scriptures, Christian Scriptures

The Scriptures, or Christian Scriptures, are the Old Testament written down by Moses, and other Hebrew texts and the New Testament, written by Christ's Apostles.

Hortensius by Cicero

The Hortensius is a book by the Roman philosopher Cicero that interests Augustine in pursuing philosophy and the truth.

Platonic Books

The Platonic books are books by various authors who are followers of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. These books help Augustine better understand the Christian Scriptures.

Ten Categories, by Aristotle

This work by the Greek philosopher Aristotle was studied by Augustine. He found it distasteful and says that it hindered his seeking of the truth and of God.

Heaven of Heavens

This place is described by Augustine in his commentary of the book of Genesis. It is a house of God above the earthly heavens.



Themes

Coming of Age

Augustine in his infancy and youth is clever, but out of control. He needs to mature and grow. It takes Augustine a long time to understand that he has control of his own will. For a long time he makes excuses for his sins and excesses, saying that evil forces are responsible for his actions. When he is little, he has to be scolded or beaten by his elders to cooperate in studying. In his youth, he finds that he is obsessed with lust and loving someone and being loved. When he is successful getting the object of his lust, only then does he become confused and unhappy again. Later in his life, Augustine controls his physical lust somewhat, but has a strong desire to be recognized for his superior intellectual gifts. It is not enough for him to only be a good master of rhetoric, he wants to know the truth about the universe. Augustine wants to be a master of philosophy, whose Greek root is the word for love of wisdom. It takes Augustine a long time to realize that to learn the truth is not a trifling business, like acquiring a new possession or a toy. Learning and seeking the truth means sacrificing everything else. It means giving up all his physical comforts in pursuit of the love of God. Finally, Augustine decides to do this, and to become a Christian monk. At that point, he realizes his human identity and knows what his destiny is.

Struggle against Sin

A main theme of Augustine's Confessions is the struggle against sin. Before his Christian conversion, Augustine is often overwhelmed by his own sins and the excessive sins and abuses of others. He wants to be a serious teacher in Carthage, but finds that it is considered normal for youth to walk in and out of class and be disruptive. When Augustine travels to Rome, he finds the students outwardly much more respectful. Yet the same outwardly respectful students form conspiracies to cheat their professors out of their expected fees.

The entertainments of Augustine's time also further sin and depravity. People go to circuses to see gladiators fight to the death, or kill prisoners or wild animals. There is so much bloodshed it can flow over the grounds of stadiums like a river. What is more shocking are the sinful attitudes of people watching this violence. Yet, what defense does a person have to sinful behavior used by a society as entertainment? If someone merely says that a certain practice is awful, others in Augustine's time argue that they were extremely enjoyable. Only by Augustine developing his knowledge of God and truth can he find an alternative to the joy in sin. Sin does not have to be outrageous acts of violence or theft. Sin can be the excessive emotionalism of the theater. It can be men who have pride in their abilities merely because they are considered the best in their field or have won awards. Augustine finds that the righteous are in danger of sin for their whole lives through ordinary things such as the pleasures of eating and drinking. A



beautiful song to God can be used in an excessive manner. Only by knowing God's power can Augustine feel freed from sin.

Spiritual versus Material Things

Augustine grows up in a not rich but comfortable home. His family makes sacrifices to advance his education. Augustine is successful in his studies and becomes a teacher. Yet, his mother Monica becomes more and more alarmed at his lack of spiritual gifts. When she turns her goals to converting Augustine to Christianity, she finds it is too late and she is near despair. Many of Augustine's colleagues are very cynical and purposely attack moral behavior. In Carthage, young men known as the "Subverters" harass ordinary moral citizens as a means of entertainment. In a society geared toward seeking pleasure, the seeking of spiritual values is difficult. For Augustine, this issue comes to a head around the Manichean sect. Although the Manicheans have their own religious rituals around the spiritual power of their elect, for Augustine, the Manicheans provide an excuse to tolerate gross materialism. Much of what Augustine calls evil in the narrative would be called by others a preoccupation with materialism. The Manicheans look at evil as an independent force. Such an outlook today would be typified by someone saying that "the devil made me do it" when he does something and doesn't want to take responsibility. So, for example, Augustine is, before his conversion, concerned with lust and sexual pleasure, not establishing a family and having children. Likewise, Rome is a society obsessed with acquiring wealth. When Augustine's friend Alypius tries to enforce justice in the courts, this gets him in trouble. He is actually put in danger for not going along with a widespread bribery scheme. Augustine finally reacts to this gross materialism and evil by deciding to dedicate his life to truth and spirituality. He decides to become a monk and promote both God's word and good works.

Style

Perspective

Augustine writes these Confessions primarily as a religious text to encourage readers to believe in God and follow the Christian church. Due to his intensive philosophical background, the text has a wide appeal to intellectuals, whether they are Christians or not. The early books of the Confessions engage many readers with their frank descriptions of Augustine's temptations and sins. The work has a great interest due to its unique viewpoint, because many readers would expect someone to be proud of such worldly achievements as those of Augustine. When Augustine is repentant and ashamed of his sexual exploits and worldly achievements, this contradicts sharply with the usual assessments of society. For, Augustine's sins, despite some of the graphic detail, are not really such horrible deeds. Augustine's remorse over sins that are often seen today as small inconveniences has an impact even on a modern audience.

The point of view of this autobiographic account is the first person. This point of view is a personal limited point of view. For the first part of the account, it is a looking back at the actions of the author, Augustine. There is some dialogue, but the work is mainly an essay, or a memoir. Augustine provides the reader with a very personal point of view of his struggles. There is much foreshadowing of events, but Augustine does not know at the time of the events what he will eventually become. The reader knows in advance that Augustine will change and convert to Christianity, but does not know how this will occur. In fact, most of the book is Augustine's internal dialogue with himself and God. Augustine will quote what someone says, sometimes at length, and then write a long passage about his feelings about the statement and his reaction to it.

Much of the book has paragraphs beginning with a biblical passage. Augustine is in an internal dialogue with himself and with God, referring to God as "you". Occasionally there are passages where a character in the third person is recounting a story, as told through Augustine. For example, in Book VIII, Chapter 6, Augustine recounts the story of Ponticianus, who, in the third person, tells the story of the monk Antony and the establishment of monasteries.

The last three chapters of the book are Augustine's first person, direct dialogue with God concerning his nature. Parts of the Book of Genesis and other Scriptures are cited and interpreted in depth. These are long dialogues between Augustine and God, where Augustine has God answered in forms such as "Your word is . . ." and similar forms. These are all Augustine's inner thoughts.

Tone

Augustine's Confessions is a unique work in which a religious tone is combined with a detailed description of his sinful deeds. He has a continuous intimate conversation with



God, addressing God as "you". This shifts later to a discussion of the nature of God and the universe that also has some language of a scientific nature in describing natural phenomenon. Augustine's Confessions are extremely subjective, in that his guilt and remorse for deeds are due to his adopted values and morals. Small errors of religious doctrine or thinking are regarded by Augustine as major sins that damaged long periods of his life. This subjective tone tends to make the reader reflect inside himself as to whether he or she has committed similar sins, or even sins of much greater dimensions. As Augustine admits, to him, there can be sins even in the normal enjoying of such pleasures as married life, and enjoying eating food and drinking beverages. Enjoying wine is described as a major sin, although many would differ with this, since it can be healthy in moderation.

The language of the book is very personal and at times earthy. It is elevated by the frequent quotations and phrases used from the Christian Scriptures. Of course, the Scriptures have scenes from real life as well. Augustine is repentant and has remorse for his sins, yet his frank descriptions of his deeds are often to the point; for example, his description of the theft of pears in his adolescent period illustrates this frank commentary. Many passages in the book have the tone of a commentary of these Biblical passages. The last three books are completely a commentary and interpretation of parts of the Scriptures, mostly from the Book of Genesis. Since the book is originally in Latin and translated into English, one doesn't know the exact original language, but the reader gets the impression that the translation by Rex Warner tries hard to maintain the original somewhat Biblical tone of the work. The biblical style of the language used in these commentaries on biblical passages adds to the sense of the book as a religious work.

Structure

The complete book, St. Augustine's Confessions, is comprised of thirteen books, each divided into short chapters. The books are each from about eighteen to forty pages long, with the chapters being from one half of a page to two or three pages.

The first nine books are the story of Augustine's life from his birth to his conversion to Christianity at the age of about thirty-two. The last four books are a detailed commentary on the beginning of the Christian Scriptures, and Augustine's view of the universe and God. Augustine grows up in the outskirts of the Roman Empire in Africa. He is seen by his parents as having intellectual promise, and has the opportunity to study. At the same time, Augustine is successful in seeking sexual partners and enjoying other pastimes with his friends. After studying philosophy, Augustine becomes dissatisfied with this type of life and wants to dedicate himself to truth. After meeting Christians around Ambrose in Milan, Augustine decides to devote his life to God and the church and to become a monk. The last four books, especially Book XII and XIII, are commentaries on the Bible, or could even be viewed as the text for a sermon.

The passages about Augustine's early life move at a quick pace as there is much action occurring. There is a certain fascination with learning the sins of someone, especially



since Augustine is later recognized as a saint. As Augustine comes closer to finding his religious faith, the passages become long and difficult. Augustine takes the reader into a detailed theological discussion about the nature of God.

The book is set in the world of ancient Rome, where Augustine lived. The first part of the book occurs in Northern Africa, in the village of Tagaste, and other towns near the city of Carthage. Scenes in these towns take place in locations such as the market place, the bath house, and various schools. This is also a farming area, and a striking scene occurs in an orchard, where Augustine and his companions sneak to and steal pears. Augustine spends much of his boyhood time in school, and later works in schools as a teacher. Christianity has become a widespread religion, but many people are pagans, or members of other religious sects, such as the Manicheans. Carthage has a large stadium, or amphitheater, where circus games and other spectacles such as gladiator fights occur. Such amphitheaters are also located in Rome and other large cities.

Augustine sails a ship to Rome, Italy, hoping to do better in his teaching profession. Rome is the center of the still existing Roman Empire and is a short boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea. Soon after, Augustine accepts an offer to teach in Milan, a city in northern Italy. Augustine attends sermons at the church of Bishop Ambrose.

Augustine has a fairly comfortable home in Milan with a garden, where he goes to meditate. Later, after Augustine decides to resign his teaching position, Augustine and his companions stay at the country estate of Verecundus in Cassiciacum, outside of Milan. Augustine and his companions decide to return to Africa. During the long journey, Augustine's mother Monica becomes sick and dies near the Tiber River.



Quotes

"What indeed can be more pitiful than a wretch with no pity for himself, weeping at the death of Dido, which was caused by love for Aeneas, and not weeping at his own death, caused by lack of love of you, God, light of my heart, bread of the inner mouth of my soul, strength of my mind and quickness of my thoughts?" Book I, Chap. 1

"Where was I, and how far was I banished from the delights of your house in that sixteenth year of my flesh when the madness of lust (forbidden by your laws but too much countenanced by human shamelessness) held complete sway over me and to this madness I surrendered myself entirely!" Book II, Chap. 2

"And so I muddled over the clear spring of friendship with the dirt of physical desire and clouded over its brightness with the dark hell of lust." Book III, Chap. 1

"But if this fig were to be eaten by some Manichean saint (always assuming that the picking of it was someone else's and not his guilt), it would be digested and then at the end of the process this saint would breathe out from the fig, angels, or rather actual particles of God, at every groan or sigh in his prayer, and these particles of the most high and true God would have remained bound up in the fruit if they had not been set free in this way by the mastication and digestion of some sainted 'elect'." Book III, Chap. 10

"That orator, however, whom I loved so much, was the kind of man that I would have wished to be myself. And I erred through swelling pride; I was tossed about by every wind, and it was too difficult for me to feel your steering hand." Book IV, Chap. 14

"He certainly did not wish to be thought little of; for he made it his business to persuade people that the Holy Ghost, the comforter and enricher of your faithful ones, was personally and with plenary authority resident in himself." Book V, Chap. 5

And I was happy when I heard Ambrose in his sermons, as I often did, recommend most emphatically to his congregation this text as a rule to go by: The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." Book VI, Chap. 4

"And it became clear to me that things which are subject to corruption are good. They would not be subject to corruption if they were either supremely good or not good at all; for, if they were supremely good, they would be incorruptible, and, if there was nothing good in them, there would be nothing which could be corrupted." Book VII, Chap. 12

"For Victorinus was afraid of offending his friends, who were important people and worshippers of these devils; he feared a torrent of ill will falling upon him from the height of their Babylonian dignity, as from the tops of the cedars of Lebanon which the Lord had not yet brought down. But from his reading and deep meditation, he drew strength." Book VIII, Chap. 2, Line 56



"Many years (at least twelve) of my own life had gone by since the time when I was nineteen and was reading Cicero's Hortensius and had been fired with an enthusiasm for wisdom. Yet I was putting off the moment when, despising this world's happiness I should give all my time to search for that of which not only the finding but merely the seeking must be preferred to the discovered treasures and kingdoms of men or to all the pleasures of the body easily and abundantly available." Book VIII, Chap. 7

"We had agreed among ourselves not to let the news out at all, although, as we were making our way from the valley of tears and singing that song of degrees, you had given us sharp arrows and destroying coals against the subtle tongues of people who, under a show of care for us, would try to thwart us and by loving us would eat us up, as men do with their food." Book VIII, Chap. 2

"All she desired was that she should be remembered at your altar, which she had served without missing every single day, and from which she knew was dispensed that holy sacrifice by which the handwriting that was against us is blotted out, by which the enemy was triumphed over, who, reckoning up our sins and seeking what there was to lay to our charge, found nothing in Him, in whom we conquer." Book IX, Chap. 13

"Or could this be the solution: the whole thing had not slipped from our memory; part of it was retained and by means of this part the other part was sought for, because the memory realized that it was not carrying along with it the totality which it was used to and, going unevenly, as it were, through the loss of something to which it was accustomed, eagerly demanded the restoration of what it was lacking." Book X, Chap. 20

"These images come into my thoughts, and though when I am awake they are strengthless, in sleep they not only cause pleasure but go so far as to obtain assent and something very like reality." Book X, Chap. 30

"So since it is by your work that all times are made, how can it be said, if there was a time before you made heaven and earth, that you were abstaining from your work? That time itself was of your creation, and no times could pass by before you made those times." Book XI, Chap. 13

"If the future and the past exist, I want to know where they are. And if I still lack the strength to know this, nevertheless one thing I do know, which is that, wherever they are, they are not there as future and as past, but as present." Book XI, Chap. 18

"For it is just this mutability of changeable things which is itself capable of receiving all those forms into which mutable things are changed. And what is this mutability? Is it soul? Is it body? Is it any species of soul or of the body?" Book XII, Chap. 8

"I conclude that this is because what is meant by "heaven" is the heaven of heavens, that intellectual heaven, where it is the property of the intellect to know all things in one act, not in part, not darkly, not through a glass, but as a whole, in manifestation, face to face." Book XII, Chap. 13



"I should like men to consider three aspects of their own selves. These three are something very different from the Trinity; I only make the suggestion as a mental exercise that will allow people to find out and to feel how far distant they are from it. The three things that I mean are existence, knowledge and will." Book XIII, Chap. 11

"On what do you feed, you man renewed in the knowledge of God; after the image of Him that created Thee, you living soul of such continence, tongue like the flying fowl, speaking mysteries? (For to such creatures is such food due.) On what do you feed? Joy." Book XIII, Chap. 26



Topics for Discussion

Discuss sin. Is Augustine an unusually sinful or evil person? Is he preoccupied with sin? Is sin something that one can escape or ignore? Are there times when it is better to tolerate one's own or someone else's sins?

Discuss pride. Is it a sin to want to achieve something and then have pride in it? Is Augustine right to feel pride in his power to learn and teach, or is it a sin? Why is pride called "one of the seven deadly sins?"

Explain the importance of the Manichean sect. Why was Augustine attracted to the Manicheans? Did their doctrine make sense? What was appealing about the doctrines of the Manicheans? Why did Augustine abandon the Manichean sect? How was the Manichean sect different from Catholic Christianity?

Compare and contrast the characters of Augustine and Monica. Did Monica also suffer from periods of her life dominated by sin? Did she always tell Augustine the right thing to do? Why was it so hard for Monica to convert Augustine to Christianity? Does she succeed in converting him, or is that done by others?

Compare Augustine's opportunities in Carthage and in Milan. Did Augustine have an opportunity to be a Christian in Carthage? If he did, why didn't he exploit it? What caused a change in Augustine's character in Milan? Was it a set of circumstances or a person or persons who made this change in Augustine? Or did the change come from within Augustine?

Why does Augustine become obsessed with finding Truth? Was this a big change in his approach to life? What brought on this change? Why is Augustine not satisfied with the Manichean sect? How did Augustine discover that the teachings of the Manicheans were false?

Discuss the language used throughout the Confessions. Was the language of a regular speaking tone? How does the use of many Biblical quotations affect the language of the text? While the language is biblical, is it formal? Could a less formal tone of language have been used? Would a less formal tone interfere with the book's role as a religious text?

Discuss the point of view. Could Augustine's story have been written from a third person point of view? What point of view is expressed when Augustine talks to God as "you"? Does the reader somehow feel included or excluded during these talks to God as "you"?