

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

LECTURE 9 – AUGUSTINE

We'll start with a prayer from the period to be studied. Augustine's autobiography was written in form of a prayer, and the opening chapter includes words (italicised in the prayer below) that are often quoted today, especially in evangelistic messages.

Great are you, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is your power, and infinite is your wisdom. We desire to praise you, for we are part of your creation; we bear our mortality about with us and carry the evidence of our sin, but yet we desire to praise you. You have prompted us, that we should delight to praise you. *You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.* Grant us, O Lord, to know and understand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We looked in Lectures 5 and 6 at two Church leaders who lived in Carthage, near the modern city of Tunis, in Roman Africa, Tertullian and Cyprian. Both were Latin speakers; we saw how Tertullian moulded the language of the Church in the West of the Roman Empire and Cyprian moulded the organisation of the Church. We come now to the man who moulded the theology of the Latin-speaking Church.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

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3. AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY

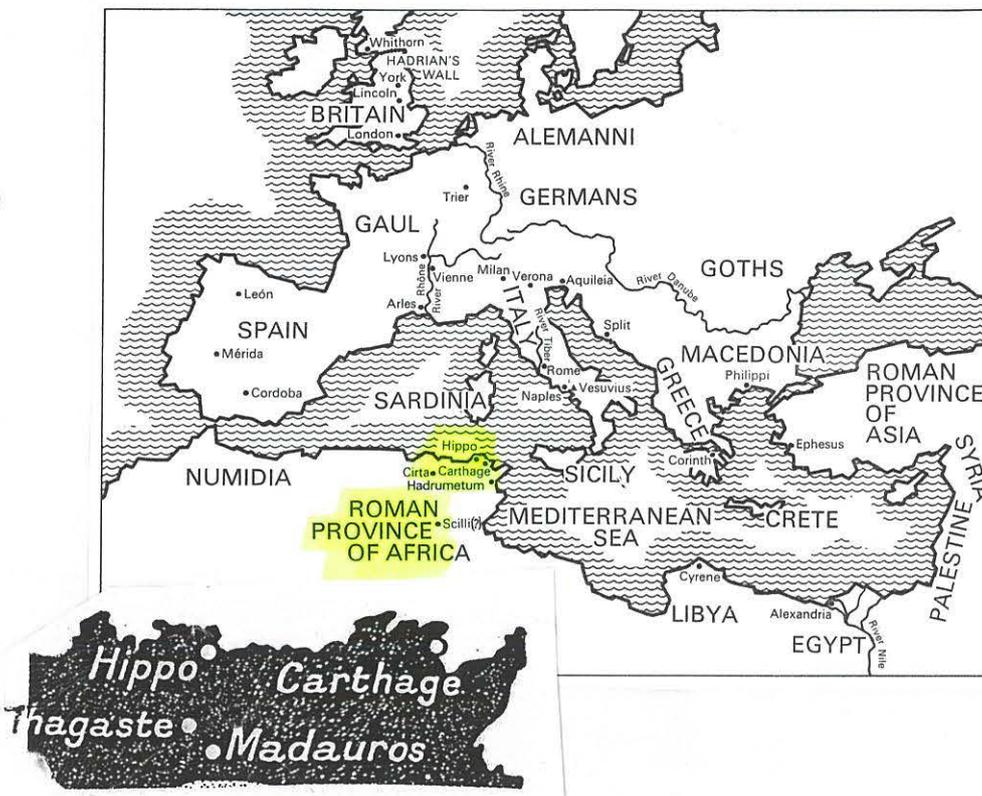
4. EVANGELICAL CONCERNS ABOUT AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY

Cairns, 139-142 (Augustine), 101-2 (Donatism), 131-2 (Pelagius);
Olson, 255-277; 265-6 (Donatism), 268-285 (Pelagianism);
Lion, 188, 206-8 (Augustine), 210-11 (Donatism);
Vos, 23-25; Hanks, *70 Great Christians*, 50-54 (Augustine); Vos, 43-44; (Pelagius).
Lane, 41-45 (Augustine), 42-43 (Donatism); 43-44 (Pelagianism).

1. BIOGRAPHY (354 - 430)

His Latin name was Aurelius Augustinus and he is known in English as Augustine.

He lived in Roman Africa for 71 of his 76 years. He was born in a small town not far from Carthage, and he studied at the university in Carthage. After a few years in Italy, he came back to Africa, and for his last 34 years he was bishop of the seaport of Hippo (See the maps – the larger one shows ‘Roman Province of Africa’, the smaller one is an enlargement of the area between Carthage and Hippo).



1.1 Birth, family and life to age 30

He was born in 354 at Thagaste, a small inland town in modern Algeria. His parents were contrasting personalities and both exercised a deep influence on the boy, causing conflict and unease in the family. His pagan father, Patrick, a man of modest means, owned a few acres of land, and was a member of the Town Council; he was hot-tempered and often unfaithful to his wife; his wayward example contributed to his son's errant behaviour. Happily, Patrick became a Christian and was baptised just before his death.

His mother Monica (331-87) was a devout Christian, and, humanly speaking, it was her consistent witness and persistent prayers that finally brought about Augustine's conversion.

Augustine's father made sacrifices, to give his intelligent son the best available education, first at primary school in Thagaste, then at secondary studies in nearby Madauros. From birth, Augustine was a Roman citizen and his upbringing and education were completely Roman; he never learned or spoke Greek all his life – he read the NT and the Eastern Church Fathers in Latin translations. He was an able student, and while his mother did

The Life of

Augustine

354	Birth in North Africa.
371	Makes his first visit to Carthage.
372	Takes a mistress.
373	Augustine's son, Adeodatus, is born; Augustine begins a nine-year attachment to Manichaeism (or Manichaeism).
383	Crosses the sea to Rome with his mistress and son.
384	Assumes the post of public orator at Milan. Separates from his mistress.
386	Converted. Writes the first of his extant books, including <i>Against the Sceptics</i> and <i>Soliloquies</i> .
387	Baptized in Milan.
388	Returns to North Africa.
391	Ordained as a priest.
395	Consecrated as bishop of Hippo Regius.
400	Completes his <i>Confessions</i> .
410	Rome is sacked.
413	Begins writing <i>The City of God</i> .
430	Dies during the Vandals' siege of Hippo Regius.

what she could to bring him up in the Christian faith; he went unwillingly to church, and as a teenager (he tells in his autobiography) he paid more attention to the girls than to the sermons. He was a catechumen, that is under instruction in preparation for joining the Church, but not yet baptized.

371 - Carthage

To further his education, Augustine went to the university of North Africa at Carthage, second only to Rome as a centre of learning in the Western Empire. He distinguished himself in rhetoric (public speaking), and also loved philosophy. He adopted a 'tear-away' student lifestyle, and although he attended church from time to time, his prayer was, he tells in his autobiography, - 'Give me chastity and continence ... but not yet.'

At Carthage, Augustine formed a relationship with a young African servant girl and they lived together for thirteen years without getting married. She produced an unwanted child a year later, but the child became much loved. They gave him the Christian name Adeodatus, 'gift from God'.

Among the heretical sets that competed with mainstream Christians at this time was a Persian religion, Manicheism. Augustine joined this sect and stayed with them for nine years. In it, two gods, Light and Darkness, competed for man's soul.

Monica prayed unceasingly, with tears, for his conversion. She tried to persuade a bishop, himself a convert from Manicheism, to show her son the errors in his beliefs. The bishop explained that prayer, not argument, would rescue Augustine, but he added: 'it cannot be that the son of such tears will perish'.

383 - Italy

In 383 Augustine moved to Italy, first to Rome, to take up a teaching position. He became ill, and almost died; his refusal to ask for Christian baptism at that point indicates how far he was from the Church. He recovered and in the autumn of 384 obtained the post of Professor of Rhetoric at Milan. He arrived in Milan on his thirtieth birthday, accompanied by his girlfriend and their son.

At this point his mother, Monica, came to Milan, still pleading with him to become a Christian. His nine-year interest in Manicheism was over and in Milan his life was changed by four factors.

1.2 Steps leading to his conversion, age 33

First, he was deeply unhappy, longing for peace. When he later wrote: 'our hearts are restless until they rest in you', he was being autobiographical. He decided to take another look at the Christian faith. Secondly, he was persuaded by a Christian friend to go to hear Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan (Lecture 8), preach. He sat at the back of the church, hiding away, but Ambrose's handling of the OT overcame Augustine's problems with difficult OT passages, and he reconsidered the faith he had abandoned.

The third factor was that in July 386, Augustine began to read the Letters of Paul and their teaching on grace. He now saw that union with God was to be found, not through philosophy but through God's grace. Fourthly, he read the biography of an Egyptian hermit, Anthony (Lecture 12), whose life-story had challenged two of Augustine's colleagues to give up being civil servants and to become monks. Augustine was increasingly aware of his sin and his vices.

Fresco of Augustine, from the Lateran Palace in Rome, the oldest known picture of him.



follow Augustine's travels on this map.



1.3. Conversion - 386

In August 386, he was praying in the garden of his Milan home for divine help, when he thought he heard a child's voice speaking, 'take and read' (*tolle lege*). He had been studying Paul's Letters, so he picked them up again and the page opened at Romans 13:13-14: 'Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. But clothe yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.' Augustine read these two verses and his doubts disappeared. In his autobiography, he said: 'I did not want or need to read any further. Instantly, as I finished the sentence, the light of faith flooded into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished.' He was 33 years of age.

He resigned his post as professor of rhetoric and prepared for baptism, taking instruction from the bishop, Ambrose. Monica saw her ceaseless prayers answered when, at Easter 387, he was baptised. Monica died shortly after that.

1.4. Return to Africa

Augustine returned to the family home in Thagaste in 388, sold most of his family property, land and possessions, and gave the proceeds to the poor. He founded a small monastery in his former house. He, together with group of like-minded Christians, entered a semi-monastic life of reading and writing, contemplation and discussion. He had found his true vocation, and wished to be a monk, not a minister/priest. Remember, there were – still are – two vocations in the Catholic Church, the priest/pastor/minister, who is ordained and who leads a congregation, and the monk/nun, who is a member of a religious community, not ordained, and whose life centres in that community.

For three years, Augustine continued in his cloister, organising his community. In 391 he visited Hippo, a flourishing city on the coast, looking for a new location for his monastery. He entered the local church and the Bishop of Hippo, who had been praying for a suitable assistant for years, spoke to him and persuaded him to be ordained as an elder/presbyter. He agreed on condition that he could live, with his colleagues, in a monastery close to the Hippo church.

In 395 the bishop asked that Augustine be made joint-bishop of Hippo with himself; a year later, the senior man died and Augustine became bishop of Hippo. His influence soon spread and he was recognised as the ablest and saintliest bishop of his time. For the remainder of his life, he was engaged in administering the Church, preaching in the cathedral and combating heresy.

1.5 397-400

During his first years as bishop, Augustine wrote his autobiography up to the death of his mother in 387, the *Confessions*, published in 400. She is now widely known as 'Saint Monica'.

1.6 Death - 430

Over his last twenty years, Augustine's reputation was enormous and he was recognized as supreme in North Africa, Italy, Gaul and Spain. He died in August 430 at the age of seventy-six.

2. FOUR LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM AUGUSTINE'S TEACHING

From among the many lessons we could learn, we'll look at four:

2.1 Augustine's teaching on sanctification (Cairns, 131-2)

Before we look at that, we'll take our Topic; what Augustine taught about it was in response to a man called Pelagius, so let's learn about him and then we'll come back to the Lecture to draw out some lessons.

TOPIC – PELAGIUS – BIOGRAPHY

was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Lecture Notes.

Pelagius' commendable zeal for Christian living was based on faulty theology. His doctrine of God was orthodox, but his belief about human nature was unorthodox. He taught that all of us come into the world with freedom to sin or not to sin. There is no such thing as original sin. People are basically good and could lead a good life if only they made the effort. Children have no sin until they, of their own free will, decide to sin. Adam had not corrupted humanity but had merely set a bad example, which his sons and daughters had followed, and so had most people since. Individuals sinned because they chose to follow Adam's bad example.

Pelagius accepted that we need God's grace in order to be good, but he defined grace as meaning two things: (i) God's gift of free-will to all human beings. and (ii) God's gift of the moral law and the example of Christ, which showed how people should live. Some people (according to Pelagius) managed to remain faultless throughout their lives by the proper use of their free will; there have been people, ever since Pelagius and down to the present day, who believe that. I have heard some of them say: 'I have lived a sinless life for the past so-many years'. This is now called Perfectionism, or sinless perfection. That's different from the phrase 'Christian Perfection' that we've come across several times, which meant taking Jesus' words literally, that if you would be perfect, give away your possessions and follow him exclusively. As we've seen, many early Christian leaders did that, giving all their worldly goods to the poor and committing themselves to a life of service within the Church. That's quite different from saying that anyone can be faultless if he or she tries hard enough - goodness through human effort.

This is not the place to pursue Perfectionism through the ages – the best-known teacher of one aspect of it was John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, whom we'll study in Lecture 29, although he defined Perfection as 'not voluntarily transgressing a known law', which is not the same as Pelagius' claim that one could be faultless by the proper use of free will – as I say, this is not the place to pursue that.

Back to Augustine. He wrote extensively against Pelagius – *On Nature and Grace*, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, and *On the Spirit and the Letter* and in doing so, he explored human nature, sin, grace, freedom of the will, human responsibility and salvation.

Augustine insisted (contrary to Pelagius) that the entire human race was present in Adam, the head of mankind; so when Adam sinned and fell, human nature fell; every human being is born into the world with a sinful nature - called 'original sin', which has robbed us of freedom of choice. We sin because our natures are so corrupt that we are unable to do otherwise until God saves us, through Christ. No one, said Augustine, not even the

greatest saint, would ever be free from sin in this present life; the Christian life was a daily struggle with the sin that still dwelt in human nature.

A contemporary of Augustine's put it neatly: 'It is necessary both that we should be our own masters and also that our salvation should be of God.' (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 37*.) Pelagius overstressed first part of that paradox, while Augustine may have exaggerated the second.

To explain original sin and human freewill, Augustine used the analogy of scales, with two balance pans. One pan represents good and other evil. If the pans are properly balanced, we could weigh up both sides of an argument in favour of doing good or doing evil and act accordingly. But, said Augustine, one balance pan (the one on the side of evil) has heavy weight in it – original sin. The scales still work, but they are biased towards making evil decisions. Human freewill can make decisions - just as loaded scales still work - but instead of giving a balanced judgment, a bias exists towards evil. Pelagians argued that human free will was like a pair of pans in perfect balance and not subject to bias.

The Western Church broadly accepted Augustine's doctrines of sin and salvation, with some modifications. Unfortunately, Augustine confused justification and sanctification; so justification was for him a process rather than a single act of God, as taught in Paul's Letter to the Romans, and the C16 Reformers had to correct that aspect of Augustine's teaching.

One practical example. Many evangelical Christians regularly attend Keswick Conventions, the original one still held annually in July at Keswick in the Lake District, and there are local Conventions all over the world. In 1955 a young college lecturer, Jim Packer, now a highly regarded evangelical scholar, teaching at Regents College in Vancouver, then in his twenties, published an article, claiming: 'Keswick teaching is Pelagian through and through.'¹

He claimed that in its teaching on sanctification, Keswick relied too heavily on human willingness to 'let God work in you'. Packer quoted Keswick teachers as saying the Holy Spirit 'will do as much in your life as he is permitted to do'. It was this idea of 'permitting' which Packer objected to, saying: 'They teach that God's ability to sanctify Christians is entirely dependent on the Christian's own prior willingness to be sanctified.'

To their credit, the leaders of the Keswick Convention took Packer's claim seriously and:

From the time of Packer's attack ... teaching at Keswick has become less definitive and more general in regard to the specific means to sanctification.²

It (Packer's article) probably contributed to the eventual demise of the dominance of the historic Keswick approach among evangelicals, and in turn significantly affected the main thrust of the Convention itself.³

So Augustine had something to say to the leaders of an important twentieth-century evangelical movement.

¹ J. I. Packer, '*Keswick and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification*', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27.3 (1955): 153-167.

² Charles Price and Ian Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, 2000, Carlisle, OM Publishing, 216.

³ Same, 222.

2.2 The Trinity and the Person of Christ

Among the other calls on his time, Augustine developed the Western Church's understanding of the Trinity and the Person of Christ. We saw, in Lecture 5, how Tertullian coined words and formulae to express these key doctrines in human language, and we'll see now how Augustine took Tertullian's ideas forward.

He made two comments that are worth keeping in mind today. First, he said: 'Our Greek friends have spoken of three persons and one essence, but the Latins speak of one essence and three persons.' That's a very sensible way for us to approach cross-cultural mission, especially if we are speaking to Muslims, who have been brought up to believe, 'There is One God' Instead of starting with the individuality of the three persons, as the East did, Augustine, following Tertullian, began with the unity of God and moved from there to work out the relationship of the three persons; One God, in three persons. The problem for theologians in the East was how to answer the question, if there are three persons, how can there be one God?

The other very quotable saying of Augustine about the Trinity is: 'If you deny the Trinity, you will lose your salvation, but if you try to understand it, you will lose your mind.'

2.3 Church/State Relations (Cairns, 140-142; Lion, 188)

In the year 410, barbarian invaders captured the city of Rome; pagans blamed the Christians because, they said, Christians had disregarded Rome's ancestral gods and the catastrophe was divine punishment by the pagan gods. Augustine countered this in a monumental book, the *City of God*, written between 413-427. He wrote that within the Roman Empire, two 'cities' were intertwined: the community of true Christians living according to God's law, and the City of Man, pagan society following its own desires and seeking material gain. For Christians, even the sack of Rome was not a catastrophe, because loss of goods does not deprive Christians of what really matters - their hearts are set on heavenly things. Suffering and deprivation are part of their Christian pilgrimage. The two cities will coexist inseparably until the end of the world, but only the City of God is eternal - and so of the greater worth.

Although Augustine believed this world is God's world, he also believed that Christianity should be other-worldly, not adopting the values of this world. What mattered was devotion to Christ and glorying God. It's a complex book, and there is a short analysis of it on the next page.

Church/State relations are increasingly an issue in this country, as many secularists adopt a more and more hostile attitude to anything Christian, so it's worth thinking about how Augustine put across the Christian message in his day.

2.4 'Ecclesiology' (through dispute with the Donatists) (Cairns, 101-2; Lion, 210-11)

Augustine faced down a group of separatists known as the Donatists, named after a man called Donatus, whom we'll come to in a moment. This led Augustine to formulate, for the first time, the doctrine of the Church (known as 'ecclesiology') - what is the Church?

What was the problem? Remember the Great Persecution - initiated by the Emperor Diocletian, from 303-305 (Lecture 7). After it was over, the issue was how the Church should deal with clergy who had handed over Bibles to the authorities for burning?

(Continued on page 10)

The City of God (written 413-427) may seem to us a rambling work, but Augustine set out, in his work *Retractions*, written in his later years, how he saw the structure of it.

- Part 1 (books 1-10) the Earthly City
- a) books 1-5 criticism of Roman cultures and customs
 - b) books 6-10 criticism of pagan philosophy
- Part 2 (books 11-22) the City of God and its relationship to an Earthly City
- c) books 11-14 the origins of the two cities
 - d) books 15-18 their history or progress
 - e) books 19-22 their deserved destinities

A medieval portrayal of the book



Historical Pictures Service—Chicago

A fifteenth-century miniature of St. Augustine's *City of God*. The upper inclosure represents the saints who have already been received into heaven; the seven lower inclosures represent those who are preparing themselves for the heavenly kingdom by the exercise of Christian virtues, or who are excluding themselves by committing one of the seven capital sins.

Those who had stood firm, and who had been tortured for it, called the clergy had who handed over Scriptures *traditores* = 'betrayers' - Latin *traditor* = 'one who hands over', so *traditores* = 'betrayers'. The issue was whether the Church should show leniency for *traditores* or whether the Church should support the hard stance demanded by those who had withstood persecution? Opinion was polarized.

When the bishop of Carthage died in 311, an election was held, in the usual way, for his successor. The delegates from Numidia – look back to the map on page 2, but on it Numidia is shown as too far to the west – it was south-west of Carthage – arrived after the election had taken place and they objected to the man chosen in their absence as the new bishop on two grounds: (1) they alleged that the new bishop, a man called Caecilian, had himself been a *traditor*, and furthermore (2) that one of the bishops involved in his consecration, Bishop Felix, had also been a *traditor*.

In protest, the Numidians elected a young Numidian priest called Donatus as a rival Bishop to Caecilian – and he presided over a rival church in Africa for forty years. It was from him that the movement known as Donatism took its name.

When Augustine became bishop of Hippo in 395, eighty-four years after the disputed election, the argument was still raging and there were more Donatist churches in North Africa than there were Catholic churches. Externally, there seemed to be little difference between them – it was like the situation in some parts of England today, where there is a Church of England on one side of the street and a Chapel on the other side; they sing the same hymns, and have the same Bible readings, but their 'ecclesiology' is different and so they maintain their separate identities.

What Augustine taught to combat the Donatists, his distinctive view of the Church, has been influential ever since. We'll look at three facets of it, (1) the sacraments, (2) membership and (3) salvation.

(1) Sacraments

To put it into modern parlance, if you were baptized by your local minister, and if, some time later, he ran off with the wife of one of your deacons, and if you then found he had been committing adultery with her at the time he baptized you, does his sinfulness destroy the validity of your baptism?

The Donatists would have said it was invalid, that you were not truly baptized; Donatists rebaptised Catholics who joined them, arguing that baptism was not valid when given by bishops of the Catholic Church. Augustine argued that the validity of baptism did not depend on the personal worthiness or orthodoxy of the clergyman who baptises, but on Christ Himself. Augustine taught that if a minister baptized you with water, in the name of the Trinity, it was Christ himself who was baptizing you – the minister was only his instrument, and the sinfulness of the instrument could not take away the validity of Christ's act. So African Catholics did not rebaptise Donatists who joined them.

The same reasoning applied to communion. In this way, Augustine developed the Western theology of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper - as long as they were correctly carried out in accordance with Christ's command, their validity could not be spoiled by the sinfulness of the clergy.

(2) Membership of the Church.

Two points to make here. First, the Donatists claimed that the true Church (by which they meant themselves) had to be a morally pure community. Augustine argued that here on

earth, the Church will always be a 'mixed' community of true and false, sincere and deceitful, saints and sinners, wheat and tares. He relied on two NT parables – the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43), and the parable of the net which catches many fish (Matthew 47-52). The farmer sowed good seed, but the resulting crop included both wheat and weeds. To separate wheat and weeds while both were growing would damage the wheat, but at harvest, they are sorted out. You and I have probably been brought up to believe that parable refers to the end of the world, but Augustine applied it to the contemporary Church. He refused to weed out those who had lapsed under persecution or other reason. This view soon became normative and had a deep impact on Christian thinking about the nature of the Church. For Augustine, holiness is not that of its members, but of Christ.

BUT (3), Unity. Augustine believed equally deeply in the unity of the Church, so he also taught that baptism outside the Catholic Church would never lead to salvation unless the baptised person later joined the Catholic Church. Membership was the key issue. Augustine tried to preserve Cyprian's view of the Catholic Church as the only body in which the Holy Spirit worked savingly. There was no need to rebaptize someone from the Donatist Church who wanted to join the Catholic Church, but join the Catholic Church they must, in order to be saved.

The C16 Reformers – and we as Evangelical Protestants today – admired/still admire much of Augustine's teaching, but the Protestant Reformers totally rejected Augustine's view that saving grace is channelled only through the Catholic Church and its sacraments. They taught, as we teach, that the Holy Spirit gives saving grace to all who come to personal faith in Christ, and commit their lives to Him. The Protestant Reformation has been called 'the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church'. (Benjamin B. Warfield, died 1921.)

So what happened to the Donatists? They remained impervious to Augustine's theological arguments, and some of them became what we would call freedom-fighters, physically attacking the Roman establishment for (they said) exploiting Africa to get cheap food supplies for Rome. The Roman army put down all Donatists by force, exiling their leaders and confiscating their church property. As a result, many Donatists returned to the Catholic Church, and became good, solid, loyal Catholics. Augustine was willing to admit that Donatist sacraments, including ordination, were valid, provided the dissidents now joined the Catholic Church and accepted its teaching.

3. AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY

Augustine's 34 years as bishop of Hippo show him as a preacher, church administrator, theologian, mystic, man of learning, leader of the monastic movement, writer of many books, and pastoral counsellor. Few have surpassed Augustine in these roles, and no one has combined them all so successfully.

Between the apostle Paul in the C1 and the Reformation in the C16, he was the most influential theologian in the Church. Even C16 Protestant Reformers considered themselves to be followers of, and interpreters of, Augustine.

Most Western Christian traditions which claim to be orthodox claim to be founded on Augustine's teaching, particularly his views on the essential goodness of creation, human nature, the nature of evil, grace, the will, sin, predestination, faith, the sacraments and the authority of the Church.

He saw sin as the misuse of God's greatest gift, which is free rational choice; when Adam fell through putting his will above God's, he took all of us with him into a fallen condition. Salvation is therefore impossible without God's grace, given to some but not to others in the inscrutable doctrine of predestination. His teaching on 'original sin' became Catholic orthodoxy at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The counterpoint of his gloomy view of human nature is confidence in God's power to save those who are chosen. Salvation is therefore God's gift, and cannot be earned.

He saw love for God and love for our neighbours as the supreme goals of life. He coined many sayings which are familiar today, such as 'Love, and do as you will', 'Unity in all things necessary, liberty in all things doubtful, charity in all things', 'Love for mankind and hatred of sins' (often quoted as 'Love the sinner but hate the sin'), 'Jesus Christ will be the Lord of all or he will not be Lord at all', 'Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand'.

4. EVANGELICAL CONCERNS ABOUT AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY

Protestant evangelicals, following the Reformation, are concerned about some of the uses which have been made of Augustine's writings. Four examples:

1. Justification and Sanctification

Evangelicals distinguish 'justification' (becoming right with God through responding to the redemptive work of Christ; Romans and Galatians) and 'sanctification' (growing in that relationship; Roms. 12:1-2, Gal. 5:16-25); for Augustine, justification was a process, not a single act, and he did not distinguish justification and sanctification.

2. 'Saving grace' available only through the Catholic Church

As mentioned (middle of p. 11), Augustine taught that 'saving grace' is channelled only through the Catholic Church and its sacraments, so baptism by others would never lead to salvation unless the baptised person joined the Catholic Church. The C16 Reformers rejected this; 'saving grace' comes through personal faith in Christ, not exclusively through membership of the Catholic Church. As quoted on page 11, the Protestant Reformation has been described as: 'The ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church'.

3. Scripture

Augustine taught that the Scriptures are authoritative because the Church has declared them so, on the authority of her bishops, which came by apostolic succession from Peter.

He also used the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but not in the extreme manner of the Alexandrians (Lecture 3). It was Ambrose's handling of the OT in this way (page 3) that overcame Augustine's problems with difficult OT passages, and restored his faith.

4. Purgatory

Augustine speculated that there might be a place where the dead could stay for a while to be cleansed from sin, before they were ready to go to heaven. This was mere speculation by Augustine, but the idea gradually gained ground from c400 that souls could be purged of their sins by fire. Gregory the Great (590-604, lecture 11) favoured it, and turned it into a firm doctrine, known as purgatory, but it did not become official doctrine until 1439.

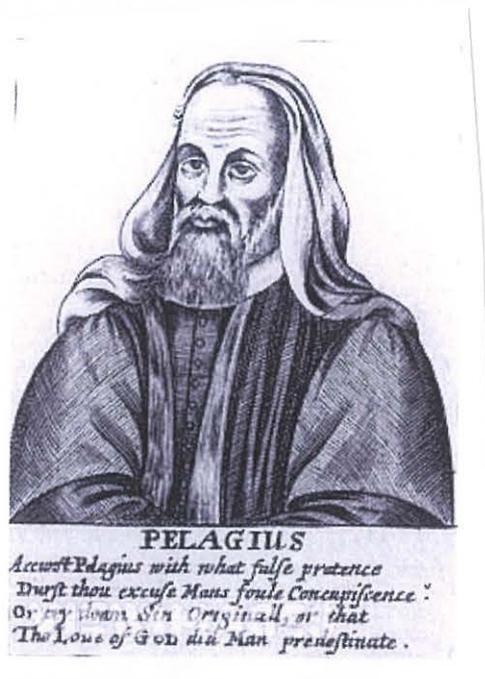
OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

TOPIC FOR LECTURE 9 – PELAGIUS (BIOGRAPHY, 354-420)

Augustine (lecture 9) was very concerned about the teaching of a man called Pelagius. Please give us a short biography of Pelagius and sketch his movements.

In the lecture, we will look at Pelagius' teaching and how Augustine answered it.

Cairns, 131-2; Olson, 268-74, Vos, 43-44 and Lane 43-44 are mostly about his teaching, but look around for biographical details – where he lived, whom he met, who opposed him and any other details about his life.



A 17th century Calvinist print depicting Pelagius.

The caption says:

"Accurst Pelagius, with what false pretence
Durst thou excuse Man's foul Concupiscence,
Or cry down Sin Originall, or that
The Love of GOD did Man predestinate."