

Augustine's Confessions III: *Confessiones*

- VIII-IX (Rejection of Secular Ambitions, Conversion and Baptism; Monnica's Story)
- X-XIII (Memory, Desire for Happiness and Longing for God; Time and Eternity; Heaven, Earth and Creation)

Prayer Before Studying Theology

Almighty God, who knows our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking: Set free your servants from all anxious thoughts about tomorrow; make us content with your good gifts; and confirm our faith that as we seek you kingdom, you will not allow us to lack any good thing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Augustine

Bk. VIII: The Moral Conversion of Augustine's Will to God

VIII.4: Victorinus' conversion requires not just an **intellectual conversion** to Christian truth, but also a **moral conversion that involves public involvement in the Christian community** (as Aug. eventually does in VIII.6.13/194).

- VIII.4.9/191: "an authoritative example pointing toward salvation"; the same is true of Antony and the characters described in VIII.15/196-197.

VIII.5.10/192-193: Augustine unable to follow this example--when the will turns away from God,

- desires become disordered and
- a habit is formed which eventually compels the soul; compare VIII.12/193-194.

Theological Significance of Conversion:

- God creates a **new will** in Augustine, a will **that is turned toward the worship of God, creating a division/warfare within the soul** (spiritual will vs. carnal will)
- Conversion involves a **healing of disordered desires** and the immoderate attraction to pleasure that readily overwhelms reason
 - Cf. VIII.17 on the restriction placed on what he asks, his reluctance and his inability in VIII.18,20-21;
 - On not being able to do what one desires/one's will for the good, see esp. 20-21; in 21 **the mind finds that it cannot command itself to will something undividedly and with a view to action** due to the burden of evil habit, so that two wills exist, though this is not the same as the Manichaeans' *enthumeseis* (considerations/deliberations).
- **The two wills** discussed (**fragmentation and disintegration vs. the will to worship God disinterestedly**) in VIII.9.21-VIII.24 and **the resolution in divine grace/conversion**.
 - See especially the account of willing and being able on VIII.20/200-202 (division-->immobility and irrationality in subsequent action, but Manichaeans' *enthumeseis* does not allow for the possibility of multiple options both for and against action[s], hence fragmentation and not mere opposition)
 - Compare also Monnica in IX.18/223

The Historicity of Augustine's Conversion Story in Confessions VIII.29-30

Questioned in 1888 by Adolf von Harnack and Gaston Boissier, who argued that Augustine's picture of himself, his outlook and his character here

- does not fit well with the differing accounts given in his slightly later Cassiciacum dialogues (where no momentous conversion experience or dramatic changes are narrated).and
- the New Testament text which is claimed to be central to Augustine's conversion in the garden (Rom. 13:13-14) is (for all practical purposes) not cited or expounded elsewhere in Augustine's writings
- there are some notable similarities between Augustine's account of his conversion and the account of Paul's Damascus Road conversion in Acts (instead of the repetition, "tolle lege, tolle lege," we have the repetition, "Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris" and we find Augustine disinterested in the Acts account prior to writing the *Confessions* but intensely interested in it while working on the latter).

It is therefore possible that Augustine drew upon his rhetorical training in depicting the scene in such a way that it would have the greatest dramatic impact and persuasive force

- *delectatio* is necessary to
 - **hold the audience's attention** (relieving the tedium of teaching and building an emotional bridge of sympathy between the speaker and the audience, thus increasing the latter's attentiveness and receptivity) and
 - **move the hearers to a greater appreciation of God's mercy and grace** (the goal of well-crafted speech in support of a credible narrative).

Note the story of the appearance of Contenance in VIII.27/2005 and the fig tree in VIII.28/206.

The pedagogical motive of the *Confessions* also needs to be kept in mind:

It is written for believers to provide them with a paradigm of conversion and the approach to God that is made possible (certain) by grace.

- See 10.8-11 on the creation of **certain trust**.
 - The certainty arises from the literary revelation of the fact that **what is remembered and is the object of one's love is not created goods but God alone**, with the senses of the body (uncertainty) being contrasted with direct inner perception (certainty).

Bk. IX --Augustine's Change of Life and Monnica's Story

Note the interiority in 9.1.1: "You cast them [sweet frivolities] out and entered yourself to take their place, you who are lovelier than any pleasure...yet more inward than is any secret intimacy"; cf. 10.39 and *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*

Renunciation of his profession/physical issues with his voice

Interim of answered prayer and scholastic discussion at Cassiciacum; he winters there with his mother and friends before returning to Milan to be baptized at Easter 387.

Cassiciacum (scene of three dialogues): At Verecundus' country villa with his mother Monnica, brother Navigius, son Adeodatus, friend, former student and fellow catechumen Alypius, two cousins and two recent pupils

After Monnica's death announced, her story and character given.

The role of rebuke in divine providence

Monnica endures the ill will of others and in time is rewarded; her mediation of arguments.

Faith in Christ grants her the confident seeing of God that philosopher hope for.

Final transition away from Manichaeism background to taking responsibility for his own life, taking up the search for a Christian philosophy (IX.10-11)

IX.6.14: baptized by Ambrose together with Adeodatus and Alypius

note also Evodius in IX.8.17 and how conversion is a conversion to a life of prayer and simple living in association with other, similarly-inspired people

Bk. X

10.2.2-6 role of memory in presenting God's grace, arousing the heart--essentially the function intended for the *Confessions* as a whole

10.12 images of things perceived by the senses are stored up in the memory, from which they can be recalled (sometimes with external help) and arranged/combined/modified (compare the "storage places of the senses" idea in Manichaeism [*Kephalaia*])

This mediate perception by means of images of sense-impressions is to be contrasted with the immediate and direct perception of higher, immaterial realities (10.19; see also 10.51 on ascent as requiring going beyond such sense impressions--one must go beyond memory to ascend toward God, where direct vision is possible)

10.29: This desire/love for ascent toward the good is evident in the fact everyone seeks happiness; we possess this desire because we have a memory of the truly happy life, which is joy in the Truth, not in lesser, material things. Now, however, we pursue the wrong things (=lesser, material things), thinking them to be the good/Truth/source of joy we seek. *See 10.38 for a classic statement of this and compare 10.53.

*10.40-41, 45, 60: "Give what you command"; compare 11.28 (p. 302)

10.41-42 Moral responsibility:

Q. Can one consent (since consent produces binding habit) in a dream?

A. Grace given can overcome even the weakness of reason/easy consent which arises from habit.

10.54: Concupiscence of senses:

(a) seeking to indulge oneself in the pleasure of the senses/sensual desires vs.

(b) unhealthy curiosity (*curiositas*; concupiscence of the mind)=a craving for experiences which involves a thirst for firsthand information, esp. for things unattainable (beyond one's right) and/or of no profit

See 10.59 (p. 276, bottom) and 10.64 against accepting praise/honor for what is done by God's gift--one's willing and doing of the good not properly to be regarded as one's own

Bk. XI

11.13: God's ubiquity and omnitemporality--God not within time but rather in eternity (outside time), so that all time is present to him at once

11.24-25, 41 on the problem this creates regarding the knowledge of future contingent events and necessity: Does God know the future in the way we know the past?

11.40: "there cannot be any time apart from creation"

Bk. XII

12.4.4; 6.6; 8.8; 14; 40; Note here the doctrine of formless matter (of which God makes use in creating *ex nihilo*)=substrate with potential to receive forms, to which things return when dissolve (rather than falling into non-being)--this is the basis/source of the mutability (liability to change/corruption) which belongs to created things. It is also intermediate/transitional to the timelessness (which characterizes incorporeal things), since no variation exists to mark time (12.14; compare 13.48 for the lack of interval between creation of formless matter and co-creation of formed created world)

12.9.9: realm of created, intelligible beings (can be perceived by the mind when the latter is rightly directed and rightly ordered)

12.11: Sin defined as will's departure fro God/the divine order

12.12,15,22,28: creaturely perfection=desire/pleasure in God alone, by which we bind ourselves/are bound wholly to the immutable God

Bk. XIII

13.10: "our true place is where we find rest"; Aristotle's doctrine of proper place applied to human life!