

From Testimony to Tradition: An Introduction to Augustine's *Confessions*

Widely considered the first modern persona to emerge in Western literature—although he lived in the fourth century!—St. Augustine is also the quintessential doctor of the Western Christian tradition, a philosopher-cum-theologian whose place in the canon of the “Great Books” is firmly secured by a number of classics including *The City of God* and *On the Trinity*. It is arguably *Confessions*, however, that reads most easily to our contemporaries, seeming at times as if it could have been composed in our own day—so startlingly honest and frank is its tone, so poignant its consideration of the human condition. In this seminal autobiography, we encounter the narrative of a man whose conversion—as seismic in its proportions as perhaps any ever recorded—leads not to the security of a comforting ideology, but rather to the wild frontier of the ultimate Mystery: Augustine does not so much give us answers, but instead introduces his readers, believers and unbelievers alike, to the full extent of the questions waiting to be asked. In the thirteen books of *Confessions* we discover that faith, far from avoiding the challenges of reason, takes them to an otherwise unattainable and entirely new level. The journey of faith, rehearsed in the first nine books, becomes a foray into the depths of epistemology and biblical interpretation by Books X-XIII.

Objectives

1. Examine today's ethical and political issues and questions through Augustine's *Confessions*.
2. Discuss the interaction of reason and faith.

P.S.

Recommended Reading

I. Primary Texts

Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford World's Classics), trans. Henry Chadwick (OUP, 2008)

II. Secondary Texts

Kim Paffenroth and Robert P Kennedy, eds. *A Reader's Companion To Augustine's Confessions* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003)

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (University of California Press, 2000)

III. Websites

<http://www.augnet.org/default.asp>

http://moses.creighton.edu/harmless/bibliographies_for_theology/Patristics_6.htm

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/>

<http://www.sant-agostino.it/links/inglese/index.htm>

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