

Andrea Castaneda

Amy F. Davis Abdallah

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Confessions of Saint Augustine 220 pages

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### Book Review: The Confessions of Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine of Hippo, a theologian born in Thagaste, Africa in 354 struggled to access salvation through rationality. Saint Augustine had a lustful and libertine youth, he studied philosophies and managed to practice different religions. He suffered and found himself lost several times because he wanted everything to make sense to his intellect. He wanted many answers about God but he was tied to his sinful nature and life pleasures. He tasted worldly things only to come to the conclusion that we are all sinners and that without God there is no perfection of the soul. His life changed drastically when he finally surrendered to Christ. The discoveries he made about the nature of the human soul, God, and sin are revealed in his book: *Confessions*. The central theme of *Confessions* of Saint Augustine is the relationship of the soul, lost in sin and saved by divine grace, with God, a relationship in which the exterior world has no other function but to mediate between both sides. His confessions are a long and deep dialogue between the creature and its Creator. They are full of divine revelation, grace and transformative power of human consciousness; it is impossible to read them and not be transformed.

Through the whole book, Saint Augustine manifests his trust in God as a true entity. He talks about his transformation and questions his sinful state since childhood. He confesses that he has bottomed out for his sins but that he always found the arms of God to save him. Saint

Augustine acknowledges that without God there will be nothing in this world, that God is immutable and that he is everywhere, always nourishing desperate souls and sheltering the unprotected under his arms. Saint Augustine did not find his place on earth, he questioned its existence and in the first pages of his *Confessions* he reveals that he is in a process of change, putting away his pride to begin his conversion. He had a fixation for understanding the sinful nature of the human being, he wanted to know if a sinner is born by inheritance of the parents or if God could have created evil souls and he came to the conclusion that “the feebleness of infant limbs is innocent, not the infant’s mind”(9). By stating this he acknowledges his sinful nature but recognizes a glimpse of goodness in human beings.

One of the reasons why this book is so transformative is the sincerity with which Saint Augustine speaks about his sins. This sincerity lead him with not doubt to the grace of God. He acknowledges his emotional instability by declaring that he liked to love and be loved by seeking love in several women: "I ran wild in the shadowy jungle of erotic adventures" (24). He knew that this promiscuity drove him away from God. Saint Augustine also did not like to obey his father, but he also understood that this distanced him from God. He was coming to such divine revelation that he was not afraid of confessing, he was sure that there is no other way to be free than to confess our wrongdoings. As the book progresses, he discovered redemption in his confessions and his soul felt the embrace of God. He embarks the reader in an encounter to this embrace as well, as it becomes almost impossible not to meditate in personal issues while reading the book.

Another remarkable aspect about Saint Augustine is that he was aware of his weaknesses. He had found in silence and solitude his real being and because of this awareness he made strict decision in his desire to follow God. Saint Augustine points out that all human beings adopt

happiness as a goal that must be achieved, the philosopher begins an arduous search for truth and becomes intelligent and intuitive. He fails to marry the woman of his youth since he decides to embark on his own path and continue his search for God. It is difficult to understand the decision of Saint Augustine to remain in celibate after having a son. He could have followed his search for God with his family as well, but Saint Augustine had a path given by God and he knew it. He had dedicated himself to the understanding of his soul and he knew his own weaknesses. He decided to continue alone in order to be able to overcome his sinful nature.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustin also narrates the beginning of his life in the church, always debating himself between the truth of good and evil. For him, God was an “immutable being that penetrated light and shadows”(87). God was the truth that he was looking for and it cost him part of his life in sin to find out. It is here that the text makes us meditate on our weaknesses and sins. It is possible that God allows sin in our lives so that we can look for the truth and find it. To Saint Augustin his sins served as a platform to find God, this does not elevate sin under any circumstances, but it does reveal to us again that God uses everything for the good of those who love him. What would have happened to Saint Augustine without his sin? His confessions would not exist. That which he most wanted to part from led him not only to God, but also to become one of the greatest Christian theologians of all time.

Without a doubt, the confessions of Saint Augustine are an ode to the divinity of God and to human complexity. The book is full of poetry, love, sincerity, passion, truth, spirituality and power. It makes the reader wonder how can a man achieve such wisdom and faith. The answer is probably simpler than we expect: Saint Augustine knew the word of God not only mentally but also in his heart. Each revelation of the book is backed by a biblical verse, the dedication to God in his years of solitude and silence is notorious. God, without doubt, transformed the life of Saint

Augustine and he did it not only with the purpose of saving his soul, but also of teaching us an amazing lesson about surrender and grace. He did it to show us the pains of sin and the power of his redemption, to teach us that faith comes by “hearing and hearing” his word and putting it to work.

“My love for you, Lord is not an uncertain feeling but a matter of conscious certainty. With your word you pierced my heart, and I love you” (183). This is indeed a magnificent revelation. It brings to mind the account of Jesus and the disciples. Jesus asks Peter who do you think I am? Peter answers that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, to which Jesus answers: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matt 16:17 NIV). There is no doubt that Saint Augustine had a revelation from heaven about who God is. Humanity struggles to find the truth precisely because we search for it in philosophies, in people, in richness or fame, in tangible things. It is only when the truth is a revelation from the Father that we can be transformed, renewed and redeemed. This is one of the biggest lessons of this book, whomever eagers for the truth must deny himself and search for God, the truth is a revelation.

Works Cited

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