

THE ROLE OF ST.AUGUSTINE AS A NORTH AFRICAN CHURCH  
HISTORIAN

Submitted by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MTh (MASTER OF THEOLOGY)

Department of Church History and Church Polity  
In the faculty of Theology

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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DATE OF SUBMISSION: APRIL 2007

## Summary

The intention of this study is to investigate the role St. Augustine has contributed as a North African Church Historian. In order to archive the intention of this study one of the most significant works that Augustine wrote the *City of God* is going to be used as a literature review.

The *City of God* is originally written to defend the church against charges of being responsible for the destruction of the city of Rome in 410 CE; the City of God has come to stand as a monument to theological reflection on the history of God's creation.

Though not primarily a historian, Augustine has made a significant contribution to the study of Christian history. He raises scripture to become the source of the meaning of history and defines the only true history as sacred history. This study considers Augustine's critique of the Church catholic, the meaning of history, the origins of the *City of God*, Augustine's views on the philosophy and theology history and the prophetic nature of biblical history.

The first part of the study will trace the early life struggle of Augustine in his quest for knowledge and the truth. He learnt rhetoric studies; he examined the Holy Scriptures and found them unworthy. Then he was a follower of the Manicheans, but he was disillusioned when he met their sophisticated leader Faustus. Finally, bishop Ambrose of Milan in his allegorical interpretation and explanation of scripture and the influence of Christian Neoplatonism helped Augustine to find an approach to the Bible and to overcome his difficulties with his childhood religion. Ambrose led him to the verge of conversion.

Augustine's impact on Reformation is considered. He is a father of the Church who has exerted an unparalleled influence on more than the thousand years that separated him from the birth of Protestant churches, but that long period is not an empty space because his historical work

was influential throughout this period. In a movement to renew and reform the Church the various Reformers of the sixteenth century like Martin Luther and John Calvin studied Augustine in order to challenge abuses within the Catholic Church. The influence and the legacy that Augustine had on other people is discussed as the final conclusion of the study. The ideas, which he phrased with great skill, were to be accepted by almost all the leading thinkers of Europe until after the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Augustine had made much of being the Catholic bishop of Hippo.

**Keywords:** Augustine's historiography, *City of God*, Ambrose of Milan, Pelagius, Manichaeism, Platonism, Donatus, The *Confessions*, John Calvin and Martin Luther.

## Declaration

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this dissertation has not previously in its totality, or partially been submitted for the attainment of a degree at any university.

Wonke Buqa  
April 2007

## Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Professor G A Duncan for his encouragement, for always being available for his practical support even at times that I got into his office without making appointment. He has been my spiritual minister, my white father, and my undergraduate teacher since I knew him at the University of Fort Hare 2001. I appreciate a lot the role you play in my life especially for assisting me to get bursary funds and your lovely wife Mrs Sandra Duncan who always encouraged me to further my studies

I should like to extend my warmest thanks and gratitude to the following people for the help and encouragement, which they extended to me while I completed this study:

I would love to thank Mrs Rina Roos the administrator of the Faculty of Theology at University of Pretoria for her patience with me and the staff in the Library in level one. I give thanks to the moderator of the Presbytery of Tshwane and my supervisor in probation the Rev. Glynis Goyns for her love and I also thank Margie Thompson for helping me in typing this work.

My family has given me great support, both from a motivational point of view and in all practical aspects, my mom Nosainethi Buqa, my sister Nonyameko, my brothers Lunika and Yandisa. I am so sorry to my two little nieces for not having quality time to spend with them while I was busy with this dissertation, Ongeziwe and Siyamthanda Buqa, I love you.

Apart from the above, I wish to express my deepest thanks to the following friends for their share in supporting me in various ways and taking me out when I was stressing up with this work:

Sikhumbuzo Ngwenya, Thando Simelane, Christine Meyer, Lauren Gill, Sixolise Melaphi, Carl Diedericks, Hannelie Basson and Kgaugelo Sebake

Wonke Buqa

## Abbreviations

C D	Civitate Dei
C E	Common Era
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DSL	De Spiritu et Littera
INST.	Institutes

## Table of contents

	PAGE
Summary	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abbreviations	vi
Table of Contents	vii
<b>CHAPTER 1 Introduction</b>	
1.1 Problem statement	1
1.2 The relevance of the study	1
1.3 The objectives of the dissertation	3
1.4 Approach of the thesis	4
1.5 Hypothesis	5
1.6 The methodology of the study	5
1.7 Literature Review	6
1.71 Primary Sources	6
1.7.1.1 The <i>City of God</i>	6
1.7.1.2 The <i>Confessions</i>	7
1.8 Chapter outline	8

## Chapter 2 History of the early Church in Africa: Augustine in his African context

2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	The early history of the Church in Africa	10
2.3	The birth of Augustine, his childhood and youth	13
2.4	Clarification of terminology	14
2.4.1	Manichaeism	14
2.4.2	Platonism	15
2.5	The devoted servant of St. Ambrose	16
2.6	The conversion of Augustine	17
2.7	The background of the <i>City of God</i>	18
2.8	The historical critics	21
2.9	Historical changes	23
2.10	Authority of the scriptures	23
2.11	Augustine and the scriptures	24
2.12	The <i>Confessions</i>	25
2.13	Ecclesiastical Troubles	27
2.13.1	Pelagianism	27
2.13.2	Donatism	29
2.14	Augustine's Spirituality	30
2.15	His monastic life	32
2.16	Priesthood and holiness	32
2.17	Augustine's view of violence in religious matters	33
2.18	Conclusion	35



## **Chapter 3 Augustine's impact on Reformation: Augustine's theology as a tool for John Calvin and Martin Luther**

3.1	Introduction	37
3.2	John Calvin and Augustine's theology	38
3.3	Martin Luther's use of Augustine's theology in the reformation	39
3.4	Luther's critique of Augustine	40
3.5	Augustine and the Reformation	41
3.6	Luther's view on the <i>City of God</i>	42
3.7	Luther's loyalty to the Augustinian order	43
3.8	Luther and the theology of Augustine	45
3.9	The controversial issues	47
3.10	John Calvin on Augustine's view of sacrament	48
3.11	Augustine on sin and sanctification	49
3.11.1	Luther	49
3.11.2	Calvin	51
3.12	The grace theology: Luther, Calvin and Augustine	51
3.13	The Lord's Supper: Luther and Augustine	53
3.14	Luther and Augustine	54
3.15	Conclusion	55

## Chapter 4 Augustine and the History of the Church

4.1	Introduction	57
4.2	Augustine's critique of the Catholic Church	57
4.3	The meaning of History	60
4.4	Origin and the History of the two cities	64
4.5	Augustine's view on philosophy and theology	68
4.6	Interpretation of History	69
4.7	Biblical History	70
4.8	Augustine and unity of the church	71
4.9	African Bishops Councils and the Roman See	72
4.10	Augustine and the Church	74
4.11	The origin of the <i>City of God</i>	75
4.12	The social and the political thought of Augustine of Hippo	76
4.13	Augustine's theology on sexual matters	76
4.14	Politisisation and Clericalisation of the <i>City of God</i>	78
4.15	On the <i>City of God</i>	78
4.16	The Salvation of the church	81
4.17	The History	82
4.18	Church authority	83
4.19	The imperfect church	85
4.20	Augustine and time	87
4.21	Conclusion	88

## Chapter 5 The influence and the legacy of St. Augustine

5.1	Influences Augustine had on other people	90
5.2	Augustine: a devoted bishop	91
5.3	His teachings	92
5.4	The Spiritual Leader	94
5.4.1	Christians in the world	96
5.5	Augustine the thinker	97
5.6	The works of Augustine	98
5.6.1	<i>City of God</i>	100
5.7	Augustine's legacy	101
5.8	Conclusion	103
5.9	Bibliography	105

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Problem statement**

This study will focus on the question: why is there so little study of the Patristic period among African Reformed Church Historians? The Patristic period is not a novel study in the historiography of the church; it is a study that dates from early centuries. Many Episcopal and other Church historians have written about the Patristic period. The challenge of this study is to explore different ways in which Augustine handled the governance and beliefs of the Church in a problematic society, which had been grounded in the Roman tradition. The basic question, then is how did Augustine conceive the task of history and how did this emerge in his historiography? We can maintain our own history as Africans and be proud of our early church African fathers, our church heritage and acknowledge the legacy they left to us.

### **1.2 The relevance of the study**

It is part of my fulfilment as a young African to attempt to discover the significant role Augustine played in the history of the Catholic Church. This research study will consider why Augustine is regarded as the greatest theologian the Roman Catholic Church ever produced in the Patristic period, and his involvement in Africa as an African who grew under Roman colonization. There are many issues that need to be discerned concerning Augustine and his personal character, as a Bishop and at the same time as a monk and theologian. The analysis of this study will embark on the context of Augustine, comparing this to the modern church, the passion of his faith and

the faith of today's church. Protestant views on Augustine's theology and the early Roman Catholic Church will be examined. My studies in Church History have exposed me to the holistic nature of the Patristic period. Augustine is one of the Patristic fathers who challenges my spirituality through his writings.

It is significant to read about his ability to be able to write apologetics on controversial Christian matters while being a monk and a Bishop at the same time. He was a tireless man working for the church. In reality the Roman Catholic Church is different from the Protestant Churches but they have the same background and history.

Protestant Churches emanated from the Roman Catholic Church and both branches of the Church claim the church fathers as founders of the doctrines and tradition of the church. Though Protestants may differ with the Roman Catholic Church in doctrinal matters from the Reformation period, given the highlighted points above, this study is significant and relevant to African church historians. This study will seek to maintain the legacy of St. Augustine as an African Christian theologian.

### **1.3 The objectives of the dissertation**

My personal interest in the patristic period developed during my first year of studies in the Department of Theology in University of Fort Hare in 2001. As my studies began in the Patristic Age, my knowledge about the Roman Catholic Church was very shallow. It was probably due to my upbringing in rural Transkei (Willowvale) where there are predominantly only Protestant churches. My knowledge about the history of the Roman Catholic Church was very limited, as Catholics are in minority in rural Willowvale.

As young children we were actually not allowed by our parents to be exposed to other denominations. Most mainline churches in rural areas were founded by missionaries; even parishes are named after missionaries such as Lundie Memorial, Malan, Buchanan, Fort Malan and Duff Kidston. All mainline churches there are traditional, conservative and the gospel message is more evangelical in a theological sense. It was a great opportunity to me to enroll at an academic institution, to learn about the foundation of early Church History and I was surprised to learn that theological doctrines developed under the Roman Catholic Church in that era. It is my interest to study Augustine's theology and reflect on it in relation to the theology of modern churches.

This study serves to excavate Augustine's approach to Church History, his thoughts, his faith and his passion about the solidarity of the church. If Augustine had a great influence in the church what can African Protestants learn from him? How did Augustine change the history of the church through his teachings? Some of the reformed fathers like John Calvin and Martin

Luther used Augustine in their polemics as a tool to argue against the weaknesses and errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Why are Augustine's historical writings among the Early Church Fathers used a great deal by the reformed fathers? It is because Augustine is regarded as the greatest theologian that ever been produced by the Roman Catholic Church, while Thomas Aquinas is known as the greatest critical philosopher that ever been produced by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages.

#### **1.4 Approach of the thesis**

The study will endeavour to seek to trace the background of Augustine, his early childhood in Carthage and his adult life. The focus will be on Augustine's historical analysis in his own era; his involvement in the history of the Church and society, and his writings written in the context of ecclesiastical controversial debates.

We shall study the implications for North Africans under Roman culture, and Augustine's involvement; his approach to scripture, and ancient hermeneutical analysis as well as ecclesiastical doctrinal apologetics. One of my aims is to discover the socio-political, economic and culture background of this period. Another aim is to become more enlightened with regard to the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic tradition in the Early Church. It is my interest to discern how Augustine managed to dialogue with heretics and fanatics. Augustine in his adult years became a man of noble character. Nature gave Augustine a delicate physique and a vivacious spirit; it gave him as well a mind that was kind, affectionate, and refined, but also strong and decisive. He

loved order, solitude, and friendship; above all he loved truth. He was easily touched, but evil invoked his indignation and, when the occasion required, he could not be moved from his purposes.

### **1.5 Hypothesis**

We can learn from Augustine's historiography broadly, concerning the progress of the history of the Church in today's world. Augustine made a significant and novel contribution to the life and doctrine of the church, which has had long-term effects. Augustine changed the history of the church through his teachings and throughout his life dedication to theological doctrines developed within Roman Catholic Church. His influence, from the early Middle Ages, through Scholasticism, Humanism and the Reforming tradition has extended to the present.

### **1.6 The methodology of the study**

The primary research will be based in Augustine's writings. The research method of this study does not include the empirical methodology. The secondary research will be based on books, and journals. The literature study will be analysed, and the study material will contain adequate theoretical argument based on my epistemology. The study will consider the history of Augustine in the early African context in his own era. In my research method, there will be an emphasis on Augustine and his role in the church, as a church patron of Africans.



## 1.7 Literature review

The literature will consist of work done by past researchers, writers and their analysis regarding primary and secondary sources on Augustine's writings. The historical church matters that Augustine became involved in will be discussed. The literature review: "*The City of God against the Pagans*" edited and translated by Dyson R. W. 1998. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This book will be useful, as it constitutes one of the most significant works that Augustine wrote himself in his era. "*Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History*" Keyes G. L. 1966. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. This book will serve the mouthpiece of Catholic Christianity and St. Augustine in Context. "*West African Christianity*", "*The Religious Impact*" by Sanneh L. 1986. Cambridge: Harvard University. "*A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500*" Wand J. W.C. 1989. London: Arrowsmith Ltd, will contribute to a critical view of Augustine's theology and his involvement in Church History.

### 1.7.1 Primary sources

#### 1.7.1.1 The *City of God*

Augustine took fourteen years to complete the "*City of God*". He wrote this book while he was writing against Pelagius the British monk. Augustine contends that there are in effect two cities and not just one, two cities, one of God, the other of the world. Augustine had to write about two cities to elaborate the confusion that emerged between the Christians and the non-Christians over the destruction of Rome in 410 CE.

### 1.7.1.2 The *Confessions*

Augustine also wrote down his *Confessions*; it is a confession of sin; it is a confession of faith, and it is a confession of praise. Nevertheless, if the *Confessions* were meant for the ears of God alone, they would never have been written, for God needs no reminder of our deeds nor of the operation of his grace, and he knows the mind of every man. Augustine admits this (*Confessions* 11:1 in O'Meara 1980:3):

Lord, art Thou ignorant of what I say to Thee? Why then do I lay in order before Thee so many relations? Not, of a truth, that Thou mightest learn them through me, but to stir up mine own and my readers' devotions towards Thee.

Augustine had a mind to reveal himself, who he was before God and before man as we have access to his *Confessions*. He was very interested in the question of what memory was and how it worked, as can be seen from his lengthy discussion in the *Confessions*.

## 1.8 Chapter outline

Chapter two will outline the history of the early church in Africa: Augustine in his North African context, his leadership as a bishop and his engagement with Church controversial issues.

Chapter three will discuss Augustine's impact on Reformation: Augustine's theology as a tool for John Calvin, and Martin Luther.

Chapter four will deal about Augustine, the History of the Church and Augustine's response against the charges brought to the Christian Church about the destruction of Rome in 410 CE.

Chapter five will in conclusion discuss the influence and the legacy of St. Augustine.

## **Chapter 2 History of the early Church in Africa: Augustine in his North African context.**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a picture of Augustine as a man, pastor and a devoted church leader in his adult years. He was generous, and a single-minded man who proudly challenged the Catholic faith and then rediscovered that faith is a long interior struggle. Augustine is a father of the Church who has exerted an unparalleled influence on more than the thousand years that separate him from the birth of Protestant churches, but that long period is not an empty space because his historical work was influential throughout this period. No comparison is made between his teaching and that of the fathers before him.

Already in his lifetime Augustine's spiritual leadership was recognized. His influence fascinates Christians, non-Christians, philosophers and others down to the present. The illustrious bishop from Roman Africa has become an inspiration to many Christians in the history of the Church both Catholics and Reformers. Augustine has exercised a deep and continuing influence on the Western world. His significance to the Church and through it to our culture cannot be easily overestimated. In this chapter the attention has been given to the early history of the Church in Africa, Augustine's theology and his *City of God*.

## **2.2 The early History of the Church in Africa**

Palestine, the land in which the early history of Christianity first appeared, had long been a land of strife and suffering. In ancient times, this was due mostly to its geographical position, at the crossroads of the great trade routes that linked Egypt to Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor to Arabia. For a long time Egypt and Syria fought for the possession of Palestine. The result was a period of unrest and political instability.

The conquests of Alexander the great (356-323 CE.) had an ideological basis, and this conquered civilization was united through Hellenism. This Hellenistic phenomenon was based in cultural and religious tolerance. This did provide the eastern Mediterranean basin with a unity that opened the way first to Roman conquest, and later to the preaching of the gospel. But there were many Jews who did not regard Hellenism as a blessing. Since part of the Hellenistic ideology consisted in equating and mixing the gods of different nations, they saw in it a threat to Israel's faith in the One God. Alexandra the Great wanted to adapt all religions to Greek culture.

There were numerous Jews who were living in Egypt even before the birth of Christ. These Jews, scattered far and wide, but with strong emotional and religious connections with the land of their ancestors, are called Jews of the "Diaspora" or "Dispersion". Diaspora Judaism is of crucial importance for the history of Christianity in Africa, for it was one of the main avenues through which the new faith expanded in North Africa and throughout the Roman Empire. During the first five centuries many African Christians suffered great

persecution, yet they remained firm in their Christian faith. During this same period great African Church leaders such as Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine contributed theological concepts and interpretations, which were eventually adopted by the global Christian Church. It is the heritage of this North African Church, which has provided guidance for the new churches in Africa. All Christians in Africa today share a special fellowship with those African Christians who have lived during the previous nineteen centuries. The churches of Africa today have received much from the early African church fathers. We owe so much to early African Christians and we should be aware of what they have given to us.

Some of them became martyrs for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. There are many prominent African Church leaders in the early centuries who wrote many books concerning the development of the Church History of Africa. In addition to this heritage from which we have benefited, there are some lessons that we should learn. Then, too, it is often said that we should learn from our mistakes, so we must be ready to recognize mistakes that were made in the African Church of the past, so that we do not repeat those same mistakes in our Church of today (Hildebrandt 1990:38).

We must learn from the mistakes of the past, but not repeat them. If the early Church historians erred in the past that need not be repeated in our days. Church History manifests that the early African Christians realised that Jesus Christ was the only important thing in the world for them. They had a hard calling as they forsook everything for the sake of Jesus Christ to pay heed to

God's calling. Church History tells us that the monastic life was one of high standards of calling in those centuries. We read how many people were put to death by the Roman government because they believed in Christ and because they refused to give up their faith. Another concern of the early African Church was evangelism and missionary outreach. There is a specific African contribution to Church History based on the experience of the outworking of the gospel on the African soil. African Church History then must be a type of history which will give Africa a strong voice, enable her to recover her self-identity and serve as an empowerment for the future.

Augustine made a significant contribution to Christian theology in the Patristic period and beyond. If we look back over Church History, we can see that without the contributions of African Christians our church today would be quite different. It is quite sad that Africa has been undermined by many first world countries as the result of many people coming to realize that this most respected doctor of the Church was an African. This early African Christian made a rich contribution to our church heritage, but not just to the heritage of Christianity in Africa, but also to the entire Holy Catholic Church throughout the world.

The early rich theology comes from the doctors of the church who shaped the doctrine of the church. There are many lessons that we can learn from the early years of the church in Africa. Church History is strongly based in the Patristic period; the great era of the formation of Church confessions coincides with that of the Church fathers. For this reason the history of the

literature and theology of the early Christian Church continues to be of great importance for Church History and the history of doctrine.

### **2.3 The birth of Augustine, his childhood and youth**

Aurelius Augustinus was born at Tagaste in Numidia on Sunday November 13, 354 CE. He was the son of a pagan, Patricius, who was not converted until late in his life. Monica, Augustine's mother, like many good mothers, could sometimes blind herself to moral issues in furthering the interests of her son. It is possible that the difference between his parents is reflected in the dual character of Augustine. Augustine was not baptized in infancy, but the rite of the cross on the forehead and the cleansing touch of salt upon the lips were observed.

Augustine spent fourteen years at Carthage learning rhetoric, and there his illegitimate son Adeodatus was born in 372. As a schoolboy he associated with a group of hooligans "euersores or wreckers" (Lawless 1990:3). He became a father at the age of seventeen. A year afterwards he turned to serious thoughts as a result of reading of *Cicero's Hortensius* (Smith 1980:21). He fell in love with the concept of wisdom. He readily, and joyfully, admits that through Cicero he was drawn to God.

Augustine examined the Holy Scriptures and found them unworthy comparison with the stately prose of Cicero. Then for nine years he was a follower of the Manicheans, but he was disillusioned when he met their sophisticated leader Faustus. Symmachus, the pagan orator, invited him to take



up a position as a teacher of rhetoric at Milan, no doubt hoping that he would offset some of the Christian influences there. He read the Scriptures, but he regarded himself too proud to bow his head to enter its mysteries.

## **2.4 Clarification of terminology**

### **2.4.1 Manichaeism**

Augustine was once a victim of Manichaean propaganda (Trape 1986:51) he accused the Catholic Church first of all of fideism, that is, the authoritarian approach that demands faith without explaining the truth; an approach that is, gnosis, and not faith, that befits a wise human being. The Manichaeans urged knowledge, not faith as the goal to be attained and the way to be followed. Augustine also criticized Catholics for maintaining an anthropomorphic conception of God, an unacceptable solution for the problem of evil, a materialist idea of the Incarnation, and an Old Testament faith. The Manicheans used both the Old Testament and New Testament as Christians do, but they interpret the scriptures heretically.

They assert that the God who gave the Law through Moses and spoke through the Hebrew prophets is not the true God but one of the princes of darkness. The Manichaers read the scriptures of the New Testament in a false way, accepting what they like and rejecting what they do not like. They prefer instead certain apocryphal works, which they claim recount the whole truth. The Manichean system was partly negative and partly positive.

It was much engaged in showing up the defects, for example, of Scripture; but it had also a positive teaching of its own. This is a kind of religious philosophy that Augustine encountered before his conversion to Christianity; he was so moved by Manichaeism before he finds out about its errors and weaknesses. Manichaeism offered a type of pseudo-philosophical faith that would appeal to young Augustine the pseudo-intellectual faith. It was based on the concept of eternal dualism, good vs. evil. This is one of the philosophies that Augustine was brought up with and probably helped him to be able to write in a polemical manner his Christian theology.

#### **2.4.2 Platonism**

Augustine engaged in a pensive re-examination of his personal conflicts, his heavy sense of sin and guilt. He also yearned for continued intellectual stimulation. He was filled with this painful darkness when the platonic philosophers came to his aid in the spring of 386. “You provided me, by means of a man much puffed up with the conceit of his own knowledge, some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin”. (Trape 1986:92).

Augustine was surrounded by group of friends who enjoyed the studious life; philosophy dominated their daily conversations. He had a difficult time in his life especially about his influences from dualism and Platonism, and also that he lived during a time of religious anxiety. Augustine was God’s tireless man working hard for the Catholic Church’s orthodox doctrines.

## 2.5 The devoted servant of St. Ambrose

St. Ambrose of Milan is one of the great men who influenced Augustine towards his conversion. Ambrose also gained a great ascendancy in Milan because of his ecclesiastical leadership. He was a great supporter of the Nicene faith, and did much to ensure the triumph of the *homoousios* concept in the West. Perhaps the greatest work in his theology in transforming the church was in his sermons. He was a great orator. More than anything else, the preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan and his reading of Plotinus and Porphyry influence of Augustine's intellectual and religious development.

Ambrose's allegorical interpretation and explanation of scripture and the influence of this Christian Neoplatonism helped Augustine to find an approach to the Bible and to overcome his difficulties with his childhood religion. Augustine, then a teacher of rhetoric, came to hear him, and, admired his thought no less than his style.

He led him to the verge of conversion. It should be also added that Ambrose was one of the great hymn-writers of the Early Church. Ambrose like the other early Church fathers maintained that the relationship between God and man is largely determined by the principle of merit and reward. Ambrose himself was an ascetic and a learned man. He had been a bishop for ten years and was about fourteen years older than Augustine. Ambrose moved Augustine spiritually and emotionally.

## 2.6 The conversion of Augustine

By this time Augustine was a complete skeptic, but he was brought under the spell of Ambrose, and with many struggles set himself to live a more orderly life. For a period he sought relief in the philosophy of Neoplatonism, but he was profoundly moved when he came into contact with some Christian ascetics. He found it possible to live a life after his own ideals without the aid of his own learning and philosophy. It was at this time that his conversion occurred in circumstances, which are incomparably described by himself. Augustine was a person of the group in his nature and particularly enjoy of socializing with his friends.

Pontitious who was Augustine's friend had told Augustine a story about Anthony of Egypt how he once, apparently by chance, came upon the saying in Holy Scripture: "Go, sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). In this Anthony magnified the call of God. In the same manner with Augustine, he picked up Paul's epistle.

In silence he read the first words on which his glance fell: "not in rioting and drunkenness, not in debauchery and wantonness, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the concupiscence of your flesh" (Romans 13:13-14). Illumination and peace came to his soul at this point. So, at that moment for him becoming a Christian meant a striving after perfection and wisdom in complete self-denial. During the Easter celebration of 387, Augustine together with his friend Alypius and his son, Adeodutus were

baptized in Milan by Bishop Ambrose. It was also in Milan at that time that Augustine made his first personal acquaintance with Christian monasticism. Augustine felt compelled to visit the “monastery” outside the city walls, which his countryman Pontitious had mentioned to him in his hour of decision (Zumkeller 1986:13). His mother died at Ostia while they were on the way back to Africa.

Augustine became a priest in 391 and four years later was consecrated as Coadjutor-Bishop of Hippo, succeeding as diocesan bishop in 396. He worked hard for church unity until he faced his death in 430 while his city was suffering from the horrors of a siege by the Vandals.

By the time the Vandals became masters of Africa they had ceased to be of importance, and only a few lingered on till the time of Gregory the Great. In the meantime Augustine had engaged in much other writing besides that of a controversial nature. About 400 he published his *Confessions*, one of the most popular books of all time. With it he founded a new type of literature.

## **2.7 The background of the *City of God***

The fall of Rome in the year 410 CE impelled Augustine to write *The City of God*. It was the event, which motivated its composition and marks a momentous date in the intellectual history of the western world. Rome remained largely pagan and after the collapse of the empire many of its leaders, deeply anti-Christian in feeling, fled to Africa. It was partly the challenge of meeting their criticisms that caused Augustine to set forth his

views in the *City of God*. Moreover, Augustine was not the only contemporary writer to be profoundly impressed by that event, as several other writings show (Mommsen 1951:346). During this period the attitude of the Christians toward the Roman Empire was divided. Some Christians strongly hated the Roman State while others showed a willingness to go even further and actually hoped and prayed for the continuance of the Roman Empire.

Augustine played a bigger role in the history of the church trying to resolve this problem by writing the *City of God*. He was, of course, well aware of both the pagan belief in “eternal Rome” and the eschatological speculations of his fellow Christians (Mommsen 1951:350). Augustine was much less certain than Tertullian, who had concluded from these words that the duration of this world is bound up with the duration of the Roman Empire. In reply to those Christian thinkers who attempted to compute the exact date of the end of the world and connected to the falling of Rome, Augustine declared that Christ himself told his disciples: “it is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the father hath put in His own power” (Acts1:7).

Whatever conditions Rome was experiencing in the year 410 CE Augustine still had a passion for Rome, for instance, in the *sermon on the Ruin of the City* he said that Rome, unlike Sodom, was not completely destroyed. Augustine confessed that he entreated God for Rome not because he believed in the duration of that city, but simply because there were many fellow-Christians in Rome, dear to him as all other Christians were. Augustine took at least fourteen years (412-426) to write his *City of God* (Wand

1989:227). It is an attempt to answer the charge that the fall of Rome and the calamities of the Empire were due to the forsaking of the old religion and the embracing of Christianity. In his reply Augustine gives his whole philosophy of history. His judgment on individuals can be seen in the vicissitudes of personal experience. But the fulfilment of God's blessings must not be looked for in a secular society, which has not submitted fully to His authority. There are in fact two cities, one earthly and one heavenly, which represent divergent claims upon the love and allegiance of men.

The strife between these two was already begun in the struggle between the angels. At the moment they are represented by the two organizations of the State and the Church; and it is in the latter that the victory and the millennial reign of Christ are also to be seen. It follows from this that the State is inferior to the Church. Later generations interpreted this in the sense that the State should be subjected to the Church, and thus Augustine was made the parent of the medieval Papacy and the medieval Empire. Augustine's theological views are set forth in his *De Trinitate* and *De Doctrina Christiana*.

The reactions of the pagan and Christian contemporaries were profound and radical during the fall of Rome. Augustine was naturally much more concerned about the reactions of the Christians than about those of the pagans. Therefore, he was willing to devote thirteen years of his life to the most comprehensive study of the problem of history, a problem, which up to the year 410 CE had been of merely incident interested to him.

Augustine's own views concerning history represent a basic reiteration and systematic elaboration of Hebrew and early Christian ideas. "To him history was the *operatio Dei* in time, it was "a one-directional, teleological process, directed towards one goal-salvation, "the salvation of individual men, not of any collective groups or organization" (Mommesen 1951:370). In regard to the developments in the sphere of the earthly city, Augustine emphasized repeatedly in his historical survey the mutability and the instability of human affairs. Cities, kingdoms and empires have risen and fallen throughout the course of history, and this will always be the case. St. Augustine fostered church unity and orthodox theology.

## **2.8 The historical critics**

Many Westerners find it difficult to believe that a number of the early church fathers were Africans. It would be easier for some to regard Augustine as an Italian. Though Augustine was perhaps the greatest gift of African Christianity to the larger Church, he is often abstracted from his African context (Kalu 2005:68). Through his later conflicts with the Manicheans, the Donatists, Pelagius and his disciples and in reflecting on the meanings of the destruction of Rome, he crafted the terms of arguments that would reverberate down to our own time.

Augustine was drawn into the Donatist conflict upon his return to Africa from his years in Italy. He confronted the intolerance of the Donatists with an increasingly intolerant policy of his own. In the face of the Donatist schism, which was developing, Augustine, who as bishop was from the beginning



intensively concerned about the unity of the church, campaigned for the universal catholic church, which for him was the mother of all believers. When Christianity began to move out of Jerusalem it seems some of the Apostles landed on African soil, encouraging the setting up of churches. There is little doubt that Africa as well as other lands came firmly within the horizon of the first disciples. Christian teaching was intended to apply to all peoples without respect to status, colour, political belief or geography.

In another way Africa was representative of the Church in other lands as Augustine was attached to Milan. Although Augustine was converted in Italy, he returned to his home in Africa to work as a church leader. In year 395 he was elected Bishop of Hippo through his contact with Bishop Ambrose. He was recognized as a great preacher, as a ruler, as a monk, and as a theologian; a restorer of the schism-torn African Church, and a defender of the faith against heresy.

Augustine had to use an interpreter in the countryside around Hippo, where local people spoke *lingua punic*, probably Berber rather than Punic (Isichei 1995:38). Many people in the rural areas and the hills spoke and understood only Punic. It is a shame that though Augustine was African by descent, he was Roman in culture and language because of Roman colonisation. He was Roman not only in language and culture, but also in feelings and heart. Latin was his favorite language. He probably knew almost nothing in old Berber spoken by his peoples of the Numidian plains.

## **2.9 Historical changes**

Augustine revived the Apostolic impulse and adorned the church with some of its finest gifts of mind and spirit. Although he failed in his patience wooing of the Donatists he succeeded at a strategic conference of Catholic and Donatists bishops in June 411 to stem the tide of Donatist revival. “Yet Augustine did manage to help the church recover some of its lost prestige among local people and gave the African Church an authority which profoundly influenced Papal and conciliar pronouncements on faith and doctrine”(Sanneh 1983:11).

Augustine was fully aware of the fact that in his exegetical works he was frequently deviating from his predecessors on essential points. During his lifetime and ever since, Augustine of Hippo has been the focus and storm center of much controversy within the Church. He was surrounded by a world of social unrest, extreme violence at times and incessant political upheaval. During his episcopacy a great number of changes were taking place. He was always engulfed with critics and church disputes.

## **2.10 Authority of the scriptures**

Augustine and the Fathers recognized that because Scripture has multiple levels of understanding many interpretations are necessary. The sacredness of Scripture, thus, becomes evident as we find in it light which illumines our lives with new possibilities. For Augustine the authority of the Scripture is dependent upon the Church; therefore, the church must guide interpretation. Scripture was and is eucharistically formed (Joseph et al 1993:326).

Augustine argues that individual interpreters can discern the meaning of the biblical text without taking account of the good ends of the community for which this text is Scripture. It is simply a mistake to assume that the text of the Bible makes sense apart from a community that gives it meaning. Augustine wanted the church to understand the significance of the Bible in finding an interpretative community to read the Bible as Scripture.

For Augustine divine authority was found in Scripture. The Scriptures bear witness to the church. One might say that, for Augustine, the Scriptures are prior by nature but the church is prior in time. For Augustine ultimate authority lay in the consensus of the Catholic Church. He put forward the continuity of Catholic teaching and apostolic succession.

### **2.11 Augustine and the scriptures**

Ambrose was Augustine's first instructor in the Scripture and taught allegorical interpretive methodology to Augustine. Augustine, in turn, interpreted Scripture in both a literal and an allegorical fashion. For years Augustine had been repelled by the Bible's narrative, largely because portions of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, seemed to him to present an unworthy picture of God (Hall 1998:105).

Ambrose helped Augustine to read the Bible in a new way by arguing that the Bible contains moral teaching, literal sense and anagogical or mystery sections. Augustine was to insist on the inseparable link between the knowledge of Scripture, the community of faith, humility and constant prayer

for guidance in the interpretation of the Bible. Augustine remains a man of immense intellectual and moral stature. He agreed with Cyprian of Carthage that there was “no salvation outside the church” but his concept of the Church was wider (Frend 1991:203). He provided the intellect and literary talent, searching the scriptures, continuously writing, discussing and getting involved in controversies.

### **2.12 The *Confessions***

Augustine’s confessions were written in 395 CE after his elevation as bishop. He tells his story of his ambition, of his loves and his sorrows. In his confessions Augustine gave an epoch-making impulse to both piety and philosophy; by his conflict with Donatism he established an equally important theory of the Church and ministry. In his *City of God* he laid down the lines of secular and ecclesiastical government; and in his doctrine of grace and predestination he started a controversy, which has not yet completely died down. In the *Confessions* Augustine was able to go beyond the provincial nature of his life and fix on them a crisp but timeless quality.

His *Confessions* was written in what he believed to be his old age, he was 43 years when he began this work. He dwells rather on the helplessness, ignorance, and frustration of infancy and childhood, not to mention the sinful inclinations to anger and selfishness, which already show their power in the child. It was therefore not only his sins that Augustine wanted to confess in public, but his gratitude to God, his praises and worship. The *Confessions* gave a permanent place to the psychological method in Augustine’s thought.

Augustine's consciousness insisted that riches, honour, and sensual satisfaction are not ultimate values and do not bring contentment. As early as 397 he had written to his old friend Simplicianus in Milan "without grace it is impossible to resist concupiscence" (Simplicianus 1:20.in Frennd 1982:205).

It is God alone who dwells in the higher faculty of man, and only God who satisfies it; such a man is indeed the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and has the mercy seat, the Cherubim the manna and the rod of Aaron. Augustine thundered unceasingly that a man without grace only grows worse through the law. For the law works wrath (Romans 4:15) and was introduced to make man aware of his sin (Romans 5:20, Galatians 3:19).

Anyone who has dipped into this work of Augustine's *Confessions* knows that it is much more than an autobiography. Augustine did not write it as a nostalgic exercise in the remembrance of things past, or to satisfy the curiosity of his friends. He saw in his own history a model case of how God humbles and recovers lost sheep. In the course of telling his story he discusses a whole host of theological topics, the powers and defects of the human mind, the need to centre our lives on God, the way to read the Bible and the authority of the church.

## 2.13 Ecclesiastical troubles

### 2.13.1 Pelagianism

The dialogue between Augustine and Pelagius, a British monk, was one of the hard controversies. Pelagius believed in the capacity of man to escape from sin by his efforts and live righteously. Augustine would argue on the basis of his personal experiences and his bad early childhood that human beings could not help themselves without the grace of God.

Augustine (Trape 1986:197) addressed the Pelagian Controversy in his writings "*The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*", the first and most important of his writings against the Pelagians. Augustine saw everything in relation to the glory of God. Pelagius was a learned man; he studied in Rome where he wrote "*The expositions of the Letters of St. Paul*", his style was exceedingly effective: he wrote in the form of letters of exhortation, and was widely read in the circles that also prized Augustine's works (Marshal 1987:134).

Pelagius wanted to live and write for men and women who were committed to making a change for the better. He had expressed his dislike of the passage in the *Confessions* in which Augustine says to his God, "Command what you will." (Marshal 1987:134). Pelagius believed the phrase stemmed from the passions, the root of mankind's problems. Pelagius was a British monk, probably of Irish origin who had settled in South Wales. He came to Rome about 400 and was shocked at the low state of morals in the capital. This seemed not only to put all initiative in the hands of God, but also to deny

altogether the possibility of any free exercise of a man's own will. Pelagius set himself to preach a more stirring morality. He believed that although most men are bad they are able to put themselves right if they will only make the effort. He based this belief upon a particular view of human nature. He denied original sin altogether; sin consists not in inheriting the nature of Adam but in following his example. Faith and effort alone are necessary if men are to succeed in their struggles.

There was at first no controversy over this teaching, perhaps because Augustine was busily occupied with the Donatist trouble. When Rome was destroyed in 410 CE Pelagius took refuge in Carthage where he laid considerable emphasis upon his view that man needs no extraordinary gift of grace to accomplish his salvation. This seemed to strike at the whole notion of redemption. It was really the Stoic philosophy of the day in Christian dress. Pelagius argued with Augustine saying people are capable of refraining from sin without God's help. He said salvation could be obtained by free will. Augustine adamantly opposed Pelagius's view, believing that humans do not have the strength to avoid sin.

Arguing from his personal experience, he contented that such terms as sin and grace were too emphatic, too cosmic; the human condition, he insisted, is more a matter of personal peccadillos and failings than of world-rending sin (Marshall 1987:134). In the year 415, Augustine wrote his famous treatise *Nature and Grace*. Augustine believed that we can do absolutely nothing at all and that we simply have to accept the process of redemption passively.

Against the teachings of Pelagius, Augustine wrote a number of treatises, the most famous of which is the *De Spiritu et Littera* (CSEL: 60). In his preaching on grace and nature, Augustine relied upon his own experience of special grace, without which he was sure that he could never have recovered from his evil ways. He felt that grace was necessary to make the fallen will free, and that without this preliminary exercise of God's goodness man would never be able to take even the first step towards reformation.

The aspects of Augustine's teaching brought a heated response from many theologians like Pelagius, and Aquitaine. There was a group called Gauls who repudiated all of Augustine's teachings. The Gauls were in full agreement with Augustine on the anathematization of Pelagianism. But they were firmly opposed to him on the question of predestination. The Gauls chose to make their own decisions about what was orthodox and what was heretical. In the case of Augustine, some of his teachings were accepted others were not accepted.

### **2.13.2 Donatism**

While Augustine was preaching and leading people in worship, he was to express himself passionately in opposition to the Donatist sect which was another controversial issue during his leadership in the church. In the time of Aurelius Augustinus people longed for wisdom, truth, personal morality, and these were regarded as high virtues to convince people about the essence of life. The most serious foes of Christianity at this time were not the rival systems, but those of her own household. When the pressure of persecution



was removed it was found to have left some serious problems. But quite the most serious of these troubles arose in Africa, in the provinces of Numidia and Mauritania, where in the shape of Donatism there appeared what Bright called “perhaps the ugliest phenomenon in ancient Church History” (Wand 1989:143). Cyprian of Carthage and the African Church had taken the line that sin destroys the office of the minister and so invalidates the sacraments. Again some of the Donatists were no doubt seriously perturbed by the thought that the Church seemed to be conforming to the standard of the world, and they were genuinely anxious to preserve its high ideals (Wand 1989:145).

#### **2.14 Augustine’s spirituality**

One of his activities was to conduct meditations on the Gospel of St. John. As his reputation grew, he was called upon to make numerous visits to Carthage where he was consulted on many questions. En route he would visit his disciples and fellow-bishops, few of whom could have known at that time what a towering pillar the man was destined to become. He made many friends and was treated with respect by leading citizens, both Christians and non-Christians.

He carried on a copious correspondence and was tremendously active as a teacher of his people. In this too the soil of Africa clings to his achievement. Augustine had a great mind and was able to write powerful arguments for Christian theology. “No other Christian after Paul was to have so wide, deep and prolonged an influence upon the Christianity of Western Europe and those forms of faith that stemmed from it as had Augustine” (Hildebrandt

1990:15). Augustine, a Bishop from Africa, made a very great contribution to the theology and worship of the Church in Europe. He had an expansive mind and rich imagination. Augustine's pastoral duties and polemical experiences shaped his theological ideas. His ministry was a long one and quite expectedly, it involved him in many changes of opinion. It is a great tribute to the openness of the bishop that he was able to change his mind on so many issues through the development of his thinking. Augustine was not writing for the benefit of university professors or students of theology. Pastoral care, *cura animarum*, was foremost in his mind (Joseph 1993:9).

Augustine's resolute refusal to accept the admissibility of a lie under any circumstance is well known. According, for him, lying is intrinsically evil. Augustine said, (Confessions X, XXIV:35 in Joseph 1993:10) "Wherever I found truth, there I found God, truth itself, and since I first learned the truth, I have not forgotten it". This personal conviction lies at the heart of Augustine's deepest thought. This is an artful and profound way of expressing both the catholicity of Augustine's mind and his overall intellectual integrity, which was fueled by his longing for truth. Augustine tried to place the human mind in the right order of things. The mind judges visible things and realizes that it is superior to them.

### **2.15 His monastic life**

Augustine founded a monastery and he was persuaded to accept ordination vows. The ideal of Christian monasticism had already undergone a significant development by the time Augustine encountered it for the first time at the crucial turning point in his life. This encounter was to be of pivotal importance for the rest of his life. But it also exercised a normative influence on the subsequent development of monastic life in the West. One of the influences, which led to the young Augustine's conversion, was the example of monastic life, which the monks of Egypt had founded.

After his baptism he went to Hippo near Carthage to live as a monk. He established the monastery and he saw in it an efficacious means of giving new life to the African Church. The church was living under pagan influence, the ruthless attacks of the Donatists and the infiltration of Arianism. His purpose would be served by the monastic movement, which would set a powerful example and supply learned and devout priests. Later he was ordained a priest and in 395 became bishop of the city where he continued to live for the next thirty-five years.

### **2.16 Priesthood and holiness**

One of the great problems of Augustine's administration faced during his ministry arose out of the conflict with the Donatists. Augustine developed his doctrine of the church against the Donatists, defining it under what have ever since been regarded as the four characteristic notes of Unity, Holiness, Catholicity and Apostolicity. His doctrine of the ministry showed a

considerable advance on that of his fellow African, Cyprian. Holy Orders are now described as belonging rather to the individual than to the office. He held that they are a personal rather than an official possession. Thus a person who has been validly ordained to the priesthood is still a priest even though for a time he leaves the church, and if he returns no further ordination is necessary to enable him to resume valid functions. In the same way the sacraments that he administers are independent of his moral character.

It is sometimes said that Augustine took an entirely subjective view of the method of the sacraments' working, holding that it is merely an outward signal of God's action upon the soul. The Donatists taught that the Church could only exist where there was complete holiness. They also said that they, not God, would decide what true holiness was (Hildebrandt 1990:14). Augustine was one of the Christian leaders who helped to end the challenge of the Donatists.

### **2.17 Augustine's view of violence in religious matters**

In 411, on the orders of the imperial government, there was a last great disputation in Carthage, in which 286 Catholics and 279 Donatists took part. Augustine's superior arguments prevailed at all levels of events, as he was vigorous in his belief. This could not be done without violence and bloodshed. Augustine and other bishops like Ambrose and Gregory of Nazianzus saw nothing un-Christian about this. They were convinced from the start that the state had the right to proceed against the heretics. But Augustine was to put this position more and more sharply over the years: in no way did he want

hypocrites to populate or influence the church. For Augustine, initially compulsory state measures were a deterrent and at first he protested against the imposition of the death penalty. But in the end, impressed by the success of crude police actions, he even justified the use force against heretics and schismatics theologically. Nevertheless, the mainstream church and the state did not succeed in completely eliminating all the schismatic and heretical sectarian churches, which kept reappearing. However, with his fatal arguments in the Donatist crisis, Augustine, the bishop and man of the spirit, could talk so convincingly about the love of God and love of human beings.

He is also connected with the key witness for the theological justification for forcible conversions, the inquisition and the holy war, against deviants of all kinds. Certainly, Augustine could not exterminate the all too numerous non-Catholics in Hippo, nor he did he want to; he simply wanted to correct and convert. But confronted with ever new heretical groups and influenced by a crude policing action, he finally thought that even violence against heretics and schismatics could be theologically justified.

The inquisition and holy war against deviants of all kinds some thing that did not occur in the same way in the Christian East. But there were also further considerable differences between East and West. Christians now began to believe that some wars are just. That was the position taken by Ambrose. Augustine elaborated the theoretical basis for a just war. He held that wickedness must be restrained by force if necessary, and that the sword of the magistrate is divinely commissioned.

Not all wars are just. To be just, so Augustine said, a war must be waged under the authority of the prince, it must have as its object the punishment of injustice and the restoration of peace and it must be fought without vindictiveness and without unnecessary violence. It must also be carried on with inward love. Yet without the authority of the prince, Augustine taught, the civilian must not use force to defend even his own life. The clergy and the monks were to be entirely exempt from military service. It was this principle of a righteous or just war, which was held by a large proportion of Christians in subsequent centuries.

## **2.18 Conclusion**

Augustine's teaching has been described as the highest attainment of religion since apostolic times. He did more than anyone else to raise the West intellectually above the East. He stood on the watershed between two worlds, the old classical antiquity, which was just disappearing, and the medieval world, which was not yet born. He sums up in himself all that richness of his vital personality to enliven the new. Augustine's personal experience is all-important; and it is that experience which was to direct the thought of mankind for many generations.

"Augustine worthily completes the great trio of African saints; more humble than Tertullian, more profound than Cyprian, he combines the excellences of both" (Hilderbrandt 1990:15). He influenced the direction from the fifth century Western theological thought. His teachings however were not received equally well in all areas. The aspects of Augustine's teaching that most

interested people were those concerned with the doctrines of grace, free will, and original sin. We have benefited a great deal from the early African Church Fathers as African Churches. Africans must be proud of these great heroes as they dedicated their lives in the life and work of the Church in early centuries. In the 21-century we are able to quest for knowledge and truth using the writings of Augustine, Tertullian and Cyprian as Church African Fathers. Their significant contribution makes Africa acknowledged in the history of the Church.

African Churches should also be able to look critically at the nature of the belief and ideology of the African Church Fathers. The context in which the early Church Fathers lived was very patriarchal and traditional in that women were not recognised in church leadership. Augustine lived in a Roman colonisation period though he was an African by birth and that led him to be more Roman in language, culture and civilisation than his African background. These are mistakes that should not entangle the African Churches in the 21 century. The past history of the church should be analysed and scrutinised for the sake of the future church.

## **Chapter 3 Augustine's impact on Reformation: Augustine's theology as a tool for John Calvin and Martin Luther**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Augustine is a Father of the Church who has exerted an unparalleled influence. Sixteen centuries separate him from the Protestant Churches, but that long period is not an empty space. The illustrious bishop from Roman Africa has become an inspiration to nearly every subsequent generation. Already in his lifetime Augustine's spiritual leadership was recognised. Augustine's authority is not less clearly illustrated by the large number of his major and minor works, nearly all of which were composed in reaction to actual problems.

His influence, from the early Middle Ages, through Scholasticism, Humanistic and Reformational traditions and the heightened attention in the seventeenth century, has extended to the present (van Oort 1991:1). Augustine's significance to the Church, and through it to our culture cannot be easily overestimated. He is a respected theologian for both Catholics and Protestants, and many of the Protestant theologians have used Augustine in substantiating their theology.

In a movement to renew and reform the Church the various Reformers of the sixteenth century like Martin Luther and John Calvin studied Augustine in order to challenge abuses within the Catholic Church. In fact Luther and Calvin were not opponents of the Roman Catholic Church but they had



intentions to reform the Catholic Church. However, to the authority of the Catholic Church, they could not succeed. This third chapter serves to examine the theology of Martin Luther, and John Calvin in relation to Augustine's theology.

### **3.2 John Calvin on Augustine's theology**

John Calvin in his theology and knowledge, used many early church fathers, who shaped Christianity particularly St. Augustine of Hippo. John Calvin left a mark on the Protestant churches; even now many scholars are still identifying themselves with Calvin and studied his institutions. He studied philosophy, medieval theology and the fathers of the church. Augustine has influenced Calvin's greater reliance on the Old Testament. Augustine's theology was very influential to the Reformers though Augustine lived many centuries before the Reformation began.

Following Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin emphasised God's majesty and humankind's total helplessness before Him. While the early fathers do not support the doctrine of purgatory, Calvin has to admit that they erred in praying for the dead. Augustine believed that infants dying unbaptised were damned, Calvin strenuously opposed this view. The Fathers differed in many church doctrines as much as the Reformers also differed in other theological beliefs. Calvin affirms that the evangelical teaching (reformed tradition teachings) cannot be overthrown since it is that of the Word of God; and he supports his claim by reference to the analogy of faith in Romans 12:6, the rule for all interpretation of the Scripture. Calvin used the Church Fathers

against those who claimed some of their Church traditional beliefs misusing the Church Fathers too. The Roman Catholic Church strongly used the Church Fathers as the carriers of church tradition, belief systems, and apostolic succession from the early bishops of the church. But, it failed to analyse critically the doctrinal belief of some of the Fathers who are quite respected by the Reformers like Bishop Augustine of Hippo.

### **3.3 Martin Luther's use of Augustine theology in the reformation**

Martin Luther entered the established Augustinian monastery on July 17, 1505 and joined the Augustinian Order of Hermit at Erfurt in Germany. While Luther was devoted to monastic life, in prayers, fasting, confessions, chastity and all the necessary monastic spirituality, he also encountered some problems in the theology of Augustine. And all his life Luther understood grace differently from Augustine, in a more personal way. Nevertheless, insight into the deep corruption of sin as human selfishness and a distortion of the self remained decisive for Luther's understanding of justification.

In his insight, he understood the omnipotence of the grace of God, which he learned above all from Augustine. So Luther remained tied to one of the basic components of the theology of Augustine, whose *Confessions* and great treatises *On the Trinity* and *The City of God* he had studied at a very early stage (Kung 1995:133). Luther continued studying Augustine's theology of the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology, but also his theology of grace. It dawned on Luther that (Romans 1:17) for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous

will live by faith". This passage was Luther's breakthrough to the Reformation; it does not speak of the inexorable judgment of God's righteousness, before which no sinner can stand, but of his righteousness as a gift. The passage was understood in this way not just by Augustine, as Luther thought, but as Catholic scholars have demonstrated, by the majority of mediaeval theologians. Luther was a passionate theologian and a passionate Saxon. He believed to lose God is to lose everything, the source of faith and life is God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Luther learned his theology from Paul and, along with all other medieval theologians, from Augustine.

### **3.4 Luther's critique of Augustine**

Martin Luther had some deep thoughts about the early Church Fathers; he questioned their theology critically as much as he respects Augustine and St. Ambrose of Milan. Luther consistently interacts with Augustine throughout his work, particularly relying on his insights. Luther was also able to criticize Augustine in his own methodology of reading scriptures especially when he feels that he interpreted the Scripture incorrectly. Luther consistently insists that it "is necessary to compare the Fathers' books with Scripture and to judge them according to its light" (Ibid:75 in Hall 1998:13).

Luther strongly believed that the scriptures should be above Church tradition. It is quite indispensable that Luther was able to read the theology of Augustine and his perspective on the history of the church critically. If Luther had ignored Roman Catholic theologians like Augustine, St. Ambrose of Milan and Bernard of Clairvaux, the Reformation could not have been a success. It

was crucial for Luther to use these theologians to counter the Roman Catholic Church using their own compatriots. The reformers insistence upon the *Solar Scriptura* principle cast grave doubt on the Church Fathers' marked tendency to read Scripture in light of the Church's tradition. The reformers doubted some of the teachings of the early Church Fathers.

### **3.5 Augustine and the Reformation**

It is interesting to study the points selected by Luther for disputation on the subject of scholastic theology. We find the theology of Augustine defended, particularly on the matter of the bondage of the will, whereas Scotus and Biel are attacked. Luther respected the theology of Augustine though he would express his own opinion where he feels Augustine made a mistake. Augustine's influence, from the early Middle Ages, through Scholasticism, Humanism and the Reformational traditions in addition the heightened attention in the seventeenth century, has extended to the present.

The study of Augustine was of considerable importance for efforts beginning in 1516 to reform the course of study at the University at Wittenberg, as well as for the formation of reformation theology. Since 1502, Augustine's theology had substantial influence in Wittenberg. Luther in his own analysis interprets Augustine following his own reformation themes. Martin Luther is viewed as one of the most brilliant spiritual and intellectual followers of Augustine in Germany during the Reformation period. It is through Luther, some say, that Augustine can be said to be the father of the Reformation or even the father of Protestantism. The Reformers clearly did believe that Augustine's view of

grace was an important point coincident with their own, and that Augustine contradicted what most of their Catholic opponents were saying was the Catholic view. And they also increasingly recognized that Augustine disagreed with key points of their theology as well. Augustine is the end of one era as well as at the beginning of another. The main currents of ancient theology converged in him, and from him flow the rivers, not only of medieval scholasticism, but also of the sixteenth-century.

### **3.6 Luther's views on the *City of God***

Luther's comments on the section in the book of Galatians 2 make reference to the famous work of Augustine *On the City of God against the Pagans*. The full title as well as the content of Augustine's work indicates that it is a work of theology and not a book about the writing of history as is commonly thought. Luther seeks to follow Isaiah, Paul, and Augustine, for his theology is concerned with God. From Luther's point of view, Augustine is right to hold on to the text that Peter was reprehensible.

From the perspective of Augustine and Luther the difference between some philosophy of history and theology is the difference between *eros* and *hesed* (Hagen 1990:116). Luther goes on to list the sins of the saints. If the church is made up of saints, then the church is simultaneously holy and sinful. Christ is our complete holiness. Luther learned his theology from Paul and, along with all other medieval theologians, from Augustine.

### 3.7 Luther's loyalty to the Augustinian order

Luther himself promoted the idea that Augustine's *Confessions* did not teach doctrine but instead provided inspiration and example. According to Courcelle, (Hagen 1990:236) the *Confessions* did in fact provide a doctrinal basis, which Luther was able to elaborate in his new theology. Pursuing Luther's use of Augustine's *De spiritu et litera* in careful textual studies, both Bernhard Lohse and Leif Grane have (Hagen 1990:236) argued that Augustine served Luther as the gateway to a new understanding of Paul's letter to the Romans and brought Luther to the threshold of his new evangelical theology.

Luther acknowledged that at first he devoured Augustine; but as soon as he began to understand from Paul what justification by faith meant, then his infatuation with Augustine was over. Augustine was more important for Luther than the Augustinian theology of the Middle Ages. Other scholars have attempted to isolate a late medieval Augustinian school of theology and to demonstrate how this theology was mediated to Luther through members of his own order. Heiko Oberman has proposed an elaborate and controversial form of this approach to the impact of Augustine on Luther (Hagen 1990:237). Careful and imaginative reading, informed by categories of interpretation that illuminate the text, is necessary in order to appreciate Luther's re-evaluation of his monastic and Augustinian heritage.

By the time Luther dedicated his treatise on monastic vows to his father, on November 21, 1521, he had been an Augustinian monk for sixteen of his thirty-eight years. During that period he had developed a strong loyalty to the

monastic life. Luther demonstrated that loyalty by the seriousness with which he attempted to follow the Augustinian rule. Luther's words also indicate that he was more loyal to the monastic life as such than to the specifically Augustinian form of that life or to Augustine himself. When Luther recalls his father's anxiety about himself as a young man, he is reminded of a single phrase from a passage in the *Confessions* in which Augustine describes his father's joy at the possibility of progeny.

Luther fails to note, however, a striking similarity between Hans' concern for him and the fear that Monica had for the young Augustine. Surprisingly, in the letter to Hans, Luther does not specifically mention the Augustinian Order at all. In fact, although Luther had enormous respect for Augustine, in general he does not link that respect to his membership in the Order. Luther's rejection of monastic vows appears to have had no direct relationship either to Augustine or to the order named after him.

The loyalty to his vows as a monk was stronger than his loyalty to them as an Augustinian. This observation is pregnant with consequences for assessing Luther's relationship to Augustinianism, however it is defined. It was difficult for Luther to disengage himself from the Augustinian monastery though he was convinced about the Reformation. This indicates how Luther was committed to the Church and respected fathers of the church like Augustine.

### 3.8 Luther and the theology of Augustine

Luther held fast to the freedom of the will. First, he saw the difference between the definition of *concupiscentia* that he initially adopted and the view of Augustine. At this point, Luther's reflections had still not reached their conclusion. On the one hand, he sought to retain the traditional scholastic definitions of sin and to harmonise them with Augustine. On the other, he began to see that Augustine obviously differed from Scholasticism in his teaching concerning the will and sin.

Above all, Paul's view of sin was gaining in significance. It appears that his study of Augustine led him to the study of Paul. At this important point, Luther had not only adopted central ideas from Augustine, but also very early had given them precise expression in his own way. The theology that Luther was developing on his own gleaned support from Augustine but also from biblical sources.

Augustine was of extraordinary significance for Luther. It is not certain when and in what way Luther became acquainted with Augustine. It has been discovered that Luther kept himself busy at Erfurt with studies of Augustine. The fairly comprehensive marginal notes on numerous writings of Augustine from around 1509 indicate that Luther's own interest may have furnished the essential impulse for his intensive study of Augustine. For the preparations of lectures in those first years at Wittenberg, Luther's occupation with Augustine was intense.



While Luther received important stimuli from Occamism on many of the basic issues of philosophy and theology, Augustine gained significance precisely through his radical doctrine of sin and grace. Chiefly in this fashion Augustine's influence on Luther increased. Luther also studied Bernard of Clairvaux, and some scholars have recently spoken of his great significance for the development of Luther's Reformation theology. In any case, Bernard's significance for Luther is far less than that of Augustine.

With his definition of theology, Luther joined hands not with scholasticism but with Augustine and theologians in the Augustinian tradition. First, there is nothing new in Luther's adoption of the distinction between Word and Sacrament current since Augustine. It is worth noting, however, that in doing so he gives priority to the Word. Luther had gained crucial help from Augustine. Luther formulated the Augustinian idea that Scripture has power, not to change into the one who studies it but rather to change the one who loves it into itself and its power.

Luther considered the authority and power of the scriptures to change those who read them with love and through interpretation Luther took support from Augustine's treatise *De spiritu et littera* which referred to God's righteousness not merely in terms of an attribute but also in terms of a divine gift. Yet in citing it Luther at important points characteristically went beyond what Augustine intended; he interpreted Augustine in line with his own new theological position. There can be no doubt in shaping his ideas about

justification Luther received essential help from Augustine. He was also conscious at times of the difference between Paul and Augustine.

### **3.9 The controversial issues**

Luther's theology was basically Augustinian. But there were two differences which became sharper as Lutheran orthodoxy made a clear system out of his expressions which were often more passionate than academic. Augustine had taught that those whom God chooses to save are made righteous by his grace within their own experience. Lutherans were to teach something different arising out of a different experience. 'Justification' was to be understood as declaring (not making) a sinner righteous and it was to be based exclusively on the righteousness of Christ whose merits were 'imputed', not 'imported', to the sinner (Edwards 1997:298).

And from Luther's experience came another difference. For him, as for Augustine, in the end not many are saved. Indeed, he agreed with Augustine that those who are saved depend on the fact that God has chosen, predestined, them. But even in his own depressed old age he usually avoided any firm statement that God predestines (rather than permits) the many to be damned.

While Augustine was an intellectual giant transcending the intellectual stature of anyone else of his generation, his career remained in many ways typical of his time. Through him we can see the transformation of both society and church. His involvement in theological controversy was apparently

inseparable from the work of a bishop, arguing with Manichees, Donatists and Pelagius. He became increasingly an establishment figure, relying on imperial authority to suppress Donatism. He had moved from a world where Christianity still appeared marginal to one where it was entirely central.

### **3.10 John Calvin on Augustine's view of sacrament**

John Calvin based his doctrine of the Lord's Supper in part on a theory of signification borrowed from Augustine. The crucial difference is, however, that Calvin did not only appeal to Augustine but also, in this respect as in so many others, was essentially Augustinian. The bread and wine received in the Sacrament were for him signs and guarantees of a present reality; the believer's feeding on the body and blood of Christ. Moreover, quite unlike Zwingli, he had no difficulty with the notion that God works through instruments or means.

Besides Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Calvin, as usual invokes in his support the name of Augustine, who called the Sacrament the "bond of love" (*caritatis vinculum*) (Gerrish 1993:186). For his definition of a sacrament, Calvin appeals expressly to Augustine, "whom" he says, "we quote rather frequently as the best and most trustworthy witness of all antiquity" (Inst.1559:4 in Gerrish 1993:103). It is true that not Calvin only but Western theology in general owes to Augustine the fundamental contrast between a visible form and invisible grace, so that in a sacrament one thing is seen and another understood.

But, Calvin's appeal to Augustine is misleading because it was Luther, not Augustine, whom he followed in defining a sacrament as a sign added by God to his promise. With Augustine, Calvin holds that one carries away from the sacrament no more than one collects with the vessel of faith. The pertinent question for the moment, however, is whether the doctrine of predestination negates Calvin's affirmation of sacramental efficacy.

As usual, citations from Augustine support his case, not that the sacraments have no effect on the reprobate; rather, like the word, they carry a judgment with them for those they do not sanctify. The point is perhaps confused in both Augustine and Calvin by association with two other questions. Whether God can save the elect only by means of the sacrament and whether the sacraments are effectual if received unworthily.

### **3.11 Augustine on sin and sanctification**

#### **3.11.1 Luther**

Luther knew better than most of his contemporaries the desperate nature of the human condition because he realized, like St. Augustine, that the sins which people worried about were merely a manifestation of something much more intractable. It was the orientation of one's whole personality towards oneself. Augustine had described how this meant that with this orientation one converted even the good things of life into idols.

Luther went deeper at this point and saw how one converted even one's religious strivings also into an idol. Luther developed in a quite brilliant way the nature of sin as self-idolatry and so the problem of man's response to the Gospel was sharpened to the point of impossibility as it was in St Augustine and St Anselm. Luther attempts to show that Christ really took on Himself fallen human nature and yet was free from original sin.

Christ's sinlessness, he insisted, was due entirely to the work of the Holy Spirit for Luther emphasized the sinfulness of the flesh He took from Mary siding with the Augustinian view which denied her immaculate conception. Although he believed in her perpetual virginity. Luther takes over from Augustine the distinction between the invisible and the visible Churches. The invisible church to him, as to Augustine, is eternal in the heavens, knowable only to God.

Since the word of God always binds men together in fellowship, the invisible Church is a true fellowship. Luther held, with Augustine, that what is called the Church corporealises itself in the world, and that what is called the church in the world contains many who have not really heard and obeyed. But Luther drew a conclusion, which Augustine did not draw that the visible Church is only visible to those who have the necessary spiritual vision

### **3.11.2 Calvin**

Calvin himself desired reformation of the church, and was attracted rather by the Augustinian than by the Roman theology. But schism and the toleration of novelties seemed to him to incur greater damage and danger for the Church than the vices and faults, which they opposed with greater hostility. He holds with Augustine, that there may be invisible sanctification without the visible sign, just as on the other hand there may be the visible sign without true sanctification.

Concerning the double will of God, which Calvin, after Augustine and other pious teachers, attributes to God, this good critic says that he marvels at such childish talk. It is noteworthy that in a mild debate with Augustine, Calvin does not consider the pride of man to be the real ground of all evil. According to his insight the root of the trouble lies much deeper.

### **3.12 The grace theology: Luther, Calvin and Augustine**

It cannot be denied that not even Augustine in the previous fifteen hundred years had come so close as Luther to the meaning of Paul's message of salvation. The years between 1527 and 1565 saw the publication of no less than twenty-three anthologies of patristic writings partly or totally devoted to the doctrine of justification. Most of these confidently claimed the fathers for one view or another. But the reality of the situation was more complex. Calvin, who in many doctrines claimed Augustine's view, or at any rate his manner of stating it, we must not entirely accept. For even though Augustine admirably deprives man of all credit for righteousness and transfers it to God's grace, he

still subsumes grace under sanctification. In other words, Augustine does not clearly distinguish justification and sanctification. The problem is that the early church fathers did not directly address many of the issues involved in the sixteen-century controversies. Calvin stressed human inability as strongly as did any of the Reformers. Yet though he was reluctant to talk of cooperation with grace because of the way contemporary Roman Catholics were using the term. He was willing to accept it in the Augustinian sense.

The Council of Trent defends the doctrine of prevenient grace and is at least open to the Augustinian doctrine of efficacious grace. The Reformers do not deny that human will plays a role in conversion. Augustine and the subsequent Catholic tradition and make no systematic distinction between justification and sanctification. Without the second of these the formula becomes problematic not just for Catholics but also for the Reformed, who are concerned to maintain a clear doctrine of sanctification. In the second sense the formula is found in Augustine.

No matter what Luther read from the fathers and teachers of the church, he would always relate it to the Bible and compare it with its original message. Through the works of Ockham, and Thomas Aquinas, Luther was introduced to Christian dogmatics. However, Augustine was the figure who became of utmost importance to Luther. Having studied his works most diligently, Luther preferred him over all other scholastics, turning him king's evidence for his reformational renewal.

### **3.13 The Lord's Supper: Luther and Augustine**

Luther agrees to study Augustine and on April 26, 1517 he presented his own version of 152 theses, which led him to side with Augustine. Luther's views on interpretation were deeply influenced by Augustine, especially his development of the Pauline distinction between spirit and letter. Luther initially remained within this ancient understanding of language that was still wholly framed by the milieu which Augustine inherited above all from the Stoics and which still widely dominates today (McKim 2003:76).

In those sermons Luther borrows a scheme from Augustine, who distinguished between visible signs and their meaning. The controversy developed around the acceptance of the thoughts and notions of the African church father Augustine. In his writings Luther had found his own understanding of God's passive righteousness and the grace-given justification of human beings remarkably confirmed.

Sometimes, taking the interpretation beyond the wording of Augustine's own writing, his main authority. Without discussing this dispute in great detail, the controversy about the understanding of the Lord's Supper deserves mention in this context. From the start a great variety of opinions came together in the Reformation movement. In subsequent years the issue of the real presence versus the symbolic character of the sacramental actions moved more and more to the forefront, owing to a long history of divergent interpretations of Augustine (McKim 2003:108). Luther's own position underwent a change over the course of the controversy.



Echoing but also expanding and revising Augustine, Luther argued that God has established two realms for the regulation of creation: the spiritual realm and the temporal realm. The spiritual realm is eternal and everlasting; it is the realm of revelation and faith. Two motives run through Luther's thought about the spiritual realm: freedom and equality. Luther was engaged in building and defending an institution. He continued to appeal to Scripture but supplemented these appeals with claims to personal authority based on his unique role within an Augustinian view of history.

In his writings Luther placed the Reformation struggle into a larger Augustinian view of the dynamics of history, which had been the common property of Western Christendom for a thousand years. Augustine was the ablest and purest of all the doctors of the Church but he could not of himself bring back things to their original condition, and he often complained that the bishops, with their traditions and ordinances, troubled the church more than did the Jews with their laws (Kepler 1979:259). Luther's hunger for piety was fed by the writings of Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux.

### **3.14 Calvin and Augustine**

The assertion of Catholicity can be seen clearly in Calvin's letter to Cardinal Sadoletto, his substantial use of Augustine, Chrysostom, and indeed of Bernard of Clairvaux. Augustine and Calvin were not exponents of a thoroughgoing Aristotelianism. There is therefore, no intrinsic relationship between the use of scholastic method and of Aristotelian language of predestination. While it is highly unlikely that Calvin had Cicero's *Orator* open

on the desk as he penned these works, he opened the Bible and the writings of Augustine. Augustine's style of writing suggests that the discipline of rhetoric continued to influence his work at a variety of levels, even as the French halls of humanism became an increasingly distant memory. For instance, Calvin often displays profound respect for his favoured theologian, Augustine. But this does not mean that Augustine is beyond critique or that Calvin will only use Augustine's arguments in the way Augustine himself used them.

It is precisely in this tendency in Calvin, his copious use of bits and pieces of linguistic images and arguments borrowed from past generations, which has made it difficult for Calvin scholars to tie his work to one school of theology or one philosophical tradition. In the 1543 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin expanded the letter very slightly, adding a concluding reference to Augustine.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

Indeed, Augustine played a significant role in the history of the church in the Patristic period throughout Middle Ages, Reformation, (Enlightenment and even in our 21<sup>st</sup> century) his legacy cannot be overestimated. He is well respected worldwide by both Catholics and Reformed Churches. The reformers also used Augustine in their own methodology of reading the scriptures especially when they want to criticize some of the Catholic doctrines.

It is quite indispensable that the reformers were able to read the theology of Augustine and his perspective on the history of the church critically. Augustine's theology had substantial influence in Wittenberg and other institutions established by the reformers. Augustine is a point of reference for his own era and for the present.

## **Chapter 4 Augustine and the History of the Church**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The church has a history that dates back many centuries, and part of this record is also found in the Holy Scriptures. The Christian faith is significant, comprehensible and also historical. As the church movement grew from the first century to the fourth century we discover theologians like Augustine of Hippo who made a significant mark in the history of the church in his defence of faith against the Donatists, Pelagius, the British monk, and particularly his writing on the '*City of God*'.

### **4.2 Augustine's critique of the Catholic Church**

Augustine rejected the idea that "the power of the keys" had been entrusted to Peter alone (Frend1991:222) primacy was simply a matter of personal privilege and not an office. Augustine did not think in terms of any primacy of jurisdiction for Peter. For Augustine, Christ himself and belief in Him is the foundation of the church. Christ entrusted the church to the disciples, as they had to convey the message to all people in the world. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20). In Augustine's thought the ecumenical council is the supreme authority. Augustine never reproached the Donatists for not being in communion with Rome, but rather with lack of communion with the apostolic sees as a whole. His view of Church government was that less

important questions should be settled by provincial councils, greater matters at general councils. When Augustine began to write the *City of God* in 413, his intention was to defend the Christian Church against the charge of having brought about the destruction of Rome in 410. Rome's misfortunes were not due to the growth of Christianity, for she suffered numerous calamities and reversals before Christ was born. Her gods did not protect her then, and they have not protected her now, because they cannot protect her: they are futile nonentities (Dyson 1998:xii). Outgrowing this initial purpose, the work evolved into a detailed critique of the political and moral tradition of Rome and provided a synthesis of Platonism and Christianity.

The *City of God* must stand as one of the most significant achievements in Western intellectual history. The destruction of Rome and the resulting problems provided the occasion for writing the *City of God*, but was not the main reason for it: 'the catastrophe of 410 is not the real reason for the genesis of the work, but only a first stimulus' (van Oort 1991:87). In fact, throughout the entire work, he rarely mentions the fall of Rome. His focus is on two loves and subsequently on two cities:

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love. the one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God, 'I will love you, my Lord, my strength' (CD [Civitate Dei] XIV:28).

This was not a new theme in Augustine's writing, but here they are ordered systematically (van Oort 1991:88). For the time being, the two cities are mingled together in this world, sharing its resources and sharing its tribulations also (CD XI:1), for God causes His rain to fall upon good and evil men alike. They will only be visibly divided at the end of history, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. Augustine's doctrine of the two

cities is intimately associated with a Christian historical perspective; it is not in any defensible sense a philosophy of history. Human history, properly conceived, is not like the history of Livy, but the history of the Bible. Here, Scripture is normative: 'These are writings of outstanding authority in which we put our trust concerning those things which we need to know for our good, and yet are incapable of discovering from ourselves' (CD XI:3). In the writing of this history, Augustine's view of revelation was that limited by his human fallibility. His earlier study of Manichaeism and neo-Platonism provided him with a dualistic model on which to base his concepts of the earthly and heavenly cities (van Oort 1991:352).

These two cities were absolutely antithetical to one another and to demonstrate this is the main purpose of the work. His apologetic purpose in the first ten chapters of his work reminds the Romans that their history contradicts their claims and that history should be judged in the light of the distinction between the two cities. Parallels in *City of God* are also found in Christian writers such as Ambrose though in his case it was an individualized internal spiritual antithesis. There are also similarities to be found in the works of Cyprian and Tertullian.

Augustine's approach to history writing is not, as certain philosophers think, an endless repetition of the same cycle of creation and destruction; nor is it the history of the glorious exploits of Rome or of any other empire. It is the gradual unfolding of the respective destinies of the two cities, in a linear, though not always straightforward, progression from the beginning of history to its end. History is not working towards some end or culmination in this world. The true destiny of mankind, whether it be damnation or salvation, does not lie within, but beyond history (Dyson 1998:xxi)

### 4.3 The meaning of history

Augustine's concern was the destiny of human beings. In his books he wrote a large-scale interpretation of history as the battle between the *civitas terrena*, the earthly state and the *civitas Dei*, the *City of God*. The great controversy between the world's state and God's state is the mysterious foundation and meaning of history, which is at the same time a history of salvation and disaster.

Augustine describes the origin and beginning of the two cities, then their progress through seven ages, and finally history's outcome and goal: 'I shall treat of their origin, their development and their destined ends' (CD X:32; XI:1). It originates in a dispute between the angels and God, prior to the creation of humanity. This is the origin of the separation of God and the good angels and those who choose to follow the devil. The Fall (CD XI) initiates the two cities, where those who wish to follow the weakness of the flesh and those who live according to the spirit part company.

There is a City of Babylon and the Catholic Church, so the city of God and the city of this world are different right from the beginning. Both world history and the history of individuals run in six periods, formed after the pattern of the week of creation, which in world history becomes a global week. As each day is followed by night, and each epoch tends towards a period of decline before the emergence of a new era. With Jesus Christ, the Lord of the city of God has appeared corporeally in the world the God-man as the climax of world history. Having paid close attention to the growth of the heavenly city (up to

CD XVII), which 'did not proceed on its course in this world in isolation', by contrast, Augustine describes the earthly city, Rome, as opposed to the heavenly city. It is an 'alien sojourner' (CD XVIII:1). This city is entangled with the secular context and so they are treated together. The earthly city is epitomized by Babylon and is succeeded in time by Rome, one empire replacing the other with the kingdom of the West superceding that of the East.

During this time, the city of God receded into the background of the writer's concerns only to become central in CD Book XVIII:1: 'the City of God developed not in the light, but in the shadow'. The restoration of the light was the new covenant signified by Christ's coming. As Israel was susceptible to apostasy, she lost her status with only the salvation of a righteous remnant. In this regard, Augustine quotes Isaiah 10:20: 'Even if the number of the sons of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, it is only a remnant that will be saved'.

This led to the call to the gentiles:

However, it would be impossible for the Gentiles to expect his coming to exercise judgment in the splendour of his power – as we now observe them expecting it – if they did not first believe in him as he came to submit to judgment in the humility of his patient endurance' (CD XVIII:45).

Yet, only Israel can rightly call herself God's chosen people (CD XVIII:47), while others could be counted among God's chosen:

I have no doubt that it was the design of God's providence that from this one instance we should know that there could also be those among other nations who lived by God's standards and were pleasing to God, as belonging to the spiritual Jerusalem; ie. 'all who are predestined for the City of God'. Hence the city of God is to have a universal character composed of pilgrims whose residence in the secular world is only temporary.



Augustine considers the Church to be an early creation not dependent on the coming of Christ: 'It has never failed to be foretold in prophecy from the beginning of the human race, and we now see the prophecy being fulfilled in all that happens' (CD XVI:2). There is a progression in Augustine's view of salvation history, which reached its highest point in Christ's incarnation. The purpose of history is completed when 'the number of the predestined saints was made up' (CD XIV:10). The eventual heavenly city will involve a return to its original pristine state (CD XXII:1). Van Oort (1991:101) states the situation quite succinctly: 'Heaven is its origin, heaven its final destination'.

Augustine's view of history is premised on a rejection of a pagan approach to history. This is based in the view that the world has always existed (CD XII:10-13). It relies on a cyclical view of history where the immortal soul 'must proceed on an unremitting alternation between false bliss and genuine misery'. Referring to Eccl 1:9, Augustine claims:

And they want this to be taken as referring to those circular movements, returning to the same state as before, and bringing all things back to the same condition.... Heaven forbid, I repeat, that we should believe this for 'Christ died once for all our sins'; and 'in rising from the dead he is never to die again'. ... 'The ungodly walk in a circle' [Ps 12:9]; not because their life is going to come round again in the course of those revolutions which they believe in, but because the way of their error, the way of false doctrine, goes round in circles (CD XII:14).

Augustine rejects this idea on the basis 'that no man existed before the creation of the first man' (CD XII:18) and that '[t]he eternal life of the saints refutes them completely' (CD XII:20). With the help of the Bible and ancient historians, Augustine wants to achieve two things; first, to present numerous historical details with all possible parallels, analogies, and allegories. Second,

Augustine wanted to offer a meaningful overall view of world history as the great clash between faith and unbelief. So it is that Augustine created the first monumental theology of history of Christianity. It had a deep influence on the whole of mediaeval Western theology and the theology of the Reformation, up to the threshold of the modern secularization of history. Down to our own days, Augustine's theology, and style reminds many people not only of the meaning of history, but also of the meaning of life.

Augustine wrote no historical works, either in our modern sense or in the sense in which "history" would have been understood at his time. In the established tradition of ancient historiography, authors general stopped short of their own lifetime. The little historical material to be found in Augustine's writings concerned very recent events, events he himself had taken part in and witnessed, such as the conference of Catholics and Donatists held under imperial supervision in 411 CE in Carthage.

His education acquainted him with the classics of Roman history, and he made use of these, especially of Sallust and the antiquarians Varro and Seneca (see CD Books VI & VII), in his own writings, notably the *City of God*. But in secular historiography as commonly understood, he disclaimed interest. Concerning the Punic Wars, he commented: 'If I were to recall and relate those calamities, I should turn into just another chronicler' (CD III.18.1).

Augustine was also well acquainted with ecclesiastical history, especially through Rufinus' Latin version of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* and Jerome's version of Eusebius's *Chronicle*. He was, of course well acquainted with history of the Donatist schism through the work of Optatus and his own research. Whereas Augustine's interest in history was confined to what he needed for polemical purposes and what he needed to incorporate in his argument. He had a deep interest in theological questions about history, its meaning and relevance to God's providence and its place in the pattern of the economy of salvation.

#### **4.4 Origin and the History of the two cities**

The origin and the history of the two cities are expounded by Augustine in the *City of God*, are considered. His periodisation of history was to exert an important influence on later historiography. In his view of *Heilsgeschichte* (van Oort 1991:361) Augustine shows a similarity with Old Testament historiography. There is a certain progression in the difference stages of the *Heilsgeschichte*; its ultimate goal is the completion of the city of God.

Augustine shows that there is a fundamental antithesis between the citizens of the city of God and those of the earthly city. He points out to his Roman opponents not only that their own history contradicts their assertions, but especially that the course of history should be judged in the light of the antithesis between *civitas Dei* and *terrana civitas* (van Oort 1991:93). Augustine arranges the actual history of the two cities in different ways. First of all, it is noteworthy that he divides the latter according to the periods that

emerge from the historical course of the city of God: the periodisation of the history of salvation determines that of world history. Moreover, he classifies the periods on the basis of *Genesis* 1: just as man was created on the sixth day, the sixth period is heralded by the coming of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The new person makes an appearance, in the final period, which at the same time means a total renewal. Only at the end of the work does his definitive approach to periodisation appear. It accords with the seven days of creation:

The first 'day' is the first period, from Adam to the Flood; the second from the Flood to Abraham. ... From that time, in the scheme of the evangelist Matthew, here are three epochs, which take us down to the coming of Christ; one from Abraham to David, a second from David to the exile in Babylon, and the third extending to the coming of Christ in the flesh. We are now in the sixth epoch. ... After this present age, God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day. ... whose end will not be an evening, but the Lords Day, an eighth day, as it were, which is to last forever, a day consecrated to the resurrection of Christ (CD XXII:30).

And all of this tends towards 'that kingdom which has no end' (ibid), the goal of the righteous, which is the result of the triumph of the kingdom of Christ over that of Satan's realm. Here we note Augustine's dependence on the Matthean genealogical schema. Augustine often refers to the city of God as Christ's body, yet he only rarely equates it with the church based in Rome. Moreover, as a man trained in rhetoric he was familiar with the scheme used by the Romans. Now he could apply it in his apology: the true city is not Rome, but the city of God. For Augustine Rome is the second Babylon, Babylon the first Rome. One empire took the place of the other. Thus a caesura in the history of the earthly city is indicated. But can the history of the other *civitas* be beginning synchronized with this? Although Augustine's basic

starting-point is the course of the city of God as described in Scripture, he sees clear parallels between the two. At the end of Book XVIII Augustine remarks that the city of God went its way in the shadows until the revelation of the New Covenant. The full light broke through with the coming of Christ.

The city of God revealed itself even more clearly in Abraham; his lineage was, as it were, the *plantatio civitatis Dei*. From then onward the history of the city of God was for a long time identical to that of Israel. This people received the law and the promise before all other nations. And yet Israel lost its citizenship in the city of God, especially after the Babylonian captivity. Instead of being the chosen people, the Israelites increasingly became enemies. They became apostate and this apostasy was soon accompanied by the disappearance of their independent existence as a state.

As the history of salvation progressed, the contents of the message of salvation became clearer. But at the same time an increasing unwillingness to accept salvation manifests itself. Augustine sees this repeatedly in the behavior of Israel. Due to this obstinacy each period in the history of the *civitas Dei* eventually experiences a decline. But again and again God makes a new start. This view of the history of salvation is reminiscent of a historiography in Israel itself, as it had been studied especially by Gerhard von Rad (cf. van Oort 1991:99). And Augustine's view can be better understood if it is related to his division of history by analogy with the days of creation: each time night falls, thereafter God creates a new day. Thus Augustine saw the history of salvation as a process that starts over and over again. For him an

immanent evolution is out of the question, but there is a continuing plan of salvation in which God acts creatively. An important aspect of the aforementioned should not be neglected, however. Augustine regards the appearance of Christ as a decisive event in the history of the city of God, but not as an absolute one. For salvation did not begin with the coming of Christ; it had been present throughout the history of mankind:

This mystery of eternal life has been made known by the ministry of angels from the very beginning of the human race. ... all the precepts for the conduct of life which shape men's character and their piety and are contained in the Scriptures, but also the ceremonies, the priesthoods, the tabernacle or the temple, the altars, the sacrifices, the sacred rites, the festal days, and everything that is concerned with the homage due to God – all these were symbols and predictions that find their fulfillment in Christ, so as to give eternal life to those who believe. (CD VII. 32).

Belief in salvation through Christ has always existed. Thus Abel was already justified, as were all the believers from the period of the Old Covenant and also those from the gentile nations like Job. The church has existed since the beginning of mankind; long before the birth of Christ there was the earthly history of the city of God.

Thus there is a progression in the stages of the history of salvation and there is one decisive event: the incarnation of Christ. Yet this event is not the termination of history. The purpose of history is to complete the number of those who are predestined. Then the city of God will have returned to what it was in the beginning. Heaven is its origin, heaven its final destination.

#### 4.5 Augustine's view on philosophy and theology

Augustine was an apologetical historian. *The De Genesi ad Litteram* and the *De Civitate Dei* are certainly not the fruit of free inquiry into the meaning of creation and history (Keyes 1996:84). His method has been criticised as anti-historical because of the rigid theological system, which controls it. His Christian creed is treated as true beyond question, and experience and the historical process, if they are not found therein, are made to conform to its prescription. It may be that Augustine is not intellectually or intuitively certain of the truth of every clause and subsection of the Christian creed. But he is willing to try to accept it complete, as a working principle.

His study of history is intended not to discover patterns or lines of development, but to demonstrate God's love everywhere expressed. He uses the great secular philosophies of antiquity as an intellectual quarry. As for canonical Scripture, he agrees with Irenaeus and St. Athanasius that the Bible is the first and greatest historical source, but he will be found as ready to distort this to secure his apologetical purpose. Thus his intent was to present Christianity in such a way that it could be seen within a historical as well as universal framework and subsequently be embraced a definitive faith perspective as an alternative to Roman political leadership.

For Augustine argues that human history itself has no ultimate meaning or significance. Temporal history is given meaning only through divine providence, and the events of this world are explainable only within the context of the concepts of redemption and salvation. Augustine's primary

purpose in writing *The City of God* was to articulate a fully developed Christian view of history. He believed that God's plan could not depend upon the fate of any temporal state. Augustine views human history as a conflict between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei*, not between one or the other of these two societies and the state. Augustine makes it clear that in human history the sphere of politics is autonomous. Politics belongs to the sphere of secular history and for Augustine the only true history is sacred history. In Augustine's thought the difference between secular and sacred history depends on the source of the narrative, that is, whether or not the historical narrative is prophetically inspired.

#### **4.6 Interpretation of history**

The church that nurtures its believers through the sacraments is not yet in heaven, but struggles and lives as a pilgrim within Christo-historical events. The fall of Rome in 410 CE, which shook the Mediterranean world, led Augustine to think and write on the meaning of history. He was a theologian of history. Secondly, precisely in this way he aimed to offer a meaningful overall view of world history as the great clash between belief and unbelief, humility and arrogance, love and striving for power, salvation and damnation from the beginning of time until today.

So it was Augustine who created the first monumental theology of history in Christianity. He had an influence on the whole of mediaeval Western theology and the theology of the reformation, up to the threshold of antiquity there was neither a philosophy of history nor a theology of history. Augustine did not



intend that crude conclusion anymore than he intended to condemn all sexuality. He was sure that the clue to the meaning of history was to be found in the Bible, not in imperial propaganda or in extravagant claims for the church. History is not the story of steady progress nor is it a repeating cycle of events ruled by chance or fate and ultimately meaningless. Nor is it an advertisement for one institution, political or ecclesiastical. It is the story of two cities.

#### **4.7 Biblical history**

*Historia* for Augustine meant the record of what has been done, either by human or by divine agency (*sive divinitus sive humanitus gesta*, *Gn.litt. imp.2.5* in Fitzgerald 1999:433). The Bible contained narratives concerning the Old and New Testaments. Biblical history was unique among other historical records in being divinely inspired, and in that many of its narratives of past events, as well as the Old Testament as a whole were endowed with prophetic meaning.

Hence it could be interpreted on two levels, historically or prophetically, according to whether the interpreter's interest lay in the past or in the future. The origin of all history was Adam's fall. Augustine considered human life in the Garden of Eden as temporal, but not, in the strict sense, historical. Although time began with the creation of a temporal world, it became historical only with Adam's loss of his union with the Creator through sin. Human history was the record of human alienation from God through sin.

Biblical history, taken as whole, was for Augustine the history of human salvation, beginning with the creation and ending with the final return of the Lord in judgment to gather his faithful from the four corners of the world. Augustine was skeptical about the possibility of interpreting divine purpose in secular history except with the aid of clues furnished by, and within the framework of, the scriptural narrative.

Augustine's anthropology surveys the sweep of human history from a Christian perspective. History begins with God creating and concludes with Christ, in whom all creation will be united and presented to the Father. Augustine is unable to speak of history without speaking of creation, incarnation, and final unity in diversity in Christ. Nor can he speak of humanity while remaining reticent about sin and grace. Real history, the only history, is a drama involving all this. In this perspective the human person is utterly dependent on God and other humans.

#### **4.8 Augustine and unity of the church**

Augustine worked through all possible philosophical approaches and material in a way, which was both conservative and innovative. He devoted himself to Christian apologetic and biblical exegesis, the systematic penetration and the practical preaching of the Christian message. He used the allegorical explanation of scripture, which at some points prefers a spiritual interpretation to the literal sense. For Augustine, God, as he has revealed himself in his Logos and his Son stands at the centre of theology. Augustine argues that the spiritual soul, which is in the possession of the body, is to find ascent to God

through Christ; religion is the matter of the heart instead of just a form of cult and community. Augustine as a Bishop of North Africa was compelled to make some changes in the Donatist and Pelagian controversies, which shook the theology of the church and was deeply stamped by these two crises in the church and theology, which proved to be of significance for the whole of Western theology and the church.

The Donatist crisis had a consequence for Augustine's emphatically institutional and hierarchal understanding of the church and then that of the whole West. In the fourth century the Catholic Church had already become a quite secularized church of the masses. Augustine fought intensely for the unity of the church. As a Christian he was tormented by the broken unity of the African church, and as a Neoplatonist more than most he found the idea of unity a sign of the true and the good.

#### **4.9 African Bishops Councils and the Roman See**

The African Church with its vast number of bishops had a history of intense conciliar activism. While for Augustine the authority of plenary councils was "most salutary in the church" (ep.54.1), his own experience was of local, provincial and African regional councils (Fitzgerald 1999:81). Thus Augustine's personal experience of councils was not that of the great eastern councils of his age. Most of the African councils were formulating strategies to deal with Donatism, not discussing Trinitarian or Christological issues. Augustine's conciliar terminology was fluid. In his treatise on baptism he stressed the superiority of Scripture to all later statements of bishops as well

as the superiority of plenary to provincial councils. The African bishops led by Augustine not only renewed their condemnation but appealed to Pope Innocent (401-17) to confirm their decisions (epp.175-77 in Fitzgerald 1999:81). Pope Innocent died shortly after this, and his successor, Zosimus (417-18), seemed to hesitate about, if not go back on, his predecessor's decision. The African bishops responded and stood by Innocent's condemnation. In this case Augustine had sought Roman confirmation so that what had happened in Palestine could not be repeated.

Palestinian approval threatened to cancel out the earlier African condemnation. But the confirmation of the African position by Rome carried with it a degree of ecumenical prestige that no other regional council could outweigh. African dealings with Rome were not always so harmonious, however, a few years later the African bishops wrote an angry letter to Pope Celestine (422-32) requesting him to let the African bishops deal with their own disciplinary problems.

It has been noted that Augustine did not sign these letters, but the reasons for this are unknown. The Romans intervened in Africa even in minor matters. In 418, in his sixties Augustine made a long journey to the West to Caesarea in Mauritania on business for Pope Zosimus. In other words, Augustine personally showed great respect for the Roman see and its bishops. Though most of the issues of later theological debates on Roman authority had not yet emerged.

#### 4.10 Augustine and the Church

Augustine had an idea of a universal church in communion with Jerusalem, Rome and the great Eastern communities. The great *Ecclesia catholica*, ever expanding and absorbing the world, endowed with sacraments and led by orthodox bishops, that church which Augustine called the 'mother' of all believers (Kung 1995:80). But Augustine also knew that this one, holy, apostolic catholic Church would never be perfect on this earth.

Some belonging to the church only in the body (*corpore*) and not in the heart (*corde*). The real church is a pilgrim church and will have to leave the separation of chaff and wheat to the final judge. To this degree the true church is the church of the saints, predestined, redeemed: a church contained in the visible church but hidden from human view.

As for the sacraments of the church, a distinction must be made between validity on the one hand and legality and efficacy on the other. The decisive thing is not what is done by the bishop or priest (who is perhaps unworthy), but what is done by God in Christ (Kung 1995:80). The sacraments are objectively valid (though they may not always be legitimate and effective), quite apart from the subjective worthiness of the one who dispenses them. As long as they are performed in order according to the understanding of the church.

#### **4.11 The origin of the *City of God***

When Augustine began to write the *City of God* in 413, his intention was to defend the Christian Church against the charge of having brought about the destruction of Rome in 410 CE. Rome's misfortunes are not due to the coming of Christianity; she suffered numerous calamities and reversals before Christ was born. Her gods did not protect her then, and they have not protected her now, because they cannot protect her: they are futile nonentities (Dyson 1998:XII).

Outgrowing this initial purpose, the work evolved into a detailed critique of the political and moral tradition of Rome and a synthesis of Platonism and Christianity, which must stand as one of the most significant achievements in Western intellectual history. For the time being concerning the *City of God*, the two cities are mingled together in this world, sharing its resources and sharing its tribulations also; for God causes His rain to fall upon good and evil men alike. They will only be visibly divided at the end of history, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead.

Augustine's doctrine of the two cities is intimately associated with a Christian historical perspective; it is not in any defensible sense a philosophy of history. It is the gradual unfolding of the respective destinies of the two cities, in a linear progression from the beginning of history to its end. History is not working towards some end or culmination in this world. The true destiny of mankind, whether it be damnation or salvation, does not lie within but beyond history.

#### **4.12 The social and political thought of Augustine of Hippo**

The analysis of Augustine is primarily a psychological one conducted with sensitivity to his personal experience and memories. Augustine's concern with education and the role of political leadership are the basis for this review of *The City of God*. The Church to Augustine became very much part of the *saeculum* of the world of men and of time. For Augustine argues that human history itself has no ultimate meaning or significance. Temporal history is given meaning only through divine providence, and the events of this world are explainable only within the context of the concepts of redemption and salvation.

#### **4.13 Augustine's theology on sexual matters**

Augustine's personal experience of the power of sex and his Manichaean past made him feel guilt at some times in his disputes with other theologians. He rejected any semblance of Manichaeism. But above all, Augustine felt that Pelagius' teaching touched a sore spot in his own personal experience and struck at the heart of his faith. In his analytical self-reflection and his experience, he described in his *Confessions* how little human beings can do of themselves, and how weak their wills are how much the fleshly desires (*concupiscentia carnis*) culminating in sexual lust keep human beings from doing the will of God (Kung 1995:85)

With regard to sex the majority of Christians had no moral problems with sexual intercourse between married partners or with the statement in scripture that God wants all human beings to be saved. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 "This is good,

and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.” According to Augustine, from the start human beings are deeply corrupted by Adam’s sin (CD XIV, 12:607 in Kung 1995:86). For all have sinned fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Indeed Augustine puts sexuality generally right at the centre of human nature. He granted that it is not sexuality itself which is evil (as the Manichaeans believed) but the loss of self-control. According to Augustine (Kung 1995:86) not only the young men have to strive for chastity but also the older, married men have to strive for chastity against sexual desires and take action against the sexual fantasies which constantly break in.

There was never before any author in antiquity who put sexuality so much under the spotlight of cool psychological analysis. It is God’s grace alone which brings about all things in human beings and which is the sole ground of human redemption. In all this Augustine’s theory of sexuality and sin remains problematical.

From Augustine’s perspective it was clear that ideally sexual intercourse should take place only for the procreation of children. Sexual pleasure purely for its own sake is sinful and is to be suppressed; it was inconceivable for him that sexual pleasure could even enrich and deepen the relationship between husband and wife. Augustine did not intend the crude conclusion anymore than he intended to condemn all sexuality.



#### **4.14 Politisation and Clericalization of the *City of God***

The Roman rule of the world had collapsed in North Africa as well; Augustine's theology was to make world history on another continent, Europe. That is why the dramatic *City of God* becomes the favourite book of the Middle Ages because it vividly presents its readers with the issues in the great, perplexing battles of world history. For Augustine, all bishops are equal in principle and all priests are servants of the church.

And what is more important to him than visible church organization is the church as the hidden body of Christ, given life through the one Spirit, united in the Eucharist. At any rate Augustine provides no impetus for Papalism; only the Bishops of Rome were concerned about that. In 418 Augustine had taken part in a synod of North African bishops, which forbade clergy to appeal against their decisions to Rome. He wanted African clergy and their bishops to deal with their own matters without the Roman intervention at the same time he had a great respect for the church in Rome.

#### **4.15 On the *City of God***

When Augustine was writing the *City of God*, his original intention was to answer the charge that Christianity was responsible for bringing about the destruction of Rome. Insofar as the elements of Augustine's political, social and historical thought are presented in the *City of God*, they are present if one may so express it, in much the way that the fragments of a pot might be present at an archaeological site. They have to be identified, sorted out from large masses of other material and assembled. When this process is

complete, however, the resultant picture is a relatively clear one, though there is a good deal of room for disagreement and debate over matters of detail. Augustine's social and political thinking depends most fundamentally upon his understanding (mediated through St. Paul) of the biblical narrative of the Fall. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in Paradise, their life there was originally one of untrammelled joy:

The love of the pair for God and for one another was undisturbed, and they lived in a faithful and sincere fellowship which brought great gladness to them, for what they loved was always at hand for their enjoyment. There was a tranquil avoidance of sin, and, as long as this continued, no evil of any kind intruded, from any source, to bring them sadness (CD XIV:9:602 in Dyson 1998: XVI)

The sin of Adam and Eve has consequences for their offspring also consequences, which determine the whole subsequent course of human history. Because of original sin then, each one of us comes into the world worthy of damnation: subject to the "necessity of death". This to Augustine's mind is the dominant fact of our individual and social existence.

It is clearly Augustine's view that had the Fall not occurred, the state, and the various devices of coercion, punishment and oppression, which we associate with the state, would not have come into existence. They would not have come into existence simply because there would have been no need for them.

The two cities are invisible communities whose duration is coextensive with the history of the world. It should be noted also that many who are outwardly members of the institutional church are, in fact, citizens of the earthly city. Augustine's doctrine of the two cities is intimately associated with a Christian perception; it is not in any defensible sense a 'philosophy' of history.

Human history, properly conceived, is not the history of lies, but the history of the Bible. It is not, as certain philosophers think, an endless repetition of the same cycle of creation and destruction; nor is it the history of the glorious exploits of Rome or of any other empire. It is the gradual unfolding of the respective destinies of the two cities, in a linear progression from the beginning of history to its end.

History is not working towards some end or culmination in this world. The true destiny of mankind, whether it be damnation or salvation, does not lie within, but beyond, history. First, Augustine confronts more fully than any of his Christian predecessors the ethical and political doctrines and assumptions of classical philosophy. At least insofar as these are mediated to him through Latin sources. In an intelligible sense, Augustine forms the turning point from which the historian can date the beginning of the medieval Christianization of political thought.

#### 4.16 The salvation of the church

There has been a strong view in the Roman Catholic Church that there is no salvation outside the church. St. Cyprian of Carthage in North Africa had warned that there was no salvation outside the church through this appears even before him. Cyprian's name is especially associated with this axiom, which occurs with frequency and urgency in his writings. But there is a massive influence that Augustine has had on the history of Christian thought, including that on the possibilities of salvation for people who die outside the church. Then there is the complexity of his teaching, especially with regard to the church and its necessity for salvation. Augustine said pertaining to salvation of those who lived before Christ:

When we say that Christ is the Word of God, through whom all things were made, we say also he is the Son of God. Coeternal with the Father the unchangeable wisdom by whom the whole universe was created, and who becomes the happiness of every rational soul. Therefore, from the beginning of the human race, all those who believed in him and knew him and lived a good and devout life according to his commands, whenever and wherever they lived undoubtedly were saved by him (Epist.102:11-15 in Sullivan 1992:29)

First, salvation has always been through faith in Christ and worship of him; this alone is the true religion. However, this religion has always been available to those who were worthy of it.

#### 4.17 The History

In the *City of God* Augustine traces the story of the human race from the creation of Adam and Eve. He also looks at the rise of Roman Empire, the birth of Christ, the establishment of the Catholic Church until the shaking of the Christian Roman Empire in 410 CE when Alaric the Goth destroyed the city of Rome. He sees God in his providence working in secular history, and at first through the Christian Empire to bring about the salvation and fulfilment of human individuals. The salvation history of humankind as told in the Bible was accepted by Augustine for what it was a sacred history of God's love for human beings and of the way to happiness.

The origin of the human race preceded all recorded history and its future was non-observable, Augustine considered it reasonable to accept on faith whatever God revealed of the creation and culmination of the world through the writers of scripture. In this way Augustine divided history into six periods (Clark 1994:94): (1) from Adam to Noah; (2) from Noah to Abraham; (3) from Abraham to David; (4) from David to the Babylonian Captivity; (5) from the Babylonian Captivity to the birth of Christ; (6) from the birth of Christ to the last judgment.

The call to God's City witnessed to transcendent capacities in human nature, but it was not seen by Augustine as a summons to abandon temporal existence. In his reflections on history in later life Augustine placed himself at the greatest possible distance from the Platonists. He departed from an ancient view of history as cyclic and affirmed the view of his Christian

predecessors the biblical view of history as linear. Consequently, he underscored the impact of history's goal as transcendent; history began from 'above' the earth and would culminate 'above' the earth. This was a philosophical decision to attend to the final cause (*telos*) as well as the efficient causes of events to discover the meaning of history. Recognizing that the end (*telos*) or purpose of history was made known through God's revelation in the scriptures, he saw faith in God's word as key to the understanding of history's meaning.

Augustine found nothing in Scripture, which indicated that governments were instruments of salvation history. He squarely faced the fact that neither the City of God nor the ungodly city could be identified with any earthly institution. The City of God is multi-cultural and multi-national Augustine saw the so-called barbarians seeking their place in the sun as an appropriate movement of history calling for the sharing of education and the gift of faith and bringing new energy into God's City.

#### **4.18 Church authority**

He saw the catholicity of the Church as consisting fundamentally in its presence throughout all the earth. Unity is the bond of love, which ties all those who belong to this single body of Christ, where there is no love, there is no unity; but it is also true that where there is no unity there is no love and therefore no church. The church that nurtures its believers through the sacraments is not yet in heaven, but struggles and lives as a pilgrim within christological events.

The fall of Rome in 410 CE, which shook the Mediterranean world, led Augustine to think and write on the meaning of history. He was a theologian of history. Augustine revered the church as the authoritative representative of Christ; he therefore looked to the universal church as a guide for the acceptance of the various scriptural books prescribed as God's word (DD OC11.8.12 in Clark 1994:101). The unity of the episcopate and of the apostles and the representative of all Christians. Just as the dissent of one man, Adam alienated his descendants from God so the assent of one man, Peter, reunited those descendants to God in the church. Thus Augustine refers to St. Peter as the 'Rock' and at times to Christ as the 'Rock' on which the church was founded: St. Peter's success is visible, Christ is invisible.

Augustine attributed true authority to the Bishop of Rome; this is evident from his request to the Pope to condemn Pelagianism and by his appeal to Rome against the Donatists. The relation of the church to the state was an issue on which Augustine apparently changed his mind while he was writing the *City of God*. Gilkey (in Clark 1994:104) asserts that in large part on the basis of the Christian interpretation of history as formed largely by Augustine the modern consciousness of history arose. Of course the new view of time and history came with Scripture, but Augustine made it an object of theological reflection.

He affirmed time and history as creative and good under the Lordship of God for the purpose of transforming individuals into the divine image. God not only created the world but works in human history. He does not work as an external cause but functions within various dynamic realities, including and

most of all, freedom. This divine providence is concerned with God's eschatological goal for humankind. Each moment of time is therefore of ultimate significance. The more a human being participates in God through grace the better does it become. Thus Gilkey recognizes that for Augustine history becomes meaningful through the work of divine providence and grace (DCD XX.6 and 9 in Clark 1994:104). The Church is the sacrament of history making visible the presence of grace in history. Sin originates in history. History is an ambiguous reality. Only through history do persons develop their full potential as true images of God. And yet history is a record of decisions that impede personal fulfilment.

#### **4.19 The imperfect Church**

The two cities are interwoven and mingled with one another in the field of history says Augustine, but their citizens differ sharply, constituting in fact two different branches of the human race: "The one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will". By two cities Augustine mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil (CD 15:1). The church is a temporal institution, and the City of God is more than that.

Within the context of history, the two overlap, but the City of God will survive beyond history while the institutional church will not. The citizens of the City of God belong to that great sweep of the whole people of God from Adam to Christ and from Christ to our own day until the end of time. Intermingled with



the people of God are those who belong to the institutional church and yet who will not end up in the City of God because they actually live by human standards. As Augustine (Marshall 1987:129) puts it,

While the city of God is on pilgrimage in this world, she has in her midst some who are united with her in participation in the sacraments, but who will not join with her in the eternal destiny of the saints. Some of these are hidden; some are well known, for they do not hesitate to murmur against God, whose sacramental sign they fear, even in the company of his acknowledged enemies. At one time they join his enemies in filling the theatres, at another they join with us in filling the churches (CD I:35)

With this perspective of the sweep and pilgrimage of history, Augustine is able to be confident that the City of God will be salvaged from history even the history that includes the disintegration of the city and empire of Rome. Nothing will be lost that is of God. It will emerge triumphantly at the end of time, clearly vindicated and recognizable as the true City of God.

In many ways Augustine killed two birds with one stone when he wrote the City of God. He rescues theology and a view of history from static categories formed by analyses in the context of some fixed point in history. He directs our attention instead to the end of all things: the solution to history lies in a point of convergence beyond history from whom all will be it seems and when the two cities will stand clearly for what they are.

#### 4.20 Augustine and time

In Augustine's famous discussion of time, he defined it as "nothing more than an extension", by which he meant that time was an expansion of each present moment forward and backward in the mind, and in the mind of God (Salisbury 2004:186). Furthermore, Augustine explained the relationship between past, present, and future. The past is always driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present [that is, God].

Augustine wrote several sermons between 410 and 413 that were to be delivered on the saint's feast day after the reading of the passion. They kept the significant elements of the story, yet they highlighted and modified portions to make the account more immediately relevant for their audiences. As early as the fifth century, while Augustine was condemning the Donatist martyrs, he had written, "There are two types of martyrs, one whose passion is apparent, another whose virtue is hidden in the soul" (Salisbury 2004:181) [that is God].

Augustine thus established the principles by which time could be inverted within the narrative of Vincent's passion and this perception of time profoundly shaped the medieval church and its hagiographers. To accomplish this hagiographers had to rewrite the history of the story of Vincent's acquisition of power the church controlled the message of a martyr on dead

#### 4.21 Conclusion

While not a work of history in the terms which we recognize it in the twentieth century, Augustine's *City of God* stands as an early contribution in the field of theological history writing. In this respect he goes beyond Eusebius. His ultimate concern is to demonstrate God's love to the world he has created and the ultimate triumph of the city of God over the secular (temporal) city. While the fall of Rome provides the occasion for the *City of God* it is not its main reason.

Augustine focuses on the political and moral state of Rome only to provide the basis for his discussion of the two cities, which emerge from the two types of love evident in the world, love of earthly power and the love of God, and are both proceeding towards a pre-determined goal. The conflict between the two gives a clue to the meaning of history engages with the dissonance between the temporal and the eternal.

The Incarnation of Christ is the turning point of history and provides Augustine with the hermeneutic on which he bases his work. He is conscious of his debt to earlier scholars though he gave his own distinctive meaning and interpretation to history. Augustine's most influential works also include his philosophy of creation and of time, his philosophy of history, and his theory of salvation. He posited that past and future were constructs of the human mind, ever-present sensations of memory and expectation.

In the *City of God*, Augustine created what was perhaps the first philosophy of history. Augustine claimed that the Church was the only means by which people could attempt to enter the *City of God*. By doing this, he set the stage for the struggle between emperors and popes that characterized Western European history until the Protestant Reformation. Although his work affected Western Europe more than it did Africa.

Augustine was part of an imperial order that suppressed the Donatists, African Christians who often contested the Catholic establishment for economic, social as well as religious reasons. Augustine had a respect for the Catholic Church and he never reproached the Donatists for not being in communion with Rome but with lack of communion with the apostolic sees as a whole. Augustine's historiography is very significant for the history of the church.

## **Chapter 5 The influence and the legacy of St. Augustine**

### **5.1 Influences Augustine had on other people**

We know more about Augustine than about anyone else in antiquity and he is widely agreed to have had great strengths. He was realistic about the human inclination to evil and about the imperfections of all human societies including empires and churches. He taught Christians not to weep for too long over the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and he taught them a faith on which a new society would one day be built. At its best it was a faith in God as supremely real and supremely desirable. Ideas, which he phrased with great skill, were to be accepted by almost all the leading thinkers of Europe until after the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Augustine had made much of being the Catholic bishop of Hippo.

He was a theologian, philosopher, preacher and letter writer whose work wholly eclipses that of anyone and everyone else writing in Latin in his age. Everyone would appeal to Augustine and would be profoundly affected by his gloomy view of fallen nature. His absolute insistence on the necessity of grace, but also on an extraordinarily rich spectrum of ideas about God, love, the church and history. Augustine provided the whole of Western theology with arguments categories, salvations and catchy formulae, especially for a differentiated doctrine of the church and the sacraments. But because he started from a polemical and defensive position, despite his emphasis on the invisible church of true believers. He developed an emphatically institutional and hierarchical understanding of the Church.

## 5.2 Augustine: a devoted bishop

Augustine was at one and the same time an evangelist and a churchman. He loved the scriptures, preached the gospel, marked it, learned it, and made it a part of himself. It was his love of scripture that made him a preacher. So, he recalls the Church in every season to be faithful in preaching and teaching. He was a walking sacrament, a pastor, a spiritual guide, a man of prayer, and a man of community.

In his formative years he found a model bishop in the person of Ambrose; in his later years he sought to renew and refresh the image of the episcopate, cutting loose from the secularised models so evident in his day and recasting it in the model of the gospel-bearing apostolic figure of the bishop. He was an evangelist, churchman, bishop, saint and the great doctor of the church. He devoted much time and attention to the study of the Scriptures in order to arm himself for the impending combat.

It was always Augustine's conviction that belief and behaviour belong together. Augustine was outstandingly well versed in Latin and rhetoric, totally at home with the Punic dialect of the country people of his diocese, well fitted by his experience with the Manicheas to deal with this sect and beat them at their own arguments. He was to become in his lifetime a walking biblical concordance, commentary, and encyclopaedia all rolled into one. He was in a sense a professional in the art of public speaking debate, and communication. From his ordination onward he became a highly skilled and articulate philosopher, a dedicated pastor and a patient protagonist of the Christian

religion. He was content to offer his energies and skills for almost the next forty years of his life amid the inefficiencies, ecclesiastical squabbles, and doctrinal divisions that were regrettably characteristic of the church in the North Africa of his day. Following on Valerius, Augustine soon found himself working as an ecclesiastical and legal lackey rushing round pursuing lawsuits.

Augustine once said, “I do not propose to spend any time in the empty enjoyment of ecclesiastical dignity, but I propose to act as mindful of this that I must give an account of the sheep committed to me”(Epistolae, 22.2.8 in Marshal 1980:99). Augustine was now the right man in the right place at the right time. He frequently spoke of himself as a prisoner of the Lord, bound in slavery to the work of a bishop.

### **5.3 His teachings**

Augustine combined knowledge and wisdom more completely than any other Father of the Church. He found not a career but eternity; not a wife but beauty. That was the background when he wrote famous words, which have often been misinterpreted: ‘love God and then do what is your will’ (Edwards 1997:163). And all of the life on which he now embarked was for him a voyage into eternity.

Augustine’s very wordy book the *City of God*, which took him thirteen years to write, ends: ‘There we shall rest and see, we shall see and have, we shall love and praise. That is what shall be in the end without end. For what is our end but to arrive at the kingdom which has no end?’(Edwards 1997:164). That was the heart of his teaching. When he returned to his roots in North Africa it

was in order to serve the Catholic Church. What Augustine taught in his sermons was that the church's sacraments could reach where intellectual arguments cannot. Had that been all that Augustine taught, his legacy to the Middle Ages would have been almost flawless in the eyes of most modern Christians.

But it was not. His years under pressure as a bishop took their toll. To the end he believed as he wrote in *The City of God*: 'God has made the mortal race of man the loveliest of all mortal things on earth' (Edwards 1997:165). But while a bishop he gave more and more emphasis to the truth that man needs to be saved. He often called the Bible which he had once despised the foundation because it was the message of salvation. Anyone who wants to understand the Catholic Church has to understand Augustine (Kung 2001:53).

Originally he was a very worldly man, an intellectual genius, a brilliant stylist and a gifted psychologist, but when he converted to Christian faith he became a passionate Catholic Christian, priest and bishop. As bishop, this man, who during his life wrote so much that was brilliant and profound, splendid and moving about the human longing for happiness, about time and eternity, about the human soul and devotion to God, remained an indefatigable preacher, expounder of scripture and author of theological treatises. As such, he was the main figure in the two crises which not only shook the church of Africa but would in fact decide the future church of Europe: the Donatist and the Pelagian crises.



#### 5.4 The spiritual leader

He was the undisputed spiritual and theological leader of North Africa, where Roman rule had now collapsed forever. But Augustine's theology was to make world history on another continent, Europe. Down to our day, this catholic theologian who in spite of his errors is beyond compare recalls the meaning not only of world history but also of human life. When Augustine closes his *City of God*, he conjures up that indescribable and indefinable eighth day on which God completes his work of creation (Kung 2001:62) "there we shall rest and we shall see. We shall see and we shall love. We shall love and we shall praise. Behold what shall be in the end and shall not end! For what other thing is our end, but to come to that kingdom of which there is no end?"(CD XXII, 30:1182).

Alongside the specifically Latin theology of Augustine, which provided the theological foundation, the development of the Roman papacy, which had already long been prepared for, now became important as the central institution of church rule. Augustine had to wrestle with many views which he did not consider to be orthodox

The Pelagians, the Manicheans, the Donatists and others all put forward views which are echoed by modern writers today. Augustine's ideas, which were generally accepted by the church, became the benchmarks for what was orthodox and what was heretical. This was not always a happy situation; Augustine's views on women and sexuality have cost a long and unhelpful shadow over the Christian tradition. Attention to his thought has been one of

the constant threads in western intellectual history. Augustine was a pastoral bishop who related theological reflections to practical needs, and at the same time a passionate and restless individual, who wrote with a depth and intensity that speak to us directly. Despite the range of his ideas and the breadth of his influence there is a limited repertoire of quotations from Augustine likely at any time to crop up in preaching or popular writing.

His acute sense of his pastoral responsibilities led him to redirect his intellectual gifts. As soon as he became a priest, he abandoned his dreams of a life devoted to philosophy, and immersed himself in the scriptures. He never shed the basic tenets about God and human nature, which he had learnt from philosophy. But from now on he was primarily a biblical theologian, concerned not only to satisfy his own intellect but also to serve the church. He was at all times an earnest and restless spirit; a perpetual seeker he constantly raised difficult questions and expected no peace till the grave.

He also stressed the need to pray at all times and never presume that our salvation is sure. It was this concern for the good of the church that generated the huge literary production that continued to his dying day. He developed his thoughts on Christian teaching, and composed the sermons that form an important part of his literary legacy; it was for the benefit of the faithful in Africa and beyond, that he produced a huge body of writing to defend the church against pagans and heretics.

#### 5.4.1 Christians in the world

In Augustine's world Christians did not form a separate group. They had to take part in the life of the broader society. How could the church, itself a mixed body of saints and sinners, look with contempt on the earthly city? In so far as the earthly city is the Roman commonwealth, all the members of Augustine's flock belonged to it, in its stricter definition of the world in rebellion against God; the unrighteous in the church are its secret members. Mixture within the church itself contributes to the subtle bond between the two cities. In fact as Augustine wrote, these two cities are mixed up and entangled with each other in this age, and will only be separated at the last judgment.

He had no sense that Christians should have their own distinctive set of political and social values. The harsher aspects of life in the Roman Empire external and civil wars and the institution of slavery saddened him. He looked forward to their disappearance in the world to come, but he could not imagine life in this world without them. In a fallen world of vicious human beings he saw no alternative to a hierarchical society that uses violence both to repel its enemies and to impose obedience on its members.

How could this be squared with Christ's Sermon on the Mount, with its rejection of the use of force even in self-defence? 'I order you not to resist the wicked; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Matthew 5:39). Augustine argued that this text is concerned not with acts but attitudes: human beings often have to discipline the weak and foolish, punish the wicked and repel their enemies. But this they must do in a spirit not of

brutality or revenge but of concern for the common good. Augustine is not only the most prolific of the early Church fathers but also the most wide-ranging. There are so many themes one could select as the heart of his message: his doctrine of the individual human being, made in the image of the Trinity corrupted through the Fall, and refashioned through the grace of Christ. Augustine does not preach community in a way that minimizes the value or responsibilities of the individual. Nevertheless, his stress on the community aspects of Christian life remains striking, and it has the leading theme of his books.

### **5.5 Augustine the thinker**

Among many Christians the non-Christian use of reason and its presuppositions were rejected. Jesus had thanked God that He had hid the gospel from the wise and prudent and had revealed it unto babes, and Paul had declared that in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom had not known God. The road to the truth most important for man was held to be the acceptance by faith of what God had done in the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection.

Augustine declared: "Believe in order that you may understand" (Latourette 2005:249). By the fourth century a loss of confidence in the Greek use of reason was fairly widespread in the Roman Empire, outside as well as within Christian circles. Augustine in his famous statement "believe in order that you may understand" which by no means repudiating reason, was giving to it a different place than that accorded it in Greek philosophy. Along with other

Christian thinkers, was taking account of data which were unknown to the pre-Christian Greeks, and which were rejected as “foolishness” by those who continued to adhere to Greek philosophy.

## 5.6 The works of Augustine

Theology is responsive to the needs of human existence as well as to the requirements of the human mind. We learn from the history of the church how Augustine responded to the destruction of Rome. Augustine had to respond to views that were shared by both Christians and non-Christians. The *City of God* was inspired by the fall of Rome, and by the claims of some pagans that this catastrophe was due to the fact that Rome had forsaken her ancient gods in order to follow the Christian God. As an answer to such claims, Augustine developed his philosophy of history in order to give answer in the *City of God*.

By writing the *City of God* he was to clarify that Christians are not responsible for the destruction of Rome, Rome is the earthly city, which could be affected by earthly problems like any other city. The *City of God* would always be a warning to Christians to be discriminating in their support of earthly states to distinguish between the realms of God and of Caesar. The great controversy between the secular world state and God's sacred state is the mysterious foundation and meaning of history, which is at the same time a history of salvation and disaster. Augustine is not a historian in the modern sense, but a theological interpreter of history. He is not primarily interested in the development of humankind, but in God's plan. With the help of the Bible and ancient historians, Augustine wants to achieve two things: first, to present

numerous historical details with every possible parallel and analogy, allegory and typology. Secondly precisely in this way to offer a meaningful overall view of world history as the great clash between belief and unbelief, humility and arrogance, love and striving for power, salvation and damnation from the beginning of time until today. So it was Augustine who created the first monumental theology of history in Christianity. He had an influence on the whole of mediaeval Western theology and the theology of the reformation, up to the threshold of the antiquity there was neither a philosophy of history nor a theology of history.

Thus with every possible parallel, analogy, allegory and typology Augustine offered an overall view of world history which in its deepest dimension is a great clash between belief and unbelief. All in all, this was the first monumental theology of history in antiquity, which was to have a wide influence down to the Middle Ages in the West, and also in the Reformation up to the threshold of the modern secularisation of history. He had no interest in institutions and individuals; he was far from politicising and clericalising God's state. The pope plays no part in God's state.

For Augustine, in any case all bishops were fundamentally equal: though for him Rome was the centre of the empire and the church, he gave no boast to papalism. He did not think in any way in terms of a primacy in rule or justification for Rome. For it was not Peter as a person (or even his successor) who was the foundation of the Church, but Christ and faith in him. The Bishop of Rome was not the supreme authority in the church, the

supreme authority was the ecumenical council, as it was for the whole of the Christian East, and Augustine did not attribute any infallible authority even to this.

### **5.6.1 *City of God***

The heavenly city will be the fulfilment of that Sabbath rest foretold in the command: 'Be still and see that I am God' (CD XXII, Gilson 1958:543). Men enter it here and now and the church represents it, although not all in the church are its citizens. The earthly city must fade as the heavenly city grows. As Augustine saw it, from its very inception all history has been directed and governed by God and moves to a climax in a society in which God's will is perfectly to be accomplished.

Although his general conception of meaning in history was derived from the scriptures, the boldness of his pattern with its contrast between the city of the world and the city of God, and the fashion in which he fitted history into that framework was a striking contribution to the thought of mankind. It is significant that the City of God concerned itself with humanity. Its subject was the dealings of God with humanity, but its emphasis was upon what happens to mankind.

In this interest in humanity, visible institutions, and history, Augustine differed from the thinkers of the Eastern sections of the Catholic Church. They focused their attention upon God and tended to minimize mankind. In his emphasis Augustine was more than an individual. He was typical of a major

trend in the Western portions of the Catholic Church of what is right being called Latin Christianity. Augustine clearly recognized that, while he had been freed by the Gospel from slavery to the grosser sins of the flesh, he had not yet completely overcome man's fundamental sin, pride.

### **5.7 Augustine's legacy**

Augustine is one of the major church fathers who still today remain an intellectual power. Irrespective of school and denomination he attracts non-Christians and Christians, philosophers and theologians alike by his writings and makes them come to terms with his intentions and his person. Augustine has shaped Western theology and piety more than any other theologian; in this way he became the father of the mediaeval paradigm (Kung 1995:71). Augustine is repudiated by the East to a greater degree than perhaps any Western Church father.

The faith of the fathers should always be listened in the church; as Augustine expressed it, he could not believe the Gospel except the church has approved it. Augustine has been, after Paul, the most influential thinker in the history of Christian thought. According to Augustine Christianity should be presented not as a religion of works and the law but as a religion of grace (Kung 1995:295). Augustine's great achievement has often been praised and need not be emphasized further.



No figure in Christianity between Paul and Luther has exercised greater influence in the theology of the church than Augustine. He had worked intensively for the unity of the church. As a Christian he was tormented by the broken unity of the African church, and as a Neo-Platonist more than most he found the idea of unity a sign of the true and the good. For him, the one true church could in no way be represented by a particular church which encapsulated itself, but only by the universal church in communion with Jerusalem, Rome and the great Eastern communities.

The great *Ecclesia Catholica* expanding further and further and absorbing the world, endowed with sacraments and led by orthodox bishops, that church which Augustine so stressed here, was to become of the utmost significance for the paradigm of the Middle Ages. Of course Augustine too was well aware that this one, holy, apostolic, catholic Church will never be perfect on this earth. Some belong to the Church only with their body (*corpore*) and not with their heart (*corde*) (Kung 1995:290).

The earthly city is, simply mankind in rebellion against God. Augustine had no wish to draw a sharp distinction between the institutional church and a spiritual church of the saints. It is true that within the church and a spiritual church of the saints. It is true that within the Catholic Church a distinction exists between its true members and false brethren, but the two cannot be told apart in this life, and are intimately linked together by the bonds of Christian fellowship. The fact that the church on earth is a mixed society of saints and sinners does not prevent it from 'being even now the kingdom of

Christ and the kingdom of heaven' (Vardy 1999:45). In Augustine's own world and mind the distinction between the city of God and the earthly city effectively coincided with that between the church and the Roman state. The *City of God* offers an interpretation of Roman history indebted to the pagan historians who had been critical of Roman imperialism, but gives it a new theological slant. As Augustine frankly recognized the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly are intermingled. He held that they are to continue to be entangled until the last judgment effects their separation.

## 5.8 Conclusion

What are the blind spots in our culture or our own lives that need to be exposed to the light of ancient wisdom? The church fathers belonged to an important intellectual tradition and wrestled with many of the some issues theologians, philosophers, pastors, and laypeople face today. Without the theology of Aurelius Augustine there would have been no theology of Thomas Aquinas. There is a great historical influence of Augustine's theology, which reaches deep into mediaeval theology and beyond. He is regarded among the greatest theologians of the Christian history.

One can say that he influenced the content and method of philosophy and theology up to the scholasticism of the thirteen-century. The programme of scholasticism, which is defined by Anselm of Canterbury's *credo ut intelligam*, goes back to Augustine. Augustine is not only most prolific of the early Church fathers but also the most in his interests far ranging.

There are so many themes one could select as the heart of his message: his doctrine of the individual human being, made in the image of the Trinity corrupted through the Fall, and refashioned through the grace of Christ. Augustine does not preach community in a way that minimizes the value or responsibilities of the individual.

Nevertheless, his stress on the community aspects of Christian life remains striking, and it has the leading theme of his books. Augustine slept peacefully on August 28, 430 as Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo, August 28 has since become the day on which Catholics honour him.

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