



## Teaching Augustine with Dr. Junius Johnson

### Lecture I: Introduction

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#### Introduction: Augustine of Hippo

*Overview of Augustine's life, times, major works and legacy.*

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#### Pronunciation and Naming Conventions

- Latin: *Augustinus*
- English variants: *AUGustine* vs. *AUGUSTine*

#### Historical and Cultural Background

- **Birth and Early Life**
  - Born in 354 AD in Thagaste, Numidia (modern-day Algeria) during the reign of Constantine's sons—a period noted for civil wars among rival claimants to the imperial throne.
  - This was during the decline of the Western Roman Empire, marked by political instability and external threats (e.g., the Huns).
- **Family and Social Standing**
  - Father: Patricius (Patrick), a pagan town councilor who converted to Christianity on his deathbed.
  - Mother: Monica, a devout Christian, later venerated as a saint.
  - Augustine's family status: Lower middle class in Roman terms, but financially meager means.

#### Imperial Politics and Succession

- **The Division of the Roman Empire**



- In the late 3rd century, Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into the Eastern and Western halves, each ruled by a senior (Augustus) and junior (Caesar) emperor.
- Constantine the Great reunified the empire but divided it again among his sons upon his death, leading to further instability.
- **Political Instability and Short-Lived Reigns**
  - Over Augustine's lifetime, the Western Empire saw a rapid turnover of emperors—between 11 to 14 emperors depending on the source—resulting in an average rule of only 5-7 years.
  - Many emperors met violent ends: some died in battle, others were assassinated, executed, or driven to suicide. Non-violent deaths included illnesses and strokes.
  - Notable figures include Julian the Apostate, who attempted to restore paganism, and the Arian Christian emperor Constantius II, who promoted Arianism across the empire.
- **Impact on Augustine's Worldview**
  - The political chaos and frequent changes in leadership contributed to a sense of instability and decline in the Western Empire, influencing Augustine's thoughts on the transient nature of earthly power and the importance of the eternal city of God.

## Augustine's Education and Early Career

- **Education**
  - Liberal arts education focused on rhetoric; strong in Latin but weak in Greek.
  - Struggled with academic motivation, influenced by classical Roman culture and rhetoric.
- **Early Career and Personal Life**
  - Engagement in debauchery and a long-term affair, resulting in a son, Adeodatus.
  - Achieved the prestigious position of rhetoric chair in Milan at age 30.

## Conversion to Christianity

- **Influences**
  - Significant influence of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and his mother, Monica.



- Conversion experience in 387 AD, followed by baptism by Ambrose.
- **Post-Conversion Life**
  - Augustine returned to Africa following the death of Monica, and founded a monastery.
  - Eventually ordained as a priest in 391 and became Bishop of Hippo in 395.

## Augustine's Theological Contributions and Legacy

- **Major Works**
  - *Confessions*: Spiritual autobiography, reflections on sin and grace.
  - *City of God*: Defense of Christianity against pagan criticism.
  - *On Christian Doctrine*: Guide to scriptural interpretation and Christian teaching.
- **Influence on Western Christianity**
  - Augustine is considered the most influential theologian in Western Christianity, with his writings shaping the core doctrines of the church:
    - the nature of God
    - the role of grace in salvation
    - the relationship between faith and reason
  - His theology of original sin, particularly his understanding of human depravity and the necessity of divine grace, became central to later Christian doctrine, influencing both Catholic and Protestant traditions.
  - Augustine's emphasis on introspection and the inner life of the soul in *Confessions* set the stage for later developments in Christian spirituality, particularly within monastic traditions and the broader practice of personal prayer and meditation.

## Controversial Aspects of Augustine's Legacy

- **Theological Disputes**
  - Augustine's rigorous opposition to Pelagianism led to the development of doctrines that emphasized predestination and the absolute necessity of divine grace
    - Overstatement in anti-Pelagian writings; lasting impact on doctrines of grace and free will.



- These ideas have continued to spark theological debates within Christianity.
- **Rhetorical Style**
  - Use of strong, sometimes divisive rhetoric in theological debates.
  - Augustine's forceful and sometimes polemical style in addressing heresies has been both praised for its clarity and criticized for contributing to a legacy of harsh theological disputes.

## Conclusion

- **Summary of Augustine's Impact**
  - Augustine's role in shaping Christian theology, particularly in the West, cannot be overstated. His contributions have defined key aspects of Christian doctrine, influenced countless theologians and philosophers, and continue to resonate in both religious and secular contexts.
  - The ongoing relevance of Augustine's works, from the profound personal reflections in *Confessions* to the sweeping theological vision of *City of God*, ensures that his thought remains a central point of reference in discussions on faith, morality, and the nature of human existence.