



PENGUIN



CLASSICS

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Confessions

Contents

	Page
Introduction	11
List of Dates of Events Recorded in the <i>Confessions</i>	19
THE CONFESSIONS	
BOOK I	21
<i>Childhood – Augustine goes to school at Thagaste and later at Madaura – He receives some religious instruction, but even when he is taken gravely ill, his baptism is deferred – He was ‘a great sinner for so small a boy’</i>	
BOOK II	43
<i>He spends a year at home before going to Carthage to continue his studies – The last of adolescence – He robs a pear-tree</i>	
BOOK III	55
<i>He goes to Carthage, where he abandons himself to a life of pleasure – Cicero’s Hortensius inspires him with the love of philosophy – He joins the Manichees as an aspirant – His mother Monica is deeply grieved but finds consolation in a vision</i>	
BOOK IV	71
<i>He becomes a teacher of rhetoric at Thagaste and takes a mistress – His interest in astrology – Grief at the death of a close friend leads him to look for consolation in the companionship of other friends at Carthage – He writes a book on Beauty and Proportion</i>	
BOOK V	91
<i>Faustus, a bishop of the Manichees, comes to Carthage – Augustine’s disappointment on finding that Faustus is unable to settle the discrepancies between the doctrines</i>	

of the Manichees and known scientific facts – Against the wishes of his mother he leaves for Rome, where he still associates with the Manichees but no longer has any firm belief in their doctrines – Instead he is attracted by the teaching of the Neo-Platonists – He obtains an appointment as professor of rhetoric in Milan – He listens to the sermons of Saint Ambrose and is impressed but not convinced – His final rejection of the theories of the Manichees

BOOK VI

111

Monica comes to Milan – Augustine listens regularly to the sermons of Saint Ambrose and realizes that his previous conceptions of Christian doctrine were mistaken – He learns that Scripture is not always to be understood in a literal sense – His ambitions in the world and difficulties over chastity still prevent him from accepting the faith – He plans to get married and dismisses his mistress

BOOK VII

133

He still has difficulty in thinking of God as a spiritual Being and in finding an explanation of the problem of evil, but is helped by the Platonist books – He realizes that evil is a perversion of the will, not a substance as the Manichees pretend – He begins to read the Epistles of Saint Paul

BOOK VIII

157

He is told of the conversion of Victorinus, the translator of Plotinus, and is eager to follow his example, but worldly ambition and difficulties over chastity hold him back – After hearing how two officers of the Emperor's court were converted by reading the story of Antony, the Egyptian monk, he goes into the garden of his house, where he hears a child's voice chanting words which he takes to be a divine message to himself – His conversion is complete and his mother is overjoyed

BOOK IX

181

He resigns his appointment and goes with his friends to a country house at Cassiciacum - At Easter the following year he returns to Milan, where he is baptized - With his mother and his friends he sets out to return to Africa - While they are awaiting ship at Ostia Augustine and Monica converse on the life of the saints in heaven - The death of Monica and an account of her life

BOOK X

207

Augustine asks his readers to thank God for his conversion and to pray for him - He considers the powers of the memory - Since all men long for happiness, they must know in some way what it is, but the only true happiness is in God - He examines his ability to master the various temptations of the body - If we have power to resist them, it is by God's grace - Only through Christ, the true Mediator, can we hope to be reconciled with God

BOOK XI

233

An explanation of the first verse of Genesis: 'In the Beginning God made heaven and earth' - God created the world in his Word alone, and therefore by the words 'In the Beginning' we must understand the Word of God - The question 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' is answered by explaining that when there was no creation there was no time - It is therefore nonsense to ask what God was doing 'then' - This leads to a discussion of the problem of time

BOOK XII

281

The meaning of Genesis 1: 1, 2: 'In the Beginning God made heaven and earth. The earth was invisible and without form, and darkness reigned over the deep' - 'Heaven' here means the spiritual creation, the Heaven of Heavens, and 'earth' the formless matter of which the material world was to be made, whereas the heaven above

our earth is the firmament which God created on the second day - On the third day he made the earth and the sea by giving form to the formless matter which he had created before the first day - How the Heaven of Heavens differs from the material creation - A discussion of other interpretations of the verse: "In the Beginning God made heaven and earth"

BOOK XIII

311

An allegorical interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis

The light which God created on the first day is the spiritual creation, which became light by the reflection of God's glory - The darkness, which God divided from the light, represents the soul still without God's light

The firmament which separates the waters above from the waters below is a figure of the Scriptures, which are like a shield held above us for our protection - Above it are the angels, safe in the presence of God

On the third day the waters of earth were gathered together to form the sea, and God commanded the dry land to appear - The 'sea' means the human race, embittered by estrangement from God, and the 'dry land' which stands out from the sea represents the good soul - The dry land produces plants and trees which bear fruit in works of mercy and charity

The lights which God set to shine in the firmament on the fourth day are wisdom and knowledge given to men so that those who possess them also shine like lights in the world

On the fifth day God commanded the waters to bring forth moving creatures, that is, signs and sacraments by which men are convinced of the truth and are helped to overcome the temptations of the world - The winged things, which the waters were also commanded to produce, are the teachers who bring God's message to man

On the sixth day the earth was told to produce the living soul, that is, the soul which lives because it has

*faith and keeps itself intact from the love of the world –
Man was made in the likeness of God in that he was
given the gift of reason by which he might understand
God's truth – His rule over the animals is a symbol of
this and of the power of spiritual judgement given to the
Church – The plants given to man for his food represent
works of charity which nourish the soul*

*On the seventh day God rested, as we too shall rest
in eternity when our work in the world is done*

BOOK I

I

CAN any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty?¹ How magnificent His strength! How inscrutable His wisdom!² Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you *thwart the proud*.³ But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.

Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether a man is first to pray to you for help or to praise you, and whether he must know you before he can call you to his aid. If he does not know you, how can he pray to you? For he may call for some other help, mistaking it for yours.

Or are men to pray to you and learn to know you through their prayers? *Only, how are they to call upon the Lord until they have learned to believe in him? And how are they to believe in him without a preacher to listen to?*⁴

*Those who look for the Lord will cry out in praise of him,*⁵ because all who look for him shall find him, and when they find him they will praise him. I shall look for you, Lord, by praying to you and as I pray I shall believe in you, because we have had preachers to tell us about you. It is my faith that calls to you, Lord, the faith which you gave me and made to live in me through the merits of your Son, who became man, and through the ministry of your preacher.

¹ Ps. 144: 3 (143: 3). In references to the Psalms the number according to the Vulgate is given first. This is followed by the Authorized Version number in brackets. ² Ps. 146: 5 (147: 5). ³ 1 Pet. v. 5. ⁴ Rom. 10: 14.

⁵ Ps. 21: 27 (22: 26).

2

How shall I call upon my God for aid, when the call I make is for my Lord and my God to come into myself? What place is there in me to which my God can come, what place that can receive the God who made heaven and earth? Does this then mean, O Lord my God, that there is in me something fit to contain you? Can even heaven and earth, which you made and in which you made me, contain you? Or, since nothing that exists could exist without you, does this mean that whatever exists does, in this sense, contain you? If this is so, since I too exist, why do I ask you to come into me? For I should not be there at all unless, in this way, you were already present within me. I am not in hell, and yet you are there too, for *if I sink down to the world beneath, you are present still*.¹ So, then, I should be null and void and could not exist at all, if you, my God, were not in me.

Or is it rather that I should not exist, unless I existed in you? For *all things find in you their origin, their impulse, the centre of their being*.² This, Lord, is the true answer to my question. But if I exist in you, how can I call upon you to come to me? And where would you come from? For you, my God, have said that you *fill heaven and earth*,³ but I cannot go beyond the bounds of heaven and earth so that you may leave them to come to me.

3

Do heaven and earth, then, contain the whole of you, since you fill them? Or, when once you have filled them, is some part of you left over because they are too small to hold you? If this is so, when you have filled heaven and earth, does that part of you which remains flow over into some other place? Or is it that you have no need to be contained in anything, because you contain all things in yourself and fill them by reason of the very fact that you contain them? For the things which you fill by containing them do not sustain and support you as a water-vessel supports the liquid which fills it. Even if they were broken to pieces, you would not flow out of them and away. And when you pour yourself out over us, you are not drawn down to us but draw us up to yourself: you are not scattered away, but you gather us together.

¹ Ps. 138: 8 (139: 8).² Rom. 11: 36.³ Jer. 23: 24.

You fill all things, but do you fill them with your whole self? Or is it that the whole of creation is too small to hold you and therefore holds only a part of you? And is this same part of you present in all things at once, or do different things contain different parts of you, greater or smaller according to their size? Does this mean that one part of you is greater and another smaller? Or are you present entirely everywhere at once, and no single thing contains the whole of you?

4

What, then, is the God I worship? He can be none but the Lord God himself, for *who but the Lord is God?* *What other refuge can there be, except our God?*¹ You, my God, are supreme, utmost in goodness, mightiest and all-powerful, most merciful and most just. You are the most hidden from us and yet the most present amongst us, the most beautiful and yet the most strong, ever enduring and yet we cannot comprehend you. You are unchangeable and yet you change all things. You are never new, never old, and yet all things have new life from you. You are the unseen power that brings decline upon the proud. You are ever active, yet always at rest. You gather all things to yourself, though you suffer no need. You support, you fill, and you protect all things. You create them, nourish them, and bring them to perfection. You seek to make them your own, though you lack for nothing. You love your creatures, but with a gentle love. You treasure them, but without apprehension. You grieve for wrong, but suffer no pain. You can be angry and yet serene. Your works are varied, but your purpose is one and the same. You welcome all who come to you, though you never lost them. You are never in need yet are glad to gain, never covetous yet you exact a return for your gifts. We give abundantly to you so that we may deserve a reward; yet which of us has anything that does not come from you? You repay us what we deserve, and yet you owe nothing to any. You release us from our debts, but you lose nothing thereby. You are my God, my Life, my holy Delight, but is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those who are silent about you! For even those who are most gifted with speech cannot find words to describe you.

¹ Ps. 17: 31 (18: 31).

Who will grant me to rest content in you? To whom shall I turn for the gift of your coming into my heart and filling it to the brim, so that I may forget all the wrong I have done and embrace you alone, my only source of good?

Why do you mean so much to me? Help me to find words to explain. Why do I mean so much to you, that you should command me to love you? And if I fail to love you, you are angry and threaten me with great sorrow, as if not to love you were not sorrow enough in itself. Have pity on me and help me, O Lord my God. Tell me why you mean so much to me. *Whisper in my heart, I am here to save you.*¹ Speak so that I may hear your words. My heart has ears ready to listen to you, Lord. Open them wide and *whisper in my heart, I am here to save you.* I shall hear your voice and make haste to clasp you to myself. Do not hide your face away from me, for I would gladly meet my death to see it, since not to see it would be death indeed.

My soul is like a house, small for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it. It contains much that you will not be pleased to see: this I know and do not hide. But who is to rid it of these things? There is no one but you to whom I can say: *if I have sinned unwittingly, do you absolve me. Keep me ever your own servant, far from pride.*² *I trust, and trusting I find words to utter.*³ Lord, you know that this is true. For have I not made my transgression known to you? Did you not remit the guilt of my sin?⁴ I do not wrangle with you for judgement,⁵ for you are Truth itself, and I have no wish to delude myself, for fear that my malice should be self-betrayed.⁶ No, I do not wrangle with you, for, *if you, Lord, will keep record of our iniquities, Master, who has strength to bear it?*⁷

But, dust and ashes though I am, let me appeal to your pity, since it is to you in your mercy that I speak, not to a man, who would simply laugh at me. Perhaps you too may laugh at me, but you will

¹ Ps. 34: 3 (35: 3). ² Ps. 18: 13, 14 (19: 12, 13). ³ Ps. 115: 10 (116: 10).

⁴ Ps. 31: 5 (32: 5). ⁵ See Jer. 2: 29. ⁶ See Ps. 26: 12 (27: 12).

⁷ Ps. 129: 3 (130: 3).

relent and have pity on me.¹ For all I want to tell you, Lord, is that I do not know where I came from when I was born into this life which leads to death – or should I say, this death which leads to life? This much is hidden from me. But, although I do not remember it all myself, I know that when I came into the world all the comforts which your mercy provides were there ready for me. This I was told by my parents, the father who begot me and the mother who conceived me, the two from whose bodies you formed me in the limits of time. So it was that I was given the comfort of woman's milk.

But neither my mother nor my nurses filled their breasts of their own accord, for it was you who used them, as your law prescribes, to give me infant's food and a share of the riches which you distribute even among the very humblest of all created things. It was also by your gift that I did not wish for more than you gave, and that my nurses gladly passed on to me what you gave to them. They did this because they loved me in the way that you had ordained, and their love made them anxious to give to me what they had received in plenty from you. For it was to their own good that what was good for me should come to me from them; though, of course, it did not come to me from them but, through them, from you, because you, my God, are the source of all good and *everywhere you preserve me.*² All this I have learned since then, because all the gifts you have given to me, both spiritual and material, proclaim the truth of it. But in those days all I knew was how to suck, and how to lie still when my body sensed comfort or cry when it felt pain.

Later on I began to smile as well, first in my sleep, and then when I was awake. Others told me this about myself, and I believe what they said, because we see other babies do the same. But I cannot remember it myself. Little by little I began to realize where I was and to want to make my wishes known to others, who might satisfy them. But this I could not do, because my wishes were inside me, while other people were outside, and they had no faculty which could penetrate my mind. So I would toss my arms and legs about and make noises, hoping that such few signs as I could make would show my meaning, though they were quite unlike what they were meant to mime. And if my wishes were not carried out, either because they had not been understood or because what I wanted would have harmed me, I

¹ See Jer. 12: 15. ² 11 Kings (2 Sam.) 23: 5.

'As a youth ... I had prayed to you for chastity and said "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!"

The son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, Saint Augustine spent his early years torn between conflicting faiths and world views. His *Confessions*, written when he was in his forties, recount how, slowly and painfully, he came to turn away from his youthful ideas and licentious lifestyle, to become instead a staunch advocate of Christianity and one of its most influential thinkers. A remarkably honest and revealing spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions* also address fundamental issues of Christian doctrine, and many of the prayers and meditations it includes are still an integral part of the practice of Christianity today.

In his introduction R. S. Pine-Coffin discusses Saint Augustine's intentions in writing his *Confessions* and the issues of translation. This edition also includes a list of dates of events recorded in the *Confessions*.

Translated with an introduction by R. S. PINE-COFFIN

P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

www.penguinclassics.com

Cover: Detail from
The Conversion of
St Augustine by Fra
Angelico, in the
Musée d'Art
Thomas Henry
Cherbourg (photo:
Consulair/
Bridgeman Art
Library)



Penguin Classics/Belgor

ISBN 978-0-14-044114-7



9 780140 441147