

St. augustine's
spiritual journey of
divine reverence as
evidenced in his
confess...



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Although Augustine of Hippo's early life was disordered and undisciplined, his adult life is marked by maturity and spiritual searching. His steadfast spiritual journey - one identified with penance and dedication - will lead him to a profound understanding of the message of Christ. He attains a refined reverence for the omnipotent will of God. Although St. Augustine lived at an age that was far removed from St. Francis Assisi's, some of the values cherished and preached by the latter is easily applicable to the former's life. Reverence is one such Franciscan value that is represented by Augustine's lifelong spiritual journey. The rest of this essay will highlight this connection by citing relevant passages from the Confessions as well as scholarly commentary given upon it.

One of the early influences on St. Augustine was the Greek theologian Plotinus, whose famous words 'alone with the Alone' made an impact on the young aspirant. This peculiar theory appeared so valid to the young Augustine because it relieved him from the moral conundrums upon which he was entangled. Further,

" by articulating God as the distant and perfect One, it allowed Augustine to think of ultimate reality apart from materialistic and this-worldly categories. Further, by removing God from this obviously ambiguous realm through a series of ontological buffers, it allowed Augustine to see how God is not directly implicated in evil. He could breathe easy again." (Barron, 2007)

St. Augustine of Hippo's early years was marked by confusion and unscrupulous behaviour. As a result there was no scope for spiritual development. In his early youth he believed in the Manichaean religion which

was full of superstition. His blind belief in astrology also hampered his intellect. It was not until his conversion to Christianity that Augustine came to realize his true calling. His reverence for life and its divine purpose began to dawn at that moment. One of the turning points in St. Augustine's progress is when he committed to upholding eternal matters - that which is spiritual and heavenly - over the temporal. He believed that Christian emperor Constantine's rise to power " was not necessarily the answer to biblical prophecy or a show of God's providence in an eternal Roman Empire." (Smither, 2007) This shows that Augustine was able to separate theology from surrounding politics at an early stage of his monkhood.

The sixth chapter of the Confessions is particularly helpful in understanding St. Augustine's spiritual growth. Here, shedding his adherence to ascetic isolation, Augustine contends that a spiritually fulfilling life is possible both in the presence of God as well as in the company of people. Thus, Augustine's outwardly ' selfish' pursuit of God " charitably benefited others while also exposing the deficiencies of humans to love. This, in turn, led him back to the presence of God for genuine satisfaction." (Smither, 2007) It is interesting to look at Augustine's philosophical antecedents in the lead up to his conversion in 386 A. D. Prior to this period he and his close friends tried living a ' happy life' as a community in Milan (Chadwick, 2008). It is a sign of his inner strength and conviction that despite the failure in Milan, he initiated similar philosophical and spiritual communities at Cassiciacum numerous other towns in the months preceding his baptism in 387. In this communal context " of pursuing God in the company of others, Augustine broke with

Cicero's classical idea of friendship (*amicitia*) toward a uniquely Christian understanding that he eventually termed *caritas*." (Smither, 2007)

Of the thirteen books that comprise the *Confessions*, it is only in the later half that St. Augustine contemplates Christianity in full measure. That too, it is in the eighth book that he finally converts to the religion. This shows that most of St. Augustine's spiritual journey is one of seeking than finding answers. The totem that the journey is itself the destination is true in this case, for all the years that was spent wandering in search of religious truth were not wasted. They were the rites of passage toward spiritual salvation. All the early struggles had actually increased St. Augustine's reverence for the Christian God. Understanding the nature and will of the Christian God was a central Augustinian preoccupation. For, everything else, including " culture, politics, nature, human relationships—is properly understood only in the measure that ultimate reality is grasped with at least a relative adequacy." (Barron, 2007) In the tradition of other Christian luminaries of his time, St. Augustine his entire spiritual quest was cantered on that question. At the end of his questioning, Augustine found a truth that liberated from ignorance. The dialectical process through which Augustine achieved spiritual wisdom is remarkably relevant to our time, and " that finding for ourselves the truth that he found is of great moment not only for our personal spiritual fulfillment but also for the health of our Church and culture." (Barron, 2007)

Works Cited

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