Augustine of Hippo as Pastor
500 Years After the Reformation
Fall 2017
HOM/TH 6/701

This course represents a joint project between St. Mark’s College/Corpus Christi and the Vancouver School of Theology to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Both sides of that tragic division in the church claimed, with some justification, to be Augustinian. That our two institutions—one Catholic, the other Protestant—can collaborate in this way a half-millenium on shows that God may be stitching back together what we sinners have pulled apart.

This course will explore Augustine’s works which are informed by his cultural, philosophical, theological perspectives as they shape his understanding as a Pastor. A distinctive feature of his early work as bishop is the extent to which he identifies with the perspective and condition of “the sheep”. His *Confessions*, composed around 397 in his early years as bishop, clearly identifies with the struggles, challenges and questions on a journey towards faith and conversion as an adult.

Looking back on his journey he marvels at how he has come to recognize the presence and the work of God throughout his infancy, childhood, adolescence and young adult. He discovers, in particular, how, unknown to himself at the time, God was using people around him and also texts he was reading in his public education.

A little later after the sack of Rome in 410, some Christians asked him to address the criticism from traditional Romans that the Emperor Theodosius’ abolition of pagan rites, temples and festivals in the 390s made the city vulnerable to attack. In his response in *City of God* Augustine not only refutes that criticism but reaches out to this audience with a comprehensive knowledge of and even appreciation for Roman literature, history, law, ethics, philosophy, and in a curious way religion. As pastor, Augustine is reaching out to a significant and influential constituency who are still opposed to the emerging dominance of Christianity. Then in this same text he goes on to review central themes in Scripture, belief and practice of Christians.

As he moves through both of these major texts, Augustine raises genuine pastoral concerns about some traditional practices such as music in Church, festivals around the tombs of the martyrs, use of relics, celebration of contemporary miracles. On some other social practices he does not demonstrate as much prophetic insight on issues such as the use of mistresses or the beating of wives, or the status of slaves.

In these two texts for a broad audience, Augustine does demonstrate his basic theological themes. Those theological perspectives become more sharpened in specifically theological controversies and more nuanced in his extensive commentaries and sermons on the Psalms. In his struggles with both the Donatists and even more with the Pelagians, Augustine employs his rhetorical expertise and his passion to defend central issues in the Christian church and life. In
his extensive correspondence, Augustine addresses many of these themes as they bear on individual cases and examples.

To get at his true pastoral vision we will examine his reflections on Christian doctrine and his treatment of the Psalms. We will examine Augustine’s uses of Scripture and of communal and personal prayer in his *Confessions*, and in his *Commentary on the Psalms*.

**Books to buy** (We will make selections from others available online)

Augustine’s *Confessions*, Trans. Sarah Ruden, Modern Library 2017. We will emphasize the narrative in I to IX.

Augustine’s *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, Trans. Henry Bettenson, *Penguin Classics*, 2003. We will focus on Book I for engagement with Roman culture, I, 35 on traditional Romans as “future citizens”, II, 21 on just society, II, 29 on noble Roman, V.24-26 on Christian Emperors, VIII, 1-12 on Platonism IX, 4-5 on Stoics, XIV, 10-17 pre-and post-lapsarian condition of humans, XIX, 7, 12 war, XIX, 26 on just society, XXI 13-17 everlasting punishment, XXII, 8 on contemporary miracles, XXII, 29-30 heaven.


Augustine *On Christian Teaching* (Selections)

Augustine *On the Trinity* (Selections)

Augustine’s *Letters* in Atkins and Dodaro, (Selections)


**Secondary Texts for further research**

A. Augustine: Biography, Encyclopedia, Texts, and Commentaries


B. Augustine: Theology, Themes and Issues


**Instructors**

From Vancouver School of Theology: Rev. Dr. Jason Byassee.

From St. Mark’s College: Dr. Paul C. Burns

Jason has a Ph.D. in Theology from Duke University. He has been a pastor with the United Methodist Church in North Carolina. He enjoys teaching Historical Theology, Biblical Interpretation, and Homiletics. Jason has published *Reading Augustine: A Guide to the Confessions* (2006) and *Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (2007) and in the same year he also published *Introduction to the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. He is currently working on a series of reflections on the last third of the Psalter.

Paul has a Ph.D. in Classics for University of Toronto, plus degrees in Theology from the University of St. Michael’s College and Oxford. Paul spent several years working in the Catholic Chaplaincy to UBC. He has taught the History of Christian Thought and World Religions at St. Mark’s and Corpus Christi Colleges, and in Department of Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies at the University of British Columbia. For many years he worked in the Team-taught program of Arts I at UBC. He is currently the Dean of Liberal Arts at Corpus Christi College. Paul edited a collection of essays for *Jesus in Twentieth-Century Literature, Art and Movies* (2007) and published *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on the Psalms* (2012). Hilary had composed this commentary a generation before Augustine. Then for a volume to honor Paul Mosca a colleague at UBC in 2014, Paul contributed
an analysis of a story from a Desert Father entitled “Child Sacrifice: A Polyvalent Story of Early Christian Piety.”

Learning Outcomes

After careful attention to lecture, readings, and assignments the student should be able to:

- Read a primary text well within historical and cultural context
- Identify some of Augustine’s pastoral concerns and initiatives
- Identify of the Scriptural and theological perspectives which inform these pastoral perspectives
- Distinguish Augustine’s perspectives from some other Christian authors in both the Reformation period and in our times
- Recognize different critical scholarly approaches to Augustine

Course Requirements

- Attend each week and participate in discussions
- Prepare short reports on background material
- Paper of 1,000 words (undergraduate) or 2,000 words (master’s level) on a major scholar due in week 4
- Paper of 2,500 words (undergraduate) or 3,000-4,000 (master’s level) words on a topic determined in discussion between student and instructors, due in week 8
- Undergraduate students: final exam.
- Master’s students training of homiletics especially: you will preach two sermons, one leaping off from the last two paragraphs of Book I of Confessions about the degree of goodness or sinfulness in humanity. The second will leap off from one of Augustine’s Psalm expositions (of your choosing) engaging a Reformation thinker on the same psalm. The goal is not a scholarly essay—but a sermon, informed by good scholarship, which edifies the gathered people of God.
- Other students: turn in a reflection on a modern literary assessment of Augustine such as Anthony Burgess’ 1985 instead of a final exam.

Grade Breakdown for St. Mark’s students (for students requiring a letter grade).

- Regular reports and contributions to discussion of assigned texts 15%
- Report on major scholar on Augustine (due week 5) 25%
- Formal Academic essay (due week 8) 35%
- Final exam or literary assessment 25%

For VST students: assignments (VST grades with narrative evaluations until the final grade, which will include a letter grade alongside evaluating how well a student has demonstrated core competencies). Homiletic track students will do the following assignments:

- Regular reports and contributions to discussion of assigned texts
- Report on major scholar on Augustine (due week 5)
- Sermon 1 drawing on Confessions (due week 3)
Tentative Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Students will have read Confessions 1

Be prepared to discuss the negative assessments of infancy and childhood throughout book 1 and to evaluate the negative assessment in 1.19 and then the positive assessment in 1.20. Some critics claim that Augustine is “guilt-ridden.” Use those two passages to develop your own judgement on him. Instructors will introduce themselves and their respective approaches to the material in the course. They will also explain the roles of students in preparation for each week and for contribution in each class.

Week 2: Students will read Confessions 2, 3 and 4.

Deal with initial characterization of his parents, the episode of the pear tree and its biblical antecedent. In Book 3 deals with Augustine’s experiences in Carthage. Account for the distinctive roles of Cicero. Assess Monica’s motives, methods and reactions in 3.11 and 31.12. Relate the cleric’s advice to the role of secular reading. Assess his characterization of his relationship with his mistress in 4.2 and 6.11 and 15. Deal with the discussion of astrology at 4.3 and the Liberal Arts at 4.16.

Week 3: Students will read Confessions 5, 6 and 7.

In Book 5, note parallels and contrasts in the roles of Faustus and Ambrose for Augustine’s intellectual development. At 5.8 Augustine appeals to Monica’s devotion to tombs of the martyrs in order to escape from Carthage. At 6.3 he cites Ambrose’s pastoral intervention to pout controls on this devotional practice. For Book 6 assess the mini-life of Alypius with the twin themes of sin and of providential intervention. At 7.3-5, Augustine sums up his two basic questions that require resolution. They are the source of evil and the omnipresence of God.

Week 4: Students will read Confessions 7 (continued) and 8.

Then at 7.9 and 10, his discovery of Neo-Platonism in Milan provides him with the philosophical tools to begin to address those two questions. Address the apparent equation Augustine makes between the books of the Platonists and the Gospel of John. In Book 8 deal with the two conversion stories of Victorinus and Antony. Assess the depth of the personal struggle and the biblical echoes in Augustine’s account of his and Alypius’ conversion at 8.12. Deal with the shared mystical passage overlooking another garden at 9.10.

Week 5: Students will read Confessions 9 and present their papers on a major scholar on Augustine.

In Book 9 Augustine describes his relationship with his son at 9.6 but the rest of the book is dominated by his mini-life of Monica. At 9.7 and then again at 9.12 he presents his hesitation and respect for the power of liturgical music. At 9.10 uses Monica to provide a version of the goal of the Christian life in the shared
mystical experience. Then in the concluding sections, he identifies the sin in Monica’s life. He raises the issue of physical abuse at the hands of her husband but offers somewhat circumscribed pastoral assessment. He uses Monica’s succinct words on two occasions to support a distinctive Christian approach to remembering the dead.

Week 6: Students will read City of God 1 and 2. 21-25 and 28-29.

Week 7: Students will read City of God 5.24-26 on Christian Emperors, 8.1-12 on Platonism, 9.4-5 on Stoicism and 14.14-17 on pre- and post-lapsarian human conditions.

Week 8: Students will read City of God 19.7 and 12 on war, 21 on just society, 21.13-17 on everlasting punishment, 22.8 on contemporary miracles, 21.29-30 on heaven.

Week 9: Students will read section from On the Trinity

Week 10: Students will read sections from On Christian Doctrine

Week 11: Students will read selections from Commentaries and Sermons on the Psalms

Week 12: Students will read selections from Commentaries and Sermons on the Psalms.

Week 13: Students will present short papers on Augustine’s influence on one of the following: Bonaventure, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Barth, or von Balthasar.