

CHAPTER H6

THE AGE OF AUGUSTINE (400 - 1300 A.D.)

THE SECOND PILLAR OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Emperor Constantine decreed in 313 A.D. that Christianity was an officially-tolerated religion in the Roman Empire. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church many years later said that was the year Constantine's mother (who had been put away by Constantine's father so he could marry into political power) converted to Christianity. The Vatican also said she made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and discovered the "true cross" and the "Holy Sepulcher," for which it dubbed her "Saint Helena."

Emperor Constantine shifted the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople in 330, a move that would result in the birth of two denominations. All Christians are part of Christ's body (**Ep 5:30**), and His body is the church (**Ep 1:22,23**). When speaking about the body of believers all over the Roman Empire, therefore, it was common to refer to it as the *universal* church in order to distinguish it from the *local* church. The word catholic means universal, so it was also referred to as the catholic church. When the capital of the Roman Empire was suddenly no longer Rome, the local preacher in Rome experienced a loss of prestige because he no longer was the preacher who rubbed elbows with high government officials. And the preacher, or bishop, in Constantinople suddenly found himself surrounded by royalty. These two Christian preachers then began a power struggle over which one had the most influence. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, several other carnal preachers, realizing it was no longer automatically assumed that the most prestigious bishop was the one whose congregation was in Rome, began promoting themselves as patriarch of Christianity. The preacher in Alexandria said his city was more centrally located and was the world's intellectual center of learning. The bishop in Antioch said believers were first called Christians in his town so he should be the most influential patriarch. And the guy in Jerusalem put forth his argument. All the local preachers and pewsters supported their patriarch because everybody wants to think he is somehow important. It turned into a huge, bitter dispute that eventually polarized around Constantinople and Rome. The Christians in the western part of the empire supported the pulpit-pounder in Rome, and the Christians in the eastern part of the realm supported the gospel preacher in Constantinople. Each of the two preachers increasingly referred to the body of believers as the "catholic church" in order to emphasize the unity of all believers – as well as to reinforce his authority so he'd be looked up to by all saints, not just those in his area. In 395 the Roman Empire split (and gradually died). Now there was less incentive to think of Christians as one body under the same Head, and the term "universal church" turned into "eastern universal church" or "eastern catholic church" and "western catholic church" or "Roman catholic church." The word catholic lost its original meaning, was capitalized, and became a denominational name as Christians increasingly identified themselves with their geographic denominations.

Over the years the military might of the Roman Empire waned along with its political unity, which made the decadent wealth of civilized communities tempting targets for plundering barbarians. In Mongolia huge mounted armies of Hsiung-nu warriors (called Huns for short) began spreading out. To the east they found their progress blocked by the Great Wall of China so they turned around and headed west across Asia and into Europe. Alaric, a Visigoth, sacked the city of Rome in 410 A.D. Sixty-six years later Attila the Hun ravaged France and Spain. As the Mongol hordes pillaged their way into Europe they created a westward migration of civilization. Like leaves swept up in a storm, many peoples, including the Alemanni, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, fled from the barbarians and settled in sparsely populated western Europe.

Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was born in Roman Africa and lived during all of this religious, political, and social upheaval. As a nineteen-year-old student he became a devoted enthusiast of philosophy. He had seen much about religion that disgusted him so he preferred living by unadorned Reason. He rejected the Christianity practiced by the catholic churches as too unphilosophic for any man who prides himself on his sophistication. The influence of Greek philosophy on the educated classes of these early centuries and the intellectual contempt with which they held Christianity cannot be overstated. Christianity's dependence upon faith in the unseen, belief in the unseen, and obedience to an unprovable Bible was nothing but contemptible, mindless superstition to those who had adopted Greek Reason as a way of life. In religion you were bound by doctrine, which meant you had to learn "God's truth" and then live by it. A man of philosophy, however, could escape the blinding rules of religion and live by the Natural truth revealed by his sincere and considered opinion. That was Augustine's "considered opinion" as a youth. When he matured his opinion of religion would change – and he would change religion.

At thirty years of age he went to Milan where he was introduced to the mix of philosophy and Christianity contained in the preaching and teaching of the Eight-Day Wonder himself, Bishop Ambrose. Ambrose's brand of sophisticated, intellectual Christianity appealed to Augustine immediately. Here was a cosmopolitan bishop who rejected the old superstition that true Biblical Christianity was supposed to subdue the Natural mind. Augustine agreed with Ambrose that Christianity *had* to be in accordance with the Natural mind because God gave us brains for a reason, and the Creator would *never* make our Natural minds at enmity against Him and His Natural Laws! Augustine quickly converted to Christianity, was baptized by the Eight-Day Wonder, and received a Wonderful education by the time he left Milan four years later. He learned that when the Bible says the *carnal mind* is enmity against God it isn't referring to the Natural mind, it is referring to *carnal knowledge – sex!* And when the Bible condemned the *lust of the flesh* it was obviously referring to *sexual desire*. He also learned that even emperors should submit themselves to the authority of the church.

Augustine was a bright young man who decided to write a Christian apology – not knowing it would become the foundation of Roman Catholicism for the next nine hundred years. Well, I really shouldn't call it a *Christian* apology because that might give you the wrong idea: His book was an apology for the *western* church – that's why it became so important to Roman Catholicism but not to Eastern Orthodoxy. Titled *The City of God*, he began writing it several years after the Visigoths sacked Rome, it took thirteen years to write, and he finished it in 426 when Celestine I was the bishop of Rome. He countered the criticism many people had for the way the Roman bishop's temporal power waxed as that of the empire waned. Augustine believed the western church was the one true church and the bishop of Rome was its legitimate head who, as God's agent on earth, had the authority to rule both church and state. Having God-ordained temporal power meant all people – even the Visigoths – should submit to the church. By cleverly appealing to human Reason rather than the Bible to support his doctrines, Augustine created a book that was very popular because it greatly appealed to that which was right in the opinion of carnal

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Christians who were more interested in politics and world events than in doctrine. His philosophy-based book was written as an apology for western Christianity quite simply because he lived in a geographic region loyal to the bishop of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church naturally adopted his book as an authoritative treatise on Christianity in order to legitimize its growing power. As the Roman Catholic Church grew in temporal power it became the foundation of Western civilization. The Eastern Orthodox Church never became the dominant power in Asia that Roman Catholicism was in Europe, and the eastern churches of Christianity never adopted Augustine's philosophy-leavened book, and, therefore, Asia remained relatively unaffected by philosophy. Yes, it is true that Protestants shaped much of later Western civilization, but do not underestimate the significance of the fact that the founders of Protestant denominations like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and King Henry VIII (along with all of his Anglican clergy) were Roman Catholics until well into their adult years. Calvin was an avid student of Augustine, and Luther was an Augustinian monk. All leaders of the Protestant Reformation were admiring students of Augustine.

In order to get an idea of how rapidly Augustine's teachings spread and how completely they were accepted we need but to look at three men. **Vincent of Lérins** was a contemporary of Augustine's, dying in 450 – just twenty years after Augustine died. A powerful intellect in his own right, Vincent despised Augustine's doctrine. But because of Augustine's popularity, and because Vincent was fearful of destroying his own reputation if he openly attacked Augustine as a heretic, he dealt with Augustine obliquely. In one famous passage, for example, Vincent disdainfully but revealingly refers to Augustine's doctrine with sarcasm: "What is everywhere, what is always, what is by all people believed." The Christian masses – always slow when it comes to doctrine – wouldn't realize Vincent was right about Augustine until 800 years later.

Another example is **Saint Leo I** who was bishop of Rome from 440-461 – just a decade after Augustine died. Leo used Augustine's teachings to solidify his tenuous control over other bishops. He cautioned the bishop in Thessalonica, for example, that although he was the local authority, he was to be subordinate to Leo. Leo also put Augustine's views about sex into practice by requiring preachers under his control to be celibate.

Our third example is **Saint Gregory I**, who idolized Augustine and is indicative of Augustine's influence on the doctrinal development of the still-evolving Roman Catholic denomination. Gregory, also called Gregory the Great, was the local bishop of Rome from 590-604, which means Augustine had been dead for one hundred and sixty years. Many earlier preachers had tried, with limited success, to centralize western denominational control by making other preachers and congregations acknowledge the bishop of Rome as their supreme earthly authority. Gregory is called the Great because after the local churches elected him as their overall bishop he amazed people by successfully subjugating the congregations of four areas, Italy, Spain, Gaul, and England. He also took steps to acquire permanent and independent real estate for his governing church – land that would later become the Papal States. Gregory was a Bible-rejecter whose theology was formed *almost* exclusively from the writings of Augustine. (If you believe everything the encyclopedia says you will want to read that last sentence without the word I added, *almost*, because the encyclopedia says, "He was completely dependent upon the teaching of St. Augustine.") For example, Gregory put Augustine's teaching that even pagans were to be subject to the rule of the western church into action by ordering Christian rulers in predominantly pagan areas to use warfare to subjugate those of other religions. It was a very successful tactic in spreading the dominion of the Roman bishop. Thus it was that Augustine established the ideology, and pastor Gregory established the precedent that future popes and Protestant leaders would use to justify the bloody atrocities of their religious wars. I say again: Neither side acted in accordance with the Bible; they went by "Thus saith Augustine." That is carnality, and it made what they did – no matter what it was – enmity against God. Because he successfully formalized a number of loosely affiliated congregations into a denomination, many historians call Gregory the first pope. The Roman Catholic Church claims the Apostle Peter was the man who started the denomination and was therefore the first pope. You and I, however, can see that without Augustine there would be no Catholic Church.

Therefore Augustine – not the Roman Empire and not the Roman Catholic Church – is the Second Pillar of Western – not Eastern – civilization. Alexander the Great was the First Pillar because he conquered the world, made Greek the universal language of the world, and Hellenized the world. Anyone who studied the Greek language back then, and anyone who studies the Greek language now, also studies "the Classics" of the Greek philosophers. But all of Alexander's work was almost wiped out by barbarians like the Huns, the Vandals, and the Visigoths who, along with their raping and pillaging, vandalized the great centers of philosophic learning and destroyed their Classical libraries. Then when the Roman Empire collapsed, social order collapsed with it. Education and law enforcement became almost non-existent. All the teachings of men like Aristotle and Ambrose were in danger of being obscured by the approaching Dark Ages. As civilization collapsed, Roman Catholicism itself was in danger of becoming just another insignificant little congregation on the Tiber River. Until Augustine wrote his book, *The City of God* convinced western Christians they needed to rally around Rome. Because of Augustine's convincing philosophy the Roman Catholic Church survived the barbarians, survived the split into east and west, and survived the independence-craving sovereignty of various Christian kings who would have preferred local denominations pastored by subjects under their control. Because of Augustine the Roman Catholic Church grew into one of the most powerful organizations in history. At a time when fledgling philosophy was being eradicated from society and openly condemned from the pulpit, Augustine gave it sanctuary in the church by wrapping it in sheep's clothing.

Because he was so instrumental in making Christianity a Reasonable religion and in rescuing it from the "narrow-minded dogmatic literalism of old-fashioned superstition", Augustine is considered – along with Aquinas – one of the two greatest Christian thinkers in history. The encyclopedia says about Augustine, "His mind was the crucible in which the religion of the New Testament was most completely fused with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy; and it was also the means by which the product of this fusion was transmitted to the Christendoms of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism."

Like his mentor Ambrose and all other preachers of the day, Augustine publicly repudiated the use of philosophy's secular Reason in Christianity. You simply could not get away with openly using pagan guidelines for thought back then. But, like Ambrose and many of his Hellenized contemporaries (and, as we saw earlier, many Old Testament saints), Augustine couldn't stop himself from using carnal Reason *when it seemed appropriate*. He "borrowed" Plato's "proof" of Pythagoras' theory of the **immortality of the unregenerate soul** and "Christianized" it: Augustine said all men agree that God exists. God is eternal, and the existence of God is an eternal Truth. Man could not know eternal truths unless he had something eternal in him. Therefore, since God the Spirit made man a "living soul" by giving him the "breath of life" (**Ge 2:7**) so man could know Him, all men must have eternal souls with the ability to tune into God's spiritual truths because man is made in the image of God. Therefore, all men – even the unregenerate – have immortal souls and are all God's children. But the Bible makes it clear that both humans and animals have souls, so it was argued that animal souls could not be immortal like those of humans

because, unlike humans, animals are not (it was incorrectly thought back then) capable of Reasonable thought. Augustine also borrowed from the Greek “know thyself”: Since God is love and God is good, love is good. Therefore, if we tune into our love and follow its lead we will be doing good. “Love, and do what you will” he said.

The Greeks had said God’s eternal laws were used when He created the Natural Laws governing the cosmos. Man is part of Nature. So we must get in touch with the love God put in us so we can find God. This is accomplished in two ways. First, quiet reflection (just like the Greeks taught) can lead to and reveal truth. Seclusion helps (this led to monastic orders). Second, a strictly ascetic life would help overcome the lusts of the flesh. In this area Augustine not only built upon the sexual paranoia of his mentor, Ambrose, he went way beyond it. (Here I’m going to combine some of his ideas with the doctrines that evolved from them in the Catholic Church.) **Thinking carnality had a meaning related to sex**, he taught that sex was a hindrance to the Christian life and must be strictly controlled and curtailed. He said sexual intercourse was a “mass of perdition.” And since this sinful act is how all children are conceived, every person becomes a child of sin at conception. Therefore, Jesus was sinless because His birth wasn’t due to Joseph and Mary having nasty sex. Even though all babies are in the womb because of sinful sex, salvation is available via the Virgin Mary. Salvation is partly attributed to her because she brought forth the Savior without sex. And Jesus never had sex, either. We need to follow their examples. This proved the sinfulness of sex and would result in the Catholic doctrine that Mrs. Joseph never in her life had sex with her husband – she remained sinless to the end. Sinless? How could she be sinless if she, too, was conceived when her parents had sinful sex? To rectify that problem the Vatican announced the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary. By a miracle God made sure His Mother was not conceived in sin like everybody else, she lived a virginal, sinless life, and therefore, just as the sinless Christ ascended into heaven after His death, so too did Mary ascend into heaven where she sits as the Queen of Heaven and as Co-Redemptrix with her Son.

The **Augustinian aversion for sex** not only led to the rule that Catholic priests couldn’t marry; it also had a **major influence on “Christian morality”** in later centuries when pagan morality (morality is not a Biblical concept) would be borrowed from Greek philosophy and incorporated into Christianity. In fact, Augustine denounced prostitution as “sinful” (for the first time in history...but nobody took it seriously until centuries later) because it was “carnal.” He built upon the teachings of his mentor, Ambrose, and said the church must rule both the spiritual world and the temporal world. Augustine’s writings are still used by Catholic and Protestant theologians and are included in religious courses of instruction. He is exalted as a “Master of Theology”, and his impact on Christianity and Western civilization cannot be overstated. For example, his incorporation of the pagan Greek doctrine of the **immortality of the unregenerate human soul** into Christianity has become a foundational doctrine of many modern denominations. Because all men – including pagans – have everlasting life, Augustine Reasoned, they will spend eternity in one of two places when they die. Those who are members of Christ’s one true western religion would go to heaven. All others would go to hell. This doctrine of Augustine’s caused verses like **Josh 11:11; Ps 89:48; Ec 3:18,19; Jb 12:10/Re 16:3; and Ezek 18:20** to gradually lose their literal meaning. His teachings caused the Vatican to launch crusades against Christians who believed that only the *second* body, which is *spiritual* (**Mt 10:28; 1 Co 15:44**), has everlasting life because it is the result of the new birth from Christ the quickening *spirit* (**1 Co 15:45**), and that the natural body gotten during the first birth, which is from Adam, is going nowhere but the grave (**1 Co 15:44,45,47,55**). Augustine’s pagan doctrine buried the real significance of the division of the human race in Abraham’s day.

Augustine’s use of Reason – something for which God caused Christians to suffer horrible deaths in the Old Testament – as a legitimate part of Christianity set the stage for philosophy’s eventual official acceptance and exaltation during the Enlightenment/Age of Reason. And that would result in the greatest and most rapid change in society in the history of mankind – something that would not be equaled until the beginning of Christ’s Thousand-Year Reign (and then later on the Eighth Day). Augustine’s impact was so great that an appreciative Vatican didn’t just make *him* a saint; it also canonized the woman who gave him birth, Saint Monica.