

AUGUSTINE, THE FATHER OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

“Writers of the fourth century were prone to describe many practices as Apostolic Institutions which certainly had no claim to be so regarded.”

– Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p. 484.¹⁷⁵

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A. Augustine's Early Life

Augustine was considered as “the father of Roman Catholicism,”¹⁷⁶ and rightly so, because his attitude and theological thinking permeate it. “The Roman Catholic Church has found special satisfaction in the institutional or ecclesiastical aspects of the doctrines” of Augustine.¹⁷⁷

Born on November 13, A.D. 354, in Tagaste, Numidia (now the modern Souk-Ahras, Algeria),¹⁷⁸ he was named Aurelius Augustinus.¹⁷⁹ His father was Patricius (died about 371 A.D.), a pagan who “later converted to Christianity.”¹⁸⁰ His mother was Monica, “a devout Christian who laboured untiringly for her son’s conversion.”¹⁸¹

B. Augustine's Conversion

Augustine studied as a rhetorician and lawyer in the North African cities of Tagaste, Madaura and Carthage.¹⁸² Between the ages of 15 and 30, he lived with a Carthaginian

¹⁷⁵ *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), 3:484. Fifteen volumes. Special edition published under the auspices of Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee. Also quoted in O. C. Lambert, *Catholicism Against Itself*, 1:18.

¹⁷⁶ Augustine is called “the greatest of the Latin Fathers and one of the most eminent Western doctors of the Church” (MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; also Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia [Columbus, OH: Funk & Wagnalls Inc., 1993], 3:58. Now abbreviated as FWNE).

¹⁷⁷ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

¹⁷⁸ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”. See also Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia 2000, art. “Saint Augustine”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁷⁹ GME 2000, art. “Augustine.”

¹⁸⁰ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁸¹ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁸² MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

woman whose name is unknown,¹⁸³ and had a son by her, named Adeodatus (Latin for “gift of God”)¹⁸⁴ Then he adopted Manichaeism.¹⁸⁵

It was while he was in Rome as a teacher of rhetorics that he met Ambrose, the bishop of Rome, whose preaching and life profoundly influenced him.¹⁸⁶ In 386 A.D., “after an intense personal struggle,” and inspired by his reading of Pauline epistles, he “underwent a life-transforming conversion.”¹⁸⁷ Along with his natural son Adeodatus, he was baptized by Ambrose on Easter Eve in 387 A.D.¹⁸⁸

Augustine became bishop of Hippo (modern Annaba, Algeria) in 395.¹⁸⁹ As bishop, he was the champion of “catholic doctrine,” as he understood it, relentlessly opposing those whom he considered enemies of the truth.

C. Augustine’s Debates

Two groups of schismatics, whom the Western Church considered as “heretics,” had stood out as Augustine’s religious enemies: The Donatists and the Pelagianists.¹⁹⁰ Donatism is a “Christian movement of the 4th and 5th centuries which claimed that the validity of the sacraments depends on the moral character of the minister... They held that the Church must exclude from its membership people guilty of serious sin, and that therefore no sacrament could rightly be performed by a traditor [that is, one who had been guilty of serious lapses, such as handing over copies of the Scripture to oppressive forces of the Roman emperor].”¹⁹¹ Augustine engaged the Donatists in polemics, both orally and in

¹⁸³ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁸⁴ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁸⁵ Augustine was a member of this sect for 9 years (MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”). The sect was founded by Mani, a Persian of aristocratic origin, who taught the following: That the body is material and therefore evil; that the human soul is spiritual, a fragment of the divine light, and must be redeemed from its imprisonment by the body and the world; that the path of redemption is by knowledge, imparted through a succession of divine messengers which include Buddha, and Jesus and ends in Mani; that with this knowledge the soul can conquer the carnal desires that imprison it, and so ascend to the divine realm (MEPS 2005, art. “Manichaeism.”).

¹⁸⁶ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:58.

¹⁸⁷ GAE, 2:320-321.

¹⁸⁸ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

¹⁸⁹ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

¹⁹⁰ “A vigorous advocate of Roman Catholicism, Augustine developed many of his doctrines while attempting to resolve theological conflicts with Donatism and Pelagianism, two heretical Christian movements.” (MEPS 2005, art. “Augustine of Hippo”).

¹⁹¹ The movement “arose as a result of the consecration of a bishop of Carthage in AD 311. One of the three consecrating bishops was believed to be a traditor, that is, one of the ecclesiastics who had been guilty of handing over their copies of the Bible to the oppressive forces of the Roman emperor Diocletian. An opposition group of 70 bishops, led by the primate of Numidia, formed itself into a synod at Carthage and declared the consecration of the bishop invalid... The synod excommunicated the Carthaginian bishop when he refused to appear before it. Four years later, upon the death of the new bishop, the theologian Donatus the Great became bishop of Carthage; the movement later took its name from him. As a result of the desire of the Roman emperor Constantine I to reach a settlement, the dispute was submitted to various ecclesiastical bodies and in 316 to the emperor himself; in each case the consecration of the bishop elected originally, in 311, was upheld. Constantine at first attempted to suppress the Donatists by force, but in 321 he adopted a

writing. A book he wrote against this sect is titled *De Baptismo, contra Donatistas* (On Baptism, Against the Donatists, 400-401).¹⁹²

Pelagianists were followers of the Roman-British monk named Pelagius (355-425), “a man of considerable learning and austere moral character.”¹⁹³ Pelagianism “emphasizes human free will as the decisive element in human perfectability and minimizes or denies the need for divine grace and redemption.”¹⁹⁴

D. Augustine and the Doctrine of Original Sin

Against the Celtic monk Pelagius’ claim that Adam’s sin had defiled him alone and that Adam’s descendants retain a natural capacity for goodness, Augustine, the “catholic”¹⁹⁵ faith defender,” propounded “the doctrine of original sin and divine grace, divine sovereignty and predestination.”¹⁹⁶ He held that “human spiritual disobedience had resulted in a state of sin that human nature was powerless to change,”¹⁹⁷ which is also known as the doctrine of “total depravity.”¹⁹⁸ In Augustine’s theology, men “and women are saved by the gift of divine grace.”¹⁹⁹

Against Manichaeism, with its doctrine that the flesh—and all matter—is inherently evil, and that the salvation of the flesh lies only in its having knowledge coming from appointed messengers such as Buddha and Mani, Augustine, the one-time Manichaean disciple, “vigorously defended the place of free will in cooperation with grace.”²⁰⁰

E. Augustine: The Church as the Final Authority

To Augustine, the church stands as the symbol of authority, both internal and external. This authority is all-encompassing, being the kind of authority that the Roman Church exercises over the bodies and minds of its followers. The Church, not the Bible, has

policy of tolerance; the policy was reversed, however, by his youngest son, Constans I, who instituted a regime of persecution. In 411 a debate between the Donatist and Catholic bishops was held at Carthage to settle the dispute. The outcome was once again unfavourable to the Donatists. As a result, they were deprived of all civil rights in 414, and, in the following year, their assemblies were banned under penalty of death. The movement then began to decline, but it survived until the Moorish conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries.” (MEPS 2005, art. “Donatism”; FWNE, 8:293).

¹⁹² MEPS 2005, art. “Augustine of Hippo.”

¹⁹³ Pelagius denied the existence of original sin and the need for infant baptism. He argued that the corruption of the human race is not inborn, but is due to bad example and habit, and that the natural faculties of humanity were not adversely affected by Adam’s fall. Human beings can lead lives of righteousness and thereby merit heaven by their own efforts” (MEPS 2005, art. “Pelagianism”; see also FWNE, 20:208).

¹⁹⁴ MEPS 2005, art. “Pelagianism”; see also FWNE, 20:208.

¹⁹⁵ “The term “catholic” (Greek, *katholikos*, “universal”, from *katholou*, “in general”) “was first used in the letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans (about AD 110). The term was later used by Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* (Miscellanies). The technical use of the word seems to have been established by the beginning of the 3rd century” (MEPS 2005, art. “Catholic Church”).

¹⁹⁶ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

¹⁹⁷ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

¹⁹⁸ This doctrine is fully discussed in my book “The Presbyterian Church in the Light of the Scriptures.”

¹⁹⁹ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

²⁰⁰ MEPS 2005, art. “St. Augustine of Hippo”; FWNE, 3:59.

authority, so the argument goes. The church came before the Bible and produced the Bible. The Bible only has authority because the Church declares it so. The authority of the church gives authority to the Word of God, so they say. And Augustine must be credited for crystallizing this philosophy that has become a dogma of the Roman church.

F. Augustine and the Use of Force

Because Augustine viewed the church as the final authority, he also taught that all unconverted and rebellious men must be brought into this church (since she is the only way to salvation, and God has no other) even through the use of brute force. Augustine, says Philip Schaff, the church historian, first held “*the truly evangelical view that heretics and schismatics should not be violently dealt with, but won by instruction and conviction; but after the year 400 he turned and retracted from this view, in consequence of his experience with the Donatists, with whom he endeavoured in vain to convert by disputation and writing... Thenceforth, he was led to advocate the persecution of heretics, partly by his doctrine of the Christian State, partly by the seditious excesses of the fanatical Circumcilliones, partly by the hope of the effect of temporal punishments, and partly by the false interpretation of the Cogite intrare, in the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:23).*”²⁰¹ Philip Schaff adds: “*The great authority of his [Augustine’s] name was often afterward made to justify the cruelties from which he himself would have shrunk with horror.*”²⁰²

Romish persecutors of later years appealed to the writings of Augustine as their reason for exterminating non-Catholics, to force them to submit to their brand of “orthodoxy,” a concept that later bloomed into the “Office of the Holy Inquisition.”²⁰³

G. Augustine and His Attitude Toward The Word of God

Augustine regards the Word of God as a means that could be done away with when love has reached its highest point.²⁰⁴ Take note that the Word is the only means whereby God exercises control over the human beings who submit to His authority; and when even that is being dispensed with, an abnormal situation occurs.

What then were the consequences of this attitude?

(a) It was the beginning point for the introduction of traditions to supplant the Word of God. The Church of Rome continually invokes the traditions of men like Augustine to justify her practices.

(b) It became the basis for the interpretation that was destined to lead people further away from the truth of the scriptures. Traditions thus makes void the Word.

²⁰¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:144-145.

²⁰² Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:145.

²⁰³ See “Inquisition,” MEPS 2005; FWNE, 14:95-97.

²⁰⁴ Just here we are being reminded of the early Mormon doctrine of “blood atonement,” in which sinners and apostates would have their blood spilled on the ground, in order for them to be saved!

(c) This loose attitude toward biblical authority led to the founding of the great apostate church, the Church of Rome.

THOMAS AQUINAS, THE “ANGELIC DOCTOR” OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

“It would be an enormous mistake to suppose that the pope is considered infallible, even on matters of faith, in his ordinary conversation; nor is he believed to be so in preaching; nor necessarily in his writings concerning matters of religion.”— Plain Facts, p. 38.²⁰⁵

Aquinas, the Catholic Church’s “Angelic Doctor”
Aquinas and the Dogma of Papal Infallibility
Aquinas and Natural Theology
Aquinas and The Worship of Dead Saints
Aquinas and the Doctrine of Transubstantiation
Aquinas and the Supremacy of the Church Over the State
Aquinas and the Catholic View on Sex and Morality
His Disagreement with the Dogma of Immaculate Conception

A. Thomas Aquinas, Catholic Church’s “Angelic Doctor”

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) was called the “angelic doctor”²⁰⁶ and prince of the scholastics of the Middle Ages.²⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas had two outstanding abilities: (a) The great ability to systematize things, and (b) the great power of exposition, as a result of which many books came out of his pen. His most important work is the *Summa Theologica*.²⁰⁸ To Thomas Aquinas goes the credit of forming a complete system of Catholic dogmas. He formulated and assembled the teachings of the Roman church over the years. “His thought,” says Ralph McInerny, “has become more or less the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.”²⁰⁹ The work of the Council of Trent of later

²⁰⁵ Quoted from O. C. Lambert, *Catholicism Against Itself*, 1:25.

²⁰⁶ FWNE, 2:223; MEPS 2005, art. “Medieval Philosophy.”

²⁰⁷ Otherwise known as Thomas d’Aquino, the son of an Italian count, he was born in his family’s castle at Roccasecca, central Italy. “At age 5, he was placed by his parents in the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino,” where his uncle was the abbot of the monastery. When Monte Cassino became the scene of a battle between the papal and imperial troops, Aquinas left the monastery. At the University of Naples, he came into contact with the Dominicans. Against the wishes of his family, he became a Dominican friar in 1244. (GAE, 2:94, 95; GME 2000, art. “Thomas Aquinas”). See also MEPS 2005, art. “Thomas Aquinas”; FWNE, 2:223.

²⁰⁸ This work filled 22 volumes in the English translation. It is divided into three parts: (a) Part I treats of God, God’s Nature, the Trinity, and God’s Relation to the World; (b) Part II treats of Man and his Ethics. The Ethics treated here was based on Aristotle’s philosophy; (c) Part III deals with Christ, the Sacraments, and Eschatology, the “doctrine of the last things” (*The Summa Theologica*, London: Thos. Baker, 1914;. 22 vols. now reduced to 10 vols.). The Dominican Order, of which Thomas Aquinas was a member, makes his work a necessary requirement for study among their students today.

²⁰⁹ GAE, 2:95; GME 2000, art. “Thomas Aquinas.”

years, in fact, was a little more than simplifying Aquinas' work and endorsing it. "More successfully than any other theologian or philosopher, Aquinas organized the knowledge of his time in the service of his faith."²¹⁰

The theological thoughts of Thomas Aquinas have become the "surest guide to Roman Catholic doctrine." *"In the encyclical Aeterni Patris (Of the Eternal Father, 1879), Pope Leo XIII recommended that St Thomas's philosophy be made the basis of instruction in all Roman Catholic schools. Pope Pius XII, in the encyclical Humani Generis (Of the Human Race, 1950), affirmed that the Thomist philosophy is the surest guide to Roman Catholic doctrine and discouraged all departures from it."*²¹¹

B. Aquinas and the Dogma of Papal Infallibility

Aquinas' theology too became the basis or foundation for the dogma of papal infallibility which came about at the First Vatican Council of 1870.²¹² The rationale for the dogma of papal infallibility goes this way: Since the church can declare the Bible as authority, she must have inherent authority. This so-called inherent authority of the church is based on the meaning (actually, the Catholic "interpretation," ETM) of Christ's statement in Matthew 16:18, "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The Lord has promised to preserve His church. Why so? Because the church is the extension of His authority.

From this premise, it has also been assumed that the church possesses infallibility. The infallibility of Christ extends to His church. The church is His infallible body. Since the church is infallible, it follows that the pope must also be infallible. The pope is her head. Besides, there needs to be a final infallible voice to determine points of doctrine. The head naturally should be that unerring voice to determine points of doctrine. The one who does it is he who has possessed that "infallible voice," the pope of Rome.

C. Aquinas and Natural Theology

Aquinas' thoughts on natural theology was made a part of the Roman Catholic dogma at the First Vatican Council in 1870. "Natural Theology" is "learning about God from creation, using reason alone. Thomas Aquinas was the first great proponent of Christian natural theology. In 1870 it became a part of Roman Catholic dogma at the First Vatican Council."²¹³

D. Aquinas and the Worship of Dead Saints

"Relics" are *"sacred remains or mementoes of religious figures. In Christian usage, these are usually remains of the bodies of saints, or objects connected with the life of Jesus Christ or with the lives of the saints. Christians are known to have venerated the relics of*

²¹⁰ FWNE, 2:224; MEPS 2005, art. "Thomas Aquinas."

²¹¹ MEPS 2005, art. "Thomas Aquinas."

²¹² The First Vatican Council is "the 20th ecumenical council recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, [and is] known for its solemn definition of papal primacy of jurisdiction and infallibility. Called by Pope Pius IX, the council met in St Peter's Basilica in Rome 93 times between December 8, 1869, and September 1, 1870." (MEPS 2005, art. "First Vatican Council").

²¹³ MEPS 2005, art. "Natural Theology."

martyrs at least as early as the 2nd century. The influx of relics from the Middle East at the time of the Crusades and the development of superstitious cults around them led to doubts about their authenticity and value. The practice of veneration was effectively defended, however, by the 13th-century theologian St Thomas Aquinas, who contended that the bodies of the saints are vessels of the Holy Spirit. The practice was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent after Protestant reformers rejected it, and relics are still important in the Roman Catholic faith today. For example, in the 1990s the Archbishop of Padua commissioned lay experts to investigate a legend surrounding the location of relics of St Luke; as a result, bones which may be relics of the Evangelist were found in the basilica of Santa Giustina in October 1998 inside a box bearing the inscription "S. L. Evang." ²¹⁴

E. Aquinas and the Doctrine of Transubstantiation

The Roman Catholic doctrine of "transubstantiation" was elaborately formulated by Thomas Aquinas. *"According to Scholastic speculation, the substance of the Eucharistic bread is, by the power of God, wholly transformed into the body of Christ. This view of the presence of Christ, called transubstantiation, was most elaborately formulated by the 13th-century Italian theologian St Thomas Aquinas. It has been the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church since the Middle Ages, although the Council of Trent, which reasserted the doctrine against the Protestant reformers in the 16th century, did not include any philosophical speculation in its statement, asserting simply that an actual change occurred in the bread and wine."* ²¹⁵

F. Aquinas and the Supremacy of the Church over the State

In the struggle for supremacy by the Roman Catholic Church and the State, Thomas Aquinas defended the Roman Catholic Church. *"Important shifts of emphasis have usually been related to the challenges of concrete historical and social problems. In the Middle Ages, for example, much political writing dealt with the outstanding political issue of the time, the protracted struggle for supremacy between the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. The Italian philosopher St Thomas Aquinas defended the role of the Church in his Summa Theologica (1265-1273), while Dante Alighieri argued in De Monarchia (On Monarchy, c. 1313) for a united Christendom under emperor and pope, each supreme in his appropriate sphere."* ²¹⁶

G. Aquinas and the Catholic View on Sex and Morality

Even the Roman Catholic view on sex and morality shows the influence of Thomas Aquinas. *"Both the Church and the medical profession have been instrumental in opposing sexual tolerance. St Thomas Aquinas considered 'lust' a vice in conflict with reason: 'sins against nature' such as homosexuality, intercourse in unnatural positions (that is, other than the so-called missionary position—the man on top of the woman, facing one another), masturbation, and bestiality (sex with animals) were thought acts against God, and were viewed with greater seriousness than acts against a neighbour such as adultery, seduction,*

²¹⁴ MEPS 2005, art. "Relics."

²¹⁵ MEPS 2005, art. "Eucharist."

²¹⁶ MEPS 2005, art. "Political Theory."

*and rape. His views remained a major influence on sexual morality in the Western world throughout the Middle Ages.”*²¹⁷

H. Aquinas Disagrees with the Dogma of Immaculate Conception

Aquinas, however, disagreed with the Roman Catholic dogma of Immaculate Conception. “Immaculate Conception” is a Catholic dogma holding “that from the first instant of its creation, the soul of the Virgin Mary was free from original sin.”²¹⁸ While the Roman Catholic Church holds that all men are “totally depraved,” “born in sin,” “tainted by the sins of Adam and Eve,” Mary is an exception!

*“Despite divergent scholarly opinions, the Roman Catholic Church has consistently favoured belief in the Immaculate Conception; a festival of that name, the significance of which is now indefinite, was celebrated in the Eastern Church as early as the 5th century and in the Western Church from the 7th century. Opposition to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was conducted in the 12th century by St Bernard of Clairvaux and in the 13th century by the famous philosopher St Thomas Aquinas. Among those who supported the doctrine was the 13th-century Scottish theologian John Duns Scotus. The theological controversy over the Immaculate Conception gained momentum in the 19th century. Finally in 1854, Pope Pius IX issued a solemn decree declaring the Immaculate Conception to be a dogma essential for the belief of the universal Church.”*²¹⁹

The doctrine of the “immaculate conception” is not to be confused with that of the Virgin Birth, which holds that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin mother.”²²⁰ To the question, “Is the Immaculate Conception the same as the ‘Virgin Birth’?” John Francis Noll responded: “No. Mary was born in a natural way of human parents as all other human beings are. It was Christ who had a ‘virgin birth,’ since His body was formed in the womb of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35.”²²¹

To the question, “Do the Catholics not worship Mary?” John Francis Noll replied: “No. That would be idolatry. We honor her more than we do any other holy creature of God, because she was the greatest saint, because Almighty God honored her first and more than any other creature.”²²² This of course is far from the truth. They do worship her. In fact the Marian cult in the Catholic Church is far better developed and organized than in any sect of the Catholic Church. A refutation of this error of Mariolatry is reserved in another study.

²¹⁷ MEPS 2005, art. “.Sexuality.”

²¹⁸ MEPS 2005, art. “Immaculate Conception.”

²¹⁹ MEPS 2005, art. “Immaculate Conception.”

²²⁰ MEPS 2005, art. “Immaculate Conception.”

²²¹ John Francis Noll, *Father Smith Instructs Jackson* (The Knights of Columbus Information Bureau, March 1962), p. 21.

²²² John Francis Noll, *Father Smith Instructs Jackson* (The Knights of Columbus Information Bureau, March 1962), p. 82.