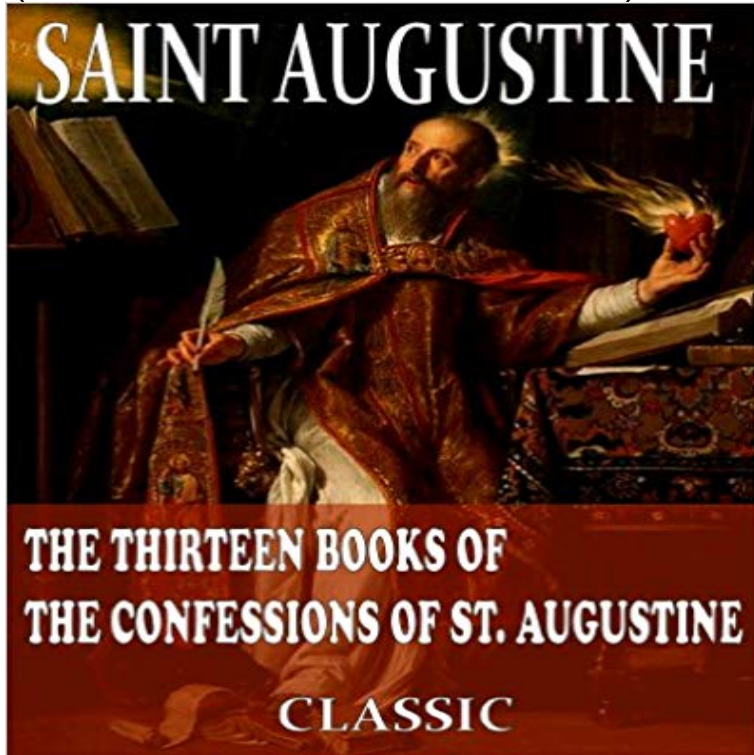


The Complete Thirteen Books Of The Confessions of St. Augustine (With Active Table of Contents)



There are several features in the Confessions deserving of remark. Chiefest amongst these is the intense desire for knowledge and the love of truth which characterised Augustin. This was noticeable before his conversion in his hungering after such knowledge as Manich?anism and the philosophy of the time could afford. It is none the less observable in that better time, when, in his quiet retreat at Cassiciacum, he sought to strengthen the foundations of his faith, and resolved to give himself up to the acquisition of divine knowledge. It was seen, too, in the many conflicts in which he was engaged with Donatists, Manich?ans, Arians, and Pelagians, and in his earnest study of the deep things of God. This love of knowledge is perhaps conveyed in the beautiful legend quoted by Nourisson, of the monk wrapped in spirit, who expressed astonishment at not seeing Augustin among the elect in heaven. He is higher up, he was answered, he is standing before the Holy Trinity disputing thereon for all eternity. While from the time of his conversion we find him holding on to the fundamental doctrines of the faith with the tenacity of one who had experienced the hollowness of the teachings of philosophy, this passion for truth led him to handle most freely subjects of speculation in things non-essential. But whether viewed as a controversialist, a student of Scripture, or a bishop of the Church of God, he ever manifests those qualities of mind and heart that gained for him not only the affection of the Church, but the esteem of his unorthodox opponents. It is to this eager desire for truth in his many-sided mind that we owe those trains of thought that read like forecasts of modern opinion. We have called attention to some such anticipations of modern thought as they recur in the notes throughout the book; but the speculations on Memory, Time, and Creation, which occupy so large a space in

Books Ten and Eleven, deserve more particular notice. The French essayists have entered very fully into these questions. M. Saisset, in his admirable introduction to the *De Civitate Dei*, reviews Augustins theories as to the mysterious problems connected with the idea of Creation. He says, that in his subtle analysis of Time, and in his attempt at reconciling the eternity of creative action with the dependence of things created, he has touched with a bold and delicate hand one of the deepest mysteries of the human mind, and that to all his glorious titles he has added another, that of an ingenious psychologist and an eminent metaphysician. Desjardins likewise commends the depth of Augustins speculations as to Time, and maintains that no ones teaching as to Creation has shown more clearness, boldness, and vigor avoiding the perils of dualism on the one hand, and atheism on the other. In his remarks on Augustins disquisitions on the phenomena of Memory, his praise is of a more qualified character. He compares his theories with those of Malebranche, and, while recognising the practical and animated character of his descriptions, thinks him obscure in his delineation of the manner in which absent realities reproduce themselves on the memory. There is one feature in the Confessions which we should not like to pass unnoticed. A reference to the Retractations will show that Augustin highly appreciated the spiritual use to which the book might be put in the edification of the brethren. We believe that it will prove most useful in this way; and spiritual benefit will accrue in proportion to the steadiness of its use. We would venture to suggest that Book X., may be profitably used as a manual of self-examination. We have pointed out in a note, that in his comment on Ps. 8 he makes our Lords three temptations to be types of all the temptations to which man can be subjected; and makes them correspond in their order, as given by St. Matthew, to the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, mentioned by St. John.

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