



## AUGUSTINE

One of the most influential thinkers of the Middle Ages, Augustine was a philosopher and teacher whose ideas bridged the gap between the classical age and the medieval age and had a significant impact on the theology of the church.

Born in AD 354, Augustine grew up in a Roman colony in what is now Algeria in Northern Africa, speaking Latin as his native tongue. Although his father was a pagan, Augustine's mother, Monica, was a devout Christian who had a profound influence on Augustine. At the age of sixteen, Augustine was sent away to school in Carthage where

he got his first taste of worldly life and was exposed to a wide variety of intellectual positions.

Augustine most wanted to learn why evil existed in the world. If God created all things, did He create evil too? Drawn to a sect that declared that evil was the result of an eternal battle between Light and Dark,

Augustine eventually grew disenchanted with the sect's leaders, who were unable to answer his questions satisfactorily. He then became interested in skepticism, reasoning that maybe he couldn't find the answers because they simply didn't exist.

Augustine traveled to Rome to start a school of rhetoric, or philosophical reasoning, but was disappointed by his students' lack of desire to learn. At the age of thirty, he accepted the post of professor of philosophy in Milan, a highly prestigious position. Through the influence of the Bishop of Milan, with whom he became friends, Augustine began to see that only Christianity could truly answer his questions.

He officially converted to the Christian faith in AD 386 after reading a passage in Romans where Paul urges his listeners to stop paying attention to the things of the world and focus on Christ (Romans 13:13–14). Augustine gave up his prestigious post and returned home to Africa. He sold the majority of his possessions, keeping only his family home for use as a monastery. He was ordained a priest in AD 391 and four years later was named Bishop of Hippo.

For the next thirty-five years, Augustine studied, preached, and wrote about philosophy and theology. He ultimately recognized that although God created all things, He did not create evil because evil is not a thing—it is a lack or privation in a thing. In other words, evil exists only as a parasite to good. (To use a modern example, evil is like rust in a car—if you take all the rust out of the car, you have a better car. If you take all the car out of the rust, you are left with nothing.)

Now considered one of the greatest theologians of all time, Augustine made it his mission to counteract the teachings of heretical sects such as Pelagianism, which claimed that humans are born without a sin nature. He wrote numerous books, more than a hundred of which survive today, including the classics *The Confessions of St. Augustine* and *The City of God*.