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Teaching Notes

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A.C.T.S. Heroes of the Faith

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

[Note: much of this presentation comes directly from John Piper's analysis in *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, p. 40-74]

I. The Fall of Rome

A. The Unthinkable Happened: 410 A.D.

Alaric and Goths came against Rome and sacked it

St. Jerome, in Palestine at the time: "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?"

Rome didn't perish immediately... 66 more years until final Western Emperor was dethroned by Germans

Augustine was 55 years old, in the prime of his ministry... it WAS shocking; Augustine wrote "City

August 28, 430... Augustine died; 80,000 vandals on their way to besiege the city in North Africa where he was; Augustine had heard that several other Catholic bishops had been tortured to death by the invaders; his council of elders gathered around him and used Jesus' words from Matthew 10, "When you are persecuted in one town, flee to the next" to urge him to leave that city and save his life. Augustine answered: "Let not one dream of holding our ship so cheaply that the sailors, let alone the captain, should desert her in a time of peril." COURAGE!!

Augustine died four months before the city was overrun

Had been bishop in Hippo since 396; five years before that he had been appointed priest and elder and had preached; served one church in Hippo for about forty years

Empire-wide reputation as a God-saturated man; articulate, persuasive, passionate defender of the faith against

1) Manichaeism; 2) Donatism; 3) Pelagianism

Just before he died, he handed over the reins to Araclius: ceremony; overwhelmed by his own inadequacy, "The cricket chirps, the swan is silent."

BUT the swan is not silent, and has not been for 1600 years

II. The Overwhelming Influence of Augustine

Absolutely incalculable influence:

Christian history magazine: "After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity."

Benjamin Warfield: "Entered both the church and the world as a revolutionary force, and not merely created an epoch in the history of the church, but determined the course of its history in the West, up to its present day." "The whole development of Western life in all its phases was powerfully affected by its teaching."

Amazingly, his influence has flowed into remarkably contradictory camps: he is a Roman Catholic saint and perhaps the most revered church Father in the Roman Catholic tradition... YET

Warfield said "Augustine gave us the Reformation!!" "Not only because Luther was an Augustinian monk, or because Calvin quoted Augustine more than any other theologian, but because the Reformation witnessed the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over the legacy of the Pelagian view of man... The Reformation was the triumph of Augustine's view of grace over Augustine's view of the church."

Unresolved problems with sacraments, baptism, etc.

Agostino Trape:

"Augustine was a philosopher, theologian, mystic, and poet in one... His lofty powers complemented each other and made the man fascinating in a way difficult to resist. He is a philosopher, but not a cold thinker; he is a theologian, but also a master of the spiritual life; he is a mystic, but also a pastor; he is a poet, but also a controversialist. Every reader thus finds something attractive and even overwhelming: depth of metaphysical intuition, rich abundance of theological proofs, synthetic power and energy, psychological depth shown in spiritual ascents, and a wealth of imagination, sensibility and mystical fervor."

Visiting the Alps:

Benedict Groeschel, visiting the Augustinian Heritage Institute adjacent to Villanova University... books on or by Augustine form their own library... Augustine's own words on computer amount to 5,000,000 words!!

"I felt like a man beginning to write a guidebook on the Swiss Alps... After forty years I can still meditate on one book of the *Confession*... during a week-long retreat and come back feeling frustrated that there is still so much more gold to mine in those few pages. I, for one, know that I shall never in this life escape from the Augustinian Alps."

But there is profit from even a one-hour visit to the Alps!!

Key Works:

- 1) Confessions
- 2) On Christian Doctrine
- 3) The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope and Love
- 4) On the Trinity
- 5) The City of God

III. An Overview of His Life

A. Born: Thagaste in modern Numidia, North Africa, November 13, 354

B. Family:

1. Father = Patricius... fiery temper, pagan habits until final year of his life
2. Mother = Monica... "one of the truly saintly mothers of the ancient world"... saw all three children and her husband become Christians before she died

C. Upbringing:

1. Father: middle income farmer; provided education in rhetoric
2. Soon became dissolute in his habits... family did nothing to stop him

"As I grew to manhood, I was inflamed with a desire for a surfeit of hell's pleasures... My family made no effort to save me from my fall by marriage. Their only concern was that I should learn how to make a good speech and how to persuade others by words." (Confessions, II,2)

"[My father] took no trouble at all to see how I was growing in your sight [O God], or whether I was chaste or not. He cared only that I should have a fertile tongue." (Confessions, II,3)

D. Struggle with Sin

1. Left for Carthage to study for three years... mother warned him against fornication, and especially against seducing another man's wife
2. Arrived at Carthage burning with lust

“I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust... My real need was for you, my God, who are the food of the soul. I was not aware of this hunger.” (Confessions, III, 1)

3. Was successful in rhetoric, but found it empty
4. Took a concubine in Carthage who stayed with him fifteen years & bore him a son, Adeodatus
5. Teacher of Rhetoric, age 19-30

John Piper: “He was a profligate until he was 31, and a celibate until he was seventy-five.”

E. Long conversion

1. Age 19: read Cicero's *Hortensius*... God used it to turn him from open immorality to study philosophy
2. Drawn into Manichaeism:
 - Dualistic system; God totally pure, cannot have created anything evil
 - Evil came from an invasion of the Kingdom of Light by the Kingdom of Darkness... equal in power, eternal, totally separate
 - Individual people were created good, but something alien came from the outside and hijacked people to do evil things
 - Mani, the prophet of this view, rejected the Old Testament as an emanation from that evil Kingdom; it was the words of the devil masquerading as an angel of light
 - Augustine was attracted to the basic idea that his struggle with sin was a struggle with something that was alien to his true nature
 - Eventually saw the falsehood of this system and became the leading opponent of Manichaeism, the leading spokesman for the true biblical vision of one transcendent, sovereign God
3. Age 29: moved from Carthage to Rome to teach... became fed up with students and moved to a teaching post in Milan
4. TWO KEY OCCURRENCES in Milan:

- a. discovered neo-Platonism
- b. met the great arch-bishop Ambrose of Milan

- Plotinus: recovered Plato's vision of one, transcendent God
- Taught the need for freedom from the fleshly nature through rigorous self-discipline
- Wrongly taught the inherent evil of the material world
- This system helped wean Augustine from Manichaeism... it became a way-station to biblical faith
- Ambrose: gifted preacher of the word, discipler of men

“In Milan, I found your devoted servant the bishop Ambrose....At that time his gifted tongue never tired of dispensing the richness of your corn, the joy of your oil, and the sober intoxication of your wine. Unknown to me, it was you who led me to him, so that I might knowingly be led by him to you.”
(Confessions, V,13)

- His neo-platonism was scandalized by the idea that the Word became flesh... but he listened week after week to Ambrose's beautiful sermons

5. Still controlled by lust

- YET still held in the bonds of sexual lust: Monica had arranged a society marriage for him, but he was required to send away his concubine. This he did with great reluctance, but couldn't control himself for the two years until his marriage, and soon had another mistress

6. His famous conversion: “Take up and read...”

“O Lord, my helper and my Redeemer, I shall now tell and confess to the glory of your name how you released me from the fetters of lust which held me so tightly shackled, and from my slavery to the things of this world.” (Confessions, VIII, 6)

- Late August, 386: Augustine almost 32 years old... pondering the holy example of Antony, a monk who had lived many years before in Egypt and who had achieved such mastery over his earthly appetites
- Picked up and read Romans 13:13-14

“Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

7. Baptized by Ambrose, Easter, 387

F. Return to Carthage: Becomes a Priest, then a Bishop

- Left Italy to return to his home; Monica died right before they sailed

"We... did by degrees pass through all things bodily, even the very heaven whence sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth; yea, we were soaring higher yet, by inward musing, and discourse, and admiring of your works; and we came to our own minds, and went beyond them, that we might arrive at that region of neverfailing plenty, where you feed Israel forever with the food of truth, and where life is the Wisdom by whom all these things are made...."

Nine days later, Monica was dead. Soon after that his son, Adeodatus also died, as did one of his best friends; Augustine was truly alone in the world, but it caused him to draw closer to God

- Sailed to Carthage; in 391 went to Hippo
- Bishop Valerius saw him in congregation; put aside prepared sermon and preached on urgent need for priests in Hippo
- Crowd spotted Augustine and forced him into service as a priest... they saw him weeping and thought it was because he wanted to be a bishop, not a priest; "All in good time," they thought!!
- Valerius was shrewd... he knew the church in North Africa needed someone to fight the heresies of Manichaeism and Donatism
- Preaching was the sole province of bishops, but Valerius gave the job to Augustine
- Augustine became the scourge of the Donatists
- Valerius convinced the arch-bishop to make Augustine co-bishop with him in Hippo and he did
- In 395, Valerius died and Augustine became sole bishop of Hippo

IV. Augustine the Controversialist

A. Against Manichaeism

Manichaeism was one of the major ancient religions of Iranian origin. Manichaeism was founded in the third century AD by Mani, who reportedly was born in western Persia and lived approximately 210–276 AD in the Persian province of Babylon. The religion reached, over the span of the next ten centuries, from North Africa in the west to China in the East.

Manichæism purported to be the true synthesis of all the religious systems then known, and actually consisted of Zoroastrian Dualism, Babylonian folklore, Buddhist ethics, and some small and superficial, additions of Christian elements.

The most striking principle of Manichee theology is its dualism, a theme gleaned from the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Mani postulated two natures that existed from the beginning: light and darkness. The realm of light lived in peace, while the realm of darkness was in constant conflict with itself. The universe is the temporary result of an attack of the realm of darkness on the realm of light, and was created by the Living Spirit, an emanation of the light realm, out of the mixture of light and darkness.

A key belief in Manichæism is that there is no omnipotent good power. This claim addresses a theoretical part of the problem of evil by denying the infinite perfection of God and postulating the two equal and opposite powers mentioned previously. The human person is seen as a battleground for these powers: the good part is the soul (which is composed of light) and the bad part is the body (composed of dark earth). The soul defines the person and is incorruptible, but it is under the domination of a foreign power, which addressed the practical part of The Problem of Evil. A human is said to be able to be saved from this power (matter) if they come to know who they are and identify themselves with their soul.

Augustine was taken in by this religion before his conversion, but eventually became its most powerful foe:

"I still thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us. It flattered my pride to think that I incurred no guilt and, when I did wrong, not to confess it... I preferred to excuse myself and blame this unknown thing which was in me but was not part of me. The truth, of course, was that it was all my own self, and my own impiety had divided me against myself. My sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner."

B. Against Donatism

Donatism was a schismatic movement among Christians of North Africa beginning in the Fourth Century A.D., led by Donatus, bishop of Casae Nigrae, and the theologian Donatus the Great. The schism arose when certain Christians protested the election of the bishop of Carthage, charging that his consecration by Felix, bishop of Aptunga, was invalid because Felix was considered a traitor (i.e., one who turns over sacred books and relics to the civil authorities during a persecution). Condemnation was extended to all in communion with Felix. Behind their objection lay the heresy that only those living a blameless life belonged in the church, and, further, that the validity of any sacrament depended upon the personal worthiness of the priest administering it. The Donatist practice of rebaptizing was particularly abhorrent to the orthodox. Condemned by the Synod of Arles (314) and also by the Roman emperor, Constantine I, the Donatists seceded (316) and set up their own hierarchy. By 350 they outnumbered the orthodox Christians in Africa, and each city had its opposing orthodox and Donatist bishops. It was the teaching of St. Augustine, as presented in his writings and at the debate between orthodox and Donatist bishops at Carthage

(411), that turned the tide against Donatism. The remnants of the schismatic movement had vanished along with African Christianity before the advent of the Islamic invaders.

C. Against Pelagianism

- Key concept: "Sovereign joy"

"During all those years of rebellion, where was my free will? What was the hidden, secret place from which it was summoned in a moment, so that I might bend my neck to your easy yoke?.... How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose! ... You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, you who outshine all light, and yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, you who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves... O Lord, my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation." (Confessions, IX,1)

- The basic idea of grace in Augustine is God's giving us sovereign joy that triumphs powerfully over sin
- God sovereignly works in us that we delight in Him above all other sources of pleasure... this drive sin away from us
- Augustine knew that all people strive constantly for their own happiness; what guides and governs the will is the natural yearning for happiness, what we consider to be our delight
- Piper: "But here's the catch that made Pelagius so angry. Augustine believed that it's not in our power to determine what this delight will be:

"Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up? Or that he will delight in what turns up?"

"A man's free-will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become known to him, unless he also takes delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly. Now, in order that such a course may engage our affections, God's 'love is shed abroad in our hearts,' not through the free-will which arises from ourselves, but 'through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us.' (Romans 5:5)" (Spirit and Letter, V)

- When asked why he spent so much time, even as an old man, battling Pelagius, he answered:

"First and foremost, because no subject but grace gives me greater pleasure. For what ought to be more attractive to us sick men, than grace, grace by which we are healed; for us lazy men than grace,

grace by which we are stirred up; for us men longing to act, than grace, by which we are helped?"
(Epistle 186, XII, 139)

- What is freedom? For Pelagius, it was a perfect balance between good and evil presented to the sovereign human will, which alone had power to cast the deciding vote.
- Freedom for Augustine: "To be so much in love with God and his ways that the very experience of choice is transcended. The ideal of freedom is not so much the autonomous will poised with sovereign equilibrium between good and evil. The ideal of freedom is to be so spiritually discerning of God's beauty, and to be so in love with God that one never stands with equilibrium between God and an alternate choice. Rather, one transcends the experience of choice and walks under the continual sway of the sovereign joy of God." (Piper, p. 62)
- Because sin is such an enemy of sovereign joy and such a powerful influence on the basic nature of all human beings, God must work obedience within us:

And my whole hope is only in your exceeding great mercy. Give what You command, and command whatever You will. You impose sexual purity upon us, "Nevertheless, I when I perceived," said someone, "that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me;... that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was. . . . O charity, my God, kindle me! You command sexual purity; give what You command, and command what You will.

[from Augustine's Confessions, Book X, Chapter 29 NPNF 1:153]

This was the very statement that so outraged Pelagius... if God has commanded something, we are totally free and are responsible to obey it

V. Augustine the Mystic

Sovereign joy takes deepest roots in the man whose constant hunger and desire is after God, and God alone: This desire can only be fostered in one seeking God by prayer and meditation on His word... in short, the life of the mystic

"The soul of men shall hope under the shadow of Your wings; they shall be made drunk with the fullness of your house; and of the torrents of Your pleasures You will give them to drink; for in You is the Fountain of Life, and in Your Light shall we see the light. Give me a man in love: he knows what I mean. Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he does not know what I am talking about..." (Tractate in John's Gospel, 26, 4)

- As a pastor, evangelist, controversialist, theologian... Augustine's constant desire was to mediate this sovereign joy to the hearts of those made ready by grace