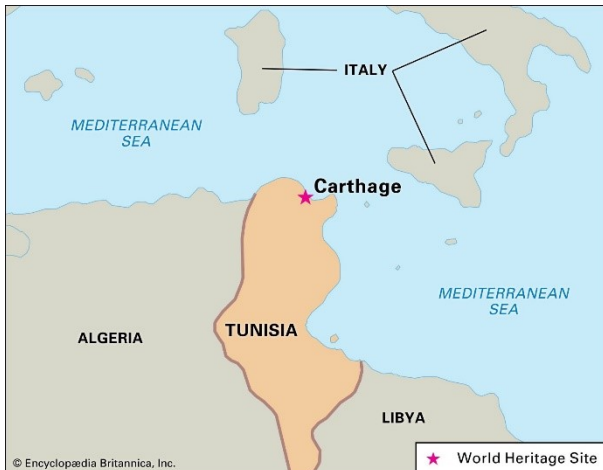


24. AUGUSTINE 354-430: HIS WILD YOUTH.

We have heard of Carthage before. The large city of Carthage used to be where the city of Tunis now stands in northern Africa. Perpetua and Felicitas (chapter 12) lived in that city. Near Carthage was a little town called Tagaste.



Carthage (Now called Tunis) Encyclopædia Britannica.

In the second half of the fourth century, between 360 and 370, a husband, wife, and their only child lived there. Although the man was not wealthy, he made a good living. He was a respected member of Tagaste and was a town councillor.

You may think there was prosperity and happiness in that house.

And yet when we enter that home, we see the mother sitting at the table with tears in her eyes. That woman is crying. Why? Did her husband recently die? Is her only child seriously ill?

No, not that. Both are exceptionally healthy. This mother weeps for her son because things are not going well with him.

In the evenings, he goes out with his friends. Then he climbs into his neighbours' gardens and steals the fruit from their trees, to the great annoyance of the owners, because they lose some of their crops.

She had already suffered so much grief because of her child. He went to school, but he deceived his teachers in all sorts of ways. He robbed his parents; he made fools of his friends; he stole the

fruit from his neighbours' gardens. And he didn't do this to taste the fruit, because he could get plenty at home, but he only did this to steal! Later, he threw the stolen fruit away so that it rotted, or he gave it to the pigs.

Everyone knew that naughty boy. Everyone talked about him. Everyone knew that he was a disobedient, bad boy.

His mother weeps because she constantly hears about her son's crimes. She is alone in her sorrow because her husband does not support her condemning their boy's bad behaviour. He laughs about it, and at times, he enjoys himself enormously when he hears about his son's boyish pranks. No, joy and happiness do not live in this home.

On the contrary, grief and sorrow dwell there. The mother had not expected such sorrow when her child, whom she loved so much, was still in the cradle.

PATRICIUS, MONICA AND AUGUSTINE

Who are that man and that woman?
Who is that boy who misbehaves?
That man's name is Patricius. As mentioned, he was a councillor at Tagaste. But he was still very much a pagan.

He married a 20-year-old girl.
Her name was Monica.
It could have been a very happy marriage, but it wasn't, because Monica was a Christian and Patricius, her husband, was rude and indifferent. He mocked her faith and wanted nothing to do with the truth of the gospel.

At times he ill-treated his young wife. Besides, he led a sinful life. Monica suffered because of it but tried to convert him with her love. She often pointed out to him the error and sinfulness of his lifestyle.

On the 13th of November, 354, a little son was born in their home, whom they named *Aurelius Augustine*. Monica was delighted with her child. When that little boy grew up, she told him stories from God's Word and taught him about Christianity. However, it seemed all in vain because Augustine grew into a careless, wicked boy, a rascal, not caring about anything as he became older. The worst was that his father never once rebuked him but laughed loudly at his sinful pranks and delighted in them. Augustine had the same character as his pagan father.

And so, there was no unity in that family. This disunity had a destructive effect on young Augustine, who listened more to his father than his mother. His father wanted him to study. At first, Augustine didn't want to. He preferred going out with his mates to studying seriously. But later on, that changed. He began to enjoy it, and very soon, he was one of the best in his class because the Lord had given him a bright mind. When he finished schooling at Tagaste, he studied to become a lawyer and orator in neighbouring Carthage.

Patricius, his father, died during that time. Some writers tell us that Patricius became a Christian before he died, but I'm not sure if that is true.

FAITHFUL MOTHER MONICA

Carthage, where Augustine now went to school, was a wicked city. Most of the students shamelessly committed the greatest sins. Augustine associated with them, and they became his friends. Their lifestyle was to his liking, and it wasn't long before Augustine was one of the worst in the group.

They organised many parties, which often degenerated into rough brawls. Augustine found joy and delight in this wickedness and went from bad to worse. This trend caused his godly mother, Monica, much grief and pain. With tears in her eyes, she repeatedly begged her child not to continue to live that way. Day after day, she admonished him. Augustine often came home late at night. But no matter how late it became, Monica did not go to bed before he was home.



Augustine the student. By Benozzo Gozzoli www.Augnet.org

She sat up, waiting for him. When he came home, he would see that her eyes were red from crying. That annoyed him because he loved his mother very much, but he would and could not bid farewell to sin. He knew very well that his mother suffered because of his bad behaviour. He saw it on her face, prematurely wrinkled from worrying about him. He saw her hair had already turned grey from sorrow over him, and her eyes were hollow due to the many sleepless nights she wrestled through because of him. When he came home late, he sometimes saw his mother kneeling next to her chair, begging the Lord to convert her unruly son. Then she wrestled with God for her child's preservation and salvation. Monica prayed a lot. All her grief and sorrow, she sobbed out to God. When Augustine saw that, he felt terrible. At times he got angry, and then he spoke harsh and angry words to his mother, but he did not turn his back on his sins or improve his life. He would not do that.

The years passed swiftly. Augustine passed his exams with honours at the school of Carthage, and he eventually became a professor of elocution.

During those years, Augustine joined a pagan group called the Manicheans. He was a member of that group for about ten years. I won't go into

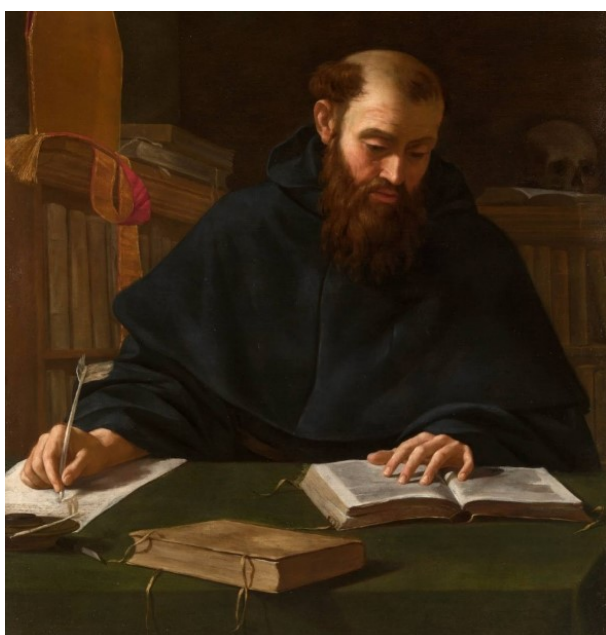
detail, but those Manicheans taught a mixture of paganism and Christianity. It seemed as if all Monica's prayers were in vain, as if the Lord did not hear her.

Come on, Monica, you may as well stop praying! It doesn't help anyway! What, *stop* praying? No, Monica can't do that. She persevered. Sometimes, just sometimes, it seemed as if Augustine showed a change of heart. This would give Monica new hope. But it never lasted for long because Augustine continued in sin.

Still, Augustine was not happy. Those who live in sin cannot be happy because God's Word tells us: "There is no peace for the wicked."

Peace? No, Augustine knew no peace. Something in the depth of his soul made him restless. He constantly searched for true happiness, but he could not find it. Finally, he decided to leave Carthage. He wanted to go to Rome, the ancient capital of the empire. He wanted to see something different, some more of the world. Besides, he hoped to obtain honour and respect in Rome. Deep in his heart, he wanted to become famous. He could achieve that better in the large city of Rome than in the relatively remote Carthage. Rome was the centre of culture and learning. He did not doubt that he, a gifted orator, would draw lots of attention in Rome. And

"There is no
peace for the
wicked."



St Augustine in his study. www.pictorum.com



Mother Monica and Augustine.
Painting by Gioacchino Assereto

finally, there was another reason he wanted to get away from Carthage.

And that was?

He wanted to get away from his mother! He wished to get away from her supervision! When Monica heard that, she got a terrible fright!

If Augustine did that, he would be lost altogether because Rome's wickedness was great. The temptations in Rome were worse than in Carthage!

Bursting into tears, she implored him not to go. And, impressed by her grief, he promised to remain in Carthage. A thankful look from his mother was his reward for that promise. How happy Monica must have been with that!

However, soon after, he shamefully broke the promise he had given his weeping mother. He went anyway!

One day, filled with unrest, Monica hastens to the harbour. In the far distance, the ship carrying Augustine disappears over the horizon. Indeed, Augustine is such a degenerate son! He has left after all and wickedly deceived his dear mother.

Riveted to the ground, Monica stares after the departing ship. She falters, and her eyes fill with big, hot tears. Sobbing, Monica finally leaves the harbour and goes home. She falls on a chair and raises her tear-stained eyes to heaven. Poor, poor Monica!

AUGUSTINE IN ROME

A man is wandering through the streets of that great metropolis called Rome. He has just arrived after a long journey. He admires the large, fine palaces and the beautiful marble temples with slim columns. Yes, you guessed it: that wandering man is Augustine, who sees Rome for the first time in his life. He went to Rome to find honour and fame and be away from his mother. He had broken the promise that he had given to his weeping mother. Now he wanders through the vast metropolis. Now he has his way. Now he can come and go as he pleases without being reprimanded by his mother. Ah no, not really, because I'm sure his mother Monica's sorrowful eyes have pursued him. No doubt he thought about her at times.

However, things do not go well for him in Rome. He becomes ill, seriously ill. High fevers sap his strength. He is in bed, all alone in a strange place, sick and miserable. No one there knows or cares about him. You may be sure that he missed the loving care of his mother.

Will he perish miserably? No, God has a different plan for him. He recovers again. But eventually, Rome does not suit him. He earns too little to support himself. Poverty is knocking at his door. The honour and fame he hoped for do not come. So he leaves Rome and becomes a professor of oratory in Milan.



Augustine teaching in Rome. Wikimedia Commons



*Augustine leaving for Milan. Bewnuzzo
Gozzoli. Wikiart.org*

WHAT HAPPENED IN MILAN

At that time, the well-known church father, Ambrose, was the bishop in Milan—chapter 22. Ambrose was a very talented speaker and orator. Even his enemies came to listen to him because he was so good. Augustine also discovers that Ambrose is an engaging speaker. He decides to go and listen to that bishop. He might learn something useful as Augustine is also an oratory professor. And so we see him sitting in the cathedral where Ambrose is preaching. He listens attentively to the eloquent, well-chosen words, and at the end of the service, he is fully determined: 'I'm going there again.'

And he does! Augustine repeatedly attends church to listen to the God-fearing bishop. At first, Augustine only comes to listen to Ambrose's fluent eloquence, but gradually he begins to take note of the *contents* of the sermon. The earnest words of the grey bishop make a deep impression on him. His mother is pleased when she notices that her son attends church regularly.

His mother? Wasn't she still in Africa? Isn't she mourning for her disobedient son who left her? Surely Monica doesn't know where Augustine is or what he's doing? Oh yes, she does! When Monica was left alone in Carthage, gazing at the ship in the distance on which Augustine was sailing to Italy, she could no longer stay in Carthage. Soon after, she followed him on his journey, first to

Rome and later to Milan. She could not let go of her child.

One day she decides to visit Ambrose. She is received kindly and sympathetically. The esteemed bishop inspires her with confidence, and she tells him about her life full of care, trouble and sorrow, strife, and praying. She pours out all that is in her heart. The grey preacher listens patiently and calmly and lets her talk. When she has finally told her whole story and is ready to leave, he encourages her with a pat on her shoulder and says:

"Mother, do not worry; a child of so many prayers and tears cannot get lost!"

Although Ambrose's preaching made a deep impression on Augustine's conscience, he still could not stop sinning and did not want to forsake the world. He kept seeking worldly pleasures but could not find peace. He became increasingly unhappy.

One day some friends visit him. One of them tells him about a small group of humble people living in Egypt. He tells Augustine those people fled from the world and sin by withdrawing into solitude. Augustine listens silently, and when his friend finally stops talking, he is deeply moved.



Tote Lege, take up and read. www.kenteringen.nl

"Oh," he cries out, "such plain, unlearned people get to heaven, and we, who have learned so much, who possess so much wisdom, wallow in sin!" Tears fill his eyes. He gets up and runs to the garden. He kneels under a fig tree and cries. Then with big sighs, he prays:

"O God, how long still? Deliver me from sin. Do pardon my *many* sins."

At that exact moment, a child's voice calls out: "Take up and read! Take up and read!"

Who is that child? I do not know.

Why does that child's voice call out those words? I do not know.

The sobbing Augustine doesn't know either, but for him, it is no longer a child's voice but the voice of God. He hurries inside again, opens a Bible, and reads Romans 13:13 & 14. He reads:

"Let us walk properly, as in the day; not in rioting and

drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts."

Oh, it seems those words are written in the Bible specifically for him because that is precisely what he does! He lives in the greatest sins.

He lives a wild, riotous life, attending many wicked feasts.

He lives in adultery and fornication. Grief about his sinful life fills his heart.

In the following days, Augustine becomes increasingly aware of his sins and guilt. He learns to see how grievously he has offended and angered God for many years. He cannot exist before such a holy God!

He can't get those words of Romans 13 out of his head. It seems as if God is using that text to call to him:

"Augustine, don't do that! Reject sin, renounce worldly pleasures, and believe in the Lord Jesus

Christ. He came to shed His blood for lost sinners and give His life for their salvation."

The Holy Spirit applies that part of Scripture to the heart of Augustine. An incredible peace descends into his soul. God enables him to believe that the Triune God has forgiven him his many sins and has blotted them out by the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus, his Saviour. And then the gospel of the Lord Jesus enlightens the soul of that rebellious sinner. Augustine can not hide that great happiness, and he hurries to his mother and tells her what has happened. What do you think? Was the grey Monica happy? Ah, no need to even ask such a question!

Now she weeps again, but these are not tears of grief and sorrow but of great, heartfelt joy. Finally, after waiting thirty-two years, God has answered her many prayers. The following year, Augustine is baptised with his son and a friend.

It is Easter.

The grey Ambrose descends the steps of the pulpit. Emotionally, he announces solemnly: "I baptise you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."



Image of Augustine's baptism at the Troyes Cathedral

It is breathlessly quiet in the church.

This baptism leaves a deep impression on the hearts of all present.

Mother Monica watches, crying tears of joy.

After that, Augustine returns to Africa with his mother. But when they set out on their journey

and look for a ship to take them to Africa, Monica becomes seriously ill. Only a few days later, she dies in the arms of her son Augustine, who had caused her so much sorrow. God called her home into eternal glory.

I'm sure Augustine will have shed bitter tears of remorse at his mother's grave.

I hope to tell you more about Augustine's life in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was happiness lacking in the marriage of Patricius and Monica?
2. How did their lack of unity affect Augustine when he was young?
3. How did his parents react to his disobedience?
4. Although Monica found it challenging to discuss the seriousness of Augustine's disobedience with him since he became so angry, she nevertheless had somewhere to go with her sorrow. Explain.
5. Identify the Manicheans.
6. Why did restless Augustine want to go to Rome?
7. Did the Lord grant Augustine his wish for happiness while in Rome? Explain.
8. How did Ambrose comfort Monica?
9. How did God use the words of a child to instruct Augustine?
10. Of which sins did Romans 13:13-14 convict him?
11. How did the restless soul of Augustine find peace?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What lessons can we learn from the unhappiness of Augustine's early home life?
2. Why couldn't Augustine find contentment in the world?
3. Augustine later testified: "My restless soul found rest in Thee." Show how God was first in Augustine's conversion.

REVIEW

Fill in the blanks.

1. reassured Monica, telling her that a child of so many prayers could not be lost.
2. The Council of exposed the errors of Arius.
3. Arius denied the of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Seven thousand people were murdered in by the emperor Theodosius.
5. Ambrose did not allow Theodosius to celebrate the because he had stained his hands with blood. He had not repented of his sin.
6. Augustine's father was a pagan.
7. John Chrysostom admonished the Empress because she had taken a field by force from a poor widow.
8. Ambrose was bishop of
9. Athanasius was banished to
10. Another name for a synod is a
11. Arius stated that the Lord Jesus was onlyof God.
12. bishops were present at the Council of Nicea.
13. refused to sign the declaration of the Council of Nicea.
14. restored Athanasius because he wished to promote division in the church.
15. The Empress demanded that Ambrose give one of the churches in Milan to the Arians.
16. interceded with the emperor, begging him to pardon the inhabitants of Antioch.
17. The body of Chrysostom was buried in the cathedral built on the spot where the burned.
18. Augustine joined a heathen group called the
19. Augustine left for Rome to seek his happiness in the world.
20. A child's voice cried out in Augustine's hearing, "Take up and"

RESEARCH TOPICS:

1. Prepare a five-column chart on the contributions of the following early Church fathers: Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Athanasius and Chrysostom.

List their names on the top of the columns. On the sides list various subjects such as "Divinity of Jesus," "Supremacy of the Bible," "Necessity of Repentance", and several others which pertain to one or more of these men. Then fill in the chart as far as you are able, showing the views of each about these subjects. Some areas will be left blank because you will not be able to find each person's opinion on each topic.