

Grace Episcopal Church, Georgetown
Adult Forum; December '09 through January '10
"The Restless Human Heart: Augustine of Hippo"

Augustine

354-430 A.D. (C.E.); born in Hippo (present-day Algeria) and Bishop of Hippo, 395-430; author of *Confessions*; *On the Trinity*; *City of God*; many other works. Key early influences:

- Monica, his mother;
- his nameless companion of 15 years, the mother of his son –
- Adeodatus;
- Ambrose of Milan, who baptized him
- Manicheans and neo-Platonists

Human Nature, part 1

Word(s) and love(s):

"What am I?"

For Augustine, human nature is what God created me to be, as over against the human person, the self I create.

- *Discerning our substance / nature:* "To the fashioning of things (*the creating of itself and its life*) the soul gives away something of its substance. Still the soul retains what it needs to judge freely the species of such images. What the soul retains for the sake of its judging is rational intelligence. And this is more truly mind than what the soul gives away."
On the Trinity, 10.5.7
- *The nature / love / will common to all human hearts:* "All see within their heart that they will to be blessed; and so great in this respect is the conspiracy of human nature that one may not be deceived in projecting this same will from one's own soul to another's. For we know that everyone wills this."
On the Trinity, 13.3.6
- *Knowing blessedness:* "(Although there is for all human beings a) single will to blessedness, there exists so great a variety and diversity of wills concerning that blessedness itself. It is not that anyone does not will blessedness; rather, it is that not everyone has come to know it."
On the Trinity, 10.11.17

From Robert Meagher, author of An Introduction to Augustine:

"Augustine sees that the will for blessedness is most often negative in practice, taking the form of a denial rather than an affirmation. The desire for blessedness finds expressions in the will's itinerant restlessness, the will's refusal to embrace finally or wholly its world"

or any part of its world. Since the desire for blessedness is somehow present in any human desire, the finite objects of desire become unacceptable in the light of their final inadequacy ...For the mind to embrace someone or something with the whole of its love is to place upon the object of that love the full, unqualified demands of human being...Human speech alone is able to interrogate the world, to ask of it more than it offers, and to judge that world on terms that are not its own."

- *Interrogating the world:* "What do I love when I love you (my God)?...I questioned the earth and it answered, 'I m not God.' And all earthly things made the same response. I questioned the sea and the deeps and creeping things and they responded: 'We are not your God; inquire higher.' And so I interrogated the airy world above; and the all-encompassing sky, with all that dwell therein answered me: 'Anaximines is wrong; we are not God.' I questioned heaven, sun, moon, and stars: 'Neither are we,' they said back 'the God whom you seek.' And I said to all the things that surround the gateways of my flesh: 'Since you are not my God, speak to me of him. Tell me something about my God.' And with one great voice they exclaimed: 'He himself made us.' My question was my intending, and the sight of these things was their response. I directed myself to myself and to myself I said, 'You, who are you?' And I responded, 'A human being'."
- Confessions, 10.6*