

Catholics indebted to St. Augustine

By Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

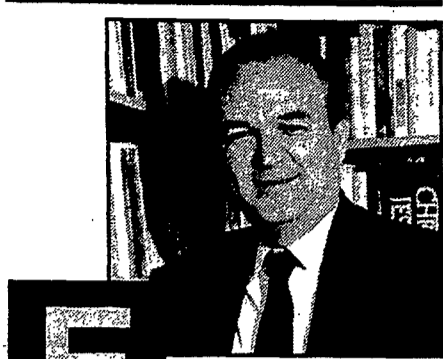
Notre Dame professor John Cavadini's excellent feature article on St. Augustine of Hippo (feast day, Aug. 28) in the new *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Theology* points out that "No other single theologian has exercised as decisive an influence on the shape and character of Western theology, both Catholic and Protestant, as Augustine."

Some Catholic readers might balk at first. It is generally assumed in the Catholic Church, especially since Pope Leo XIII's vigorous endorsement of Thomism in 1879, that that honor belongs to St. Thomas Aquinas, not Augustine.

But the key phrase in Cavadini's entry is "both Catholic and Protestant." While it is surely arguable that Thomas Aquinas is the single most influential theologian for Catholics, no one can seriously propose that Aquinas' influence within the Protestant traditions is anywhere near as great as Augustine's.

Although thoroughly Catholic in his theology, Augustine has appealed to Protestants — beginning with Martin Luther and John Calvin — because of his strong emphasis on the absolute need for grace and his pessimism about the possibilities of human reformation.

Protestants readily embraced this approach, particularly in their stress upon the absolute necessity of grace ("grace alone") over good works in the



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

attainment of salvation.

The Catholic position is that, while grace is absolutely necessary for salvation, good works are also necessary. God alone saves us, but not without our free cooperation. For Catholics it is both/and, not either/or.

Augustine's pessimism about salvation — he referred to the human race as a *massa damnata* ("damned mass") — led some Protestants into predestinationism, the belief that, apart from the exercise of human freedom, God pre-determines who is to be saved and who is to be damned.

But Augustine's theological legacy is much greater among his fellow Catholics than among Protestants. In opposing Manichaeism, a philoso-

phy that depreciated the material world as the creation of the powers of evil and also the act of procreation within marriage, Augustine insisted on the goodness of the Creator, of creation, and of marriage.

Second, he also advanced the church's thinking on the sacraments when he opposed the Donatists, a rigorist group in North Africa which declared that sacraments administered by one in the state of serious sin are by that fact invalid.

Augustine argued that the sacraments belong to Christ and his church, and do not depend on the minister's holiness. Even if the sacrament of baptism were administered by one who left the Catholic Church, the sacrament need not be repeated if the recipient later becomes a Catholic.

Third, he stood firm against Pelagianism, which proposed that everyone is born with the same degree of freedom which Adam and Eve had before their sin and that newborns do not need baptism. The Pelagians regarded grace as useful, even necessary, to aid us in the exercise of human freedom, but mainly because our freedom has been "rusted over" by bad habits.

For the Pelagians, however, grace is something purely external to us. It does not permeate our being and sanctify us from within.

Augustine argued that Adam and Eve's sin had so compromised our human nature that we are unable to exercise our freedom for good without

the inner workings of divine grace. Jesus Christ, as the Word of God made flesh, is the supreme embodiment and source of this grace for us.

But Augustine was more than a theologian. After having been baptized by St. Ambrose in Milan in 387, and after the death of his mother Monica later that same year, he returned to his birthplace of Tagaste in North Africa, where he established a kind of monastic community of educated laymen on his family estate.

In 391, while visiting the port city of Hippo (in present-day Algeria), he was acclaimed by the congregation at church and forced to agree to ordination. Four years later he became its bishop. He remained in Hippo, preaching, writing, deciding ecclesiastical cases, and living in community with his clergy. He died in 430, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

Among his rich legacy is the Rule of St. Augustine which is attributable at least in part to him. By the eleventh century its use had become widespread and at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 it was formally accepted as one of the approved monastic rules of the church.

The new Dominican order adopted it immediately thereafter, and more than 150 communities, including the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine (Augustinians), still follow it today.

There are few individual figures to which the Catholic tradition is so thoroughly indebted as it is to Augustine.

World's currency is not rich in God's things

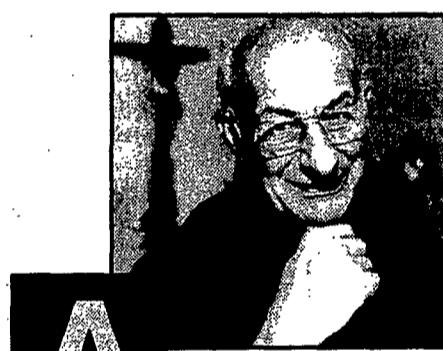
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 12:32-48; (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9; (R2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19.

"Do not live in fear, little flock." What a great statement. How greatly it is needed in our own times. We seem to live in fear. We fear we won't have enough for old age; and so we have insurance and IRAs. We fear we won't have enough when we get sick; and so we have Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and Medicare. We fear we might get in a car accident; and so we have car insurance. Don't misunderstand me, insurance is fine, by all means. "Insure and be sure."

But don't try to be too sure. Money is important, but it isn't everything. Times are tough, and they are likely to get tougher. There's nothing wrong with wishing we had more money. What Jesus condemned was not money, but making money the end-all, the be-all, and the all-in-all of life — laying up treasures on earth and forgetting to work for eternity's things.

Jesus condemned one foolish thing



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

that people do with their money: namely, they hoard it. They think only of themselves. "Give alms," Jesus said. "Help others."

Jean Paul Getty was one of the richest men in the world, but he was a terrible father. When his grandson was kidnapped, Getty refused to pay the \$1 million ransom to get him back. The kidnapers cut off the boy's right ear

and mailed it to Getty. Finally, Getty agreed to pay the ransom, but he insisted that his son, the boy's father, pay him back — with interest no less.

J. Paul Getty's millions never brought him any real happiness. Happiness comes from sharing what you have with others. Money's important, there's no question about that. But money is only a means by which we reach higher goals: service to others and obedience to God.

Once a man traveled to a primitive land in the South Seas with the intent of becoming rich. And he did — in the currency of his new homeland. He accumulated a large store of shells and beads, which is what the natives used for money. He accumulated more of this kind of wealth than anyone else in that land. All the natives admired his financial acumen.

When he returned home to England, however, he discovered that he was a beggar, even though he had a ship full of what had been wealth in his adopted land. The shells and beads were of no use to him back in a world that honored a different currency. So it will be for those who lay up for them-

selves the currency of this world but are not rich in God's things.

So, our posture in life should be to walk without fear, trusting in God, and walking in faith in Him, like Abraham. To walk as strangers and foreigners on earth, searching for a better, a heavenly homeland. What Jesus taught was to be like watchful servants — "servants," because servants do their Master's will; "watchful," because they know that the Master's coming in death is often sudden and unexpected.

On April, 14 1912, the Titanic glided through the North Atlantic at 22 1/2 knots, disdainful of all obstacles because it was "the ship that not even God could sink!" At midnight she brushed an iceberg. Two hours and 40 minutes later she upended and sank. Only 705 of her 2,207 passengers survived the tragedy. Among the passengers were the Astors, Guggenheims, Morgans — a passenger list worth \$250,000,000.

Men and women of faith do not live in fear, but put their trust in God in this world, like Abraham. And they work for the next, like servants with belts fastened and lamps burning.

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