

CATH 370: Topics in Catholic Studies
WINTER 2021
The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (354–430)



A close reading of Augustine's monumental *Confessions* - the odyssey of a restless soul seeking rest in God alone (*conf.* 1.1.)

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:35 pm-3:55 pm (Birks 203)

*Cover of *Confessions*, trans. Thomas Williams, Hackett Publishing Company, 2019.

“I am resolved **to make truth** in my heart before [God] in my confession, and to make truth in my writing **before many witnesses**”
(Augustine, *Confessions* 10.1)

What does *the truth* of confession make of Augustine, and what does it make of us, his witnesses? This course charts Augustine’s adaptation of the classical heroic ideal in the *Confessions* and the role of praise (*confession*) in the *metamorphosis* of the Christian hero’s odyssey.

CATH 370: TOPICS IN CATHOLIC STUDIES

The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine

Winter 2021

Tues. & Thurs.: 2.35 pm-3.55 pm (Virtual/Zoom)

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Virtual Office Hours: By appointment only.

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A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, a monumental 4th century Christian figure. Augustine famously wrote, ‘I am resolved to make truth in my heart before [God] in my confession, and to make truth in my writing before many witnesses’ (*conf.* 10.1). What does the truth of confession make of Augustine and what does it make of us, his witnesses? This course charts the (re)making of the classical heroic ideal in the *Confessions* and the role of praise (*confession*) in the *metamorphosis* of the Christian hero. To this end, we shall read Augustine carefully by deploying a comprehensive approach of analysis, according to three axes of interpretation: contextual, intercontextual and systematic.

1. *Contextual Axis*. A number of important contextual factors and sources inform the *Confessions* including scripture, Augustine’s life experience and encounters, the works of Saint Paul, and pastoral engagement, as well as theological and speculative reflection. Augustine also masterfully deploys Latin rhetoric, paradox and philosophy. Thus, the contextual axis of interpretation aims at understanding how the various contextual forces shape the narrative of the *Confessions*.
2. *Intercontextual Axis*. Augustine was a profound and prolific writer. Accordingly, the *Confessions* must be situated within the spectrum of the Augustinian corpus, which spans four decades. It is crucial, therefore, to carefully draw from Augustine’s writings, composed before, during and after the *Confessions*. The intercontextual axis aims at understanding the interrelatedness and complexity of Augustine’s developing thought across writings and how this informs the

Confessions. Thus, we will draw from material of the broader Augustinian corpus to appreciate the significance of the *Confessions*.

3. *Systematic Axis*. For centuries, the *Confessions* has been a source of insight and controversy. Even during Augustine's lifetime, it sparked a debate on the nature of grace, free will, sexuality and sin. Furthermore, the *Confessions* is full of traces of Augustine's later key ideas on the Church, the state, original sin and biblical interpretation. The work, according to some, birthed the 'Western self' and constructed (post-) modern interiority. Accordingly, the systematic axis seeks to identify, articulate and understand the various philosophical and theological questions nascent in the *Confessions*, their impact in history, and their relevance today.

B. REQUIREMENTS & OBJECTIVES

There are no requirements for joining this course. Anyone at McGill University is welcome to enroll. The *Confessions* will be of special relevance to anyone interested in religion, classics, literature, philosophy, theology, history and political science. In the course of our class, the student will:

1. Learn *to do* philosophy and theology by turning to early Christian sources for insight.
2. Become familiar with the content of the *Confessions*.
3. Become familiar with methods for the scientific study of Augustine.
4. Articulate a research question, identify relevant sources, and present an articulate and well-developed answer in the form of a research paper.
5. Engage with specific texts according to the three axes of interpretative analysis, i.e., contextual, intercontextual and systematic.
6. Appropriate the material and understand the relevance of the *Confessions* today.

C. READING & LECTURE SCHEDULE

We will cover a book of the *Confessions* (there are 13 books) per week of scheduled lectures. Please read the assigned readings in preparation for the class. We will use the translation of the *Confessions* by Thomas Williams (2019). The lectures will rely on the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible. Students are expected to read Brown (1967) and are advised to consult Paffenroth (2003), Fitzgerald (1999), Rist (1994), Gilson (1949) and Mayer (1986) in the course of the semester. There is no course pack for this class.

Date	Discussion
05-Jan	The Hero's Journey (Campbell, 2008), the Story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15.11-32)
07-Jan 12-Jan	Book I (pp. 1-18)
14-Jan 19-Jan	Book II (pp. 19-28)
21-Jan 26-Jan	Book III (pp. 29-42)
28-Jan 02-Feb	Book IV (pp. 43-60)
04-Feb 09-Feb	Book V (pp. 61-77)
11-Feb 16-Feb	Book VI (pp. 78-97)
18-Feb 23-Feb	Book VII (pp. 98-118)
25-Feb 09-Mar	Book VIII (pp. 119-138)
11-Mar 16-Mar	Book IX (pp. 139-162)
18-Mar 23-Mar	Book X (pp. 163-201)
25-Mar 30-Mar	Book XI (pp. 202-223)
01-Apr 06-Apr	Book XII (pp. 224-248)
08-Apr 13-Apr	Book XIII (pp. 249-278)

D. COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Lectures are delivered via Zoom on Tuesdays & Thursdays, from 2.35 pm to 3.55 pm.
2. You are encouraged to attend all lectures to be sure you stay on top of things. I will introduce myself and go through the syllabus during the first class. Please do not miss the first class.
3. Participation grades depend on attendance and quality contributions during discussion.
4. I suggest you read all of the *Confessions* before our first class. This will enhance your ability to appreciate the lectures. I suggest you actively engage with the text.
5. I will not share my notes. Please take notes during the lectures and pay attention to the various modes of interpretation I employ. The aim is not to repeat what I discuss, but to learn to confront the texts with questions and to offer insightful responses. We will

not only speak *about* philosophy and theology; we will be *doing* philosophy and theology.

6. I hold weekly NON-MANDATORY (but highly recommended) reading and Q&A sessions on Fridays from 3 pm – 4 pm (Montreal time). Email me to sign up: pablo.irizar@mcgill.ca

E. ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

The course draws from a variety of pedagogical methods to present the material. A corresponding threefold method of evaluation is designed for the student to *discover*, *engage* and *integrate* the material. To *discover*, the student will carefully read the *Confessions* and write two philosophical and/or theological meditations. To *engage*, the student will participate actively during lectures and will prepare and deliver a presentation. To *integrate*, the student will write a systematic passage interpretation and a research paper. The learning experience will be greatly enhanced by consulting the online resources listed below (cf. **H. Online Resources**).

1. Participation (10 %). Students are expected to attend lectures. Participation points will be deducted per days of absence. Participation grades also include active and quality contributions during lectures and discussions.
2. Meditation 1 (15 %). Due on **12 January** (at the beginning of class), max. 750 words. Chose a section from Book I of the *Confessions* and discuss its significance. What is the text about? What questions and paradoxes does it raise? What is its relation to praise (confession)? Offer insightful textual analysis.
3. Meditation 2 (15 %). Due on **26 January** (at the beginning of class), chose a section from Book II or Book III of the *Confessions* and discuss its significance. What is the text about? What questions and paradoxes does it raise? How does it illustrate the *metamorphosis* of the heroic ideal? Offer insightful textual analysis.
4. Presentation (15 %). Presentations will be scheduled by the end of the first week and will take place throughout the month of February. A passage will be assigned to each student. The student will prepare a presentation of the passage based on the three axes of interpretation: contextual, intercontextual and systematic. Presentations are individual and last only 10 mins.
5. Interpretation (15 %). Due on **16 March** (at the beginning of class). The interpretation is a written paper of exegesis based on the presentation component above. The interpretation is max. 1500 words.
6. Research paper (30 %). The research paper is due on **13 April** (at the beginning of class). I will offer research topics early in the semester. All students (without exception) must submit a research paper proposal for approval by 2 February (earlier is preferable). This must contain a research question, a structure, at least 5 relevant passages for analysis from *Confessions*, a focused bibliography, and a tentative hypothesis/argument. The length of the paper excluding footnotes and

bibliography is max. 5000 words. Papers under 3000 words will not be accepted.
All papers must follow

F. POLICIES & REGULATIONS

Please consult the various resources below on policies and regulations as need arises.

1. Student Rights and Responsibilities: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/>
2. *Academic Rights and Responsibilities*:
<https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights>
3. *McGill University Student Policies*: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/policies-student-rights-and-responsibilities>
4. *Email*. Please *only* contact me at the following email address:
pablo.irizar@mcgill.ca The subject line should read “Lastname_CATH 370.” I appreciate full sentences and a clear question, inquiry or request. I will answer emails within 24 hours except on weekends. If I have not replied within 24 hours, please send a follow up email.
5. *Assignment Submissions*. I only accept assignments submitted by email (pablo.irizar@mcgill.ca). Late assignments not granted an extension will be deducted 5% per day. For an extension, please email me indicating your circumstances. For any other accommodations you may require, please contact me.
6. *Assignment Feedback*. I usually return assignments within 2 weeks of submission. I will discuss the assignments only 48 hours after I return them to you.

G. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Required Texts

Confessions, trans. Thomas Williams, Hackett Publishing Company, 2019.
Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography*, Berkeley, 1968.

Select Bibliography

Augustine, Saint. *The works of Saint Augustine: a translation for the 21st century*. New City Press, 1995.
Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New World Library, 2008.
Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine of Hippo: A Life*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
Dodaro, Robert, and George Lawless, eds. *Augustine and his Critics*. Routledge, 2005.
Dodaro, Robert. *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. Harper & Row, 1963.
Ferguson, Everett, ed. *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*. Routledge, 2013.
Gilson, Étienne. *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*. Vrin, 1949.
Harrison, Carol. *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

- Kalligas, Paul. *The Enneads of Plotinus, Volume 1: A Commentary*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Lancel, Serge. *Saint Augustin*. Fayard, 2014.
- Mayer, Cornelius Petrus, and Erich Feldmann. *Augustinus-Lexikon*. Schwabe, 1986.
- O'Daly, G. J. P. *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*. Berkeley, 1987.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. *Plotinus: an Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Pecknold, Chad C., and Tarmo Toom, eds. *The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology*. A&C Black, 2013.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.
- Paffenroth, Kim, and Robert Peter Kennedy, eds. *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*. John Knox Press, 2003.
- Pollmann, Karla, Willemien Otten, James Andrews, Alexander Arweiler, Irena Backus, Silke-Petra Bergjan, Johannes Brachtendorf et al. *Oxford Guide to the History of the Reception of Augustine*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Quinn, John M. *A companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine*. Peter Lang, 2002.
- Rist, John M. *Augustine: Ancient thought Baptized*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Norman Kretzmann, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Teske, Roland. *Paradoxes of Time in St Augustine*. Milwaukee, 1996.
- Toom, Tarmo, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's "Confessions"*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Vaught, Carl G. *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: books VII-IX*. SUNY Press, 2012.
- Vaught, Carl G. *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: books X-XIII*. SUNY Press, 2012.
- Vaught, Carl G. *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions: books I-VI*. SUNY Press, 2003.
- Vessey, Mark, ed. *A Companion to Augustine*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
- White, Peter, ed. *Augustine: Confessions Books V-IX*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Williams, Rowan. *On Augustine*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

H. ONLINE RESOURCES

Encyclopaedias & Introductory Resources

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/>

New Advent Encyclopedia: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/augustin/#H7>

Cliff Notes: <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-augustines-confessions/book-summary>

Introduction by James J. O'Donnell:

<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/introconf.html>

Augustine's *Confessiones* by James J. O'Donnell:

<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/latinconf/latinconf.html>

Chronologies of Augustine's Life & Works

Chronology of the *Confessions*:

<https://web.stanford.edu/class/ihum40/augchron.pdf>

Chronology of Life & Works:

<https://exploringaugustine.weebly.com/chronological-list.html>

Videos

The School of Life – Saint Augustine:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBAxUBeVfsk>

Yale Lecture: <https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-210/lecture-5>

Why Study Saint Augustine – John Milbank:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDeP2qGpbDA>

LibriVox Audio of the *Confessions* (full length):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVPwXNfyT00>

Podcasts

In Our Time: <https://uk-podcasts.co.uk/podcast/in-our-time-philosophy/augustine-s-confessions>

Partially Examined Life Ep. 121:

<https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2015/08/10/ep121-1-augustine/>

Partially Examined Life Ep. 122:

<https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2015/08/24/ep122-1-augustine/>

History of Philosophy without Gaps:

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/augustine-confessions>

Search Engines & Resources

Library of Latin Texts:

<http://www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=LT-O>

Zentrum Für Augustinus-Forschung: <https://www.augustinus.de/>

Perseus Digital Library: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>

Finding Augustine: <http://findingaugustine.org/>

Sant'Agostino: <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/>

Biblical Resources

Interlinear Biblehub: <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/>

Bible Gateway (ESV): <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/English-Standard-Version-ESV-Bible/>

Logos Bible Software (subscription required): <https://www.logos.com/>

The Vatican Bibles: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/index.htm>

Stylistic Guidelines

What is the Chicago Manual of Style?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chicago_Manual_of_Style

Chicago Manual of Style:

<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

Purdue University Chicago Manual of Style:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/chicago_manual_of_style_17th_edition.html

I. SOME WELLNESS RESOURCES

1. McGill Student Wellness Hub: <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>
2. McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life: <https://www.mcgill.ca/morsl/>
3. Religious Places of Worship: <https://www.mcgill.ca/morsl/connect/religious-places-worship>
4. Faith Clubs & Organizations on Campus: <https://www.mcgill.ca/morsl/connect/clubs>
5. Stress Management Tips: <https://www.mcgill.ca/thewelloffice/our-services/spot-scsd-ison/wellness-support/wellness-curriculum/take-home-messages/stress-management-tips>
6. Counselling Appointments (WELL Office): <https://www.mcgill.ca/thewelloffice/our-services/spot-scsd-ison/wellness-support/counselling-appointments>
7. Office for Students with Disabilities: <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>