

Augustine: Conversions to Confessions

By Robin Lane Fox

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Saint Augustine is one of the most influential figures in all of Christianity, yet his path to sainthood was by no means assured. Born in AD 354 to a pagan father and a Christian mother, Augustine spent the first thirty years of his life struggling to understand the nature of God and his world. He learned about Christianity as a child but was never baptized, choosing instead to immerse himself in the study of rhetoric, Manicheanism, and then Neoplatonism—all the while indulging in a life of lust and greed.

In *Augustine*, the acclaimed historian Robin Lane Fox re-creates Augustine's early life with unparalleled insight, showing how Augustine's quest for knowledge and faith finally brought him to Christianity and a life of celibacy. Augustine's *Confessions*, a vivid description of his journey toward conversion and baptism, still serves as a model of spirituality for Christians around the world.

Magisterial and beautifully written, *Augustine* will be the definitive biography of this colossal figure for decades to come.

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Editorial Review

Review

Choice

"[*Augustine*] is an engaging, respectful, and highly erudite yet readily accessible study worthy of its glowing commendations."

Catholic World Report

"Fox has written an attentive, rich, and compelling book about Augustine which will reward scholars and edify non-specialists. It will also entertain both."

Wolfson History Prize Judge Professor Julia Smith

"This book revisits one of the most influential and prolific authors in western thought, a man whose preoccupations with sin, evil, bodily pain, longing, and love lie at the heart of this scintillating analysis. In brief, the book is about one man's life-long search for heaven in a world of abundant evil, and his strivings to make some sort of contact with that heaven in his daily life… But unlike so many interpretations of works of philosophy and theology, this study is grounded in the man's direct experience of the world around him—the people he knew, those he loved, his emotions and intense physical experiences, whether of pain, lust, pleasure or anger… Beautifully written in a crystalline prose where not a word is out of place, it's a book to read in a garden, or the shady courtyard of a Mediterranean villa, as well as in the study or library."

Irish Catholic

"It is a compelling emotional drama…. This is a richly detailed and well informed book, which is written with skill and style. It will provide many with a rich feat of insights and information, and will doubtless find its place beside Brown, Chadwick, Marrou and other scholars of the past."

Wichita Eagle

"Lane Fox presents a fascinating portrait, showcasing a vast knowledge of antiquity that allows him to explore and contextualize the themes of confession, conversion and salvation….[He] captures the drama – and at crucial moments the melodrama – of Augustine's emotional wrestling, his battles with being "in love with love," his self-proclaimed inner lack of God."

Paula Fredriksen, author of *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*

"*Augustine* vividly retells the gripping story of Augustine's serial self-reinventions with both sympathy and shrewd insight. Robin Lane Fox brings to life the world of late Roman antiquity, and one of its most compelling personalities: *Augustine* is a perfect alloy of great scholarship and great story-telling."

Independent (UK)

"This is an impressive resource for classicists, theologians and historians of the late Roman Empire, who will enjoy chewing over the argument that the *Confessions* were written in a single burst, in 397."

Literary Review (UK)

"*Augustine* [is] a work of scholarship as readable as any historical novel."

New Statesman (UK)

"Lane Fox's book is undoubtedly a water-shed in Augustinian studies."

Sunday Times (UK)
“Lane Fox's work is the fruit of intense study of Augustine's *Confessions* in its rhetorically forceful, rather jingly Latin, and modern scholarship on the topic.... Any reader interested in one of the early church's most influential figures, a saint we know more about than any other from the ancient world, will find this stimulating biography a pleasure to read.”

***Booklist,* starred review**
“[R]eaders pious and skeptical alike will recognize Fox as an exceptionally insightful and probing biographer.”

Library Journal
“Highly intriguing is the exposition on the role of Platonic philosophy in Augustine's metamorphosis, his allegorical biblical exegesis, and his mystical ascent toward divine union.”

Robin Young, Catholic University of America
"In this new book on Augustine, Robin Lane Fox brings his customary wit, verve, and insight to bear on the record of a passionate and complicated man. Author and subject are well-matched, and readers can freshly savor Augustine's intelligence and ambition, as well as his depth and his devotion, as Lane Fox generously allows us to follow every move of the man whose conversions and conflicts sired most of the children of Western Christianity.”

Susanna Elm, Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley
“Robin Lane Fox's *Augustine* is a masterpiece. Here, Lane Fox erects in splendid prose his very own trinity by reading Augustine's *Confessions* in the company of two other ancient literary lions, the pagan rhetorician Libanius and the Christian Platonic philosopher and bishop Synesius, whose lives share what many have considered quintessential Augustinian qualities—conversions and autobiographical confessions. As a result, Augustine emerges fully as a man of his very own time, the later Roman empire, deeply formed from the beginning by the intellectual concerns of his day to which he formulated his own brilliant, unique, and lasting responses.”

Kirkus
“Fox guides readers on an epic journey through the book and the life that inspired it…[he] systematically explores his subject's well-documented life and provides in-depth background and commentary capable of assisting even seasoned scholars in a deeper understanding…[Fox] provides a true service to readers…[his] writing is coherent and approachable...[The book] represents a close analysis of both Confessions and of Augustine himself, leaving few stones unturned. An erudite and ordered reading of Augustine's Confessions and a worthy addition to any library on early Christianity.”

New Criterion
“The universe of Augustine scholarship is a supremely crowded one and anyone who essays a new biography must, above all, distinguish himself from the magisterial works of Peter Brown… Lane Fox does this in several ways. The first is a remarkably unsentimental take on his subject…The most significant distinction is to frame the study entirely around Augustine's Confessions, which Lane Fox gracefully describes as ‘a prayer which no pagan could have produced and which no Christian, before or since, has equaled'…Lane Fox deploys an astonishing amount of newly discovered material.”
See attached for full review.

New York Times Book Review
“Robin Lane Fox has now done [Peter] Brown [author of *Augustine of Hippo*] one better…Fox is such a

good writer that interest never flags, and you always feel that ‘you are there'...[an] excellent book.”

***New York Times Book Review*, Editor's Choice column**
“This narrative of the first half of Augustine's life conjures the intellectual and social milieu of the late Roman Empire with a Proustian relish for detail.”

Financial Times
“It is a profound understatement to observe that it was appropriate for Robin Lane Fox, at last, to tackle a biography of Augustine...he [is] one of the most distinguished and prolific living scholars of Late Antiquity.... Lane Fox, with the power of his writing and deep familiarity with the huge circuit of Augustinian texts, reveals with remarkable enthusiasm and sympathy the spiritual and intellectual drama of his remarkable subject.”

Chicago Tribune
“Such is the power of Lane Fox's pen that this biography, which begins with Augustine's birth in 354 A.D., captures our modern-day attention, ignites the imagination and sets the soul stirring… *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions* is a compelling read… A page-turner that might last the whole winter long, come spring you'll be all the more enlightened.”

Winner of the 2015 Wolfson History Prize

Included on the list of 100 Notable Books of 2015 in the 12/6 issue of *New York Times Book Review.*

Wall Street Journal

“Mr. Fox traces with clarity the development of Augustine's thought, but also of his character…[He] succeeds in offering us a figure whose inner and outer struggles, whose strengths and weaknesses, do somehow reach across the centuries and touch something profoundly human.”

New Yorker
“This biography of the Church Father displays an eclectic, discursive approach. New delights, such as an exploration of Cicero's lost Hortensius, beloved by Augustine and pieced together by scholars through scattered mentions in the ancient record, add surprising shadings to Augustine's personality. Lane Fox sees his subject in intimate yet global terms: Augustine's disenchantment with politics, the dubious powers of rhetoric, and his own skill at navigating the system draws comparisons with Tolstoy, Byron, and Joyce. Most engaging is the portrait of Augustine's complex relationship with his lively, wine-drinking, social-striving mother, Monnica, from whom he ‘imbibed the name of Christ,' and learned to ‘retain it deeply within.'”

About the Author

Robin Lane Fox is a university reader in ancient history and an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford. The author of several books, Fox lives in Oxford, England.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Victoria Williams:

This Augustine: Conversions to Confessions are reliable for you who want to become a successful person, why. The explanation of this Augustine: Conversions to Confessions can be one of many great books you must have is usually giving you more than just simple reading food but feed you actually with information that probably will shock your previous knowledge. This book is handy, you can bring it just about everywhere and whenever your conditions in the e-book and printed versions. Beside that this Augustine: Conversions to Confessions forcing you to have an enormous of experience such as rich vocabulary, giving you tryout of critical thinking that we realize it useful in your day exercise. So , let's have it appreciate reading.

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