

**SAINT AUGUSTINE (AURELIUS
AUGUSTINUS, EPISCOPUS
HIPPONIENSES). A.D.
387-430: A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND
WRITINGS AS AFFECTING THE
CONTROVERSY WITH ROME**

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Saint Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus, Episcopus Hipponienses). A.D. 387-430: A Sketch of His Life and Writings as Affecting the Controversy with Rome by Charles Hastings Collette

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CHARLES HASTINGS COLLETTE

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Caro Palmar

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Ch. Collette

A SKETCH

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BY

CHARLES HASTINGS COLLETTE.

"Let not these words be heard between us, 'I say,' or 'you say,' but rather let us hear 'Thus saith the Lord;' for there are certain books of our Lord, in whose authority both sides acquiesce; there let us seek our Church, there let us judge our cause. Take away, therefore, all those things which each alleges against the other, and which are derived from any other source than the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures. But, perhaps, some will ask, why take away such authorities? Because I would have the Holy Church proved, not by human documents, but by the Word of God."--AUGUSTINE. *De Unitate Ecclesie*, c. 4, Tom. vii. p. 625- Lugduni, 1662.

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P R E F A C E.

"The main object in discussion should be not to refute error, but to establish truth."—
DR. J. H. NEWMAN.

AUGUSTINE shines among the early Christian writers as a star of the greatest magnitude; "not only," as Sir W. Hamilton has observed, "in the character of the most illustrious of the Christian Fathers, but as one of the profoundest thinkers of antiquity." And Alban Butler, in the "Lives of the Saints," says that "the name of the great Augustine raises in all minds the most exalted idea, and commands the most profound respect." Du Pin, the Roman Catholic historian, in his "History of Ecclesiastical Writers," adds to his biography:—"The name only of St. Augustine is the greatest commendation that can be given him; and whatever may be said after that can serve only to lessen the opinion men have conceived of his rare merit and his great piety." He has been proclaimed by the Roman Church as a Doctor and Teacher, and a Saint in heaven; and an annual festival is set apart for his commemoration, and Romanists struggle hard on every available occasion to induce us to believe that he was a member of the Roman branch of "the Catholic Church." It becomes, therefore, a matter of interesting inquiry, what were the opinions of Augustine on the various subjects in controversy between the Reformed and the Roman Church. I have endeavoured to work out this view of the question in a practical manner, not so much "to refute error, but to establish truth." Independent of that consideration, the extracts from the writings of Augustine, which I have transferred to the following pages, will, I trust, afford subjects for profitable meditation.

To enter into a detailed criticism of the voluminous works of Augustine would be far beyond the scope and object of the present sketch, for who could improve on the elaborate and learned review so ably executed by Du Pin in the history above referred to? I

may, however, with advantage, borrow the following paragraph with which he continues his criticism:—

“Though we have given a sufficient account both of St. Augustine’s character and genius, in speaking of his works; yet it is convenient to say something of them here in general. He was a man of great extent, great exactness, and great force of mind. His reasonings were very strong. His ordinary method is to lay down extensive principles, from which he draws an infinite number of consequences; so that all the points of his doctrine have a great connection one with another. He argued more upon most of the mysteries of our religion than any author before him. He starts several questions never thought of before, and resolves many of them by the mere strength of his wit. He often left the notions of his predecessors to follow a path wholly new, whether in expounding the Scriptures, or in opinions of divinity. That may be said of him, as to divinity, what Cicero said of himself, as to philosophy—that he was *magnus opinivictor*; that is, that he advanced several opinions that were only probable. But St. Augustine doth it modestly, and with much prudence, without pretending to oblige others to embrace his opinions without examination; whereas, when the question is about the doctrine of the Church, he proposes and maintains it stoutly, and as strongly opposes its opposers. He had much less learning than wit; for he understood not the languages, neither had he read the ancients much. He wrote with greater facility and clearness, than politeness and elegancy. Though he had taught rhetoric, yet either he was not master of the eloquence of the orators, or he neglected it; nay, his expressions are not always pure; for he often uses improper and barbarous words. He often uses little strokes of wit, and plays with words. He repeats the same things, and insists upon the same arguments in hundreds of places. He dwells long upon the same thought; to which he gives several turns, and enlarges frequently upon commonplaces. He treated of infinite numbers of things, by laying down principles; and framed (if we may so say) the body of divinity for all the Latin Fathers that came after him. They have not only taken out of his books the principles they make use of, but often they have only copied them. The Councils have borrowed his words to express their decisions. In short, Peter Lombard, in the twelfth century, going about to compose an epitome of the whole body of divinity, did little else but collect passages out of St. Augustine. And though Thomas Aquinas, and other schoolmen, followed another method; yet, for the most part, they have stuck to St. Augustine’s principles, whereupon they erected their theological opinions.”

In every case, with respect to my citations, I have added precise references to the editions purported to be quoted, but the difficulties of my task increased as I progressed in my investigations in endeavouring to separate the genuine from the spurious writings of Augustine, on which so many questions have been raised. I have, however, restricted my extracts to writings generally admitted as genuine by Roman Catholic writers; but even some of these, which I have quoted, have been questioned. I have not been able to satisfactorily account for the fact that the numerous Sermons attributed to Augustine—if delivered at public services of the Church—are in

Latin. In his "Confessions" Augustine tells us that as a student he took a great dislike to Greek, but the study of the Latin language was a pleasing task to him, which he speedily acquired. This presupposes that Latin was not his native tongue, and of consequence not the vernacular of his country. In that view it is highly improbable that the Sermons were ever delivered as such. That may account for the doubt which has been raised as to the genuineness of many of those now attributed to Augustine. In fact, the question arising on the authenticity of the writings of this, and many others of the early Christian Fathers of the Church, must be extremely perplexing to a conscientious member of the Roman Church, since by his Creed he is precluded from placing any interpretation on any text of Scripture unless the Fathers are unanimous on that particular interpretation, rendering that branch of his Rule of Faith practically a dead letter. Setting aside other insurmountable difficulties, how is he to arrive at what is a genuine production of any particular Father?

But we have another difficulty to encounter, namely, the manner in which Romish writers themselves treat these same Fathers when they apparently go counter to their modern theories. Several instances I have given in the sequel as applied to the writings of Augustine. On this view of the subject I cannot do better than quote the opinions expressed by DR. J. H. NEWMAN, now a Cardinal in the Roman Church, extracted from his "Lectures on the Propaganda Office of the Church" (2nd Edition):—

"Whatever principles they profess in theory, resembling or coincident with our own, yet when they come to particulars, when they have to prove this or that article of their Creed, they supersede the appeal to Scripture and Antiquity by the pretence of the Infallibility of the Church, thus solving the whole question by a summary and final interpretation both of Antiquity and of Scripture" (p. 60).

"They [the Romanists] extol the Fathers as a whole, and disparage them individually; they call them one by one Doctors of the Church, yet they explain away one by one their arguments, judgment, and testimony. They refuse to combine their separate and coincident statements; they take each by himself, and settle with the first before they go on to the next. And thus their boasted reliance on the Fathers comes at length to this,—to identify Catholicity with the Decrees of Councils, and to admit those Councils only which the Pope has confirmed" (p. 71).

"Romanist, heretic, and infidel unite with one another in denying the orthodoxy of the first centuries" (p. 74).

"The Fathers are only so far of use in the eyes of Romanists as they prove the Roman doctrines, and in no sense are allowed to interfere with

the conclusions which their Church has adopted; they are of authority when they seem to agree with Rome, of none if they differ" (p. 53).

"How useless then is it to contend with Romanists, as if they practically agreed to our foundations, however much they pretend to it! Ours is Antiquity, theirs the existing Church" (p. 85).

"According to the avowed or implied conviction of their most eminent Divines, there is much actually to censure in the writings of the Fathers, much that is positively hostile to the Roman system" (p. 97).

"Enough has been said to show the hopelessness of our prospects in the controversy with Rome. We have her own avowal that the Fathers ought to be followed, and again that she does not follow them; what more can we require than her witness against herself which is here supplied us? If such inconsistency is not at once fatal to her claims, which it would seem to be, at least it is a most encouraging omen in our contest with her" (p. 99).

"As far as it is Catholic and Scriptural, it [Romanism] appeals to the Fathers; as far as it is a corruption, it finds it necessary to supersede them" (p. 124).

The various subjects on which I have treated might have been considerably elaborated and strengthened by additional quotations from the writings of Augustine, at the expense of the patience of the reader; but sufficient proofs, I trust, have been advanced to establish, as a fact, that the "Catholic Faith," as taught by Augustine, was wholly different from the theological system as now professed by the Roman Church, as promulgated by the Decrees of the Trent Council and the Creed of Pope Pius IV., including the more modern additions of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Supremacy and alleged Personal Infallibility, "in faith and morals," of the local Bishop of Rome.

Augustine of the fifth century, the subject of the present sketch, has often been confounded with Augustine—or Austin the Monk—of the seventh century, who sought to subjugate British Christians to the dominion of the Bishop of Rome. Nevertheless, as a fact beyond dispute, not one single dogma covered by the Pian Creed, and the subsequent additions above alluded to, including the "Supremacy," formed part of the faith of the Roman Church of that period, or of the Christian dogmas alleged to have been then planted in this country. These were all additions of successive subsequent periods.

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